

2014 3rd QUARTER MEET THE PRESS TOPICS

David Gregory is the moderator of "Meet the Press." Rob Yarin is the executive producer, and Tom Lumley is the senior producer.

Effective September 7, 2014, Chuck Todd is NBC News Political Director and the moderator of "Meet the Press," the flagship Sunday Morning public affairs program and longest-running broadcast in television history.

"Meet the Press" is seen on the NBC Television Network from 9-10 a.m. ET in most markets. In New York City and Washington D.C., the broadcast is seen from 10:30-11:30 a.m. ET.

The program re-airs on MSNBC Sunday afternoons at 2 p.m. ET/11 a.m. PT and again at 2 a.m. ET/11 p.m. PT and 4 a.m. ET/1 a.m. PT Monday. At these times, "Meet The Press" will also air on SIRIUS channel 90 and XM channel 120.

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"MEET THE PRESS" -- SUNDAY, JULY 6

Jeh Johnson

Secretary, Department of Homeland Security

* * *

Rep. Raul Labrador (R-ID)

* * *

Tony Blair

Former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom

* * *

ROUNDTABLE:

Chuck Todd

Political Director & Chief White House Correspondent, NBC News

Carolyn Ryan

Washington Bureau Chief, The New York Times

Lori Montenegro

National Correspondent, Telemundo

Michael Gerson

Columnist, The Washington Post

"MEET THE PRESS" CLIPS & TRANSCRIPT – SUNDAY, JULY 6, 2014

Mandatory Credit: NBC News' "Meet the Press"

JULY 6, 2014 -- Today's "Meet the Press" featured an interview with Secretary of Homeland Security **Jeh Johnson**; an interview with Rep. **Raul Labrador**; an interview with former UK Prime Minister **Tony Blair**; and a political roundtable featuring NBC News' **Chuck Todd**, The New York Times' **Carolyn Ryan**, Telemundo's **Lori Montenegro** and The Washington Post's **Michael Gerson**.

Additionally, the program featured NBC News Correspondent **Harry Smith's** journey of finding special places in history across the country, and the latest installment of **"Meeting America,"** which took NBC News Correspondent **Kevin Tibbles** to Dearborn, Michigan, where Muslims make up a fast-growing portion of the population.

Below are highlights, video, and a rush transcript of today's program. All content will be available online at <http://www.MeetThePressNBC.com>.

###

Sec. Johnson on the administration's position on the border: "Our message to those who come here illegally: Our border is not open to illegal migration."

VIDEO: <http://nbcnews.to/1tc3sZr>

DAVID GREGORY:

But critics say you're not stemming the tide fast enough. This number's going to grow wherever it ends up. The bottom line is what happens now? Are you prepared to deport these children, young mothers, that we're seeing in Miguel piece and all of these images? Are you prepared to deport them?

SECRETARY JEH JOHNSON:

Our message to those who come here illegally: Our border is not open to illegal migration. And we are taking a number of steps to address it, including turning people around faster. We've already dramatically reduced the turnaround time, the deportation time. For the adults, we're asking this week for a supplement for Congress, from Congress, to bring on additional capacity. And we're cracking down on the smuggling organizations.

DAVID GREGORY:

Okay, but even for the children, we're talking about 50,000 so far this year. Do they need to be deported? Or I've seen some reporting suggesting that more than half of them could end up staying with families in America.

SECRETARY JEH JOHNSON:

The law requires that, when DHS identifies somebody as a child, as an unaccompanied child, we turn them over to The Department of Health and Human Services. But there is a deportation proceeding that is commenced against the child. Now, that proceeding can take some time. And so we're looking at options, added flexibility, to deal with the children in particular, but in a humanitarian and fair way.

###

Sec. Johnson on the protests in Murrieta, CA: "It is unfortunate to see that type of hostility directed at women and children on a bus, frankly."

VIDEO: <http://nbcnews.to/1siqcCW>

DAVID GREGORY:

When you look at the protests in Murrieta, you see that anger, do you see that as hate towards illegal immigrants? Do you see it as prejudice? Or do you understand frustrations with the federal government, with the inability of Congress to pass immigration reform, the drain on resources for our community? What do you see?

SECRETARY JEH JOHNSON:

Well, I look at it, and it is unfortunate to see that type of hostility directed at women and children on a bus, frankly. I do not believe that that band of individuals that you showed in your lead-in reflects Murrieta, California. And it certainly does not reflect the response we've seen across the southwest--

DAVID GREGORY:

But doesn't it reflect frustration at the government-- you're the head of The Department of Homeland Security-- for not doing more to protect the border, the enforce the nation's laws with regard to turning migrants away who are coming illegally?

SECRETARY JEH JOHNSON:

The broader response across the southwest has been very different. In places like McAllen, Texas, Nogales, Arizona, where the city governments, the population at large, faith-based organizations, have really stepped up to support the border patrol to do the humanitarian thing here. The media is focused on that band of individuals in Murrieta, California. I don't think that even reflects the sentiment in Murrieta, frankly.

###

Sec. Johnson on terror threats coming from overseas: "Our job is to try to anticipate the next attack, not simply react to the last one."

VIDEO: <http://nbcnews.to/1siqcCW>

DAVID GREGORY:

So Secretary Johnson, the question I think a lot of Americans have, flights coming into the U.S. facing tougher security screening, are we going to see that here again domestically?

SECRETARY JEH JOHNSON:

Well David, our job is to try to anticipate the next attack, not simply react to the last one. And so we continually evaluate the world situation. And we know that there remains a terrorist threat to the United States. And aviation security is a large part of that.

So this past week, I directed that we step up our aviation security at last point, at some last point of departure airports coming into the United States. This is not something to overreact to or over-speculate about. But it's something we felt was necessary. We do this from time to time. We ratchet it down from time to time.

###

Rep. Labrador demanding that the Obama administration deport the undocumented women and children who have entered the US: "...they're creating a crisis at this time that is actually going to harm these children."

VIDEO: <http://nbcnews.to/1xAVaZM>

REP. RAUL LABRADOR:

The own administration estimates are that it's going to be about 60,000 to 90,000 this year, that it's going to increase to 150 to 200,000 next year. These are their own estimates. And now they come on national T.V. and they say that they're doing everything they can to stem the flow? But that their number one priority is actually to make sure that we do right by these children.

The thing this administration needs to do is immediately deport these families, these children. I know it sounds harsh. I know it sounds difficult. But they're creating a crisis at this time that is actually going to harm these children. These children, as your own reporting said, these children are going to come through the border, they're going to come from Central America. Many of them are being raped. Many of them are being harmed. This is an outrageous thing that is happening to these children. And we need to actually take a strong stance against what's happening and against these illegal cartels.

###

Chuck Todd on the political implications of the Hobby Lobby decision: "What was fascinating... was how, frankly, excited Democratic campaigns were acting."

VIDEO: <http://nbcnews.to/1mXjE7x>

DAVID GREGORY:

But isn't the question, "Can you find a way to get contraception to women who want it through the insurance companies, and as a way to get around people who have religious exemption--

CHUCK TODD:

Well, that's obviously what the fix was supposed to do. But let's go to the raw politics of this is, you know, normally it used to be conservative, the social conservative movement used to quietly hope for losses on the Supreme Court, because it gave them a political reason for existing. It gave them something to campaign for. It gave them somebody to beat up the courts.

What was fascinating post-Hobby Lobby was how, frankly, excited Democratic campaigns were acting. Almost like, "We have something to run on here on the left." And I'll tell you, the swing vote in these midterm elections is when it is white women basically 40 to 55, if you want to just ID the exact demographics. And these were the women that, in 2010, they were leaning Republican at this time. This time, they haven't been. And it all starts with a contraception ad campaign that Obama campaigned--

###

Tony Blair says “it’s hard to judge” if Iraq would be a different place if the US & Britain had not invaded in 2013.

VIDEO: <http://nbcnews.to/1m5YTep>

ANDREA MITCHELL:

I know you've written that removing Saddam Hussein did not cause this conflagration. But if we had not invaded in 2003, the United States, Great Britain and others-- wouldn't Iraq have-- be a very, very different place?

TONY BLAIR:

Well, it's, again it's hard to judge, because, you know obviously, if you were to ask some of the Kurds against whom Saddam launched genocide, or people down on Basra, the most Shi'a area, who were excluded from government or excluded from their right to worship, they'd probably say no. If you asked the people up in Baghdad, who've had this terrible time over the last years, they'd probably say yes.

However, the purpose of what I'm saying is not to shuffle off responsibility. I take full responsibility for what we did. The important thing is to realize this is a long term problem. Its root cause is in this extremism. These regimes were never going to be sustained. I mean we removed the one in Iraq. But the people removed the other ones.

And so in the end, the question is how do we help the region, and can we help the region, to the future of which this toxic mix of religion and politics is taken out of the situation and people are allowed to have the type of government that a majority of people in the Middle East probably want?

###

Additional video clips from today's program:

Crisis at the Border: What Immigrants Face on Trek to US

<http://nbcnews.to/1zhJQUg>

Jeh Johnson: 'Our Border is Not Open to Illegal Migration'

<http://nbcnews.to/1tc3sZr>

Jeh Johnson: 'If Congress Doesn't Act, We Will'

<http://nbcnews.to/1mXjuNr>

Full Meet the Press Interview with Secretary of Homeland Security Jeh Johnson

<http://nbcnews.to/1siqcCW>

Full Meet the Press Interview with Rep. Raul Labrador

<http://nbcnews.to/1xAVaZM>

Meet the Press Roundtable Talks Immigration

<http://nbcnews.to/1oyx1iE>

Hobby Lobby Ruling: What's the Impact?

<http://nbcnews.to/1mXjE7x>

Tony Blair on Terror in the Middle East

<http://nbcnews.to/1m5YTep>

Meeting America: All-American Muslims in Michigan

<http://nbcnews.to/1mXjFbz>

On Meet the Press: Finding History in Everyday Places

<http://nbcnews.to/1j6tGlq>

COMING UP ON "MEET THE PRESS" -- SUNDAY, JULY 13, 2014

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THIS SUNDAY: David goes one-on-one with **Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif** in an exclusive, wide-ranging interview. Nuclear talks in Vienna have entered a critical stage, but will Iran and the P5+1 powers be able to reach a comprehensive agreement by the July 20 deadline? What happens if they cannot break through a stalemate? Plus, with Iraq in turmoil, how will Iran use its influence there -- and does their cause align with the U.S.? And as the humanitarian crisis takes its deadly toll in Syria, how much longer will Iran support the Assad regime?

Video excerpt: <http://nbcnews.to/1s4r4xA>

PLUS: Reaction from **Martin Indyk** in his first television interview since stepping down as the Obama administration's Mideast peace envoy, as well as *The Atlantic's* **Jeffrey Goldberg**.

###

CHAOS AT THE BORDER: Some say humanitarian crisis, some say national security breakdown. We will hear from both sides:

Rep. Mike Rogers (R-MI)

Rep. Joaquin Castro (D-TX)

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POLITICAL ROUNDTABLE: House Speaker John Boehner says he wants to sue President Obama over health care, and now former Governor Sarah Palin joins in the cry for presidential impeachment. Is this political rhetoric -- or is Washington truly broken?

Fmr. Gov. Jennifer Granholm (D-MI)

Fmr. Sen. Rick Santorum (R-PA)

Stephen Henderson

Columnist, *Detroit Free Press*

Kimberley Strassel

Columnist, *The Wall Street Journal*

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ALSO SUNDAY:

-- NBC News correspondent **Mark Potter** covers the immigration crisis up close, traveling with Border Patrol agents along the Rio Grande in South Texas, where they find 1,000 immigrants crossing into the U.S. border every day.

-- Meeting America: the national spotlight turned to Cleveland this week -- first with the news that the Republican party will hold their 2016 convention there, followed by LeBron James' decision to return to the Cavaliers. NBC News correspondent Kevin Tibbles showcases the revitalization and growth underway throughout the Ohio city

"MEET THE PRESS" 7/13/14: EXCLUSIVE WITH IRANIAN FM ZARIF; MIDEAST ANALYSIS FROM INDYK & GOLDBERG; ROGERS & CASTRO ON IMMIGRATION; AND MORE

Zarif: "We don't see any benefit in Iran developing a nuclear weapon"

Indyk: Netanyahu's "bluff of mobilizing all these tanks is not working"

Castro: crisis of children at U.S. border "raises the question of who we consider to be a refugee"

JULY 13, 2014 -- Today's "Meet the Press with David Gregory" featured an exclusive interview with Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif; analysis from former U.S. special Mideast envoy Martin Indyk and *The Atlantic's* Jeffrey Goldberg; discussion of the immigration crisis with Reps. Mike Rogers (R-MI) and Joaquin Castro (D-TX); a roundtable conversation with Fmr. Gov. Jennifer Granholm (D-MI), Fmr. Sen. Rick Santorum (R-PA), *Wall Street Journal* columnist Kim Strassel, and *Detroit Free Press* columnist Stephen Henderson; and Kevin Tibbles' "Meeting America" spotlight on Cleveland, Ohio.

Below are highlights, video, and a rush transcript of today's program. All content will be available online at MeetThePressNBC.com.

###

Former U.S. special Mideast envoy Martin Indyk: Netanyahu "bluff" is not working

VIDEO: <http://nbcnews.to/1saugaZ>

MARTIN INDYK: "I think Prime Minister Netanyahu is extremely reluctant to go in on the ground... and in a sense Hamas knows that and so the bluff of mobilizing all these tanks is not working in terms of getting Hamas to stop the firing."

Rogers on immigration crisis: "The policy on the border certainly is encouraging this behavior."

VIDEO: <http://nbcnews.to/1mYv9S6>

REP. MIKE ROGERS: The problem is by encouraging the behavior that you see and not stopping this attitude that it's okay to --

DAVID GREGORY: But who's encouraging the behavior? Is that fair to say the president's somehow encouraging them to come?

REP. MIKE ROGERS: The policy on the border certainly is encouraging this behavior. If I believe, and I'm in El Salvador or somewhere else, that I can pay a criminal gang, think of that, to take my children through some very dangerous circumstances to get to the United States and then

they're going to open up with loving arms and keep those kids, you're encouraging that behavior.

Castro: crisis of children at U.S. border “raises the question of who we consider to be a refugee in America in the 21st century.”

VIDEO: <http://nbcnews.to/1jEldeV>

REP. JOAQUIN CASTRO: That 2008 law, passed under George W. Bush, was passed for a reason, because the problems with sex trafficking are real. And also, David, because many people believe that these kids should have a chance to make their case for asylum. So I think we've got to be careful when we consider completely doing away with that law.

DAVID GREGORY: So you don't support what the president is saying here, which is the majority of even the children need to be deported?

REP. JOAQUIN CASTRO: Well, I think those are decisions for an immigration judge to make, not for the president or myself or any member of Congress. That's a decision the judge will make. But the point is that these folks need to be given a chance to go to court and argue their case. And I think it also raises the question of who we consider to be a refugee in America in the 21st century. And that's a very tough question for us. And it tugs at our conscience.

Zarif: “We don't see any benefit in Iran developing a nuclear weapon.”

VIDEO: <http://nbcnews.to/1qwPDiP>

MOHAMMAD JAVAD ZARIF: No, I will commit to everything and anything that would provide credible assurances for the international community that Iran is not seeking nuclear weapons, because we are not. We don't see any benefit in Iran developing a nuclear weapon.

DAVID GREGORY: How could you not see a benefit? I mean you're a Shia state surrounded by Sunni states, many of whom are your enemies. You know full well the deterrent factor that a nuclear country like Pakistan can wield in the international community. You can have more of the influence regionally. Cynics would say, "Why wouldn't you want to have a nuclear weapon?"

MOHAMMAD JAVAD ZARIF: Actually, all these calculations are wrong. In fact we need to go out of our way in order to convince our neighbors that we want to live in peace and tranquility with them, because the politics of geography, the fact that we're bigger, the fact that we're stronger, that we're more populous, the fact that we have a better technology, the fact that our human resources is by far more developed than most of our neighbors. All of these provide us with inherent areas of strength that we don't need to augment with other capabilities.

Zarif on Iraq turmoil: It is “in the interest of stability in our region to keep to keep territorial integrity of Iraq”

VIDEO: <http://nbcnews.to/1riBrLR>

DAVID GREGORY: Does Iran feel that it is common cause with the United States for the future of Iraq? Would you like to see it stay together? Do you think it'll break apart?

MOHAMMAD JAVAD ZARIF: I believe Iraq -- it is in the interests of everybody, and I mean everybody, in the interest of stability in our region, to keep territorial integrity of Iraq. To keep

Iraq one. All attempts to break out are short sighted and will hurt even those who are trying to do it. So it is in the interests of not only Iran but the United States and all other countries--

(OVERTALK)

DAVID GREGORY: How does Iran and the United States come together to defeat ISIS?

MOHAMMAD JAVAD ZARIF: We need to be on principles. We need to respect the choices of the Iraqi people. We need to use whatever influences we have in Iraq, as well as in Afghanistan for instance, in order to convince various portions inside the country that the best way to move forward is through inclusivity, is through working together.

Zarif on P5+1 Nuclear Negotiations: “What we need to do is to establish a new paradigm”

MOHAMMAD JAVAD ZARIF: What we need to do is to establish a new paradigm. That new paradigm is to provide incentives for Iran to stick to a strategic doctrine that we do not need nuclear weapons, but we cannot be deprived of the science and technology that the rest of the world has.

I can assure you, I can assure you, that within the next 11 days, we can reach an agreement that would put all the concerns, all the concerns that are serious, if you want not to be allayed of your concern then you will never be allayed. But if you want to address these concerns, then all of these concerns can be addressed.

If you're talking about even a hypothetical breakout, we can extend this breakout to over three to four years. Not three to four months, but in reality to three to four years. In every aspect of our nuclear program. So that it will not be even conceivable to people for Iran to go for a bomb. We are prepared to do all of that, but in a realistic framework and we have presented ideas about it. We are engaged in very serious discussions with our partners in Five Plus One. I hope that they are working on the basis of the realities and not on the basis of illusions.

Goldberg reacts to Zarif: “breathtakingly audacious”

JEFFREY GOLDBERG: It's a breathtaking interview. Breathtakingly audacious. ... The danger is that this is a country that destabilizes the entire region. That supports terrorist groups. I mean let's not forget, this country is considered the prime sponsor, state sponsor, of terrorism in the world by the Obama State Department. So do you want the prime state sponsor of terrorism in the world to have nuclear weapons?

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Additional video clips from today's program:

Full interview with Martin Indyk:

<http://nbcnews.to/1saugaZ>

Rogers: Obama Policies Encouraging Border Crisis

<http://nbcnews.to/1mYv9S6>

Rogers: National Security Problem Unfolding on the Border

<http://nbcnews.to/1mx4wma>

Rep. Joaquin Castro on Immigration Crisis

<http://nbcnews.to/1jEldeV>

Iranian FM Zarif on Nuclear Talks, ISIS, and the violence in Gaza

<http://nbcnews.to/1qwPDiP>

Zarif Explains Iran's Influence in the Mideast

<http://nbcnews.to/1riBrLR>

Zarif: Extended Web-extra Interview

<http://nbcnews.to/1mxgQD1>

Roundtable: Santorum Says "Republicans Need a Positive Vision"

<http://nbcnews.to/1ycojuG>

"Meeting America" -- Kevin Tibbles spotlights Cleveland's Renaissance

<http://nbcnews.to/1mYHype>

"MEET THE PRESS" 7/20/14: SEC. JOHN KERRY ON MH17 AND FOREIGN POLICY; SEN. LINDSEY GRAHAM SLAMS ADMINISTRATION; ROUNDTABLE; AND MORE

Kerry: "There's a build-up of extraordinary circumstantial evidence" that Russia provided the weapon that took down MH 17

Kerry: "Israel has every right in the world to defend itself."

Graham slams administration: calls Kerry comments "ridiculous and delusional" -- says "Obama is the king of indecision."

JULY 20, 2014 -- Today's **"Meet the Press with David Gregory"** featured interviews with Secretary of State **John Kerry**, Senator **Lindsey Graham** (R-SC), and NIAID director and top AIDS research **Dr. Anthony Fauci**; a roundtable discussion with *The National Journal's* **Ron Fournier**, author and *Wall Street Journal* editorial board member **Jason Riley**, *Cook Political Report* national editor **Amy Walter**, and NBC News chief foreign affairs correspondent **Andrea Mitchell**.

The show also included **Kevin Tibbles'** "Meeting America" visit to Davenport, Iowa; and a breakdown of the latest polling insights from NBC News political director and chief White House correspondent **Chuck Todd**.

Below are highlights, video, and a rush transcript of today's program. All content will be available online at <http://www.MeetThePressNBC.com>.

###

Kerry on reports of rebels removing bodies and evidence from the crash site: "grotesque"
VIDEO (Full Interview): <http://nbcnews.to/1u5O2Xa>

SECRETARY JOHN KERRY: What's happening is really grotesque. And it is contrary to everything that President Putin and Russia said that they would do. There are-- there are reports of drunken separatist soldiers unceremoniously piling bodies into trucks, removing both bodies, as well as evidence, from the site. ... The separatists are in control. And it is clear that Russia supports the separatists, supplies the separatists, encourages the separatists, trains the separatists. And Russia needs to step up and make a difference here.

Kerry on the possibility that Russia provided the weapon that shot down MH17: "there's a build-up of extraordinary circumstantial evidence"

DAVID GREGORY: Are you bottom lining here that Russia provided the weapon?

SECRETARY JOHN KERRY: There's a story today confirming that. But we have not, within the administration, made a determination. But it's pretty clear, when, you know, there's a build-up of extraordinary circumstantial evidence. You know, I'm a former prosecutor. I've tried cases on circumstantial evidence. It's powerful here. But even more importantly, we picked up the imagery of this launch. We know the trajectory. We know where it came from. We know the timing. And it was exactly at the time that this aircraft disappeared from the radar.

Kerry on US relations with Russia: “This is a moment of truth for Mr. Putin and for Russia.”

SECRETARY JOHN KERRY: This is more complicated than just throwing names at each other and making declarations. There has to be a continued effort to find a way forward. ... We cannot continue with a dual-track policy where diplomacy is winding up with nice words and, you know, well-constructed communiqués and agreements, but then there's a separate track where the same policy continues. This is a moment of truth for Mr. Putin and for Russia. Russia needs to step up and prove its bona fides, if there are any left, with respect to its willingness to put actions behind the words.

Kerry: “Israel has every right in the world to defend itself.”

SECRETARY JOHN KERRY: This is a very, very difficult moment, also, and a very difficult situation. Israel has been under attack by rockets. I don't think any nation in the world would sit there while rockets are bombarding it, and you know that there are tunnels from which theaters have come, you know, jumping up in the dead of night, some with handcuffs and with tranquilizer drugs on them, in an obvious effort to try to kidnap people then hold them for ransom.

The fact is, that is unacceptable by any standard, anywhere in the world. And Israel has every right in the world to defend itself. But we're hopeful, very hopeful, that we could quickly to try to find a way forward to put a ceasefire in place so that the underlying issues, so that we can get to the questions. But you cannot reward terrorism. There can't be a set of preconditioned demands that are going to be met.

Graham: Secretary Kerry “gave the most ridiculous and delusional summary of American foreign policy I could imagine.”

VIDEO: <http://nbcnews.to/UkgW5e>

SEN. LINDSEY GRAHAM: To the Israeli government: Do whatever is necessary to protect your people. Stay as long as you need to say. And as to Secretary Kerry, he gave the most ridiculous and delusional summary of American foreign policy I could imagine. It scares me that he believes the world is in such good shape. America is the glue that holds the free world together. Leading from behind is not working. The world is adrift. And President Obama has become the king of indecision. His policies are failing across the globe, and they will come here soon.

Graham doubles down: “Indecision reigns.”

SEN. LINDSEY GRAHAM: Nothing knee-jerk is going on here. Indecision reigns. President Obama is trying to be deliberative. It comes off as indecisive. He's trying to be thoughtful. It comes off as weakness.

Graham: GOP chances of winning the White House in 2016 are “very low” if they don't get immigration reform right

VIDEO: <http://nbcnews.to/1nL3ui6>

DAVID GREGORY: Senator, the crisis on the border, immigration reform. This is an international problem. But it's also a big political issue, as well. Is your party prepared to move with the president on this?

SEN. LINDSEY GRAHAM: There will be no money for supplemental without changes in the 2008 law. We have to streamline and quicken deportations. There'll be no immigration reform because of the crisis on the border. I blame Obama for this moment. But in 2015, if we start over, and the Republican Party doesn't get immigration reform right in 2015 and the House should lead, not the Senate, our chances in 2016 of winning the White House are very low.

NIAID Director remembers fellow AIDS researchers on MH 17: "What has been lost are really extraordinary colleagues"

VIDEO: <http://nbcnews.to/1rubz1S>

DR. ANTHONY FAUCI: It's really permeating the meeting, David. I just came out of the opening ceremony. And there's a feeling of really great sadness and loss ... What has been lost are really extraordinary colleagues, activists who've been in it from the very beginning, pushing the envelope.

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Additional video clips from today's program:

Andrea Mitchell on the High Stakes with Russia
<http://nbcnews.to/1sBsEaq>

Full Interview with John Kerry
<http://nbcnews.to/1u5O2Xa>

Graham: Kerry's Outlook on Foreign Policy 'Delusional'
<http://nbcnews.to/UkgW5e>

Graham: No Immigration Reform Because of Border Crisis
<http://nbcnews.to/1nL3ui6>

Roundtable Talks Questions of American Leadership
<http://nbcnews.to/1u5OCEh>

Where the 2016 Race Stands in 2 Minutes
<http://nbcnews.to/1kIX1UR>

Roundtable Looks Ahead to 2016
<http://nbcnews.to/1mtsY30>

Meeting America: Immigration Crisis reaches to Iowa
<http://nbcnews.to/1zUEI8T>

Remembering AIDS Researchers Lost in MH17 Crash

<http://nbcnews.to/1rubz1S>

Roundtable Discusses the Big Question: Is Vladimir Putin a threat to the world?

<http://nbcnews.to/1nWYjQX>

###

COMING UP ON “MEET THE PRESS” -- SUNDAY, JULY 27, 2014

THIS SUNDAY: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu joins David Gregory for a conversation on crisis in the Middle East. Can the two parties find a way to make a truce last more than 12 hours? What is the latest on the ceasefire talks and is Secretary of State John Kerry aiding the process?

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu

###

SUNDAY EXCLUSIVE: Rep. Paul Ryan joins David Gregory for an interview. Will his new initiative to fight poverty work? Can Congress solve the border crisis before leaving Washington for the summer? Plus, as a result of changes in House leadership, what is the state of the Republican Party? Finally, with the Ukraine and the Middle East in turmoil, how will the U.S. lead on the world stage?

Rep. Paul Ryan

###

WILL THE U.S. SOLVE RUSSIA OR THE MIDEAST?

Sen. Charles Schumer

###

DYSFUNCTION IN CONGRESS: In the final days before the summer recess, what can get done? Who is to blame for inaction?

Sen. Ted Cruz

###

POLITICAL ROUNDTABLE:

With the current crises abroad, how should the US respond? In the Ukraine, how does the US make sure that Putin doesn't get his way? In the Middle East, can a deal for peace, even a cease fire, come soon? Plus here at home, if nothing can be accomplished in the next week by Congress, what does this mean for the rest for the Congressional term and the Obama Presidency?

Judy Woodruff, Co-Anchor and Managing Editor, PBS NewsHour

David Brooks, Columnist, New York Times

Nia-Malika Henderson, Reporter, Washington Post

Ruth Marcus, Columnist, Washington Post

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ALSO SUNDAY:

Meeting America: NBC News correspondent Kevin Tibbles heads to Vermont to explore their unique single-payer health care system.

**“MEET THE PRESS” 8/3/14: CDC DIR.: ‘ENCOURAGING’ OUTLOOK FOR EBOLA PATIENT;
MANSOUR & DERMER ADDRESS FUTURE FOR ISRAEL & GAZA; NEW POLLING**

Riyad Mansour: “empower the national consensus government” to decrease Hamas’ influence

Amb. Dermer: “The road to peace goes over Hamas. It doesn't include Hamas.”

New NBC/WSJ/Marist Poll: 74% of voters say Congress is unproductive

AUGUST 3, 2014 -- Today’s **“Meet the Press with David Gregory”** featured the latest analysis on the Ebola outbreak from CDC Director **Dr. Tom Frieden** and Cleveland Clinic President & CEO **Dr. Toby Cosgrove**; interviews with the permanent observer of Palestine to the UN **Riyad Mansour** and the Israeli Ambassador to the U.S. **Ron Dermer**; a conversation about dysfunction in Washington with Senators **John Thune** (R-SD) and **Robert Menendez** (D-NJ); and a political roundtable with Rep. **Keith Ellison** (D-MN), Republican strategist **Mike Murphy**, Echelon Insights co-founder **Kristen Soltis Anderson**, and *New York Times* Washington bureau chief **Carolyn Ryan**.

The program also unveiled a new **NBC News/Wall Street Journal/Marist poll** which finds 74% of voters say Congress has been unproductive. Full details and analysis:

<http://nbcnews.to/1o19k3T>

Below are highlights, video, and a rush transcript of today’s program. All content will be available online at MeetThePressNBC.com.

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CDC Director: stopping Ebola is “old-fashioned, plain and simple public health”

VIDEO: <http://nbcnews.to/UKICli>

DR. TOM FRIEDEN: It is a very serious condition. And it is currently out of control in Africa with a high risk of spreading further in Africa. What we're doing now at CDC is surging our response. We are going to put at least 50 public health experts in the three countries in the next 30 days. Because actually, we do know how to stop Ebola. It's old fashioned, plain and simple public health. Find the patients, make sure they treat it, find their contacts, track them, educate people, do infection control at hospitals. You do those things, but you have to do them really well, and Ebola goes away.

Frieden responds to concerns about CDC preparations: “your plan and your execution has to be meticulous”

DAVID GREGORY: People who are looking at the events of the last couple of days were concerned even at the Centers for Disease Control's mishandling of biochemicals and other agents and diseases at your own labs, have to be wondering about the ability of our healthcare system, of the U.S. government to be able to prevent a spread here, particularly with those affected workers, two, a total who will be back in the United States. What can you say to deal with that concern?

DR. TOM FRIEDEN: I certainly understand that concern. At CDC, we had lapses in our laboratories. Fortunately no one was hurt. And nothing was released out of the laboratory and

into the environment. But what is so important is if there are patients with possible Ebola or confirmed Ebola in hospitals, that doctors and the entire healthcare team are super careful. They have protocols in place and make sure that every one of those protocols is followed. Because Ebola is really a formidable enemy. And your plan and your execution has to be meticulous to avoid spreading. If you don't do that, you can have spread to workers in the healthcare system or family members. That can happen. You can have some secondary cases if you're not really, really careful.

Head of Cleveland Clinic says it's "a terrific sign" that Dr. Brantly was walking on his own
VIDEO: <http://nbcnews.to/1zKMY0>

DR. TOBY COSGROVE: I think it's a terrific sign. And as you know, the incubation period is somewhere between eight and 21 days. And people spread the disease most when they're sick, now which is a good thing. And it looks to me like he is now in even a recovery stage or has been able to handle it.

Riyad Mansour: "I am outraged at the killing of innocent civilians from any party from any side."

VIDEO: <http://nbcnews.to/1kfCtIE>

DAVID GREGORY: Do you have any outrage towards Hamas?

RIYAD MANSOUR: I am outraged at the killing of innocent civilians from any party from any side. ... These things need to be stopped. And my president, President Abbas, is doing more than that. He dispatched yesterday a delegation composed of all Palestinian political groups to begin the negotiation with Israel through the Egyptians to have a ceasefire extended more than three days, to have a sustainable ceasefire, and to begin the discussions on the root causes ... We are waiting on the Israeli side to come to begin the negotiation process.

Mansour: "empower the national consensus government" to decrease Hamas' influence

DAVID GREGORY: I just want to try one more on this, which is: do you think that Hamas is helping or hurting Palestinians right now?

RIYAD MANSOUR: Hamas is part of the Palestinian political configuration. The question is how to deal with that. The first step is the national consensus government. Israel is trying to destroy this government. To destroy this government, it's pushing us back into divisions. And allowing Hamas to have support from the Gaza Strip. The alternative is empower the national consensus government, allow the government of President Mahmoud Abbas to show the people in the Gaza Strip that we've succeeded in having peace and stopping the fighting and addressing the wounds of our people in Gaza, then in lifting the siege in Gaza, giving people hope.

Dermer: IDF hopes that the last of the uncovered tunnels will be destroyed "in a matter of hours"

VIDEO: <http://nbcnews.to/1nhwj5Q>

DAVID GREGORY: Is the ground operation in Gaza about to end?

RON DERMER: Well, we're finishing up decommissioning these tunnels. We've uncovered about three dozen tunnels. ... We've destroyed these tunnels that are used to actually burrow

underneath Israel's borders, come out on the other side and massacre our civilians, to massacre soldiers, kidnap people. So once we've uncovered these, we're obviously going to destroy them. And we hope that that job will be completed in a matter of hours.

Dermer on including Hamas in Palestinian government: “The road to peace goes over Hamas. It doesn't include Hamas.”

RON DERMER: You have to fight terror. You can't embrace terrorists. That's unfortunately what President Abbas has done. Take the case of Iraq. Do you think a solution of Iraq is to have the Iraqi government to simply include ISIS as a member of the government? Because that's what the Palestinian government just did. They did it two months ago. We were very much opposed to it and very upset when the international community basically said, "Hey, this is a good thing for peace." It's a terrible thing for peace. The road to peace goes over Hamas. It doesn't include Hamas.

Rep. Keith Ellison voted against more money for Iron Dome “because a ceasefire is what we should prioritize now”

VIDEO: <http://nbcnews.to/1p2j7Hf>

DAVID GREGORY: But you just voted against more money for [Iron Dome]. Why?

REP. KEITH ELLISON: Because a ceasefire is what we should prioritize now. A ceasefire protects civilians on both sides. It doesn't just say, "We're only concerned about people on one side." I've been to Sderot, I have stood with those people, talking about those rockets and that indiscriminate rocket fire, and I've also been to Gaza three times since 2009. And I can tell you, those people are absolutely devastated. We need a ceasefire now.

Sens. Thune and Menendez on immigration reform

VIDEO: <http://nbcnews.to/WUy6Zh>

SEN. JOHN THUNE: We've got to deal with this immediate crisis right now. And what the House bill did is it addresses the flow, stopping the flow. I think most Americans realize it's a reasonable position that we can't sustain what's happening at the border right now. ... As Marco Rubio has said, you can't fix legal immigration until you fix illegal immigration. ... We're not going to have the trust and the confidence in the American people that we can address this problem on the legal immigration side if we don't fix illegal immigration.

SEN. ROBERT MENENDEZ: That's exactly what we did, David, when 68 members of the Senate ... Republicans and Democrats alike, sent a broad legislation, border enforcement, pathway to legalization, the economics, and even a Congressional Budget Office said would create jobs, lower the deficit, and help the national economy. Republicans in the House can't seem to get there.

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Complete video clips from today's program:

Dr. Nancy Snyderman: How is the CDC preparing for a potential Ebola outbreak?
<http://nbcnews.to/1kvOZ79>

CDC Director: Prognosis on American Doctor 'Encouraging'
<http://nbcnews.to/UKICli>

Cleveland Clinic President Talks Ebola Outbreak
<http://nbcnews.to/1zKMY0>

Full Interview with the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the U.N.
<http://nbcnews.to/1kfCtIE>

Andrea Mitchell: Will Israel Lose Support If Violence Continues?
<http://nbcnews.to/1uXrMze>

Full Interview with Israeli Ambassador to the U.S.
<http://nbcnews.to/1nhwj5Q>

Rep. Ellison: A Cease-Fire Is What We Need
<http://nbcnews.to/1p2j7Hf>

Chuck Todd: The Numbers Behind the 'Do Nothing Congress'
<http://nbcnews.to/1onPWhc>

Roundtable: The 'Do Nothing' Congress?
<http://nbcnews.to/1lpMPku>

Sens. Menendez and Thune discuss gridlock in Washington
<http://nbcnews.to/WUy6Zh>

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Below is a RUSH transcript of this morning's broadcast -- mandatory attribution to NBC News' "Meet the Press." A final transcript of the program will be available at www.MeetThePressNBC.com.

**"MEET THE PRESS WITH DAVID GREGORY"
August 3, 2014**

DAVID GREGORY:

Next on Meet the Press, our focus is on the search for a solution to keep crisis around the U.S. and the world. The first ever known Ebola patient on U.S. soil is now being treated at an Atlanta hospital. What's his prognosis? And how is the U.S. government responding? I'll ask the head of the Centers for Disease Control. No end in sight to the war in the Middle East. Strong backing for Israel from President Obama.

Will Israel win the war militarily but lose the battle of public opinion? Plus, your government at work not working. The most do-nothing Congress ever heads for vacation. And tempers flare on the House floor. Will anything get done on some of the country's most pressing problems?

ANNOUNCER:

From NBC News in Washington, this is Meet the Press with David Gregory.

DAVID GREGORY:

Good Sunday morning. Let's show you a live shot of Emory University Hospital at Atlanta where Dr. Kent Brantly is in a special isolation ward this morning. He was flown to the U.S. yesterday and walked into the hospital of his own accord with the assistance of another medical worker. He arrived on an especially quick plane after contracting the deadly disease while working in Liberia.

President Obama weighed in on the Ebola crisis Friday saying the U.S. is taking the outbreak of the disease quote, "Very seriously." Our chief medical editor, Dr. Nancy Snyderman has the very latest on the crisis and how the U.S. government plans to respond. Nancy, good morning.

DR. NANCY SNYDERMAN:

Good morning, David. Well, the government has responded. The CDC is now issuing an order for 50 people, disease detectives, if you will, to be deployed to West Africa to try to start to get this epidemic, this outbreak of Ebola under control.

But in the meantime, they were also at the epicenter of an extraordinary operation that required the coordination of the State Department, CDC, White House, F.B.I., the doctors and nurses at Emory, and even patients on the ground, people on the ground if you will, to get Dr. Brantly safely from Liberia to the United States and admitted to the hospital. It was a military operation that took every precaution.

(BEGIN TAPE)

DR. NANCY SNYDERMAN :

While the disease continues to ravage parts of West Africa, the death toll now over 700 and climbing, chances of an Ebola outbreak in the United States are slim. But the government says it's ready. Here are the three main reasons why. Number one, government on alert. Only the CDC can confirm Ebola cases in the United States.

And they have 20 quarantine stations at all major points of entry to the country staffed with medical and public health officers. If a traveler is sick on a flight, that person will be flagged by the flight crew, isolated, and passengers and crew may be detained to get medical attention upon landing.

If necessary, those with the disease can be denied entry into the United States. Number two, our modern healthcare system. A person can't get Ebola without direct contact with bodily fluids of someone who already has the disease. Basic hygiene in our emergency rooms should prevent the virus from spreading.

Number three, command and control. Hospitals in West Africa have almost become amplification centers for the disease. Meaning unmodern facilities and lack of medical supplies can increase rather than halt the disease's spread. In the United States, the government says there are strong systems in place to find people who are sick, isolate them, and give treatment. Having a command and control center gives experts a place to centralize decision making and take quick action.

(END TAPE)

DR. NANCY SNYDERMAN:

The real issue right now is to prevent any further kidney or liver damage, to limit any bleeding, and that is the best way to save Dr. Brantley's life. No news yet on an update from Emory, we expect that later today.

DAVID GREGORY:

All right, Dr. Nancy. Thank you so much for your time this morning. Earlier I spoke with Dr. Tom Frieden, director of the Centers for Disease Control, and I asked him, as Nancy was just talking about that, about the outlook for Dr. Brantly at this point.

(BEGIN TAPE)

DR. TOM FRIEDEN:

Well, it's encouraging. He seems to be improved from the reports we got earlier. Ebola can be deadly. But in people who are healthy, the case fatality rate may be lower than the ones that we're usually quoting because people like this doctor are much healthier going in than many of the people who unfortunately are still getting Ebola in Africa.

DAVID GREGORY:

Right. And he was working in Western Africa in Liberia. When you look at some of the precautions that are taken, a specially-outfitted plane for him to be contained, the medical units onsite from the airport to his transport to Emory, and then in a containment unit at Emory, is this an unacceptable risk to bring somebody with Ebola back?

DR. TOM FRIEDEN:

Well, first off, we have to say that he was coming home. And the organization that sent him to Africa made the decision to bring him home. He's an American citizen. And what our role is in public health is to make sure that if an American is coming home with an infectious disease, we protect others so that they don't spread it. And that's what we did in transit and when he's here.

DAVID GREGORY:

The head of the World Health Organization has said in the last couple of days the following from Dr. Margaret Chan, "This outbreak, the Ebola outbreak, is moving faster than our efforts to control. If the situation continues to deteriorate, the consequences are going to be catastrophic in terms of lost lives, but also severe socioeconomic disruption and a high risk of spread to other countries." What is the U.S. government doing to respond to that need, to respond to the potential for its spread?

DR. TOM FRIEDEN:

It is a very serious condition. And it is currently out of control in Africa with a high risk of spreading further in Africa. What we're doing now at CDC is surging our response. We are going to put at least 50 public health experts in the three countries in the next 30 days. Because actually, we do know how to stop Ebola.

It's old fashioned, plain and simple public health. Find the patients, make sure they get treated, find their contacts, track them, educate people, do infection control at hospitals. You do those things, but you have to do them really well, and Ebola goes away.

DAVID GREGORY:

People who are looking at the events of the last couple of days were concerned even at the Centers for Disease Control's mishandling of biochemicals and other agents and diseases at your own labs, have to be wondering about the ability of our healthcare system, of the U.S. government to be able to prevent a spread here, particularly with those affected workers, two, a total who will be back in the United States. What can you say to deal with that concern?

DR. TOM FRIEDEN:

I certainly understand that concern. At CDC, we had lapses in our laboratories. Fortunately no one was hurt. And nothing was released out of the laboratory and into the environment. But what is so important is if there are patients with possible Ebola or confirmed Ebola in hospitals, that doctors and the entire healthcare team are super careful.

They have protocols in place and make sure that every one of those protocols is followed. Because Ebola is really a formidable enemy. And your plan and your execution has to be meticulous to avoid spreading. If you don't do that, you can have spread to workers in the healthcare system or family members. That can happen. You can have some secondary cases if you're not really, really careful.

DAVID GREGORY:

All right, Dr. Frieden, we'll certainly send our best wishes to Dr. Kent Brantly and monitor his progress. Thanks so much for your time this morning.

DR. TOM FRIEDEN:

Thank you very much.

(END TAPE)

DAVID GREGORY:

I'm joined now by Dr. Toby Cosgrove, chief executive officer and president of the renowned Cleveland clinic. And Dr. Cosgrove, great to have you here. I wanted to get some additional perspective from the private sector, from the hospital sector in the United States. First of all, take me inside what this containment unit is like when you have a Dr. Brantly. How he's protected, how the workers are protected, how are their patients and then wider public are protected as a result of these efforts.

DR. TOBY COSGROVE:

We have to understand how the disease spreads. And different diseases spread differently. This disease is spread by direct contact or bodily fluid contact. And so inside these containment areas, there's negative pressure. So any air going, would go in through rather than coming out of that facility. And they are protected, the workers are protected by contained covering of their face and all of their body.

And they are isolated. And so this is much like any other infectious disease that we deal with. Interestingly, this is not as highly contagious as many other diseases. For example, more people die in the United States right now from influenza. And that requires hand washing and isolation to prevent that. So we must remember that we are in a global world.

DAVID GREGORY:

Right, well, is it irrational then to say, "Oh my goodness, these wonderful people who are helping to stop the spread of Ebola in Western Africa, they are Americans, but they shouldn't

be allowed to come back in the United States because the risk is too high"?

DR. TOBY COSGROVE:

No, but you have to understand that we've gone to a globalized world now. And diseases are globalized as well. And so just because it's in Africa doesn't mean that it doesn't affect the entire world. And with transportation, this is something we must learn to deal with and I think the CDC has done a wonderful job being able to isolate these patients, having centers that look for people coming into the United States with the disease. I think they've done a super job.

DAVID GREGORY:

It means a lot of people will think about a visit to the hospital, which is unpleasant, and they worry about getting sicker than what they came in for being at the hospital. When you have an introduction of a virus like this, is that a compounded fear and is it real?

DR. TOBY COSGROVE:

I don't think their fear is real first of all because we understand we have the disease, we isolate it, we take tremendous precautions with it and I don't think that that represents an additional risk. The intentions that occur in the hospital are generally important in terms of people not washing their hands and spreading bacterial diseases that way, not so much diseases that are viral diseases like this.

DAVID GREGORY:

No known cure for the Ebola virus. What do you look for them for Dr. Brantly and others who have contracted this disease and who are being cured for it now.

DR. TOBY COSGROVE:

We're looking for supportive care. You may have renal function failure, you may have failure of liver, you may have respiratory failure. All these can be supportive. And that's the real care that these patients get better in the United States than anyplace else in the world.

DAVID GREGORY:

And as Dr. Frieden was saying, younger, healthier, better chance of survival that Dr. Brantly was walking of his own volition. A big sign to you as well?

DR. TOBY COSGROVE:

I think it's a terrific sign. And as you know, the incubation period is somewhere between eight and 21 days. And people spread the disease most when they're sick, now which is a good thing. And it looks to me like he is now in even a recovery stage or has been able to handle it.

DAVID GREGORY:

And if you'd been over in the area, if you were in Western Africa in an outbreak area, when would you show symptoms?

DR. TOBY COSGROVE:

Somewhere in eight to ten, 21-day period. And people who are coming back to the United States are having their temperature measured every day now and quarantined until that 21 days passed.

DAVID GREGORY:

Before I let you go, there's a real health threat in your neck of the woods, in Cleveland and in

Toledo as algae bloom in Lake Erie that is making the drinking water there toxic. How concerned are you about Cleveland? What are they doing to fix this?

DR. TOBY COSGROVE:

Well, we're concerned about the water supply across Lake Erie and across the Great Lakes in fact. And the runoff from fertilizers from the farms has caused the algae to bloom in the lakes. And that has gotten worse and worse each year as we've gone along. And it's now reached critical proportions in the western portion of Lake Erie. And obviously Cleveland is right down the lake from that and we're concerned as well.

DAVID GREGORY:

All right, Dr. Cosgrove, always great to have you here on the program. Thanks so much for your time this morning.

DR. TOBY COSGROVE:

My pleasure.

DAVID GREGORY:

We're going to take a break here, come back, and talk about the big news overseas as well. The brutal fight between Israel and Hamas. No end in sight as President Obama defends the effort of his secretary of State John Kerry.

PRESIDENT OBAMA:

There shouldn't be a bunch of complaints and second-guessing about...well it hasn't happened yet or nitpicking before he's had a chance to complete his efforts...

DAVID GREGORY:

The question this morning, is there any hope of a negotiated solution to the crisis? I will ask diplomats from opposing sides of this conflict coming up next.

****Commercial Break****

DAVID GREGORY:

We're back with the discussion about the war in the Middle East. The conflict between Israel and Hamas and Gaza with diplomatic and ceasefire efforts so far unsuccessful. Can its solution be found any time soon? More Israeli shelling killed at least 30 people today. The death toll in Gaza now stands at more than 1,700 people.

Israel is withdrawing and redeploying some troops, but Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu says he will keep up the pressure on Hamas even after destroying the Hamas network of tunnels into Israel. I'm joined now by the permanent observer of Palestine to the United Nations, Riyad Mansour. And Ambassador, welcome. Good to have you here.

RIYAD MANSOUR:

Thank you for having me.

DAVID GREGORY:

First of all, on that point about the redeployment and withdraw of the Israeli troops, do you see some opening here to break this impasse, to get to a more durable ceasefire?

RIYAD MANSOUR:

Well, we hope that the Israeli army would withdraw completely from the Gaza Strip. We have a tragic humanitarian situation in Gaza in which, as you have indicated, more than 1,700 Palestinians, most of them civilians, 80% or more, and more than 9,000 have been injured. 80% of them, according to UN statistics have been injured. What we need now is to stop this fighting, to address the tragic humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip.

DAVID GREGORY:

And let me stop you on that point. Your anger at Israel, certainly understandable. The loss of civilians horrific. There is agreement about that. I'm wondering though whether you're outraged by the conduct of Hamas, starting the conflict by firing rockets, building tunnels to kill and kidnap Israelis, being more than willing to sacrifice Palestinian lives by embedding them into their own kind of arsenal and using them, as Israel contends, as human shields. Do you have a level of outrage at Hamas itself?

RIYAD MANSOUR:

Well, first of all, this concept of using Palestinian civilians as human shields is not right, it is not correct, it is not even moral. Instead of asking me, why don't you bring on the show and let the American public, I'm including the Congress to listen to third party. For example, Doctors Without Borders.

DAVID GREGORY:

Hold on a second. I want you--

(OVERTALK)

DAVID GREGORY:

Hold on, I'm asking whether you are outraged that the conduct of Hamas--

RIYAD MANSOUR:

I am outraged--

DAVID GREGORY:

--they fired rockets, they built tunnels for the purpose of killing and kidnapping Israelis, and they do exploit these Palestinian civilians when they know they're going to be in danger from where they're firing the rockets and so forth. Do you have any outrage towards Hamas?

RIYAD MANSOUR:

I am outraged at the killing of innocent civilians from any party from any side. Today another school of UNRWA United Nations was hit in Gaza. At least ten civilians were killed and possibly 100 injured. These things need to be stopped. And my president, President Abbas, is doing more than that.

He dispatched yesterday a delegation composed of all Palestinian political groups to begin the negotiation with Israel through the Egyptians to have a ceasefire extended more than three days, to have a sustainable ceasefire, and to begin the discussions on the root causes--

(OVERTALK)

DAVID GREGORY:

But, Ambassador, I'm trying to--

RIYAD MANSOUR:

We are waiting on the Israeli side to come to begin the negotiation process--

(OVERTALK)

DAVID GREGORY:

Fair enough, fair enough. And indeed, the reason I'm pressing this point is not to challenge you about how horrific the loss of civilians are. As a more moderate Palestinian political figure, which is what you are, a representative of Palestinian authority, which there's certainly no love lost between the Palestinian authority and Hamas, I'm wondering what level of culpability you believe that Hamas has for the advancement of the Palestinian people not just in this conflict, but more generally.

RIYAD MANSOUR:

I believe that if we allow for peace to take place, negotiation to take place, under the leadership of President Mahmoud Abbas, who is bringing all political elements in the Palestinian side including Hamas under his wing and the national consensus government. If we empower this government, we will be able to move gradually from the situation of confrontation and fighting into the situation of lifting this tragedy and blockade against our people in Gaza.

Giving the people there a hope. 50% of the population in Gaza are under 18. If you put them in a continuous situation of fighting and resentment and hate, this is an excellent atmosphere for radicalism. But if you give them hope, you open the borders, you let them go to schools, let them look for good jobs, let them look for moderation, then we will succeed in allowing all those who want to have peace between us and the Israelis to have the upper hand.

DAVID GREGORY:

And I think a lot of people list, right, would find that compelling, maybe, that the Palestinian authority could provide better leadership perhaps in Gaza than Hamas. But I just want to try one more on this which is do you think that Hamas is helping or hurting Palestinians right now?

RIYAD MANSOUR:

Hamas is part of the Palestinian political configuration. The question is how to deal with that. The first step is the national consensus government. Israel is trying to destroy this government. To destroy this government, it's pushing us back into divisions. And allowing Hamas to have support from the Gaza Strip.

The alternative is empower the national consensus government, allow the government of President Mahmoud Abbas to show the people in the Gaza Strip that it's succeed in having peace and stopping the fighting and addressing the wounds of our people in Gaza, then in lifting the siege in Gaza, giving people hope.

Then the 1.8 million people in Gaza see that this national consensus government is improving their lives. Then that would be strengthening President Mahmoud Abbas and allowing us to have more strength in the Gaza Strip and giving our people an alternative. Instead of the continuation of fighting, an alternative in moving in the direction of peace.

DAVID GREGORY:

All right.

RIYAD MANSOUR:

And of course we have to put an end to the occupation so that the independent state of Palestine can become independent and to actualize the dream of a two-state solution.

DAVID GREGORY:

All right, Ambassador Mansour, thank you very much for your--

(OVERTALK)

RIYAD MANSOUR:

You're very welcome. Thanks for having me.

DAVID GREGORY:

I appreciate you being here this morning. Thank you. Polls do show that the majority of Americans are sympathetic towards Israel. But yesterday, thousands of people protested in support of the Palestinians near the White House. And the harrowing pictures of Palestinian suffering being beamed out of Gaza has have provoked an outcry and prompted protests across the world. Our chief foreign affairs correspondent Andrea Mitchell assesses whether Israel may achieve military victory, but lose the battle of wider world opinion.

(BEGIN TAPE)

ANDREA MITCHELL:

As the violence continues, the civilians trapped in the middle. Israel's strategy of self defense is becoming less defensible in world opinion. In Berlin, pro-Palestinian marches, in Kosovo, "Free Gaza" signs. And in Spain, demonstrators against Israel covering their hands in red tape. This week's cover of The Economist are warning that Israel could be winning the battle, losing the war. As images of Palestinian suffering are shown around the world, a very real problem for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

AARON DAVID MILLER (WILSON CENTER):

Then you'd have to reach the conclusion that no set of talking points, however compelling they are from Israel's point of view, can somehow stand up and match up to those pictures. Which is why most of the international community is reacting quite negatively to say the least, to what's going on in Gaza.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

Here in the U.S., Israel still enjoys strong support. Our new polling shows 43% of Americans sympathize with the Israelis in the current conflict. 14% with the Palestinians. 43% are unsure. But the generational divide is striking. Among Americans under 45, support for Israel drops to 33%. Among 18 to 29 year olds, it's only 27%. And the longer this drags on, Israel's global standing risks slipping further as President Obama cautioned Friday.

PRESIDENT OBAMA (ON TAPE):

Part of the reason why we've been pushing so hard for a ceasefire is precisely because it's hard to reconcile Israel's legitimate need to defend itself with our concern with those civilians.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

Right now, Israelis overwhelmingly support their government's portion of Gaza to eliminate Hamas' tunnels. But they don't want a permanent occupation.

DAVID IGNATIUS (THE WASHINGTON POST):

The casualties that would be required to go house to house and secure Gaza would be I think something that no Israelis would want. And I think Prime Minister knows that.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

The most surprising difference in this conflict, most Arab leaders are quietly rooting for Israel to eliminate the Hamas threat, which they see as a potential threat to them as well. For Meet the Press, Andrea Mitchell, NBC News, Washington.

(END TAPE)

DAVID GREGORY:

I'm joined now by the Israeli ambassador to Washington, Ron Dermer. Ambassador, welcome.

RON DERMER:

Good to be here.

DAVID GREGORY:

Good to have you here. First the news. Is the ground operation in Gaza about to end?

RON DERMER:

Well, we're finishing up decommissioning these tunnels. We've uncovered about three dozen tunnels. And we--

(OVERTALK)

DAVID GREGORY:

--I guess that means?

RON DERMER:

Yes.

DAVID GREGORY:

Yeah.

RON DERMER:

We've destroyed these tunnels that are used to actually burrow underneath Israel's borders, come out on the other side and massacre our civilians, to massacre soldiers, kidnap people. So once we've uncovered these, we're obviously going to destroy them. And we hope that that job will be completed in a matter of hours--

(OVERTALK)

DAVID GREGORY:

--ground troops will come out in a course of a week?

RON DERMER:

Well we are going to deploy our forces.

DAVID GREGORY:

Meaning they'll be taken out of Gaza?

RON DERMER:

Not necessarily. It means that we deploy to a position where Israel can continue to do what it has to do to protect the security of our people.

DAVID GREGORY:

What is the state of Gaza being demilitarized? In other words, having the capacity for Hamas to fire off rockets?

RON DERMER:

Well, their capacity has been significantly degraded because we've hit a lot of their missile batteries, a lot of their rocket warehouses. They've also fired over 3,000 rockets at our country. So they started this operation with over 10,000 rockets. There are probably less than half at this point. The key, David, is to prevent them from the rearming in the future.

This is the third time we've had to have a confrontation with Hamas. The first was in 2008 in Cast Lead. The second was in Pillar of Defense in 2012. Now in 2014, a year and a half after Pillar of Defense, what we don't want to see is us simply leaving and allowing Hamas to use the time to simply rearm thousands of rockets more tunnels. We have to make sure that we have an effective mechanism to prevent Hamas from rearming and refueling its war machine.

DAVID GREGORY:

So Ambassador Mansour just here, saying, "Look, you are essentially, Israel is giving space to Hamas because the population is desperate, is being hit and attacked, civilians killed." While he would not express outrage toward Hamas for starting all of this, it is still a reality that Hamas is isolated, disliked by most of the Arab world. And yet this campaign has given them newfound political energy and support.

RON DERMER:

Oh, I don't think so. I think they're more isolated. I think that--

DAVID GREGORY:

Within Gaza? They're casting off the government

(OVERTALK)

RON DERMER:

I think they're, well, five Palestinians were executed a few days ago. I don't know if you know that. They tried to protest against Hamas. It's not a free society in Gaza. You can't just come out and say you're against Hamas. They actually shoot you. And it was very telling that the Palestinian official would not actually condemn Hamas.

His problem is he has to go back to Ramallah. And Ramallah right now, President Abbas is in an alliance with Hamas. Let's remember what Hamas is? This is like Al Qaeda. They're a terror organization, they're committed to our destruction. This is an organization whose officials were

celebrating on 9/11 when thousands of Americans were killed, whose prime minister who is right now underneath in some tunnel in Gaza, he actually condemned the United States for killing Osama bin Laden. That's who we're dealing with.

DAVID GREGORY:

So what is the solution here? You don't have a delegation that's going to Egypt to engage in talks.

RON DERMER:

What's the point?

DAVID GREGORY:

Well, I'm asking you. Is there really a military solution to this? If you look at Andrea Mitchell's piece and this larger question which is, well-acquainted as I am, obviously, with Israel's arguments about security, are you paying a price here that ultimately endangers Israel's security in the future, inflames not just international opinion against Israel, but certainly within Gaza and the Arab world to a point where you're losing a larger war even if you achieve some military objectives right now?

RON DERMER:

No, I don't think so. You have to fight terror. You can't embrace terrorists. That's unfortunately what President Abbas has done. Take the case of Iraq. Do you think a solution of Iraq is to have the Iraqi government to simply include ISIS as a member of the government? Because that's what the Palestinian government just did.

They did it two months ago. We were very much opposed to it and very upset when the international community basically said, "Hey, this is a good thing for peace." It's a terrible thing for peace. The road to peace goes over Hamas. It doesn't include Hamas.

DAVID GREGORY:

So is there a military solution to the Hamas problem?

RON DERMER:

Yes. And Israel right now is working very hard to degrade their capabilities.

DAVID GREGORY:

Degrade them? Can you eliminate them?

RON DERMER:

You can. There is a cost for any action that you have.

DAVID GREGORY:

And is Israel willing to pay it?

RON DERMER:

And unfortunately, Israel has many threats. This is not the only threat that Israel faces. We live in a very, very unstable region.

DAVID GREGORY:

But what do you want? If you want the Palestinian Authority led by Mahmoud Abbas to have a

greater political say in what happens in Gaza, then how do you achieve that? Do you do it militarily?

(OVERTALK)

RON DERMER:

Do you really think Hamas is going to allow them to go in? Hamas is the ones who threw them out. The Palestinian officials who sat here, I forgot to mention that in 2007, there was a coup in Gaza. Palestinian officials were thrown over the tops of buildings. They were shot, Palestinian Authority officials. Now unfortunately they're in alliance with this terror organization.

I hope they're -- and it's a genocidal terror organization. Hamas's charter calls for the murder of Jews worldwide. I hope that after this round of fighting is over, that President Abbas will abandon the pact that he's made with Hamas and he will go back to peace negotiations.

DAVID GREGORY:

Is the number of civilian deaths by Israel in Gaza unacceptable to Israel?

RON DERMER:

Well, every civilian death is unacceptable to Israel. We don't try to kill any civilian. The problem that we have is we have an enemy that build fires indiscriminately at our civilians, but hides behind their own civilians. They use hospitals and schools and mosques. They embed themselves in civilian areas. They want those civilians dead. Hamas doesn't care about the civilian population in Gaza.

We left Gaza in 2005. We withdrew all of our settlers, we withdrew all our military and we said, "Hey, make a better future for Gaza." People were hoping at the time they were going to make a Singapore in Gaza of the Middle East. Instead, they built an Iran in the Middle East. Used all this concrete to build a subterranean fortress in Gaza. And used all the iron not to build buildings and schools, but to actually manufacture rockets to fire at Israel.

DAVID GREGORY:

All right. We're going to leave it there. Ambassador Ron Dermer, thank you so much.

RON DERMER:

Thank you.

(OVERTALK)

DAVID GREGORY:

We'll be monitoring the situation. When we come back here, we'll switch gears. We'll talk politics. A big week here, all this impeachment talk, why do some Democrats think it's actually helping their party? And the immigration fiasco. What the impact of Congress getting nothing done will have on the Republicans and on this issue. Our round table will be here to discuss a pretty dramatic for politics.

****Commercial Break****

DAVID GREGORY:

We are back with our roundtable. But first, just how angry are Americans at Washington? Shall

we count the ways? Our political director Chuck Todd has some exclusive new poll numbers.

(BEGIN TAPE)

CHUCK TODD:

More bad news for a Congress already blistered by a bad reputation. New polling from NBC News, The Wall Street Journal, and Marist, that we're revealing exclusively today shows that three out of four voters agree that Congress hasn't done much this year. This includes 50% who say they've been very unproductive. And guess what? The public's right.

Congress hasn't been productive. In fact, this Congress, with Republicans in charge of the House and Democrats in charge of the Senate is on track to be the least productive in history. 142 bills passed into law so far. That's fewer than even the last Congress at this same point. And they have set a record for inaction themselves. And it's a lot less productive than the most famous do-nothing Congress of all time, the one Harry Truman ran against in 1948.

HARRY TRUMAN:

This country can't afford another Republican Congress.

CHUCK TODD:

That do-nothing Congress actually pushed through more than 900 bills into law. So what does it mean for the midterm this year? Well, Americans are divided on who should control Congress. Our polling shows that in both the House and the Senate, there is a virtual tie over which party they want in charge, with Republicans holding a slight edge.

The Democrats are starting to feel like they have something to run on, or run against. Take the House Republicans and their own struggle to pass even small bills, like one to deal with the emergency at the border.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA:

So that's not a disagreement between me and the House Republicans, that's a disagreement between the House Republicans and the House Republicans.

CHUCK TODD:

Now it's a sprint to November with both parties pointing the finger at the other for Washington's dysfunction, which itself was on full display this week. With the House voting to sue the president, senators not even showing up to do their job to confirm a new ambassador to Russia. And now Congress leaves town for a five-week vacation, unable to address a slew of major issues.

DAVID GREGORY:

And we've got our roundtable here, Carolyn Ryan, Washington Bureau Chief, political editor of The New York Times; our friend Mike Murphy, a daddy primarily, but also Republican political strategist who has advised senior GOP figures including Mitt Romney and Jeb Bush; I'd also like to welcome a new face to the program, Kristen Soltis Anderson, a Republican pollster, cofounder of Echelon Insights, an opinion research firm; and Democrat Congressman Keith Ellison of Minnesota.

Welcome all of you. Good to have you here. Politics is easier than figuring out the Middle East. So, but it's in a pretty bad way, Mike Murphy. The Republicans are going to come back in the

fall and ask America to allow them to govern. Are they in a position to govern?

MIKE MURPHY:

Oh, I think we are. And I think we're going to do well at the elections. But the question is, we're not going to win enough at the elections to govern. We're still going to have a Democrat in the White House. And the next two years for the Republican party, assuming we win the Senate, which we have a good, a certain chance to, is going to be a test. Do we use the double majority in both houses to do something and get some things done? Or do we just continue to pound away in kind of a campaign mentality? I think we'll see--

(OVERTALK)

DAVID GREGORY:

But what is the mentality, Carolyn? The Wall Street Journal editorial page lashing fellow Republicans for basically botching this immigration debate by giving the president something of a victory in being so hopelessly divided within itself? Ted Cruz lobbying for House members to oppose the speaker's bill?

CAROLYN RYAN:

Right. I think what we have created is a timid and often craven political culture in Washington. And I think the one thing that we haven't really captured is the degree to which money is driving that. I think that Republicans are fearful of primary opponents. So they don't want to move toward the middle, they move toward the extreme.

And as primary opponents can access big money, you probably saw our story, there is going to be \$2 billion in outside spending on the congressional election. So they're changing the culture in turning out the voters and sort of driving the divide between members of Congress and the people they serve.

DAVID GREGORY:

How do you, you can't feel good about the way this week ended.

REP. KEITH ELLISON:

No, I don't feel good about it at all, because I'm still mindful about 3.5 million people have not had their unemployment extended. People are in bad shape. We haven't done anything about the minimum wage. This mess with the immigration. We're just not moving forward on the things that people need us to cooperate on.

But the president I think is trying because he just this week signed an executive order to help workers get all of the money that they earn by coming down on wage, on companies that do wage theft who have federal contracts. Earlier this year, raised the minimum wage for people who work for federal contractors. So the president's going out of his way to try to be productive. I wish we could get some action in the House.

DAVID GREGORY:

Well, Kristen, we're also going to see the president probably take executive action on immigration. What that means exactly we'll see. He's got some power to create a legal framework or path for some of the undocumented children who are coming across. Those who are in the process or those who need be here, Republicans certainly aren't going to like that.

KRISTEN SOLTIS ANDERSON:

No, they're not. And what we've actually seen is even the folks who are very frustrated with Congress, they didn't necessarily think that means it's time for the president to become the king. Only about 22% of Americans say they don't think that the president has taken enough executive action in the face of a Congress that hasn't accomplished much.

About 45% told a CNN poll that they think the president has gone too far with his executive action. On this immigration issue, since the border issue has arisen, Republicans have actually gained a little bit of an advantage when you ask voters which party do they trust more on this issue. So to the extent that the president takes action that may be beyond the scope of what is office allowed, I don't actually think this is necessarily a bad thing for Republicans politically.

DAVID GREGORY:

I think--

(OVERTALK)

DAVID GREGORY:

--Mike Murphy might disagree--

MIKE MURPHY:

Here's the problem this is one of these great conundrums. Just politics, policy-wise is simple. We've got other have a big immigration solution. That's what causes immigration and solve this?

REP. KEITH ELLISON:

I agree.

MIKE MURPHY:

But short term, what this is going to help us win races we're going to win anyway. Long term, looking at 2016, when the Senate map is bad, not good for Republicans, we'd like to hold any majority we win, and the presidential race is even more of a head win demographically than ever, we're playing with nitroglycerin here. This is very dangerous stuff.

DAVID GREGORY:

We're also in a very difficult spot in terms of American leadership not just in Washington but around the world. The president spoke with reporters on Friday. He was asked by Bill Plante at CBS news about his efforts to try to use influence. And with doubts whether he, America's lost its influence, whether he's lost his influence, here's a bit of that back and forth.

(BEGIN TAPE)

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA:

People have forgotten that America, as the most powerful country on earth, still does not control everything around the world.

BILL PLANTE:

Do you think you could've done more?

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA:

On which one?

BILL PLANTE:

On any of them.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA:

Well look.

BILL PLANTE:

Ukraine?

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA:

I think, Bill, that the nature of being President is that you're always asking yourself what more can you do.

(END TAPE)

DAVID GREGORY:

Carolyn, some will see that and say, "You know, this is the reality of American world today or maybe it's the reality of President Obama's leadership, that he doesn't have a big play here to use U.S. influence."

CAROLYN RYAN:

Exactly. Well, there are two points here, right? Every American election is a reaction to a last administration. So we elect Barack Obama to end the wars that George Bush started and that were very unpopular. So he was with the American people there. But I think the cumulative unease about Obama's leadership domestically and internationally kind of creates a sort of vagueness and a sense that he's uncertain about how and when to assert American interests abroad. And I think that has created sort of a general uncertainty about what our mission is, and he's not good at articulating it.

DAVID GREGORY:

Can or should America shape global events right now?

REP. KEITH ELLISON:

Yes, but I think it's important to understand that the world that Barack Obama is in is radically different from the world of a generation ago when you had, basically, Soviet Union, the United States, and the world was kind of simple that way. Now, you have non-state actors.

You have failed states. You have a very complex board to play on. And I think the president is trying to do the best he can. And in fact, he's using diplomacy, he's using development, and sometimes using kinetic power to try to marriage a very unstable environment.

DAVID GREGORY:

But management is different than leadership.

KRISTEN SOLTIS ANDERSON:

And there's a sense that things are getting worse, not better despite that approach. The president's job approval numbers on foreign policy has been very bad over the last year. People

don't think that he's able to lead. And they're looking around the world, and they're seeing it's not just the non-state actors, and it's not just the rise of terrorism.

But we actually are now back in a state where we're seeing the potential of a second cold war. It makes people feel very uneasy. And that paired with their sense that we've lost sort of economic competitiveness, America long term is not necessarily the big economic player on the block. It's all coming together to make people feel very anxious about our place in the world.

MIKE MURPHY:

The world is more complicated. I agree with my friend Keith on that. But channeling Jimmy Carter is not the answer. Because where we don't control the world, we influence it more than anybody. And when foreign actors, good and bad, perceive a vacuum of American leadership and a passivity here, and no strategy, our friends get very worried because we're still the biggest, most important force in their calculation. And our enemies get encouraged. Which creates more disorder.

And I think the biggest criticism of this administration has been their passivity and the lack of much of a clear strategy. When that Syrian red line was put down on the president of the United States and nothing happened, we kind of had deflation in the currency of American foreign policy and political will power and we're paying a price for it.

REP. KEITH ELLISON:

But wait a minute, I had calls nine against to one for when this whole Syrian crisis came up. The president, I think, was trying to stop Assad because he would not stop until he is stopped. Yet my constituents, I guarantee you, were not in favor of us doing anything in Syria. So--

CAROLYN RYAN:

It's not just the policy outcomes. It was the herky-jerky nature of how it unfolded.

REP. KEITH ELLISON:

It's a herky-jerky environment that we're--

DAVID GREGORY:

Well, but Congressman, you're not suggesting that the kind of calls you get influence your leadership, right? You have to make a decision about what the--

(OVERTALK)

REP. KEITH ELLISON:

You have to listen to what your constituents want. Now I was supporting the president because I believe Assad is a real problem and more continue to be one.

DAVID GREGORY:

But the president says, "If you cross--

(OVERTALK)

DAVID GREGORY:

--this line, you cannot cross this line because of core national security interest." And then you pull back from that because the sentiment was against it--

REP. KEITH ELLISON:

And the--

(OVERTALK)

REP. KEITH ELLISON:

And he ended up getting weapons of mass destruction, chemical weapons, cleaned out of that country. So I think the president did take good action. The president took the action he was to take. But you cannot just lead without the support of the country.

(OVERTALK)

MIKE MURPHY:

--a good example of this. I mean, John Kerry, I give him an A-plus for burning up jet fuel flying around the world. But when the economy deals with the Egyptians with very little influence now with Hamas. And you start creating space and tension in the American relationship with Israel, and the Israelis know the stakes now. We're going to be powerful in putting the thing back together. We're not going to be powerful enforcing a ceasefire that neither side wants because strategically they both think are right.

(OVERTALK)

REP. KEITH ELLISON:

--ceasefire, Mike, the people--

(OVERTALK)

REP. KEITH ELLISON:

My point is, for John Kerry to run around trying to achieve one I think is exactly--

(OVERTALK)

DAVID GREGORY:

Can I ask you on that point? You always supported Iron Dome which is the missile defense system --

REP. KEITH ELLISON:

I always--

(OVERTALK)

DAVID GREGORY:

But you just voted against more money for it. Why?

REP. KEITH ELLISON:

Because a ceasefire is what we should prioritize now. A ceasefire protects civilians on both sides. It doesn't just say, "We're only concerned about people on one side." I've been to Sderot, I have stuck with those people, talking about those rockets and that indiscriminate rocket fire,

and I've also been to Gaza three times since 2009. And I can tell you, those people are absolutely devastated.

(OVERTALK)

REP. KEITH ELLISON:

We need a ceasefire now.

DAVID GREGORY:

All right, let me get a break in here. We'll come back, talk a little bit more in just a moment. Coming up here, tempers flare in Congress, as you might imagine. So just what prompted House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi to actually cross the House floor to confront a Republican member of Congress? They had a debate about a policy issue that got pretty heated. Find out next.

****Commercial Break****

DAVID GREGORY:

Up next, do things actually get worse in Washington? I'll ask two key senators when we come back.

****Commercial Break****

DAVID GREGORY:

We are back. I mentioned a flashpoint on the House floor this week, a display of anger in the House on Friday. Democratic Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi actually crossed the floor of the House chamber, considered kind of a break with protocol to confront Pennsylvania Republican Tom Marino. He accused Pelosi and Democrats of not doing anything about the immigration crisis when the Democrats controlled the House just a few years ago.

The theme was sadly representative of why this is one of the least productive congressional sessions of all time. Joining me now, Democratic Senator Robert Menendez of New Jersey and Republican Senator John Thune of South Dakota. Welcome both.

SEN. ROBERT MENENDEZ:

Good to be with you.

SEN. JOHN THUNE:

Good morning, David.

DAVID GREGORY:

So let me ask you this. There were the votes in the House to sue President Obama. And yet neither the House or Senate could pass even a bill on immigration that would deal with the border crisis at the moment. Does this undermine the ability for Republicans to say, "Vote for us in the fall, we should control the Senate and the House and really be a governing party"?

SEN. JOHN THUNE:

Well, David, the House did pass a border security bill before they went out. The Senate has not. And you mentioned earlier people's frustration. I can understand that. Wages are flat, unemployment's high, everything from gas to food to healthcare costs more for the American

people.

But you can't address that situation if you don't vote. The United States Senate, we went for an entire year where we cast less than one vote on a Republican amendment per month. And in the Harry Reid Senate, that's become the norm. It's become a factory for show votes where votes are made that are more interested in winning votes that are for Democrats in November elections than they are for winning jobs for the American people. And that's got to change. The Senate's got to function again. It is dysfunctional. And that's what's frustrating the American people.

DAVID GREGORY:

Thanks for the correction, the House did in fact pass something that even though the president supported it, it doesn't look like it'll get through the Senate. To that point though, Senator Menendez, if the president on immigration wants to use executive power to deal with this problem, is that in excess of his authority? Congress has spoken dysfunctionally or not and said, "We're not going to deal with any aspect of immigration." Why shouldn't the president then stand pat and say he can find some way to get everybody and involved and on board?

SEN. ROBERT MENENDEZ:

Well, David, I wouldn't say that Congress has spoken. The Senate spoke last year with an overwhelmingly bipartisan talk about gridlock. Sixty-eight votes, Republicans and Democrats, the gang of eight, of which I was part of, put together a broad, bipartisan, comprehensive immigration reform to fix our immediate system. Now that stalled in the House of Representatives and they haven't even permitted one vote on it, an up or down vote, or a vote on their version of immigration reform.

In light of that, then it seems to me that the president, which and my Republican friends often call upon to act, in this case is I hope will act. Because the system as it exists today is broken. And to the extent that I believe and submitted to the White House and to the Department of Homeland Security, a legal memorandum that outlines the powers that they do have, I hope they'll use those powers to try to get some elements of the system under order.

DAVID GREGORY:

Senator, I want to stick with you on another big issue we talked about start morning, Senator Menendez about what's happening in Israel and in Gaza. There appears to be a redeployment, as you heard Ambassador Dermer say just a few moments ago. How would you define victory here for the Israelis?

SEN. ROBERT MENENDEZ:

Well, for the Israelis, obviously they need peace and security. And they will define it for themselves in terms of what is their national security. Look, the loss of any life is lamentable. The loss of Palestinian lives is lamentable. But when you have a terrorist organization that hides behind women and children and puts their weapon stockpiles in mosques and schools and fires from civilian targets, it is an untenable situation for the Israelis.

When you have tunnels that pop up in your home country and which people come out shooting or wearing suicide bombs, it speaks volumes of the adversary Israel has. And so that's why you see broad bipartisan support in the Senate on supporting the state of Israel.

DAVID GREGORY:

But even friends, Senate Thune, have to worry about the international opinion against Israel, actions taken by Israel that have contributed to so many civilians deaths in Gaza, that perhaps undermine Israel's long-term security. As a friend of Israel, do you fear for Israel?

SEN. JOHN THUNE:

Well, that's one of the things, David, as Bob mentioned, that there is bipartisan support for in Congress. We were able to get through the House and the Senate, moved legislation to provide funding for Iron Dome. I think everybody realizes Israel's got to be able to protect its citizens.

And I think this operation hopefully will conclude quickly once they destroy the tunnels and the rockets, launchers that are coming into Israeli communities, this thing will get, I think over with. And hopefully we can get to a place where we're actually discussing a solution, a long-term solution to the situation there in that region of the world.

We've got to defend and support Israel's right to defend its own citizens from this constant hammering of rocket attacks and these tunnels that are being burrowed into their country. No country is going to be able to sustain that. And we've got to be able to support Israel so we can get this job done.

DAVID GREGORY:

Senator Thune, final question for you, and this is about immigration. On this program numerous times, Senator Lindsey Graham has said that it would be a political death sentence for the Republican party, I'm paraphrasing again, but that's his sentiment, if they don't coalesce around broad-based immigration reform. Do you agree with that?

SEN. JOHN THUNE:

Well, I would say David, we do. We've got to deal with this immediate crisis right now. And what the House bill did is it addresses the flow, stopping the flow. I think most Americans realize it's a reasonable position that we can't sustain what's happening at the border right now. We've got an immediate crisis that has to be dealt with.

Yes, we have to deal with the issue of immigration. I think it's important for Republicans and Democrats to come together behind a plan. As Marco Rubio has said, you can't fix legal immigration until you fix illegal immigration. And that means border security.

That means building a strategic fence and having an E-Verify program and an entry/exit program that ensures that our borders in this country are secure. We're not going to have the trust and the confidence in the American people that we can address this problem on the legal immigration side if we don't fix illegal immigration.

DAVID GREGORY:

All right. We're going to leave it--

SEN. ROBERT MENENDEZ:

That's exactly what we did, David, when 68 members of the Senate, I'm not which senators voted for it or not, but 68 members of the Senate, Republicans and Democrats alike, sent a broad legislation, border enforcement, pathway to legalization, the economics, and even a Congressional Budget Office said would create jobs, lower the deficit, and help the national economy. Republicans in the House can't seem to get there.

DAVID GREGORY:

I'm going to leave it there. My thanks to Senators Menendez and Thune. We'll be back with the big question driving the conversation this week right after this.

****Commercial Break****

DAVID GREGORY:

Back with our final moment here. The week's big question, what issues should Congress focus on when it gets back from the August recess? And Kristen, my question is, how do you Republicans win the fall? What do you think they're leaving, going home, to think about?

KRISTEN SOLTIS ANDERSON:

I think they're going home to visit these town hall meetings and they're going to get a lot of questions about the border issue. But I think they're also going to get a lot of questions still about jobs and the economy. It remains the number one issue. These House members can say they voted on a number of bills, they sent over to the Senate, that have died there. But I still think--

(OVERTALK)

KRISTEN SOLTIS ANDERSON:

--jobs and the economy is the number one issue.

DAVID GREGORY:

All right. Thank you all very much. You can find our big question and weigh in on the debate on our Facebook page. That is all for today. We'll be back next week. If it's Sunday, it's Meet the Press.

*** * *END OF TRANSCRIPT* * ***

"MEET THE PRESS" 8/10/14 -- DURBIN: ESCALATION IN IRAQ IS "NOT IN THE CARDS" -- KING SAYS ISIS IS MORE POWERFUL NOW THAN AL QAEDA ON 9/11

Durbin warns of lack of Congressional support beyond limited strikes King criticizes "shameful abdication of American leadership"

AUGUST 10, 2014 -- Today's "**Meet the Press with David Gregory**" featured interviews with **Sen. Dick Durbin** (D-IL) and **Rep. Peter King** (R-NY); a foreign policy roundtable with **Robin Wright**, **Michael Leiter**, and **Jeffrey Goldberg**; a political roundtable with **Rep. Donna Edwards** (D-MD), **Chuck Todd**, **Andrea Mitchell**, and **Rich Lowry**; and a discussion about impeachment with former Clinton White House counsel **Greg Craig** and former Speaker of the House **Newt Gingrich** (R-GA).

The program also featured the latest news on U.S. action in Iraq from NBC News Pentagon correspondent **Jim Miklaszewski**, reporting on impeachment from NBC News justice correspondent **Pete Williams**, and a "Meeting America" segment on political divisions in Milwaukee from NBC News correspondent **Kevin Tibbles**.

Below are highlights, video, and a rush transcript of today's program. All content will be available online at MeetThePressNBC.com.

###

Durbin: "Only Iraq can save Iraq."

SEN. DICK DURBIN: Only Iraq can save Iraq. The president has stepped in because it has threatened genocide. I support that. Bringing food and water to these people who are dying on that mountaintop, of course the United States should do that. And when it comes to the Kurds, yes, they have been the adults in this neighborhood, the grownups. And I think that we ought to help them preserve their capital against this ISIS invasion. And we also want to make certain that the Americans that are on the ground are protected. The bottom line is this: there is so much that we can do to help the Iraqis help themselves. But ultimately, they have to save their own country.

Durbin: “We cannot send the troops, we must not sent the troops.”

SEN. DICK DURBIN: There's no question that this ISIS threat in Syria and in Iraq is growing and troublesome. The big question is what can the United States do to stop it? If the Iraqis come together, oust Maliki, put in someone in power who wants to bring in Sunnis and Shias to govern with the Kurds, then perhaps they can do it themselves. But we cannot send the troops, we must not sent the troops.

Durbin on action in Iraq: “Escalating it is not in the cards.”

SEN. DICK DURBIN: I can tell you this: Escalating it is not in the cards. Neither the American people nor Congress are in the business of wanting to escalate this conflict beyond where it is today. I think the President's made it clear this is a limited strike. He has, I believe, most Congressional support for that at this moment. To go beyond is really going to be a challenge.

King criticizes Obama on Iraq: “a shameful abdication of American leadership”

REP. PETER KING: Well first of all, David, this is not just Iraq. ISIS is a direct threat to the United States of America. What Dick Durbin just said and what President Obama has said, is really a shameful abdication of American leadership. This isn't Iraq we're talking about. And we can't wait until Maliki and the Iraqi parliament to fight ISIS.

Every day that goes by, ISIS builds up this caliphate, and it becomes a direct threat to the United States. They are more powerful now than al-Qaeda was on 9-11. So Dick Durbin says we're not going to do this, we're not going to do that. I want to hear what he says when they attack us in the United States.

King calls for more aggressive action in Iraq: “We should take nothing off the table.”

REP. PETER KING: Well first of all, we should take nothing off the table. We start off with massive air attacks. I think doing it from aircraft carriers is limiting them. We should use bases in the area so we could have much more sustained air attacks. We should be aggressively arming the Kurds. The president says that once there's a unity government in Iraq we will then fight alongside and work with the Iraqi Army. Start doing that now. Why wait? Why wait months and months before the Iraqi government is back in place? Every day that goes by, ISIS builds up in strength. Well, whatever you do as Commander-in-Chief, you never, ever tell the enemy what you're not going to do. You shouldn't even tell what you are going to do.

Leiter describes the ultimate threat from ISIS

MICHAEL LEITER: The ultimate threat is an American who goes to either Syria and Iraq, trains, gets experiences on weapons, comes back to the United States, we didn't know they were there, and they set off improvised explosive devices in New York, Washington, or somewhere else. That is a real and concrete threat.

Lowry: Obama taking action on unilateral amnesty would be “a stark hijacking of the legislative function with malice of forethought”

RICH LOWRY: Our system of government is meant, it's designed, to make it hard to do big things. And you really do big things only if there's a national consensus or if one party controls both the legislative and the executive. And that's relatively rare. But if you think things are poisonous and divided now, just wait until President Obama does this big unilateral amnesty he's talking about. It's going to be much, much worse after that. Because it would be a stark hijacking of the legislative function with malice of forethought. And there's going to be a huge reaction to it.

Gingrich on impeachment: "Every Republican I talk to knows it would be a dumb idea."

NEWT GINGRICH: Every Republican I talk to, with a handful of a couple of fringe figures, every Republican I talk to knows it would be a dumb idea. And those are actually the people who most want an impeachment site are the president and his team. They raise money off the word "impeachment." They mobilize their base off the word "impeachment." ... The president would love for us to be that dumb.

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Complete video clips from today's program:

Jim Miklaszewski on U.S. action in Iraq

<http://nbcnews.to/1rewd2n>

Durbin: Escalation in Iraq Is Not the Answer

<http://nbcnews.to/1sKKLcT>

Peter King: 'We Should Do Whatever We Have to Do' to Combat ISIS

<http://nbcnews.to/1pJH5WC>

Roundtable: What's Next for the U.S. in Iraq?

<http://nbcnews.to/1q3NoBP>

Roundtable: Obama's Foreign Policy Challenges

<http://nbcnews.to/1onhc0D>

Meeting America: The Deep Political Divide in Greater Milwaukee

<http://nbcnews.to/v9R90a>

Pete Williams: How Far Will Boehner's Lawsuit Go?

<http://nbcnews.to/1onhiFG>

Greg Craig and Newt Gingrich on Building Impeachment Chatter

<http://nbcnews.to/1oBq4Kg>

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Below is a RUSH transcript of this morning's broadcast -- mandatory attribution to NBC News' "Meet the Press." A final transcript of the program will be available at www.MeetThePressNBC.com.

"MEET THE PRESS WITH DAVID GREGORY"

August 10, 2014

DAVID GREGORY:

Next on Meet the Press, as President Obama vacations on Martha's Vineyard, the dog days of summer have turned into a new phase of America's war in Iraq. U.S. air strikes now targeting ISIS militants. How does the U.S. avoid mission creep in a country that President Obama said was stable and self reliant when U.S. troops left? We'll speak with influential voices from Congress this morning.

Plus, Hillary Clinton weighs in. We'll have exclusive new details on how she's distancing herself from President Obama's foreign policy. And impeachment talk is here in DC once again. Two key players in the fight over the impeachment of President Clinton: Newt Gingrich and former Clinton lawyer Greg Craig will discuss whether the legal maneuvering against President Obama will work or whether it's all politics.

ANNOUNCER:

From NBC News in Washington, this is Meet the Press with David Gregory

DAVID GREGORY:

And good Sunday morning. With President Obama warning against a quick fix, limited U.S. air strikes have yet to solve the critical situation in northern Iraq where thousands of Yazidi Christians who remain surrounded and in fear of their lives. This morning, the Iraqi government claims at least Yazidi have been killed by the Islamic state of Iraq and Syria known as ISIS. The ISIS fight is including many women and children who were buried alive.

The U.S. is also determined to stop the militants from capturing the strategically important city of Erbil in the Kurdish area of northern Iraq, home to a U.S. consulate and hundreds of American personnel. Fighters for the Islamic state are already in control of several key cities in both Iraq and Syria.

I'm joined now by our chief Pentagon correspondent, Jim Miklaszewski, who has an in-depth look at why the president started air strikes now and whether they'll be successful. Mik, good morning.

JIM MIKLASZEWSKI:

Good morning, David. At this very moment last week, nobody at the White House or the Pentagon, for that matter, expected American war planes to be launching air strikes in Iraq within the next few days. But according to U.S. military officials, that rapid and alarming advance by those Islamic rebels, the U.S. could no longer ignore it, sending the generals back to the war room, and U.S. war fighters back to Iraq.

(BEGIN TAPE)

JIM MIKLASZEWSKI:

ISIS has easily stormed through Iraq for the past eight months, terrorizing their enemies, forcing religious conversions, and slaughtering those who resist their rule and religion. But President Obama waited to intervene militarily until this week, when the extremist group threatened to topple the Kurdish capital, Erbil. But why now? When ISIS took Mosul in June, the president sent 300 American troops to support and advise the Iraqi military, but not to fight.

PRESIDENT OBAMA:

I think we always have to guard against mission creep. American combat troops are not going to be fighting in Iraq again.

JIM MIKLASZEWSKI:

But since then, the militants have gone on a rampage, taking Iraq's largest Christian town earlier this month, seizing the Mosul dam, key to Iraq's infrastructure, and routing the Kurdish Peshmerga forces last week. But when thousands of Yazidi worshipers were forced to flee for their lives to the mountains with no food or water to escape the brutality, it forced the President's hand and gave him the opening he needed. Now any U.S. military intervention would be framed, in part, as a humanitarian operation.

PRESIDENT OBAMA:

And I believe the United States of America cannot turn a blind eye.

JIM MIKLASZEWSKI:

But saving Erbil, the Kurdish region, and the Peshmerga, the most capable military force in Iraq, was the most immediate objective.

STEVEN A. COOK (SENIOR FELLOW, COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS):

The Iraqi security forces have, up till now, not proven themselves to be effective, despite a lot of American training, which leaves us with the Kurds.

JIM MIKLASZEWSKI:

And the Kurds have proven to be a loyal ally to the United States. Too much was at stake to let the region fall without a fight. But with no inclusive Iraqi government in place, and little support from N.A.T.O. allies for military action, the U.S. is going it alone in an open-ended operation.

PRESIDENT OBAMA:

This is going to be a long-term project.

JIM MIKLASZEWSKI:

But critics say the current U.S. strategy is all wrong.

GEN. BARRY MCCAFFERY (NBC NEWS MILITARY ANALYST):

We need to arm the Kurds and let them protect themselves, and stop trying to hold together an Iraq that is already disintegrated.

JIM MIKLASZEWSKI:

And the president acknowledged Saturday that any substantial progress against ISIS may hinge on bringing them down, not just in Iraq, but in Syria, as well. And while American air strikes may keep Erbil safer, they will not stop ISIS. And even with U.S. support, the outlook may be grim for a long time to come.

(END TAPE)

JIM MIKLASZEWSKI:

President Obama has vowed he would not send U.S. ground troops back to an Iraq, but acknowledged only yesterday that the U.S. military will be engaged in that war for some time to come. And as we heard him just a moment ago, for what he calls that "long-term project," David.

DAVID GREGORY:

Jim Miklaszewski, thanks so much this morning. I'm joined now by Democratic Senator, Assistant Majority Leader, Dick Durbin of Illinois, a member of the foreign relations committee. Senator, welcome.

SEN. DICK DURBIN:

Thanks, David.

DAVID GREGORY:

You have heard Jim's reporting. Just the goals here, preventing genocide, stopping ISIS, protecting the Kurdish territory, protecting, really, the integrity of Iraq and American personnel on the ground. All of those goals so important. Why are you already talking about limits to this operation?

SEN. DICK DURBIN:

Because only Iraq can save Iraq. The president has stepped in because it has threatened genocide. I support that. Bringing food and water to these people who are dying on that mountaintop, of course the United States should do that.

And when it comes to the Kurds, yes, they have been the adults in this neighborhood, the grownups.

And I think that we ought to help them preserve their capital against this ISIS invasion. And we also want to make certain that the Americans that are on the ground are protected. The bottom line is this: there is so much that we can do to help the Iraqis help themselves. But ultimately, they have to save their own country.

DAVID GREGORY:

But talk about ISIS itself. This is a terror state trying to construct a caliphate, cast off by al-Qaeda because this group is considered too extreme. Is the problem that the Obama administration, wanting to be something other than President Bush, got out of the business of confronting terrorism on a big, global scale and just dealt with it in a more limited way? Is it an under-reaction to the terrorist threat?

SEN. DICK DURBIN:

Don't forget, they invited us to leave in Iraq. The president was negotiating after President George Bush had this timetable for withdrawal. President Obama was trying to negotiate the final days of withdrawal.

DAVID GREGORY:

I'm talking about the terrorist threat. I'm talking about fighting terrorism. The Obama team said, "We are not in the business of a global fight against terror. We're fighting al-Qaeda in limited forms." This is a big, expansive terrorist threat that has amassed on his watch.

SEN. DICK DURBIN:

Well, there's no question that this ISIS threat in Syria and in Iraq is growing and troublesome. The big question is what can the United States do to stop it? If the Iraqis come together, oust Maliki, put in someone in power who wants to bring in Sunnis and Shias to govern with the Kurds, then perhaps they can do it themselves. But we cannot send the troops, we must not send the troops.

DAVID GREGORY:

But isn't it galling for you--

(OVERTALK)

DAVID GREGORY:

--but isn't it galling to you, as a United States Senator, that we, the American military, are targeting assets that ISIS has in its control, where there are American assets, American military hardware, that they stole, left behind, because we got out of Iraq?

SEN. DICK DURBIN:

How many times has this happened in history? When the United States, with the best military in the

world, goes in and fights a war, leaves behind equipment and ordnance and then finds it being used, perhaps even against it, in the next conflict? This is not new. It reflects the reality of war today. And it reflects the limitations when it comes to our fight against terrorism.

We need to make certain, not that, as many argue, that we should be in every theater in every war, that is not the United States' role. We need to be certain that what we do has surgical precision to it and a clear goal of success.

DAVID GREGORY:

If this doesn't work, the goals that have been spelled out, which is preventing genocide, stopping ISIS, protecting the Kurds and American personnel, if an air campaign of some duration does not work, what do you believe, Senator Durbin, is America's responsibility to counter these threats?

SEN. DICK DURBIN:

First, to protect the Americans on the ground, number one. To protect American interests in the region. And that means, of course, our friends who are nearby neighbors of this disintegrating, chaotic situation.

DAVID GREGORY:

Right, but--

(OVERTALK)

DAVID GREGORY:

--what do you do if it doesn't work with a limited air campaign?

SEN. DICK DURBIN:

Well, I can tell you this. Escalating it is not in the cards. Neither the American people nor Congress are in the business of wanting to escalate this conflict beyond where it is today. I think the President's made it clear this is a limited strike. He has, I believe, most Congressional support for that at this moment. To go beyond is really going to be a challenge.

DAVID GREGORY:

All right, I'm going to leave it there. Senator Durbin, thank you, as always, for your views, for joining me this morning.

SEN. DICK DURBIN:

Thank you.

DAVID GREGORY:

Joined now by Republican Congressman Peter King of New York, member of the House Homeland Security Committee. And Congressman, welcome. Let me challenge you in a different way.

REP. PETER KING:

Sure.

DAVID GREGORY:

Which is, those who would argue, conservatives, Republicans, others, that the president has underestimated this, that we're only using limited action to fight this threat, what more can be done, as the president said, than just keep a lid on this problem and all of these threats by the United States?

REP. PETER KING:

Well first of all, David, this is not just Iraq. ISIS is a direct threat to the United States of America. What Dick Durbin just said and what President Obama has said, is really a shameful abdication of American leadership. This isn't Iraq we're talking about. And we can't wait until Maliki and the Iraqi parliament to fight ISIS.

Every day that goes by, ISIS builds up this caliphate, and it becomes a direct threat to the United States. They are more powerful now than al-Qaeda was on 9-11. So Dick Durbin says we're not going to do this, we're not going to do that. I want to hear what he says when they attack us in the United States.

I lost senators and constituents on 9-11. I didn't want to do that again. We've seen this coming. And so for the president to say, "We're doing air strikes, we're not doing anything else, we're not going to use American combat troops, we're not going to do this, we're not going to do that," what kind of leadership is that?

(OVERTALK)

REP. PETER KING:

We have to let the enemy know what you're going to do.

DAVID GREGORY:

Well, let's ask you about the leadership you would provide. So if these goals are not achieved through an air strike campaign of some duration, what would you call for America to do?

REP. PETER KING:

Well first of all, we should take nothing off the table. We start off with massive air attacks. I think doing

it from aircraft carriers is limiting them. We should use bases in the area so we could have much more sustained air attacks.

We should be aggressively arming the Kurds. The president says that once there's a unity government in Iraq we will then fight alongside and work with the Iraqi Army. Start doing that now. Why wait? Why wait months and months before the Iraqi government is back in place? Every day that goes by, ISIS builds up in strength. Well, whatever you do as Commander-in-Chief, you never, ever tell the enemy what you're not going to do. You shouldn't even tell what you are going to do.

(OVERTALK)

DAVID GREGORY:
But a lot of people--

(OVERTALK)

DAVID GREGORY:
Congressman, hear you and they say, "Wait a minute. We invaded this country. We took over the country. We occupied the country. We had massive troop levels there, armaments. Military hardware that's being used by ISIS now. This is Iraq's responsibility. Why can't or why won't Iraq deal with this threat that is a grave threat to its future?"

REP. PETER KING:
First of all, let's put this in perspective. What we've done in Iraq, as President Obama and Vice President Biden said, turned out to be a significant achievement, a great achievement. Iraq was stable. Iraq was a unified government. It was when President Obama withdrew all the American troops, when our troops that were imbedded with the Iraqi troops were taken away.

That's when the Iraqi Army started to disintegrate, when we lost control over Maliki because we withdrew. That's what started. There's no reason why Iraq would not have worked. The president, he started this. He started this downfall in 2011 with the direct withdrawal of American troops.

So as far as the weapons being turned over, that's terrible story by Maliki. But the fact is, we can't say because we're mad at Maliki, and Maliki can do his job, that we're going to sit back and let ISIS attack the United States. David, they have ten times, 20 times more money than al-Qaeda ever had. They have much more weapons than al-Qaeda ever had.

And ISIS has hundreds of foreign fighters with them, available to come to the United States to attack us. That's the reality. And when the president says and he tries to blame this on the intelligence community that they didn't tell him, General Flynn was saying months ago that ISIS was going to move to Iraq. Fallujah fell months ago. This president did nothing.

All we talked about is ending the war in Iraq. All we ended was American influence in Iraq. And that's a failure and it's on his hands. And for him to-- what a weak leader. "We're going to attack this, but we're

not going to do that. We're going to do this, we're not going to do that." Can you imagine Winston Churchill or Franklin Roosevelt--

DAVID GREGORY:
So you're saying--

REP. PETER KING:
--or Harry Truman--

DAVID GREGORY:
--U.S. troops on the ground to defeat ISIS because that is the ultimate goal.

REP. PETER KING:
I am saying we should do whatever we have to do. If people say American want troops on the ground. My constituents don't want to see another couple hundred people killed by an attack from ISIS. But let's not set up the false argument that it has to be troops on the ground.

We have the entire weight of the American military we can work with the Kurds. Plus we can provide weaponry to the Kurds who have been good fighters. No one's been more loyal to us than the Kurds. And why wait for the Iraqi government to come into play? If the president says that--

(OVERTALK)

REP. PETER KING:
--military action when they're the government, why wait for that? Let's start now.

DAVID GREGORY:
All right, Congressman Peter King, thank you, as well, for your views this morning. I appreciate it.

REP. PETER KING:
David, thank you.

DAVID GREGORY:
I want to get a little bit more in depth on the situation in Iraq. I'm joined now by Michael Leiter, NBC national security analyst, former director of The National Counter-Terrorism Center, Robin Wright, a fellow at The Wilson Center and author of Rock the Casbah, Rage and Rebellion Across the Islamic World, and Jeffrey Goldberg, national correspondent for The Atlantic magazine, who-- an exclusive interview with Hillary Clinton on the subject of Syria and terrorism and leadership in the world, which

will get to in just a minute.

But I'm just trying to really make sense of all of this. And there's layers to it. Michael, I really want people to understand what we're up against with ISIS.

MICHAEL LEITER:

This is not just a normal terrorist group. This is a terrorist army that now controls land. And I think this would be clear if they'd kept their old name. This is al-Qaeda in Iraq, which has become the Islamic state in Iraq and Syria. This is now the biggest terrorist organization we've ever seen with the most control, with the most money, getting more and more recruits.

They're obviously threatening Iraq. But they're also serious threats to the stability of our neighbors in Jordan. And the intelligence community believes that both ISIS in Iraq and Syria and other elements of the opposition in Syria are absolutely looking to attack the West. Western operatives in Iraq, Western operatives in Syria who can travel easily back to Europe and back to the U.S. homeland. That's the homeland terrorist threat that people are most concerned about.

DAVID GREGORY:

Jeffrey, what are we fighting for now in Iraq?

JEFFREY GOLDBERG:

What are we fighting for in Iraq?

DAVID GREGORY:

Yeah.

JEFFREY GOLDBERG:

We're fighting, I think mainly, to keep ISIS from spreading. I have to agree with that. Well, that's the problem with that. And as Hillary Clinton says, these threats never stay where they are. These groups are expansive in nature. They want to go further than they are.

So A), we're fighting, if we are indeed fighting, we're fighting to prevent them from spilling over their borders. We're also fighting, I think, for the Kurds. The president is hesitant to say that, but the Kurds are our key ally in that part of the world. And they are in trouble. If they fall, they would have even more trouble, because ISIS expands into their space. So we're doing a couple of things. And then, of course, there's the humanitarian picture. Which, of course, is we have a selective outrage but humanitarian problems in the Middle East.

DAVID GREGORY:

Right.

JEFFREY GOLDBERG:

You know.

DAVID GREGORY:

And how about the president, back in 2007, said, "Well, it's not as if based on the humanitarian reasons we're going to send troops into the Congo." And now, you know--

(OVERTALK)

JEFFREY GOLDBERG:

I mean look, this is a problem all presidents face.

DAVID GREGORY:

Right.

JEFFREY GOLDBERG:

It's like how do you pick the people to save? In this case, you can make a good argument that we've stayed on the sidelines in Syria for years while 170,000 people have been killed. We're saving these people in Iraq. It's a devilish problem, I'll admit that.

DAVID GREGORY:

Robin, I don't know that everybody understands when we talk about a Sunni-Shia split, that is at large what's happening here. It's what has given space for an ISIS to grow, like fuel to a forest fire. You know, that it keeps attracting more fighters and more energy because these are disaffected Sunnis, from Syria to Iraq.

ROBIN WRIGHT:

Absolutely. The sectarian problem is one we've seen now across the Middle East. And it's beginning to redefine the borders that have shaped that region now for a century. And I think this is not the only place we're likely to see this. But it plays out, remember, in 2006, when the U.S. was debating sending in the surge, one of the questions was can you achieve a military goal, but the separate, political goal, at the same time?

And the joint chiefs of staff said, "We can push back what was then al-Qaeda." The question was can you solve the diplomatic problem? Can you get the Shia dominated government to embrace the Sunnis in a way that they will feel contained? And sure enough, we sent in 30,000 additional troops. We achieved the military objective, but we never solved those political objectives. And the problem is that the core of this problem is not the Yazidi genocidal problem, it is the issue of can Shiites and Sunnis, within a modern state, come to terms with each other in a way that is inclusive and just?

DAVID GREGORY:

--And form a kind of unity government. Isn't the problem here, Jeff, that the president is playing catch-up? I mean this is a president who is determined to leave Iraq. He's right, there's a status of forces agreement that got U.S. troops out. But there was no-- I mean you went from President Bush dealing with Maliki in Iraq directly, and then the new president comes in, back of the hand to Iraq. Did we waste the influence that we could have had on this government to try to prevent the creation of this vacuum that ISIS is now filling?

JEFFREY GOLDBERG:

Look, I mean he's right to argue that, ultimately, the solution is an Iraqi solution. If Iraqis can't pull it together--

DAVID GREGORY:

Right.

JEFFREY GOLDBERG:

--as Robin is suggesting, then there's really not much that the U.S. can do. On the other hand, yes, there are ways to intervene early in this process that probably would have helped the Iraqis not only fight ISIS but try to pull together some kind of political coalition that works.

DAVID GREGORY:

Your thoughts on this?

MICHAEL LEITER:

Well, I think, first of all, this is not an Iraq problem, it is not a Syria problem, it is both. There is no border anymore.

DAVID GREGORY:

And now it becomes a terrorism problem.

MICHAEL LEITER:

Absolutely. It is a terrorism problem. It is a regional problem. We can stop-- militarily, there's no doubt we can stop them from taking over Erbil.

DAVID GREGORY:

But that's just putting--

(OVERTALK)

MICHAEL LEITER:

But that is minor.

DAVID GREGORY:

Yeah.

MICHAEL LEITER:

And you're still going to have an ISIS controlled caliphate across this region. We're going to have to address this in much larger ways. As Jeffrey said, the Iraqis are obviously key to the solution. We can't solve it without them. They can't solve it without us, either.

DAVID GREGORY:

It's interesting. So there's obviously a political dimension to this, as there always is. Not just for now, but in the 2016 context. So you interviewed Hillary Clinton. You talked about all of these issues, including Syria. Now we know that she disagreed with the administration. She wanted to support--

JEFFREY GOLDBERG:

Right.

DAVID GREGORY:

--Syrian rebels. Here's what she told you, in part, in this interview that's in The Atlantic this morning.

This is Secretary Clinton, former Secretary Clinton speaking to you: "I know that the failure to help build up a credible fighting force of the people who were the originators of the protest against Assad, there were Islamists, there were secularists, there was everything in the middle, the failure to do that left a big vacuum, which the jihadis have now filled." That's the most criticism--

(OVERTALK)

JEFFREY GOLDBERG:
Yeah.

DAVID GREGORY:
--we've ever heard.

JEFFREY GOLDBERG:
That's pretty blunt. I think this week she feels, and people around her, supporters of Hillary and supporters of intervention, feel like she's been vindicated by events. It's impossible to know. Of course it's impossible to know whether U.S. intervention in Syria three years ago would have helped.

DAVID GREGORY:
I mean the president says that's a fantasy to believe that--

(OVERTALK)

JEFFREY GOLDBERG:
The president says it's a fantasy. Hillary Clinton obviously says it's not a fantasy. We'll never know. Those are counterfactuals you can break your head over. On the other hand, it's pretty obvious that, by staying on the sidelines, not only the U.S. but the entire West, allowed what became ISIS to fill a vacuum. I think what she's saying there is reasonable analysis.

And, you know, and obviously, these are questions going forward that she's obviously beginning a process of maybe distancing herself from some of the policies she disagreed with. And in this interview with me, I think she went a little bit further than she usually has in distancing.

DAVID GREGORY:
That's interesting. I mean it is interesting now because we're looking at a 2016 race where Republicans say, "You see? We've lost American leadership in the world." Which is what President Obama campaigned on, as well. And we always react to the last person in power. And if the line against Obama will be under-reaction to these threats.

ROBIN WRIGHT:
Yes. And the interesting thing is he's the fourth president to be involved in Iraq. And when you look back at the record of what it took to, when we engaged last time, the first Bush administration dropped 265,000 bombs on Iraq. President Clinton, in a four-day period, dropped 600 bombs, 400 missiles. And Second President Bush used 30,000 bombs.

The idea that a few 500-pounds bombs are going to make a difference, I think we have now crossed a

threshold when it comes to our involvement. This is not something that's going to last a few weeks, even a few months.

DAVID GREGORY:

Right.

ROBIN WRIGHT:

This, I think, we're back in. And I think also we've crossed a threshold when it comes to what the Islamic state sees as our role in the region. And the great danger if this becomes a mobilizing rallying cry to draw thousands of other not only Arabs and Muslims to the cause, but Westerners as well--

(OVERTALK)

JEFFREY GOLDBERG:

That's not to say that they wouldn't be up for this, had the United States not had a presence in the region. It's not as if these are good boys and girls who are on the sidelines, and then America came and decided to become bad people.

ROBIN WRIGHT:

But remember that there was no al-Qaeda in Iraq before the U.S. intervention. There was no Hezbollah in Lebanon before the Israeli invasion. That sometimes there are unintended consequences of invading somebody else's territory--

(OVERTALK)

MICHAEL LEITER:

Just please remember that the 9-11 attacks were not caused by the 2003 invasion of Iraq. I mean that happened well in advance--

(OVERTALK)

JEFFREY GOLDBERG:

--but let's get the sequencing.

DAVID GREGORY:

Final point, Michael, the ultimate threat from ISIS as you look at as a counter-terrorism specialist now that plays out over the short term and longer term.

MICHAEL LEITER:

The ultimate threat is-

(OVERTALK)

MICHAEL LEITER:

--an American who goes to either Syria and Iraq, trains, gets experiences on weapons, comes back to the

United States, we didn't know they were there, and they set off improvised explosive devices in New York, Washington, or somewhere else. That is a real and concrete threat.

DAVID GREGORY:

And that's what the administration has to be so worried about. Thank you all very much for your perspective this morning. Coming up here, the U.S. so divided politically, we will take you to one major city where even crossing the street can take you from Republican to Democratic territory.

CHARLES FRANKLIN:

Everybody's united in support of the Green Bay Packers. It's when we get to partisan politics that these divisions become deep.

DAVID GREGORY:

Our political roundtable up next: Chuck Todd, Andrea Mitchell, Rich Lowry, and Congresswoman Donna Edwards all weighing in. Plus, are Republicans about to do what they did to Bill Clinton and try to impeach President Obama? Key figures from that fight 15 years ago: Newt Gingrich and former Clinton lawyer Greg Craig are here to discuss the prospect of success in the legal battles against President Obama.

Commercial Break

DAVID GREGORY:

We are back. It is August. That means there's plenty of news to discuss, because anybody who covers news knows that August is the most busy time of the year. Our roundtable's here to discuss a lot going on. Our political director, Chuck Todd, Donna Edwards, Democratic Congresswoman from Maryland, Rich Lowry, editor of The National Review, and our chief foreign affairs correspondent, Andrea Mitchell.

My question for the table is are we closer to the events this week in Iraq of identifying what is the true Obama doctrine? He told Tom Friedman of The New York Times the following. I'll put it on the screen. "Obama made clear," Friedman writes, that he is only going to involve America more deeply in places like the Middle East to the extent that the different communities there agree to an inclusive politics of no victor, no vanquished." Did we learn something here?

ANDREA MITCHELL:

I think we learned a lot. And what we learned is this contrast between Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton when Hillary interviewed with Jeff Goldberg.

DAVID GREGORY:

Yes.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

How do we say that we have a humanitarian mission here in Iraq with the Yazidis and not the Syrians, who are 170,000 people there? That's what Hillary Clinton would say to Jeff Goldberg. How do you say that Syrian arming the opposition was fantasy, Barack Obama, when Hillary Clinton lays out a completely different and, I think, going to be an escalating, differentiation--

DAVID GREGORY:

Right.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

--between her and Barack Obama?

DAVID GREGORY:

Here's the big criticism, Rich Lowry. And I expect you would agree with this criticism, that this was a reaction to President Bush when President Obama said, "We are not going to be in war against terrorism where a war gives something very specific." Now he faces something quite vast.

RICH LOWRY:

Yeah, this was the amazing thing. Obviously, he wouldn't be president of the United States if it weren't for his opposition to the Iraq war. But here it is, Iraq, where his view of how the world should work is being discredited by the day. He thought Iraq wasn't important. He thought we should have left influence and involvement in the Middle East generally. He thought there were all these ready alternatives to military forces. All of that was exaggerated or, frankly, wrong. And that's why you have ISIS on the market.

DAVID GREGORY:

And you have a politically vulnerable president on vacation today in Martha's Vineyard with a lot of people saying, as they did to President Bush when he went away for vacation during Iraq, "Hey, you're checked out here while the world is going up in flames." Look at our poll, Chuck Todd, that you detailed this week, not just the President's approval rating at 40% now, 54% disapproval, but you go inside the numbers a little bit: overall approval 40%, handling the economy only 42% approval, handling the foreign policy, 36% approval.

CHUCK TODD:

You know, the first half of his presidency, that was always his strength. Handling the foreign policy, he always did better than his overall job approval. Now it's worse. And he really is in an odd political box here, because he is giving the country the foreign policy it wants. Okay? The country wants less intervention.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

Right.

CHUCK TODD:

The country wants less of these wars. The country wants to retreat. There is this isolationist streak in the country, less intervention, all of those things.

He's giving them that foreign policy. It's a very, in some ways, poll perfect foreign policy that the President's doing. And it's seen as less popular. It's seen as less stable. Because it looks as if he's not leading. Events are leading him. And I think that that's what the country was reaction personally to him, that this is like, "Where's the leadership. What's going on here? You don't seem to have your arms around this."

DAVID GREGORY:

Congresswoman, the flip side of that is this is pragmatism. This may be a recognition of what limits the United States has, rather than rushing to do something that may be counterproductive.

REP. DONNA EDWARDS:

I think that's somewhat true. And I think the president, in his statements with Tom Friedman, probably indicated his reticence because there is not-- he recognizes there's no political solution in Iraq. And he also knows that, in order to defeat ISIS, or to put a stamp on them, he has to consolidate that political power on the ground. And if the recognition that if the Kurds, Sunnis and Shia are all on the same page politically, then they stand a better chance of--

(OVERTALK)

REP. DONNA EDWARDS:

--American power-- but in using American power--

(OVERTALK)

REP. DONNA EDWARDS:

--to do that. Well look, we have the selection of a prime minister, the selection of our president. We're working-- I mean I think that we're closing to having a political solution where Maliki is not in charge of--

(OVERTALK)

DAVID GREGORY:

--involved in this political influence game. He shied away from--

(OVERTALK)

RICH LOWRY:

Exactly. This is the shame of the situation. Obama never ended the war in Iraq, as he said. He abandoned the war in Iraq right at a time when we'd achieved a fragile stability that we might have been able to maintain.

(OVERTALK)

REP. DONNA EDWARDS:

The Iraqi government did not want the president-- the United States to stay in Iraq. Let's be really clear about that. We have to come at the invitation--

(OVERTALK)

REP. DONNA EDWARDS:

--even now we're at the invitation.

(OVERTALK)

DAVID GREGORY:

Right, but this president ideologically did not want--

(OVERTALK)

CHUCK TODD:

They were not. This was not an administration that was eager to Maliki, "You don't want a strategic forces agreement?" You know. Your original question is what did we learn about the doctrine. And I think that I've been trying to figure out this man's doctrine now for six years. He doesn't have one.

He ran basically with a wink and a nod that this was going to be a George H.W. Bush type of foreign policy, stability and diplomacy first, okay? And yet, he has been pulled in different directions. His instinct actually is very George W. Bush-like, which is democracy, freedom. You know, he doesn't want winners and losers.

So look at the way he had intervened early in the Arab Spring. And then we realized that that was a mistake. So then-- I mean it's almost like he's pushes and pulls between the idea of democracy first versus stability first. And he goes back and forth, and he's messed around with democracy first in Egypt. Didn't work. In Libya, didn't work. He admits is now. And now he's trying for stability first. And I think, you know, in this case, he's struggling--

(OVERTALK)

ANDREA MITCHELL:

--tactically he's being held hostage to end these negotiations to get Maliki out. And to decide that you're not going to do anything until you have a government is to wait forever. And is to permit ISIS to do what its done--

(OVERTALK)

ANDREA MITCHELL:

And arguably-- and to say there's not hard intelligence. This is not a hard target. This is Erbil. We have people there. The fact is there was intelligence. And to say that they were shocked by the Peshmerga on Saturday night being routed is a farce. The White House wasn't listening.

RICH LOWRY:

But even if everyone with the best intentions prevails in Baghdad, they're going to still need massive help from the United States. And the fact that you read the best reporting about what happened when we're in negotiating with the Iraqis, whether we had the residual force, there was zero interest, really, in the administration and cutting that. I mean he bragged about how he ended the war because we completely eliminated our involvement in Iraq. And that's turned out to be--

(OVERTALK)

CHUCK TODD:

I want to campaign then for reelection. That was the number one highlight.

DAVID GREGORY:

Let's turn back to domestic politics, Iraq's politics are tough, ours are just as tough in many ways. On the issue of immigration, on the issue of executive power, here was a moment this week that involved Senator Rand Paul in Iowa, who was confronted during lunch by a described dreamer, somebody who was able to come in while the parents-- a child of illegal immigrants-- who appears part of the Dream Act, or the executive order, rather. This is that confrontation.

ERIKA ANDIOLA:

I am actually a DREAMer myself and I'm originally from Mexico, but I've been raised here. I graduated from Arizona State University actually--and--Arizona State University. And I know you wanted to get rid of DACA so I wanted to give you this opportunity. if you really want to get rid of it, just rip mine.

DAVID GREGORY:

I mean that is a striking political moment. I mean, really, this is a serious issue. This is, you know, political theater, which has a good place in police officer. But here was Rand Paul saying, "not a conversation I want to be a part of."

RICH LOWRY:

And failing political instinct. This is why that guy's a serious political contender. Look, his people say he had another interview.

CHUCK TODD:

Yeah

(OVERTALK) (LAUGHTER)

RICH LOWRY:

But look, these dreamers, so-called dreamers, are the single most sympatric subset within the illegal population. They're the first people I would amnesty by law, if we had a workable system of enforcement in force. But that's not an excuse for doing it lawlessly, the way the president did.

And what he did is part of what has become the magnet for this border crisis. It was a signal sent south of the border, "You're young, you get here illegally, you're going to stay."

DAVID GREGORY:

But let me-- you wrote this, this week, and I want to get the others to talk about it, because it gets to kind of the bigger issue we always talk about impeachment of President Obama. You wrote this: "The signs are that President Obama's going to proceed with a massive unilateral amnesty that will affect one of his most important legislative goals without the legislature, as a brazen distortion of our constitutional system, this move will provoke a major reaction and, at the very least, lead to more calls for his impeachment. But for the cynics of the White House, this appears to be not a bet but a future."

REP. DONNA EDWARDS:

Well, you know, first of all, I think to Rand Paul, what that little clip demonstrated is the fact that you can't run on wanting to be an inclusive Republican Party and run away from immigration. And he did exactly that.

DAVID GREGORY:

Let me talk more generally about the divide in this country. You go around the country, people talk about it, because it's unhappiness with our government, it's reflected in a number of things we've been talking about. Our NBC News Wall Street Journal poll found 79% of voters are dissatisfied with the political system. One big example of this political divide is in the Milwaukee area, as our Kevin Tibbles found in this week's Meeting America.

(BEGIN TAPE)

KEVIN TIBBLES:

On a gorgeous summer evening in Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin, the local high schoolers may be dancing in the streets. But the politics here are anything but a walk in the park.

CHARLES FRANKLIN:

Everybody's united in support of the Green Bay Packers. It's when we get to partisan politics that these divisions become deep.

KEVIN TIBBLES:

When Charles Franklin conducted a poll for the Marquette University Law School, he found a state so politically entrenched, Democrats and Republicans don't even live in the same neighborhoods anymore.

CHARLES FRANKLIN:

It changes dramatically from deep blue to deep red right at the county lines. And it just leaps out at you.

KEVIN TIBBLES:

Here in Milwaukee, there's a dividing line. One side of the street Republican, the other, Democrat. Within the city, 63% give President Obama the thumbs up. In the suburbs, it's 64% thumbs down. And the Republican Governor, Scott Walker, enjoys 63% approval in the suburbs and 61% disapproval in the city. Neighbors, worlds apart. In the city, at Glorious Malone's, the specialty meats company started by her mother in their kitchen.

DAPHNE MALONE JONES: Gotta move fast

KEVIN TIBBLES:

Give me three at a time, maybe.

DAPHNE MALONE JONES:
You're a natural.

KEVIN TIBBLES:
Daphne Malone Jones watched a business grow by word of mouth.

DAPHNE MALONE JONES:
It's so delicious.

KEVIN TIBBLES:
And when partisan divisions within the beltway spread, she says it's bad for the business of nation building.

DAPHNE MALONE:
How do we come together from both sides so we meet in the middle and accomplish the task?

KEVIN TIBBLES:
Back in suburban Menomonee Falls, AJ O'Brady's owner, Bruce Russell, has a rule behind the bar.

BRUCE RUSSELL:
Don't talk about religion, don't talk about politics.

KEVIN TIBBLES:
Patrons, on the other hand, will discuss the political deep freeze.

SHERRY:
It seems to me that years ago you can have a conversation about politics with somebody that was different than you. Today you can't. Everybody is so hard core in what they believe, they're so set in their ways. And I'm that way, also. I've had to put up with Obama for two terms now. I'm not a fan of the Health Care Act.

KEVIN TIBBLES:
While some in the suburbs support suing the president over his handling of the Affordable Care Act, city minister Clarence Montgomery calls it an unhealthy distraction.

CLARENCE MONTGOMERY:
Good governance and what they're doing as far as this lawsuit is concerned is an oxymoron. It's easier to say no than to sit down and say, "How can we find a yes?"

KEVIN TIBBLES:
What would it take for a thaw?

CHARLES FRANKLIN:
This won't change until it becomes electorally destructive to one party or perhaps both.

KEVIN TIBBLES:
Until then, the political peaks and valleys will likely keep the two neighbors apart. For Meet the Press, Kevin Tibbles.

(END TAPE)

DAVID GREGORY:

At least they're still dancing in Milwaukee. Chuck, I thought that was really, you know, until it becomes electorally destructive to one or both parties, this won't change. Until voters change the incentives for both sides--

CHUCK TODD:
It's going to change.

DAVID GREGORY:
--until you reward.

CHUCK TODD:
And that's -- what's happened here is we don't have an electoral system where swing voters matter.

DAVID GREGORY:
Right.

CHUCK TODD:
Right? They don't matter. We know what the middle wants. Until you have candidates that feel as if they can move away from the base in a general election more often, or that they will lose. And if that's gone, and that incentive's not there, then you're going to get this.

I thought it was interesting in the Friedman interview, we all talk about that foreign policy, the president saying, in our system of government, in some ways right now, it's worse than some of the stuff he's seeing in the Middle East."

DAVID GREGORY:
Right.

CHUCK TODD:
That is quite the shot at his political opposition.

ANDREA MITCHELL:
If there is a turnout, I think there could actually be a revulsion, a reaction against the "Do-Nothing" Congress with old apologies. (LAUGHTER)

(OVERTALK)

ANDREA MITCHELL:
But the "Do-Nothing" in Congress, the ineffective White House leadership, you know, to sort of Washington--

(OVERTALK)

ANDREA MITCHELL:
--at large--

(OVERTALK)

ANDREA MITCHELL:

--and I think that there are going to be people staying home in masses, which is really upsetting to anybody who cares about democracy. Or perhaps an outpouring of "throw the bums out." And that's--

(OVERTALK)

DAVID GREGORY:

And the idea that we face these challenges, and that our system, our entire system of government, is not up to the challenges that we face, that's what's daunting, frustrating, and beyond. I mean demoralizing.

RICH LOWRY:

Well, I have a slightly different take on it. Because our system of government is meant, it's designed, to make it hard to do big things. And you really do big things only if there's a national consensus or if one party controls both the legislative and the executive. And that's relatively rare.

But if you think things are poisonous and divided now, just wait until President Obama does this big unilateral amnesty he's talking about. It's going to be much, much worse after that. Because it would be a stark hijacking of the legislative function with malice of forethought. And there's going to be a huge reaction to it.

(OVERTALK)

REP. DONNA EDWARDS:

Well, that's a big exaggeration. Look, I think that people out there sort of vote for candidates who are centric, who speak to their needs, who speak to what it needs that will make a difference in their lives. And I think that any candidate who's running for office now, who is authentic, who says, "I'm on your side, and this is what I want to do to help you out," are the candidates who are going to win. And those are the people who then begin to reflect the broader--

(OVERTALK)

DAVID GREGORY:

I'm going to leave it there. And the prediction and this question of what comes next is actually where we're going to go next in the program when we come back. So thank you all very much. So how the political system has so unraveled that the politics of impeachment is being played on both sides. Two key players are going to join me in just a minute, involved in the impeachment of Bill Clinton, Newt Gingrich and Greg Craig will be joining me up next on Meet the Press.

Commercial Break

DAVID GREGORY:

Saturday was the 40th anniversary of the resignation of President Richard Nixon. We've compiled a list of his most memorable moments here on Meet the Press, including a conversation during which he

reveals what he thought was his biggest mistake as president. And it was not Watergate. See that and more at any time at MeetThePressNBC.com. And we'll discuss the motives behind the current talk of impeachment of President Obama by both Republicans and Democrats, coming up next.

Commercial Break

DAVID GREGORY:

We are back. Congress might be out for the summer, but the battle lines have been drawn between House Republicans and President Obama. They've filed suit against the president. There's also been talk of impeachment of the president on both sides, by the way. In a moment, I'll be joined by Greg Craig, who served as President Obama's first White House counsel, who was also a key member of President Clinton's impeachment defense team, and Newt Gingrich, who was, of course, Republican Speaker of the House just before President Clinton was impeached in 1998. But first, our justice correspondent, Pete Williams, has an analysis of whether the lawsuit against the president, or the possibility of impeachment, have any legal merit.

(BEGIN TAPE)

PETE WILLIAMS:

40 years ago, Richard Nixon became the first U.S. president to resign after a House committee voted to impeach him. Now there's talk of it again, this time, against President Obama.

SARAH PALIN:

What he's engaged in are impeachable offenses. They incurred fraud on the American people.

PETE WILLIAMS:

But does any of it amount to high crimes and misdemeanors, the constitution's grounds for impeachment?

JONATHAN TURLEY:

This president has about as much chance of being impeached as being elected the next pontiff. Right now, he has not committed any impeachable offense that I can see.

PETE WILLIAMS:

Republican leaders insist they have no interest in impeachment. But in a legal long shot, the House has voted to sue the president over his order delaying for a year the requirement that businesses provide employee health insurance.

PETE WILLIAMS:

The suit will come to the federal court at the foot of Capitol Hill. The judges are reluctant to referee fights between Congress and the White House. So the suit will have to overcome a legal obstacle that could stop it at the courthouse door.

PETE WILLIAMS:

The Supreme Court has talked out lawsuits against presidents brought by members of Congress in the past, ruling that those who sue must have a personal stake in the outcome, a claim they're harmed in a way no one else is. Another problem, there's a new House every two years. And it's the previous one that passed Obamacare.

AKHIL REED AMAR:

If Nancy Pelosi wants to sue on behalf of that House, that might be a different question. I think it'd still be tough. But at least that's more plausible.

PETE WILLIAMS:

But some say the courts should step in to clarify the boundary lines.

JONATHAN TURLEY:

When the courts remove themselves from these fights, they leave the parties with nothing but muscle politics, the type of dysfunctional and negative acts that we see all the time.

PETE WILLIAMS:

If the lawsuit is heard, it might not be over until after President Obama leaves office. For Meet the Press, Pete Williams, NBC News Washington.

(END TAPE)

DAVID GREGORY:

Greg Craig and Newt Gingrich are here. Welcome both. I want to talk about the politics of this, the policy of it. Greg, let me start with you on just the law. You heard Rich Lowry say in our roundtable that, if the president takes action unilaterally with executive power on an attempt to deal with illegal immigration, providing a path to citizenship for a large group of people, that the response will be furious. Is that a legal response or is that just a political response?

GREG CRAIG:

I think that's a political adjustment rather than a legal observation. I do think that the question of impeachment boils down to whether the politics will change dramatically over next three or four months. One of the things that might change the politics is precisely what Rich identified. If the president takes action on immigration that the majority of the American people disagree with, then you might have a change in the chemistry of impeachment to process. Another thing that might happen would be if the Senate gets captured by the Republican Party in November, that might change the chemistry and the politics of impeachment for the coming----

(OVERTALK)

DAVID GREGORY:

But is there an evolution, Newt Gingrich, of what we think of as the utility, the role of impeachment, as we think about President Nixon to Clinton--

(OVERTALK)

DAVID GREGORY:

--talk about it with Bush and Obama, as well.

NEWT GINGRICH:

Well, we've often had one or two or three members of a party say, "Well, why don't we impeach the president of the other party?" That's nothing new if you Google impeachment suggestions, there are lots of them. (LAUGHTER)

The challenge here is very different. The president, and you ran into this yourself on the advice on Guantanamo. I mean the president would liked to have closed Guantanamo. It was one of his highest priorities. He still hasn't closed Guantanamo, because there are, in our system, there are larger realities that shape these things.

This President's worst issue is immigration. He had 68% disapproval. If he comes in around Labor Day with some grand scheme by executive order, then I think the Republicans are going to pass a bill saying it's wrong in the House, taunt the Senate Democrats who are up for reelection to get the bill to the Senate, and say to the American people, "You want to stick with the Venezuelan style anything-I-want-is-legal presidency, or you want to go back to the constitution? These are your two parties in the government."

And then, in January, the Republican Senate and the Republican House just cuts off the money. You don't have to impeach a president to control him. You can just cut off the money.

DAVID GREGORY:

But let me stay on this. Aren't we at a point in our politics, and the argument will go both ways, who's contributed more, Republicans or Democrats, efforts to de-legitimize presidents and go back, just even in our recent times, certainly happened to Bush, happened to Clinton, has happened to President Obama, that impeachment is discussed more as a means of recall than it is as the legal action that it was originally intended to be.

GREG CRAIG:

Well, I might disagree with you. I think that the impeachment provisions in the constitution were politically intended. They were intended to remove a president who was abusing the powers of the presidency. And the legal process by which it is done is quasi-legal. It's primarily and fundamentally a political process.

And that's why I don't think you're going to be able to organize a serious impeachment effort over the objections of the American people. That's what they tried to do in 1998. And the American people punished the Republican Party in the midterm elections in November 1998.

DAVID GREGORY:

Unless you want to pull some Republicans aside and say, "Please tell me you're not talking about--

(OVERTALK)

NEWT GINGRICH:

Every Republican I talk to, with a handful of a couple of fringe figures, every Republican I talk to knows it would be a dumb idea. And those are actually the people who most want an impeachment site are the president and his team.

DAVID GREGORY:

Right.

NEWT GINGRICH:

They raise money off the word "impeachment." They mobilize their base off the word "impeachment." This is why, when you see on the football, okay, the president would love for us to be that dumb. My prediction is Republicans are going to, in fact, pa-- if he does do something around Labor Day, they will pass a bill repudiating it in the House almost overnight--

(OVERTALK)

DAVID GREGORY:

Do you agree that this been overly cynical by this White House, how they view the impeachment talk politically? (LAUGHTER)

(OVERTALK)

NEWT GINGRICH:-

You can't ask their attorney that. (LAUGHTER)

DAVID GREGORY:

In a moment of candor, he buckles.

(OVERTALK)

NEWT GINGRICH:

Hillary's radical candor. Give us that.

(OVERTALK) (LAUGHTER)

GREG CRAIG:

You'll not be surprised to learn that Democrats would be deeply suspicious of a Republican-controlled House and a Republican-controlled Senate in the last term of a second-term president. And it's been done once before. It can be done again. And so I don't think it's entirely cynical, although I've got to say, my e-mails are filled up with money (LAUGHTER) to fight off impeachment. It's really-- true.

DAVID GREGORY:

The bottom line, though, as any legal action goes nowhere.

NEWT GINGRICH:

Right.

DAVID GREGORY:

Against--

(OVERTALK)

DAVID GREGORY:

--impeachment and some of the other things, the lawsuit.

GREG CRAIG:

This is a crowd management, crowd control provisions that the House--

(OVERTALK)

NEWT GINGRICH:

The right fight will come in January if Republicans get the Senate. And right fights over cutting off money. It's a totally legitimate thing for the Congress to say to the president, "You won't be able to enforce this. No money will be allocated for it." And that is at the core of the American constitutional system.

DAVID GREGORY:

Just quickly before we go, you were on the defense team for John Hinckley Jr. This is coming up again. Jim Brady has passed. It's been ruled a homicide. What was your reaction to that, and where does that go?

GREG CRAIG:

Well, I'm not surprised. First of all, we mourn the death of Jim Brady. He was an extraordinary man and a great American leader who contributed a lot to our public life. And we're sad he's gone. And probably there is much to be said that the contributing factors to his death was the head wound that he suffered.

So I can't say that there's anything unrelated to that. I can't change the notion that it's a homicide. But the idea of retrying John Hinckley after a three and a half week trial where he was found not guilty by reason of insanity, on the question of the assault of Brady, it's not going to happen.

DAVID GREGORY:

All right.

GREG CRAIG:

It shouldn't happen.

DAVID GREGORY:

We're going to leave it there. Speaker Gingrich, Greg Craig, thank you both very much.

GREG CRAIG:

Thank you, David.

DAVID GREGORY:

Appreciate it. I want to return before we go to where we started. The big question for the week that we'll be talking about as the week wears on, the ISIS threat in Iraq. Is President Obama doing enough? You can find our big question and weigh in on the debate on our Facebook page. That is all for today. We'll be back next week. If it's Sunday, it's Meet the Press.

* * *END OF TRANSCRIPT* * *

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"MEET THE PRESS" 8/17/14: NIXON "DEEPLY DISAGREES" W/ VIDEO RELEASED, OGLETREE CALLS FOR AN ARREST + DISCUSSION ON ISIS

Wesley Lowery on Ferguson: "There should be a release of information...and I think that is where, that's the core of the anger and the core of frustration is" Jason Riley on situation in

Iraq: "I think the president has been obsessed with a political solution there. But the best political solution is to defeat ISIS"

AUGUST 17, 2014 -- Today's "Meet the Press" featured interviews with **Gov. Jay Nixon** (D-MO) and **Rep. John Lewis** (D-GA); a panel discussion on the situation in Ferguson, MO with Washington Post reporter **Wesley Lowery**, Baltimore Mayor **Stephanie Rawlings-Blake**, Harvard Law Professor **Charles Ogletree**, St. Louis Post-Dispatch Editor in Chief **Gilbert Bailon** and Los Angeles City Councilmember **Bernard Parks**; a political roundtable with **Rep. Michael Turner** (R-OH), Wilson Center President **Jane Harman**, Wall Street Journal editorial board member **Jason Riley** and Washington Post diplomatic correspondent **Anne Gearan**. NBC News chief foreign affairs correspondent Andrea Mitchell served as guest moderator.

Below are highlights, video, and a rush transcript of today's program. All content will be available online at MeetThePressNBC.com.

###

Gov. Nixon says there has been "serious discussions" about surveillance video being released.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

But he's still, with all due respect governor, he's still doing things, like releasing that video, without even reporting to the state police captain, Captain Johnson, who's supposed to be in charge.

GOVERNOR JAY NIXON:

Yeah. Everyone can rest well assured that we've had very serious discussions about that action and how much we felt that it was not the right way to handle the victim's family, which I had a chance to speak with. They were deeply troubled. And when you see your son gunned down in the street and then you see a police chief begin an attempt to attack his character.

That's just not the way to operate. And we've made that clear to everyone. And our hope and expectation is that now that our folks are in charge of security, and we have these dual investigations going on, that, that bump is behind us, hopefully.

###

Charles Ogletree calls for the arrest of Officer Wilson

CHARLES OGLETREE: Exactly. And I think the first thing that needs to happen, we need to arrest Officer Wilson. He shot and killed a man, shot him multiple times. And he's walking free. No one knows anything about him, no one knows why he did it. We need to have that done, number one. And number two, the curfew is, I appreciate it, the mayor, it's very important. But that's not the answer. You have to have a dialogue with people who are frustrated, who are angry, who are mad at what's going on in Ferguson, Missouri. Until that happens, until there's a dialogue, the people are going to continue to go out, they're going to continue to in a sense show their disobedience. And if you think about it, John Lewis, who I think will be coming on the program later, we need to have a lot of lessons learned from him.

###

Jason Riley on the larger issue of black criminality in the United States

JASON RILEY: You could say that. I don't want to litigate this in the press. But the officer used excessive force. I think he should be prosecuted. But at the same time, let's not pretend that our morgues and cemeteries are full of young black men because cops are shooting them.

The reality is that it's because other black people are shooting them. And we need to talk about black criminality. Blacks are only 13% of the population. But they're 50% of homicide victims in this country. And 90% of those victims are killed by other black people. We have to talk about that.

###

Wesley Lowery on the lack of information coming out of Ferguson

WESLEY LOWERY: There should be a release of information. I think that one of the biggest issues, as I've talked to hundreds of protesters the last few days, hundreds of residents over the last few days, is there's still no police narrative provided whatsoever as to why Officer Wilson was interacting with Michael Brown, why he pulled his gun, why after the first shot, he continued firing. And I think that that is where, that's the core of the anger and the core of frustration is. There's been so little information. There's been an open hostility towards members of the press trying to get that information. And so do I think that would calm things completely? Not at all. I don't know if there's a plausible pathway forward that's peaceful, because I don't know. But I think that we need some more information.

###

Jane Harman on Hillary Clinton's criticism of President Obama's foreign policy.

JANE HARMAN: Yes. She thought she was addressing one problem. And she created another. Some distance from Obama was inevitable. Foreign policy is a very natural place for her to have some distance from him, despite the fact that she implemented his foreign policy as secretary of State for four years. It's the issue on which the two of them disagreed most sharply during their own campaign.

And they do continue to have disagreements. It was natural and inevitable that there would be some distance created. The question for her politically is did she do it too fast or too much? And is the backlash saying, "Hey, wait a minute, why are you going after our guy here from the--"

###

VIDEO

Missouri Gov. Jay Nixon explains the latest on the situation in Ferguson.

<http://nbcnews.to/1pUAngz>

Missouri Gov. Jay Nixon says keeping the peace in Ferguson is his priority.

<http://nbcnews.to/1v4NOY4>

Missouri Gov. Jay Nixon says he disagrees with the release of the robbery video on Friday.

<http://nbcnews.to/1mY3s79>

St. Louis Post-Dispatch editor Gilbert Bailon says the problems faced in Ferguson are indicative of issues across the region.

<http://nbcnews.to/1p2Aec7>

Baltimore Mayor discusses changes her city has made to make safety forces reflect the community's demographics.

<http://nbcnews.to/1v4N4XW>

Harvard professor Charles Ogletree on why the end of protests in Ferguson are just the beginning of a greater movement.

<http://nbcnews.to/1oSB3iP>

Panel explains what the situation in Ferguson means for the rest of the nation.

<http://nbcnews.to/VwR1rq>

Harvard professor Charles Ogletree calls for discussion in seeking long-term resolution, not police action.

<http://nbcnews.to/1sNpPUe>

Rep. John Lewis talks about the racial divide in America and how to move forward.

<http://nbcnews.to/1kLP1Yt>

Rep. John Lewis says leaders in Ferguson owe the African-American community an apology.

<http://nbcnews.to/1tbK7nh>

Rep. John Lewis touches on the militarization of the police in America.

<http://nbcnews.to/1yNHbia>

NBC's Chief Global Correspondent Bill Neely reports on whether or not the President's decision not to bomb Syria is having an impact in Iraq today.

<http://nbcnews.to/1pUAAR5>

MTP roundtable discusses the U.S.'s strategy to combat ISIS in the Middle East.

<http://nbcnews.to/1m8HChl>

MTP roundtable debates the politics of challenging President Obama's foreign policy.

<http://nbcnews.to/1rgDRhb>

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Below is a RUSH transcript of this morning's broadcast -- mandatory attribution to NBC News' "Meet the Press." A final transcript of the program will be available at www.MeetThePressNBC.com.

MEET THE PRESS -- SUNDAY, AUGUST 17, 2014

ANDREA MITCHELL:

Next on Meet the Press, the racial divide in America. New developments this morning at the slaying of an unarmed black teenager by a white police officer turns a Saint Louis suburb into a combat zone. The search for answers in the national debate over race and policing. It prompted President Obama to weigh in once again. I'll be joined by the governor of Missouri, and key voices from law enforcement and the political world.

And taking on the ISIS threat, to President Obama's refusal to intervene in Syria, new attempts to stop the terrorism from taking hold in Iraq. And why? And just how deep is the rift between Hillary Clinton and the president on the United States of force in the Middle East? Plus, the memory of a comic genius, as the world mourns the death of Robin Williams. Our Harry Smith has an insightful interview with Barry Levinson, director of Williams' breakout movie, Good Morning, Vietnam.

ANNOUNCER:

From NBC News in Washington, this is Meet the Press.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

Good morning. A state of emergency is now in effect in Ferguson, Missouri, after another night marred by clashes between protesters and police. A group of protesters defying a new overnight curfew were met by the continued, massive, military-style police response, with armored vehicle, tear gas, and smoke bombs.

Seven people were arrested for violating the curfew, one person was hurt in an unrelated shooting. And more controversy Friday as Ferguson Police released the name of Darren Wilson,

the police officer who shot Michael Brown. The release was accompanied by a surveillance tape the police say linked Brown to a convenience store robbery.

But then Ferguson's police chief issued conflicting statements as, "To whether the confrontation between Brown and Wilson wouldn't have been related to the robbery." And adding to the confusion and anger of protesters. No details about the exact circumstances still of the shooting of Michael Brown have been released.

I'm joined now by the governor of Missouri, Jay Nixon. Governor, thank you very much for being with us. Tell me, why has a full week elapsed, and we still do not know anything? The public wants answers to what happened between Michael Brown and the white officer who shot and killed him?

GOVERNOR JAY NIXON:

Well, it's been a challenge week with the horrific death of Michael Brown, shot down in the streets of his home town and the appropriate energy and acts that everyone's had around there. I think with the dual investigations going on right now with the justice department and with the local prosecutor, and I'm especially appreciative.

After talking to General Holder, I appreciated them sending in 40 additional F.B.I. agents to make sure that they're moving to get a thorough investigation, to get justice here. And I appreciate their response and that energy to make sure that they get this right.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

But why is it taking so long? And you also have a county prosecutor who many say has a conflict of interest here, because he said that he disagrees strongly with your decisions in bringing the county police. He called it shameful, saying that that was in fact an illegal decision. So how is he the person that would be trusted by this very angry and eventful community to come with answers that are credible?

GOVERNOR JAY NIXON:

Well, he's a seasoned prosecutor that has an opportunity to step up here and do his job. And also though, when you see a dual investigation going on, and the resources of the Justice Department, an F.B.I. agent's out working in the community yet again yesterday, 40 additional officers, I think that having those dual investigations will help guarantee that this gets done in a timely fashion. That it's done thoroughly, and that it gets justice.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

Isn't it more important to get answers, correct answers, and answers to the public? What of the timely investigation? What is taking so long about telling the people what happened to Michael Brown?

GOVERNOR JAY NIXON:

It's been a week, and it's been a very long week. And late in the week, when we saw the additional militarization of the police response there and the security side, I had to take an unprecedented action, which was to replace and bring in our highway patrol to lead that. I think that that has made a big difference. You saw that first night, very much peace.

Second night, until late in night, there was peace. And last night, I think the vast majority of local citizens, the local elected officials and others called on me to put a curfew in place, so there'll be guaranteed peace late last night. And of the thousands of protesters and the community members out there, I think they made a difference. In order to get justice, we need peace. Those are both intertwined here. And we look forward to keeping the peace and getting justice.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

Well, governor, there was peace. There was peace on Thursday night after you appointed the county police to come in and take over. The state police, rather, their takeover from the county. But then the local police chief who released that video, what justifies releasing the video about the convenience store, while there's still no details about what happened with the shooting itself? That is what caused everything to erupt again on Friday night and eventually led to the curfew having to be imposed.

GOVERNOR JAY NIXON:

Yeah, we and our security team and the highway patrol did not know that was going to be released. I don't think the attorney general knew that. And quite frankly, we disagree deeply I think for two reasons. Number one, to attempt to in essence disparage the character of this victim, in the middle of a process like this is not right. It's just not right. And secondarily, it did put the community and quite frankly the region and the nation on alert again. These are old wounds. These are deep wounds in these communities. And that action was not helpful.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

Well, should the police chiefs, Chief Jackson then be fired or have to step down?

GOVERNOR JAY NIXON:

We've moved the highway patrol in to manage security. The Justice Department and the detectives in Saint Louis are doing the investigation. So he--

(OVERTALK)

ANDREA MITCHELL:

But he's still, with all due respect governor, he's still doing things, like releasing that video, without even reporting to the state police captain, Captain Johnson, who's supposed to be in charge.

GOVERNOR JAY NIXON:

Yeah. Everyone can rest well assured that we've had very serious discussions about that action and how much we felt that it was not the right way to handle the victim's family, which I had a chance to speak with. They were deeply troubled. And when you see your son gunned down in the street and then you see a police chief begin an attempt to attack his character.

That's just not the way to operate. And we've made that clear to everyone. And our hope and expectation is that now that our folks are in charge of security, and we have these dual investigations going on, that, that bump is behind us, hopefully.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

Well, governor--

GOVERNOR JAY NIXON:

But the wounds are very real.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

Well, governor, I know that when you say that you were doing a lot of things behind the scenes, but why did it take you till Friday to get to Ferguson, what they call ground zero? And when did you first hear from the president about all this?

GOVERNOR JAY NIXON:

I've been involved all week. I've been having meetings and phone calls and meeting with local officials, been here a number of times. And once again, yesterday in the morning conference call with local officials have asked me to put a curfew in place, to make sure that we have safety as well as peace, so that this community could be safe.

So we've been here all week. I've been here most of the days. And I talked to the president in the middle part of the week. I talked to General Holder at some length later in the week, and I appreciate deeply, and actually that conversation, General Holder and the F.B.I. sending 40 additional F.B.I. officers in to make sure they're getting a thorough but timely investigation here. And I think that's helping.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

Thank you so much, Governor Nixon, from Missouri. While the events in Ferguson this week have certainly shocked the nation, focusing renewed attention on the nation's disparity that still exists in our justice system. Our Kevin Tibbles takes a closer look at that situation.

(BEGIN TAPE)

KEVIN TIBBLES:

A week of unrest and racial tension. In today's America, black men are six times more likely to be incarcerated than white men. Prison sentences for black men are 20% longer than those for whites convicted of the same crime. And on average, 100 black people are killed each year by white police officers.

JAMES CLARK:

They had to get America's attention. They had to get America to take notice of their pain.

KEVIN TIBBLES:

James Clark is a Saint Louis community activist who says he sees the disparity every day.

JAMES CLARK:

Crimes is going up. The perpetrators are now getting younger and younger. And there is a fundamental reason why, because they're living in subcultures that mainstream, would rather act like it doesn't exist.

KEVIN TIBBLES:

But they do exist. And some maintain there are two Americas, one white, one black. And they are not equal. Greg Howard is a columnist who was so outraged, he wrote an essay entitled America is Not For Black People.

GREG HOWARD:

We're seeing so many black men killed by police officers because police officers don't value black men's life as they do that of white people. It's physically easier for a police officer to weigh what a black man's life is worth and to end up feeling what he's justified in pulling the trigger.

KEVIN TIBBLES:

Heather McDonald strongly disagrees.

HEATHER MCDONALD:

I stand the opposite. The criminology profession has been trying for decades to prove that the over-representation of blacks in prison or in arrest statistic is a result of criminal justice racism. It is black crime rates that predict the presence of blacks in the criminal justice system. Not some miscarriage of justice.

KEVIN TIBBLES:

Still, in Ferguson, as in many other impoverished urban communities, the authorities are often seen as the enemy.

JAMES CLARK:

After the cameras leave, and after young Michael is buried, if we don't reach into the neighborhoods, they'll become more bold. They'll become much more brazen.

KEVIN TIBBLES:

The death of a young man in suburban Saint Louis resonates across the nation. But will it encourage solutions or create further division? For Meet the Press, Kevin Tibbles.

(END TAPE)

ANDREA MITCHELL:

And to discuss the broader meaning of Ferguson for the rest of the country, I'm joined by Wesley Lowery, he's been covering this story for The Washington Post. He had his own encounter with Ferguson police that he shot on tape. He was arrested and released without being charged there on Wednesday.

And also here is Gilbert Bailon, editor of The Saint Louis Post-Dispatch, Stephanie Rawlings-Blake, the mayor of Baltimore, Charles Ogletree, professor at Harvard Law School, and founder of the Charles Hamilton Houston Institute for Race and Justice. And from Los Angeles, Bernard Parks, former chief of the L.A. Police Department, now a member of the Los Angeles City Council. Welcome all. Wesley, first to you. You were on the streets that awful night and all week really. What has been the response now to the local police and the curfew as the state police have taken over?

WESLEY LOWERY:

Unfortunately, I think we've seen a lot of community leaders and members, protesters, organizers, who really tried to abide by the curfew. And I was talking to people getting on the plane on the way up here as well, I was talking to reporters who were still on the ground.

The community wanted to respect this curfew, by large. There was certainly a group of people who stayed past the curfew, protesters, and also what it sounds like, some people who were looking for trouble. We have a real anger on the ground here.

And we have not just an anger in the protesters and the residents, but also people who are seeing this as an opportunity to come into Ferguson, from outside of Ferguson, either opportunistically, to cause trouble, but also as a way of saying, "This is a way of having the same voice. That this protest is happening here, these clashes are happening here. So maybe I don't live here in Ferguson, I live in a separate suburb, but I can now come here and express my voice." And there were chants of, "We have the right to peacefully assemble," back at the police after they said, "You're violating the curfew."

ANDREA MITCHELL:

And Gilbert Bailon, the back story here is there are 90 municipalities around Saint Louis, there is a deep racial divide, there's a history of police harassment. And you've got a police team here led by a chief who released that video about the convenience store without telling any of his then superiors. And you've got three black officers and 50 white officers with a town that is 67% African American.

GILBERT BAILON:

Well, it's interesting to know the history of this town. This town's been incorporated for more than a hundred years. It has historic areas. And people have been beginning to change in the last few decades. The African American population grew. What has not grown with that is the political representation, the economic opportunity.

They feel very isolated. And additionally, a deep mistrust for the police there. We have a story today in the apartment complexes where this happened, that people report being harassed, being profiled, being asked questions about why they're even in the neighborhood. So that's their feeling.

The police, on the other hand, will say there's a crime problem in this area, and we have to enforce it to keep the public safety. So that's the clash we have on there. This is not unique to Ferguson. I think many, many cities in our region and many cities throughout the country have similar issues.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

But a lot of people, Mayor, were shocked by the militarization that we saw on Wednesday night. And we've seen this started in 1996 and 1997 as an anti-drug war component. But then it became armored vehicle, the kind of surplus defense vehicles. I think more than \$60 million in the last five years was spent in the Saint Louis area alone. Does Baltimore have the same kind of equipment? And who decides when it gets used?

STEPHANIE RAWLINGS-BLAKE:

Well, we have some equipment that is used for emergencies, and emergency preparedness. And up and down the East Coast, especially after 9/11, our region has armed ourselves for that type of emergency. It's very unusual that it would be used against your own citizens. So I don't understand that decision.

There's a sacred bond that the police have with the community. And when it's broken, it has ripple effects in that community and across the country. People don't want their military equipment being used on them when they're just voicing their opinion. So you have to be very careful.

We had the Occupy Wall Street Movement. Baltimore is one of the only cities that was able to break up that encampment without any arrests, or any problems because we were very judicious in the use for force. You have to be. You don't get do-overs with things like that.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

Stephanie, your city is 63% African American, yet your police and fire departments don't fully reflect that racial background. You have tried to have more community policing, tried to do something with hiring promotions. We talked about this this week, but it still hasn't worked.

STEPHANIE RAWLINGS-BLAKE:

Well, we're determined to get it right. The issue of you can't do the same thing that you did year after year, knowing that you have a chip in the demographics and expect things to happen differently. We are doing things differently in the fire department, in the police department. We have members of the community who are now part of the panel when we are putting police officers up for promotion.

So the community has a voice in who responds, who are the first responders in their community. You have to do it on a consistent basis. You can't just show up after something that's happened and think that you're going to have that level of trust that is necessary in a crisis.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

Charles Ogletree, we've seen some interesting and diverse races around the nation this week. One leading Republican, who may well be running for president, Rand Paul wrote, "Coupling the militarization of law enforcement with an erosion of civil liberties and due process that allows the police to become judge and jury, we begin to have a very serious problem. Given the racial disparities in our criminal justice system, it is impossible for African Americans not to feel like their government is particularly targeting them." Speak to that.

CHARLES OGLETREE:

I think Rand Paul is telling the truth. And I'm glad that the Republican is saying that. I think people are going to really understand that this is a problem. And what's going on in Ferguson, Missouri, is now like any other city. It's never going to change. The conflict between African Americans who are arrested too often, too young, too many times by white police officers, and this is a predominantly black community.

And you have these white officers who don't live there, who aren't a part of the community, who don't know the community, and yet they're given all the power to make things happen. We need to have a change in that sense right now. And I'll tell you what, people think that three days of rioting is the end of it in Ferguson, Missouri. It's just starting.

The people are upset, they're frustrated, they want to take their city back, they don't like the way the young black men are being stopped and killed. How many people have to bury young people for people to understand that something is wrong in Ferguson, Missouri? And I think we have to change that right now.

We have to change that urgently. The governor, the mayor, everybody involved, and I appreciate the fact that the federal government is involved in it, with President Obama and with the Attorney General Eric Holder. But we need a lot more to happen, a lot more to get going.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

Well, and in fact, I think with a 67% African American community here, Wesley, and 83% is the arrest rate and incarceration rate is 93% African American.

WESLEY LOWERY:

That's exactly right.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

And so they're targeting. Bernard Parks, you were a police chief in a very complicated place, Los Angeles. And now a member of the city council. The disengagement in Ferguson is extraordinary. It's not just the police department that's virtually all white, it's the city council and the school board. They're not electing people who represent them ethnically or racially.

BERNARD PARKS:

I think it's very important as we watch the coverage of this incident, because we've not heard, in my judgement, heard one word from the mayor or the city council members. You hear from the governor, you hear from the highway patrol, you hear from the Saint Louis County Police. And I think one of the issues that is going to have to be addressed, what is the recovery plan for this city?

When is the Ferguson police going to get reintroduced to the community so where they can begin to work in a relationship? When is the community, in addition to raising their hands as to a protest, become activists and that energy goes into elections and voting so they can take that role that they request to be a part of city government?

Showing at the council meetings, electing representation? These are things that should be on the table, on the recovery of Ferguson, because this issue is going to pass. You're going to have the shooting investigation completed, the F.B.I., eventually all those people will go home. How are the citizens going to interact with Ferguson elected officials and the police department, the personnel department, and all those decision makers once everyone else goes home?

ANDREA MITCHELL:

And let's go around the table. What can be done? What do you think is the most important thing that should be done to try to move beyond the anger and the disengagement?

WESLEY LOWERY:

There should be a release of information. I think that one of the biggest issues, as I've talked to hundreds of protesters the last few days, hundreds of residents over the last few days, is there's still no police narrative provided whatsoever as to why Officer Wilson was interacting with Michael Brown, why he pulled his gun, why after the first shot, he continued firing.

And I think that that is where, that's the core of the anger and the core of frustration is. There's been so little information. There's been an open hostility towards members of the press trying to get that information. And so do I think that would calm things completely? Not at all. I don't know if there's a plausible pathway forward that's peaceful, because I don't know. But I think that we need some more information.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

Well, what was the range, how close was he, where did he shoot him, Charles Ogletree--

CHARLES OGLETREE:

All that is critical.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

We don't have any of that information.

CHARLES OGLETREE:

Exactly. And I think the first thing that needs to happen, we need to arrest Officer Wilson. He shot and killed a man, shot him multiple times. And he's walking free. No one knows anything about him, no one knows why he did it. We need to have that done, number one. And number two, the curfew is, I appreciate it, the mayor, it's very important. But that's not the answer.

You have to have a dialogue with people who are frustrated, who are angry, who are mad at what's going on in Ferguson, Missouri. Until that happens, until there's a dialogue, the people are going to continue to go out, they're going to continue to in a sense show their disobedience. And if you think about it, John Lewis, who I think will be coming on the program later, we need to have a lot of lessons learned from him.

He was beaten on the Edmund Pettus Bridge, he was a person who has gone through all of this. And we have to realize that somebody who has been beaten, who ran for Congress, who was a young, nonviolent person, and still believes in non violence, I think that his message has to be listened to by not just seniors, but young people who were wondering what am I going to do. Because they're coming out. They're very angry. And they're going to be made until something happens to make that change.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

In fact, that's a perfect introduction to John Lewis. And we should point out that there is a continuing curfew not only in Ferguson, but a continuing curfew as well in Baltimore City. I'm joined now by Congressman John Lewis, Democratic congressman from Atlanta, who of course, marched with Dr. Martin Luther King Junior more than a half a century ago. And survived that beating by police in Birmingham, Alabama. Congressman, what do you see as the solutions going forward for this terrible situation in Ferguson, Missouri?

REP. JOHN LEWIS:

Well, I think it's important for people to come together and begin a dialogue. Begin to talk. That's what we did during the '60s. When we had difficult, when we had this order, black people and white people came together. In a place like Ferguson, and it's not just Ferguson. It may be Ferguson today, but tomorrow it could be someplace else.

We have to get police officers, locally-elected officials to respect the dignity and the words of every human being. It's a shame and a disgrace that in a city that is almost 70% African American to have only three African American police officers. Ferguson is not in the American South.

But we're doing much better in the small towns and cities in Georgia and Alabama and Mississippi. This is shameful. This is a disgrace. We must teach people the way of peace, the way of love, the way of nonviolence. But we cannot have peace and order without justice.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

Well how would you persuade people there that they can believe in their local authorities, that they should actually participate in elections, run for office, when they're being harassed by their local police and when we see what the police chief did just on Friday?

REP. JOHN LEWIS:

Well, I think that the police chief and the mayor and other local officials have a moral obligation and responsibility to literally apologize to the community. And the city mothers or city fathers should come together in a fashion, reach out to the African American community and say, "We're going to work together for the common good." And say, "We all live in this city together and we've got to learn to live together as brothers and sisters," as Dr. King would say, "Or we're going to perish as fools."

ANDREA MITCHELL:

Now Congressman, I know you voted against it, but does Congress bear some responsibility for the militarization of local police departments around the country?

REP. JOHN LEWIS:

Well, when I was watching the film footage coming out of Ferguson, it looked like it was in Baghdad or some other war-torn zone. Ferguson is a part of the United States of America. It's not China. It's not Russia. It's not the Congo. It's America. People have a right to protest. People have a right to engage in peaceful, nonviolent action. And the press have a right to cover what is going on.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

Thanks so much, Congressman John Lewis, and to all of our other guests on this issue. And next, the U.S. has launched more air strikes targeting Islamic extremists in Iraq this weekend. But what does President Obama's failure to intervene in Syria has fueled the rise of

ISIS in the first place. Hillary Clinton seems to think so. Our roundtable will discuss, coming up next.

Commercial Break

ANDREA MITCHELL:

Welcome back. The latest now in a key military offensive in the U.S. air war in Iraq. The U.S. is launching more air strikes as part of a joint operation with the Kurds to recapture a strategically important dam in Mosul held by ISIS militants. Kurdish forces say they are now advancing on that dam. And on Friday, at least 80 Yazidi men were reportedly killed by ISIS after refusing to convert to Islam in a Northern Iraqi village.

But there was some welcomed news for the U.S. this week with the nomination of Haider al-Abadi as prime minister to replace Nouri al-Maliki, whose divisive leadership created the vacuum for ISIS in the first place. All this as Hillary Clinton apologized to President Obama, for saying she believes his failure to act in Syria fueled the rise of ISIS. Our chief global correspondent Bill Neely looks at whether America's latest intervention in Iraq can be successful without going after ISIS strongholds in Syria.

BILL NEELY:

The Islamist militants of ISIS are on a fast march through the heart of the Middle East. In Iraq, they've taken the second biggest city, Mosul, and advanced to within an hour's drive of the capital, Baghdad. In Syria, they're threatening a bigger city, Aleppo, and killing off moderate rebel groups, many of them backed by the U.S.

They're doing what Al Qaeda never did in the region, holding ground, and defeating armies. American air strikes targeted its fighters to halt their advance. In the last 24 hours, and just half an hour's drive from here, American warplanes have hit ISIS targets nine times. But why is ISIS being hit here in Iraq?

Why was the plight of the Yazidi the trigger when the gassing of hundreds of civilians in Syria last year and the killing of tens of thousands more merited a threat from President Obama, and then no military action whatsoever? The president drew a red line in Syria. But when the Assad regime used chemical weapons in Damascus, he pulled back from airstrikes and struck a deal with Assad's main ally, Russia.

Questions are again being asked in Washington and elsewhere about American power and the President's willingness to use it. But bombing ISIS and bombing Syria are very different. The militants have no big country protecting them at the UN. America attacked them to stop the threat of genocide, but also to protect its own facilities.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA (ON TAPE):

We will continue airstrikes to protect our people and facilities in Iraq.

BILL NEELY:

Questions are also being asked about America's strategy. Striking a few ISIS vehicles will do little to halt their advance.

MAX FISHER:

Our success means that a few million Iraqi Kurds are saved from ISIS and Kurdistan is kept stable, which is a good thing. But that means really nothing for the millions of Arab Iraqis who are going to stay under ISIS rule for the foreseeable future.

BILL NEELY:

President Obama, wary of military action, is now the fourth consecutive president to bomb Iraq. But now that he's started, when and why will he stop? ISIS is a threat way beyond Syria and Iraq.

BRETT MCGURK:

There's no political solution to the ISIS problem. ISIS has to be squeezed, it has to be deprived of oxygen, and it has to be confronted.

BILL NEELY:

Analysts estimate perhaps a thousand Westerners have joined this fight, among them dozens of Americans. ISIS presents an indirect national security threat to the United States. ISIS wants to redraw the map of the Middle East to establish the Islamic state, the caliphate. It's already targeting not just Syria and Iraq, but Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey. It has its sights on a far bigger prize. Bill Neely, NBC News, Iraq.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

And to talk about the Iraq crisis and the rest of the week's politics, the roundtable is here. Anne Gearan, diplomatic correspondent for The Washington Post, will be covering Hillary Clinton as well. Jason Riley a member of The Wall Street Journal's editorial board and author of *Please Stop Helping Us: How Liberals Make It Harder for Blacks to Succeed*.

Jane Harman, the president and CEO of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, and a former Democratic congresswoman from California. And Republican Congressman Michael Turner from Ohio. Welcome all. Thanks so much. Anne, you just got back off another round-the-world trip with John Kerry.

And you've been spending so much time in Iraq and Afghanistan as a conflict zone. What about the argument that ISIS would not have taken hold if the administration had a year ago labor day, gone after Assad with air strikes and done more militarily to help the rebels there?

ANNE GEARAN:

There's a fair amount of evidence that ISIS could have been blunted some time back. You can pick another various point where they were gathering strength. But when they were incubating in Syria, might have been a better time to have been paying more attention to how much weaponry they were amassing, what kind of training was happening, where they were getting the money.

Not that the Obama administration wasn't paying any attention to it, but it seems like it's a much more distant problem and it's a problem that got so big so quickly that a lot of people are asking now where were some vector points that American, even stopping short of the military power, but other kinds of American influence might've been able to stop it.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

And now we have military engagement, Jane Harman, it is described as a humanitarian mission. But then the president comes out and says, "Well, we've done that. The Yazidis are okay." And now we see air strikes, really successive air strikes to deal with retaking the dam in Mosul, working with the Peshmerga, the Kurds on the ground. Are we involved in a war there?

JANE HARMAN:

Well, I think it's important that we protect our consulate in Erbil, if that dam is sludge, our consulate and a lot of people will be taken out by ISIS. I don't think we should consider ISIS a rational actor, by the way. And I take this very seriously. I spent years on the House Intelligence Committee and Homeland Committee, and I think we should've acted in Syria.

This was something we said at the time. I think we sent a signal to the neighborhood that was disserving. The Saudis expected us to act and were very upset and still are that we didn't. But let me just say this about Saudi Arabia. Where are they? If they think that they can export terrorism again, they tried this with Osama bin Laden, I think they're wrong. And this big caliphate, if it should come to be, God forbid, and I think we will stop them, is going to have its center in Saudi Arabia. So this neighborhood better wake up.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

Well, among the critics, by the way, all of you, is General Jim Jones. James Jones, the First National Security Advisor to President Obama, he wrote, "Mr. Maliki's failure to unify Iraq's diverse populations is the chief cause of the current crisis, but Washington bears some blame for not taking timely action that could have limited this summer's chaos.

"The Obama administration could have maintained a limited military training presence in Iraq after 2011; could have acted in Syria last year when the chemical weapons 'red line' was crossed; and could have insisted that Mr. Maliki arm the Kurds. But what matters more is what the U.S. can do now." Congressman, you I think were against going to Syria, were against continued military action.

REP. MICHAEL TURNER:

Well, what the president needs is a strategy and a plan. I think when we failed to garner the support for the action that he proposed in Syria was because he did not have a strategy and plan, and still we see the failure of that. The failure in his foreign policy and the neglect, as Anne was saying, as this threat involved in Syria, ISIS didn't evolve out of thin air, they were emerging.

And then also a neglect of the administration to work with Iraq. We see now how unstable Iraq is. How threatened they can be by ISIS. And then this very odd red line that the president established with the Yazidis. And instead of when ISIS was establishing a stronghold with major infrastructure, threatening Baghdad, mass killings, tens of thousands of refugees, the administration took action only when it was a humanitarian issue.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

Well, that is a question. Who do we save, Jason? We don't save the Syrians.

JASON RILEY:

Just because we can't save everyone doesn't mean we don't save anyone. I think one problem is that we've consistently underestimated ISIS. This is a committed group of extremists that broke off from Al Qaeda because they felt Al Qaeda was too moderate. And our policy needs to reflect that reality.

I think the president has been obsessed with a political solution there. But the best political solution is to defeat ISIS. The Kurds in the North, the Sunni clerics in the West, which ISIS now pretty much controls, want to know that Baghdad can protect them. Defeating ISIS moves us towards that goal.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

Hillary Clinton of course has disagreed with the president about this. She did say this in her book *Hard Choices*, but she made it a lot more explicit with Jeff Goldberg. First read was looking at it this way, the problem for Clinton: when she distances herself from Obama, to a degree she distances herself from, well, herself. With the book rollout, she's been suggesting that her hard choices at the State Department are a key qualifier for the 2016 bid. So how much can she really pull away from the person who gave her the job? And Jane, there is the disloyalty issue among the base.

JANE HARMAN:

Yes. She thought she was addressing one problem. And she created another. Some distance from Obama was inevitable. Foreign policy is a very natural place for her to have some distance from him, despite the fact that she implemented his foreign policy as secretary of State for four years. It's the issue on which the two of them disagreed most sharply during their own campaign.

And they do continue to have disagreements. It was natural and inevitable that there would be some distance created. The question for her politically is did she do it too fast or too

much? And is the backlash saying, "Hey, wait a minute, why are you going after our guy here from the--"

(OVERTALK)

JASON RILEY:

The other question is how plausible is it? She didn't say, "I wanted to arm the opposition in Syria." But she called Assad a reformer. And she refused to call for his ouster when the uprising began. She can say, "Oh, I deplore this Russian aggression," but she was all for the Russian reset. So there's a plausibility issue here as well. But yes, she is acting like a lot of Democrats in this election cycle, trying to distance themselves from a president whose approval rating has fallen sharply.

JANE HARMAN:

Well, let's not forget, there are two and a half years to go, and there are opportunities to get this right. And I think Obama's made right choices in Iraq, right, and in Ukraine. But what's still missing is a narrative that links everything together. And it's not just what our foreign policy actually is, it's how it's perceived in the Middle East and how it's perceived in the Middle East is, "Don't be stupid, let's use drones."

And that is going to take a lot of work. One last comment on Iraq. And that is about the Sunnis. Let's understand that there is an opportunity now with this new government, applause, applause, applause, to get the Sunnis back and to have a new Sunni awakening which will hopefully defeat ISIS, which is overreaching.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

But Congressman, is it too late? Because we now have a new prime minister, but he's been critical of the Kurds in the past. What could be proved that he's really going to be inclusive?

REP. MICHAEL TURNER:

Well, and this is a time for the president to engage. And I think we've seen again that's a result of the neglect that the president has had in his foreign policy with respect to Iraq, the instability that has occurred. But the president also has to come to the recognition that ISIS is a threat to the United States.

British Prime Minister Cameron wrote in an op-ed that he sees ISIS as a threat to Britain and to the British. Certainly this president needs to make a case and I think his policy should reflect it, that this is not just a threat to a stable Iraq, this is a threat to--

(OVERTALK)

JASON RILEY:

And that means more than air strikes. That means reconstituting the Iraqi army, that means arming the Kurds. Air strikes are not going to get it done. Containing ISIS is not going to eliminate that threat.

ANNE GEARAN:

Well, but it also means going after ISIS in Syria, which is going to be a whole different ballgame. And there are a lot of people in the administration who are worried about--

(OVERTALK)

ANNE GEARAN:

--alone.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

There will be another big headline--

(OVERTALK)

ANDREA MITCHELL:

I want to get to another big headline today which is Rick Perry. And what Rick Perry had to say that the fact that he has been indicted on two felony charges for vetoing a bill and all this stemming from a Democratic vacuum in this Republican state, Travis County, Austin. So there are a lot of questions about whether it's political and this is what he had to say.

RICK PERRY (ON TAPE):

I intend to fight against those who would erode our state's constitution and laws purely for political purposes, and I intend to win. I am confident that we will ultimately prevail. That this farce of a prosecution will be revealed for what it is. And those responsible will be held accountable.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

He's clearly been gearing up, Congressman, for the potential run for president. Is this going to hurt him? It could help him with debate.

REP. MICHAEL TURNER:

Well, I think everyone sees that this is the criminalization of just the legislative function. You do that, you weaken democracy. This is certainly a political attack. And this is very bad precedent.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

Before we go, I want to ask you about Ferguson, because you've written a whole book, Please Stop Helping Us: How Liberals Make It Harder for Blacks to Succeed. What we're seeing in Ferguson certainly shows the disengagement between the local police force and the community.

JASON RILEY:

You could say that. I don't want to litigate this in the press. But the officer used excessive force. I think he should be prosecuted. But at the same time, let's not pretend that our morgues and cemeteries are full of young black men because cops are shooting them.

The reality is that it's because other black people are shooting them. And we need to talk about black criminality. Blacks are only 13% of the population. But they're 50% of homicide victims in this country. And 90% of those victims are killed by other black people. We have to talk about that.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

We certainly saw that, the blacks were the victims of the looting as well.

JASON RILEY:

At the same time, the same weekend that this went down in Ferguson, we've had 26 shootings in Chicago. But Al Sharpton didn't head to Chicago. He headed to Saint Louis, because he has an entirely different agenda.

JANE HARMAN:

Well, he has--

(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

JASON RILEY:

--whites--

JANE HARMAN:

But that is--

(OVERTALK)

JANE HARMAN:

Obviously he's talking to everyone.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

Because he's actually there on a peace mission today. But before I go, I just want to say a word about Mo'ne Davis, because she is showing that throwing like a girl is a great thing to do, 70 mile an hour pitches in--

(OVERTALK)

JANE HARMAN:

Here, here.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

And what a great moment for the Philly team and a shutout with a two-hitter. So you go. Thirteen years old, her goal is to go and be in the national league, let her into Major League Baseball. Thank you all. A great roundtable.

REP. MICHAEL TURNER:

Thank you.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

I appreciate your being here today. A lot to cover. Coming up, remembering Robin Williams. Barry Levinson, director of some of the most memorable performances. He tells our Harry Smith just what made his friend so special.

(BEGIN TAPE)

BARRY LEVINSON:

There are a lot of talented people that come along. And there's only a few that are in some other class that you can't even define.

HARRY SMITH:

And he was one of them.

BARRY LEVINSON:

Yeah.

(END TAPE)

Commercial Break

ANDREA MITCHELL:

As you may be aware, David Gregory's final show as moderator of Meet the Press was last Sunday. Meet the Press makes a lot of history. And a great deal of it was with David at the helm since he started in December 2008.

(BEGIN TAPE)

ANDREA MITCHELL:

Vice President Joe Biden made front-page news when he got ahead of the president in 2012 and embraced gay marriage.

JOE BIDEN (ON TAPE):

I am absolutely comfortable.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

And an important moment of the 2012 presidential primary, when David moderated a GOP debate live on a Sunday morning just two days before the New Hampshire primary. Then there was David's landmark interview in Afghanistan, 2010 with General David Petraeus, after he took command of U.S. and NATO forces.

Before taking the Meet the Press chair, David had a stellar eight years covering presidential politics at the White House for NBC News, where he covered George W. Bush from the first primaries to 9/11, and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. In 20 years with NBC News, David has done it all. The O.J. Simpson trial, Timothy McVeigh and the Oklahoma City bombing. Today Show guest-hosted.

DAVID GREGORY (ON TAPE):

And how you doing?

ANDREA MITCHELL:

And when the cameras weren't rolling, dead-on imitations of everyone from the president of the United States to Tom Brokaw. Through all the years, David has been truly the traditions of this program and NBC News.

DAVID GREGORY (ON TAPE):

If it's Sunday, it's Meet the Press.

(END TAPE)

ANDREA MITCHELL:

On Thursday, David tweeted, "I leave NBC as I came, humbled and grateful. I love journalism," he wrote, "and sitting as moderator of Meet the Press was the highest honor there is. I have great respect for my colleagues at NBC News and wish them all well. To the viewers, I say thank you." As David leaves NBC News for his next adventure, I will miss him as a daily colleague. But I know he will always be a friend. We'll be back with more right after this.

Commercial Break

ANDREA MITCHELL:

Here now with a special edition of Images to Remember, looking back at the extraordinary life of Robin Williams. Robin Williams was a force of nature with the ability to make just about anyone laugh, but he was also an accomplished dramatic actor, winning an Oscar for Good Will Hunting. Barry Levinson directed him in three films, including two of his more politically-themed works, Good Morning, Vietnam and Man of the Year. Levinson spoke to our own Harry Smith about what made his friend such a special and unique talent.

(BEGIN TAPE)

ROBIN WILLIAMS (FROM "GOOD MORNING VIETNAM"):

Good morning, Vietnam. Hey, this is not a test. This is rock-n-roll. Time to rocket it from the delta to the DMV.

BARRY LEVINSON:

In a sense it was like fireworks went off.

ROBIN WILLIAMS (FROM "GOOD MORNING VIETNAM"):

Let's play this backwards and see if it gets any better. Freddie is the devil.

BARRY LEVINSON:

It's like, "Boom," and then all of a sudden, he's off to the races.

ROBIN WILLIAMS (FROM "GOOD MORNING VIETNAM"):

Picture a man going on a journey beyond sight and sound.

BARRY LEVINSON:

And ideas are going through him so fast and coming out at lightning speed.

ROBIN WILLIAMS (FROM "GOOD MORNING VIETNAM"):

He's left Crete. He's entered the demilitarized zone.

BARRY LEVINSON:

To the point you go, "How is this humanly possible? What is he connected to?" That it's not like, "Here's a joke and then here's a joke."

ROBIN WILLIAMS (ARCHIVE):

Well, what do you use to look for them? Well, we ask people, "Are you the enemy? And whoever says yes, we shoot them."

BARRY LEVINSON:

It was like something that just came out in a way that he channeled something and he could run with it and take you on that little ride. It was pretty extraordinary to see.

HARRY SMITH (V/O):

Barry Levinson directed Robin Williams' first hit movie, Good Morning, Vietnam.

HARRY SMITH:

Did you guys talk politics? Had you ever talked politics?

BARRY LEVINSON:

We did. It wasn't necessarily political to one or the other. It was this is what's wrong, this is what's crazy and how come we can't address it and why is it so crazy. How is it we can't come to terms on some basic issues that shouldn't become a political football of a left and right?

ROBIN WILLIAMS (IN STAND UP ACT):

Nice to be in Washington, where the buck stops here. Way to go. And then it's handed out to AIG and many other people. Now I have a new Timothy Geithner \$20 bill. It's just been printed. Kind of neat. And instead of, "In God we trust," it just says, "Trust me."

HARRY SMITH (V/O):

In 2005, Williams and Levinson teamed up again for Man of the Year, a story about a comedy talk show host who decides to run for president.

ROBIN WILLIAMS (FROM "MAN OF THE YEAR"):

And you can't spend \$200 million on a campaign and not be owing people something. And the next thing you know, they have to deal with special interests, and next thing you know, they're doing special favors for special people, and not dealing with what you need.

BARRY LEVINSON:

With all of the comedy that he would do, there something very humanistic about it. There was never an angry, putting down. He could show us how at times where we can be foolish and absurd, et cetera. But there was something that there was a human with a certain degree of kindness to all of the work that he did. And it's a very, very special person.

ROBIN WILLIAMS (FROM "MAN OF THE YEAR"):

Politicians are a lot like diapers. They should be changed frequently and for the same reason. Keep that in mind the next time you vote.

HARRY SMITH (V/O):

Levinson and I spoke on the stage of the Juilliard School, where Williams first learned his craft.

BARRY LEVINSON:

You're trying to find your feet. You're trying to figure out how do I connect to an audience. How do I navigate that? And then the brain starts to go to work. "Well, this is good, this doesn't work, this isn't right, I need to do--" And so I'm sure there was that personality that began to take shape.

HARRY SMITH:

Right here.

BARRY LEVINSON:

Right here.

HARRY SMITH:

Then took off like a rocket ship.

BARRY LEVINSON:

There are a lot of talented people that come along. And there's only a few that are in some other class that you can't even define.

HARRY SMITH:

And he was one of them.

BARRY LEVINSON:

Yeah.

(END TAPE)

ANDREA MITCHELL:

Robin Williams went on six USO tours from 2002 to 2013. He visited troops in the U.S. and 12 foreign countries, making three stops in both Iraq and Afghanistan. And traveling with him on the trip to Afghanistan is our Anne Gearan. You had a remarkable experience with him.

ANNE GEARAN:

It was really funny. It was actually it was in Iraq in 2010 with Chairman Mullen. And we were put up at one of those old Saddam palaces that had been turned into a guesthouse. And he was given a big fancy suite, but only half of it. And the other half was three women journalists.

The problem for him was that there was only one bathroom and only one shower. And he did not get a shower because we kept taking a shower and then we'd go back in our room and he'd come in and knock and say, "Is it free yet?" "Oh no, not quite."

ANDREA MITCHELL:

So you kept Robin Williams from having a shower?

ANNE GEARAN:

We did. But he was charming about it.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

What an amazing person. And thank you to the roundtable and that's all for today. And we'll be back next week. If it's Sunday, it's Meet the Press.

END TRANSCRIPT

"MEET THE PRESS" 8/24/14: ROGERS: ISIS IS "ONE PLANE TICKET AWAY FROM US", NBC EXCLUSIVE W/ SEN.PAUL + POLITICAL ROUNDTABLE

Rep. Mike Rogers: "There's no mulligans in foreign policy." Gov. Jay Nixon on Prosecuting Attorney Robert McCulloch: "He was elected overwhelmingly by the people a number of times. He's been through a lot. Certainly with this level of attention I think everyone will work hard to do their best work." Amb. Peter Westmacott: "I think we are close" to identifying the person who executed James Foley.

AUGUST 24, 2014 -- Today's "Meet the Press" featured an exclusive interview with **Sen. Rand Paul (R-KY)**; interviews with **Rep. Mike Rogers (R-MI)** and **Gov. Jay Nixon (D-MO)**; a panel discussion on the threats from ISIS with British Amb. to the US **Peter Westmacott**, NBC News Chief Foreign Correspondent **Richard Engel** and New York Times White House Correspondent **Helene Cooper**; a political roundtable with PBS NewsHour co-anchor **Gwen Ifill**, Washington Post columnist **David Ignatius**, Atlanta Mayor **Kasim Reed**, and Washington Post columnist **Michael Gerson**; and a discussion on the racial divide in America with **Rev. Al Sharpton**. NBC News Senior White House Correspondent Chris Jansing served as guest moderator.

Below are highlights, video, and a rush transcript of today's program. All content will be available online at MeetThePressNBC.com.

###

Rep. Mike Rogers on the threat of ISIS

REP. MIKE ROGERS:

Oh, it's a very real threat. You saw the very barbaric behavior. And one of the problems is it's gone unabated for nearly two years, and that draws people from Britain to across Europe, even the United States, to go and join the fight. They see that as a winning ideology, a winning strategy, and they want to be a part of it. And that's what makes it so dangerous. They are one plane ticket away from U.S. shores. And that's why we're so concerned about it.

###

Rep. Mike Rogers on missed opportunities to take out ISIS and what the US needs to do now.

REP. MIKE ROGERS:

That disruptive activity is critically important. The president's going to need to change his policy. This is an opportunity for the president to take a step back, change his presidential guidance on how we disrupt terrorism around the world, including Al Qaeda, that has been slowing down. We have missed dozens and dozens of opportunities to take really bad people off the battlefield in the recent, last two years—

###

Rep. Mike Rogers on defeating ISIS

CHRIS JANSING:

Are you confident that the United States is in a position to defeat ISIS?

REP. MIKE ROGERS:

We have the capability to defeat it. We now have to have the political will, and we have to have the policy to do it. We have the first; we don't have the second two.

###

Sen. Rand Paul: Hillary Clinton “so gung-ho” on another war.

SEN. RAND PAUL:

I think the American public is coming more and more to where I am, and that those-- people, like Hilary Clinton, who, she fought her own war, Hilary's War, you know, people are gonna find that, and I think that's what scares the Democrats the most, is that in a general election, were I to run, there's gonna be a lot of independents and even some Democrats who say, "You know what, we are tired of war. We're worried that Hilary Clinton will get us involved in another Middle Eastern war, because she's so gung-ho."

###

Sen. Rand Paul on the militarization of police forces.

SEN. RAND PAUL:

Homeland Security gave \$8 million to Fargo to fight terrorism in Fargo, North Dakota. And I say if the terrorists get to Fargo, we might as well give up. I say that as a joke, but, I mean, it's like, "What are we doing spending \$8 million in Fargo? What are we doing sending a tank?" There's an armored personnel carrier in Keene, New Hampshire. They haven't had a murder in Keene, New Hampshire in 15 years.

###

Amb. Peter Westmacott on how James Foley's murder has alter the plan of attack against ISIS

AMB. PETER WESTMACOTT:

Well, I think Helene was right to say that the brutal murder of James Foley has, to some extent, galvanized opinion and maybe governments to make us feel that we have actually got to look afresh at what more that we can do with our regional partners, not just on our own, to fight back.

I think there are a number of different options on the table. We are not, at the moment, being invited to do more than we are at the moment. They want training, they want equipment, they want political support. We're trying to help the Iraqi government get established so that it is, you know, credible and able to fight back, if you like, against the sectarian mentality on which ISIS has thrived. There have been a lot of different things.

###

Richard Engel: U.S. Strikes 'Invisible Border' ISIS Doesn't Recognize

RICHARD ENGEL

But what's important to understand is how we got here and where we're going. You were just talking about what can be done. The U.S. is carrying out strikes right now in northern Iraq. And they're stopping at a border, but they're stopping in an invisible border. They're stopping at a border that ISIS doesn't recognize. So it seems likely that, in the next few days, few weeks, we're also going to be carrying out some strikes in Syria. That's what U.S. officials seem to be hinting about. We'll see if that's enough or if it's too little, too late.

###

VIDEO

NBC News' Keir Simmons tells the chilling words of British citizens supportive of ISIS' Mission.

<http://nbcnews.to/1mE8NRs>

Rogers: ISIS 'One Plane Ticket Away From U.S. Shores'

<http://nbcnews.to/1qbWRuE>

British Ambassador: 'We Are Close' to Identifying Foley's Killer

<http://nbcnews.to/1znm1Yu>

Engel on MTP: U.S. Strikes 'Invisible Border' ISIS Doesn't Recognize

<http://nbcnews.to/1tHw9tw>

MTP Exclusive: Dr. Rand Paul in Guatemala

<http://nbcnews.to/1vAKf12>

Rand Paul: Clinton a 'War Hawk'

<http://nbcnews.to/1vbL1Eb>

Michael Gerson on MTP: Paul's Intentions Good, Ideology Could Be Disastrous

<http://nbcnews.to/1p5E6tS>

Gov. Nixon on MTP: Prosecutor Was Elected, So He Should 'Do His Job'

<http://nbcnews.to/1wozK5b>

Gwen Ifill: New Civil Rights Movement Is Here

<http://nbcnews.to/1wozMKc>

The Meet the Press roundtable discusses ISIS' capabilities, as well as the optics of presidential vacations.

<http://nbcnews.to/1znmg5E>

Rev. Al Sharpton on MTP: Turn This Moment Into a Movement

<http://nbcnews.to/1tyy844>

###

Below is a RUSH transcript of this morning's broadcast -- mandatory attribution to NBC News' "Meet the Press." A final transcript of the program will be available at www.MeetThePressNBC.com.

MEET THE PRESS -- SUNDAY, AUG. 24, 2014

CHRIS JANSING:

Next, on Meet the Press, today President Obama returns from vacation to face a crucial national security question, how to defeat ISIS terrorists. And what can be done about the hundreds of ISIS fighters with American and Western passports. I'll ask Mike Rogers, chair of the House Intelligence Committee.

And healing the racial divide. Calm is returning to the streets of Ferguson, Missouri, but this morning more concerns about whether the police officer who killed Michael Brown will face criminal charges. I'll be joined by the governor of Missouri and the Reverend Al Sharpton.

Plus, exclusive: Rising political star Senator Rand Paul on a mercy mission to Guatemala. I traveled with the senator who wants American voters to see him in a different and perhaps presidential light. Will it work? I'll bring you my report as I host Meet the Press.

ANNOUNCER:

From NBC News in Washington, this is Meet the Press.

CHRIS JANSING:

Good morning, I'm Chris Jansing. The pressure is mounting on President Obama to authorize more military action, including air strikes in Syria, to defeat ISIS. Top U.S. officials are escalating the rhetoric about the threat posed by the group. The F.B.I. and Department of Homeland Security issuing a bulletin warning of attacks by ISIS sympathizers.

And intelligence services on both sides of the Atlantic are getting closer to identifying the jihadist with a British accent who executed the American journalist James Foley. Our Keir Simmons joins me now from London where he has been hearing firsthand the chilling words of British citizens supportive of ISIS' mission. Good morning, Keir.

KEIR SIMMONS:

Chris, good morning. The intelligence agencies view this as not just a hunt for the killer of James Foley but as a race to try to save the life of a second American hostage threatened with death by ISIS. It's made more difficult because that gruesome video has clearly been edited. There appear to be two knives. And one senior official speculated to me that the tape may even be dubbed. But they are convinced a British man is at the center of it, a man they are close to identifying, raising uncomfortable questions about extremism in Europe.

(BEGIN TAPE)

KEIR SIMMONS:

These are the soldiers of ISIS calling for more recruits.

MALE #1:

This is the land of jihad and the l--

KEIR SIMMONS:

Many with European accents and passports that would grant direct travel to the U.S.

MALE #2:

And ask yourself is this how you want to die?

MALE #3:

This is James Wright Foley--

KEIR SIMMONS:

It was a British voice that accompanied James Foley's murder, a citizen of America's closest ally apparently administering death to a U.S. national on a foreign battlefield.

SHIRAZ MAHER:

We have a British citizen beheading an American citizen in Syria in some vain attempt to try and pressure the United States government into changing its foreign policy.

KEIR SIMMONS:

Out of an estimated 2,000 Western recruits to extremist groups in Syria and Iraq, at least 70 are thought to be U.S. citizens, but more than 500 have been from the U.K. Half have returned

home. And in a basement in an area of London where James Foley's killer may be from, I meet an extremist fringe group who actually defend ISIS.

MALE #4:

This type of, you know-- state is very attractive to many people.

MALE #5:

And we believe, in fact, that one day the Islamic state will come to Britain and implement the Shia even to America.

KEIR SIMMONS:

They know people who've traveled to Syria where British ISIS recruits boast of their brutality. Here, one holds a severed head; another photographs his bloodied hands. "My first time," he tweets. They use iPhones and a laptop to produce propaganda.

MALE #6:

Here this is where most of the media were kept--

SHIRAZ MAHER:

They want to create this generalized sense of panic, of fear about their own barbarism.

KEIR SIMMONS:

Last year, on the streets of London, a British soldier was hacked to death. And in the same city, a minority blamed the killing of James Foley on Western foreign policy.

MALE #4:

This execution of this man was obviously to send a message to America to say, "Mind your own business."

MALE #5:

His blood is fairly and squarely on the hands of the Americans.

KEIR SIMMONS:

People will be sick to hear you say that about the murder of an innocent man.

MALE #5:

Well, are you talking about the innocent men in Gaza, or are you talking innocent men in Afghanistan? Or Iraq?--

KEIR SIMMONS:

James Foley, you know who I am talking about

MALE #5:

Yes, one--

KEIR SIMMONS:

European women have even traveled to Syria to marry ISIS fighters. This week, a London jihadist wife asked on Twitter for links to the video of James Foley's killing. Then she said she'd like to be the first woman to do the same. The European recruits are drawn to ISIS for many reasons. Some appear to be psychopaths; others think they are freedom fighters. Many are simply naïve. All are dangerous.

(END TAPE)

CHRIS JANSING:

So, Keir, it raises the question are the British intelligence services able to take advantage of any connection between those extremists in the U.K. down in a basement, that you talked to, and the ISIS fighters in Syria and Iraq?

KEIR SIMMONS:

Well, that is the irony. It may not be those particular men, but it does help British intelligence that there are people here with connections to ISIS. They can monitor communications. They can question them. But that doesn't mitigate the concern, Chris. Even one senior Pakistani official in the past six months told me that he had warned the British about rising extremism in Britain.

CHRIS JANSING:

Keir, thank you very much. And I'm joined now by Congressman Mike Rogers, Republican chair of the House Intelligence Committee. Welcome.

REP. MIKE ROGERS:

Thank you.

CHRIS JANSING:

From your perspective, well, we've heard a ramping up of the rhetoric by the administration. How significant a threat is ISIS?

REP. MIKE ROGERS:

Oh, it's a very real threat. You saw the very barbaric behavior. And one of the problems is it's gone unabated for nearly two years, and that draws people from Britain to across Europe, even the United States, to go and join the fight. They see that as a winning ideology, a winning strategy, and they want to be a part of it. And that's what makes it so dangerous. They are one plane ticket away from U.S. shores. And that's why we're so concerned about it.

CHRIS JANSING:

But we've heard the Pentagon say that, right now, they are not in a position to launch an attack on the United States. Is there any credible intelligence that ISIS is either planning that or has the capability to do it.

REP. MIKE ROGERS:

Well, I'm going to dispute that. So we know that, and the number 2,000 of Westerners with Western passports is low. Intelligence has a very different number and it's much higher than that. And the very fight between Al Qaeda that allowed ISIS to separate from Al Qaeda in Syria was the fact that they wanted to conduct Western-style operations.

Zawahiri, the leader of Al Qaeda, said, "No, we want you to focus on Syria." That's what started the fight. This notion that they were too barbaric is almost laughable given that Al Qaeda flew airplanes and slaughtered 3,000 people on 9/11. It was all about direction, control of those individuals. What they were saying at the time was we have a lot of people who have passports that could go to Europe and then to the United States without a visa waiver, meaning they wouldn't have to apply for a visa. The only way we would know is by looking at who was riding on those airplanes, and that might not be enough.

And so they were believing, at the time, that they could be aggressive in that, and they still talk about that. If you note, even the rhetoric is, "We're still going to conduct a Western-style attack." And remember, Al Qaeda wants to put some points on the board because they want to be the jihadist organization that attracts people and money. And ISIS has said that they are and want to be the terrorist organization that attracts--

CHRIS JANSING:

But aren't we, Congressman, significantly safer than we were on 9/11 in terms of being able to keep those kinds of threats out of the United States?

REP. MIKE ROGERS:

Well, we have a better system of trying to do it, but we're just not configured. We, the United States intelligence services and Department of Defense and administrative policy is not configured in a way to continue a tempo that allows disruption. The reason ISIS is so successful is there was nothing deterring them for years. So they recruited, they financed, they trained. All of that was happening.

And so, yes, we might be okay if we continue the posture that we're in from a defensive posture. But remember, they get new recruits every single day. And what's dangerous, think of this: If that's a British citizen, we believe it was, you have somebody that was watching and participating in the whole exercise of making that video. That individual goes back home and, is again, buys one plane ticket, they're in the United States. We may or may not know who that individual is. That's what's so dangerous about this, and why we can't let them continue unabated.

CHRIS JANSING:

So what do we do about it? We've seen what the U.K. has done, for example. They've been revoking passports of U.K. citizens who have gone over to Syria to fight so they can't come back West. Obviously the president is considering a whole range of options. We already have air strikes in Iraq; questions about whether there should be air strikes in Syria. Should there, for example, be more small teams of special ops on the ground to gather more intelligence? What do we do now?

REP. MIKE ROGERS:

Yes. There's no mulligans in foreign policy. And if you look at the way the administration last year changed the bureaucratic role of our operators engaging in disruption activities against terrorism, both Al Qaeda and ISIS, it's caused a problem. We need to regroup.

Again, we are not configured, our intelligence services and our Department of Defense, to be more disruptive. So we have to back up. We need to engage our Arab League partners who have as much a problem and as much a stake in this as we do. They will still cut their heads off and put them on spikes as well. We need to engage them in a more robust campaign against the safe haven in eastern Syria. And, again, continue to engage in Iraq.

It can't be about the dam. It can't be about an individual who was so brutally murdered. These are individuals who have killed thousands of people, some were executions, beheadings. They've sold women into slavery. And they're going to continue to do that because they believe they're winning.

That disruptive activity is critically important. The president's going to need to change his policy. This is an opportunity for the president to take a step back, change his presidential guidance on how we disrupt terrorism around the world, including Al Qaeda, that has been slowing down. We have missed dozens and dozens of opportunities to take really bad people off the battlefield in the recent, last two years--

CHRIS JANSING:

Are you confident that the United States is in a position to defeat ISIS?

REP. MIKE ROGERS:

We have the capability to defeat it. We now have to have the political will, and we have to have the policy to do it. We have the first; we don't have the second two.

CHRIS JANSING:

Chairman Mike Rogers, always a pleasure to see you. Thank you so much.

Well, as you just heard, this has gotten a lot more complicated because you have these Westerners who want to aid ISIS and are doing it right now. We saw them in the basement in Keir Simmons' package.

For more on this, I'm joined by the British ambassador to the United States, Sir Peter Westmacott; NBC Chief Foreign Correspondent Richard Engel who has spent years covering Iraq and Syria. He's just back from the Turkish/Syrian border where many foreign fighters cross into Syria to join ISIS. Helene Cooper is the White House correspondent for The New York Times. She has been writing extensively about how the U.S. is trying to counter the ISIS threat. Good morning to all of you. Let me start with you, Ambassador. How close are we to identifying the person who executed James Foley? And what else can you tell us about the threat of ISIS?

AMB. PETER WESTMACOTT:

I think we are close. I've been in touch, obviously, in the last day or two with my colleagues at home. We're not yet in a position to say exactly who this is, but there is some very sophisticated voice identification technology and other measures that we have got which should allow us to be very clear about who this person is before very long.

But let me underline, it's not just about one brutal murder. There are a whole lot of other people, there are other hostages who are under threat, as you've just been mentioning. We think that there's probably as many as 500 people from the United Kingdom have gone to join

jihad, gone to join ISIS. And so we are focusing our efforts across the board on how to counter this terrible threat which is, as my foreign secretary was saying in an op-ed this morning, with the trail of all that we stand for. And I might add and the trail of everything, frankly, that the teachings of the prophet stand for, as the leaders of the Muslim communities in the United Kingdom have been very clear about.

CHRIS JANSING:

As someone who has spent so much time in the region, tell us specifically about these people, Richard, about this threat. I've heard the head of ISIS described as a narcissistic psychopath. What are we dealing with here?

RICHARD ENGEL:

You know, you're dealing with a group of people who have been successful, who believe that they are winning, that they are creating an Islamic caliphate. And they call themselves the Islamic state, and they now have a state. They have a big area across northern Syria. They have a large section of Iraq.

They move freely between these two areas, between the part of Iraq that they hold and the part of Syria they hold. They have heavy weapons from the Iraqi army, U.S.-made weapons. And they have thousands and thousands of fighters, not just foreign fighters but local fighters as well. So we are dealing with a little failed state, that doesn't see itself as a failed state. It sees itself as a triumphant state that is bringing the Islamic battle to the world.

CHRIS JANSING:

And the key question becomes, Helene, what do they want? Do they want to just expand this? Do they want to take over Israel and Jordan? Do they want to essentially control the Middle East, or do they have a plan to come into the United States, to come into Western countries, and attack?

HELENE COOPER:

No, it's called the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, or the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. Before American air strikes began, you did not hear ISIS talking about coming to the United States. You didn't hear them talking about, you know, attacks on Americans. It wasn't until after the American air strikes began that you saw them taking advantage of people, Americans, who they had kidnapped years before.

Their mission has been to establish a caliphate within this region. They're a huge threat to Iraq and to Syria and to Jordan and to, you know, the area, even Israel. You heard General Martin Dempsey, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, during a press conference with Chuck Hagel, the defense secretary, on Thursday talking about their aspirations, or end-of-days, they're apocalyptic. But they have been limited to that specific region.

But things now have changed, and I think that's part of why you're seeing the response that we're having here in the United States. I mean, in January, President Obama compared them to junior varsity, the Al Qaeda junior varsity basketball team. Now, all of a sudden, we're talking about, you know, can they attack the American homeland? That's where I think you're sort of seeing the rise in awareness of Americans, because of this horrible image of James Foley in that video that sort of showed up on front pages--

(OVERTALK)

CHRIS JANSING:

Well, there's no doubt that ramped up the emotion that we felt, and the awareness of what ISIS is and what they're willing to do, Ambassador. What do we do about it? What is your country willing to do, either militarily or in cooperation with the United States?

AMB. PETER WESTMACOTT:

Let me just underline that this is a threat in different series of ways to us. It is a threat to our citizens, Americans, British, and others in the region. It's a threat to the stability of those countries. But it's also a threat in terms of they're turning radicalized jihadis, who have left our countries, not just Britain but many others as well, and who are coming back with very specific missions and with instructions sometimes to create acts of terror at home.

And which is why in the U.K., for example, over the last year we've picked up around 70 different people on terrorist-related offenses to do with activities in Iraq and Syria. So we're very conscious of the threat we believe back at home. What can we do about it? Well, we're doing a whole bunch of different things. We have had to address a humanitarian disaster as a result of the depredations of ISIS in the region.

We've been very active with air drops and aircraft and aerial surveillance to try to help drop things there. We are transporting military equipment to people who are fighting back against ISIS, particularly in the Kurdish regional government in northern Iraq. We are involved with the provision of intelligence and training and equipment in a number of different ways to those who would like us to help. We've been providing refueling tankers for aircraft which have been involved in some of these missions.

And we are doing a very complex operation in terms of trying to identify, detect, and obstruct terrorist activity by individuals going to and coming back from the region. So we're doing a very great deal. We're using diplomacy, we're using development funds, we're using military strengths and equipment.

CHRIS JANSING:

How far can military action go, though? And how far does it need to go, do you think, if ISIS is not to be a threat anymore?

AMB. PETER WESTMACOTT:

Well, I think Helene was right to say that the brutal murder of James Foley has, to some extent, galvanized opinion and maybe governments to make us feel that we have actually got to look afresh at what more that we can do with our regional partners, not just on our own, to fight back.

I think there are a number of different options on the table. We are not, at the moment, being invited to do more than we are at the moment. They want training, they want equipment, they want political support. We're trying to help the Iraqi government get established so that it is,

you know, credible and able to fight back, if you like, against the sectarian mentality on which ISIS has thrived. There have been a lot of different things.

But I think that we've got to look afresh at what it takes, my foreign secretary was saying this morning, to push back against this brutal organization, given what they do and the threat that they pose to the local countries, to our friends, and to our own national security.

CHRIS JANSING:

And we can't forget, Richard, that another American journalist, Steven Sotloff, his life is hanging in the balance here. You have been taken hostage, and it was the same group that originally took James Foley, right, that then handed him over to ISIS. Tell us a little bit, from your perspective, about what happens now, and the whole conversation about whether paying ransom, and some other countries do, the United States doesn't, is an incentive for more hostage taking.

RICHARD ENGEL:

Well, first, you mention my case. I was taken hostage in Syria roughly at the same time as James Foley, two years ago. And don't forget that James Foley was executed after being in custody, being terrified, being abused, for two years.

So at the time, two years ago, when he was taken, when I was taken, there were lots of different groups that were rounding people up. And then ISIS started to collect those people. And now they're really the only group or the main group that is holding foreign hostages.

It didn't seem, on the negotiation front, that ISIS has any real intention of negotiating Americans. It doesn't want to give them up for ransom. In the case for James Foley, it wasn't really seriously negotiating. It was using Europeans to try and raise between \$3-5 million a head. That was the going rate. For James Foley, they asked for \$130 million, which is not a realistic number. It's like, you know, saying, you know, "You want to sell him? Well, if you pay this, you can buy him."

But what's important to understand is how we got here and where we're going. You were just talking about what can be done. The U.S. is carrying out strikes right now in northern Iraq. And they're stopping at a border, but they're stopping in an invisible border. They're stopping at a border that ISIS doesn't recognize. So it seems likely that, in the next few days, few weeks, we're also going to be carrying out some strikes in Syria. That's what U.S. officials seem to be hinting about. We'll see if that's enough or if it's too little, too late.

CHRIS JANSING:

Richard, it's always good to see you. Richard Engel, Helene Cooper, Ambassador Westmacott, thank you so much for being with us. And up next, if you think Washington politics is complicated, how about performing eye surgery. Kentucky Senator Rand Paul like you've never seen him before. I had exclusive access to him on his humanitarian mission in Guatemala. But were the senator's political as well as surgical skills at work there?

SEN. RAND PAUL (TAPE):

I think that's what scares the Democrats the most, is that in a general election, were I to run, there's going to be a lot of independents and even some Democrats who say, "You know what? We are tired of war. We're worried that Hillary Clinton will get us involved in another Middle Eastern war because she's so gung ho."

Commercial Break

CHRIS JANSING:

And now to a Meet the Press exclusive: A journey to Guatemala with Kentucky Senator -- and Doctor -- Rand Paul. Top Republicans eyeing a run for president in 2016 have spent a lot of time in two key battleground states: 20 visits to Iowa, 10 more to New Hampshire. But so far, only Paul has turned a foreign country into a unique photo op.

I accompanied him on his humanitarian mission to Salama, a remote town about three hours north of Guatemala City. But, as you'll see, his trip to Central America may have been as much about the White House as it was about medicine.

(BEGIN TAPE)

CHRIS JANSING:

In a makeshift operating room in remote Guatemala, a side of Senator Rand Paul most people have never seen. The eye surgeon, on a mission to help the blind and near-blind see in a country where more than half the population lives in poverty. He's one of 28 American volunteers organized by the Moran Eye Center in Utah.

RAND PAUL:

This is an amazing enterprise. We have a surgery center. We have a dental clinic and we have a place doing glasses.

CHRIS JANSING:

Scores of people line up every day for a week - hoping American doctors can give them their sight - and their lives back. A 79 year-old great-grandmother who hasn't been able to walk for nine years, then cataracts plunged her into darkness. A farmer just wants to see again so he can work in his field. A mission to restore sight, and hope, to the poorest of the poor.

And if it all plays well to American voters it could further Rand Paul's personal mission, too -- to position himself for a race for president.

RAND PAUL:

I've been doing, you know, this kinda stuff for 20 years and so--

CHRIS JANSING:

But not in a foreign country.

RAND PAUL:

Right. Well, I've been operating on kids from Guatemala for, you know, it-- I think the first kids I operated on were 1996. This isn't something new that we're doing.

RAND PAUL (NATURAL SOUND):

No but she doesn't really feel anything on this side of her face.

RAND PAUL:

A physician is who I am. And, you know, to represent who I am, that's who I am. I'm a physician.

CHRIS JANSING:

But you just won't always bring camera crews

RAND PAUL:

Well, you know, depicting who I am, I think, is an important part of-- presenting a face to the public.

CHRIS JANSING:

There is no doubt about the humanitarian aspect of this trip. Paul performed dozens of pro bono cataract surgeries over three days, in a region where there are only two eye surgeons for 800,000 people. Chronicling it all are Paul's advertising team.

RAND PAUL (IN VIDEO):

I'm Rand Paul and I approved this message.

CHRIS JANSING:

Whose TV commercials helped him with his upset win for Senate four years ago. Also along, a film crew from Conservative super PAC Citizens United, with equipment that included a drone for aerial shots, and its co-founder and President Dave Bossie.

CHRIS JANSING (TO DAVID BOSSIE):

Does having Citizens United, Dave Bossie, there make it look more political?

DAVID BOSSIE:

I think-- if-- having Citizens United documentary unit following him around, whether I was there or not, was going to do it. And so, you know, I went-- to oversee it. I went to experience and see exactly, for myself, what Rand Paul was about.

CHRIS JANSING:

Bossie did some charity work of his own, helping to install a water filtration system. But he spent many hours with Senator Paul and gave advice to the camera crew. For Paul, too, long hours in the O.R. were interspersed with interviews, multiple conversations with us over three

days where nothing was off limits, including the death of Michael Brown and the unrest that followed..

RAND PAUL:

Let's say none of this has to do with race. It might not, but the belief-- if you're African American and you live in Ferguson, the belief is, you see people in prison and they're mostly black and brown, that somehow it is racial, even if the thoughts that were going on at that time had nothing to do with race.

So it's a very good chance that had this had nothing to do with race, but because of all of the arrest and the ra-- the way people were arrested, that everybody perceives it as, "My goodness, the police are out to get us," you know? And so that's why you have to change the whole war on drugs. It's not just this one instance.

And I don't know what happened during the shooting, so I'm not gonna make a judgment on the shooting. But I do know what's happening, as far as that you look at who's in our prisons

CHRIS JANSING:

It's vintage Rand Paul -- the sometimes controversial free market, small government, low taxes Libertarian with views that can also appeal to the Left, pushing for the de-militarization of police -- days before President Obama called for a review.

RAND PAUL:

Homeland Security gave \$8 million to Fargo to fight terrorism in Fargo, North Dakota. And I say if the terrorists get to Fargo, we might as well give up. I say that as a joke, but, I mean, it's like, "What are we doing spending \$8 million in Fargo? What are we doing sending a tank?" There's an armored personnel carrier in Keene, New Hampshire.

CHRIS JANSING:

And at a time when the U-S footprint in Iraq is expanding again, he's quick to provide a contrast to the Democratic presidential front-runner.

RAND PAUL:

I think the American public is coming more and more to where I am, and that those-- people, like Hillary Clinton, who, she fought her own war, Hillary's War, you know, people are gonna find that, and I think that's what scares the Democrats the most, is that in a general election, were I to run, there's gonna be a lot of independents and even some Democrats who say, "You know what, we are tired of war. We're worried that Hillary Clinton will get us involved in another Middle Eastern war, because she's so gung-ho."

If you wanna see a transformational election in our country, let the Democrats put forward a war hawk like Hillary Clinton, and you'll see a transformation like you've never seen.

CHRIS JANSING:

Back inside the hospital, less than 24 hours after surgery, bandages are removed and the reactions they are heart-warming, even tear inducing. Just a day before -- a farmer couldn't see through cataract clouded eyes, then the eye patches come off.

One of more than 200 success stories in a week -- lives transformed. For all the successes here, Rand Paul was effective but not emotional, something that worries even supporters who know winning primaries is often as much about kissing babies as making policy statements.

ED O'KEEFE (THE WASHINGTON POST):

He reminds me of doctors I had who are very matter-of-fact, and I think that's where he gets it, that you know he sees a problem and he fixes it and he moves on.

CHRIS JANSING:

But you wonder how that will translate on the campaign trail...

ED O'KEEFE:

It could be very difficult.

CHRIS JANSING:

Do you go to Iowa and not shake hands?

ED O'KEEFE

That's, I think, the next test

CHRIS JANSING:

Dr. Paul's enthusiasm for medicine is palpable, and he's a guy who likes his odds when he's the one controlling the outcome.

So if he runs, it will be because -- like here in the O.R. -- he thinks he's got a real chance of winning

(END TAPE)

CHRIS JANSING:

Before leaving, Senator Paul had a closed-door meeting with the president and prime minister of Guatemala and talking immigration, telling them the immigration problem is not the fault of Guatemala City but of White House policies. He's also pushing to allow more Americans to adopt Guatemalan children.

Let's get some reaction for the roundtable. Gwen Ifill, co-anchor and co-managing editor of PBS News Hour; David Ignatius, columnist for The Washington Post; Kasim Reed, Democratic mayor of Atlanta; and Michael Gerson, former speechwriter for President George W. Bush, now a columnist for The Washington Post. Welcome to all of you. David, could you seen some of this in a convention bio, some of this footage maybe in a little infomercial?

DAVID IGNATIUS:

You can see in the piece you just did why Rand Paul is going to be a dynamic face in the Republican nominating process. The rap on Rand Paul is that he's an isolationist. And to see him out and Guatemala, helping people, not talking about carrying guns or dropping bombs but fixing people's eye problems, that's part of the pitch he's going to make. Whether the American people will trust this man, who says, you know, "I'm speaking to a country that's tired of war," with national security at a time of growing crisis, is a big question.

CHRIS JANSING:

Yeah. Well, a question I asked him, Michael, was whether this changed his opinion about giving more foreign aid to countries in need, whether it changed his opinion about immigration. I don't think we're going to see a sea change there.

MICHAEL GERSON:

Well, it is wonderful, what he's doing.

QUESTION:

It is.

MICHAEL GERSON:

But he's a senator, and a possible presidential candidate, and his policy views matter. He's called for the gradual elimination of all foreign aid. Now, I've seen its effect in sub-Saharan Africa and other places. This would cause misery for millions of people on AIDS treatment. It would betray hundreds of thousands of children receiving, you know, malaria treatment. These are things that you can't ignore in a presidential candidate. This is a perfect case of how a person can have good intentions but how an ideology can cause terrible misery. He will need to explain that. This is his policy views.

CHRIS JANSING:

And there's substance and there's style, Gwen, and his style is pretty reserved. And you wonder if, in 2016, if in the modern era you can be the candidate who doesn't have that political charm, who doesn't do the retail--

(OVERTALK)

GWEN IFILL

You're saying he's not charming? He certainly looked more at home in his scrubs than he does in the suits he wears on Capitol Hill. But it's interesting to look at, for instance, what he had to say about Hillary Clinton and what we heard you say to Mike Rogers earlier, heard Mike Rogers say to you.

He thinks we should be doing more. He thinks we should be more forward leaning, the chairman of the Intelligence Committee. Rand Paul is saying Hillary Clinton is a hawk. There are a lot of people in his own party who are looking at him and saying, "Hold on a minute, brother, I don't know about that," including the fact Guatemala, even though he's been there before, is where a lot of the children are coming from who are crossing the border. Guatemala,

Honduras; not Mexico. And so by being there at this moment in time, with that debate still bubbling under the surface, is not insignificant.

CHRIS JANSING:

Now I want turn to the latest on Ferguson, Missouri. President Obama has called for a review of federal programs to militarize local police over concern about the armed force used during the unrest in Ferguson. And joining me is the Democratic Governor of Missouri Jay Nixon.

(BEGIN TAPE)

CHRIS JANSING:

Welcome, Governor Nixon.

GOV. JAY NIXON:

Good morning.

CHRIS JANSING:

As you know, a lot of concerns were raised when we saw the heavily armored vehicles rolling into Ferguson. We also saw police in camouflage carrying heavy weapons. Let me ask you about the president's decision to review these Pentagon policies of giving this equipment to localities. Do you think it contributed to the unrest that happened in your state?

GOV. JAY NIXON:

Well, certainly appropriate to review all of that sort of thing, and I'm glad the president and others around the country will do that discussion. There are times when you need to have protection on bomb units and whatnot, but the bottom line is it's a good and worthy discussion that we oughta have around the country.

CHRIS JANSING:

And when you look at what happened in Ferguson, should it have been done differently?

GOV. JAY NIXON:

Well, when you look at this you can certainly see things that you could have done and work with that you hope would focus things a little bit better. But when we came in here, we were focused on three things: Making sure people had the right to speak, making sure that they were safe in that community, and also making sure that the dual prosecutions that were going would get to justice and truth. And in that regard, we've seen a lot of progress over the last week.

CHRIS JANSING:

Well, let me ask you about that prosecution, particularly the one that's going on in your state as opposed to the federal investigation. And you made a decision in the last week not to replace the controversial prosecutor Robert McCullough. In fact, what you said in making that decision was that to do so would potentially jeopardize the prosecution. How?

GOV. JAY NIXON:

Well, first of all, you have an elected prosecutor. He should do his job, do his duty, as the attorney general, as will quite frankly do their duties. I think you focus on making sure that they live up to the high standards that are out there, making sure that they get all the information so that justice can be served.

CHRIS JANSING:

Do you believe he has the trust of the people of your state and the people of Ferguson?

GOV. JAY NIXON:

He was elected overwhelmingly by the people a number of times. He's been through a lot. Certainly with this level of attention I think everyone will work hard to do their best work.

CHRIS JANSING:

How concerned are you, and this has been expressed by a number of people, that if there is not a decision to prosecute in this case, if charges are not brought, that there will be more unrest? Are you prepared for that? And give us a sense of your level of concern.

GOV. JAY NIXON:

Well, as I've said before, we've been working hard over the last two weeks, but especially the last eight or nine days, to really see progress. And I'm heartened by that. And that's really come from the people here. I mean, the policing strategies and all that sort of stuff's important, and Captain Johnson and his team on the ground, the unified command have done a great job.

But really what's happened is the people of this region have said, "We want to speak, but we want to do so peacefully." And I think that transition's a positive transition. They just want to make sure that what has happened over the last two weeks is not swept under the rug and forgotten, and that instead it's used to get positive action, not only in the community of Ferguson and around St. Louis, but around the country.

CHRIS JANSING:

So let me ask you what you say, not just to people in Missouri to but people around the country. Six in ten blacks in a new poll say that they don't believe that they have confidence that the investigation will be handled fairly. What do you say to them?

GOV. JAY NIXON:

Well, first of all, I think with a lot of attention on it and a lot of focus on it and dual efforts going on at the same time, one at federal, one at the state, and a lot of public attention, I think they have the chance to get it right. And the justice system, with that much focus, these folks just need to do their duty.

And with that, that includes prosecutors and jury members and grand jury members and everyone, and citizens who have things to say that can be helpful in those cases. So we have to work hard to make sure that everybody does their best and is strong in this effort. And if they do, then it's our best hope that justice will be served.

CHRIS JANSING:

Governor Jay Nixon, thank you.

GOV. JAY NIXON:

Thank you.

(END TAPE)

CHRIS JANSING:

So then the question becomes what does it mean to do your best, Mr. Mayor? What do you do going forward, and starting with how do you make this a fair investigation?

MAYOR KASIM REED:

Well, I think the thing that you do is to start seeing this case through the eyes of a mother and father who lost a child who got shot six times and left for four hours on the street. That's really the issue right now. We are laying all of our feelings about race and class and all of the rest, and it's really moving away from the dignity that should have been shown to a mother and a father whose child got killed.

And to the extent that we can start handling this case through that lens, Ferguson's going to be better off, and so is the United States of America. We need to stop layering our issues on what is happening there, and make sure that justice is handled equitably for this mom and this dad who lost their son on the street because he was killed and shot six times with four witnesses.

And so we have an obligation, and I think the attorney general's visit there was vital, to ensure transparency to all of the people of Ferguson. But most important, to this mom and this dad, to make sure that this prosecutor is going to use all of the resources available to make sure that this is done in a transparent fashion. We also need federal oversight to move simultaneously so that, in the event that we have an adverse decision, there certainly is another path to seeing that justice is done here.

CHRIS JANSING:

Certainly the reaction in the community in the interviews that we heard, the fact that the attorney general went there, what he had to say, his own personal experience that he shared about being a young black man and being stopped helped to calm the fears. But there is a question that's still out there, Gwen, about whether the president should do more. Questions raised about the tone of the remarks he made. What do you think is the president's role in all this?

GWEN IFILL

I think that we get caught up in, the mayor used the term layering, layering on our issues. In Washington, we're used to layering on questions about governance, and process, and what

happens next, and before the grand jury, and what happens next with, you know, the trial. We like to cover it like a soap opera.

But there's something else that's been exposed here which no president, no attorney general can get to, which is that there's this bruise that we keep poking at in this country about race. We don't know how to deal with it unless there's a flare-up.

What we've seen is that we're dealing with it again and again. You can name the list of names that sparked it. But also more important is watching what's happening behind it. There's a new civil rights movement which has sprung up. We've been looking back 50 years for the last couple of months, the 50-year signings of bills and laws. These young people on the streets, these young people who've created a social media movement around Michael Brown, they're not saying, "Pass a law." They're saying, "Enforce the current ones."

They're not saying, "We're going to wait for a single, singular leader to tell us which way to go." They're saying, "We're going to lead ourselves." And there is something which we can't miss in what feels different to me than Trayvon Martin, it feels different to me than Rodney King; these are all situations in which justice was questioned. But it feels to me like Americans, not just African Americans, are picking themselves up and saying-- the first pictures we saw out of Ferguson, the common response was, "Is that America?" And I think people are saying, "Let's address that. Let's address ourselves, not expect some person to figure it out."

CHRIS JANSING:

We did have this sense, though, that the president, in coming to the microphone and being such a great communicator, might be able to have moved the needle. I want to read to you what was written about this by Ezra Klein. Do we have that? We have that there.

"The problem is the White House no longer believes Obama can bridge divides. They believe, with good reason, that he widens them. President Obama's speeches polarize in a way candidate Obama's didn't. Obama's supporters often want to see their president leading, but the White House knows that when Obama leads his critics become even less likely to follow." What does he do going forward?

MICHAEL GERSON:

I have to disagree a little bit. I think the president's tone has been very presidential in this. This is a case where the facts are not established. We're still looking at what the facts are. And there are limits to what a president can do in a circumstance like that.

I think the president has shown appropriate grief, has shown some outrage. But, you know, this is difficult for him, and it was right for him to send Eric Holder, the guy that can bring the F.B.I., that can bring, you know, the forces of the federal government to this, to send him to that circumstance. So, you know, I disagree. I think he should, at the right moment, give a framing speech on this set of issues, which he's good at. But I think his restraint here was pretty admirable.

CHRIS JANSING:

Thank you all. Coming up, we'll have more with our roundtable. Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel certainly wasn't holding back about the threat posed by ISIS.

SECRETARY CHUCK HAGEL (ON TAPE):

This is beyond anything that we've seen. So we must prepare for everything.

CHRIS JANSING:

But can the Islamists be defeated without putting U.S. troops on the ground in Iraq and Syria?

Commercial Break

CHRIS JANSING:

Welcome back. I want to talk more about the threat posed by ISIS with our roundtable. And let me read what Vice President Biden wrote in The Washington Post in an op-ed. "There is no negotiating with ISIL. We have seen its appalling murders of U.S. journalist James Foley and countless other innocent people, its cruelty and its fanaticism." That was followed up by Chuck Hagel saying, "This is more than just a terrorist group." Is he right?

DAVID IGNATIUS:

Well, it's a terrorist group that now controls about a third of Iraq, so, yes, it is. It's a particularly potent, well-organized, mobile, ambitious terrorist group. President Obama has been trying to walk a very fine line between a gradual escalating response to ISIS and reassuring a country that is weary of war, especially in Iraq where he's not going to take American troops back.

So far, I think he's basically gotten that about right. We are stepping up to protect the Kurds, to stop the massacre of the Yazidi minority, to take ISIL control away from this big, strategic dam in--

(OVERTALK)

CHRIS JANSING:

But with the brutality of what we saw on that video, does that escalate the pressure, Gwen, on him?

GWEN IFILL:

It escalates the tight rope, it tightens the tight rope. I don't quite know how he does this. On one hand, we saw the intelligence chairman saying we have the capability we just don't have the will or the policy. On the other hand, I haven't heard anybody saying what we ought to be doing instead. You know, they're hinting that we're going to go inside Syria, but to what end, and what is the goal? And that is a very complicated situation right now. I don't know that there's an easy answer, which is why we're all teetering.

CHRIS JANSING:

And of course in the meantime, he's taking hits; so is David Cameron. You can take a look at the covers both of The Daily Mirror yesterday and The Daily News on Thursday criticizing these two leaders for going out, in the case of the president, and golfing; in the case of David Cameron, out in the water.

And I guess the question is raised about whether we're sending the wrong message, maybe even to Europe, maybe even to the Middle East, with us. Even if most people who live in Britain and the United States may say, you know, "They have a hard job. They should be able to take a break."

MICHAEL GERSON:

Well, having working for a president, I don't really criticize presidential vacations. Presidents need this. And they also, like a turtle, carry their house with them. I mean, the White House comes with the president. He doesn't escape any of these problems. I think that's true.

But symbolism does matter. And the juxtaposition of beheading and golfing is not a very good symbol. And that, I think, is what he's being criticized for. I think that that shows, you know, bad staff work, or the president doesn't really care.

MAYOR KASIM REED:

Well, I don't think it's that. I think that we have a real problem in Europe and in the United States that's going to have to be addressed, and it has to be addressed right now. I think the president certainly is willing to do what is required. But we have to have Congress come along, and we have to have the Parliament in the U.K. come along.

And the last time we were in a position where we were going to have to be more muscular, candidly, we did not have that kind of support. So it's not just the president. The country has to be ready to deal with ISIL. And the country has to be ready to do what it is required.

The attorney general and the secretary of defense have said that the kind of threats that ISIL is presenting are unprecedented. So no one can say that they're not focused on it or having conversations about it. But a war-weary nation is going to have to understand that, if we're going to address these acts, it's going to take the will, and Congress. And that's coming out of this fog of not being willing to do what is required.

CHRIS JANSING:

Mr. Mayor, all of you on the roundtable, thank you so much for being here this morning. And coming up, the racial flashpoint in Ferguson, Missouri. Healer or divider? The Reverend Al Sharpton joins me next.

Commercial Break

CHRIS JANSING:

Welcome back. As we look ahead to the coming week in Ferguson, Missouri, the funeral of Michael Brown will take place tomorrow. Reverend Al Sharpton, civil rights leader and host of MSNBC's Politics Nation will deliver the eulogy at that service, and he joins me now. Welcome.

REV. AL SHARPTON:

Thank you.

CHRIS JANSING:

There has been a dramatic shift in the mood in Ferguson, for the better. Much calmer now. What can you say tomorrow to help that along?

REV. AL SHARPTON:

I think that what we can say is that we must turn this moment into a movement to really deal with the underlying issues of police accountability and what is and is not allowable by police, and what citizens ought to be moving toward.

I think that we need to deal with how we move towards solutions, how we deal with the whole aggressive policing of what is considered low-level crimes. And that goes from Ferguson to Staten Island, New York, to L.A. We see this occurring all over the country. And I think we need to move in that way otherwise we will end up only repeating ourselves every incident.

CHRIS JANSING:

You and I talked a lot though, Reverend, after the verdict in the Trayvon Martin case. You've said that needs to be a moment. Many others said the same--

REV. AL SHARPTON:

Right.

CHRIS JANSING:

--thing. We have also seen, as you alluded to, you led a march yesterday after another black man died in an incident involving police in New York City. Now you're going to be giving the eulogy for yet another funeral tomorrow. What's it going to take for that moment to change things freely?

REV. AL SHARPTON:

I think it's going to take legislation. Our demonstrations must lead to legislation. We need federal legislation, and we need the criminal justice system, which is why the federal

government coming in is so important. I think the attorney general, Eric Holder's unprecedented trip sent a signal.

We didn't see Bobby Kennedy go to the South in the civil rights era. We saw a sitting attorney general go to Ferguson, and I think that's historic. I think these moves will lead to real change. Our chants must lead to change, our demonstrations to legislation and we'll get up there. We must remember the Montgomery bus boycotts started in 1955; we didn't get civil rights legislation until '64, Civil Rights Act. Change takes time. But those of us that are committed are willing to put in the time because we cannot tolerate not having the change.

CHRIS JANSING:

There's a big article on you in Politico Magazine this week. It talks about how close your contact is with the White House, how you often serve as a kind of surrogate for the White House. But let me ask you about the president, and in the case of Ferguson in particular, race relations in America in general. Is he doing enough?

REV. AL SHARPTON:

First of all, I'm not a surrogate. I have access to the White House. In every era going back to Lincoln with Frederick Douglass, presidents talk to those that were leading at that time. I'm not comparing Marc Morial or Melanie Campbell and I to Frederick Douglass, but that's nothing unusual.

I went to Ferguson because the family, the grandfather called and asked me to come. The White House called while I was there, talked to me, the head of the N.A.A.C.P., and others. So it's not a surrogate; it is a customary, traditional role.

I think the president, by addressing it twice while he was on vacation, not a statement but coming out live, and yet not compromising the right of the family. Because where I was nervous, because I've been in this a while, I'm not a studio activist or someone in an ivory tower, I've been in this. For the president to go further, then it would be used in a legal context of saying, "Oh, the president ordered the indictment," rather than letting a process go fairly.

But the president governing, and saying how we've got to deal, as I'm reading this morning, he's saying we're going to deal with the military equipment and expenditures on citizens. We, in terms of those that are talking to the family and the lawyers, involved in this cases don't need the president to politicize it and give an escape from the criminal justice system for those that need to be investigated and possibly brought into the criminal justice system. So a lot of people talking are not talking to the victims, who don't need their rights violated by politics.

CHRIS JANSING:

We have just a few seconds left, Reverend, but what would be justice in this case?

REV. AL SHARPTON:

Justice is a fair and impartial investigation and let the facts go where they need to go. But too often, with local prosecutors, we don't get that.

CHRIS JANSING:

Reverend Al Sharpton, thank you so much.

REV. AL SHARPTON:

Thank you.

CHRIS JANSING:

That's all for today. We'll be back next week. If it's Sunday, it's Meet the Press.

“MEET THE PRESS” 8/31/14: SEN. FEINSTEIN ON ISIS & PUTIN, FOREIGN + POTITICAL PANELS + LEARN MORE ABOUT CHUCK TODD FROM HIS FRIENDS & FAMILY

Gen. Zinni: “I wish we were not so paranoid about boots on the ground.” Sen. Feinstein on ISIS’ latest offensive: “I believe the goal is Baghdad.” Amb. McFaul: “I think that a deal is ready to be made. But Putin has to want to negotiate.” Savannah Guthrie on Chuck: “If you look up, “Political junkie” in the dictionary, you will find a picture of Chuck Todd and his goatee.” Andrea Mitchell on Chuck: “He’s relentless. He’s like a dog with a bone”

AUGUST 31, 2014 -- Today’s “Meet the Press” featured an exclusive interview with **Sen. Dianne Feinstein** (D-CA); a foreign affairs discussion with **Gen. Anthony Zinni** (Ret.), Fmr. Commander in Chief, US Central Command, **Michele Flournoy**, Fmr. Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, **Michael Leiter**, Fmr. Director of National Counterterrorism Center and **Michael McFaul**, Fmr. US Ambassador to Russia; a political roundtable with **Wes Moore**, Afghanistan War Veteran, **Dan Henninger**, Wall Street Journal Deputy Editorial Page Director, **Ruth Marcus**, Washington Post Columnist, **Doris Kearns Goodwin**, Presidential Historian. NBC News Chief Foreign Correspondent **Richard Engel** provided an update on the threat of ISIS and NBC News Foreign Correspondent **Jim Maceda** shared the latest on the unrest in the Ukraine. Plus, **Chuck Todd’s** friends and family reveal more about the next moderator of “Meet the Press.” NBC News chief foreign affairs correspondent **Andrea Mitchell** served as guest moderator.

Below are highlights, video, and a rush transcript of today’s program. All content will be available online at MeetThePressNBC.com.

###

Sen. Dianne Feinstein calls for “direct discussions” with Putin and believes that sanctions won’t work in the short term.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

I want to ask you about Vladimir Putin because there is a lot of talk that Putin cannot be stopped, and that he has moved with tanks, with artillery, with troops across the border. We’re calling it an incursion, not an invasion. Is there anything we can do to stop Vladimir Putin?

DIANNE FEINSTEIN:

I think there ought to be direct discussions with Vladimir Putin. I think he is the singular figure in Russia. Russia is a huge country. The Ukraine is a large country. The Crimea is gone. I think there ought to be steps taken to send people, to talk with him, to have our secretary of State talk with him personally.

I think this is deeply personal with him. I really do. And I think he's calling the shots himself. And he's enjoying intensely high favorability in his country. People say, "Well, just wait till the sanctions bite and the economy slips." I don't think so. I think if Russians follow him, and up to date, they are following him, the Russians are very brave and very long-suffering. And they will tough out any economic difficulty.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

And you don't see sanctions working in the short term?

DIANNE FEINSTEIN:

I'm not sure they will work. I'm not sure that shakes the people that much. And it's the people that have to be spoken to. And it's their solitary leader, Vladimir Putin, who has to be spoken to.

###

Gen Anthony Zinni (Ret.) on the military plan to combat ISIS: the need for boots on the ground and a strong coalition.

ANTHONY ZINNI:

The boots on the ground question's always the toughest one. I wish we were not so paranoid about boots on the ground. We can't even define it. There's going to have to be Special Operations Forces. There's going to have to be people that can in and adjust air and fires and advisors to be with these units.

And very simply put, if you put two brigades on the ground right now of U.S. forces, they would push ISIS back into Syria in a heartbeat. And probably take less time, less cost and, I think in the long run, fewer casualties overall. Let me say one thing. The important piece of this is not just the military plan. That's not a strategy in and of itself.

We need to rebuild the coalition in the region. It is fractured ever since we first went into Iraq. We have allies out there that no longer trust us, believe in us, and think we can get it done or have the leadership. We need to bring together a coalition of outsiders, Europeans and others, like we did in the first Gulf War.

I don't know why we're waiting for a U.N. Resolution to condemn ISIS and authorize use of force, which makes this easier. So all the other pieces that Michele talked about that are starting, we don't have the time for this kind of deliberation. There is a battle of the narrative going on, and we're losing it.

###

Michele Flournoy sees the need to enhance military assistance to Ukraine.

MICHELE FLOURNOY:

I think bolstering N.A.T.O.'s posture along the N.A.T.O. frontier is very important. But more significantly, I think we need to be having a serious discussion about enhancing the military assistance we provide to Ukraine. We cannot afford to see them be trumped on the battlefield and to see them lose even more territory in eastern Ukraine.

At the same time, turning up the sanctions-- and opening a channel of dialogue with Putin, it's very disturbing that we aren't engaging him more fully. I'm not suggesting that will be immediately productive. But you've got to have some kind of dialogue to try, over time, to figure out how is he going to come out of the tree. How is he going to come out of this situation that he's created for himself?

###

Michael McFaul on a resolution between Russia and the Ukraine: "I think a deal is ready to be made."

AMB. MICHAEL MCFAUL:

But I think that a deal is ready to be made. But Putin has to want to negotiate. And so far, I think it's very clear, that he doesn't want to negotiate. He thinks he can advance his interests through military means on the ground.

###

Richard Engel says the rise of ISIS was “incredibly predictable.”

RICHARD ENGEL:

The build-up of ISIS in Iraq and Syria was incredibly predictable, Andrea. We've reported about it. Reporters risk their lives going into Syria to talk about this buildup of-- extremists in the country. Yet, nothing seemed to have been done. And now we have a very serious situation.

###

Chuck Todd describes his frustration on the lack of participation in politics.

CHUCK TODD:

It is. And I'm frustrated by the fact that people are not participating.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

Yeah.

CHUCK TODD:

And that's why I'm really upset. It's sort of like, "Okay, you guys have really broken it." I've had plenty of advice or critics that say, "You and the media have helped break this." But, you know, that's the part of this, I think, that is problematic is that people aren't participating. So that's one of our jobs is sort of make it big, make it important enough so people realize they have to participate. If you have problems with Washington, look in the mirror.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

And participation, making people care, the passion that you bring to all of this, it's all very exciting.

CHUCK TODD:

Look, I do. It is fun. I'll admit. Politics can be fun, too.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

And you have the last word.

CHUCK TODD:

All right. Well, if it's Sunday, it's Meet the Press. I'll see you next week.

###

VIDEO

Sen. Feinstein on MTP: 'I Believe the Goal Is Baghdad'

Senate Intelligence Chair Sen. Dianne Feinstein details ISIS' latest offensive in Iraq.

<http://nbcnews.to/1wWFfbo>

Feinstein: ISIS Is 'a Major Varsity Team'

Chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee Dianne Feinstein says ISIS is a serious threat.

<http://nbcnews.to/Y3vtoF>

Sen. Feinstein on MTP: Not Sure Russian Sanctions Will Work

Intelligence Chair says people of Russia will not break under economic sanctions, will turn to Putin.

<http://nbcnews.to/1ph2C5A>

Will U.S. Fight ISIS in Syria?

Richard Engel explains the president's reluctance to take the fight against ISIS beyond Iraq's borders.

<http://nbcnews.to/1sT0Jib>

Michael Leiter on MTP: Al-Nusra Front Just As Dangerous As ISIS

NBC News analyst says other organizations within Syria could pose a greater threat to the U.S.

<http://nbcnews.to/Z3s3ma>

Gen. Zinni: 'I Wish We weren't So Paranoid' About Ground Troops

Retired general says "boots on the ground" would push ISIS back into Syria.

<http://nbcnews.to/1nN62gG>

Putin Striving for a 'New Russia'?

Jim Maceda reports on Russia's incursion into Ukraine and President Putin's relationship with President Obama.

<http://nbcnews.to/1qSi6yf>

Michael McFaul: Putin Escalating Conflict Off the Battlefield As Well

Fmr. Ambassador to Russia says Russia is making moves to support separatists politically in Ukraine.

<http://nbcnews.to/1qgE8hY>

Is Putin Testing American Leadership?

Retired General Anthony Zinni, says American leadership should be "demonstrated clearly and decisively."

<http://nbcnews.to/1sTONiT>

How Is President Obama Handling ISIS?

This week's roundtable debates the president's handling of the crisis in Iraq.

<http://nbcnews.to/1ovV0fg>

Wes Moore: ISIS 'Is a Global Issue'

Afghanistan veteran and TV host warns caution could only help ISIS long-term.

<http://nbcnews.to/1pwTWho>

Is President Obama's Immigration Policy 'Herky-Jerky'?

Ruth Marcus and the roundtable discusses the politics behind President Obama's apparent mixed signals on immigration.

<http://nbcnews.to/1lCOQja>

Doris Kearns Goodwin: Promises Hurt Obama in Immigration Debate

The presidential historian says executive orders can have major impact but Obama promised action too early.

<http://nbcnews.to/1pYPYxp>

Ruth Marcus: 'Weight Is the New Rape'

Columnist on why a women's figure should be off the table in Congress in wake of Gillibrand allegations.

<http://nbcnews.to/1qsxpjT>

Should Men Be More Active in Sexism Conversation?

Wes Moore says men have an obligation to be a part of improving work environments.

<http://nbcnews.to/1ug1y6C>

A New Chapter for Meet the Press

A revealing look at Chuck Todd, the new moderator of MTP, from those who know him best.

<http://nbcnews.to/1tQkfiL>

Chuck Todd on MTP: Don't Hate Politics, Hate Bad Politicians

New moderator of Meet the Press explains why politics should be everyone's passion. <http://nbcnews.to/1qgEe9h>

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Below is a RUSH transcript of this morning's broadcast -- mandatory attribution to NBC News' "Meet the Press." A final transcript of the program will be available at www.MeetThePressNBC.com.

MEET THE PRESS -- SUNDAY, AUGUST 31, 2014

ANDREA MITCHELL:

Good morning. Huge challenges for President Obama this holiday weekend from enemies old and new. The president admits he does not yet have a strategy for defeating ISIS as Britain raises its terror threat level. I'll ask Dianne Feinstein, chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee about the threat posed to the U.S. and whether the president's recent comments show weakness.

And, facing down an old adversary: Ukraine's president says his country is near full-scale war with Russia. How far will Vladimir Putin go, and can President Obama and the allies get him to back down? Plus, a new era on Meet the Press, a revealing look at Chuck Todd from those who know him best.

ANNOUNCER:

From NBC News in Washington, this is Meet the Press.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

And good morning, two major military flashpoints this Sunday, both with strong consequences for the U.S. After fierce fighting, Iraqi troops have reached a town in northern Iraq that was under siege by ISIS militants. Overnight, the U.S. launched airstrikes against ISIS fighters near the town and dropped humanitarian aid. An estimated 15,000 people had been trapped in the siege.

And in the Ukraine crisis, the European Union is now giving Russia an ultimatum: Change course in one week or face tougher sanctions. But this morning, a defiant President Putin calling for talks on statehood for eastern Ukraine and saying it is impossible to predict when the crisis will end. So how should President Obama respond to both crises? I'm joined by Dianne Feinstein, chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

Senator Feinstein, welcome. Thank you very much.

DIANNE FEINSTEIN:

Thank you very much.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

We're approaching another 9/11 anniversary and we've heard of this dire warning, Great Britain has raised its security level. How serious is the ISIS threat, the threat from ISIS and other related groups to the American homeland?

DIANNE FEINSTEIN:

Well, I believe it's potentially very serious. They have announced that they don't intend to stop. They have announced that they will come after us if they can, that they will quote, "spill our blood." They have indeed done

that by beheading Mr. Foley and who knows how many others that are unknown. This is a vicious, vicious movement. And it has to be confronted. I think Senator McCain and Senator Graham really laid the basis in Saturday's New York Times in an op-ed for confrontation. And I happen to agree with what they said.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

Then is the president wrong to signal indecision by saying that we still don't have a strategy against ISIS?

DIANNE FEINSTEIN:

Well, in that same newspaper, down below the McCain op-ed is one by our secretary of State, John Kerry. And in that, he does in fact lay out a strategy, which begins next week at the NATO Conference, NATO Summit, talking with our NATO allies. The United States taking over the presidency of the Security Council in September. And the beginning of a strategy to put together a coalition of the willing, if you will. I mean, it's a savage movement.

And in this case, they have money, they have direction, they have moved rapidly to cross the Syrian border, take over Mosul, and then give a sermon from the mosque in Mosul. They took over the Mosul dam, well, that's changing now, but I believe the goal is Baghdad. And I think it's very, very serious. And we have to have a strategy to deal with it in Syria and in Iraq, in this new caliphate, and to prevent that caliphate from expanding.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

The fact is, they have been on the march now for months, if not years. So why does the president still say we don't have a strategy yet? Doesn't that project weakness from the White House?

DIANNE FEINSTEIN:

Well, I mean, I know what you want me to say. But I'm not going to say it in that sense. I think I've learned one thing about this president, and that is he's very cautious. Maybe in this instance, too cautious. I do know that the military, I know that the State Department, I know that others have been putting plans together.

And so hopefully, those plans will coalesce into a strategy that can encourage that coalition from Arab nations, Jordan's at jeopardy, Lebanon's at jeopardy, the UAA and other countries are in jeopardy. So there is good reason for people to come together now and begin to approach this as a very real threat, that it in fact is.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

The president back in January told The New Yorker magazine, David Remnick, that ISIS is the JV team. That was clearly wrong.

DIANNE FEINSTEIN:

Well, I think it's wrong too. I think it's a major varsity team. And if you want to use those kinds of monikers. But I see nothing that compares with its viciousness. I've been on the intelligence committee now since before 9/11, and I've watched this evolution of non-state actors into world terror very carefully and closely.

And this is really the first group that has the wherewithal in terms of financing, the fighting machine in terms of a structure-- a heavy equipment, heave explosives, the ability to move quickly, I mean, they crossed the border into Iraq before we even knew it happened. So this is a group of people who are extraordinarily dangerous. And they'll kill with abandon.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

Was that an intelligence failure, or was the White House not listening to the community?

DIANNE FEINSTEIN:

Well, I think our intelligence in Syria has not been good for a number of reasons. But I do know that the breaking through of the borders was not known ahead of time. I think a lot of that hopefully has been repaired now. And I think the intelligence community is well aware of the need to get up and running in a major way, both in Iraq and in Syria.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

And do we have to go to Syria to get at the root of ISIS?

DIANNE FEINSTEIN:

Well, I don't know exactly who was where when. But there's no question, but they have a home-base in Syria. They have expanded that base now into Iraq. That part of it is a fighting base. And it is devoted to taking over cities. It's failed to hold the Mosul Dam, thank God. I believe it is on its way to Baghdad. And I believe that they will try to attack our embassy from the West, which is a Sunni area, where I believe they are infiltrating now.

So I think this is extraordinarily serious and I think the president is wise in this sense. What I understand, he's trying to do, is give an opportunity for this new Iraqi government, new because of a new prime minister, al-Abadi, to begin to make the moves which offer an alternative to the Sunni people in his country.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

I want to ask you about Vladimir Putin because there is a lot of talk that Putin cannot be stopped, and that he has moved with tanks, with artillery, with troops across the border. We're calling it an incursion, not an invasion. Is there anything we can do to stop Vladimir Putin?

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And you don't see sanctions working in the short term?

DIANNE FEINSTEIN:

I'm not sure they will work. I'm not sure that shakes the people that much. And it's the people that have to be spoken to. And it's their solitary leader, Vladimir Putin, who has to be spoken to.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

Dianne Feinstein, chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee, thank you very much.

DIANNE FEINSTEIN:

Thank you.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

Thanks for being with us on Meet the Press.

DIANNE FEINSTEIN:

You're welcome, thank you.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

And for more now on the ISIS threat. I'm joined by our chief foreign correspondent, Richard Engel, who has really been studying ISIS for quite some time in the field. And Richard, what about the President's reluctance to take the fight against ISIS to Syria?

RICHARD ENGEL:

Well, I speak to military commanders. I speak to former officials. And they are apoplectic. They think that this is a clear and present danger. They think something needs to be done. One official said that this was a Freudian slip, that it shows how the United States does not have a policy to deal with Syria.

Even when you have ISIS, which has effectively become a terrorist army, roughly 20,000 strong, about half of them foreign fighters, and incredibly well armed after two major weapons hauls. The first when ISIS took over the city of Mosul and the Iraqi Army, the U.S.-trained Iraqi Army, disgraced itself by not fighting. And the second just last week, when ISIS took over a Syrian air base.

(BEGIN TAPE)

RICHARD ENGEL:

Like it or not, the U.S. may now be forced to take action against ISIS, not only in Iraq, but also, in Syria. This, critics say, could mean helping the Assad regime, which the president said had to go.

RYAN CROCKER:

If we think that we are not in their sights, we are delusional. They have the same agenda that al-Qaeda has.

RICHARD ENGEL:

So what has the U.S. done about it? To a large degree, the administration's policy has been to ignore Syria, ignore it until the horrors there become too barbaric to stomach. (YELLING) A year ago, that was a chemical weapons attack outside Damascus, when Washington blamed the regime for gassing over 1,000 to death, including hundreds of children. The Syrian regime crossed, leapt over, in fact, the President's red line.

PRESIDENT OBAMA:

This menace must be confronted. I will seek authorization for the use of force from the American people's representatives in Congress.

RICHARD ENGEL:

Instead, without Congressional support, the bombings against Assad never came. Neither did large-scale support for the Syrian opposition. In retrospect, the bombings probably would have been too little, too late to have made things better in Syria. ISIS was already on the rise. Weapons given to the opposition would very likely have ended up in the hands of radicals.

Then, after empty threats and empty promises, the administration turned away from Syria again, for another year. (CROWD NOISE) Until ISIS shocked the world by occupying large parts of Iraq and declaring a new state, the Islamic state, the caliphate. The U.S. is now flying surveillance missions over Syria, looking for targets it can attack from the air.

RYAN CROCKER:

This is not mission creep. This is establishing a vital mission for American security. And we need to do it, we need to do it yesterday.

RICHARD ENGEL:

The U.S. risk, falling into what one former official called Bashar al-Assad's trap. Assad's regime helped ISIS grow by attacking other opposition forces and rarely targeting ISIS. Assad waited patiently until ISIS pushed out almost all other more moderate groups, and is now telling the world that he's fighting a just war against terrorism. If the U.S. starts bombing ISIS in Syria, it will be helping the Syrian regime, in effect, pulling weeds out of Assad's garden, which he allowed to grow, but which have now become a global threat.

(END TAPE)

RICHARD ENGEL:

The build-up of ISIS in Iraq and Syria was incredibly predictable, Andrea. We've reported about it. Reporters risk their lives going into Syria to talk about this buildup of-- extremists in the country. Yet, nothing seemed to have been done. And now we have a very serious situation.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

Indeed. Thank you so much, Richard Engel. And for more on the military options for taking on ISIS, I'm joined by Michael Leiter, NBC national security analysts, who served as director of The National Counter-terrorism Center, Michele Flournoy, who served as under secretary of defense for policy in President Obama's first term, and she's now executive director at The Center for New American Security, and General Anthony Zinni, our former commander-in-chief of U.S. Central Command, and special envoy to the Middle East. His new book is *Before the First Shots Are Fired: How America Can Win or Lost Off the Battlefield*. Welcome all. Thanks so much. General Zinni, first to you. What we've seen is Dianne Feinstein just saying that the president is perhaps too cautious in this instance. Agreed?

ANTHONY ZINNI:

I agree with Senator Feinstein. This ISIS has committed atrocities, potential genocide. That's unacceptable. And I think that we shouldn't be so cautious. We should blunt them before their recruiting really grows, before they gain more territory.

But I would say one thing that's key to this, a lesson we should have learned in Afghanistan, even back to Vietnam, you can't give sanctuary to a potential enemy. We will have to go to Syria. If we sort of honor that border, unfortunately, they'll be allowed to rebuild, much as AQY al-Qaeda in Iraq morphed into this ISIS.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

Michael Leiter, you led The Counter-terrorism Center during very, very difficult times after 9-11 in two administrations. Right now, the Brits have raised their threat level to the second highest threat level in Great Britain. The U.S. has not. What is the threat to the American homeland from ISIS?

MICHAEL LEITER:

I think the threat from ISIS is growing. And the threat from other organizations within Syria is probably even higher than it is from ISIS. What the British threat level increase really means is they don't know what's going on in their country. They don't see something specific, but they know there've been many people from the West traveling to Syria and Iraq, and they're not sure where they are and what they're doing. The U.S. doesn't have that same scale of problem, but we do still have that issue. And it's really got people scared.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

And when you say, "Others," you mean al-Nusra and other very militant groups.

MICHAEL LEITER:

That's right. I mean ISIS is in the news now. But the al-Nusra front, which is affiliated directly with al-Qaeda, same ideology, and in some ways, more focused on attacking the West than ISIS has been in the past, but I expect ISIS is also going very much in that direction.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

Michele Flournoy, I wanted to play for you a little bit of what Chuck Hagel said a week before the president issued his caution warning. Let's watch.

CHUCK HAGEL:

They are an imminent threat to every interest we have, whether it's in Iraq or anywhere else. This is beyond anything that we've seen.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

The president seemed to be almost speaking to his own national security cabinet. You've served in the situation room. You've been in the national security team with this president. He seemed to be saying to Chuck Hagel and to John Kerry and others, "Not so fast."

MICHELE FLOURNOY:

I think we have, in President Obama, a very deliberative decision maker. He wants to take his time to get it right. And yet, I think what you heard Secretary Hagel reflecting is that growing sense of urgency about the nature of the threat. But the truth is you watch what the administration's doing, they are putting the pieces of a strategy together.

You have John Kerry going to the region to consult with partners and allies, start to bring them on board to a common approach. They have the intelligence mission now flying over Syria to try to understand the possibilities there to set up the possibilities of strikes. So you have the engagement in Iraq trying to form a government that could enable the Iraqi forces to be more effective against ISIS. So the pieces are starting to emerge. But I think, again, this is a president who wants to take his time and get it right.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

And the way presidents frame would matter. The way they frame--

MICHELE FLOURNOY:

Yes.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

--the threat does matter, especially around the world. John McCain and Lindsey Graham, two frequent critics of the President's foreign policy, were editorializing on the op-ed page in The New York Times and said, "Mr. Obama has begun to take military actions against ISIS in Iraq, but they have been tactical and reactive half measures. Continuing to confront ISIS in Iraq but not in Syria would be fighting with one hand tied behind our back. We need a military plan to defeat ISIS wherever it is." General Zinni, what is the military plan, though? What are the pieces, as Michele Flournoy was just saying, beyond surveillance? Don't you have to have boots on the ground in order to really do air strikes effectively?

ANTHONY ZINNI:

Well, I think there are many parts to this. First is the intelligence piece, especially tactical intelligence and targeting. The second is to provide the air support and the capability that will bolster the Kurds, the Iraqi military. We need to revamp the security assistance program in both Iraq and with the Kurds that we've been reluctant to do because of Iraqi objections. I think the same with Jordan, Saudi Arabia and others, because they have a front in this literally.

The boots on the ground question's always the toughest one. I wish we were not so paranoid about boots on the ground. We can't even define it. There's going to have to be Special Operations Forces. There's going to have to be people that can in and adjust air and fires and advisors to be with these units.

And very simply put, if you put two brigades on the ground right now of U.S. forces, they would push ISIS back into Syria in a heartbeat. And probably take less time, less cost and, I think in the long run, fewer casualties overall. Let me say one thing. The important piece of this is not just the military plan. That's not a strategy in and of itself.

We need to rebuild the coalition in the region. It is fractured ever since we first went into Iraq. We have allies out there that no longer trust us, believe in us, and think we can get it done or have the leadership. We need to bring together a coalition of outsiders, Europeans and others, like we did in the first Gulf War.

I don't know why we're waiting for a U.N. Resolution to condemn ISIS and authorize use of force, which makes this easier. So all the other pieces that Michele talked about that are starting, we don't have the time for this kind of deliberation. There is a battle of the narrative going on, and we're losing it.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

As you point out, in *Before the First Shots Are Fired*, you have to build these coalitions. Has that become appreciably harder, Michael Leiter? You know the Gulf so well, since the president backed down, said he was going to ask for Congressional support after Assad crossed that red line last year. And is it now harder when Secretary Kerry goes to the region? Are the Saudis and others going to be more reluctant to follow us?

MICHAEL LEITER:

I think they are. And the best illustration of that was what happened last week with the UAE, working with Egypt, to bomb in Libya. This is airplane where we had been deeply involved. These are two important allies in the region. And we didn't even know they were doing it. That shows their view that there has been an absence of U.S. leadership in the region.

So it is going to take very forceful leadership. I agree with Michele. The pieces are now starting to come together. The question is how quickly they can do it. Because we've been playing on defense. We have to get on the offense, because otherwise, with counter-terrorism, the intelligence people can't stop all the threats.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

Let's wait just a moment. We want to talk about another major foreign policy crisis. And then we'll pick it up there. And that is Ukraine, of course. Our Jim Maceda looks at who is winning the showdown with Vladimir Putin, President Obama or Putin?

JIM MACEDA:

Vladimir Putin, as he wants fellow Russians and the West to see him: in charge, projecting power by land, by air, and by sea.

JIM MACEDA:

And ever defiant. (GUNFIRE) Despite international condemnation for what N.A.T.O. calls an invasion of Eastern Ukraine like Crimea before it. Putin's response? Sending yet more troops and tanks over the border, N.A.T.O. sources say, and opening a new front in the form of conflict that's killed at least 2,600 people, according to U.N. figures.

But some critics fear Putin's carving out new territory. The Kremlin referring officially, for the first time Friday, to Novorossiya, or "New Russia." What's Putin really up to? Theodore Lukyanov, who advises the Kremlin on defense matters, says Putin has no grand strategy to resurrect the Soviet Union.

THEODORE LUKIANOV:

But the former Soviet states should be recognized by the West as a zone of special interest and in exclusive rights for Russia.

JIM MACEDA:

For Putin, Ukraine is a red zone within that space, though he still denies Russia plays any role in the war there. Putin's unpredictability has made relations with the U.S., already at a post-Cold War low, even more strained, with Putin resisting all efforts by Obama and the West to reign him in over Ukraine. In June, Obama told NBC's Brian Williams that he and Putin spoke, quote, "Repeatedly."

PRESIDENT OBAMA:

We generally have businesslike relationship. And are very candid and blunt with each other.

JIM MACEDA:

But according to Kremlin phone records, confirmed by the White House, the two have spoken just ten times all year. The last call a month ago. Dismissing boots on the ground in Ukraine, the president says targeted sanctions have hurt the Russian economy and Putin, even if he doesn't admit it.

PRESIDENT OBAMA:

Russia is already more isolated than at any time since the end of the Cold War. (VOICES, GUNFIRE)

JIM MACEDA:

Still, Putin is undeterred, triggering calls to arm the Ukrainian forces lethally.

STEVEN PIFER:

Except there may be tools that we give them, for example, light anti-armor weapons, that would allow them to defend their country better.

JIM MACEDA:

But that could risk a major escalation, with Putin, just this week, warning that Russia is a nuclear power not to be messed with.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

And our thanks to Jim Maceda. Joining our conversation now is Michael McFaul, former U.S. ambassador to Russia. Michael Leiter, Michele Flournoy, General Zinni are still here with me. First to you, Ambassador McFaul. Let's talk about Putin. What will it take to get him to back down?

AMB. MICHAEL MCFAUL:

I'm not sure, to be honest. What you see today in Jim Maceda's report is him escalating on the ground in response to the Ukrainian military winning just a few weeks ago. He decided he did not want his separatists, his mercenaries in eastern Ukraine to lose, so he opened up this third front. And until there's a stalemate in eastern Ukraine, which I don't see any time soon, I think it's very unlikely that we're going to have real negotiations.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

And Michael McFaul, we also heard Putin saying today that Eastern Ukraine should be able to vote on its own statehood, which sounds like the next step, similar to what already happened with Crimea.

AMB. MICHAEL MCFAUL:

Well, he said that, and then his press secretary rolled it back. So they have their communication problems, like sometimes our leaders do, too, in terms of what the phrase actually meant. But it was notable for the first time they did use this phrase, "noveracia," which he hadn't used for about four months. And that, inside eastern Ukraine, for the separatists, was taken as a major vote of confidence for them from Vladimir Putin, who had not really supported them for a long time. So it was a rhetorical escalation, as well.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

Michele Flournoy, is there a military option here as NATO begins its meetings next week in Wales?

MICHELE FLOURNOY:

You know, I don't think there's an exclusively military option that would be meaningful. But I do think what we do with N.A.T.O. and what we do in terms of assistance to Ukraine matters a great deal. This is a significant escalation. Putin is now watching what are we, the West, going to do.

I think bolstering N.A.T.O.'s posture along the N.A.T.O. frontier is very important. But more significantly, I think we need to be having a serious discussion about enhancing the military assistance we provide to Ukraine. We cannot afford to see them be trumped on the battlefield and to see them lose even more territory in eastern Ukraine.

At the same time, turning up the sanctions-- and opening a channel of dialogue with Putin, it's very disturbing that we aren't engaging him more fully. I'm not suggesting that will be immediately productive. But you've got to have some kind of dialogue to try, over time, to figure out how is he going to come out of the tree. How is he going to come out of this situation that he's created for himself?

ANDREA MITCHELL:

With Dianne Feinstein also was suggesting in that area, earlier this morning. Now, Samantha Power, the same day that President Obama was in the briefing room suggesting that we should take it a little slowly with Vladimir Putin, Samantha Power was at the U.N.. Let me show you this contrast.

SAMANTHA POWER:

It has manipulated, it has obfuscated, it has outright lied.

PRESIDENT OBAMA:

I consider the actions that we've seen in the last week a continuation of what's been taking place for months now.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

Tone matters. Anthony Zinni?

ANTHONY ZINNI:

Yes. It does. I believe Putin is doing two things. One, testing American leadership, particularly in Europe. And second, testing European will, resolve and cohesion. It's very important that our leadership be demonstrated clearly and decisively, and that the Europeans, through N.A.T.O., stand. I agree with everything that Michele said. Now is the time to bolster Ukrainian military support.

It's also time to find a way to engage Putin. And maybe even leadership to a meeting or a summit with the president and Putin. But of course a lot of work done before that. I think one mistake we make, and it's a point I would disagree with Senator Feinstein, sending the secretary of state out to meet with Putin probably insults him even more. I think you need to do the groundwork to build up to something. But we're going to need a way to walk this down where there's face-saving, or else we're going to have a confrontation that we don't want.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

And briefly, Michael McFaul, is there a way to give Putin an exit strategy?

AMB. MICHAEL MCFAUL:

Yeah. I think it's easy. This is not like a lot of other conflicts around the world. It would entail more decentralization in eastern Ukraine, the use of the Russian language, perhaps some international monitors there. And by the way, I think the government in Kiev would be willing to negotiate along those lines.

It's different who would sit down with them. Because it can't be Putin. But I think that a deal is ready to be made. But Putin has to want to negotiate. And so far, I think it's very clear, that he doesn't want to negotiate. He thinks he can advance his interests through military means on the ground.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

Thank you all. Thank you Michael McFaul, thank you here at the table. And coming up next, is the White House playing politics with immigration? Why President Obama will likely now delay action until after the midterm elections. And why does the Congressional leader greet visitors with this little guy? Our roundtable will reveal all, coming up next.

Commercial Break

ANDREA MITCHELL:

And welcome back. The roundtable is here with a lot to discuss. Daniel Henninger, columnist and the deputy editorial page editor for The Wall Street Journal. Doris Kearns Goodwin, Pulitzer Prize-winning historian, whose latest book, now out in paperback, is The Bully Pulpit: Theodore Roosevelt, William Howard Taft, and the Golden Age of Journalism. Wes Moore, Army combat veteran and host of Beyond Belief on The Oprah Winfrey

Network. And Ruth Marcus, columnist for The Washington Post. Welcome all. Dan Henninger, first here, we've been talking a lot about the fallout from what the president said last week. What about his comments? Do they matter if the strategy comes together?

DAN HENNINGER:

Well, it matters a lot. I mean I think what we're seeing here, and everyone is pretty much describing, Andrea, is a political model, foreign policy model, they described earlier in the administration, which was "leading from behind," the idea that others would sort of coalesce and take the lead. I think we've seen that does not work.

And if you try to lead from behind, you are always playing catch-up. And clearly we are playing catch-up in both the Middle East right now and in Ukraine. And the problem when you do that is that your so-called partners begin to make deals on their own. As Michael Leiter was just describing, the Egyptians and the UAE bombed Libya on their own. One might say that's a positive development.

But in the short term, if people out there start making deals that are only in their interest and not in the U.S. interest, then the United States will have a very hard time getting to the point where we can form a coherent strategy involving our partners.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

But Doris, you've written historically about presidents, and having teams of rivals, if you will, or teams that give him different points of view. Is it a good thing that he is hearing from a Kerry, a Hagel, and deciding on his own?

DORIS KEARNS GOODWIN:

Well, I think the most important part of the discussion that history suggests, that we haven't talked about, is whatever the right decisions are, and we've been talking about possibly special ops on the ground, air support, air strikes going into Syria, if it's going to be a long struggle, and it sounds like it might, the public has to get involved.

And that's where the leadership challenge comes from the president at a time when we're very war weary. We've been through Iraq, we've been through Afghanistan. You know, way, way back in 1937, FDR understood the threat that Mussolini and Hitler posed. And he made a quarantine the dictators, which, "We've got to do something." And he said, "You look back, and no one is following." And that's the trouble. So he had to move step by step to get the country involved.

So Congress better debate this. They've got to come back. I don't know why they're not here talking about this. This is important. The country has to understand it. They have to have simple language. Is it containment? Are we destroying? Is it an arsenal? What are we doing? We need to understand this before this goes much further.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

And what's more, you have military experience in Afghanistan. The military also wants a Congressional debate. They want to know what direction the leaders are taking them.

WES MOORE:

And what they really also need to do for a military expression is Congress can help give the president air cover. Congress can help the president be able to enact the policies that need to be enacted. And we need to be clear about that, because we need domestic support.

But we also do need international partners are on board. And it's important for three main reasons. You know, one for the idea of capacity, and also for the idea that this is not just our war. You know, last week alone we had a Lebanese soldier who was decapitated, who was beheaded. We have 40 Turkish diplomats who are now being held captive by ISIS. This is not just our issue. This is a global issue that has potential for global and regional conflagration.

The second thing is intelligence. If we're so cautious and weary about putting boots on the ground, which ironically, we actually already do have boots on the ground, but if we're cautious about adding the number of troops on the ground, the challenge of that is, in order to be effective, you have to be able to have intelligence on the ground. Not just air intelligence, but human, human intelligence.

And the third reason is, if we go at it alone, we're playing right into ISIS's hands. ISIS is extraordinarily complex and complicated in terms of social media strategy and how they're going and affecting the disaffected. We have to be able to bring in an international coalition, not leading from behind, but an international coalition that can help justify these actions and be truly effective in what we're trying to do.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

And while we're talking about all these foreign challenges, domestically, the president is signaling, also, a retreat on a promise that he made only earlier this summer when John Boehner basically said there was no Congressional

action on immigration, Ruth Marcus. The president said, "I will come up with a plan, my people will come up with a plan, and I will act on it quickly."

RUTH MARCUS:

Yes. And it's very similar to the debate we're having about the President's handling of foreign policy. Because Senator Feinstein used the nice phrase, "too cautious." I want to use a slightly less nice phrase, "Herky jerky." We just see him veering in one direction and then the other.

So on immigration, he told the Hispanic groups and the labor groups, which are very focused on this issue, that he was going to act, essentially, by the end of the summer. All of a sudden, he's changing his mind. He's now in a position where he is going to aggravate everybody.

It's not yet decided, but it's fairly clear which way this is trending, to put this off until after the election. So he's going to have Hispanic and labor groups angry with him for not acting swiftly. He has Senate Democrats agitated that he raised the profile of this issue and endangered them. And so they're all worked up.

(OVERTALK)

ANDREA MITCHELL:

Four major states.

RUTH MARCUS:

Yes.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

Their red state Democrats are trying to hang on.

RUTH MARCUS:

And then, whatever he does, he is going to have Republicans asserting that he's overstepping his executive authority. Why was this not thought through when he made the announcement on June 30th that he would be getting recommendations and acting, essentially, by the end of the summer? Because the border crisis did explode immediately after that. But it was entirely predictable that immigration would be an issue in the fall campaign. And--

DORIS KEARNS GOODWIN:

And you know, it is predictable that they will yell at him. Every executive order in history there's the cry of, "Dictator." So he knew that was going to come anyway. And some of those executive orders have been really important, ending discrimination in housing, the executive orders that have done socially just things.

But the question is he shouldn't have promised, as you say, "I'm going to do it by a certain time." He may be right to relate the timing now till after the election. Because he can still do it in December. But if he hadn't promised, it would have been fine.

RUTH MARCUS:

Right.

DORIS KEARNS GOODWIN:

And then he wouldn't have gotten the cries of "dictatorship," but he could have said, "Yeah, but--

(OVERTALK)

DORIS KEARNS GOODWIN:

--this is a good thing being done."

DAN HENNINGER:

But Doris, they've got to get past November, I think, to Ruth's point. The president has put his party in a very difficult spot. The most important metric in the midterm elections is the President's approval rating. That's what's going on in all of these red states that the Democrats are running in.

His handling of foreign policy just keeps going down. It's below 40%. And I'm sure it's going to drop further after the past week. And so I doubt that these Democrats want to come back to Washington and have a debate. Perhaps they should. But that's the last thing they're going to want to talk about. And somehow they're out there on their own, having to defend themselves against the criticisms we're now hearing of the president.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

But as promised, we do have the monkey in the room, which is that Congress hasn't come back. Take a look at the monkey, (CHUCKLE) we saw, the only thing we've seen from Congress is John Boehner putting out a video where he introduces the monkey on the table when people come into his office. Now, basically, Wes Moore, they are missing in action, members of both houses, who've had a series of foreign policy crises. Why haven't they come back?

WES MOORE:

Well, the reason I think they haven't come back is exactly what we're saying, is that there are certain things that they don't want to debate before the midterm elections. The problem is that we don't have time to wait until after the midterm elections. The problem is that the people who are in office, they're in office to make actions and they make decisions.

And people want leadership that's going to be driven by a sense of passion and a sense of pragmatism, and not my pollsters. And so these issues that people have been waiting on for years to be address have to be addressed. And you cannot simply wait for an election cycle to determine a timeframe.

DORIS KEARNS GOODWIN:

And the public has to--

RUTH MARCUS:

And the--

DORIS KEARNS GOODWIN:

--stop being so passive about it. Everybody is mad at Congress. Everybody says what's going on in Washington is horrible, it's dysfunctional. And what do we do? We just talk about it. Somehow there has to be some way to move this group of people. They were elected for a reason.

JIM MACEDA:

Yeah.

DORIS KEARNS GOODWIN:

They're supposed to be doing the public business.

RUTH MARCUS:

And--

DORIS KEARNS GOODWIN:

They should be proud of being politicians. And yet, we're looking at the monkey in the room.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

And speaking of other issues that come up on Capitol Hill, coming up next: sexism in the Senate. Our roundtable discusses a Senator's shocking revelations of boorish behavior from male colleagues. Stay with us.

Commercial Break

ANDREA MITCHELL:

Earlier you saw my interview with California Senator Dianne Feinstein about Iraq and Ukraine. I also asked her about the so-called C.I.A. Torture Report. She said that report will not be released if it is redacted, in other words, censored, too heavily. And definitely include her committee's main findings. That extended interview on MeetThePressNBC.com. More coming up with our roundtable. And one Senator's charges of sexism in the Congressional gym.

Commercial Break

ANDREA MITCHELL:

And welcome back. New York Senator Kirsten Gillibrand has stirred up a storm with excerpts from her upcoming new book *Off the Sidelines* about sexism in the Senate. *People Magazine* reports that she describes one older male lawmaker as telling her in the House gym, "Good thing you're working out, because you wouldn't want to get porky."

She quotes another House member as saying, "You know Kirsten, you're even pretty when you're fat." And an older Senator once squeezed her waist and said, "Don't lose too much weight. Now I like my girls chubby." Our roundtable is back with us, Daniel Henninger, Doris Kearns Goodwin, Ruth Marcus and Wes Moore. Ruth, you've written about this today. "I like my girls chubby?" (CHUCKLE) Squeezing her waist? I mean we both cover the Senate, we both covered the Clarence Thomas hearings and all of the ruckus after that. Have things not changed?

RUTH MARCUS:

Oh well, yes and no. Anybody who's been around there, certainly any woman who's been around there, is not exactly shocked, shocked that there are comments like this going on. And by the way, for politicians of both parties, might I suggest that weight is the new rape. It's really a bad idea to talk about. (LAUGHTER) Certainly to one of your colleagues.

But I do think it's simultaneously important to note. And Senator Gillibrand talks, in some way, about how this a generational thing, that there is a difference between the 60, 70, 80-year-old politicians in the way they handle gender issues-- not to say that it's a gender equity paradise in Congress, it's not-- and the way some of the younger senators, younger, when I say younger, I mean middle aged, like me, in both parties handle it. They're different.

Their spouses work for Goldman Sachs, they work for lobbying firms. They're used to dealing with working women. And from the conversations that I've had with women senators, their male colleagues of a younger age are a little bit more adept at dealing with them.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

This is generational, Wes. But there still is a lot of sexism on the Hill.

WES MOORE:

A tremendous amount. But the thing is, we can't just have Senator Gillibrand speaking out about it, we also need males speaking out about it, as well. You know, I have a dear friend who met his wife at Harvard Law School. And he says how, when he met his wife at Harvard Law School, there was a professor who would only call on women on Tuesdays. (CHUCKLE) And it was an unspoken thing that happened. But when women raised their hand, it was only on Tuesdays that he thought that they had something to contribute to the conversation.

And when I speak to him about it now, he talks about how embarrassing that it was. But he said, "But it wasn't even embarrassing that the professor did it, because that's who he is." What was embarrassed was that none of the men said anything. Not a single man said a single thing. So it cannot just be a conversation amongst female lawmakers, male lawmakers have to be part of that conversation, as well.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

Well, we're going to have to leave it there. Doris, Daniel, Wes and Ruth, thank you all so very much. And coming up, a special shout out from President Obama this week for the new moderator of Meet the Press.

PRESIDENT OBAMA:

I'm going to start with somebody who I guess is now a big cheese.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

I'll be joined by the big cheese himself coming up next.

Commercial Break

ANDREA MITCHELL:

Welcome back. For the tenth anniversary of Meet the Press, John F. Kennedy wrote, "I know of no other radio or television program which has become such a firm and widely respected institution in American life." Well, there's no one better suited to uphold and build on that legacy than my friend, Chuck Todd.

(On Tape)

ANNOUNCER:

This is Meet the Press with--

PRESIDENT OBAMA:

Chuck Todd. Chuck Todd.

Robert Gibbs:

Chuck

Jay Carney:

Chuck

PRESIDENT OBAMA:

Chuck Todd. Where's Chuck?

PRESIDENT OBAMA:

I'm going to start with somebody who I guess is now a big cheese. I understand this is going to be his last chance to ask me a question in the press room. So I want to congratulate Chuck Todd and give him first dibbs.

Chuck Todd:

I'm glad you said "In the press room."

ANDREA MITCHELL:

Chuck Todd defines being a White House correspondent.

CHUCK TODD:

You began your term, your first term, big fanfare.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

He would ask the question, he'd ask the follow-up.

(OVERTALK)

PRESIDENT OBAMA:

Chuck, how many you've got?

ANDREA MITCHELL:

He'd ask another question.

BENJAMIN NETANYAHU:

This is not a kosher question, but don't hog it. (CHUCKLE)

CHUCK TODD:

I want to talk about my colleague over here, and the follow-up that he had, and then another question I have for you.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

He's relentless. He's (CHUCKLE) like a dog with a bone.

CHUCK TODD:

Why do you believe the Israeli people have not embraced President Obama the same way they embraced our last two U.S. presidents?

PRESIDENT OBAMA:

So you had to get a polling question in there, right? (LAUGHTER) Chuck, I mean you're incorrigible.

CHERI ROPER:

I think Chuck has an amazing brain, which he, I'm sure, inherited from his father. He always knew who was running for what office locally. He knew who was running for office in the state and nationally.

SAVANNAH GUTHRIE:

If you've ever seen him on election night, it's like a tour de force of political nerd fest.

CHUCK TODD:

You didn't let me geek out a little bit on Florida here.

BRIAN WILLIAMS:

Go ahead, man.

BRIAN WILLIAMS:

Hang on, Chuck. Hang on, Chuck.

(OVERTALK)

BRIAN WILLIAMS:

We got some critical calls.

CHUCK TODD:

Yes, we do.

BRIAN WILLIAMS:

Chuck, I don't see this often enough. Great work on the board tonight.

SAVANNAH GUTHRIE:

If you look up, "Political junkie" in the dictionary, you will find a picture of Chuck Todd and his goatee.

MALE #1:

The control room would like you to shave too.

CHUCK TODD:

Yeah, well good luck with that. (CHUCKLE)

SAVANNAH GUTHRIE:

The first time he was on with Tim Russert, that was a dream come true for him.

TIM RUSSERT:

What is a blog?

CHUCK TODD:

Well, blog, so the actual term itself, by the way, is short for web log. And you know, you drop the W and you get the blog.

SAVANNAH GUTHRIE:

Tim always used to say, "Meet the Press is a national treasure." And I can't think of a better custodian for that treasure than Chuck.

CHUCK TODD:

The voting rights act doesn't pass... Are you in Congress?

REP. JOHN LEWIS:

I wouldn't be standing here as a member of Congress.

CHUCK TODD:

And President Obama?

REP. JOHN LEWIS:

President Obama would not be president.

KRISTIAN DENNY TODD:

Chuck Todd is my best friend. People think that he only wants to talk to, you know, high level folks at the White House or-- not really that at all. He wants to hear what everybody thinks.

TOM BROKAW:

I've known Chuck Todd since Tim Russert brought him to NBC News. And we agreed (CHUCKLE) that he was a walking encyclopedia of politics. He knew all the players, all the moves, all the consequences. And, as the director of our national polling, he also knew where the country stood on these many issues. So Chuck Todd is the perfect man for this job, especially in this critical year.

I'm here in Montana, where Chuck and I have been talking about how the Republicans hope to pick up a Senate seat. But there are a lot of these contests across the country. This is a time when American politics is not only in play, but it's on trial, in many ways. And Chuck is the guy who can bring this home to the American people. So I want to wish you all the best, my friend. I also want to wish all the best to another friend, to David Gregory, for his future.

BRIAN WILLIAMS:

So what have we learned? Chuck Todd is a goatee enthusiast. He is a walking political briefing book. But most of all, he is a good guy, and he is, by the way, the only good reason to allow a camera crew on a good, beach day in the waning days of summer here at the Jersey Shore. Mostly for me at work, he is a friend and he's a guy with whom I can talk football year in and year out. The new NFL season is about to start, so, too, begins a whole new season for my friend, Chuck Todd.

(END TAPE)

ANDREA MITCHELL:

Chuck has said that politics is not a game it's a passion, because it reflects the worst and the best of our democracy. And here's here now. Chuck, politics, how did that become a dirty word? Politics is all about America.

CHUCK TODD:

I'm still recovering. My mother in there, (CHUCKLE) my wife, saying things about me, so nice. Anyway it's very--

(OVERTALK)

CHUCK TODD:

Yes, she did surprise me. (CHUCKLE) I did not see that or hear any of that stuff. You know, the issue of politics, and I've said, the art of politics is a very important part of how the world governs itself, how Americans govern themselves. This show today has been emblematic of, like, when Meet the Press was at its best.

I mean that was an amazing-- when I think about that roundtable of General Zinni, Michele Flournoy, Mike Leiter, Mike McFaul, these are people who've been in the room making decisions, helping to translate what's going on inside the situation room for the American public. And you were doing a great job asking them some of the questions the American public is asking. And that's our job as political journalists. In many ways, we're the go-between.

Which is why people sometimes get angry at us. Politicians get angry at us. The public gets angry at us. Because they know that's-- they want us to be that interpreter. And my issue these days when people say, "I hate politics," it's like, "No. No you don't. What you hate is the politicians who don't know how to practice it."

You know, it's like watching a game. You want to compare it to a game, it is like watching a game of people that don't play the game very well. You'd stop watching the game because you're like, "Those baseball players stink," or, "Those football players, they don't respect it." If you have politicians that know how to practice the art of politics, the democracy gets stronger, the world gets safer. And then that's when you realize politics is a good thing.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

And it doesn't stop at the beltway. Because--

CHUCK TODD:

Not at all.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

This is--

CHUCK TODD:

In fact, you know that sometimes (CHUCKLE) the beltway is part of the problem.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

So we go outside and we look at the elections, the midterm election that's coming up. But it all has to do with redistricting.

CHUCK TODD:

Right.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

With things that are very granular but really affect the way people live--

(OVERTALK)

CHUCK TODD:

It is. And I'm frustrated by the fact that people are not participating.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

Yeah.

CHUCK TODD:

And that's why I'm really upset. It's sort of like, "Okay, you guys have really broken it." I've had plenty of advice or critics that say, "You and the media have helped break this." But, you know, that's the part of this, I think, that is problematic is that people aren't participating. So that's one of our jobs is sort of make it big, make it important enough so people realize they have to participate. If you have problems with Washington, look in the mirror.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

And participation, making people care, the passion that you bring to all of this, it's all very exciting.

CHUCK TODD:

Look, I do. It is fun. I'll admit. Politics can be fun, too.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

And you have the last word.

CHUCK TODD:

All right. Well, if it's Sunday, it's Meet the Press. I'll see you next week.

“MEET THE PRESS” 9/7/14 -- CHUCK TODD’S EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH OBAMA: “GAME PLAN” ON ISIS, “SHIFT” ON IMMIGRATION, “OPTICS” OF GOLFING

Obama: “The next phase is now to start going on some offense” against ISIS Plus: Mayors discuss successes despite Washington gridlock; new Senate polling in AK, KY, & CO; and political panels

SEPTEMBER 7, 2014 -- Chuck Todd’s debut as moderator of “Meet the Press” this morning featured an exclusive, wide-ranging interview with **President Barack Obama** on the rise of ISIS in Iraq and Syria, the Ebola threat, the future of immigration reform, the midterm elections, and more. The full, unedited interview is online here: <http://nbcnews.to/1rSghrt>

Chuck was joined by foreign policy and political panelists for reaction and analysis: NBC News chief foreign affairs correspondent **Andrea Mitchell**, NBC News national security analyst **Michael Leiter**, NBC News senior political analyst and host of MSNBC’s “Morning Joe” **Joe Scarborough**, *Washington Post* national political reporter **Nia-Malika Henderson**, BuzzFeed Washington bureau chief **John Stanton**, and the Cook Political Report national editor **Amy Walter**.

Chuck also talked with a panel of mayors about how they’re finding success in their cities: Tacoma, WA’s Mayor **Marilyn Strickland**; Pittsburgh, PA’s Mayor **Bill Peduto**; and Oklahoma City, OK’s Mayor **Mick Cornett**.

And Chuck unveiled new **NBC News/Marist polling** in three key Senate races: Kentucky, Arkansas, and Colorado: <http://nbcnews.to/ZdxVZW>

Below are highlights, video, and a rush transcript of today’s program. All content will be available online at <http://www.MeetThePressNBC.com>.

###

Obama to give speech Wednesday describing “game plan” for dealing with ISIS

PRESIDENT OBAMA: On Wednesday, I'll make a speech and describe what our game plan's going to be going forward. But this is not going to be an announcement about U.S. ground troops. This is not the equivalent of the Iraq war. What this is similar to the kinds of counterterrorism campaigns that we've been engaging in consistently over the last five, six, seven years. And the good news is that because of American leadership, we have I believe, a broad-based coalition internationally and regionally to be able to deal with the problem.

CHUCK TODD: What are you asking of the American people on Wednesday? You say you're giving a speech. That's the type of thing, I assume, you're preparing the country for something. What are you asking of them?

PRESIDENT OBAMA: I just want the American people to understand the nature of the threat and how we're going to deal with it and to have confidence that we'll be able to deal with it. ... I'm confident that I have the authorization that I need to protect the American people. And I'm always going to do what's necessary to protect the American people. But I do think it's important for Congress to understand what the plan is, to have buy in, to debate it.

Obama on confronting ISIS in Syria: “The notion that the United States should be putting boots on the ground, I

think, would be a profound mistake.”

PRESIDENT OBAMA: In Syria, the boots on the ground have to be Syrian. And that's why--

CHUCK TODD: Who?

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Well, we have a Free Syrian Army and a moderate opposition that we have steadily been working with that we have vetted. They have been on the defensive, not just from ISIL, but also from the Assad regime. The strategy both for Iraq and for Syria is that we will hunt down ISIL members and assets wherever they are. I will reserve the right to always protect the American people and go after folks who are trying to hurt us wherever they are. But in terms of controlling territory, we're going to have to develop a moderate Sunni opposition that can control territory and that we can work with. The notion that the United States should be putting boots on the ground, I think would be a profound mistake. And I want to be very clear and very explicit about that.

Pres. Obama defends decision to delay executive action on immigration: “I want to make sure that it’s sustainable”

CHUCK TODD: It looks like election-year politics.

PRES. OBAMA: Not only do I want to make sure that the T's are crossed and the I's are dotted, but here's the other thing, Chuck, and I'm being honest now, about the politics of it. This problem with unaccompanied children that we saw a couple weeks ago, where you had from Central America a surge of kids who are showing up at the border, got a lot of attention. And a lot of Americans started thinking, "We've got this immigration crisis on our hands." And what I want to do is when I take executive action, I want to make sure that it's sustainable.

Obama says Ebola is not a “short term” threat to US, but we need to treat as a national security priority

CHUCK TODD: How concerned are you and how concerned should Americans be?

PRES. OBAMA: Well, Americans shouldn't be concerned about the prospects of contagion here in the United States short term. Because this is not an airborne disease.

CHUCK TODD: I noticed you said "short term" though.

PRES. OBAMA: Well, I'm going to get to that. ... What I said, and I said this two months ago to our national security team is, we have to make this a national security priority. ... If we don't make that effort now, and this spreads not just through Africa, but other parts of the world, there's the prospect then that the virus mutates, it becomes more easily transmittable, and then it could be a serious danger to the United States.

Obama says he “should’ve anticipated the optics” of golfing after statement on beheaded journalist

CHUCK TODD: So during that vacation, you made the statement on Foley, you went and golfed. Do you want that back?

PRES. OBAMA: It is always a challenge when you're supposed to be on vacation because you're followed everywhere. And part of what I'd love is a vacation from the press.

CHUCK TODD: Yeah, you want us to stop following you. I promise you, in two and a half years I think that'll happen.

PRES. OBAMA: Because the possibility of a jarring contrast given the world's news, there's always going to be some tough news somewhere, it's going to be there. But there's no doubt that after having talked to the families, where it was hard for me to hold back tears listening to the pain that they were going through after the statement that I made, that I should've anticipated the optics.

Andrea Mitchell reacts: “He’s got the strategy. The question now will be: will it work?”

ANDREA MITCHELL: He is basically saying he outlining a war against ISIL in Iraq, based on an Iraqi army that has yet to be proved effective at all. So if you're only going to fight them in Iraq, degrade them in Iraq, and then worry about Syria with the Syrian state army that we let down for three years, we have not armed them to their needs, how does that work? So it's a strategy, it's the clearest strategy. This is an incredible interview, in that he's laying it out point by point.

CHUCK TODD: It does. It feels like this is a long way from, "I don't yet have a strategy yet."

ANDREA MITCHELL: No, he's got the strategy. The question now will be will it work.

Scarborough: the media obsesses over things that the American people don't

JOE SCARBOROUGH: But we obsess over things like the "JV team," which I obsess over. Everybody, we all do. The brown suit. The "I don't have a strategy yet." The American people aren't there. It's about safety, it's about security. And again, this president's taking a fairly measured approach. And that's not only where Democrats are, that's where a lot of conservatives are.

Mayors share lessons for Washington: "bridge that divide"

MICK CORNETT: In your interview, the president talked about this great divide between the Republicans and the Democrats. In my view, it's up to the executive branch to be the bridge in that divide. It's what I do with my city council, I think it's one of the ways that our city's been able to move forward so rapidly.

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MARILYN STRICKLAND: I would say that as mayor, you are about being an ambassador and bringing people together. So you have an opportunity to keep focused on the goal and not get bogged down in the partisanship of what can happen.

//

BILL PEDUTO: Well, I mean, the ultimate goal is what is the vision. And it has to be a shared vision, just as we have to work with our councils, the president needs to work with the Congress. But at the end of the day, you have to move forward. The idea that trying to get to perfection for anybody, and especially with a Congress that really does not have a track record right now of getting things done, there has to be that compromise and willing to see that success does happen.

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Complete video clips from today's program:

Obama: the ISIS threat
<http://nbcnews.to/1pEgil2>

Obama: ISIS not "JV"
<http://nbcnews.to/1BkR3TL>

Obama: the Ebola outbreak
<http://nbcnews.to/1uc31ga>

Obama on "optics" of golfing after Foley statement
<http://nbcnews.to/1qtaGFP>

Obama: people want to get stuff done
<http://nbcnews.to/1ur3zxM>

Panel: Obama Has ISIS Strategy, But Will It Work?

<http://nbcnews.to/1ofh6n2>

Michael Leiter: President Downplays Threat

<http://nbcnews.to/1rVCbrB>

Panel: Immigration and the Midterms

<http://nbcnews.to/Ynsckm>

Joe Scarborough: Deja Vu Hearing the Obama Remarks

<http://nbcnews.to/1w4ydlE>

John Stanton: This Election May not Matter Much

<http://nbcnews.to/1oUQN51>

Who Needs Washington?: Mayors Making Progress

<http://nbcnews.to/WAjZHK>

Panel: Mayors Making Progress

<http://nbcnews.to/WugiTD>

NBC News Exclusive: New Polling on the 2014 Midterms

<http://nbcnews.to/1uF9crs>

What Everyone in Washington Knows: What Is Hillary Up to?

<http://nbcnews.to/1BkQAkg>

Panel: Political Theatre

<http://nbcnews.to/1qxR0Av>

Stanton: Optics Recurring Problem for President Obama

<http://nbcnews.to/1CFHL6d>

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**Below is a RUSH transcript of this morning's broadcast -- mandatory attribution to NBC News' "Meet the Press."
A final transcript of the program will be available at www.MeetThePressNBC.com.**

"MEET THE PRESS WITH CHUCK TODD"

September 7, 2014

CHUCK TODD:

This Sunday on Meet the Press, my exclusive interview with President Obama on the ISIS threat.

PRESIDENT OBAMA (ON TAPE):

The next phase is now to start going on some offense.

CHUCK TODD:

On why he's delaying action on immigration.

PRESIDENT OBAMA (ON TAPE):

When I take executive action, I want to make sure that it's sustainable.

CHUCK TODD:

On the political fight.

PRESIDENT OBAMA (ON TAPE):

Give me a loyal opposition that has some common sense.

CHUCK TODD:

And struggling with the theatrics of the presidency.

PRESIDENT OBAMA (ON TAPE):

It's not something that always comes naturally to me.

CHUCK TODD:

Plus, who needs Washington? Cities around the country are making significant change. I'll ask three mayors what they're doing right and what Washington needs to learn. And the battle for the Senate. New, exclusive poll numbers that remind us just when we think we know what's going on, everything can change. It's a packed Sunday, I'm Chuck Todd.

And joining me to provide insight and analysis are NBC's Joe Scarborough, Nia-Malika Henderson of The Washington Post, NBC's chief foreign affairs correspondent Andrea Mitchell, NBC national security analyst Michael Leiter, I've got BuzzFeed's John Stanton, and Amy Walter of the Cook Political Report. Welcome to Sunday, it's Meet the Press.

ANNOUNCER:

From NBC News in Washington, this is Meet the Press.

CHUCK TODD:

And good morning. Obviously it's a pretty big honor for me to be sitting in this chair as the 12th moderator of the program, following in the footsteps of the likes of Martha Rountree, Lawrence Spivak, Tim Russert, and of course, David Gregory. And as you can see, we're making a few changes around here.

As I like to say, we're living in a house as we remodel it. So the program and this studio will continue to evolve over the coming months. But what better way to start off on my first show than with an exclusive sit-down with the president of the United States.

(BEGIN TAPE)

CHUCK TODD (Voiceover):

To say it's been a long, hot summer for President Obama is quite an understatement. The brutal rise of ISIS and Iraq and Syria and their execution of two American journalists triggered U.S. airstrikes in Iraq. And the president inviting criticism when he made this frank admission:

PRESIDENT OBAMA (ON TAPE):

We don't have a strategy yet.

CHUCK TODD (Voiceover):

More criticism came when he went golfing shortly after condemning James Foley's murder. All this contributing to a sense the world is spinning out of the president's control. At home, the president's approval ratings have hit all-time lows. And many Democrats are desperate to distance themselves from the White House. All this hanging over his head, yesterday I sat down with the president in the Cabinet Room of the White House.

CHUCK TODD:

Mr. President, welcome back to your 12th appearance on Meet the Press.

PRES. OBAMA:

Great to see you.

CHUCK TODD:

Thanks for doing this. We start with a very basic question. Are you preparing the country to go back to war?

PRES. OBAMA:

I'm preparing the country to make sure that we deal with a threat from ISIL. Keep in mind that this is something that we know how to do. We've been dealing with terrorist threats for quite some time. This administration has systematically dismantled Al Qaeda in the FATA.

ISIL poses a broader threat because of its territorial ambitions in Iraq and Syria. But the good news is coming back from the most recent NATO meeting is the entire international community understands that this is something that has to be dealt with.

So what I have done over the last several months is, first and foremost, make sure that we got eyes on the problem, that we shifted resources, intelligence, reconnaissance. We did an assessment on the ground. The second step was to make sure that we protected American personnel, our embassies, our consulates. That

included taking air strikes to ensure that towns like Erbil were not overrun, critical infrastructure, like the Mosul Dam was protected, and that we were able to engage in key humanitarian assistance programs that have saved thousands of lives.

The next phase is now to start going on some offense. We have to get an Iraqi government in place. And I'm optimistic that next week, we should be able to get that done. And I will then meet with congressional leaders on Tuesday. On Wednesday, I'll make a speech and describe what our game plan's going to be going forward. But this is not going to be an announcement about U.S. ground troops. This is not the equivalent of the Iraq war. What this is is similar to the kinds of counterterrorism campaigns that we've been engaging in consistently over the last five, six, seven years. And the good news is that because of American leadership, we have I believe, a broad-based coalition internationally and regionally to be able to deal with the problem.

CHUCK TODD:

What are you asking of the American people on Wednesday? You say you're giving a speech. That's the type of thing, I assume, you're preparing the country for something. What are you asking of them?

PRES. OBAMA:

I just want the American people to understand the nature of the threat and how we're going to deal with it and to have confidence that we'll be able to deal with it.

CHUCK TODD:

you're giving that speech the day before the 13th anniversary of 9/11.

PRES. OBAMA:

But right. And I--I want everybody to understand that we have not seen any immediate intelligence about threats to the homeland from ISIL. That's not what this is about. What it's about is an organization that, if allowed to control significant amounts of territory, to amass more resources, more arms to attract more foreign fighters, including from areas like Europe, who have Europeans who have visas and then can travel to the United States unimpeded, that over time, that can be a serious threat to the homeland.

So what I'm going to be ask-- asking the American people to understand is, number one, this is a serious threat. Number two, we have the capacity to deal with it. Here's how we're going to deal with it. I am going to be asking Congress to make sure that they understand and support what our plan is. And it's going to require some resources, I suspect, above what we are currently doing in the region--

CHUCK TODD:

This is asking Congress for a vote, an authorization of your strategy. This is not a what-- what does that mean?

PRES. OBAMA:

Well, I-- I-- I'm confident that I have the authorization that I need to protect the American people. And I'm always going to do what's necessary to protect the American people. But I do think it's important for Congress to understand what the plan is, to have buy in, to debate it.

And that's why we've been consulting with Congress throughout. And this speech will allow Congress, I think, to understand very clearly and very specifically what it is that we are doing but also what we're not doing. We're not looking at sending in 100,000 American troops.

We are going to be as part of an international coalition, carrying out air strikes in support of work on the ground by Iraqi troops, Kurdish troops. We are going to be helping to put together a plan for them, so that they can start retaking territory that ISIL had taken over.

What I want people to understand, though, is that over the course of months, we are going to be able to not just blunt the momentum of ISIL. We are going to systematically degrade their capabilities. We're going to shrink the territory that they control. And ultimately we're going to defeat 'em.

CHUCK TODD:

Long way, long way from when you described them as a JV team.

PRES. OBAMA:

Well, I--

CHUCK TODD:

Was that bad intelligence or your misjudgment?

PRES. OBAMA:

Keep-- keep-- keep in mind I wasn't specifically referring to ISIL. I've said that, regionally, there were a whole series of organizations that were focused primarily locally. Weren't focused on homeland, because I think a lot of us, when we think about terrorism, the model is Osama bin Laden and 9/11. And the point that I was--

CHUCK TODD:

You don't believe these people--

PRES. OBAMA:

Not yet. But they-- they can evolve. And I was very specific at that time. What I said was, not every regional terrorist organization is automatically a threat to us that would call for a major offensive. Our goal should not be to think that we can occupy every country where there's a terrorist organization.

CHUCK TODD:

You've not said the word, "Syria," so far in our conversation. Obviously, if you're going to defeat ISIS, you have used very much stronger language. It's gone through the week during your trip to Wales. You have got to go to Syria in some form or another.

You've ruled out boots on the ground. And I'm curious, have you only ruled them out simply for domestic political reasons? Or is there another reason you've ruled out American boots on the ground? Because your own-- your own guys have said, "You can't defeat ISIS with air strikes alone."

PRES. OBAMA:

Well, they're absolutely right about that. But you also cannot, over the long term or even the medium term, deal with this problem by having the United States serially occupy various countries all around the Middle East. We don't have the resources. It puts enormous strains on our military. And at some point, we leave. And then things blow up again. So we--

CHUCK TODD:

Like what happened in Iraq.

PRES. OBAMA:

--so-- so we've gotta have a more sustainable strategy, which means the boots on the ground have to be Iraqi.

CHUCK TODD:

What about boots--

PRES. OBAMA:

And-- and in Syria, the boots on the ground have to be Syrian. And that's why--

CHUCK TODD:

Who?

PRES. OBAMA:

Well-- we have a Free Syrian Army and a moderate opposition that we have steadily been working with that we have vetted. They have been on the defensive, not just from ISIL, but also from the Assad regime. The strategy both for Iraq and for Syria is that we will hunt down ISIL members and assets wherever they are. I will-- reserve the right to always protect the American people and go after folks who are trying to hurt us wherever they are. But in terms of controlling territory, we're going to have to develop-- a moderate Sunni opposition that can control territory and that we can work with. The notion that the United States should be putting boots on the ground, I think-- would be a profound mistake. And-- I want to be very clear and very explicit about that.

CHUCK TODD:

I-- I got a somewhat snarky email from-- from-- a casual viewer who said, "The United States gives a lotta military aid to Saudi Arabia. It's about time they use it." What do you say to that?

PRES. OBAMA:

Well, I think that it is absolutely true that we're going to need Sunni states to step up-- not just Saudi Arabia, our partners like Jordan, United-- Arab Emirates-- Turkey. They need to be involved. This is their neighborhood. The dangers that are posed-- are-- are more directed at them right now than they are us.

And the good news is, I think, for the first time, perhaps the first time, we have absolute clarity that the problem for Sunni states in the region, many of whom are our allies, is not simply Iran. It's not simply a Sunni-Shia issue. Sunni extremism, as represented by ISIL, is the biggest danger that they face right now.

CHUCK TODD:

Assad essentially putting-- putting aside that priority that Assad must go, because ISIS is a more direct threat?

PRES. OBAMA:

You know-- the reason we're in this situation is because-- Assad-- brutalized his people and specifically brutalized the Sunni population that is the majority in Syria. It's going to be hard for us to attract Sunnis to fight against ISIL in this area if they think that we're doing it on behalf of Assad.

So-- our attitude towards Assad continues to be that-- you know, through his actions, through using chemical weapons on his own people, dropping barrel bombs-- that killed-- innocent children-- that he-- he has foregone legitimacy. But when it comes to our policy and the coalition that we're putting together, our focus specifically is on ISIL.

(END TAPE)

CHUCK TODD:

Part one of my interview there. Some of you may have noted that I said the president hadn't mentioned the word "Syria" at all in one of my questions. He had mentioned it, but he hadn't said whether he was taking military action there. Let me get a little bit of reaction here. Joe, Nia, Andrea, and Mike Leiter are here. Mike, let me start with you, former head of the counterterrorism center. Is that a president that now is getting briefing from your successor now, and that believes those briefings?

MICHAEL LEITER:

He believes that they are a threat regionally. I don't think they see this as a homeland threat to the same degree that they should. The fact is--

CHUCK TODD:

You think he's downplaying the 9/11 threat too much?

MICHAEL LEITER:

I think they can transition much more quickly than we might detect from a regional threat to a threat to the homeland. And what we do know, as you talked about, we defeated organizations before, Al Qaeda in Pakistan, it has to include the offense. And that has to be in Syria. You can't get around that. And that's the long pole in the tent.

CHUCK TODD:

Okay, we talked about Saudi Arabia, he brought up he wants this moderate Sunni. John Kerry, your beat, is traveling all there this week. Is that going to happen?

ANDREA MITCHELL:

It's going to take a while because you can't totally roll back. You can't in fact roll back what happened for three years. The Saudis and others in the region are very upset, they're angry, they don't trust this president to go after Assad, because he didn't. And he is basically saying he's outlining a war against ISIL in Iraq, based on an Iraqi army that has yet to be proved effective at all.

So if you're only going to fight them in Iraq, degrade them in Iraq, and then worry about Syria with the Syrian state army that we let down for three years, we have not armed them to their needs, how does that work? So it's a strategy, it's the clearest strategy. This is an incredible interview, in that he's laying it out point by point.

CHUCK TODD:

It does. It feels like this is a long way from, "I don't yet have a strategy yet."

ANDREA MITCHELL:

No, he's got the strategy. The question now will be will it work.

CHUCK TODD:

Obviously we refer to it at NBC News as ISIL. The Obama administration, president says the word ISIL. The last S

stands for Syria, the last L they don't want to have stand for Syria. Joe, he's going to give a speech, American public. What does he need to say, do you think, that will rally the public to his strategy?

JOE SCARBOROUGH:

I think he laid it out pretty well. I mean, we have other remember, you look at the polls, and six months ago, three months ago, the American people said they didn't want to get involved. They didn't want the hyperactive foreign policy. We are an exhausted nation. And I think this president's taking a fairly reasonable, measured response. Now we obsess--

CHUCK TODD:

Do you think he's been poll-driven about it? Do you think that's why the delayed any action?

JOE SCARBOROUGH:

I don't think he's been poll-driven enough for a lot of Democratic senators who this past week started breaking and suddenly they're sounding a lot more like John McCain than you would expect Democratic senators to sound.

CHUCK TODD:

Yes, they are.

JOE SCARBOROUGH:

But we obsess over things like the "JV team," which I obsess over. Everybody, we all do. The brown suit. The "I don't have a strategy yet." The American people aren't there. It's about safety, it's about security. And again, this president's taking a fairly measured approach. And that's not only where Democrats are, that's where a lot of conservatives are.

CHUCK TODD:

It seemed like a pretty serious (UNINTEL). So there's a vote in Congress. He's asking for a vote. It's interesting. Not authorization, he says, but he wants them to basically thumbs up or thumbs down on his plan. That's what he's asking for. How's that vote going to go?

NIA-MALIKA HENDERSON:

Yeah, I mean, he talked about a buy-in, right? He didn't specifically say authorization, he said he had that authorization.

CHUCK TODD:

By the way, "buy-in" really is funding.

NIA-MALIKA HENDERSON:

Yes, exactly, exactly.

CHUCK TODD:

Let's remember what that really is.

NIA-MALIKA HENDERSON:

He talks a little bit about, oh, resources, right, and that's exactly what. I was on the Hill last week, and it looks like this Congress is looking at this next two weeks where they're all on the Hill as sort of a lame-duck period, right? And trying to do the bare minimum. So that might be what he faces going forward, and he is also facing Congress that might not want to go forward on an authorization.

CHUCK TODD:

Let's see, what's going on in November?

NIA-MALIKA HENDERSON:

That's right.

CHUCK TODD:

There's something that's happening in two weeks for these guys.

ANDREA MITCHELL:

Yeah, the first week in October.

CHUCK TODD:

They are. It'll be interesting, do they really want to use September to debate that?

ANDREA MITCHELL:

But they do have scheduled hearings for the 16th of September.

NIA-MALIKA HENDERSON:

And Bill Nelson is going to put forward a bill as well on this authorization. So we'll see.

CHUCK TODD:

All right. Well we now know what our September's going to be about. It's about ISIS both abroad and here. Thank you Andrea and Michael for being here. My national security gurus, Joe and Nia, are sticking around. We've got a lot more of the president's interview. Taking some heat for delaying the executive action on immigration. But you'll hear how he tries to explain why politics wasn't behind it. And then there's Ebola. He says the U.S. has no choice but to take charge.

PRESIDENT OBAMA (ON TAPE):

There's the prospect then that the virus mutates, it becomes more easily transmittable, and then it could be a serious danger to the United States.

COMMERCIAL BREAK

CHUCK TODD:

And welcome back. This morning's New York Times says this: "Given the world's weakness on Ebola, that the United States needs to take the lead." Well, in the second part of my exclusive interview with President Obama, I asked him about that as well as his decision to delay executive action on immigration till after the election.

(BEGIN TAPE)

CHUCK TODD:

I'm going to go to immigration. You made a decision to delay any executive action until after the election. What do you tell the person that's going to get deported before the election that this decision was essentially made in your hopes of saving a Democratic Senate?

PRES. OBAMA:

Well, that's not the reason. A couple of things that I want to say about immigration. Number one, I have been consistent about why this is important. The country's going to be better off if we have an immigration system that works. That has strong border security, that has streamlined our legal immigration system. So the best and the brightest who want to stay here and invest here and create jobs here can do so.

That families can be unified, and that a system where the millions of people who are here in many cases for a decade or more, who have American kids, who are neighbors, who oftentimes are our friends, that they have a path to get legal by paying taxes, and getting above board, paying a fine, learning English if they have to. So the good news is, we have bipartisan support for that. We have a Senate bill that would accomplish that. The House Republicans refuse to do it. And what I said to them was, "If you do not act on something that's so common sense that you've got labor, business, evangelicals, law enforcement, you've got folks across the board supporting it, then I'm going to look for all the legal authorities I have to act." I want to make sure we get it right. I want to make sure, number one, that all the T's are crossed.

CHUCK TODD:

Looks like politics. I mean, it looks like election-year politics.

PRES. OBAMA:

Not only do I want to make sure that the T's are crossed and the I's are dotted, but here's the other thing, Chuck, and I'm being honest now, about the politics of it. This problem with unaccompanied children that we saw a couple weeks ago, where you had from Central America a surge of kids who are showing up at the border, got a lot of attention. And a lot of Americans started thinking, "We've got this immigration crisis on our hands." And what I want to do is when I take executive action, I want to make sure that it's sustainable. I want to make sure that--

CHUCK TODD:

But the public's not behind you.

PRES. OBAMA:
No, no, no, no.

CHUCK TODD:
Are you concerned the public wouldn't support what you did?

PRES. OBAMA:
What I'm saying is that I'm going to act because it's the right thing for the country. But it's going to be more sustainable and more effective if the public understands what the facts are on immigration, what we've done on unaccompanied children, and why it's necessary.

CHUCK TODD:
Ebola. There's some anxiety in the country about it. Obviously, it's something that Africa's trying to get its hands around. But there's obviously anxiety in the United States. How concerned are you and how concerned should Americans be?

PRES. OBAMA:
Well, Americans shouldn't be concerned about the prospects of contagion here in the United States short term. Because this is not an airborne disease.

CHUCK TODD:
I noticed you said "short term" though.

PRES. OBAMA:
Well, I'm going to get to that. It's not an airborne disease like the flu. You can only catch it through the transmission of bodily fluids. The problem that we've got is in right now a limited portion of Western Africa. So what I said, and I said this two months ago to our national security team is, we have to make this a national security priority.

CHUCK TODD:
It's going to be a U.S.-led effort.

PRES. OBAMA:
As usual. And we're going to have to get U.S. military assets just to set up, for example, isolation units and equipment there to provide security for public health workers surging from around the world. If we do that, then it's still going to be months before this problem is controllable in Africa. But it shouldn't reach our shores. Now here's the last point I'm going to make. If we don't make that effort now, and this spreads not just through Africa, but other parts of the world, there's the prospect then that the virus mutates, it becomes more easily transmittable, and then it could be a serious danger to the United States.

CHUCK TODD (PRETAPE):
What's the rationale for this election? I'm going to be a little cynical here. \$3 billion, I would argue, is being decided to see if it's Harry Reid or Mitch McConnell that's in charge of gridlock in the Senate. I mean, we're talking, what's the difference between a two-seat-Democratic majority and a two-seat-Republican majority as far as your agenda is concerned?

PRES. OBAMA:
First of all, there's a sharp difference between the Democratic agenda and the Republican agenda. And the American people need to know that. If you've got a Democratic senate, that means bills are being introduced to raise the minimum wage. That's something Democrats support. We think America needs a raise.

CHUCK TODD:
Was that on your desk?

PRES. OBAMA:
I'll get to that. Equal pay for equal work. We care about that. The Republicans, that's not their priority. We think it's important to make sure that issues like family leave and family-friendly policies and more effective childcare are in place so that folks are getting help, that young people are getting more assistance when it comes to paying

for college educations. Rebuilding our infrastructure. Putting folks back other work on our roads, our bridges. All of which would boost our economy now and boost it into the future. On all those issues, there's a sharp contrast. Now it is true that if the house stays Republican, that it's unlikely that I get a lot of these bills to my desk. But it makes a big difference if we've got at least one branch in Congress that is presenting these ideas, making arguments.

I know that given the gridlock that we've seen over the last couple years, it's easy to say that these midterms don't matter. But the fact of the matter is that on every issue that's important to middle class Americans, overwhelmingly, we're seeing a majority prefer the Democratic option.

And us having a Democratic Senate that can present those issues and put them forward, just like they did on immigration, even if the House Republicans fail to act means that we're debating the right stuff for the country, we're debating the things that are going to help us grow.

CHUCK TODD:

This wouldn't be Meet the Press if I didn't have a chart with me. Your year of action on the State of the Union. And it's a little small here, it'll be bigger for the television viewers.

PRES. OBAMA:

Yeah, you've got to make it bigger.

CHUCK TODD:

I will. Yeah, there you go. A lot not accomplished here. The one thing about in your State of the Union, support Syrian rebels is there. But immigration, overhauling the tax system, raising the minimum wage. You brought up the issues yourself.

PRES. OBAMA :

Exactly.

CHUCK TODD:

That was with a Democratic Senate. So that's why you look at this and you sit there and say, "How do things change?" And do you think your presidency's in bigger trouble then if you have a Republican Senate?

PRES. OBAMA:

I think elections matter, I think votes matter. And given the fact that the punditry overwhelmingly felt that this was going to be--

CHUCK TODD:

You're overtly pointing at me.

PRES. OBAMA:

That this was going to be a good year for Senate Republicans because the seats that were up were in states that were tilting or with significant Republican majorities. If Democrats hold the Senate, I think that should get Republicans to once again--

CHUCK TODD:

I think that sends a national message.

PRES. OBAMA:

I think what it does is to send a message to Republicans that people want to get stuff done. That their strategy of just obstructing and saying no to every piece of legislation that might help middle class families, that might create ladders of opportunity for people, that that is an agenda that the American people reject.

And that then gives us room, hopefully, to find some compromises. Look, I've said this before, Chuck. If you ask me back in August what I want for my birthday, I'd say, "Give me a loyal opposition that has some common sense and is willing to work on some basic issues that didn't used to be partisan issues."

(END TAPE)

CHUCK TODD:

Well, for more reaction on the domestic portion of my interview there, Joe and Nia are back. John Stanton of BuzzFeed is here, because we didn't have enough goatees on the desk for the first time as well. And Amy Walter, of course, of the Cook Political Report. Joe, let me quickly start with you. You just made a comment off-camera,

make it on-camera what you just said. You thought you've déjà vu all over again.

JOE SCARBOROUGH:

I'm just surprised. I think the president's more engaged than he's been engaged. I've been watching and saying, "You know what? This guy looks like he's finally getting reenergized and he's ready to play." But then I hear him say, "Well, you know, if we win this time, then this time, Republicans are going to get the message they have to work with us."

He had said that to me in 2012 before the election. He said, "Well, if it wasn't this time, then they'll understand that I'm legitimate and dah, dah, dah." And I said, "Well, Bill Clinton got re-elected, and we impeached him the second time."

CHUCK TODD:

Is that where you're headed?

JOE SCARBOROUGH:

No, it's not where I'm headed. But the idea that if Republicans don't win this time that suddenly they're going to play ball isn't the answer. The answer is figuring out the way you figure it out. And how do you come to a deal with these guys on issues that matter?

CHUCK TODD:

You know, Stanton, he was trying to make the rational for why the midterms matter. And when you have to say, "I know some people don't think, but they really do matter."

JOHN STANTON:

You've already lost.

CHUCK TODD:

That's a tough sell. Clearly it's about energizing the Democratic base. He was the xylophone, as Chris Matthews likes to call it. He was trying to tap all the right notes for the right constituency group.

JOHN STANTON:

Yeah, I mean, if you look at it, he went down the laundry list of things to get women out, to try to get Latinos out. But, you know, the reality is, is that this election sort of doesn't matter. Unless there is something that happens over the next two or three weeks that creates a massive wave.

CHUCK TODD:

I'm trying to have a bunch of shows here before that fully--

(OVERTALK)

JOHN STANTON:

But no, I mean, in terms of legislation passing. If Democrats keep the Senate, and they have, what, a two-seat or a one-seat majority, or if Republicans take it and have a two-seat or one-seat majority, you still are left with essentially the same dynamic in Washington. Until, as Joe says, until he figures out a way to get around that, it's going to stay the same.

CHUCK TODD:

All right, let's go to the immigration issue here, Amy and Nia. First of all, nobody's happy with this decision. We've got the president getting hit left and right. Here is America's Voice Education Fund, a pro-immigration rights group. "In June, President Obama promised he would take every action he could to fix our broken immigration system before the end of the summer. Today, President Obama said that he won't until after the election, but delay comes with a human cost."

Meanwhile, John Boehner says that there's never a right time for the president to declare amnesty by executive action, but the decision to simply delay the deeply controversial, and possibly unconstitutional unilateral action till after the election instead of abandoning the idea all together, smacks of raw politics.

NIA-MALIKA HENDERSON:

Isn't it always raw politics, Chuck?

(OVERTALK)

CHUCK TODD:

This is more so than most though from the president.

NIA-MALIKA HENDERSON:

It is, although I will say this. He is correct when he said after the crisis on the border, there was a jump in concern. And you can see that in the polls, when this issue really on border security went up. Where it becomes raw politics is when you recognize that Democrats are playing complete defense this year in the race for the Senate.

They're playing in red states where this issue is always going to be red hot. So whether there was a border security issue or not, taking executive action on anything that Republicans can call amnesty was going to boost up the Republican base.

JOE SCARBOROUGH:

And you look also, Arkansas, Louisiana, North Carolina, Alaska, Kentucky, Montana, Georgia. This is not helping single Democrat in any--

(OVERTALK)

CHUCK TODD:

But in fact, Nia, let me put up this map. You had this great stat. Look, eight of the night states with competitive Senate races, Hispanics make up less than 10% of the election.

NIA-MALIKA HENDERSON:

That's right, that's right, I mean, very small. I mean, if you look at those southern states are right now, I mean, it's anywhere between 3% and 8% of this electorate. It'll be different going forward. But you do see this population boom among Hispanics. You look at a state like Colorado, this is going to matter. You already have Mark Udall saying he wishes the president would've moved forward on this. 12% of the electorate in Colorado will likely be Latino.

CHUCK TODD:

Well, that's why I wondered. He's trying to get the Democratic base out. And this is going to upset.

NIA-MALIKA HENDERSON:

In that one state. But let's just say this: 2016, this is a bigger problem for Republicans going forward.

CHUCK TODD:

No doubt, no doubt.

NIA-MALIKA HENDERSON:

If they are seen as a party that still is not bringing Latinos, that is a big, big, problem.

CHUCK TODD:

Do you think that they're thinking about 2016. They're not thinking about--

(OVERTALK)

JOE SCARBOROUGH:

They're more worried about that than they worry about that.

CHUCK TODD:

Exactly, exactly. All right, coming up, I've got more from President Obama. But first, a little bit of a break here. What Washington can learn from America's cities, where more and more mayors are getting things done despite the red/blue divide.

COMMERCIAL BREAK

CHUCK TODD:

And welcome back. We're introducing a new feature here on Meet the Press, who needs Washington? Dysfunction here has left Congress with all-time low approval ratings. The president, not far

behind. But away from Washington, many of America's cities are growing and revitalizing rapidly under the leadership of some dynamic mayors. My colleague Kevin Tibbles now on how many cities have put partisanship aside to put people over politics.

(BEGIN TAPE)

KEVIN TIBBLES:

There are cities across this nation pulling themselves from the depths of desperate economic times by rolling up their sleeves and going it on their own with little of Washington's help or dysfunction. From Houston and its Rebuild Houston plan, 200 projects to improve quality of life with a quarter billion of mostly local, taxpayer dollars, to Seattle, which voted to raise the minimum raise.

And Detroit, where private money is revitalizing a more abundant motor city. In Oklahoma City, what used to look like this now looks like this. All designed to jumpstart city economies. And Census Bureau figures now show many urban populations are on the rebound.

KEVIN TIBBLES:

How desperate was Oklahoma City?

MICK CORNETT:

We may have had the worst economy in the country. We finally decided we're going to have to invest in ourselves. No one's going to come bail us out.

KEVIN TIBBLES:

Mayor Mick Cornett says Oklahoma City had been decimated. A tanked economy, the horror of the bombing of the federal building, and a tornado had left it desperate for rebranding.

MICK CORNETT:

It's almost as if we grabbed hands, pulled each other up, and dared the world to separate us again.

KEVIN TIBBLES:

A penny on the dollar sales tax was agreed to. Yes, a tax increase that will pump some \$1.8 billion into rebuilding everything from a new minor league baseball stadium, to the Bricktown Entertainment District. Attracting young people seeking vibrant city life and seniors seeking services, every school in the city received dollars for improvements. And to ensure the city God noticed and stayed noticed, it lobbied for and won an NBA franchise. The funder and star player Kevin Durant now call Oklahoma City home.

MICK CORNETT:

This place is humming. This place is on fire right now.

KEVIN TIBBLES:

The secret, this town's Republican mayor says, is in attracting people. If they come, businesses will follow. And it's all been done without a penny of debt and with little help from Washington.

MICK CORNETT:

We stand here and look with our jaws open at the inefficiencies of Washington, where it seems more important to win some partisan argument than it does to deliver a service to the citizens of your community.

KEVIN TIBBLES:

Here, he says there are no Republican potholes, or Democratic potholes. And getting them fixed has been taken care of right here locally. For Meet the Press, Kevin Tibbles.

(END TAPE)

CHUCK TODD:

I'm now joined by three mayors who are getting things done, Republican Mick Cornett, of Oklahoma City, who we just saw there in that spot, Democrat Bill Peduto of Pittsburgh, and Marilyn Strickland of Tacoma, Washington, who is an independent. Look at that, DRI, perfectly. Mayor Strickland, I'll start with you, and I know there's a little Seattle/Oklahoma City rivalry there with the basketball team, so don't get too upset still about the old Sonics. But what's familiar in his story, in Mayor Cornett's story, in Oklahoma City to you?

MARILYN STRICKLAND:

What was familiar to me was the story of resilience. And I think that's something that Oklahoma City shares with Tacoma and Pittsburgh. It's about economies that struggled in the past, but are really trying to rebound by doing innovative things right in our own community.

CHUCK TODD:

I think what's interesting is you're also-- you went to the private sector. You got the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation, they're obviously local, they helped you transform an education project you were trying to do.

MARILYN STRICKLAND:

Absolutely. It's the Tacoma Housing Authority project, the McCarver project. And we're basically trying to address the fact that for a lot of students who aren't doing well in elementary school, it's mobility. The families move around too much. So through this project, we were able to stabilize housing for five years through housing vouchers and give these families a chance for stability.

You know, Mayor Peduto, the story of Pittsburgh, it's been America's most livable city, people have been talking about it, transforming from the manufacturing economy to the sort of new-tech economy. What is it about Washington that you wish could help you out more? Or have you just said, "Forget it. We'll just have to find different ways."

BILL PEDUTO:

Well, I think living in a new normal. I mean, Pittsburgh's overnight success story was 30 years in the making. And it really came through an idea that it would be transformed into something that it wasn't. So today we're looking and we're saying how do we become a city of learning, in partnerships with the White House, or early on conversations with the president and with his administration on if early childhood education isn't going to take off in Washington. Or, if it's going to take two years in battles to get something that may be watered down. Find a dozen innovative mayors around the country. Let us run with the ball.

CHUCK TODD:

Right, be a little pilot project.

BILL PEDUTO:

And we had Secretary Duncan come into Pittsburgh to announce a competitive grant, which I'm sure I'm going to be competing with these mayors on. But you know what? We're going to do it. And we'll create universal education for four year olds, and I want Pittsburgh to be that type of city, as I'm sure every mayors want to see in their cities. Washington has to understand it's about getting the job done and it really isn't about the political victory that holds us back.

CHUCK TODD:

You know, it's interesting, Mayor Cornett. You've advocated for tax increases when you've needed it. Explain how you do, here are, a Republican, deep red Oklahoma. Let's not pretend. This is not light red, this is deep red Oklahoma. You've got people to back tax increases. What do you pull off that maybe Republicans in Capitol Hill can't?

MICK CORNETT:

I think the citizens of Oklahoma City have begun to differentiate between the type of government they don't mind paying for and the type they don't like to pay for. I think they like capital projects that they can go up and touch and feel and they know they're going to be long-lasting. I think they're less enthused about social programs that they really wonder how efficiently-run they are.

CHUCK TODD:

You know, what would you say a lesson to Washington should be of your story? And it's really the same question to all of you guys. What's one lesson they want to take away from Oklahoma City?

MICK CORNETT:

In your interview, the president talked about this great divide between the Republicans and the Democrats. In my view, it's up to the executive branch to be the bridge in that divide. It's what I do with my city council, I think it's one of the ways that our city's been able to move forward so rapidly.

CHUCK TODD:

What about you, Mayor Strickland?

MARILYN STRICKLAND:

I would say that as mayor, you are about being an ambassador and bringing people together. So you have an opportunity to keep focused on the goal and not get bogged down in the partisanship of what can happen.

CHUCK TODD:

All right, it's easy to say though, Mayor Peduto, but we all know raw politics is there. It seems like Washington is there. But what's something you would tell these guys enough?

BILL PEDUTO:

Well, I mean, the ultimate goal is what is the vision. And it has to be a shared vision, just as we have to work with our councils, the president needs to work with the Congress. But at the end of the day, you have to move forward. The idea that trying to get to perfection for anybody, and especially with a Congress that really does not have a track record right now of getting things done, there has to be that compromise and willing to see that success does happen.

CHUCK TODD:

Well, we want to show that some people do practice the art of politics. Remember, it's not politics that people hate, it's that they hate the politicians that don't know how to practice the art of it. Anyway, Mayor Strickland, Mayor Strickland, Mayor Peduto, thanks for being on my inaugural show. I really appreciate. Coming up, some very surprising polling numbers and the president's reaction to the criticism that he played golf shortly after talking about James Foley's murder.

PRES. OBAMA (ON TAPE):

I should've anticipated the optics.

COMMERCIAL BREAK

CHUCK TODD:

A few more exclusives to unveil on our show, one is of course our new election look, you're going to see this a lot, "Decision 2014." But more importantly, we have a few new polls to show you. Plus I'll show you a few new toys. But of course, the Senate battleground this year, this is the big kahuna, who's going to control the Senate. As you see here, these are 11 seats in play right now. Red-state Democrats, are they going to hold on in Arkansas? Swing-state Democrats, are they going to hold on in Colorado? We took a look in Kentucky, one of the few Republican seats in play, and here's what we found out. In red-state Arkansas, Mark Pryor is struggling. He's behind Tom Cotton by five points.

In red-state Kentucky, Alison Grimes, a Democrat, tons of money, she's behind eight. Not looking very good for her. But look in Colorado here, Democrat's got to feel a little bit better that Mark Udall in purple-to-blue Colorado is hanging on. But this idea that somehow Democrats cut into the Republican momentum of the summer doesn't look very true. And our polls will have a lot more about this right after the break.

COMMERCIAL BREAK

CHUCK TODD:

And one final chunk of my interview with the president, where we talked about the pressure of job. And how he sometimes struggles being under the relentless scrutiny.

(BEGIN TAPE)

CHUCK TODD:

I've had former aides of yours, plenty of supporters of yours say to me, "He looks exhausted." Are you exhausted?

PRES. OBAMA:

I actually feel energized about the opportunities that we've got. There are days when I'm not getting enough sleep because we've got a lot on our plate. When you're president of the United States, you're not just dealing with the United States, as we saw during the NATO Summit. If there's a problem in the Ukraine, we're the ones who are expected to mobilize the world community to isolate Russia, put pressure, support, Ukrainians, and to vindicate the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity and freedom that we stand for.

If there's a problem in the Middle East, the expectation is, is that we create the coalitions to deal with a problem

like ISIL. If there's an issue in Africa around Ebola, we need to help mobilize that public health infrastructure. And so it's not just me, it's my staff also that our inbox gets pretty high.

CHUCK TODD:

I've got to ask, so during that vacation, you made the statement on Foley, you went and golfed. Do you want that back?

PRES. OBAMA:

It is always a challenge when you're supposed to be on vacation because you're followed everywhere. And part of what I'd love is a vacation from the press.

CHUCK TODD:

Yeah, you want us to stop following you. I promise you, in two and a half years I think that'll happen.

PRES. OBAMA:

Because the possibility of a jarring contrast given the world's news, there's always going to be some tough news somewhere, it's going to be there. But there's no doubt that after having talked to the families, where it was hard for me to hold back tears listening to the pain that they were going through after the statement that I made, that I should've anticipated the optics.

That's part of the job. And I think everybody who knows me, including, I suspect, the press, understands that you take this stuff in and it's serious business. And you care about it deeply. But part of this job is also the theater of it. Part of it is how are you--

CHUCK TODD:

You hate that you--

PRES. OBAMA:

Well, it's not something that always comes naturally to me. But it matters. And I'm mindful of that. So the important thing is in addition to that, is am I getting the policies right? Am I protecting the American people? Am I doing what's necessary?

CHUCK TODD:

Well, I think I need to pre-book you for next week, because I've got about another 35 questions.

PRES. OBAMA:

I appreciate it.

CHUCK TODD:

But I'll let you go with that, Mr. President. Thank you very much for coming on Meet the Press.

PRES. OBAMA:

I enjoyed it. Great to see you.

(END TAPE)

CHUCK TODD:

The full unedited interview is already on the website right now at MeetThePressNBC.com. I want to bring back Joe, Amy, Nia, and Stanton here. Nia, let me start with you. The president talking optics. He hates that aspect of the job. He admitted it. It was sort of a very honest moment.

NIA-MALIKA HENDERSON:

Yeah. I remember a newcomer President Obama in 2008, candidate Obama when he was running. He did get the optics then, right?

CHUCK TODD:

Well, he likes good optics.

NIA-MALIKA HENDERSON:

Yeah.

CHUCK TODD:

Brandenburg Gate, yeah, that's cool.

NIA-MALIKA HENDERSON:

But he got the theater of politics. And this idea that somehow he doesn't get it now, I think he gets it. I think he probably just doesn't care at this point. And is fine with blaming the press.

CHUCK TODD:

Presidents do have to compartmentalize. I mean, that is a fact of the matter.

JOE SCARBOROUGH:

They do.

CHUCK TODD:

If you don't, you could never go to sleep.

JOE SCARBOROUGH:

They do have to compartmentalize. I remember reading a column once by Maureen Dowd talking about first ladies, said, "Pat Nixon made a great peanut butter and jelly sandwich. It relaxed Richard Nixon." And if that is what she needed to do, then she needed to do it. I've always said presidents should be able to golf, they should be able to do whatever they want to do.

Obviously, he made some very clumsy mistakes. And the White House has always said they don't do theater. Well, they do theater they want to do. They don't do theater they don't want to do. So in this case, so I was glad. It was good to hear the president say, "I'm not really good at it. I probably should be a little bit better at optics." That's hard for him.

CHUCK TODD:

You know, Stanton, it's important to note, he's basically saying, "I messed up the optics." He's not saying, "I shouldn't have done the golf." He's basically saying, "Look, I deal with this all the time. You guys just had a different picture."

JOHN STANTON:

Yeah, and I think they've had this problem I think throughout particularly the last couple of years since the last election. But, I mean, it's been a systemic problem for the administration where they don't quite understand that these things matter to people. It does matter to see the president being serious, leaving something like that and not being out laughing and joking with his friends. Even though I think most Americans get that he can compartmentalize and that this does not necessarily impact his ability to do the job. It matters still for them psychologically.

(OVERTALK)

JOE SCARBOROUGH:

Or his impact to win elections. This guy has been attacked for not getting optics since 2008 in many ways. He's won by a larger margin now in '08 and '12 than any other president since Bush in '88. So you can forgive the White House for shrugging and saying, "What's the big deal?"

CHUCK TODD:

But Amy, this is clear, this is the president himself. We know the people behind him are saying, "Hey, don't do it this way, don't do it that way." They think about the optics all the time. At the end of the day, it's the president saying, "You know what? I'm going to do what I want to do."

AMY WALTER:

Exactly. He's going to do what he wants to do. And also, he knows more than you do and than anybody else in the public knows about all the security issues going around this. "So don't tell me that I wasn't taking this seriously. I took 15 calls while I was out there."

CHUCK TODD:

No, absolutely. All right, stick around. Coming up, we have a fun new feature, what everyone in Washington knows but is afraid to say or won't say for some reason this week, what Hillary Clinton's really up to. We'll be right back.

COMMERCIAL BREAK

HILLARY CLINTON (ON TAPE):

I am going to be making a decision around probably after the first of the year about whether I'm going to run again or not. And I will have to be convinced that I have a very clear vision with an agenda of what I think needs to be done.

CHUCK TODD:

You just heard it there, Hillary Clinton. And it dovetails with another new feature we're bringing to the show, simple premise, what everyone in Washington knows, but is afraid to say. So with that in mind, I'm going to make a decision, Amy Walter. But I'm going to have a vision of what it's-- right? Come on. It's done. But I'm glad she did it in Mexico City, because that's where--

AMY WALTER:

What have these past few weeks been? But this book tour has been a rollout for the 2016 campaign. And every time you see her in another venue talking about another issue, it becomes clearer and clearer that this thing is ready to go.

CHUCK TODD:

Yeah, it's obvious, Nia, that she's running. Now January, is it too soon?

NIA-MALIKA HENDERSON:

Well, when she announced before, she announced in January, I think it was January 20th. Obama announced in February.

CHUCK TODD:

She had seven opponents then.

NIA-MALIKA HENDERSON:

Exactly, exactly. To take some of the flak and attention away from her. But she's also going to face the situation where it looks like some of these Republicans, won't name any names, Rand Paul, already seems to be eyeing.

CHUCK TODD:

I guess, Joe, obviously, if she's making the decision in January, I guess it's a way to freeze anybody else. Right? That's the decision, go in, go early, or go home?

JOE SCARBOROUGH:

I hate to be the thick one on the panel, but that's my job, right? I'm going to be different. I'm not so sure she's going to run. It's just like Jeb. I'm still trying to figure out if Jeb's going to run. We get the news this past week that Jeb's freezing everybody. We know she's freezing everybody. But it was such a disastrous book tour, when it should've been so easy. I'm just, why does she want to do it? She's been struggling for a very long time.

CHUCK TODD:

Stanton, where are you on this?

JOHN STANTON:

Well, I think the longer she teases people, the worse it is for her. If she's going to run, she's going to have to come out and say it sooner rather than later, because at some point, it becomes, I mean, it's already sort of ridiculous theater to watch. And the public is going to start to see this.

CHUCK TODD:

All right, guys. I've got to leave it there. That's all we have--

JOE SCARBOROUGH:

--to you next week.

CHUCK TODD:

Then you better. All right, we'll be back next week, because you know why? If it's Sunday, it's Meet the Press.

*****END OF TRANSCRIPT*****

“MEET THE PRESS WITH CHUCK TODD” 9/14/14: MCDONOUGH & BAKER ON ISIS; ‘MEET THE CANDIDATE’ SERIES; POLITICAL PANEL; NEW POLLS

###

THE ISIS THREAT: In his primetime address, President Obama called for an international coalition to destroy ISIS, but what is the status of support from other countries to ensure that more American troops don't return to the region?

Denis McDonough
White House Chief of Staff

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WILL IT WORK? Former Secretary of State James Baker, the architect of the U.S.-led coalition that successfully liberated Kuwait from Saddam Hussain's Iraq in the early 1990's, joins Chuck to discuss President Obama's strategy to combat ISIS.

James Baker
Former Secretary of State

###

MEET THE CANDIDATE: We kick off our 'Meet the Candidate' series in the run-up to 2016 with Sen. Bernie Sanders who, like Hillary Clinton, is in Iowa this weekend.

Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT)

###

POLITICAL PANEL: Insight into President Obama's strategy to roll back the terrorist threat of ISIS; what Hillary Clinton's visit to Iowa means for 2016; and how the NFL in crisis ignited a national conversation about domestic violence.

Nia-Malika Henderson
National Political Reporter, *The Washington Post*

Helene Cooper
Pentagon Correspondent, *The New York Times*

Mike Murphy
Republican Strategist

Jim VandeHei
President and CEO, POLITICO

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ALSO SUNDAY:

-- Analysis of President Obama's plan to "degrade and destroy" ISIS from our two correspondents on the ground: **Richard Engel** in Erbil, Iraq, and **Bill Neely** in Damascus, Syria.

-- **Andrea Mitchell** reports from Iowa, where Hillary Clinton's visit is being seen as a signal of her presidential ambitions. But is she a sure thing to secure the Democratic 2016 nomination?

-- Brand new **NBC News/Wall Street Journal/Annenberg polls** with a look at the latest midterm head-to-head numbers and the country's mood about going to war with ISIS.

“MEET THE PRESS” 9/21/14 -- CAN THE U.S. DEFEAT ISIS WITHOUT TROOPS ON THE GROUND? AMB. POWER, ADM. MULLEN, SENS. JOHNSON & MURPHY WEIGH IN

Ambassador Power: “The commitments are coming in every day”

Sen. Murphy: other countries “aren’t as committed as the United States”

Admiral Mullen on public opinion vs. military recommendations

SEPTEMBER 21, 2014 -- Today’s “Meet the Press with Chuck Todd” featured interviews about the U.S. strategy against ISIS with U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations **Samantha Power**, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Ret. Adm. **Michael Mullen**, and Senate Foreign Relations Committee members **Ron Johnson** (R-WI) and **Chris Murphy** (D-CT); a conversation on the tax debate with **Grover Norquist** and author **Thomas Frank**; and a panel discussion with BuzzFeed’s **John Stanton**, the Center for American Progress’s **Neera Tanden**, the Cook Political Report’s **Amy Walter**, and National Review’s **Ramesh Ponnuru**.

The program also featured a report from NBC News correspondent Kevin Tibbles on the anti-tax fever in Kansas, a look at how the fight for the Senate may turn out to be a battle between Starbucks and Chick-Fil-A, plus Chuck Todd’s take on Democratic candidates running away from President Obama.

Below are highlights, video, and a rush transcript of today’s program. All content will be available online at MeetThePressNBC.com.

###

Amb. Power: “We’re seeing a diverse range of forms of support” in fight against ISIS

CHUCK TODD: What countries in this coalition have committed combat troops to fight in Syria? Have any of them done it yet?

SAMANTHA POWER: Well, let me underscore the point about the outpouring of support. Secretary Kerry convened a meeting of the security council on Friday, where more than 40 countries spoke in support of the anti-ISIL effort, half at the ministerial level. The French, last week, joined combat strike missions in Iraq for the first time. You have the Saudis, who’ve come out and offered training bases for the moderate opposition now that Congress has approved the train and equip program that the president put forward. So we’re seeing a diverse range of forms of support. And the commitments are coming in every day.

Power: training Syrian rebels will aid in fight against Assad

SAMANTHA POWER: May I add, the training also will service these troops in the same struggle that they’ve been in since the beginning of this conflict against the Assad regime. ... We think, with an infusion of support, these fighters, who have actually held their own against this wide array of actors fighting on all fronts, will be in a much stronger position, both to go after ISIL and to put pressure on the regime so we can get back to negotiating table for a political solution.

Sen. Johnson: “We have to recognize reality.”

SEN. RON JOHNSON: Well Chuck, first of all, we have to recognize reality. And if you want to see what is going to happen in the future, you have to look to the past. ... I agree with President Obama’s goal that [ISIS] must be defeated. I’m just not seeing the strategy that’s actually going to work.

CHUCK TODD: So you’re open to the idea of keeping combat troops on the table at some point?

SEN. RON JOHNSON: I’m open-- I’m no military expert. I’m certainly open to doing what it takes to achieve the goal that President Obama has stated we have to defeat ISIS. Because they made their intentions very clear. We know what their aims are. They need to be defeated.

Sen. Murphy: “We totally misunderstand how you beat a group like ISIL.”

SEN. CHRIS MURPHY: We totally misunderstand how you beat a group like ISIL. Military exercises are a shaping exercise to give the space in order to create political resolution there. And so our focus should be on enough military power in order to force changes on the ground in Iraq so that the Sunni moderates have a place to go other than ISIL. That's what we weren't able to do in Libya, because we hadn't made the fulsome commitment to both a military and political strategy there. We've got to be able to do both of those things inside Iraq.

Murphy: other countries “aren’t as committed as the United States”

CHUCK TODD: Well, Senator Murphy, I mean that's the issue here. How do you defeat this ideology? I mean diplomacy isn't going to do it, is it?

SEN. CHRIS MURPHY: And what we've learned is that whenever we kill an extremist, whenever we take out the number two, it seems like another one or two more take their place. So ultimately, you have to get the regional powers to be just as committed. And Chuck, I--

CHUCK TODD: But are they committed?

SEN. CHRIS MURPHY: They aren't as committed as the United States. ... That's the part today. Saudi Arabia is not leading this coalition, the United States is leading this coalition. And that really is going to be the key as to whether this is ultimately successful.

Adm. Mullen: disagreement between President Obama and the military has been “blown way out of proportion”

ADMIRAL MIKE MULLEN: There should not be any question in the end, who decides this. And that's the president. So I think what General Dempsey was trying to do was certainly explain, to some degree, how the process works. I think it's been blown way out of proportion in terms of the disagreement between the military and the president.

Mullen: the question is whether the Saudis support us in Syria

CHUCK TODD: What countries are really capable of being a good ground force and a help in Syria?

ADMIRAL MIKE MULLEN: We've had -- and again, not major combat units -- but we've had forces on the ground in Afghanistan from the UAE. We've had them from Jordan. We've had them, small numbers, from Bahrain. ... The Saudis actually have a capable force. ... I think, in the end, that becomes a question, is will the Saudis support us in that regard? And I don't know the answer to that question, quite frankly.

Mullen: military leaders should not integrate politics or public opinion into their recommendations

CHUCK TODD: As a chairman of the Joint Chiefs, public opinion about a war, public opinion about ground troops -- should it impact the advice you give a commander-in-chief? And does it end up impacting, even if it shouldn't?

ADMIRAL MIKE MULLEN: I didn't see it. I don't think it should. And I didn't certainly integrate it into my recommendations to two presidents. Obviously, you know it's out there. But you're given a mission by the president. You put the options on the table to execute that mission. And it really is up, I think, to the president and his team to integrate all the other aspects of it, the political aspect of it, the policy aspect of it, the confidence they have in terms of executing. ... I didn't see military leaders shape options or shape ideas or come up with plans that were shaped by politics or anticipation of difficulties in that arena. That we really kick over to the president and his team.

Norquist predicts Brownback victory in Kansas: “If you want lower taxes, vote for a Republican governor”

GROVER NORQUIST: One, I think he'll win. Two, I think he'll win because he's done the right thing for the economy. But three, there are 50 states. And in the 30 states with Republican governors, in the last four years, they cut taxes over \$30 billion. The Democrat states, the 20 Democrat states, they raised taxes \$40 billion. If you want your taxes higher, vote for a Democrat governor. If you want lower taxes, vote for a Republican governor.

Frank: "This country is sliding into oligarchy."

THOMAS FRANK: The problem these days in America is not overreaching big government taking away your freedom. Who's taking away your freedom? This country is sliding into oligarchy. You and I know this. President Obama talked about inequality. You look at the top 1% and what they're taking home. Taxes are one of the ways that our ancestors used to deal with this problem, okay? It's off the table today, and look what's happened.

###

Complete video clips from today's program:

Power: 'Diverse range' of Support for ISIS Mission
<http://nbcnews.to/1qWWLJp>

Sen. Johnson: 'You Cannot Negotiate' With ISIS
<http://nbcnews.to/1AZx22O>

Adm. Michael Mullen: The President Decides the Mission
<http://nbcnews.to/1reeyKR>

Kevin Tibbles on the Anti, Anti-Tax Movement in Kansas
<http://nbcnews.to/1p8mkS7>

Grover Norquist: Vote Republican for Lower Taxes
<http://nbcnews.to/1qWX9aA>

The Nerd Screen: Coffee vs. Chicken
<http://nbcnews.to/Z5c3jT>

Chuck Todd Looks at Democrats Contrasting Themselves With Obama
<http://nbcnews.to/1DqGyA7>

Ponnuru on MTP: Distancing From President Never Works
<http://nbcnews.to/1sQzXGR>

What Everyone in Washington Knows: Joe Biden Will Not Run Against Hillary
<http://nbcnews.to/1v6aRGK>

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Below is a RUSH transcript of this morning's broadcast -- mandatory attribution to NBC News' "Meet the Press." A final transcript of the program will be available at www.MeetThePressNBC.com.

**"MEET THE PRESS WITH CHUCK TODD"
September 21, 2014**

CHUCK TODD:
This Sunday on Meet the Press, can we defeat ISIS without troops on the ground?

PRESIDENT OBAMA (ON TAPE):
I will not commit you and the rest of our armed forces to fighting another ground war in Iraq.

CHUCK TODD:

But is that a promise the president can keep?

SEN. JAMES INHOFE (ON TAPE):

This notion that we're not having boots on the ground that the president keeps saying is just not true.

CHUCK TODD:

I'll ask Samantha Power, ambassador to the UN, and Mike Mullen, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, if U.S. troops will be dragged into battle. Also, some Americans saying tax cutting has gone too far.

WINT WINTER, JR. (ON TAPE):

It's been a train wreck.

CHUCK TODD:

Could Republicans now become the victims of a new anti-anti-tax fever? Plus, how the fight for the Senate may really turn out to be a battle between Starbucks and Chick-Fil-A. And what everyone in Washington knows, but is afraid to say.

I'm Chuck Todd and joining me to provide the inside analysis are BuzzFeed's John Stanton, Neera Tanden of the Center for American Progress, Amy Walter of the Cook Political Report and Ramesh Ponnuru of National Review. Welcome to Sunday, it's Meet the Press.

ANNOUNCER:

From NBC News in Washington, this is Meet the Press with Chuck Todd.

CHUCK TODD:

And a good Sunday morning to everybody. President Obama will be addressing the United Nations on Wednesday as the United States continues efforts to build a coalition to take on ISIS in Iraq and Syria. Last week, the House and Senate voted resoundingly to approve funding for the so-called moderate Syrian rebels.

But there are huge questions that remain over the president's strategy after the country's most senior general, Martin Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, suggested that American troops might be needed on the ground. It's an option that the president continues to rule out. All this adding to a sense of confusion about the administration's approach to defeat ISIS. In fact, let's rewind and watch we've seen over the last three days.

(BEGIN TAPE)

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA:

These American forces will not have a combat mission.

GEN. MARTIN DEMPSEY:

And if there are threats to the United States, then I of course would go back to the president and make a recommendation that may include the use of U.S. military ground forces.

BRIAN WILLIAMS:

The nation's top military officer just opened the door to the possibility of American combat troops in this fight against ISIS, despite what the president told the nation.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA:

I will not commit you and the rest of our armed forces to fighting another ground war in Iraq.

SEN. LINDSEY GRAHAM:

There is no way in hell we are going to beat these guys without an American ground component in Iraq and Syria.

JOHN KERRY:

U.S. ground troops will not be sent into combat in this conflict.

ROBERT GATES:

So there will be boots on the ground if there's to be any hope of success in the strategy.

SUSAN RICE:

Our strategy does not involve U.S. troops on the ground in a combat role.

(END TAPE)

CHUCK TODD:

Joining me now is Samantha Power, the U.S. ambassador to The United Nations. Ambassador Power, welcome back to Meet the Press.

SAMANTHA POWER:

Good to be here.

CHUCK TODD:

Let me start with this issue of combat troops. And yes, there's been what appears to be a debate between the military leaders and the civilian leaders. Your job as ambassador to United Nations, you're trying to build a coalition. Secretary Kerry's trying to build a coalition. You tweeted this on Friday, "Huge outpouring of support now at U.N. Security Council for U.S.-Led effort to support fight against ISIL." What countries in this coalition have committed combat troops to fight in Syria? Have any of them done it yet?

SAMANTHA POWER:

Well, let me underscore the point about the outpouring of support. Secretary Kerry convened a meeting of the security council on Friday, where more than 40 countries spoke in support of the anti-ISIL effort, half at the ministerial level. The French, last week, joined combat strike missions in Iraq for the first time. You have the Saudis, who've come out and offered training bases for the moderate opposition now that Congress has approved the train and equip program that the president put forward.

CHUCK TODD:

Right.

SAMANTHA POWER:

So we're seeing a diverse range of forms of support. And the commitments are coming in every day.

CHUCK TODD:

But this issue of getting combat troops from other countries, we know the president doesn't want them to be American. But because we're not pledging American combat troops, potentially, is that making it harder to get other countries to commit?

SAMANTHA POWER:

We are not having problems getting countries to commit. Our strategy is predicated on the Iraqi forces and Kurdish forces on the ground in Iraq leading the effort. They are going to be in the best position to know how to take back territory in their own country. And so too, as you know in Syria, our strategy is predicated on the moderate opposition building out its capabilities over time, professionalizing those forces. That's the strategy, Chuck. It's us using our unique capabilities, the other capabilities the coalition partners bring to bear in support of ground operations by local people.

CHUCK TODD:

Well, let's talk about this moderate opposition in Syria. I'm a little confused at who we're training them to fight. All week long, the president says we're training them to fight ISIS. But a year ago, the idea was to train the moderate Syrians to fight Assad. Are we training them to fight ISIS? Are we training them to fight Assad? Who are we training them to fight?

SAMANTHA POWER:

Well, as you know, our national security imperative is to go after ISIL and to degrade and destroy it over time. And the moderate opposition now will have greater capabilities to do that, thanks to an overwhelming bipartisan vote in Congress to support that.

CHUCK TODD:

But is that what--

SAMANTHA POWER:

The training--

CHUCK TODD:

--the Free Syrian Army wants to do? I thought the Free Syrian Army was trying to fight Assad, that they've been fighting side by side, in some cases, with ISIS. That's why-- do they know that's why we're training them?

SAMANTHA POWER:

They do. But may I add, the training also will service these troops in the same struggle that they've been in since the beginning of this conflict against the Assad regime. Let me note, the Free Syrian Army and other moderate forces, have been fighting ISIL since December. They have pushed ISIL out of strategic areas.

The reason that they've lost, the moderate opposition have lost territory over time is that they have been fighting ISIL and taking the fight to ISIL, on the one hand, and then also fighting a regime that has backed by Hezbollah, Iran, Russia, et cetera. So we think, with an infusion of support, these fighters, who have actually held their own against this wide array of actors fighting on all fronts, will be in a much stronger position, both to go after ISIL and to put pressure on the regime so we can get back to negotiating table for a political solution.

CHUCK TODD:

I know the president believes he already has the legal justification to go after ISIS inside of Syria's borders. What do you need from the United Nations this week in some sort of resolution? I know there's talk of a chapter seven type resolution to try to at least give some legality to what the president wants to do, to what this coalition wants to do in Syria. Can you explain what, legally, you want the U.N. to give on this front?

SAMANTHA POWER:

Well, the U.N., again, has provided a stage to show the overwhelming support for the anti-ISIL effort. It will do some again this week, when the president, President Obama, comes to down and convenes a meeting at the security council, very rare thing to have a head of state summit in the security council, dedicated to the cause of stopping the flow of foreign terrorist fighters, cutting off their financing, et cetera, and underscoring, I think, again, the multi-dimensional aspects of the fight against ISIL and the fight against foreign terrorist fighters more specifically. In terms of the United Nations, again, we continue to hear from our partners how grateful they are that we have answered Iraq's appeal to come to their defense and use our unique capabilities in support of them.

CHUCK TODD:

There's a big headline in The Washington Post this morning about, basically, more chaos in Libya, some assassins in Benghazi. The back and forth has been going back there, the fight, to sort of control Libya. What's the lesson learned on the United States' intervention in Libya, in hindsight now, for you, when you're applying it to sort of how we're dealing in Syria? We left a vacuum in Libya. And now there's chaos in Libya. How do you prevent that from happening in Syria? Once the U.S. is successful at, for instance, getting rid of ISIS? The goal to get rid of Gaddafi, you did it. Then there was a chaotic vacuum. You're going to get rid of ISIS in Syria. How do you prevent a similar chaotic vacuum?

SAMANTHA POWER:

Well, let me note, of course, that, notwithstanding being roughly in the same region, these are two very different countries, two very different sets of circumstances. What is very important, and the key, again, to stability over time, is national institutions, national actors, taking ownership of the stability of their countries. And that's, again, why this investment in the moderate opposition in Syria is so important. In addition to their fight against ISIL, in addition to them being able to fend off regime attacks more effectively, potentially, with our support, this is an investment in the future of Syria and in the stability of those institutions that are going to be needed.

CHUCK TODD:

All right, very quickly, more dysfunctional, United Nations or the U.S. Congress?

SAMANTHA POWER:

No comment. I'm a diplomat. (LAUGHTER)

CHUCK TODD:

A very diplomatic answer. Samantha Power, thanks for coming back on Meet the Press.

SAMANTHA POWER:

Thanks, Chuck.

CHUCK TODD:
You got it.

CHUCK TODD:
Well, in the studio with me now are two members of the Senator Foreign Relations Committee who are on opposite sides of the President's request. A Democrat, Chris Murphy, voted against the President's request to fund the Syrian rebels. And a Republican here, Ron Johnson from Wisconsin, voted in favor of the President's request. Welcome to both of you to Meet the Press.

SEN. RON JOHNSON:
Morning, Chuck.

CHUCK TODD:
Morning. Murphy, let me start with you. Why did you vote against the president's request to arm these rebels?

SEN. CHRIS MURPHY:
So I'm broadly supportive of the President's strategy. There's no doubt we need to have strong response to ISIL. The question is whether getting involved in a very complicated, sectarian civil war in Syria is necessary to the overall strategy. The reality is that, over the last year, these so-called moderate rebels have been openly coordinating with Jabhat al Nusra, which is a wing of al-Qaeda. It is likely an impossibility that they can effectively fight on two fronts against both Assad and against ISIS.

And to me, the risk is that the United States begins getting involved in what may be a very long-term commitment to a messy civil war inside Syria. I think that with air strikes in Syria, counter-terrorism, and a focus on Iraq, you can effectively degrade ISIS to the point that you have the room for a political solution.

CHUCK TODD:
I guess, Senator, I mean that is-- I've heard this center. It's sort of if you fail, if the moderate opposition just doesn't work, Iraq, we've spent billions of dollars and years training Iraq, and the first time ISIS came, they were all over. So what happens? Does the United States have to then sell the vacuum if these moderates don't work?

SEN. RON JOHNSON:
Well Chuck, first of all, we have to recognize reality. And if you want to see what is going to happen in the future, you have to look to the past. And, you know, we've had testifying before our committee, and I've been talking to people behind the scenes, that were involved in the 2007 surge. And back then, we were fighting six to 8,000 members of al-Qaeda in Iraq. And that's basically what--

CHUCK TODD:
Basically what ISIS is now--

SEN. RON JOHNSON:
Right.

(OVERTALK)

SEN. RON JOHNSON:
--because we didn't leave a stabilizing force behind, so they were able to rise from the ashes. But back then, we had engaged about 100,000 Sunnis in that battle. We had about 100,000 Iraq security forces that were--

(OVERTALK)

SEN. RON JOHNSON:
--cleared, we would hold new pride of protection for the Sunni populations. And we had 160,000 American troops, 35-40,000 of those were involved in that fight. That's what it took for us to defeat six to 8,000 members of al-Qaeda in Iraq. Now we've got 31,000 members of the Islamic state. And we don't have a strategy to defeat them. Listen, I believe they're a threat. I agree with President Obama's goal that they must be defeated. I'm just not seeing the strategy that's actually going to work.

CHUCK TODD:
Do you-- so you're open to the idea of keeping combat troops on the table at some point?

SEN. RON JOHNSON:
I'm open--

(OVERTALK)

SEN. RON JOHNSON:
I'm no military expert. I'm certainly open to doing what it takes to achieve the goal that President Obama has stated we have to defeat ISIS. Because they made their intentions very clear. We know what their aims are. They need to be defeated.

CHUCK TODD:
Senator Murphy, you heard the question I had to Samantha Power about the-- Ambassador Power about this issue of a vacuum in Libya. We were successful with the campaign to get rid of Gaddafi. And then, with nothing there, chaos has ensued. How do you prevent that from happening in Syria?

SEN. CHRIS MURPHY:
So we had Secretary of State Kerry before the foreign relations committee this week. And 90% of the questions that he got asked were about the military strategy. This is the Secretary of State, the guy in charge--

CHUCK TODD:
Of diplomacy.

SEN. CHRIS MURPHY:
--of diplomacy--

CHUCK TODD:
Yeah, right.

SEN. CHRIS MURPHY:
--and the political strategy, which tells you where Congress's head is here. We totally misunderstand how you beat a group like ISIL. Military exercises are a shaping exercise to give the space in order to create political resolution there. And so our focus should be on enough military power in order to force changes on the ground in Iraq so that the Sunni moderates have a place to go other than ISIL. That's what we weren't able to do in Libya, because we hadn't made the fulsome commitment to both a military and political strategy there. We've got to be able to do both of those things inside Iraq.

CHUCK TODD:
Is the United States more committed to defeated ISIS than folks in the Middle East?

SEN. RON JOHNSON:
It's hard to say. And that's certainly one of the reasons why I'm going up to the U.N. next week is I want to meet with every representative of every Arab state to certainly make sure they understand that the only way the American public will support the type of action we're going to have to take to defeat ISIS is they have to be visibly supportive themselves, both militarily and financially, to this effort.

Because in fact, they are more threatened by the Islamic state than we are. But we aren't a threat. And Chuck, it has to be pointed out, you cannot negotiate with ISIS. Their diplomacy consists of beheadings, crucifixions. We've heard of, you know, obviously, mass executions. And what they do to women is just-- and we sanitize it. We say 'the enslaved women'.

No, the fighters who took over Mosul Dam. And I hate to say this, but people have to face this. There were two women bound, they were naked. They'd been raped repeatedly. They were the spoils of war. That's who we're fighting right now. And we've been at war with this Islamic terror since 1993. We have to recognize it. We can't bury our head in the sands on this.

CHUCK TODD:
Well, Senator Murphy, I mean that's the issue here. How do you defeat this ideology? I mean diplomacy isn't going to do it, is it?

SEN. CHRIS MURPHY:

And what we've learned is that whenever we kill an extremist, whenever we take out the number two, it seems like another one or two more take their place. So ultimately, you have to get the regional powers to be just as committed. And Chuck, I--

(OVERTALK)

CHUCK TODD:

But are they committed?

SEN. CHRIS MURPHY:

They aren't as committed as the United States.

CHUCK TODD:

Right.

(OVERTALK)

SEN. CHRIS MURPHY:

That's the part today. Saudi Arabia is not leading this coalition, the United States is leading this coalition. And that really is going to be the key as to whether this is ultimately successful.

CHUCK TODD:

There are-- weird transition here. But there are three different bills trying to take away the NFL's tax exempt status. I know where you stand on this. You want to see the NFL lose its tax exempt status. Senator Johnson, where are you on this?

SEN. RON JOHNSON:

We have far higher priorities than really arguing about--

(OVERTALK)

CHUCK TODD:

Three Senate bills are in there.

(OVERTALK)

SEN. RON JOHNSON:

But listen--

CHUCK TODD:

Coburn, Cantwell, Booker.

SEN. RON JOHNSON:

But listen. We are mortgaging our children's future. We're facing the threat of Islamic terror.

CHUCK TODD:

How would you vote if it hits the Senate floor?

SEN. RON JOHNSON:

I'll take a look at the bills. I mean that is so low on my priority list--

(OVERTALK)

SEN. RON JOHNSON:

--I'm not even thinking about it.

CHUCK TODD:

Fair enough. Senator Murphy, Senator Johnson, thank you much.

SEN. RON JOHNSON:
Thanks, Chuck.

CHUCK TODD:

By the way, where do you see this one? As we were digging through the Meet the Press archives this week, we found something fascinating. This is a 1970 clip of a Senator from New York, a Republican, discussing Congress's power to authorize military action. We posted it on our website. The Senator's name? Charles Goodell. And he just happens to be the father of NFL commissioner Roger Goodell.

SEN. ROGER GOODELL:

Because Congress has permitted its power to be to be eroded completely in this area and we've let the president do anything he wants to and the constitution does not give the president the power to declare war. Only congress has that.

CHUCK TODD:

44 years ago and that debate is actually still raging. Anyway, can we really defeat ISIS without American ground troops being deployed. I'm going to ask the former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, President Obama's first chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mike Mullen who is right here with us. I'll be back in a minute.

Commercial Break

CHUCK TODD:

And we are back. As we've been discussing, the political talk this week was dominated by the President's strategy to take on ISIS and whether the war can be won without committing U.S. troops on the ground. No better person to assess that next question than my next guest, Mike Mullen, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. And I know you love armchair generals and admirals so I will try not to make you play that armchair aspect of this.

Admiral, I want you to react to something that retired General Mattis said this week in testimony in front of the intelligence committee. He was talking about the U.S. not taking anything off the table when it comes to combat troops.

He said "If we put any restrictions in terms of how much time we are willing to commit to it or if we say there are certain elements of our national power that we are going to take off the table in advance, it can perhaps work against us in terms of building the coalition that will give the full support.

You deal with-- you've dealt with military leaders in other countries. Will they be hesitant to commit if the U.S. is not committing ground troops?

ADMIRAL MIKE MULLEN:

I think that they'll commit to the mission as they understand it. I think what you heard General Mattis say was, "Don't take any options off the table." I actually think, when General Dempsey, current chairman, anticipating a question at a hearing that he'd be asked about ground troops, took it off the table in his opening statement from the standpoint of if the circumstances warranted it, that he'd go back and he'd recommend to the president the possibility or the option of using ground troops.

I think that's a natural part of the discussion in this debate about how you execute a mission. There should not be any question in the end, who decides this. And that's the president. So I think what General Dempsey was trying to do was certainly explain, to some degree, how the process works. I think it's been blown way out of proportion in terms of the disagreement between the military and the president.

CHUCK TODD:

And sometimes we're also talking about degrees of what might be done. Nobody is saying, and I don't even think military leaders say, "You need hundreds of thousands of American combat troops in Syria." I think the question is could you need five or 10,000 of, say, Special Forces serving side by side, sort of the way Special Forces helped the Iraqi troops? Is that really-- when some military leaders talk about it, is that what they're talking about?

ADMIRAL MIKE MULLEN:

I don't know any leaders, military or civilian, who are talking about brigade size units, 4,000, 10,000 at a crack. We've certainly learned in these wars that it's important to have indigenous forces on the ground. And our ability to both train them and support them has made a difference. I think we're going to clearly, right now, see

where we are in Iraq, at least feedback I'm getting is cautiously optimistic, once the air power strikes have started, the force is a little more engaged.

CHUCK TODD:

Why did they roll over that first time? Why did they seem-- we spent billions training this Iraqi Army.

ADMIRAL MIKE MULLEN:

I think what's missing in that discussion is what Maliki did to his army, his ground forces, over the course of three years. And he replaced all the leaders, and particularly those in the north, were generally known as weak leaders. And when it got really tough, those leaders left. And then you had the forces with no leadership there. So I think that is a big part of it. I mean what I'm hearing now is that, with the support of the American firepower, they're coming back. So we'll see. And I think they've got to work hard to reduce the space that ISIL's operating in. And I'm cautiously optimistic that they'll be able to do that.

CHUCK TODD:

Now, when you talk about Syria, the president does want some combat troops in there not American. Who's capable in the region? If, you know, we're asking these coalition forces, we're trying to create this.

ADMIRAL MIKE MULLEN:

Yeah.

CHUCK TODD:

What countries are really capable of being a good ground force and a help in Syria?

ADMIRAL MIKE MULLEN:

We've had, and again, not major combat units.

CHUCK TODD:

I understand.

ADMIRAL MIKE MULLEN:

But we've had forces on the ground in Afghanistan from the UAE. We've had them from Jordan. We've had them, small numbers, from Bahrain. And so--

CHUCK TODD:

But those are the countries we should really be thinking about when--

(OVERTALK)

ADMIRAL MIKE MULLEN:

Right. And actually, I mean we've seen the Saudis. I mean the Saudis actually have a capable force.

(OVERTALK)

ADMIRAL MIKE MULLEN:

I think, in the end, that becomes a question is will the Saudis support us in that regard? And I don't know the answer to that question, quite frankly. I mean I listened to Ambassador Power talk about this meeting on Friday. And the feedback I got on that, it was a pretty powerful meeting.

I mean there were foreign ministers that flew in from all over the world because the United States asked them to come to discuss this. So it's sort of this convening power of the U.S., as well as the sense of urgency that we really need to do something about this threat.

CHUCK TODD:

As a chairman of the Joint Chiefs, public opinion about a war, public opinion about ground troops, should it impact the advice you give a commander-in-chief? And does it end up impacting, even if it shouldn't?

ADMIRAL MIKE MULLEN:

I didn't see it. I don't think it should. And I didn't certainly integrate it into my recommendations to two presidents. Obviously, you know it's out there. But you're given a mission by the president. You put the options on the table to execute that mission. And it really is up, I think, to the president and his team to integrate all the

other aspects of it, the political aspect of it, the policy aspect of it, the confidence they have in terms of executing.

CHUCK TODD:

But you end up having to come up a plan where you realize, "Boy, the politics of this are just impossible. We're going to focus on this plan even though we really could do this one," just because the reality of the politics.

ADMIRAL MIKE MULLEN:

I mean I didn't do that. I didn't see military leaders shape options or shape ideas or come up with plans that were shaped by politics or anticipation of difficulties in that arena. That we really kick over to the president and his team.

CHUCK TODD:

And create the firewall there.

ADMIRAL MIKE MULLEN:

Yeah.

CHUCK TODD:

Admiral Mike Mullen, nice to see you--

ADMIRAL MIKE MULLEN:

Thanks, Chuck.

CHUCK TODD:

--this morning on Meet the Press.

ADMIRAL MIKE MULLEN:

Thank you.

CHUCK TODD:

You got it. We get some reaction from the panel, John, Neera, Amy, Ramesh. Neera, let me start with you. Your party, a little bit split on this when it comes sort of the hawks and the doves. You know, you work at a think tank that does try to get into foreign policy. What are you hearing from the progressive base when it comes to what the President's trying to do in Syria?

NEERA TANDEN:

Oh, there's a lot of anxiety about what the President's trying to do in the Middle East, right? And I think what's energizing it is an anxiety-- you know, people are really haunted by the last Iraq war. And the truth is we put a lot of boots on the ground, and it had a really negative repercussion.

I mean we're still dealing now, throughout the world, with the repercussions from George Bush's war in Iraq. And so I think actually that really permeates this debate. And I think people think about the politics. But I also think what we should recognize about the President's position about ground troops and a large American footprint is that it can have negative repercussions. It's not just a--

(OVERTALK)

CHUCK TODD:

No. And there's no doubt that's what's haunting-- that's what haunts him more. I mean--

NEERA TANDEN:

Absolutely.

(OVERTALK)

CHUCK TODD:

It's a different-- it is politics, but it's a different politics.

NEERA TANDEN:

But it's also that if it's just a U.S. war with ISIL, right, or--

CHUCK TODD:
Right. That's what ISIS wants.

NEERA TANDEN:
Yes.

CHUCK TODD:
Yes.

NEERA TANDEN:
That also will create real problems for an effort to defeat it. So I think we're talking about the politics. But I think there's a real substantive reason why a large footprint is a problem.

CHUCK TODD:
Stanton, Capitol Hill, it seems that's where you see this rubber meet the road. It really is--

JOHN STANTON:
No, and--

CHUCK TODD:
--anxiety. Iraq fatigue. It's the new Vietnam fatigue, isn't it?

JOHN STANTON:
Well, yeah. And I think, you know, if the public is haunted by it, politicians are very much haunted. I mean we're not talking about the Clinton administration here, right?

CHUCK TODD:
No.

JOHN STANTON:
We're talking about the Obama administration. And there's a reason, partly, because of how votes on the war in Iraq and Afghanistan. And I think you see this playing out on Capitol Hill. Nobody wants to touch this thing with a ten foot pole. You know, they're willing to give him money to train people--

CHUCK TODD:
They don't even want to authorize it.

JOHN STANTON:
No.

CHUCK TODD:
They claim they want to authorize-- "Oh yeah, we should vote on it." But--

JOHN STANTON:
"We'll wait until next--

CHUCK TODD:
Yeah, "We'll wait till next year."

JOHN STANTON:
"We'll wait till next year."

CHUCK TODD:
Yeah.

JOHN STANTON:
And next year again.

(OVERTALK)

NEERA TANDEN:
After the election. After.

CHUCK TODD:
Right.

JOHN STANTON:
And which election exactly are they talking about? Is it 2014? Is it 2016? You know, I think it's very toxic right now for everybody on the Hill.

CHUCK TODD:
Ramesh and Amy, I mean it is this sort of-- you feel the anxiety. The military leaders, I don't think they think they can win with this strategy. But they know that the public-- I mean this is where you feel this tugging.

(OVERTALK)

CHUCK TODD:
Yeah.

AMY WALTER:
Right, was pretty clear in what you put out there. And look, the American public-- this is what's fascinating doing this. I know we said there's not just politics involved, but there obviously is a lot of politics. The fact this is happening 40 days before an election is important to remember, in that, if you're a Democrat right now and you wanted to make this election about the issue which you are strongest on--

CHUCK TODD:
Right.

AMY WALTER:
--the economic security issues, right, to make the contrast between the Republican economic plan and the Democratic plan, that's not what we're talking about at all. We're talking about security. And it is permeating-- watching voters right now, there is a security concern--

CHUCK TODD:
Oh.

AMY WALTER:
--safety concern that is palpable.

CHUCK TODD:
Ramesh before I let you jump in. We play Republicans are-- it's a 2002 flashback. I've got a couple of ads that they're doing now. Let me run a couple of them. The ads were in places like Iowa and in a little more rural areas, swing districts, where Republicans are doing the terrorism attack. "Hey Democrats, weak on terrorists."

AMY WALTER:
That's right.

CHUCK TODD:
The politics of the GOP?

RAMESH PONNURU:
Well, you know-- terrorism was one of the remaining advantages that President Obama had where he was weighted with a pretty good job approval. And that advantage has now collapsed in the CBS New York Times poll out this week. I think they're in a very precarious position. If you look at the House vote earlier this week, Republicans in the House were actually more supportive of this action than Democrats were. So he's going into this conflict with a split party.

CHUCK TODD:
Right.

RAMESH PONNURU:

And I think that that, though, overstates his support on Capitol Hill, because Republicans are still deferring a little bit to the Commander-in-Chief, and Democrats are still deferring to their party leader. But those things are going to erode over time.

AMY WALTER:

That's right.

CHUCK TODD:

All right. Sorry about that little-- I caught the control room off guard there. (LAUGHTER) I was telling them when I wanted to pull that out. That's okay. (CLAP) Interesting week for you here. Anyway, up next, the anti-tax revolt, people actually saying, "Tax me more, sort of." And it's happening in a place you'd least expect.

Commercial Break

CHUCK TODD:

And we are back. Some things are just set in stone. The sun rises in the east. The Chicago Cubs are just never going to win a World Series. And Republicans are in favor of tax cuts. Or are they? One of the givens of American politics is being seriously challenged this year. And of all places, it's in Kansas, where Republican Governor Sam Brownback policy of cutting taxes and shrinking government has put his job in jeopardy. We sent Kevin Tibbles to go cover a Kansas prairie fire that is threatening to spread to other states.

(BEGIN TAPE)

KEVIN TIBBLES:

In the deep red state of Kansas, a full-on Republican revolt over taxes and the governor who cut them.

WINT WINTER, JR.:

It's been a train wreck.

MARK BUHLER:

My disappointment tends to be pretty focused on the governor's office.

KEVIN TIBBLES:

These are all dyed-in-the-wool Republicans taking aim at their Republican governor, Sam Brownback, who's done what Republicans historically want their politicians to do, cut taxes. But in Kansas, critics say schools are suffering, social services have been slashed, and the deficit is going through the roof. Kansas is not alone. A 1992 Colorado constitutional amendment said taxes could only be increased by popular vote. It left the state so broke voters ultimately suspended it. At least 30 states since then have considered similar measures. None has passed, with opponents citing Colorado's experience. (VOICES) Over breakfast in an historic Lawrence, Kansas hotel, a group of Republican voters, some former politicians, explain why they've had enough of tax cut fever.

ALICE ANN JOHNSTON:

I'm going to vote for the Democratic governor.

KEVIN TIBBLES:

Is that difficult for you to say? (LAUGHTER)

ALICE ANN JOHNSTON:

A little.

PAT ROSS:

That's the direction that many of the Kansas farmers are going.

WINT WINTER, JR.

He's taking us in a track of bankruptcy.

KEVIN TIBBLES:

Still, not all Republicans here feel alienated.

JANE REA:

It takes time for the free market to grow. It's the right direction.

KEVIN TIBBLES:

And voters will decide whether their state remains red or turns blue. For Meet the Press, Kevin Tibbles.

(END TAPE)

CHUCK TODD:

Thank you, Tibbs. I'm joined now by Thomas Frank, columnist for Salon.com and author of numerous books on politics and economics, including What's the Matter With Kansas?. He published that one ten years ago. And Grover Norquist, president of Americans for Tax Reform. Grover, since it apparently tax cuts that are on the ballot this year, if Sam Brownback loses, he's losing on a referendum on he cut taxes too much. Are you concerned that this basically hurts your cause for 30 years that you've been fighting, which is to try to get taxes lower all across the country?

GROVER NORQUIST:

One, I think he'll win. Two, I think he'll win because he's done the right thing for the economy. But three, there are 50 states. And in the 30 states with Republican governors, in the last four years, they cut taxes over \$30 billion. The Democrat states, the 20 Democrat states, they raised taxes \$40 billion. If you want your taxes higher, vote for a Democrat governor. If you want lower taxes, vote for Republican governor.

Right now, it's overwhelming Republican governors in the country. And the people who are losing are guys like Illinois, Democrat, who's raised taxes too much in the state, and maybe Republican governor who also raised taxes in Pennsylvania.

CHUCK TODD:

But, you know, I mean I'm going to pull up a chart here that we did. There is no-- that tax cuts, or take hikes, have no impact on economic growth in either direction. Let me put up this chart here. Thomas, I want you, I mean this is something that you based a lot of your book on, in some ways, in this argument: taxes and economic growth. So we got here the red dots are when we've had tax cuts. This is on a federal level. The black dots are when we've had tax hikes. And as you can see, economic growth is sometimes spiked after tax hikes.

THOMAS FRANK:

Uh-huh (AFFIRM).

CHUCK TODD:

And sometimes economic growth has gone down after tax cuts. But there is no correlation.

THOMAS FRANK:

Well, it's actually worse than that, Chuck. I mean if you go back to the age that we think of nowadays as kind of golden age of capitalist prosperity in this country, in the '50s and '60s, do you know where taxes were back then? I mean they were pretty high.

CHUCK TODD:

They were incredibly high. Up to 90% on some people.

THOMAS FRANK:

That's right. Well, you know, the marginal tax rate.

CHUCK TODD:

Right.

THOMAS FRANK:

Yeah. And so it's more complicated a story than that. But the Kansas story is very interesting. The Brownback administration talked the state legislature into cutting taxes in a pretty spectacular way, in a way that states don't often do, as you mentioned before. And it was-- the promise was that this would lead to a kind of immediate economic boom in the state. And that hasn't materialized.

But it has, of course had this, you know, obvious effect of, you know, cutting off revenues. You know, revenues coming into the state. And that, in turn, has had all the problems that you would expect from that, public schools, you know, state services. Now I should say public schools are a particularly big deal in Kansas. Because, first of all, they're very proud of their schools. I went to their public schools in Kansas.

(OVERTALK)

THOMAS FRANK:

And as someone else did here. We'll talk about that later.

CHUCK TODD:

Yeah.

THOMAS FRANK:

But also, if you were in a small town, and your public school closes, that's it. This is a state that the rural areas are suffering from depopulation in a kind of dramatic way, people leaving, people moving, small towns dying. When you lose your elementary school--

(OVERTALK)

THOMAS FRANK:

--in a small town--

GROVER NORQUIST:

This has been declining in its population over the last 40 years. What we had was a bipartisan establishment position which was keep raising taxes in Kansas. We've now elected a Reagan Republican majority in the House and the Senate. This is not all about the governor. The governor certainly supportive of reducing taxes.

CHUCK TODD:

Right.

GROVER NORQUIST:

But the reason why the entire left in the country has jumped on top of Kansas is they provided the model, a successful model, that will phase out the income tax. Why? Because when revenue comes in--

CHUCK TODD:

But wait.

GROVER NORQUIST:

--beyond 2% growth--

CHUCK TODD:

Yeah.

GROVER NORQUIST:

--it goes towards reducing the income tax. We've now taken it down to where you pay 4.8% above 30,000. The Democrat running for governor, Paul Davis, a week ago, people thought might win. Now, because Politico did an exposé on his lap dance with the naked lady in a strip club, he's not the kind of person you can ask your sister to vote for anymore. But the issue is going to-- or your mother or your daughter.

CHUCK TODD:

All right. But is--

(OVERTALK)

CHUCK TODD:

But wait a minute.

(OVERTALK)

CHUCK TODD:

But let me ask you this. Moody's downgraded Kansas, what, three months ago on their ability to borrow money, and saying, because of the sluggish recovery, which a lot of people think is because of these tax cuts that has made the economic recovery worse in Kansas than it should have been.

GROVER NORQUIST:

Except that they've had 57,000 jobs in the private sector created in Kansas. They've actually been spending more money each year from the state on education than in the past. They can try and make this case. But there are 191,000 small businesses in that state, many in the rural areas, who basically have their corporate income tax, their business income tax, taken to zero.

There's a reason why Missouri passed a tax cut to be more like Kansas, why Kansas's model is being looked at in Oklahoma and Louisiana. It's halfway passed in North Carolina. There are a lot of states looking to do exactly what Kansas did. And yes, they've had challenges. But they've had decades--

CHUCK TODD:

Right.

GROVER NORQUIST:

--if bipartisan establishment, too much government.

CHUCK TODD:

John's saying you want to jump in.

JOHN STANTON:

You know, Grover, you know, you've done a great job of getting folks on the Republican side to be ideologically pure on taxes. But that purity has come at a cost, which is now we look at Congress, tax reform is probably not going to get done for several years, immigrant reform, all these other issues. Do you feel a bit of responsibility for this sort of intransigence we see now? And is there any way to move away from that and get back to sort of more of a Reagan Republican, willing to compromise, kind of an approach?

GROVER NORQUIST:

Oh. Well, I'm always willing to compromise, which means moving towards freedom less rapidly than I'd like to. What the pledge did was stop a \$1.4 trillion tax increase--

THOMAS FRANK:

But it-- but it's--

GROVER NORQUIST:

--that Obama wanted--

CHUCK TODD:

Right.

GROVER NORQUIST:

--and gave us \$2.5 trillion in spending, gave us the sequester--

CHUCK TODD:

Yeah.

GROVER NORQUIST:

--and gave us a stronger economy. That was progress.

CHUCK TODD:

Thomas, I'm going to give you the last word here. Tax cuts, taxes, I mean can you use that for economic growth? Or if not-- in either way?

THOMAS FRANK:

Well, I mean of course. There is all sorts of situations. But look, you need to take this-- I mean I'm not talking about Kansas here anymore, although, you know, I could talk about that for hours and then write about it today on Salon. But--

CHUCK TODD:
You call it Brownbackistan.

THOMAS FRANK:
Well, yeah. That's a sort of--

(OVERTALK)

CHUCK TODD:
Brownbackistan and this weird strip club story. But--

THOMAS FRANK:
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

CHUCK TODD:
--that's--

(OVERTALK)

THOMAS FRANK:
We can talk about that some other time.

CHUCK TODD:
--the Wizard of Oz.

THOMAS FRANK:
But this is something that he-- this is something-- I mean this is so ridiculous that this is on national television. Because this is something that's happened back in the '90s. He wasn't married yet. He was a lawyer.

(OVERTALK)

CHUCK TODD:
His reaction to the police was what was--

(OVERTALK)

THOMAS FRANK:
But it doesn't-- you know, that's not what I want to talk about.

CHUCK TODD:
Right.

(OVERTALK)

THOMAS FRANK:
Okay. But no, but seriously, Grover, the tax issue, you have to think about this in the grander terms of the problems that we're facing in the country.

CHUCK TODD:
Right.

THOMAS FRANK:
The problem these days in America is not overreaching big government taking away your freedom. Who's taking away your freedom? This country is sliding into oligarchy. You and I know this. President Obama talked about inequality. You look at the top 1% and what they're taking home. Taxes are one of the ways that our ancestors used to deal with this problem, okay? It's off the table today, and look what's happened.

CHUCK TODD:
This is a debate that I have to pause. And it will continue. I wish I had another hour. Thomas Frank, Grover

Norquist, thank you both. Up next, control of the U.S. Senate, is it really being decided by Starbucks and Chick-Fil-A's? Actually, yes, it is. Caffeine versus chicken. Back in a moment.

Commercial Break

CHUCK TODD:

And now to a different way to look at campaign 2014 this election cycle. In one corner, it's Starbucks Nation. These are Democrats that live in the big cities, adjacent suburbs, lots of Starbucks. In the other corner, it's Chick-Fil-A country. Basically, Republicans that live in the areas between suburban America and rural America. We call them the exurbs. It's also another way of saying small town America.

In 2012, the presidential battleground map favored Democrats. And here's why. 36% of people that lived in those battleground states were in the cities, or those close-in suburbs close to the cities. 20% lived in those Republican strongholds, the exurbs, more rural America. This year, the numbers are completely reversed. Only a fifth of the population in this Senate battleground map live in urban areas. While it's 36% that live in those communities that are favorable to Republicans, in the exurbs.

So what does all this mean? When Democrats had the advantage two years ago, President Obama essentially swept the board. He won all but one of the nine tossup states. He had a lot of Starbucks states, essentially. This year, it's the Republican edge. The GOP is almost certain to pick up states in Chick-Fil-A country, Montana, South Dakota and West Virginia. Don't forget, they have Arkansas, Louisiana here. These Republicans have a lot of opportunities to win Senate seats in areas that are favorable to them.

Then you have the swing states, the ones that are in the battleground map, both in 2012 and 2014. It's places like Colorado and Iowa. These were the big swing states in both years. And they're going to make the difference. And look at how close things are here. For instance, in Colorado, incumbent Democrat Senator Mark Udall support is mostly going to come from Denver and the immediate suburbs, plus Boulder County, which account for 37% of the state's population, Starbucks territory.

But as the counties around Denver that are growing rapidly and becoming more Democratic, much of the other parts of Colorado are more rural. They are the suburbs of Denver outside of those immediate areas, and Colorado Springs, and they're much more conservative.

Congressman Cory Gardner is hoping it's these areas in Chick-Fil-A country that end up determining that race.

Let's move to Iowa. It's the same thing. You do have Des Moines and those folks in suburbs around it, as well as the college towns of Ames and Iowa City. That's territory that's good for Democrats. But the rest of the state is going to be a lot tougher for the nominee for the Democrats there, Bruce Braley. It's a lot of more rural middle America. And that tends to favor Republicans. Take Dallas County, it's a true exurb next to Des Moines. It went for Romney by 12 points. So the challenge for Democrats will be getting out the vote in their urban center, firing up their turnout in Des Moines while holding back a Republican surge in a Dallas County that hopeful Joni Ernst believes will take her to victory.

So there you have it. It's Starbucks country versus Chick-Fil-A country. Who's going to turn out in 2014? It could be advantage to the chicken. We'll see. Election will be determined between the big cities and rural America. And that's the way to look-- one way to look at this 2014 map. Coming up in half a minute, the strategy Democrats are trying to use the hold the Senate that has never worked in the past. So why are they trying it again? I'll be back in 30 seconds.

Commercial Break

CHUCK TODD:

Welcome back. We're now just six weeks, that's 44 days, away from the midterm elections. And we're seeing something that happens whenever a president has low poll numbers, members of his own party are doing everything they can to look like they are keeping him at arm's length.

CHUCK TODD:

With President Obama's approval ratings continuing to sit at or even below 40%, Democrats who face the voters in a matter of weeks aren't just walking away from the president, they're running and gunning away. Just this week, Kentucky Democratic Senate hopeful Allison Grimes was out with this ad.

ALISON LUNDERGAN GRIMES (TAPE):
I'm not Barack Obama.

CHUCK TODD:
That's the standard play if you're a Democrat in a tight race from a state that the president lost in 2012, like Louisiana.

MARY LANDRIEU (TAPE):
I'm Mary Landrieu and I approve this message.

CHUCK TODD:
Where Obama lost by 17 points. Or Alaska.

MARK BEGICH (TAPE):
I'm Mark Begich and I approve this message.

CHUCK TODD:
Where he lost by 23 points. And of course Kentucky.

ALISON LUNDERGAN GRIMES (TAPE):
I'm Alison and I approve this message.

CHUCK TODD:
Where he also lost by 23 points. And a parade of Democrats are following this practice.

NARRATOR (TAPE):
He [Mark Begich] took on Obama.

MARK PRYOR (TAPE):
I'm not gonna invite anyone from out of state.

MARY LANDRIEU (TAPE):
This administration's policies are simply wrong.

NATALIE TENNANT (TAPE):
I'll make sure President Obama gets the message.

CHUCK TODD:
And when the president has shown up in these states, Democrats are suddenly finding themselves busy and making it clear Obama does not want to see them.

MARK UDALL (TAPE):
The White House, when they look down the front lawn, the last person they want to see coming is me.

CHUCK TODD:
Okay, Mark Udall. Anyway, don't laugh too loud there, Amy.

AMY WALTER:
Sorry.

CHUCK TODD:
But Ramesh, Jim Talent on this program in 2006, in a heated debate with Clair McCaskill, talked about all the things he differed from President Bush. He lost. Blanche Lincoln, in 2010, took all the differences she had with President Obama. She lost. The strategy, it never works.

RAMESH PONNURU:
It's a strategy that's always tempting and never works. And as we just saw with that segment, it's not just in red states that voted for him.

(OVERTALK)

CHUCK TODD:
Right, Colorado, right.

RAMESH PONNURU:
Obama won that twice.

CHUCK TODD:
Yeah.

RAMESH PONNURU:
And Mark Udall is trying to distance himself. And the reason is Obama, in the latest poll in Colorado, 36% approval.

AMY WALTER:
But, you know, this is also sort of the depressing part, right? Where we have Americans that say, "You know what? We want a Congress that compromises. We want people to get things done." And guess who they vote out? The people who are the compromisers.

CHUCK TODD:
Right.

AMY WALTER:
When those people that you just mentioned in the package, if they lose, there's nobody for Republicans to go to, to compromise.

(OVERTALK)

AMY WALTER:
The moderates are gone. And it happened in 2006 when Democrats attached everybody to Bush and said they were terrible and--

CHUCK TODD:
Right.

AMY WALTER:
Even though--

(OVERTALK)

CHUCK TODD:
Voted 95% of the time.

AMY WALTER:
Right.

CHUCK TODD:
The ads are almost identical right now.

AMY WALTER:
They're all the same.

(OVERTALK)

AMY WALTER:
And so that power gets the Congress we get, which is--

CHUCK TODD:
Yeah.

AMY WALTER:

--if you want to push those people out, that's fine. But they're actually the people who are compromisers.

CHUCK TODD:

And the irony here is, okay, so you're Mark Prior, you're doing everything you can to distance yourself from Obama, but the only way he wins Arkansas is if African-Americans turn out in a bigger way around the Delta than they had before. So the strategy actually can work against his own coalition.

NEERA TANDEN:

Yeah. And there's definitely a squeeze play between moderates and base voters in this. But I have to say, like, you know, look, in Colorado I think we're going to win Colorado, or Democrats--

(OVERTALK)

CHUCK TODD:

Do you think they're winning it because Mark Udall is so-- strikes so much fear (LAUGHTER) into the hearts of Barack Obama on the West Wing Drive?

(OVERTALK)

NEERA TANDEN:

No, no, I--

AMY WALTER:

Yeah.

NEERA TANDEN:

--look, I think there are-- there's a dissatisfaction in the country, right? And unfortunately, the president is facing that and feeling that. And people are taking at it against him. But there are also, look, it's not like the Republican brand is doing so well.

CHUCK TODD:

Right.

NEERA TANDEN:

People love the Republican Party. It's really a problem of two parties. And it's an anti-Washington mode, mood, not just anti-Obama.

CHUCK TODD:

But there's no doubt that, but Stanton, there is a-- voters have a BS detector. And when they see these guys suddenly do this, especially if some-- you know, you see some of them, you're like, "Well, they rode the coattails of this president." It's like, you, that's what hurt Talent, right? You know, he'd say, "Well, Republicans rode the two coattails of Bush, and then they suddenly tried to run away."

JOHN STANTON:

Well, in an election like this, you know, you're not going to get a lot of middle-of-the-road voters. This is not that time, right? I mean there's no big polarizing issue--

(OVERTALK)

CHUCK TODD:

Which makes this sort of a silly way.

JOHN STANTON:

Exactly.

CHUCK TODD:

It should be a base, right?

JOHN STANTON:

You need the margins.

(OVERTALK)

JOHN STANTON:

But we need those groups on the outside, then all those votes will count. And if you're not trying to bring them in, and it's-- you know, this is a corollary to also running against your time in Washington. And we see that over and over again and these guys always lose. Whereas those that say, "I brought home all this bacon," are like Mary Landrieu--

CHUCK TODD:

Right.

JOHN STANTON:

--who's now in a very good position where she maybe shouldn't be. And so it's an odd--

(OVERTALK)

CHUCK TODD:

And the thing is one out of ten it works for. And nobody says, "Oh see! That strategy worked." (LAUGHTER) Nine out of ten, it didn't. All right, very quickly, before we go, time for our fun segment here. What everyone in Washington knows but isn't saying, this week it is Joe Biden. He's not running against Hillary Clinton. And yet, the media cheeses it as if he is.

AMY WALTER:

He is the sitting vice president of the United States.

CHUCK TODD:

I understand that. But he's not running against Hillary Clinton.

(OVERTALK)

CHUCK TODD:

We know he's not running against Hillary Clinton.

AMY WALTER:

That's true. But--

CHUCK TODD:

So-- but we pretend--

(OVERTALK)

CHUCK TODD:

Am I wrong?

(OVERTALK)

JOHN STANTON:

It'd be so great.

CHUCK TODD:

Well see, that's what it is. It's like-- right, it's reporters.

NEERA TANDEN:

So this is really on you. Like, you guys cover it, right? So it's really a media-- it's a media issue.

CHUCK TODD:

Do you agree with that premise? Should we be shocked if Biden challenges Hillary?

NEERA TANDEN: I would be surprised. But, you know, things happen in politics.

CHUCK TODD: Ramesh, I mean is it-- this is reporters cheering for a story. It's not based in reality, correct?

RAMESH PONNURU: The alternative is that we spend the next two years talking about Hillary Clinton's inevitable nomination.

(OVERTALK)

CHUCK TODD: We're now playing into the stereotype--

NEERA TANDEN: I think it's--

CHUCK TODD:
--that everybody's saying--

NEERA TANDEN:
--really exciting. (LAUGHTER) I think that's very exciting.

CHUCK TODD:
But that is. We're actually--

(OVERTALK)

CHUCK TODD: And this is actually-- and in all honesty, I think it becomes a media trust issue a little bit. We're almost playing into a stereotype.

JOHN STANTON: True. Although, again, like with Joe Biden, he's sort of media crack, right? I mean he goes out there, he says all this crazy stuff. And he's sort of hilarious. And people look at him, you know, like, "What is going on with this guy?"

(OVERTALK)

CHUCK TODD: I was just going to say--

(OVERTALK)

CHUCK TODD: But isn't he like W, like people-- they don't get offended by his--

NEERA TANDEN:
Right.

CHUCK TODD:
--gaffes the way they did-- just like W, right?

(OVERTALK)

NEERA TANDEN:
Other people get offended by--

CHUCK TODD: All right. (CLAP)

(OVERTALK)

CHUCK TODD: I've got to leave it there. That's all for today. No program next week due to NBC Sports coverage of the Ryder Cup. Go America. We've got to get that thing back, right? We'll return in two weeks. With a bit of luck, we're going to have a shiny new set. Just remember, if it's Sunday, it's Meet the Press.

**** *END OF TRANSCRIPT* ****

September 28, 2014 – MEET THE PRESS WAS PREEMPTED DUE TO RYDER CUP