

TRANSCRIPT

Barack Obama Press Avail Q and A

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Q: Senator, is it your impression that Senator McCain is trying to paint you as too naïve to operate in this – to naïve in foreign policy to operate in this climate?

BO: I think it's my impression that John McCain has adopted not only George Bush's policies but George Bush's playbook. This is what was done in 2000; this is what was done in 2004. but we are now in 2008 and there will be a different outcome because I think the American people recognize that after years in Iraq, thousands of deaths, hundreds of billions, soon to be trillions of dollars that we've spent in Iraq, three, four, five ,military tours of duty for our military and their families. I think the American people are recognizing that this was not a good approach. Now they're not interesting in reiterating what happened in the past. They want to look forward and the plans that I've presented in terms of dealing with Iraq, having a responsible paced withdrawal, going in to Afghanistan and putting more resources behind that effort so that we can finally win against Al Qaeda, taking seriously the need to forge alliances, attacking Al Qaeda wherever it appears, restoring a sense of rule of law in ways that are consonant with what the Supreme Court talked about. Those are all, I think, approaches that the American people are open to and that's what we're going to keep on presenting over the next five months.

Q: Can you tell me when was the last time you spoke to Senator Clinton and specifically when you talked to her about some of these national security issues? And what do you intend to do to roll back whatever damage might have been done during the primaries when she described you in some of the ways that Senator McCain has, of not being ready on national security to be president?

BO: You know, I have not had conversations with Senator Clinton because she has been getting a well-deserved vacation and we will be speaking I think in the next few days or certainly the next week and will be having an ongoing conversation. But if you look at my positions and Senator Clinton's, there's not a lot of difference, which is why it's so easy for advisers, senior advisers of Senator Clinton to support my candidacy.

Q: Senator, if you were president and Osama bin Laden was captured, how would you want to proceed? Would you want to put him on trial, and if so, would that be in the US or international court?

BO: You know, first of all, I think there is an executive order out on Osama bin Laden's head, and if I'm president and we had the opportunity to capture him, we may not be able to capture him alive. I think it does not make sense for me to speculate in terms of what the best approach would be in trying him and bringing him to justice. I think what would be important would be for us to do it in a way that allows the entire world to understand the murderous acts that he's engaged in and not to make him into a martyr and to sure that the United States government is abiding by the basic conventions that would strengthen our hand in the broader battle against terrorism. You know I've used this analogy before but one of the hallmarks, one of the high water points, I think, of US foreign policy, was the Nuremburg Trials. Because the world had not seen before victors behave in ways that advanced a set of universal principles. And that set a tone for post-war reconstruction and creation of an international order that I think was extraordinarily important. Yeah.

Q: Senator, can you elaborate on the fresh approach that you would take in Afghanistan. You mention that a lot of money is already being spent -

BO: Right.

Q: What would be your fresh approach to Afghanistan and would you be hamstrung by the money spent in Iraq?

BO: Well, if we engaged in a responsible withdrawal from Iraq, then that allows us to start strengthening the operations that are in Afghanistan. Currently, the operations in Afghanistan are smaller, substantially smaller than Iraq, so we don't have to transfer every troop to Afghanistan, what we can do is provide relief, lower the number of tours that people are on, make sure that some of the money that is currently being spent in Iraq is going to Afghanistan but still have some money left over for, for example, re-setting our military, re-equipping our National Guard and so forth. Specifically, what needs to be done in Afghanistan, I did a speech about this last August, I think it's critical that we get at least a couple of additional brigades in there. I think it's very important for us to ramp up our non-military aid to Afghanistan. We've got to provide alternatives to the poppy crops that are now financing so much of the Taliban's activity as well as Al Qaeda's activity in the area. This is an example of where, and Secretaries Perry and Albright and the others who are here emphasized this. We've got an opportunity to mount a trans-Atlantic surge in diplomacy, where our NATO allies, our European partners feel more confident in our overarching strategy, feel that they're being listened to, and may be willing to re-engage or engage further in Afghanistan in a way that right now they're resistant to. And that's not, don't take my word for it, I think Secretary Gates himself acknowledged that one of the difficulties in getting NATO support or additional support from NATO

countries, additional commitments in Afghanistan is they're still frustrated about what's happened in Iraq and still suspicious about US motives. So, these things can't be separated, I think that if we are acting responsibly and wisely in Iraq, then not only will it free up resources for Afghanistan, but it will also give us some additional diplomatic leverage that will allow us to operate more effectively in Afghanistan, okay? Alright, guys, I'm going to have to get going. Thank you so much.