Interview With Representatives Janice Schakowsky and Peter King

April 7th, 2003

CNN CROSSFIRE

NOVAK: Who will run post-war Iraq? Should the United States go it alone, or should the United Nations step in? That's our "CROSSFIRE" debate tonight with Congresswoman Janice Schakowsky, Democrat of Illinois, and Congressman Pete King, Republican of New York -- Paul.

BEGALA: Congressman King, our president, as we speak, is in northern Ireland -- a place you're very familiar with -- meeting with the British prime minister. Our sources telling us, CNN sources, that they've agreed to an advisory role for the U.N. But it sounds very, very limited. Explain to the moms and dads in your district who have got sons and daughters over there why their kids are the ones who should man every checkpoint for every terrorist in Iraq for the future instead of other countries bearing that burden as well.

REP. PETE KING (R), NEW YORK: Mainly because you can't trust the U.N. We saw with the U.N. what a terrible job they did in Bosnia when they had peacekeepers in there. We saw the way they totally fouled up the debate in the Security Council leading up to this.

The U.N. is capable of endless process and mindless psychobabble, but as far as getting the job done on the ground, I just don't see them doing it. So I think the safest way to protect our troops is to have the American, British and coalition forces in charge of it, at least for the time being.

NOVAK: Congresswoman Schakowsky, the countries doing the fighting and the dying in Iraq are the United States and the United Kingdom. They decided in northern Ireland, according to our CNN reporters, that the U.N. would only have an advisory role. Now surely you're not saying the U.S. and the Brits don't have the say, that the people who should decide what to do are the Germans and the French, who didn't want to fight?

REP. JANICE SCHAKOWSKY (D), ILLINOIS: With all due respect, that would be a very childish outcome, to say, well, we won it and now we own it. We're going to go in all by ourselves and we're going to set it up. And "we" being the Pentagon. Even the United States Congress

thought that the State Department should be involved, but the Pentagon is moving ahead without really consulting with anybody in setting up the (UNINTELLIGIBLE) on the ground to run the show all by itself.

NOVAK: So the people who fight and die, you don't get any...

SCHAKOWSKY: What is the point? What are we trying to achieve? Are we trying to achieve democracy, are we trying to bring Iraq into the world community? We're trying to create peace in the Middle East and in the Gulf region?

If our goal is to own another country, then absolutely we should run it ourselves. But if we want to create stability in the world, then the time is now for us to bring in the international community.

BEGALA: Let me ask you about that, Congressman King. I was one of the people very critical of this policy going into it, but I always argued that this was not a war for oil. I never believed those who said that there was some sort of imperialist design. I thought there was an honest difference of how to best secure our national interests.

Doesn't it look an awful lot like old-fashioned American imperialism if we don't let other countries in the world help to bring some peace and stability there and make every one of our kids face every one of the terrorists we know are going to be there, that the president tells us are in Iraq?

KING: Listen, I would love it if the U.N. was a stable force, if they had a proven track record in situations like this, but they really don't. Again, we saw in Bosnia -- we had U.N. peacekeepers tied to trees, being taken hostage. The fact is they don't have the type of deliberate and authoritative rule that I think is needed to get the job done.

BEGALA: So you're not worried that our troops...

KING: And I don't want to be in a position with France and Germany in trying to even the score during this reconstruction. Trying to get their contracts out, trying to prove that they were right all along.

BEGALA: But our troops are going in as liberators, our president says.

KING: Right.

BEGALA: I believe him. Soon, though, they will become occupiers if your view and the president's view holds forth, because we won't have others sharing that burden. Aren't you worried about the burden of occupation?

KING: No, because I think we will be -- as far s the occupation over the years, sure, we can bring in other troops as it goes along. But in this first three, four, five-month period, I want to have -- I don't want to be opening it up to the French and Germans and running that risk of

having them try to (UNINTELLIGIBLE) Security Council.

SCHAKOWSKY: You're talking about track record. Let's talk to the Afghanis about track record and staying power of the United States. Or let's talk to the Kurds, who we deserted before.

The United States in fact does not have a great track record in reconstructing after we've gone in. And I think it is time now to bring in the...

(CROSSTALK)

NOVAK: Congresswoman, liberals like you always say we can't do anything right, the U.N. does it well. I wonder if you know a couple of facts. For example, the fact that Iraq was scheduled to take over the Disarmament Commission at the U.N. this week. They backed out because I think the guy who was supposed to take it over is in a basement in Baghdad.

KING: And Libya was going to head the Human Rights Commission.

NOVAK: No, Libya is a head of the Human Rights with a dictator, Khadafi. And you know how Libya got there? They bribed the other African countries with oil payments to elect them. Is that the kind of organization you have faith in?

SCHAKOWSKY: That it is not to say that the United States and Great Britain can't have a significant role in shaping what the rest of the international community will do. I'm saying that they don't -- you don't have to trust the United Nations. We can be a part of that process...

NOVAK: Isn't it a lousy organization, though?

SCHAKOWSKY: We can be part of that process to make sure -- look, this is the 21st century. Were (ph) we better as the United States help to build these international institutions...

(CROSSTALK)

KING: No, those institutions have to realize that we were right. France and Germany have been collaborators all along. So have the Russians with the Iraqis. They're the ones who have been subsidizing Saddam Hussein, and we shouldn't allow them to continue that.

SCHAKOWSKY: We're going to see unilateralism on steroids coming into this aftermath of Iraq.

KING: This is leadership of a coalition of the willing, not collaborators like the French and Germans and Russians.

BEGALA: Let's take a look at the leadership that President Bush has showed in Afghanistan. You know Will Rogers famously said the United States never lost a war or won a peace. We promised the Afghans...

(CROSSTALK)

KING: We certainly did with Germany and Japan. And we did in South Korea also.

BEGALA: But George W. Bush wasn't the president then, Harry Truman was. And we did rebuild those countries under Truman...

NOVAK: I thought Eisenhower was.

BEGALA: ... and then later Eisenhower. But President Bush promised the Afghans that he would rebuild their country.

Today in Iraq there is much devastation. Our troops are doing everything they can to limit civilian casualties, I know. But there is enormous devastation.

This is what today in The Associated Press, the brother of the Afghan president had to say. He's running southern Kandahar for his brother. He says, "What was promised to Afghans, with the collapse of the Taliban, was a new life of hope and change. But what was delivered? Nothing. Everyone in the Taliban is back in business."

So we -- President Bush turned his back on the Afghans. Why won't he turn his back on the Iraqis?

KING: Well, first, the situation in Afghanistan is much better than it was. But there is no comparison between Afghanistan and Iraq. Iraq has a bureaucracy, Iraq has wealth. Iraq has an educated class of people who are positioned to come in and take over.

SCHAKOWSKY: And Iraq is going cost $20 billion a year. Should we do that all by ourselves?

KING: No, because Iraq also has the oil. And if the French and Germans and the Russians are going to be so cooperative, they can forgive the debt of what the Iraqis owe them: blood money that they made because of the Iraqis.

NOVAK: I want to get in a last question to you, Ms. Schakowsky. The last time you were on this program, before the war, you were very much opposed to going into there. But when you watch television and you see our young men and women doing a fabulous job, maybe some of them from your district in Chicago, going in to Saddam Hussein's gold bathroom and really taking over, don't you get a thrill out of that?

SCHAKOWSKY: Bob Novak, you were also not convinced about the wisdom of this war.

NOVAK: I'm asking you a question.

SCHAKOWSKY: And I think you were right. I think if we...

NOVAK: Did you get a thrill out of it or not? Did you get a thrill out of these...

SCHAKOWSKY: You know what? What I see, I see boys and girls, children, Iraqis and...

NOVAK: You don't get a thrill out of it?

SCHAKOWSKY: No, I see death and destruction.

NOVAK: OK. I thought you wouldn't.

SCHAKOWSKY: I see death and destruction.

BEGALA: That will have to be...

KING: I see liberation.

BEGALA: Congressman Peter King, Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky, thank you both very much.

SCHAKOWSKY: Thank you.

KING: Thank you.

BEGALA: A fascinating discussion. This is not the last we will hear from Capitol Hill on this reconstruction effort. But now we want to turn back to Wolf Blitzer, who is live in Kuwait City -- Wolf.

BLITZER: Thanks very much, Paul and Bob and your guests. It was an interesting discussion.