

Hagel: We Need a Regional Security Conference

Speaking with anchor Bob Schieffer on CBS's "Face the Nation" on Aug. 6, Sen. Chuck Hagel (R-Ne.) put forward a rational perspective on the conflict in Southwest Asia:

This is a regional issue. It is evolving into a global issue. We have got to keep working it. And until we have that cease-fire that stops all of this, we can't move toward moving to a high ground here of moving a process to get us to a resolution, which we all support and we all know what it is, a two-state resolution. . . .

So you cannot separate what's going on in Lebanon and Israel, from Iraq or anywhere else. This is going to have to include Iran, Syria. That means engagement. That means direct talks, and put all of it on the table. But we have to stop the slaughter. That's the first thing we have to do. . . .

We can find a way out of this. But it's going to take a lot different approach than what we have seen. Last point I'd make: Diplomacy and engagement and talking to adversaries is not and cannot be seen as a reward. It's part of the diplomatic process. . . .

And I think where we go from here, with all the prob-

lems and inconsistencies, is a cold, hard assessment that Iraq is not going to turn out the way that we were promised it was. And that's a fact, not because I say it. That's where it's going, just as the general said it very honestly, I think, this week, before the Congress.

What you do, I think—because we don't have many options. There are no good options here, no good options. I would move toward a higher ground, toward right back to what you talked about, Bob, the regionalization.

I would get the first President Bush, President Clinton, involved and try to impanel a regional security conference, a regional diplomatic conference. The UN can be part of that.

Unless you come at it that way, we're going to be leaving Iraq. And it's not going to be the way we intended to leave Iraq, because that is the direction this is going.

It is very wrong, Bob, to put American troops in a hopeless, winless situation, just keep feeding them in to what's going on. That's irresponsible and that is wrong. . . .

We are decimating our army. We can't continue with the tempo and the commitment that we are on right now. You go talk to any sergeant major, sergeant first class that's been around a little bit, or any general quietly, and they'll tell you.

I get the calls. Chris [Sen. Chris Dodd (D-Conn.), also on the show—ed.] gets the calls. So let's not pretend that things are a certain way. They are where they are. We have got to understand that, and deal with the facts as they are.