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LEHRER: I know, OK, let's go to the latter point and we'll back up The point about your not having been

OBAMA: Look, I'm very proud of my vice presidential selection, Joe Biden, who is the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and as he explains, and as John well knows, the issues of Afghanistan, the issues of Iraq, critical issues But that's Senate inside baseball But let's get back to the core issue here Senator McCain is absolutely right that the violence has been reduced as a consequence of the extraordinary sacrifice of our troops and our military families They have done a brilliant job, and General Petraeus has done a brilliant job But understand, that was a tactic designed to contain the damage of the previous four years of mismanagement of this war And so John likes – John, you like to pretend like the war started in 2007 You talk about the surge The war started in 2003, and at the time when the war started, you said it was going to be quick and easy You said we knew where the weapons of mass destruction were You were wrong You said that we were going to be greeted as liberators You were wrong You said that there was no history of violence between Shiite and Sunni And you were wrong And so my question is

LEHRER: Senator Obama

OBAMA: of judgment, of whether or not – of whether or not – if the question is who is best-equipped as the next president to make good decisions about how we use our military, how we make sure that we are prepared and ready for the next conf

LEHRER: I have got a lot on the plate here

MCCAIN: I'm afraid Senator Obama doesn't understand the difference between a tactic and a strategy But the important – I'd like to tell you, two Fourths of July ago I was in Baghdad General Petraeus invited Senator Lindsey Graham and me to attend a ceremony where 688 brave young Americans, whose enlistment had expired, were reenlisting to stay and fight for Iraqi freedom and American freedom I was honored to be there I was honored to speak to those troops And you know, afterwards, we spent a lot of time with them And you know what they said to us? They said, let us win We don't want our kids coming back here And this strategy, and this general, they are winning Senator Obama refuses to acknowledge that we are winning in Iraq

OBAMA: That's not true

MCCAIN: They just passed an electoral

OBAMA: That's not true

MCCAIN: An election law just in the last few days There is social, economic progress, and a strategy, a strategy of going into an area, clearing and holding, and the people of the country then become allied with you They inform on the bad guys And peace comes to the country, and prosperity That's what's happening in Iraq, and it wasn't a tactic

LEHRER: Let me see

OBAMA: Jim, Jim, this is a big

MCCAIN: It was a stratagem And that same strategy will be employed in Afghanistan by this great general And Senator Obama, who after promising not to vote to cut off funds for

the troops, did the incredible thing of voting to cut off the funds for the troops in Iraq and Afghanistan

OBAMA: Jim, there are a whole bunch of things we have got to answer First of all, let's talk about this troop funding issue because John always brings this up Senator McCain cut – Senator McCain opposed funding for troops in legislation that had a timetable, because he didn't believe in a timetable I opposed funding a mission that had no timetable, and was open-ended, giving a blank check to George Bush We had a difference on the timetable We didn't have a difference on whether or not we were going to be funding troops and I absolutely understand the difference between tactics and strategy We had a legitimate difference, And the strategic question that the president has to ask is not whether or not we are employing a particular approach in the country once we have made the decision to be there The question is, was this wise? We have seen Afghanistan worsen, deteriorate We need more troops there We need more resources there We've been successful in Afghanistan Senator McCain, in the rush to go into Iraq, said, you know what? There is nobody who can pose a threat to us there This is a time when bin Laden was still out, and now they've reconstituted themselves Secretary of Defense Robert Gates himself acknowledges the war on terrorism started in Afghanistan and it needs to end there But we can't do it if we are not willing to give Iraq back its country Now, what I've said is we should end this war responsibly We should do it in phases But in 16 months we should be able to reduce our combat troops, put – provide some relief to military families and our troops and bolster our efforts in Afghanistan so that we can capture and kill bin Laden and crush al Qaeda And right now, the commanders in Afghanistan, as well as Admiral Mullen, have acknowledged that we don't have enough troops to deal with Afghanistan because we still have more troops in Iraq than we did before the surge

MCCAIN: Admiral Mullen suggests that Senator Obama's plan is dangerous for America

OBAMA: That's not the case

MCCAIN: That's what

OBAMA: What he said was a precipitous

MCCAIN: That's what Admiral Mullen said

OBAMA: withdrawal would be dangerous He did not say that That's not true

MCCAIN: And also General Petraeus said the same thing Osama bin Laden and General Petraeus have one thing in common that I know of, they both said that Iraq is the central battleground Now General Petraeus has praised the successes, but he said those successes are fragile and if we set a specific date for withdrawal – and by the way, Senator Obama's original plan, they would have been out last spring before the surge ever had a chance to succeed And I'm – I'm – understand why Senator Obama was surprised and said that the surge succeeded beyond his wildest expectations MCCAIN: It didn't exceed beyond mine, because I know that that's a strategy that has worked and can succeed But if we snatch defeat from the jaws of victory and adopt Senator Obama's plan, then we will have a wider war and it will make things more complicated throughout the region, including in Afghanistan