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**Interview with Senator Jim Webb
By John King, USA**

KING: Let's get the perspective from a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee whose resume also includes military service and a stint as secretary of the Navy. Senator Jim Webb of Virginia is with us from Capitol Hill.

Senator, let me start right there. Who is right? The president with his cautious approach at the moment or Senator Lieberman and others who say let's have a no-fly zone? Let's perhaps start arming the opposition.

SEN. JIM WEBB (D), VIRGINIA: Well, I think it's even more complicated than that. This is a region that is known for divisions within divisions. And you can't even take the Egyptian template, which the president mentioned, and apply it to the situation that we see in Libya. In Egypt we had long relationships with people that we were talking to who were inside the opposition movement.

... I asked Secretary Clinton yesterday when she was testifying before the Foreign Relations Committee if we had any idea really who these people would be if we were to take that step. And she basically said we don't know these people. So we're in a situation where we've got a long history in this region of making mistakes in supporting opposition movements or in tilting one way or the other when the results come out in a way we really wouldn't like to see them. So who would we be giving arms to in Libya? There are so many different factions that are in this opposition movement. And since we don't know them, what we need to do is work very hard with other countries and other actors who do know them so we can get a better picture of what's going on there.

KING: But as we wait to get a better picture people are dying, of course and I guess the question is at what point does legitimate caution, legitimate fact finding, legitimate consultation and diplomacy end up looking like its indecision?

WEBB: ...you've got to be really careful when you make a decision. I was in Beirut as a journalist in 1983 and I saw with my own eyes what happens when you get involved in a five-sided argument and particularly when you pick one side in a five-sided argument. I was secretary of the Navy during the Iran/Iraq war in 1987 when the Reagan administration tilted toward Iraq with very unfortunate circumstances four years later when we went to war against Iraq.

And I think I was the only member of the Reagan administration who opposed the tilt to Iraq in writing in a memo to Secretary Weinberger. So you have to be extremely careful when you take action. Particularly when you're providing military support to opposition movements that you don't even know. I think it's appropriate for us to offer humanitarian assistance and to keep working with other countries and other elements to try to get a better picture of what's really going on inside Libya.

KING: And so at the moment, would you do anything different from the administration or in your view do they have it about right?

WEBB: ...seems to me there's been a little bit of a disagreement or certainly strong discussion within the administration about what to do. But I think Secretary Gates has had the right position when it comes to the potential use of the military in Libya. And we got to slow down a little bit here...

KING: And yet the president is on the record saying regime change must happen. That is now a credibility test, is it not?

WEBB: Well, even in Egypt as we move forward, there were times when some including myself were saying you need to be careful in saying what should happen as opposed to what we believe should happen, and the situation in Libya is even more so in that category. We need to identify the players.

If the opposition movement were to come forward with an opposition government that our State Department felt comfortable dealing with it would be different. But for the moment you know we need to be careful before we literally pull the trigger in any action inside Libya.

KING: And so there are some like Senator Lieberman who seems to be suggesting the president is being too timid. It seems to me that by even saying that the only good result for him is regime change, you think the president is perhaps too far out on the limb already?

WEBB: Well just remember there are -- people are -- you know there are different historical examples you can pull from. But one of the most graphic examples of when we got a little ahead of ourselves is when we traded the Shah of Iran for the Ayatollah Khomeini (ph). And so you know I think that people who are saying we should use military force or provide weapons to an opposition movement simply because we don't like the present leadership in Libya ... need to ask themselves who you're giving the weapons to and what is their future role if Gadhafi leaves?

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