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Transcript for December 4, 2005

John McCain, Thomas Kean & Lee Hamilton

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Towards the end of the show he asked about Able Danger:

**MR. RUSSERT: A few weeks ago I had the former director of the FBI, Louis Freeh, on this program, and he was very pointed on some comments about your commission. And he wrote this piece for The Wall Street Journal. Let me walk you through it: "Why Did the 9-11 Commission Ignore `Able Danger'?** Recent revelations from the military intelligence operation code-named `Able Danger' have cast light on a missed opportunity that could have potentially prevented 9/11. Specifically, Able Danger concluded in February 2000 that military experts had identified Mohamed Atta by name (and maybe by photograph) as an al-Qaeda agent operating in the U.S. Subsequently, military officers assigned to Able Danger were prevented from sharing this critical information with FBI agents, even though appointments had been made to do so. Why?...

"Was Able Danger intelligence provided to the 9-11 Commission prior to the finalization of its report, and, if so, why was it not explored? In sum, what did the 9/11 commissioners and their staff know about Able Danger and when did they know it? ...the 9-11 Commission inexplicably concluded that it `was not historically significant.' This astounding conclusion--in combination with the failure to investigate Able Danger and incorporate it into its findings--raises serious challenges to the commission's credibility and, if the facts prove out, might just render the commission historically insignificant itself."

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MR. HAMILTON: Well, that's a big "if" on the end there. Look, we looked at Able Danger very, very carefully. We do not think there was anything there of great significance. Now, something could come out in the future. I don't know. But in Mr. Freeh's article he did not present any new evidence at all. Our investigators were informed about Able Danger. We requested all of the documents relating to Able Danger. We reviewed these documents. We had investigators meet with some of these people in Afghanistan and other places. The bottom line is that they can furnish no documentary evidence to support their charges that they had a chart, for example, with Mohamed Atta's name on it. It is...

MR. RUSSERT: Congressman Weldon of Pennsylvania says he gave that chart to the national security advisor.

MR. HAMILTON: And the national security advisor denied that he ever got it. That was the assistant, Stephen Hadley, not Condi Rice, at the time. We have not seen that chart. We have not seen Mohamed Atta's name in any documentation prior to 9/11. Believe me, we know the name of Atta and we would have been alert to it. We just need evidence to support these charges. We don't accuse anyone here of bad intentions. But the people that have brought forward this information have not given us any documentation. They were not involved in the analysis of it themselves. Their recollections in some respects--for example, the whereabouts of Mohamed Atta--simply are not accurate. We have documentation to show that. So we need to have more evidence, and Mr. Freeh's article simply did not bring forward any new evidence. We concluded--the staff concluded, not the commission--that this information was not valid, that there was too much doubt about it.

MR. RUSSERT: Do you agree with that?

MR. KEAN: Yeah. We had an awful lot of people coming forward, 50 or 60, saying they saw Mohamed Atta here, they saw Mohamed Atta there; they had this and that. There was absolutely no evidence to back this up. There still isn't

any evidence to back it up. If people want to look into it, they're welcome to. We still haven't seen the evidence to indicate it. We saw every file. The Pentagon denies it. They say they haven't gotten any information. The White House...

MR. HAMILTON: White House denies it.

MR. KEAN: White House denies it. Nobody brought the congressional investigation any information. Nobody gave any information to the 9/11 Commission to back this up. If this is true in any way, it's a monstrous conspiracy. I haven't seen any evidence to back it up.

MR. RUSSERT: I want to go back to your original report. You found that there was no connection between al-Qaeda and Saddam Hussein that was "operational." And you found that there was no evidence that the--Iraq cooperated with al-Qaeda in developing or carrying out attacks against the U.S. Is that accurate?

MR. KEAN: That's correct.

MR. RUSSERT: So there's no suggestion that Iraq was, in any way, shape or form, involved with September 11?

MR. KEAN: No, and we can find no evidence whatsoever, and we came out with that statement clearly.

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MR. RUSSERT: Before you go, if one year from now we have exactly the same report in terms of all the factors I raised with you this morning, what would you say?

MR. HAMILTON: I'd be extremely disappointed.

MR. KEAN: And extremely worried that we may have had another attack at that point because some of these things weren't done.

MR. HAMILTON: We believe another attack will occur, and we had better get to it and protect the American people.

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MR. RUSSERT: Not if but when.

MR. HAMILTON: It's not a question of if. We know what their intent is. They've expressed it over and over again.

MR. RUSSERT: And are we prepared?

MR. HAMILTON: We've...

MR. RUSSERT: Are we prepared?

MR. HAMILTON: No, we are not as well prepared, as Tom put it early on, as well prepared as we should be. There is plenty of room for improvement, and we've got to get with the task.

MR. KEAN: And God help us if we have another attack and we haven't done some of these things.

MR. RUSSERT: Who has to grab hold of this? Is it the president?

MR. KEAN: It's the president and the Congress. It's our government. And there are things we talked about today that Congress has to do; there are things we talked about that the administration has to do. First of all, the safety of the American people has got to be their number one priority. There is nothing more important.

MR. RUSSERT: Are you now out of business?

MR. KEAN: We're going out of business as of December 31.

MR. RUSSERT: That's it.

MR. KEAN: That's it.

MR. RUSSERT: Never to be heard from again.

MR. KEAN: As individuals, we're going to be around, but...

MR. RUSSERT: And your son is running for the United States Senate of New Jersey.

MR. KEAN: Our son is--my son is running for the United States Senate. Good candidate, by the way.

MR. RUSSERT: OK. We need equal time for the Democrats, but that's--Governor Tom Kean, Congressman Lee Hamilton, thanks very much.

And we'll be right back.

(Announcements)

MR. RUSSERT: Start your day tomorrow on "Today" with Katie and Matt. Then the NBC News with Brian Williams.

That's all for today. We'll be back next week. If it's Sunday, it's MEET THE PRESS.