

NBC's *Today*

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7:01:09 a.m. [TEASE]

20 seconds

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: One-on-One]

HODA KOTB: One on one, Craig sits down with new Republican presidential candidate Nikki Haley in her first interview since entering the race.

NIKKI HALEY: We have to start righting the ship. We need new blood.

KOTB: What she's saying about her decision to run and her phone call with her former boss-turned opponent, Donald Trump.

HALEY: I didn't ask, I told.

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7:07:56 a.m.

6 minutes and 24 seconds

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Nikki Haley One-on-One]

SAVANNAH GUTHRIE: Meanwhile, the 2024 presidential race is beginning to take shape. Republican Nikki Haley's campaign is officially under way after her announcement yesterday and the former U.N. Ambassador heads to New Hampshire today after making her first appeal to voters in her home state of South Carolina. And, Craig, you were there and spoke with Haley after that announcement.

CRAIG MELVIN: Yes, we were down in Charleston yesterday. Savannah, Hoda, good morning, good morning to you as well. Nikki Haley first made a name for herself on the national stage as the governor of South Carolina, then as U.N. Ambassador. Now, Haley has become the first challenger to her former boss, Donald Trump, for the Republican nomination. [TO HALEY] Less than a year ago, you said that if former President Trump was going to run, you wouldn't run. It's been reported that, a couple weeks ago, you call your former boss, you ask for his blessing to run, and he said that you — you called him the greatest president. If that's true, then why run against him?

HALEY: I'm going to keep that phone call personal. I didn't ask. I told that I thought that we needed to go in a new direction, but when I first said I wouldn't run against him, Afghanistan hadn't fallen, we didn't see the rise in inflation like we've seen, we didn't see what was happening in our schools the way it was, and we didn't see the results of the midterms that we just had. It is a time for a new generation of leaders. You shouldn't have to be 80 years old to get to Washington. And we got to start righting the ship. We need new blood because we have some

serious challenges.

MELVIN: After the insurrection you said Trump, “will be judged harshly by history. He went down a path we shouldn’t have and we shouldn’t have followed him.” And then, later that year, you said he “has the ability to get strong people elected. We need him in the Republican Party.” Can both be true?

HALEY: Yes. Except for the media because the thing is —

MELVIN: He can be responsible —

HALEY: No, let me finish.

MELVIN: — for the insurrection but still be an essential part of the party?

HALEY: I have said January 6th was a terrible day. I criticized him for that and I stand by that criticism. I have said, he was a good president in the way that he lifted up so many people economically, and he did real good in this country. That can be true too. When I see something right, I praise it. When I see something wrong, I criticize it.

MELVIN: As you know, the immediate past President still maintains that the election was rigged, that it was stolen. He’s not alone. There’s this recent Monmouth poll that found 61 percent of Republicans say that President Biden because of voter fraud. How do you navigate that?

HALEY: I don’t have to navigate anything. We saw a lot the things happen during COVID that wouldn’t normally happen that created mischief that shouldn’t have been there. Is Joe Biden the President? Yes. Joe Biden is the President. I — we shouldn’t question that. Do I think that everybody needs voter I.D. like what we did in South Carolina so we know everybody’s vote is valid, yes.

MELVIN: But you know, election denialism has become a pretty significant part of —

HALEY: There’s going to be a percentage of people who don’t think Joe Biden’s President.

MELVIN: But 61 percent?

HALEY: I don’t think it’s 61 percent.

MELVIN: That’s —

HALEY: I think you have 61 percent who were saying look, we need to have trust in our election, and we need it to be as transparent as possible.

MELVIN: In your speech, you said of China that China will end up on the ash heap of history if

you're elected. That's pretty strong. And a few months ago, you said that China was closer than ever to invading Taiwan. If China does invade Taiwan should there be a military response from the United States?

HALEY: Republicans and Democrats for too long thought that if we were nice to China, they would want to be like us. They don't want to be like us. They want to destroy the west. We need to change the way we look at them and so that means we should have a strong military and for God's sake, we should not have Americans look up at the sky and see a spy balloon from China looking back down on us. And if we do those things, Craig, it there won't be an issue in Taiwan because if you are strong and China knows that we mean business, they're not going to make that move.

MELVIN: If they do invade, should there be a military response?

HALEY: I think we have to look at that when that happens. But what we do is we have the backs of our allies.

MELVIN: Let's talk Ukraine for a moment. The former President, your former boss, has said he would stop supporting the Ukrainians if elected. House Speaker Kevin McCarthy has said that the Ukrainians shouldn't get a blank check. Where do you stand?

HALEY: The war in Ukraine and Russia is not about Ukraine. It's about freedom and it's a — it's a war we have to win. Because if Ukraine doesn't win this, Russia will go on to Poland and the Baltics and then we'll have a World War. What we need to do and Biden should have done was give them what they needed to win early. We're not putting troops on the ground. We are not writing blank checks, but when they need the ammunition to win, we should give it to them.

MELVIN: President Zelenskyy has asked for F-16s. Should — should we give those to him?

HALEY: We give him what he needs to win, not money but equipment.

MELVIN: And you recognize there's daylight between you and the other declared candidate on that front?

HALEY: There's some daylight between me and Joe Biden because Joe Biden was slow to the take.

MELVIN: To be fair, Madam Ambassador. You have to win the primary. You're talking about President Biden a lot. But are only two candidates right now, it's you and your boss.

HALEY: No and you guys are obsessed with me talking about him, but what I'll tell you —

MELVIN: Well, there are only two candidates.

HALEY: — it's okay. I don't kick sideways, I kick forward and what I'm telling you is Joe Biden

has not led.

MELVIN: Let's talk about the primary field. Back in 2016 a lot of folks believed that one of the major reasons Donald Trump won was because the field was so crowded. How real is the worry that —

HALEY: I —

MELVIN: — the same thing happens this time around?

HALEY: — I don't care about any of that. What I care about is going straight to New Hampshire, going to Iowa, talking to the people in South Carolina and getting our message out to America.

MELVIN: The only other contender in this race — he's been known to say some pretty dirty and nasty things about his opponents, been known to give them nicknames. Does that concern you at all?

HALEY: Not at all. Not one bit. I have worked with him. He's known for doing that. I got a job to do.

MELVIN: Are you going to get kick back?

HALEY: Whenever I'm kicked, I always kick back and he knows that.

MELVIN: During the conversation, I also asked the former ambassador about issues facing Americans at home, including whether she supports a federal abortion ban and her plans for Social Security and Medicare. We'll have that part of our conversation coming up for you in the third hour.

KOTB: Mmhmm.

GUTHRIE: Alright.

KOTB: Great conversation, Craig.

GUTHRIE: Good conversation. Thank you very much.