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FACE THE NATION

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GUEST: COLIN POWELL
Former Secretary of State

MODERATOR: BOB SCHIEFFER - CBS News

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FACE THE NATION - CBS NEWS
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BOB SCHIEFFER, host:

Today on FACE THE NATION, Colin Powell, an exclusive interview. What does the former secretary of state think about the course of the war? Does he believe more troops could quell the violence? Should we be talking to Iran and Syria? We'll ask those questions and more of Colin Powell in his first Sunday interview in one year. Then I'll have a final word on the short campaign of Evan Bayh.

But first, Colin Powell on FACE THE NATION.

Announcer: FACE THE NATION with CBS News chief Washington correspondent Bob Schieffer. And now, from CBS News in Washington, Bob Schieffer.

SCHIEFFER: Good morning again. And yes, the former secretary of state is with us in the studio this morning, his first Sunday interview in about one year exactly.

Well, Mr. Secretary, let's get right down to it. A lot of people are talking about and assessing the situation in Iraq. We just had the James Baker-Lee Hamilton Commission say that, quote, "The situation was dire, and getting worse." What is your assessment?

Mr. COLIN POWELL (Former Secretary of State): I agree with the assessment of Mr. Baker and Mr. Hamilton. It's grave and deteriorating. And as Secretary-designate of Defense Bob Gates said at his confirmation hearing, we're not winning. So if it's grave and deteriorating, and we're not winning, we are losing. We haven't lost, and this is the time now to start to put in place the kinds of strategies that will turn this situation around.

It's a war that's unfolded really in three phases. Phase one was the march to Baghdad and the removal of the Saddam Hussein regime and the destruction of that army. That was done very, very well. We thought that was it, though. Phase two then began, the destruction of ministries, the burning down of buildings, the disorder in the streets. We didn't establish security in the communities of Iraq. And then that led to an insurgency. After three years, we still now are not on top of that insurgency.

But the most serious phase began earlier this year, phase three, with the blowing up of the Golden Mosque in Samarra. And that turned it into sect-on-sect violence, communitarian violence, which I think has degenerated into what some of us are calling, anyways, a civil war. And it is very difficult to see how the American army, the United States armed forces, can impose its will on this kind of conflict, the phase three conflict. And we still haven't settled phase two.

So I think it's a very serious situation, and it is not just an American strategy that's needed, it is an Iraqi strategy. How the Iraqis are going to deal with it, because ultimately I think the Iraqis are the key to the solution. And what I'm sure President Bush is trying to come up with over the next several weeks is how can American strategy and American efforts support

the Iraqi strategy?

SCHIEFFER: Well, you said some time ago that it had reached the stage of a civil war. What made you use that term?

Mr. POWELL: I watched it all year long, from the blowing up of the mosque to the present. And for a while I said, 'Well, it's sect-on-sect, it's communitarian violence.' But when I see a situation where the government is having difficulty extending control, it's essentially in the green zone, where you have a situation like just in the last 24 hours, 51 dead people show up who have been murdered and assassinated, and another two dozen have been kidnapped this morning, and three more American soldiers have been killed in the last 24 hours, and nothing seems to be improving. It seemed to me that this looks like a civil war, and we ought to call it that.

There was another reason. I was looking for a way to make it a stark situation, so that we would get the kind of response that I think is needed to deal with this situation that is deteriorating.

SCHIEFFER: Well, let's talk about where we go from here. The president is apparently considering options, there seems to be stories leaking out now that perhaps he's talking about something like John McCain has been proposing, and that is a temporary surge, put in more troops, 20, 30,000 troops into Baghdad. The Baker Commission, of course, took the opposite tack, they said we need to start drawing down, essentially. What do you think we ought to do?

Mr. POWELL: Over the summer, the United States and Iraqi forces launched Operation Forward Together. Began in June, and then phase two began in August, with thousands of American troops going into Baghdad to try to stabilize the situation. They haven't stabilized the situation. So we have tried this surge of troops over the summer. I am not persuaded that another surge of troops into Baghdad for the purpose of suppressing this communitarian violence, this civil war, will work. But if somebody proposes that additional troops be sent, if I was still chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, my first question to whoever's proposing it is what mission is it these troops ought to accomplish? Is it to secure Baghdad, in which case the American army isn't large enough to secure Baghdad, and we should not use our troops as policemen. It is to take over--is it to take over a certain section of Baghdad, is it to go after the insurgents? There needs to be a clear mission that these additional troops are going to be performing.

Secondly, can they accomplish that mission? Once you set it out, is it something that really is accomplishable? And third, do we have enough troops to accomplish it? And we have to be very, very careful in this instance not just to grab a number out of the air. It really has to be analyzed.

General Abizaid said in his testimony just a few weeks ago, the Central Command commander, that he didn't see a need for more troops. I'm not sure that any of the commanders have said that yet. We hear from the Iraqi leadership that they want to take control of Baghdad, not bring in more American troops. We hear from Prime Minister Maliki, standing next to

President Bush in Amman, Jordan, a couple of weeks ago that he believes Iraqi forces will be able to take over all security by June.

Now, I don't know if they really can do that or not, or whether they can secure Baghdad by themselves. But this is the time to say to them, 'Fine, you think you can do that, show us not only the political will to do that, show us the political means you're going to use. How are you going to go about reconciliation? How are you going to get the parties together and stop fighting one another? How are you going to do that?' Because you need a political process to go along with the buildup of their military forces, and especially the buildup of their police forces, which is the weak link in all of this. It is the DC police force that guards Washington, DC, not the troops that're stationed at Fort Meyer. And in Baghdad, you need a police force to do that. And in the other cities you need a police force to do that, and not American troops.

So before I would add any additional troops or recommend it to a commander in chief, I'd want to make sure we have a clear understanding of what it is they're going for, how long they're going for.

And let's be clear about something else, Bob, that gets a little confusing. There really are no additional troops. All we would be doing is keeping some of the troops who're there there longer and escalating, or accelerating, the arrival of other troops.

SCHIEFFER: Well, let me just ask you about that, because--do we have the troops? You seem to be suggesting that we don't.

Mr. POWELL: I'm suggesting that what General Schoomaker said the other day, before a committee looking at the Reserve and National Guard, that the active Army is about broken. General Schoomaker is absolutely right, and all of my contacts within the Army suggest that the Army has a serious problem in the active force, and it's a problem that will spread into the Guard and Reserves: Backlog of equipment that is not being repaired, soldiers--especially officers and noncommissioned officers--going on repetitive tours.

So if you surge now, you're going to keep troops who've already been kept there long even longer, and you're going to be bringing in troops from the United States who were going to be coming anyway, but perhaps a little bit later. And so that's how you surge. And that surge cannot be sustained. The current active Army is not large enough, and the Marine Corps is not large enough, for the kinds of missions they're being asked to perform. And we need to let both the Army and the Marine Corps grow in size, in my military judgment.

And the Congress has a--a--a serious task ahead of it: to make sure that the Army and the Marine Corps get the funds they need to sustain themselves and to sustain their equipment, their ammunition, everything else they need if they're going to be put in these kinds of situations.

SCHIEFFER: General, is that why--because the Army is the size it is--that we

didn't have more people going in in the beginning for the invasion?

Mr. POWELL: Well, there were enough people for phase one. We took care of the regime and the army. I don't think there were enough people for phase two. And it was not just a matter of not enough troops, because there were other--there were troops heading in, and they were stopped from coming in because a political judgment was made in the Pentagon that additional troops were not needed, we would build up the Iraqi forces quickly. But that didn't happen, and as a result we saw disorder.

And the first responsibility of any government--and we became the government the day that Saddam Hussein's regime fell under international law--and the first responsibility of a government is to provide security for the people. And what the people did not get in that second phase, and what they don't have now, is security to go about reconstruction, to go about building. So you see that mixed neighborhoods are ethnically cleansing themselves now, and tens upon tens of thousands of Iraqis have left the country because of lack of security. The number one priority...

SCHIEFFER: About 1.6 million, I think.

Mr. POWELL: The number one priority has to be working with the Iraqi government and their strategy, provide security for the people of Baghdad, initially--that's the center of gravity. But I think, ultimately, with our help, has to be done by the Iraqis. They're the ones who have to solve this internecine civil war humanitarian--communitarian conflict that they're in--communitarian.

SCHIEFFER: Well, let--let's--let's--you've talked about it, and as I--I take it, you--you think that the 160,000 troops are not going to be any more successful than 140,000 have at this point.

Mr. POWELL: Nobody's made the case to me that 100--it's 140 now--but I have not seen a case that persuades me that it'll be better at 150 and 160. And frankly, that would take a surge that you'd have to pay for later by not having troops that can come in and replace some of the 160,000 that are there.

SCHIEFFER: General, do you think that victory is still possible? And I say that because it seems to me the Baker Commission went to some effort not to talk about victory. They talked about success. And yet the president--and we're told he has done that on purpose--has talked about victory. Do you think victory, in the traditional sense, is still possible there?

Mr. POWELL: It defines which--you have to define what you mean by victory. Victory means you have gotten rid of every insurgent, you have peace throughout the country, I don't see that in the cards right now. What we are going to have to do is try to bring a sense of order and security to the country, even if there continues to be a low level of violence and insurgency.

But victory is not in the hands of the American government or the American president. Victory, to be achieved or not to be achieved, as I have just

defined it, is increasingly in the hands of the Iraqi leadership. If they can't pull it off, if they can't demonstrate the political will and means to go after the militias, to create a military force that is answerable and confident in the government and to root out the corruption that exists in the police forces. If they are unable to do that, the United States is not going to be able to do it for them.

SCHIEFFER: Do you think that we are safer or are we more unsafe because of what has happened in Iraq at this point?

Mr. POWELL: Well, I think we are a little less safe in the sense that we don't have the same force structure available for other problems. I think we have been somewhat constrained in our ability to influence events elsewhere. But I think that's all recoverable. There are some--some good things that are going on in the world today that we sometimes don't talk about. You know, there is no prospect of war in Asia or Europe. We have strong alliances and we have many friends. We're going through a bad spot with respect to anti-American attitudes, but people are still lining up at our embassies and consular officers to come to the United States. So I think we still have great strength in our country and in our society and our relations with the rest of the world. But this is a tough time for us.

SCHIEFFER: All right. Well, let's talk about some of that and we'll do that after a brief commercial.

We'll be back in just a minute.

(Announcements)

SCHIEFFER: We're back again with former Secretary of State Powell.

General Powell, we talked about whether putting more troops in would help. Let's go back to what the Baker Commission talked about, and they said that an eventual drawdown, the whole idea, putting the Iraqis on the front line to do the fighting, using Americans as advisers and trainers. Is that practical?

Mr. POWELL: Well, there are advisers in Iraqi units now, and when General Abizaid testified a few weeks ago, he said that he wanted to increase the number of advisers in our units, in the Iraqi units.

SCHIEFFER: Mm-hmm.

Mr. POWELL: And I think that's a sensible plan. Whether you accept exactly what Mr. Baker and Mr. Hamilton said or some other plan, sooner or later, there has to be the beginning of a baton pass between the United States forces and Iraqi forces. I can't predict when that would be. Mr. Baker said early '08, others have used other time frames. It has to be determined by the situation and not by some lunar event. But sooner or later, you have to begin the baton pass. Passing it off to the Iraqis for their security and begin the drawdown of US forces. I think that's got to happen sometime before the middle of next year, at least the beginning of this. You cannot--we cannot

walk away.

SCHIEFFER: Is it safe--is it safe for those trainers? I mean, who's going to protect them?

Mr. POWELL: They are, one, they'll have some ability to protect themselves. But they embed themselves within the Iraqi unit. There will always be risk. It is--it is a conflict.

SCHIEFFER: Mm-hmm.

Mr. POWELL: But I am no concerned that you have to have huge formations waiting to go rescue some advisers.

SCHIEFFER: You're just saying eventually that's going to have to happen.

Mr. POWELL: Eventually, I think it has to happen unless we're planning on staying there forever.

SCHIEFFER: So we're...

Mr. POWELL: And you know, and when--when--when one of these units gets hit, gets hit right away...

SCHIEFFER: Mm-hmm.

Mr. POWELL: ...a reaction force that's two hours away isn't terribly useful.

SCHIEFFER: All right, so you say that more troops is not the answer in the short term.

Mr. POWELL: Unless...

SCHIEFFER: What is the answer?

Mr. POWELL: Unless you can give me...

SCHIEFFER: Unless you have a plan. Yes.

Mr. POWELL: ...a solid reason and mission for these troops.

SCHIEFFER: Mm-hmm. What is--what should we do, General?

Mr. POWELL: I think that what we should do is to work with the Iraqi government, press them on the political peace, do everything we can to provide equipment, advisers, and whatever the Iraqi armed forces need to become more competent. And to train their leaders, so that those leaders realize their responsibility to the government. We should do everything we can to help the Iraqi police forces--and there are many different components of their police forces--become more effective and competent. And that's going to be the toughest one. Because remember, ultimately, it is police force--police force

that maintains order in the various communities. And I think in the months ahead, press the Iraqis to come up with a strategy that they can execute, and then our strategy should fall into their strategy, and support them, rather than us thinking we have a silver bullet that we can produce in Washington, DC, and impose upon the Iraqis.

SCHIEFFER: Let's talk a little about diplomacy. Should we talk to Iran? Should we talk to Syria?

Mr. POWELL: Let's start with Syria. In my four years as secretary of state, we talked to Syria. I went to Damascus twice, we have an embassy that's open in Damascus right now. We have diplomatic relations with Syria. In my four years we've placed requests before the Syrians; sometimes they complied, sometimes they didn't. The put requests to us, sometimes we answered, sometimes we didn't. Many times we just exchanged arguments with each other. But I'll point out one time where Prime Minister Sharon, the Israeli Prime Minister Sharon knew I was going to Damascus from Jerusalem. He didn't like me going there, but he said to me, 'Please talk to President Assad about knocking off Hezbollah rockets that are now starting to come across the border in the north again.' I went to Damascus, I spoke to President Assad, and passed on that concern, and the rockets stopped the next day. And Prime Minister Sharon thanked me for it.

So I think you have to talk to a country like Syria. It's a little--not--it's a little discordant to see that we're not talking to them, but the Iraqis have just opened their embassies in Damascus and Tehran. So they have relations with them again.

Iran is a little difficult. It's a much more difficult account. We had low-level conversations with the Iranians in 2001, the end of 2001, 2002, and then we stopped it in 2003. There is hostility that goes back 27 years, and they're difficult to deal with, and they're acting very, very badly. But at the same time, I think that low-level conversations of the kind we had earlier might give us some channels of communication.

Now, I have no illusions that either Syria or Iran want to help us in Iraq. I also am quite confident that what is happening in Iraq is self-generated for the most part. The money, the resources, the weapons are in Iraq already. Do they get marginal support, and some support from Iran and Syria? You bet they do. Are Iran and Syria regimes that I look down upon? I certainly do. But at the same time, I've looked down on many people over the years in the course of my military and diplomatic career, and I still had to talk to them.

SCHIEFFER: Let me ask you about the retirement ceremony they had for Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld. The vice president said Secretary Rumsfeld is the finest secretary of defense in the history of this country, or words to that effect. What is your assessment?

Mr. POWELL: Well, that's the vice president's judgment. I've known many fine secretaries of defense: Caspar Weinberger comes to mind, and Dick Cheney comes to mind himself. But it's history that will judge the performance of

all of us in this troubling time of history, and it is a history that I think will ultimately be written as a result of what happens in Iraq.

SCHIEFFER: Just a short time--amount of time left. North Korea. What do you think's going to happen there? What...

Mr. POWELL: I--I...

SCHIEFFER: Is there a chance of success here?

Mr. POWELL: I don't see--you know, they're meeting now, and I don't--I don't yet see the conditions for a breakthrough. But I think ultimately with patience and persistence, and with the help of all of our partners, we can eventually find a way to solve this diplomatically and politically.

SCHIEFFER: Should we talk to them directly?

Mr. POWELL: I did. I started talking to them directly. Initially, the president wanted to take time to examine our policy. We did.

SCHIEFFER: I remember that very well.

Mr. POWELL: But then he authorized me, and I talked to the North Korean foreign minister on several occasions, and we started conversations. But then we discovered they had another nuclear weapons program that we did not know about. And when we presented that to them, they acknowledged it, and the relationship went bad after that. And then we created first a three-party and now the six-party framework to involve all of North Korea's neighbors, not just the United States, in trying to find a solution.

SCHIEFFER: All right. Mr. Secretary, thank you so much for joining us this morning. We really appreciate it.

Mr. POWELL: My pleasure, Bob. Thank you.

SCHIEFFER: And I'll be back in a moment with final thought.

(Announcements)

SCHIEFFER: Finally today, Evan Bayh is a well-regarded two-term senator from Indiana, but he is not exactly a household name. So when he announced two weeks ago that he was thinking about running for the Democratic presidential nomination, even he knew it was a long-shot. He acknowledged it was a David vs. Goliath kind of thing, but he remembered that David had done pretty well.

True enough. But yesterday, Bayh realized why the smart money is usually on the giants, because they're giants. And he quit the race as quickly as he had entered. 'Whether there were too many Goliaths or whether I'm just not the right David,' he said, 'I concluded the odds were longer than I felt I could possibly pursue.' In other words, he took a look, realized he had no chance and decided not to waste his time or the country's.

How refreshing. None of this, 'I decided I needed to spend more time with my family,' or the catalog of excuses we've come to expect from the usual wannabes or even worse, one those ego-trip campaigns that all involved know is headed nowhere except to get some TV time for the candidate. Bayh just concluded it wasn't to be, and said so.

The one down side is that this is just the kind of straight talk we need more of in politics, not less. A man so candid about himself and his chances might have had some interesting thoughts on other subjects. In a way, I'm sorry we won't get to hear them.

We'll be back in just a moment.

(Announcements)

SCHIEFFER: And that's our broadcast. We'll see you next week right here on FACE THE NATION.