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TELEVISION PROGRAM TO "CBS NEWS' FACE THE NATION."*

CBS News

FACE THE NATION

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BOB SCHIEFFER, host:

Today on FACE THE NATION, the Democratic Party chairman Howard Dean wants the race for his party's nomination over by July 1st. But is that just a pipe dream? Can he force superdelegates to make their choices by then? Can he make a candidate who wants to take the race to the convention drop out? And how much is Senator McCain benefiting from all this? We'll ask the chairman.

Then we'll turn to Iraq. General Petraeus will report to Congress this week on progress there. How will he say it's going, and what's it like on the ground? We'll go first to CBS News chief foreign correspondent Lara Logan in Baghdad. Then we'll talk with Nancy Youssef, the chief Pentagon correspondent for the McClatchy newspapers; and Rajiv Chandrasekaran, the national editor and former Baghdad bureau chief of The Washington Post.

I'll have a final word on a piano competition that changed the world.

But first, Howard Dean 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: And good morning again.

We begin this morning in Burlington, Vermont, where the chairman of the Democratic Party, Howard Dean, is standing by.

Good morning, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. HOWARD DEAN (Chairman, Democratic National Committee): Good morning, Bob, how are you?

SCHIEFFER: Well, I just couldn't be better.

Mr. DEAN: Good.

SCHIEFFER: Let's start with this question. There are 800-and-some-odd superdelegates in the Democratic Party, about 470 of them, I think, have announced who they're going to support. You want the other 330 to announce who they're supporting, and you'd like to get that done by July 1st.

Mr. DEAN: Yeah.

SCHIEFFER: If you can do that, you're saying that you can avoid a nasty fight at the convention. But I guess the question, Governor Dean, is how are you going to get them to do that?

Mr. DEAN: Well, I think they'll do it because this is a race that's more important than either Senator Clinton or Senator Obama. This is a race about the change in our country. Look, John McCain wants to take the country essentially in the same direction that George Bush is taking it.

I don't think that's what most Americans want. The only thing that's going to make John McCain president is disunity among Democrats. And we cannot afford four more years, essentially, of George W. Bush. So I think the remaining 300-and-some-odd superdelegates, or unpledged delegates, will continue to do what the 470-odd have already done, which is to make their views known in drips and drabs between now and the end of June, and I think that's the right thing to do for the country, never mind just the party.

SCHIEFFER: Well, what are you doing? Are you--some people are saying that you're not doing enough, that you ought to really get in there and put pressure on these people for all of the reasons that you have just cited, because of what it's doing to the party.

Mr. DEAN: Well, most people who say that I should put pressure on people, what they mean is I should put pressure on them to do what they want to do. Well, I'm--you know, that haven't--we haven't had anybody in this job for 50 years, since John Bailey, who did that, and in the modern era of primaries and caucuses, where the voters actually get to choose the nominee, we don't do that anymore.

So my job is to make sure, first of all, that voters get their fair chance to express themselves, which we're doing, and that'll end on June 3rd, and then secondly, to bring all the instruments that I have--which aren't all that many, but to bring them to bear on getting an agreement between the candidates to find a way to seat Florida and Michigan, and then to have this process cleared. We only have two nominees. Unless it's a dead heat, which I don't think is likely, there's no reason we shouldn't know our nominee by July 1st.

SCHIEFFER: Well, the CBS News/New York Times poll this week showed that 81 percent of the people in this country now believe it's headed in the wrong direction. Yet these polls, when you match up either one of the Democrats against John McCain, show that they're running about even. Does that tell you that what you're worried about is actually true, that this fight that's going on is really hurting these two Democrats, hurting both of them?

Mr. DEAN: I think that's temporarily true, although the help that's--is amazing. I mean, here we are having--both our candidates, I think this weekend were in Montana. They've been in North Dakota. People haven't campaigned in states like that for the presidency in years. So every time you have a big contest in a place, for example, like Pennsylvania, we haven't had a contest there for years and years, and now we know everything there is to know about Pennsylvania. We know who all those 150,000 new voters are that are registered. So there's a lot of good things that're happening because of this, and people are really excited about it because they know it's going to change the country.

But you're right. If it goes on--if you go into the convention divided, you're probably going to come out of the convention divided. The only--look, John McCain is wrong on Iraq, wrong on the economy and wrong on health care. Those are the three biggest issues that the American people are voting on. At least, he's wrong compared to what they believe should happen. And so he is not a strong candidate. And people also believe he's a flip-flopper, which he is. So the question is, can we make sure that we do head in the new direction that 81 percent of the American people want us to head in? And I think we can if we are united.

SCHIEFFER: Let me ask you about what we keep hearing, and that is that both Hillary Clinton and Bill Clinton are telling--they're telling superdelegates, they're telling anybody who will listen, they say this in private, but they--we keep hearing it, so there must be something to this, that they are saying Barack Obama simply can't win. And maybe the suggestion is can't win because he's an African-American. Do you believe he can't win?

Mr. DEAN: Certainly not. I think either one of them can win, and I think it'd be terrific. But the ongoing dispute, while it's healthy in the short run, is--needs to have an end at some time. And if it has an end at the convention, that only gives us eight or nine weeks to recover from that. So again, I think this has all been for the good, most of this. Some of the things that have been said have been debated. I'd rather have that debate now in March than I would in October. We've gotten tremendous information about the American people, what they want in almost every state, and we will have in every state by the time this is over with. But again, unless this is a dead heat, there's no reason to go to Denver. If the--if the pledged delegate--unpledged delegates would make their preferences clear and the voters will make their preferences clear, which they will by the third of June, then we'll know who our nominee is and we can win.

SCHIEFFER: Well, have you talked to either of the Clintons about this argument that they're making to these delegates that Barack Obama can't win? Is that...

Mr. DEAN: Well, first of all, I have not heard that they have made the argument that he can't win because he's African-American. I have not heard that, and I don't think they would make that argument. Secondly...

SCHIEFFER: Well, can't win in general.

Mr. DEAN: Well, yeah.

SCHIEFFER: Have you heard that?

Mr. DEAN: But, you know, both campaigns argue that. I mean, that's what you do in a presidential campaign, is you argue that you're the best candidate because you can win and because you have a better policy on this or that. I mean, look, this stuff is--I don't--I'm not deeply offended that somebody argues that the other side can't win. I've been through one of these races. I--if that's the worst that gets said in this--in this campaign, then we're--I think we're in very good shape. Because somebody is going to win, and I think our candidate is most likely going to win the presidency of the United States because people are fed up and they do not want a third term for George W. Bush, which is essentially what the policies of John McCain are offering us.

SCHIEFFER: At this point it appears that there will not be do-over elections in either Michigan or Florida, that the results are going to stand, which means that the delegates from those two major states, big Democratic states--or that have a big Democratic vote--will not be seated at the convention. Are you going to take any position on that?

Mr. DEAN: OK. We want them to be seated in some way. They obviously can't be seated as-is, which is what one campaign is saying. And they're certainly not going to be excluded, which is what the other campaign is saying. But there is a--there is a reasonable, thoughtful way to do this. The elections were flawed, there's no question about that, particularly in Michigan, where there

was only one candidate on the ballot. On the other hand, that wasn't the voters' fault, and the voters ought to have some say. The voters in Michigan and Florida are important to us.

So the--I think the Michigan delegation and the Florida delegation have been very constructive in the last couple of weeks. We've met, we've discussed this on--by phone, and we're both, I think, committed to making sure this works in some way. But if you're going to change the rules in the middle of the game--which we're doing, because we said that--we said that they wouldn't count, and now they will in some way--you're going to have to get the assent of both candidates. And it's going to take some time to work that out, because these candidates are really focused on these primary battles in Virginia--I mean, excuse me, in Pennsylvania and West Virginia and North Carolina and so forth and so on. And so it's going to take some time to work this out, but I think we can work it out and I want to work it out.

SCHIEFFER: All right. Well, Governor Dean, we want to thank you for being with us this morning. And clearly there's a lot more of this campaign ahead. Thanks for being with us.

Mr. DEAN: Bob, thank you.

SCHIEFFER: We'll be back in just one minute to talk about Iraq. We'll go first to Lara Logan in Baghdad.

(Announcements)

SCHIEFFER: General David Petraeus, our top man in Iraq, returns to Washington this week to talk about where we go from here in the war. Joining us now from Baghdad, our chief foreign correspondent, Lara Logan.

Lara, just bring us up to date on what's happened here, and I guess the general question I want to ask you, is Iraq any better--have things calmed down at all over this last year? Because suddenly many Americans were surprised over the last couple of weeks when you had this new round of violence. What's the situation there now?

LARA LOGAN reporting:

Well, the last few weeks have really been brutal for General Petraeus because he really was looking at a year where he had managed to be quite successful in reducing violence, particularly in Baghdad and some of the surrounding areas. One of the main reasons for that is the agreement with the Sunni tribes and also with some Shiite tribes, the militias that they were forming and working with the Americans. But those gains have almost disappeared in the face of the recent violence, which spread so quickly from Basra in the south of Iraq.

And it's--what that fight--it's really about two things. It's a fight amongst the Shiites for power in Iraq, what the future of this country is going to look like, how the Shiites will divide Iraq amongst themselves. But perhaps even more importantly, it's also a fight between the US, who backs the Iraqi government and Iraqi security forces, and Iran, who backs those militias. And this is really the proxy war that everybody talks about behind closed doors, but nobody wants to admit to in public, Bob.

SCHIEFFER: So where does it go from here? I know you were in Sadr City just recently. What is the situation there? That's where all these attacks are coming from, right, that they're not launching on the green zone in Baghdad itself?

LOGAN: Well--that's right, Bob. That's where most of the rockets and mortars fired at the green zone and all over Baghdad are being launched from, Sadr City. And General Petraeus really has a very difficult issue on his hands because Sadr City is home to the Mahdi army militia that's loyal to powerful anti-American cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, and really one of the most powerful and popular militias in the country. It's densely populated and to--for the US, they are on the outskirts of Sadr City. But for them to move deep into this area, they risk a potential bloodbath, and nobody wants to see that happening. The US has been looking for a political solution to that, trying to bring Muqtada al-Sadr on board. And they've been successful to a degree.

But what has been seen in the last few weeks--and there were 20 people reportedly killed overnight in clashes between the US forces and the Mahdi army militia inside Sadr City--what you've seen is a very determined defense by these militias, not wanting to give up the rocket launch sites, not wanting to give up any ground, and in the words of the American commander there who's in charge of Sadr City, he said this fight began as a fight for these launch sites and it's now all about killing Americans.

SCHIEFFER: And quickly, Lara, this is all about fights between militias, which sound just a muddled as ever. Whatever happened to al-Qaeda, the terrorists?

LOGAN: Well, that's a very good question because al-Qaeda has been significantly hurt by this agreement with the tribes and also by the surge troops on the ground, being there to enforce the agreement with the tribes and really force the Iraqi government to accept the reconciliation that America brokered, really. Al-Qaeda moved north towards the city of Mosul and to other areas like Samarra. I mean, it's very much now an Iraqi organization predominantly, but the US is very careful to say that al-Qaeda, you know, they've been seriously defeated, but they are not gone, not by any stretch of the imagination. They know that al-Qaeda is still there. They're waiting for their opportunity to come back. And they took advantage of the violence and the fighting amongst the Shiites. You know, that's exactly what they'll do, be looking for opportunities like that to turn around the security gains that General Petraeus was able to make.

SCHIEFFER: All right. Well, Lara, thank you very much. Be safe and thanks for that update.

And we turn now to our guests here in Washington: Nancy Youssef, who is the chief Pentagon correspondent for the McClatchy newspapers, former bureau chief in Baghdad for that group; and Rajiv Chandrasekaran, who is the national editor of The Washington Post, the author of the best-selling book "Imperial Life in the Emerald City." You, too, were a bureau chief for The Washington Post in Baghdad.

I must say, listening to Lara's report this morning, Nancy, it doesn't sound like things are getting a whole lot better.

Ms. NANCY YOUSSEF (McClatchy Newspapers): Well, it's interesting. Basra really became a case study of a number of key issues in Iraq, among them the strength of the US-trained Iraqi security forces, what are they capable of doing? They clearly were better than they were six

months ago, but had big problems. They defected in some cases and couldn't really stand up to the militias in a--in a sustainable way.

It also said something about Nouri al-Maliki's leadership and his capabilities and his priorities in the south. And finally, it really said something about--that US troop withdrawals and what it could mean in the face of that. I think General Petraeus will have to sort of talk about the fight that's ahead in the--in the south, and that--what the US will--may have to deal with. Clearly, the surge was able to deal with some of the bigger issues in the west, but--with the Sunnis, but now they're--the Basra offensive exposed that major issues need to be resolved in the south.

SCHIEFFER: Rajiv, how could the United States have basically been blind-sided when the prime minister decided to launch this attack on Sadr's militia?

Mr. RAJIV CHANDRASEKARAN (The Washington Post): I'm not entirely sure that the American command there was entirely blind-sided.

SCHIEFFER: Really?

Mr. CHANDRASEKARAN: The Iraqi military, at the most senior levels, does coordinate with the United States military. I think it was pitched and described to General Petraeus and his senior commanders as a more narrowly targeted operation, one that was aimed at going after very real rogue militia elements that have caused an awful lot of problems in Basra, which is the country's second largest city, which is the principle source of the country's oil exports. It is--it is essential to stabilize the situation there. And I think the American command wanted to see Maliki step up and take some actions aimed at doing so. But obviously what we saw was an operation that was ill conceived, ill planned and wound up really provoking a much harsher response from Muqtada al-Sadr's militia than I think had been envisaged, both by Maliki's government and by the American officials.

SCHIEFFER: Well, do you think the United States wanted him to do this, Nancy?

Ms. YOUSSEF: I think they were in a precarious position. Because, on one hand, there had been a lot of pressure on Nouri al-Maliki to step up and really take a leadership position, and Basra is a big problem. It's a big security problem, it's unstable, it's not controlled by anyone, and it's the last major stronghold that Muqtada al-Sadr, the rebel cleric, has in the south. And the US military officials that I've talked to say that they were working with Nouri al-Maliki to craft a long-term, thoughtful plan. It appears that what the US didn't want was what happened, which was a very sudden, ill-planned attack that potentially put the gains of the surge in jeopardy.

SCHIEFFER: It seems to underline that whatever else you can say about it, that the Iraqis are not ready to take over the security of their own country.

Ms. YOUSSEF: That's right. And it also showcased Iran's influence on the security and the politics in Iraq in a very pronounced way. It exposed how much they influence not only the Badr organization, as I think a lot of people had assumed, but also Muqtada al-Sadr, who had promoted himself as an Iraqi nationalist. And so it put the gains of the surge in question, and I think it also raised questions about what would the US role be vis a vis the Iraqi security forces if there was a drawdown. In this case, the US says that it wasn't informed about what the plan was

and then had to rush and get air combat support in place when the Iraqi security forces couldn't handle the fighting.

SCHIEFFER: All right. We're going to take a little break here. We'll be back in one minute to continue this conversation.

(Announcements)

SCHIEFFER: And back again with Nancy Youssef and Rajiv Chandrasekaran.

Rajiv, the general comes before the Congress, before the next--this week, this week. What's he going to say now?

Mr. CHANDRASEKARAN: Well, this recent fighting in Basra poses a real challenge for both General Petraeus and Ambassador Ryan Crocker, who will be delivering this much-awaited progress report to both the House and the Senate this week. And in many ways, the violence in Basra is the most, perhaps, honest assessment of where things stand in Iraq today. It--where things stand in terms of the status of Iraqi security forces. There are very credible reports that more than 1,000 Iraqi soldiers defected rather than fighting against fellow Shiites in the south. It raises real questions about the progress we're making in training and equipping Iraqi security forces. It raises some very real questions about the role of Iran. As Nancy's news organization very well reported this past week, part of the reason for the cease-fire was direct intervention by very senior Iranian military commander, and of course, it shows the ascendant role of Iran.

And thirdly, Bob, it shows the degree to which political reconciliation, which is a key benchmark that we in the United States are looking for in Iraq, simply isn't happening. It's not just Sunni-Shiite lack of reconciliation, but it's intra-Shiite fighting. And one of the reasons that Maliki moved with such alacrity in Basra is because the Iraqi government is going to be going forward with province-level elections. And he is worried that his political party and that of another large Shiite party may lose out to Sadr's forces, and they're trying to marginalize and contain Sadr. All of this has to be looked at through the lens of domestic politics in Iraq. But what it says to us here in Washington is that efforts at reconciliation are not going as well as the Bush administration would like us to believe.

Ms. YOUSSEF: Interestingly, it also comes at an important time domestically. Here, the 2000 presidential elections are ongoing, and all three presidential candidates will be questioning Petraeus. And Basra and the events of the past few weeks have taught us that the situation on Iraq is very fragile and fluid, and so while General Petraeus talks about planning ahead, it's clear that that's becoming increasingly difficult. And I think when the candidates have an opportunity to question Petraeus, what they'll really be exposing to everyone is how they're thinking ahead. What will really be happening on Capitol Hill is a discussion about what the next administration will inherit.

SCHIEFFER: Go ahead.

Mr. CHANDRASEKARAN: That said, the security challenges of the past few weeks may help to bolster General Petraeus' argument on Capitol Hill that we need to pause the drawdown of troops and that we shouldn't take the troop levels much below the 140,000 they will be at by this

summertime. It's an argument he's making to try to sort of sustain the progress that has been made through the troop surge, and this is a way to argue, 'hey, look, we've got these problems in places like Basra in the south. We can't go lower.'

SCHIEFFER: Well, it seems to me that this is going beyond the reasons that America went to Iraq, and that was to provide, you know, establish some sort of a stable democracy in this part of the world, to help the Iraqis put down these terrorists, who are a threat to the United States. Now we have this militia fighting. It's all about the neighborhood, it seems to be now, much more so than it is about Iraq. I want to thank both of you for being here.

We'll be back with a final word in just a minute.

(Announcements)

SCHIEFFER: Finally today, it was 50 years ago this week that the Soviet Union held an international piano competition and named it for the great Tchaikovsky. It was a competition with more than one purpose. The Soviets had rattled American confidence by putting the first satellite into orbit, and to show that Russia was culturally as well as technologically superior, Soviet leader Nikita Krushchev invited musicians from around the world to compete against Moscow's best.

But it didn't come out the way he planned. Van Cliburn, a tall, rail-thin, 23-year-old kid from Texas played so brilliantly that night that the crowd gave him an eight-minute standing ovation. The judges saw their duty, but in a sign of the times, they had to check with Krushchev himself before announcing their decision. 'Is he the best?' Krushchev asked. 'Then give him the prize.' And so it was done. Van Cliburn won the hearts of the Russian people that night and came home to a ticker tape parade and would go on to be the most famous classical musician in the world. And America, whose confidence had been shaken by Sputnik, finally had something to cheer about. Overnight, American morale soared.

Today, the piano competition named for Cliburn is perhaps the most prestigious musical competition in the world. But in an era of spoiled celebrities, Cliburn himself is little changed from the modest, shy kid who captivated a dangerous world so long ago. For Cliburn, it was never about politics or celebrity or even competition, but about the transformational power of art. He is 73 now, and perhaps nothing better exemplifies that belief than his own music and the way he's lived his life. For that, Americans and Russians can be grateful.

That's it for us. See you next week right here on FACE THE NATION.

