

© 2009, CBS Broadcasting Inc. All Rights Reserved.
PLEASE CREDIT ANY QUOTES OR EXCERPTS FROM THIS CBS
TELEVISION PROGRAM TO "CBS NEWS' FACE THE NATION."



April 12, 2009
Transcript

TOPIC: MEXICO'S WAR ON DRUGS

GUESTS: ARTURO SARUKHAN
Mexican Ambassador to the United States

KATHLEEN PARKER
Syndicated columnist

RAJIV CHANDRASEKARAN
Senior correspondent, The Washington Post; author of
"Imperial Life in the Emerald City: Inside Iraq's Green
Zone"

David Sanger
Correspondent, The New York Times

HOST: BOB SCHIEFFER

This is a rush transcript provided
for the information and convenience of
the press. Accuracy is not guaranteed.
In case of doubt, please check with
FACE THE NATION - CBS NEWS
(202) 457-4481

TRANSCRIPT

BOB SCHIEFFER, CBS NEWS CHIEF WASHINGTON CORRESPONDENT: Today on FACE THE NATION, President Obama heads to Mexico this week. How can he help Mexico in their violent war against the drug cartel? Should the ban on assault weapons be reinstated? Should National Guard troops be sent to the borders? Life with corruption. How does Mexico win this war? And what is the fate of the president's plan for immigration reform? We'll get the views of Mexican ambassador to the United States, Arturo Sarukhan.

Then we'll talk about President Obama's trip abroad and the rest of the week's news with David Sanger of the "New York Times," syndicated columnist Kathleen Parker, and Rajiv Chandrasekaran of the "Washington Post."

I'll have a final word on our religious inheritance.

But first the war in Mexico 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. The ambassador from Mexico is in New York this morning, Arturo Sarukhan. Mr. Ambassador, thank you so much for joining us. The president goes to Mexico this week at a time when the Mexican government is fighting these drug cartels, nearly 7,000 people killed in the violence down there last year. Number one, what do you want from the United States on this front? And what will your president be telling President Obama when he gets there?

ARTURO SARUKHAN, MEXICAN AMBASSADOR: First of all, Bob, that as most things in life, you need to two to tango. And as Mexico seeks to shut down the flow of drugs coming into the United States from Mexico, from South America, we need the support of the United States to shut down the flow of weapons and bulk cash. I think it is very clear that President Obama, who has been seized by the importance of the bilateral relationship, since even before his administration kicked off -- the flurry of visits by Secretary Clinton, Secretary Napolitano, Attorney General Holder, down to Mexico in previous weeks, I think have started to push the ball in the right direction.

I think the key issue right now is how can the United States help to shut down those guns and shut down that bulk cash that is providing the drug syndicates in Mexico with the wherewithal to corrupt, to bribe, to kill?

SCHIEFFER: In your estimation, where are most of these weapons coming from? From the United States?

SARUKHAN: Ninety percent of all weapons we are seizing in Mexico, Bob, are coming from across the United States. Just on the Arizona and Texas borders with Mexico alone there are approximately 7,000 FFLs, federal firearms licensees. And a lot of the weapons that are being bought by the drug syndicates, either directly or through proxy purchases are coming from those gun shops.

SCHIEFFER: The National Rifle Association and the gun lobby takes issue with your statements that most of them are coming from the United States. What data do you have to back that up, Mr. Ambassador? SARUKHAN: Well, the data that we have is the one that we've been sharing with our counterparts in the U.S. government, ATF and the Justice Department, and other agencies that have been working with us to determine where those guns are coming from. Look at the most recent large seizure in Reynosa, a town that is on the border. In November, in a military checkpoint, just about three or four kilometers into Mexican territory, we seized more than 250 assault weapons and half a million rounds of ammo. These had just crossed over the border from the United States into Mexico. By tracing back

these weapons, by looking at the types of weapons, we're determining that most of these weapons are coming from the United States, Bob.

SCHIEFFER: I don't want to belabor this, but they say that the people who take issue with this say that actually only 17 percent are coming from the United States, that the rest of them are coming through Central America, some are coming from Israel, from other countries around the world, and coming in through Central America. So how is it you can be so sure that so many are coming across the border in your view from the United States?

SARUKHAN: It's not only because of some of the tracing that we're doing with ATF, our partners in ATF, and some of the numbers we're looking at there, but also the types of weapons that are coming through our border with Guatemala, Central America, they're mainly grenades.

Most of the grenades that we're seizing are the ones that are coming from Central or South America. Most of the assault weapons are coming from the United States.

SCHIEFFER: Do you think -- or would you advocate that the United States reinstate the ban on assault weapons? Because that ran out I guess last year. It's obviously a controversial thing in this country. Will your president tell President Obama that needs to be done?

SARUKHAN: The assault weapons ban ran out in 2004, Bob, and since then we have seen a dramatic rise of assault weapons being seized in Mexico. There's a direct correlation between the expiration of the assault weapons ban and our seizures of assault weapons.

We cannot determine how Congress and the administration will move on this. What we will say is that this is one of the instruments by reinstating the ban that could have a profound impact on the number and the caliber of weapons going down to Mexico.

SCHIEFFER: What about the call by some in this country that more National Guard troops or federal troops should be placed along the border with Mexico? Do you see that as something that would be of help?

SARUKHAN: I think some of the steps that the Obama administration has already taken. Three weeks ago, Secretary Napolitano announced a significant ratcheting up of ATF and ICE agents along the border to do southbound interdiction of weapons and guns. I think that is very effective, very productive. Sometimes I think it could be more effective than placing National Guard troops, because these two agencies are charged with interdicting these weapons and bulk cash going down into Mexico. So we do see this as a very positive step in the right direction. We think that ATF and ICE should play a more prominent role along the border.

SCHIEFFER: There's been considerable publicity, of course, on this side of the border about tightening up security along the border, the talk of building a fence and all of that. Has any of that had any impact on the number of guns and drugs that are coming across the border?

SARUKHAN: Not so far. And again, what we have to understand here is that we will be able to control our border if we can control illicit traffic in moving both directions, the drugs moving north, the weapons and the cash moving south. We will have to work together. And it behooves Mexico to ensure that this common border is secure, that we're doing things on both sides of the border to jointly ensure that the border is secure, that the well-being of our citizens on both sides of the border is being protected, and that together we're shutting these guys down, both in El Paso, but also in Juarez.

SCHIEFFER: Do you think this war can actually be won, Mr. Ambassador?

SARUKHAN: I think that the Mexican government is moving in a very, very strong fashion-forward to shut these guys down. I think that if we can mitigate the damage, the levels of violence, we can continue breaking down some of the drug syndicates' organization. If we can continue to shut down their trafficking

routes, their staging ground, we will be able to make great, great, great progress in the way that we fight against the drug syndicates. But again, it's going to have to be done in a holistic fashion. It's going to have to be done on both sides of the border.

And we have to be aware that if we're very successful in Mexico, this will create problems for other countries in the region when drug traffickers decide to relocate because the opportunity and cost of doing business in Mexico has risen.

SCHIEFFER: Is it still safe for Americans to go to Mexico, especially to the border towns? I know in Juarez, for example, the number of killings there is just astounding. What would you advise Americans who might want to go to Mexico?

SARUKHAN: Well, I think that if you go to Juarez, I would certainly advise precaution. I think that this is one of the places where we are pushing these guys back. We're shutting them down there. And this is a place where we have seen a high concentration of drug-related violence.

Almost 70 percent of all drug-related deaths in Mexico these past two years are concentrated in three places, Guiltacan (ph), Tijuana and Juarez. But if you go to the rest of the country, you will find a country that is at peace. All tourists that have been going down these past months can certify that this is so. So yes, if you go to a place like Juarez, I think that precaution is necessary, but violence is not prevalent in all of Mexico's territory.

SCHIEFFER: Mr. Ambassador, what if marijuana were legalized? Would that change this situation?

SARUKHAN: This is a very divisive issue. There are proponents and opponents on both sides of the border. I think that those who would suggest that some of these measures be looked at understand the dynamics of the drug trade, that you have to bring demand down, and that one way that you can do it is by moving that direction, but there are many others that believe that by doing this, you would only fan the flames.

This is a debate that needs to be taken seriously, that has to be -- that we have to engage in on both sides of the border, both in producing, in trafficking...

(AUDIO GAP)

SCHIEFFER: ... point of view on it this morning.

SARUKHAN: Thank you, Bob.

SCHIEFFER: We'll be back with a roundtable discussion in just a minute.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

SCHIEFFER: And with us now to talk about Mexico and some of the other top stories of the week, syndicated columnist Kathleen Parker, Rajiv Chandrasekaran, "The Washington Post" senior correspondent, author of "Imperial Life in the Emerald City: Inside Iraq's Green Zone" and our friend David Sanger, correspondent for "The New York Times". He is the author of a new book called "The Inheritance," which made "The New York Times" bestseller list. It's the story about Obama, the challenges that President Obama confronts, and the challenges to American power.

Gentlemen, lady, let's start with the most important news of the day. It is now out. It is official. The Obamas have picked a dog. And the dog's name is Bo. And here is the picture that appeared in "The Washington Post" this morning, a picture of the Obamas' -- I guess the dog came for a short visit. His official arrival won't be till Tuesday. His name is Bo. And he is a Portuguese water spaniel. And I guess Senator Ted Kennedy who has one of these dogs made it possible for this dog to come live in the White House.

I'm just so relieved the news is out, Kathleen.

KATHLEEN PARKER, COLUMNIST: I am, too. It's been stressful. I mean, Iraq's been a problem, Mexico is a problem, but the dog has really been eating me. So I'm glad it's out and in the open.

SCHIEFFER: And congratulations to "The Post" for getting the first pictures, Rajiv.

RAJIV CHANDRASEKARAN, "THE WASHINGTON POST": It's quite a scoop for the newspaper that broke Watergate. We've been digging around this story for a while, but it is also worth noting there were leaks. Web sites did have some photos of this dog over the weekend that I think forced the White House's hand. And that's why we got it overnight.

SCHIEFFER: And I guess there's some solace that "The Times", you all got the first pictures of the garden, if I'm ...

DAVID SANGER, "NEW YORK TIMES": That's right. At some moment the dog and garden will all come together in one big sort of happy set of events, I'm sure.

SCHIEFFER: I've never seen a story, as long as I've been in Washington, that's attracted this much attention, or questions from people. I mean, the definition of news or things people need to know and things people want to know, this meets the definition, because people certainly did want to know about this.

Well, let's get on to more actually serious topics, and that is this whole business of piracy. This morning this boat with these pirates and this American sea captain, captain of that cargo ship, is now adrift. It's run out of fuel. There are big American warships surrounding it. David, what about all this?

SANGER: Well, you know, there's sort of two interesting things going on here. Number one is just the sense of how our tremendous navy, with its huge power, is still not really oriented to be able to deal with people floating around in a small boat with four pirates and so forth. What's obviously the most important thing here is making sure that their hostage, that the captain remains alive.

But there's a bigger issue you've just seen in the first couple of weeks of -- the past couple of weeks. And we saw this all through the summit meetings and the trip in Europe with President Obama. Suddenly the president is confronted with failed state problems. The reason there are pirates in Somalia is that Somalia is a failed state. The problem begins on land, we're seeing it on sea.

During the trip, we saw the North Korean launch. And they spent all week trying to come up with a resolution which it all looks like they can come up with, that condemns the North Koreans, but nobody is willing to say whether they're willing to enforce it by stopping shipping or doing any of those things we promised years ago we would do to keep missile parts from coming in.

You see it some in Afghanistan and Pakistan. And while Mexico fortunately is nowhere close to a failed state, it's obviously a big federal state that can deal with its problems, the kinds of issues you were just discussing with the ambassador, these are what are going to be the big confrontations of the Obama time, and it's what got ignored to some degree while we were distracted in Iraq.

SCHIEFFER: And I should also -- distracted and rightly so by the economic crisis back home. I mean, there are a lot of things going on right now, very serious things that have literally gotten pushed off the newspaper's front pages, off television completely, because we had to devote so much attention to this economic situation in this country, and we'll get to that in just a second, but, Rajiv, another thing that hasn't gotten much attention, but yet the United States is committing more troops, more resources, and that is the war in Afghanistan.

You're just back, you've been back three weeks from Afghanistan, you're getting ready to go back again. When the president announced that he was going to send more troops over there, he said because we know that al Qaeda is in Afghanistan planning another attack on this country. Now, I've talked to a lot of experts since then. Nobody seems to know exactly what that attack is, or seems to have much information on it, but they do say we presume that's going on.

How serious is the threat that the president is sending these troops to Afghanistan to fight?

CHANDRASEKARAN: Well, Bob, I think right now the consensus of the intelligence community is that the bulk of the senior al Qaeda leadership and the operatives are just across border in the ungovernable, lawless frontier regions of Pakistan, but they have a degree of support and get aid and comfort from the Taliban militants that have an awful lot of sway in the southern and eastern parts of Afghanistan. And it is precisely in those areas where the United States will be making a more serious military push this year.

The bulk of the troops that the president has deployed to Afghanistan, which will start rolling in this spring will be sent to southern Afghanistan, which has been the site of some of the most violent attacks of late, where there's been just a tremendous under- resourcing of international military forces, and so the goal there is to -- is to try to restore some degree of stability there, but this is going to be an incredibly difficult challenge, one that is not going to see a turnaround in a matter of months according to both military and diplomatic people I talk to. This is going to be a years-long commitment.

And it's going to pose a challenge for the new president, not just a wartime challenge, but also a political one back home here.

SCHIEFFER: Do you think, Kathleen, that this country and most people really are aware that we are increasing this commitment in Afghanistan in the sense that we are, you know, now, those of us in the press, get a lot of criticism. They say we didn't ask the right questions before we went marching off to Iraq. We weren't aware of what was going on. We should have been more skeptical about all this. It makes me wonder, do we really realize what's happening here?

PARKER: Bob, let's make that statement right now. We're escalating. We're moving into Iraq in larger numbers ...

SCHIEFFER: Into Afghanistan.

PARKER: I'm sorry, into Afghanistan. And we are not bringing a lot of allied support with us. But Obama has said something very smart here, I think, which is that he has narrowed the focus of what we're trying to accomplish there. When he was -- when he was across the Pond, he was very specific in saying, you know, we are not exporting democracy, we're not nation-building. He avoided all those Bush phrases, and instead we're going specifically after al Qaeda. And we're trying -- and the Taliban and trying to limit our effort there. So there will be -- and he's talking about putting measurable, you know, benchmarks in there so that we can see the progress we're making.

So I think Americans will be less stressed out about it if they see there is a real tangible objective. And of course the original objection to Iraq was they had nothing to do with 9/11, why are we ignoring - or moving on from Afghanistan too soon.

SCHIEFFER: He got a nice reception in Europe on his trip, but he also did not get much support, material support from the Europeans, or from our traditional allies for what he's doing in Afghanistan.

PARKER: No, that's right. They promised, you know, some troops are being promised, 3,000, but for temporary measures and for security primarily, and for training Afghan security forces. So it's not really, you know, fighting with our men and women on the frontlines.

CHANDRASEKARAN: This is turning into a real American operation. This for the first seven years had a multinational operation where the Americans were players along with NATO, but now what we're seeing,

in eastern Afghanistan, and now especially in southern Afghanistan, it's going to be a U.S. a U.S.-dominated approach. It's Americanized. The United States has not been able to get the commitments it needs from NATO.

What we've gotten -- what the president got on this trip was fairly paltry, some modest sums of money for training, but not really much more. But the real political question is also here, Bob, if part of the end state with getting these troops in there is to force compromise, and the president said the goal was to go after al Qaeda, how will it play back here if we start to make deals with Taliban warlords to essentially oppose al Qaeda? But maybe not institute what people back home have wanted to see in terms of the building of democratic institutions in Afghanistan.

SCHIEFFER: Well, David, talk about that. No one disputes one thing. This is maybe the most dangerous part of the world right now, because all this backs up to Pakistan, and Pakistan has nuclear weapons and so on and so on.

DAVID SANGER, NEW YORK TIMES: You're right, Bob. And I think the strategic hall that became evident during the president's trip, and is evident even if you talk to some of the people who were involved in the debate of putting the strategy together, is we're pouring our troops into Afghanistan, but there aren't really any al Qaeda in Afghanistan. All the al Qaeda are in Pakistan. And the problem is, as one senior military official said to me when I was working on "The Inheritance," is the problem with Pakistan is how do you invade an ally?

And so you have seen the president dancing around this question of how much more we're going to go do this. We reported in "The Times" two or three weeks ago that there's discussion now of extending the air strikes well beyond the tribal areas into Beluchistan, which is another part of the country because we've begun to see Mullah Omar and some of those other groups there.

That would mean running predators and big air strikes deep into a country that is fundamentally facing three crises at once -- an economic crisis, several insurgencies, and a very weak central government. And as you said, this is the country that has got 70 to 100 nuclear weapons, and for all the assurances about how safe they are, we really don't know.

SCHIEFFER: Kathleen, let me just turn quickly to domestic affairs. The economic news was a little bit better last week than it has been. What's your sense of where we are on all of this? Are the things that Obama laid out, are we beginning to see whether or not they're working?

PARKER: Well it depends on who you listen to. I mean, some people are saying -- even the administration is saying we're starting to see improvements, and things are starting to move a little bit. But from the other side, I'm also hearing that we're a long way off from even the vice president, Joe Biden, said we're going to still see unemployment rise for the rest of the year.

The housing is -- problems are not going to improve anytime soon. So, you know, I think it would be -- it would be overly optimistic to say we're going to see anything improved soon.

SCHIEFFER: All right. Well, we've run out of time. I want to thank all of you for an enlightening discussion. Back with a final thought in just a minute.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

SCHIEFFER: Finally today, for most of us, our religion, like our politics, is inherited. We generally grow up to be what our parents were. My mother was a Baptist, so we went to the Baptist Church. That is until she got mad at the preacher, and then we became Presbyterians.

I remember adults arguing over the details, but it didn't seem all that different to me, or to one might have grandmothers who approved of neither denomination. Had my mother been of a different faith, I'm sure I

would have been raised to be whatever she was -- Christian, Jewish, perhaps Muslim. Reason enough for us of one faith to have respect for those of other faiths.

I thought about that when I saw the picture of President Obama and his Christian family holding a Passover Seder with their Jewish friends at the White House, but I thought of something else as well. What a fine way to help his children understand that whatever our faith all religions share the same great truth, yet so often we forget that.

Families have been torn apart, wars have been fought, millions have died in the arguments over religion's details. It's been said in another context that the devil is in the details, but in no case is it truer than in the case of religion, nor in any case more regretful.

We can take comfort in this season, in the greatest of all truths that religions share, that love is more powerful than hate. But may we also remember as well only if we allow it to be. That's it for us. We'll see you next week right here on FACE THE NATION.

Source: CQ Transcriptions