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FACE THE NATION

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Secretary of State

Representative **NANCY PELOSI**
Speaker of the House

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BOB SCHIEFFER, host:

Today on FACE THE NATION, two very different takes on Iraq.

Mr. ROBERT GATES (Secretary of Defense): It's a process, and I would say that the process has been moving in the right direction.

Representative NANCY PELOSI (Speaker of the House): The president has been kicking the can down the road for the last couple of years, saying, 'We'll have a surge, and if it works, then we can bring our troops home.'

SCHIEFFER: Exclusive interviews with defense Secretary Robert Gates and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. Where do we go from here in the war? The dangers of Iran, the divisive Colombian trade deal and politics. We'll cover all those issues in interviews with the secretary of defense and the speaker.

Then, I'll have a final word on the era of no good answers.

But first, Gates and Pelosi at 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 we begin this morning with the secretary of defense, Robert Gates.

Mr. Secretary, thank you very much for joining us. I think we ought to get right to Iraq. General Petraeus was here all week. He said we can't leave Iraq until things get better, basically. But he couldn't say exactly what it is that is going to tell us things are good enough that we can start withdrawing troops. Can you enlighten us on what has to happen here?

Mr. GATES: Actually, I think it's already happening. Eight provinces in Iraq are already under provincial Iraqi control, where there are either no coalition forces or they are in a strategic overwatching background position; they're not involved in combat. The next province to go that direction will be Al Anbar, of all places, considering where it was 18 months ago.

So what we have is half of Iraq where the transition has already been made to a different kind of role or mission for US forces. We are still involved in combat in Baghdad. We are still involved in combat in Mosul and in the north. But the--but the process is one of province by province, district by district, when the Iraqi security forces are good enough, when the situation locally has--the security situation is calm enough, that we can then recede into the background. This is the process that's under way, and there're clearly large populous areas that aren't in that category yet, but that's the direction in which we're headed.

SCHIEFFER: Well, can you give us any idea of when that might be?

Mr. GATES: Well, I think people want certainty about things that no one can know. They're--it's--clearly things have headed in a direction--very few would have thought a year ago that things would be as good as they are in Iraq, despite the challenges that remain...

SCHIEFFER: Mm-hmm.

Mr. GATES: ...before us now. So who knows how fast these things can develop? It may take awhile, or one of the things we're hearing is that some of the local Shia tribes and leaders in the Basra area are now beginning to think along the same lines as some of their Sunni counterparts in Al Anbar. They're looking at Shia bad guys in their own neighborhoods and saying, 'We don't want these people here.' So whether that would turn in the same way that Anbar did, with the locals taking control of their own future, if you will, remains to be seen. But a lot depends on those kinds of developments, and, frankly, they're not predictable.

SCHIEFFER: Well, I mean, are you talking about something that might could happen before the end of the year? I mean, General Petraeus said we've got to have a pause here. We've got to kind of reassess. I believe you called it a brief pause.

Mr. GATES: Well, I think what the general is doing is, basically, he will have withdrawn 25 percent of the combat troops in--of US combat troops in Iraq. What he basically wants to do is look at the battlefield geometry. He wants to see where he's spread forces out, has the security remained? Where there are fewer US forces than there used to be, where the Iraqis have taken over more responsibility for security, is that stable after the withdrawal of these five-brigade combat teams? That's what he's really evaluating.

And then he can move on in terms of recommendations in mid-September or whenever of whether he thinks conditions are ripe to continue the drawdowns, or whether, if elections upcoming, may require a little heavier troop presence to make sure they take place safely. So the--it's a process, and I would say that the process has been moving in the right direction, if unevenly, over the past year.

SCHIEFFER: President talks about chaos if we leave Iraq, but some critics talk about just the opposite--Zbigniew Brzezinski, for example, who was Jimmy Carter's national security adviser, says he believes that the possibility is greater that we might stumble into some sort of a head-on confrontation with Iran the longer we stay in Iraq.

Mr. GATES: Well, I have the highest respect for Dr. Brzezinski. In fact, I worked for him for three years when he was national security adviser. But in this instance, I would disagree with Zbig. I think that--I think the chances of us stumbling into a confrontation with Iran are very low. We are concerned about their activities in the south, we are concerned about the weapons that they are sending in to--that they continue to send in to Iraq, but I think that--I think that the process that's under way is, as I said, headed in the right direction.

SCHIEFFER: The president seems to be a little more worried about Iran than what I just heard you say.

Mr. GATES: Well, I think what the president said, that Iran has a choice. Do they want to be a cultural, religious and economic partner of Iraq, the cultural ties, particular--I mean, the religious ties, particularly in the south, where the holy places are, religious sites go back many centuries. But he was positing, do they want to have a positive relationship with Iraq or do they want to have a negative relationship with Iraq.

And I think that one of the interesting developments of prime ministers--Prime Minister Maliki's offensive in Basra is that it has revealed to the Shia, particularly, in the Iraqi government the level of Iranian malign influence in the south and on their economic heart line through Basra. And so I think what has happened is that the hand of Iran has been exposed in a way that perhaps it had not been before to some of the Iraqi government, and, frankly, I think that's a very positive development.

SCHIEFFER: It's hard for me to understand exactly who we're fighting, who the enemy is right now in Iraq. We went there to topple Saddam Hussein. We did that. Then we found ourselves fighting the Sunni-backed al-Qaeda. Now we seem to be in the middle of some sort of a Shiite civil war, where you have some of these Shiites backed by Iran on one side, and others on the other side. Who exactly is the enemy now? We don't hear much about al-Qaeda anymore.

Mr. GATES: Well, the reason you don't hear much about al-Qaeda is because our soldiers have been very successful--our soldiers and our Marines, in taking them on, as have the Sunnis in Iraq themselves. I think that--I think the enemy is extremism in Iraq, and it's Shia extremism in the form of the special groups and the Jaish al-Mahdi, extremism in terms of al-Qaeda. It's those who are not willing to participate in the political process and do so peacefully. Those are the enemy, and those who we are trying to help are those who are trying to build a stable government and a stable country.

SCHIEFFER: Are you worried about the strain on the military troops there, what Colin Powell said just the other day, that we're basically maxed out right now, the American military. You've got problems in Afghanistan. I understand the situation in Pakistan grows worse. What do you feel about that?

Mr. GATES: Obviously I worry about strain on the force. The chairman of the Joint Chiefs, the Joint Chiefs, we all worry about the strain on the force. We all know that these 15-month tours have been very difficult on our soldiers. We know that the longer tours for the Marines have been very difficult for them. But the generals will tell you, these young men and women are amazingly resilient and determined, and I think that Admiral Mullen has said just this week that this--that there's a spring in their step because they know that they're being successful. So, yes, they're under strain, but they're determined, and, frankly, the decision to go back to 12-month deployments, the increase in the size of the Army and the Marine Corps, there are a number of measures in effect to begin to relieve that strain.

SCHIEFFER: Mr. Secretary, do you have enough troops available to do what is going to need to be done in Afghanistan? Because we hear the Taliban grows stronger by the day. Aren't you going to have to reduce those levels in Iraq in order to get troops to Afghanistan?

Mr. GATES: I think we have sufficient forces in Afghanistan for this fighting season in 2008. We've deployed 3500 additional Marines there. The French have committed to send a battalion, which will allow us to send additional forces to the southern part of the country. I think that there is a requirement to have more forces in the longer term, and, frankly, I'm confident that we will have lower force levels in Iraq in 2009 that will enable us to be more helpful in Afghanistan.

SCHIEFFER: Do you want more help from NATO? Is NATO doing what it needs to be doing?

Mr. GATES: I always want more help from NATO.

SCHIEFFER: And do you have any idea that you're going to get it?

Mr. GATES: Well, I think that several countries stepped up to the plate at the Bucharest summit, the French foremost among them. But there are a number of countries that are increasing their commitment. And I think, really, an important element of the Bucharest summit was that, when NATO took over this mission in Afghanistan two years ago Riga, they really didn't know, I think, in many respects what they were getting into, that this was going to be a tough fight and it was going to last awhile. What's amazing is, knowing what they know now, every single NATO head of government signed a commitment that NATO--that Afghanistan was NATO's most important operation and we were determined to win there.

SCHIEFFER: Mr. Secretary, thank you so much for coming by.

Mr. GATES: My pleasure.

SCHIEFFER: We'll be back in one minute, and we'll talk to the speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi.

(Announcements)

SCHIEFFER: We talked to Secretary Gates on Friday to accommodate his very busy schedule. And for a very different take now on Iraq, we turn to Democratic Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi. We also spoke to her Friday at her Capitol office.

Madame Speaker, thank you for joining us. You're making a lot of news lately. The president says it's logical to have a pause now in the withdrawal of our troops, to just sort of see where we are before we decide whether to withdraw any other troops. Doesn't that make sense?

Rep. PELOSI: Well, I don't think so. But of course, I don't think the war made sense in the first place in terms of the justification for going, the conduct of the war and the rest. But the president has been kicking the can down the road for the last couple of years, saying, 'We'll have a surge and if it works then we can bring our troops home.' And now there's a pause in withdrawal and redeployment out where we haven't really had any major redeployment out. I think that what we have passed in the House over and over again, the honorable, responsible and safe redeployment of our troops out of Iraq in a reasonable period of time in order to bring stability to the region and to make the American people safer so that we can focus our full attention on the real war on terror, which is in Afghanistan, makes sense.

SCHIEFFER: Every member of the administration that has spoken out--General Petraeus--they all say if we withdraw now, that it would be--it would be chaos. The Democrats, including you, seem to say that it would cause stability. But can you say what would happen if the administration decided to do exactly what you're proposing?

Rep. PELOSI: What would happen is, is the Iraqi government would take responsibility for its country. They would be--get a signal from us that they must now make the political decisions necessary to be--bring peace and reconciliation to their country. They have had no incentive to do that because we are there and we're there in greater numbers. So the most important message is to them. The generals on the ground there--not retired generals, the generals on the ground there have said the biggest obstacle to peace in Iraq is not the al-Qaeda, it's not the Iranians, it's not the Sunni militias, it is the government of Iraq. They haven't made the decision necessary to take the actions that are commensurate with the sacrifice of our troops.

SCHIEFFER: What would be the reaction, though, in Iran? Wouldn't this sort of be a signal that we've given up, that we were turning tail and running, and wouldn't that--wouldn't that really be dangerous for this country?

Rep. PELOSI: Bob, we've been there for over five years. As you know, March 19th, the feast of St. Joseph was the fifth anniversary of our initiation of hostilities into Iraq. Pretty soon we'll be in Iraq two years longer than we were in World War II. There have--is not a strategy involved here to go in, get a job done and come home. That's really unfair to our troops. Our men and women in uniform, who've done everything they have been asked to do, and well; and we praise them for their patriotism, their courage and the sacrifice they're willing to make. That's what we have to think about.

We have to think about the safety of the American people. We don't have a combat-ready unit in the United States to protect any threats to our security, wherever they may occur. The real war on terrorism, as I said, is in Afghanistan. We need to redeploy troops to Afghanistan, but there are no troops to redeploy. So the president says he wants a pause in redeployment out of Iraq. We don't have any troops here to send to Afghanistan, that's where the threat is. This policy is not making--the president's Iraq war policy is not making the American people safer, it is undermining the capability of our military to protect the American people.

SCHIEFFER: Can you do anything as a Congress to change the direction of this policy? Because so far you haven't.

Rep. PELOSI: Well, you know, interesting question. When we won and the American people overwhelmingly spoke to the issue of the Iraq war, that they want it to come to an end, we thought with the strength of their message and their strong voices would be heard by the president and/or by the Republicans in Congress. We thought that that would give us an opportunity to have a compromise on how we could redeploy out of Iraq in a way that kept our troops in the region--we're talking about Iran--troops would be in a--in the region, over the horizon, but not an occupying force in Iraq. But the president had a tin ear to the will of the people, and he has a blind eye as to what is really happening in the Middle East and in Afghanistan.

And so we have not been successful because what we found out, really, is it's not just the president, it's the Republicans in Congress who are committed to this course of action, which is, I believe, the wrong course of action, and it will keep us in Iraq for many years to come instead of taking us out, strengthening our military, regaining our reputation for security in the world. It's a big--I've always say it was a mistake. Sadly, it's now a mistake that is five years old.

SCHIEFFER: Let's take a break here. We'll come back and talk about this some more and some other things.

(Announcements)

SCHIEFFER: We're back now with the Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi.

Madame Speaker, you decided to block a vote on this trade agreement that the president wants to make with Colombia. One of the president's supporters said that you got the 3 AM call and decided just to not answer the phone, referring of course to the famous Hillary Clinton commercial. What's your response to that?

Rep. PELOSI: Well, first of all, without going into anybody's political commercials, the seriousness of this issue goes beyond whoever made that statement. I'm more interested in statements of the president of the United States, as the speaker of the House. And we didn't move to block the consideration of the bill, we moved to create a timetable for consideration of the bill that was sensitive to the concerns of America's working families. It's now their timetable, not the--President Bush's timetable. But until we can address the concerns of the American people in this downturn in the economy, which some call a recession, we're--and we can talk to you about how this trade bill fits into that picture, then, again, we need more time to do that. So it wasn't blocking, it just removed the timetable.

SCHIEFFER: The White House says that you're actually harming national security, that this is one of our staunchest allies, that the leader of Colombia is fighting the narcotics mafia down there. They just say this is the worst thing you could possibly do for our policy toward Latin America.

Rep. PELOSI: Well, I--the president wants us to see the bill in the context of foreign policy, and we agree. We want to see it in the context of economic security in America. So he doesn't want to see it in a vacuum, and neither do we. And I called the ambassador from Colombia the day that we announced we were doing this and told her this is--this is--we appreciate the friendship between our two countries, we send our respects to the president of Colombia, and that it should not be viewed as it is being characterized by the White House.

SCHIEFFER: Let's talk a little politics here. Hillary Clinton's husband has now brought up this whole business about the story that she told about her arrival in Bosnia and about the snipers and all that. He says she's being very unfairly treated, this was something she said late at night. In fact, he has mischaracterized it because she said this on three different occasions. My question is, why would he bring this up again? It seems to me as if it--if it was all dying down, this whole controversy, and now here it is back in the news. Do you think this was a good thing for him to do?

Rep. PELOSI: Well, I think you started off the question appropriately: Hillary Clinton's husband. I think Hillary Clinton's husband was being a husband and wanted to be protective of her. But I have to tell you the truth, I don't spend a whole lot of time thinking about the motivation of comments like that. We're trying to address the subprime crisis, deal with the war in Iraq, have a stimulus package to turn our economy around, deal with global warming issues and the rest. And I know it's fun to talk politics, but I couldn't possibly tell you the motivation for that remark.

SCHIEFFER: Well, do you know, I'll tell you what a lot of people are saying, and what kind of the buzz is, that maybe he's...

Rep. PELOSI: Tell me, because I haven't heard.

SCHIEFFER: Well, that maybe he's trying to undermine her candidacy. Could that be possible?

Rep. PELOSI: Well, maybe it was late at night when he said it and maybe he should be forgiven. What did he say, age and time of night? Well, maybe the same applies to him as he uses the excuse for Senator Clinton. Let's put it--Senator Clinton and Barack Obama, we have two great candidates. One of them will be president of the United States, the other one will emerge as a great leader and respected leader in our country. It's fun to talk politics, we all know that, but we have serious work to do to take the country in a new direction, and I can't for the life of me figure out why the president would have said it, except he may have been having a late night adult moment. But let's leave it at that.

SCHIEFFER: All right. Madame Speaker, thank you very much.

Rep. PELOSI: Thank you.

(Announcements)

SCHIEFFER: Finally today, I listened closely this week as Washington debated the war. As you heard from our guests this morning, it all boiled down to this: The administration believes there will be chaos if we leave Iraq; Democrats see chaos if we stay.

The more I listened, the more I came to believe that neither side really knows what to do now. We have reached the point where there are no longer any good answers. Whatever we do, there will be consequences. Yes, there has been progress, as the administration argues, but even the administration admits that what has been accomplished is so fragile that it could evaporate if we leave. Democrats rightly argue that our military is stretched so thin we cannot continue to keep troop levels where they are for much longer, yet they cannot say what will happen if we draw down the force. There is no longer even agreement on exactly who the enemy is or what poses the greatest threat to our own national security.

During Vietnam, the government kept seeing a light at the end of the tunnel. In the darkness of the Iraq tunnel, all seem to agree there is something ahead, but no one can make out just what it is or how long this tunnel may be.

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