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



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TRANSCRIPT

BOB SCHIEFFER: Today on FACE THE NATION, should the United States send thousands more troops to Afghanistan?

General Stanley McChrystal wants forty thousand more troops to continue the counterinsurgency strategy in Afghanistan. Is he going to get them? Or is there a better way to fight the war there? And is the administration rethinking the whole idea of why we're in Afghanistan?

We'll talk first with President Obama's National Security Advisor General James Jones. Then we'll bring in the Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee Carl Levin of Michigan and the House Armed Services Committee Chairman Ike Skelton of Missouri who have very different ideas about all of this. And we'll talk to the retired general who was once responsible for Afghanistan, Anthony Zinni.

I'll have a final word about the end of the world, it didn't happen and we'll have details.

But first National Security Advisor Jim Jones 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.

BOB SCHIEFFER: And we begin in the studio this morning with General Jones. General, thank you for coming. More bad news from Afghanistan this morning--eight American troops killed in this latest attack. This as the White House is debating whether to send more troops to Afghanistan.

I want to begin by asking you about this meeting that the President had with General McChrystal, our top General in Afghanistan. He met with him in Copenhagen after the General basically shot down the idea of changing our strategy in Afghanistan.

Two questions: First, did the President feel that the General was trying to bring pressure on him in public and did he tell him not to do that?

GENERAL JIM JONES (National Security Advisor): Well, Bob, fir-- first, thank you very much for having me on-- and-- and it's good-- good to be back. Secondly to-- to answer your question, I wasn't at that meeting and this was a one-on-one meeting between the two of them. And I haven't really talked to the President about that.

So I don't-- I-- I couldn't answer the-- couldn't answer this question except to say that the-- the-- the two had a-- a good meeting and it was a good opportunity for them to get to know each other a little bit better. And I'm sure they exchanged very direct views.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Well, did the-- did the General tell the President that he thinks it's a bad idea not to put these extra troops into Afghanistan that he is requesting? Because he says he needs forty thousand troops.

GENERAL JIM JONES: Well, General McChrystal and the entire military chain of command as well as the Secretary of Defense and the entire national security team is in the process of-- of discussing this very issue. We've had one lengthy meeting already with-- last week with General McChrystal on the-- on the screen from Kabul. We will have more this week, two more meetings this week.

So all of these things are being discussed as they should be against the backdrop of this unfortunate tragedy that we all-- we all regret. But it serves to underscore the importance of the moment to make sure that the strategic issues and the strategic decisions that the President will make are fully aired and vetted and that the options that the President has are also put on the table.

And-- and it would be, I think, unfortunate if we let the discussion just be about troop strength. There is a minimum level that you have to have, but there's unfortunately no ceiling to it.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Well-- well, let me just put up on the screen here what exactly the General said last week—

GENERAL JIM JONES (overlapping): Sure.

BOB SCHIEFFER: --in London. When he was asked is scaling back the force, as Vice President Biden wants to do, was a good idea. Here's what he said. "The short answer is: no. A strategy that does not leave Afghanistan in a stable position is probably a short-sighted strategy."

GENERAL JIM JONES: Mm-Hm.

BOB SCHIEFFER: That's pretty tough bottom line there—

GENERAL JIM JONES: Mm-Hm.

BOB SCHIEFFER: --it seems to me. Would-- for example, do you agree that that would be a short-sighted strategy, General?

GENERAL JIM JONES: Well, I think that the-- I've said before for many years-- and I've had about six years of involvement in-- in Afghanistan in-- in various— in various functions. I-- I think it would-- it would be a mistake to underestimate the importance of other elements of the strategy that were decided on in March. We do have a strategy. What General McChrystal has done has presented his opinion-- is presenting his opinion of what he thinks his role within that strategy is. Our strategy is a regional strategy. We focus on Afghanistan and also Pakistan.

And-- and I think that to-- to not understand the value of the role that the-- that the government has to play in Afghanistan and we have an election that's playing itself out is a very, very significant aspect of the strategy. And to not fully understand how reconstruction and development play in, whether you're adopting a counterterrorism strategy or counterinsurgency strategy there are things you have to do-- there are common things which you have to do to be successful in both.

So I-- I think this is what we're going to tear apart and look at and consider General McChrystal's input. The President should be presented with options not just one fait accompli. And-- and we will come up with the right solution, I think.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Well, isn't it going to be difficult, though? Because this is the man that President Obama sent out there.

GENERAL JIM JONES: Correct.

BOB SCHIEFFER: He relieved the general that was in command. He sent the new man out, said, "You go out there and tell me what we need to be doing here."

GENERAL JIM JONES: Mm-Hm.

BOB SCHIEFFER: And he comes back and says we need forty thousand troops. Isn't that a hard decision for the President to disagree with, I mean?

GENERAL JIM JONES: Well, on-- on that score, the-- the-- the President is just now receiving the-- the what-- what the ask is in terms of-- in terms of troops but-- so that hasn't-- that has not been discussed yet.

Our-- our process is to examine the strategy, make sure we have that right, and it's-- again it's-- it's Afghanistan for sure, but it's also Pakistan and it's the region, which is why we-- we reshaped ourselves to deal with this issue in that way. There are things going on in Pakistan that are very encouraging. The Pakistani Army and the government have done much better since March when the strategy was announced against the insurgency on their-- on their side of the border. The relationship between the United States military and the Pakistani military is a growing one. It's on the ascendency. We hope that will lead to a-- a campaign against all insurgents on that side of the border.

And if that-- if that happens, that's a strategic disc-- shift in that it will spill over into Afghanistan. So, I would remind, just-- just for the sake of this discussion here, what our goals were--to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al Qaeda from being able to operate inside of Afghanistan, returning to Afghanistan, and also in the so-called safe areas in Pakistan.

BOB SCHIEFFER (overlapping): General, that prompts a question. Do you believe-- I mean, the general conventional wisdom is that if-- if-- if the Taliban comes back in force, if we're not there, then al Qaeda will come back. Other people are saying, you know, during these discussions at the White House, we're questioning all the assumptions. Do you think it follows that if the Taliban comes back that al Qaeda will be back?

GENERAL JIM JONES: You know that's a hypothetical that I just, you know, it-- it-- it just depends on the circumstances. I would prefer to-- to think about the other side of the coin as how do we make the present government successful? How do we-- how do we get better rule of law at the local, regional, and national level? How do we marshal the-- the nation-building effort, if you will, the development effort, economic development, so the people of Afghanistan have a better future? By the way, the people of Afghanistan know what life is like under the Taliban. They're not exactly thrilled about that possibility.

BOB SCHIEFFER (overlapping): Let me-- let me just ask you this. Officials in Pakistan and Afghanistan have told us that they are concerned that once again America is losing our resolve in-- in that part-- part of the world. Are-- are you concerned that what we consider deliberating others might see as dithering?

GENERAL JIM JONES: Well, I don't-- I-- you know, I-- I think that deliberation is important. We have not only our national deliberation but we have an international presence that is extremely impressive and important. We have-- we are working side by side with NATO, for example, as we evaluate General McChrystal's recommendation.

So, this is something that the President had said we would always do. Back in March he said after the elections we will ha-- make an assessment. This is exactly what's happening. And we-- no one has suggested that we're about to leave Afghanistan. We-- we are committed to the battle against the radical-- radical terrorism.

BOB SCHIEFFER (overlapping): Well, let me ask you this.

GENERAL JIM JONES: Yeah.

BOB SCHIEFFER: When do you think we'll have a decision? When will the General have a decision--a matter of weeks or months?

GENERAL JIM JONES: I think-- I think no, no, no. I think in-- in a matter of weeks we're going to-- we-- we have time on the President's schedule. He's going to devote an enormous amount of his time to lead us through this. Everyone will be involved. And at the end of the day, the-- the-- the right way to do this is to present the President with a set of options on what he can do. And-- and Afghanistan will be the topic, but it won't be the only topic. It will be Pakistan. It will be the region. And that's-- that's the way we should do it.

BOB SCHIEFFER: I have to ask you before you go about Iran. The New York Times reports this morning that this Atomic Energy Agency concludes that Iran has acquired sufficient information to be able to

design and produce a workable bomb. I take it we know about this. What is the significance of that, because two years ago, of course, our intelligence reported that Iran had stopped trying to design a nuclear weapon?

GENERAL JIM JONES: You know-- you know, I don't think, you know, whether they know how to do it or - or not is, you know, is-- is a-- is a matter of some conjecture, but that what we're-- we're watching is what-- what is their intent. And we have been worried about that intent. We now have an Iran that is willing to come to the table. We have two more meetings scheduled, one-- one in which they will announce the-- they will allow the inspectors to visit the-- the-- the Qom site which has been just recently announced and the other one to discuss methodology by which we can ship their low-- low-enriched uranium out of the country.

Those two things alone move the-- move the dial in our direction favorably. And the issue of proliferation is one that really keeps us up at night and should keep us up at night whether it's North Korea or Iran. and on both fronts we're seeing some positive-- movement in the positive direction.

BOB SCHIEFFER: All right. Well, General, we have to let you go. Thanks so much for joining us this morning.

GENERAL JIM JONES: Bob, it's always a pleasure. Thank you very much.

BOB SCHIEFFER: We'll be back with the chairman of the House and the Senate Armed Services Committee and our one time commander of troops out there in Afghanistan, General Anthony Zinni, in a minute.

(ANNOUNCEMENTS)

BOB SCHIEFFER: And we're back now. Senator Carl Levin, the chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee is with us in Detroit. Here in the studio Representative Ike Skelton who is the chairman of the House Armed Services Committee and General Anthony Zinni who used to command American forces on that side of the world, including Afghanistan.

General, I want to start with you. This whole question of what we see as debate and examining an issue here in this country. Some people are telling us that in Pakistan and in Afghanistan, they see that as dithering. What do you think the impact of this is right now?

GENERAL ANTHONY ZINNI (Former CENTCOM Commander): Well I--

BOB SCHIEFFER (overlapping): You've been out there and dealt-- spent a lot of your life dealing with this side of the world.

GENERAL ANTHONY ZINNI: Sure. I-- well, I think certainly it's great to have the-- the strategic debate and to take all sides into account. But I think we have to be careful how long this goes on. It-- it could be seen not only out there in the region by our allies even as the enemy as being indecisive--unable to make a decision.

We've had a strategy since March. We have a general out there who is probably the best qualified we could have that's telling us what we need on the ground to have the security space and the time to get those non-military things done. And I just don't understand why we're questioning that judgment at this point and I hope this doesn't go on much longer.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Well, General, it's going to be a difficult time thing, isn't it, for a President to send his own man out there--and that is who General McChrystal is--who went out there and came back and said, "I need a whole lot of new troops out there." Isn't that going to be a hard thing just politically for him to turn him down?

GENERAL ANTHONY ZINNI: Yeah, well, I don't know much about the politics, but I can certainly tell you from the military perspective, you have the finest lineup you could have in Secretary Gates and Admiral Mullen, General Petraeus and General McChrystal on the ground. And I'm sure this advice is well thought out. And-- and it is what you need on the ground if you're going to make this kind of strategy work.

BOB SCHIEFFER: So you think we do need those troops.

GENERAL ANTHONY ZINNI: I do think we need those troops. And I think General McChrystal has made an honest and thorough assessment as-- as to what you need. It begins with security. You can't do all the other things without it.

BOB SCHIEFFER: All right, well let me go to Carl Levin, because Senator Levin it's my understanding, you think we don't need more troops out there. And you're-- here you are the chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee.

SENATOR CARL LEVIN (D-Michigan/Chairman, Senate Armed Services): I would not c-- commit to more combat troops at this time. There's a lot of other things that need to be done to show resolve. What we need a surge of is Afghan troops. There is a marine captain out in Helmand Province who put it this way. He says our Achilles Heel is a shortage of Afghan troops. When I was in Helmand Province just a month ago, we were told by the local folks what they want is their Afghan army to be strengthened. And the ratio of marines to Afghan soldiers when we were down in Helmand Province was five marines for one Afghan soldier. That is exactly the wrong ratio. It ought to be reversed from that.

And-- and in terms of terms of dithering, when President Bush was considering at the end of 2006 for four months whether or not to increase the number of troops in Iraq to surge those troops--September, October, November, December of '06, he took four months to decide that we should have a surge of American troops at that time. And by the way, when he made that decision, I believe it was against the wishes of his commander in Iraq, General Casey.

So, he made a decision which turned out to be the right decision in Iraq. It took him four months to do so. It ended up helping, not being the only reason, there were other reasons, but helping a more successful outcome in Iraq.

So I think, and by the way, General McChrystal himself, people ignore what General McChrystal is now saying--give deliberative process a chance. He supports looking at the strategy which was in place in March, but things have changed since March and-- including that election in Afghanistan, which has had has had significant fraud--

BOB SCHIEFFER (overlapping): Yeah. Let me-- let me just ask you this, senator. I mean, I-- I think everybody would wish that we had more Afghan troops that you could surge there. But-- but where are they? I mean, they would have to be trained. I mean, they're not there. If they were I'm sure they would surge them. So—

SENATOR CARL LEVIN (overlapping): Well,

BOB SCHIEFFER: --where do you get these Afghan troops?

SENATOR CARL LEVIN: You get them by sending in a lot more trainers--two to three thousand more trainers--including from NATO countries that have that responsibility. And by the way, just take a look at the equipment of the Afghan army. We do not have in place yet a plan to send a-- to surge equipment for the Afghan army. We have a lot of equipment in Iraq. Some of that is going to stay there, but a lot of it is going to come home. A lot of it should go to Afghanistan.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Mm-Hm.

SENATOR CARL LEVIN: When we were in Afghanistan we pressed our people--where is the plan for surging equipment to the Afghan army? That is also a sign of commitment.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Let me go to your counterpart in the House, Congressman Skelton. It's my understanding you believe we ought to send those troops and get them out there right now, American troops.

REPRESENTATIVE IKE SKELTON (D-Missouri/Chairman, House Armed Services): Well, I-- I think we have to look at it from day one. The war really didn't start until March of-- of this year when the President came forth with a-- a strategy, and frankly an excellent strategy. He chose General McChrystal who is the best in the business for this type of conflict. He asked General McChrystal for an assessment and he got that assessment. And of course that was-- that became known--it was public and in essence he's going to be asking for additional resources.

BOB SCHIEFFER: So you're going to back him up?

REPRESENTATIVE IKE SKELTON: I back him up. I-- I sent a letter to the President a number of days ago spelling out in great detail--some six pages of letter, spelling out basically--give the General what he needs. You see you have to have security in Afghanistan. You have to have governance in Afghanistan. And if you don't have both of them your whole strategy falls apart.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Let me ask you about one of the things I was kind of surprised because he said it was a hypothetical question. When I asked General Jones, did it necessarily follow that if the Taliban comes back, al Qaeda comes with them? He said, "Well, that's hypothetical." What do you think, General--Congressman?

REPRESENTATIVE IKE SKELTON: Well, just like water running downhill. They're going to come back in. They had a safe haven there at one time. And there's no reason to believe they wouldn't have a safe haven again. That's the purpose of this entire mission--to quell the al Qaeda and to make sure that the Taliban is not there to invite them back.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Well, General Zinni, I want to just going to go around the table on this question. Do you think they'd come back or will they just stay in Pakistan, because some people are saying, "Well, why did they need to go to Afghanistan? They've got safe haven in Pakistan right now."

GENERAL ANTHONY ZINNI: Well, I think they could find themselves with-- with the safe sanctuary inside Afghanistan to work against the Pakistani military in the tribal areas, in the Swat Valley just like the reverse when they went into Pakistan to fight our forces there.

I-- I think we have to remember, this is not just about al Qaeda and the Taliban. We have two nations out there with nuclear weapons one of which had the Taliban sixty-five miles from their capital. We have the Taliban and others trying to provoke some sort of conflict between these two nations. We also have a Taliban that is stretching their influence into Central Asia.

I would say one thing about trainers. I've been a trainer. And-- and it's wonderful to have a lot of trainers on the ground. Who protects the trainers? Who ensures the roads they're on aren't going to be full of IEDs because you can't control them? If you don't have enough forces on the ground you give maneuver space to the enemy--the freedom to attack our outposts that are remote, ineffici-- ineffectively manned. And I think that you need both. It's not a matter of either/or.

BOB SCHIEFFER: What about that, Senator Levin? Do you think it follows that al Qaeda will come back if the Taliban comes back?

SENATOR CARL LEVIN: I think there's a real possibility. And that's what ought to be protected against. And the question is how to maximize the chances of success in Afghanistan? And when General Zinni said that we've got a very strong chain of command starting in the-- in the field with General McChrystal,

he's exactly right. And up that chain of command we have a chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. We ought to listen to him. But above them all is a Secretary of Defense. He's a long way, and these are his words, from having decided that we should have more combat forces in Afghanistan.

We ought to put some focus on what will Secretary Gates's recommendation be to the President under these new circumstances, including the changed circumstances in Pakistan, much more favorable, and including the governmental circumstance in Afghanistan with this flawed election, which has these allegations of fraud which is much less favorable?

We've got to put some focus not just on McChrystal, although we ought to listen to McChrystal when he says, "Yes, deliberate, yes, get strategy right instead of focusing on resources," but we also ought to listen to the Secretary of Defense when he makes up his mind.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Let me-- we have about thirty seconds left. Let me just ask you a quick question, Senator Levin. Right now, if this came to a vote, are there the votes in the Senate to send forty thousand troops to Afghanistan?

SENATOR CARL LEVIN: Well, first of all there's going to be options offered. It's not just forty, but it depends, it seems to me, not just on what the recommendation is specifically but what the other factors are that are presented to us. I don't think anyone can guess in advance what all that comp--

BOB SCHIEFFER (overlapping): Mister Skelton, what about the House?

REPRESENTATIVE IKE SKELTON: Well, I-- I think the House would support a gentleman that-- General McChrystal that is running the show. There's-- and there's no question about it.

BOB SCHIEFFER: You think they would?

REPRESENTATIVE IKE SKELTON: I think so.

BOB SCHIEFFER: All right.

Well, I'm sorry our time's up. Thank you all for a very interesting round table. Back with the final word in just a second.

(ANNOUNCEMENTS)

BOB SCHIEFFER: And finally today, this is going to come as a surprise to some, but the world did not end Friday. And from what I heard all week, a lot of people thought it might. If the President flew to Copenhagen and failed to bring home the Olympics.

Well, he went. He asked. He failed. He was not even close. So he came home.

Washington spent most of the week gnashing its teeth about whether he should have gone. Republicans accused him of dereliction of duty. Some in his own party shuddered at the possible humiliation of it all.

Frankly, it didn't seem all that big a deal to me. I said at one point that if a trip to Copenhagen took his presidency over the side then it wasn't much of a presidency. If he wanted to give his hometown a boost, why not? Chicago is part of America the last time I looked.

Anyway, he's back. Nothing happened. When I drove in this morning the Washington Monument was still standing. The problems that were here when he left are still here; no better, no worse, but so bad my guess is the great Copenhagen gambit will soon be forgotten.

Still, let us mark a moment of sympathy for the unfortunate White House staffer who told the President, if you'll just fly all night to Copenhagen and then fly back we're sure to get the Olympics for Chicago. No, I wouldn't want to be that person.

Back in a minute.

(ANNOUNCEMENTS)

BOB SCHIEFFER: And that's our broadcast. We'll be back right here next Sunday on FACE THE NATION.

ANNOUNCER: This broadcast was produced by CBS News, which is solely responsible for the selection of today's guests and topics. It originated in Washington, DC.