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



## February 14, 2010 Transcript

GUEST: VICE PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN

MODERATOR/

HOST: Mr. BOB SCHIEFFER  
CBS News

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## TRANSCRIPT

BOB SCHIEFFER: Today on FACE THE NATION, Vice President Joe Biden. He's live from the Winter Olympics in Vancouver, British Columbia in Canada. But the questions will be all about the administration's handling of terrorism, congressional gridlock and the latest broadsides from his predecessor Dick Cheney. It's all next 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 good morning once again. The Vice President is with us live in Vancouver this morning heading the U.S. delegation to the Olympics. And last night, Mister Vice President, in a taped interview with NBC, you began an extraordinary exchange with your predecessor, former Vice President Dick Cheney. Knowing that he was going to be on ABC this morning, you took a preliminary swipe at him saying he was either misinformed or misinforming and was trying to rewrite history. Well, I have to tell you, Mister Vice President, he did not disappoint--he'd lied to you this morning for misunderstanding the threat posed by al Qaeda, when you told Larry King you didn't believe that al Qaeda was planning a 9/11-level attack on this country. He said they are trying to get a nuclear weapon and will use it if they do get one. Listen to this.

DICK CHENEY (This Week, ABC): I think in fact the situation with respect to al Qaeda to say that, you know, that was a big attack we had on 9/11 but it's not likely again. I just think that's dead wrong. I think the biggest strategic threat the United States faces today is the possibility of another 9/11 with a nuclear weapon or a biological agent of some kind, and I think Al Qaeda is out there even as we meet trying to figure out how to do that. I think they need to do everything they can to prevent it. And if the mindset is it's not likely, then it's difficult to mobilize the resources and get people to give it the kind of priority that it deserves.

BOB SCHIEFFER: So, Mister Vice President, are you underestimating the threat posed to this country by al Qaeda?

JOE BIDEN (Vancouver Live, EST): No. But I always underestimate the way Dick Cheney approaches things. The reason that it's unlikely is we-- because we have been relentless, absolutely relentless, in isolating al Qaeda, central al Qaeda, Osama bin Laden, al Qaeda coming out of the-- the Afghan-Pakistan region.

We agree the worst nightmare is the possession of nuclear weapons or a radiological weapon by al Qaeda. That's why we put incredible resources. We've had significant success. We've eliminated over a dozen of their top twenty operatives, another hundred of their associates. We have been relentless in our effort to deal with keeping them isolated. They've been unable to operate in any significant coordinated way. That's why you're seeing al Qaeda metastasize in the smaller-bore operations coming out of the Arabian Peninsula; not directly coordinated by them. So--

BOB SCHIEFFER (overlapping): So you do not--

JOE BIDEN: --I don't know what Dick doesn't understand. The-- the worry is legitimate. The reason why I do not think it's likely is because of all the resources we have put on this, considerably more than the last administration did, to see to it that it will not happen. And in

addition to that we are in the process--the President has put me in charge of it--for a plan to corral loose nuclear weapons and fissile material within the next four years. Something the last administration paid virtually no attention to.

So because we know that is the ultimate weapon in the hands of al Qaeda, we have used an incredible number of resources to isolate them, continue to stay on them, and to focus on their inability to plan.

BOB SCHIEFFER: But, you know, Mister Vice President, for all of that and you say that you are relentless, here a guy who's own father tried to turn him in to our Central Intelligence Agency, managed to get onto an aircraft that was coming to the United States. I'm talking about the Christmas Day bomber. Listen what the Vice President had to say about that.

DICK CHENEY: The thing that I learned from watching that process unfold though was that the administration really wasn't equipped to deal with the aftermath of an attempted attack against the United States in the sense that they didn't know what to do with the guy.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Didn't know what to do with him.

JOE BIDEN: You know, I-- (LAUGHING) I don't know what Dick's been doing lately. I don't know-- we did exactly what he did with the shoe bomber, Richard Reeves, exactly what he did. We brought in "the experts." I-- I was told he said we didn't-- didn't bring in the right people. "The experts" are the FBI interrogators. They are the best that we have. We brought them in immediately. They were in his custody. They got all the information they could get from him prior to him going silent. Once-- once he went silent. He was read his Miranda rights and put him in the system. Since he's been in the system he's continued to talk because we have handled him in a way that encourages him to talk. His family has come over. They've encouraged him to talk. We continue to get significant information from him.

I was told, I don't know if this true, in a briefing that-- that-- that Dick lamented the fact, or made some reference to the fact, we should have kept waterboarding on the table. You saw how much success they got from that. The irony here is and that's exactly what was done with Moussaoui, the twenty-first hijacker, that was exactly what was done with Richard Reid, that was exactly what was done under the Cheney administration that he defended. And now, he finds this somehow an extraordinary measure, which happens to work that he doesn't like.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Well, let me--

JOE BIDEN (overlapping): I don't get it.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Well, let me just-- so you can hear it. You said you heard this is what he said. Here's what he said.

JOE BIDEN: Oh, yes.

JONATHAN KARL (This Week, ABC): You believe they should have had the option of everything up and to and including waterboarding?

DICK CHENEY (This Week, ABC): I think you ought to have all of those capabilities on the table.

BOB SCHIEFFER: So?

JOE BIDEN: I-- that's Dick Cheney. I mean thank god, the-- the last administration didn't listen to him at the end.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Go ahead.

JOE BIDEN (overlapping): I mean, you know, I mean-- I mean-- hey look, we got-- we got incredible amounts of information. We're continuing to get the information. We got information from Richard Reid, which resulted in a-- in-- in a guilty plea. He's in jail, not able to get out. I mean, I am absolutely-- you know, I'm just trying to-- I was asked last night-- this morning on the show, what was this all about with Dick Cheney. And I-- I said, I never-- I never questioned other man's motive. But then, I also heard that he got into saying he disagreed with the last administration with-- with-- with the last attorney general, Republican attorney general. So, I think he's fight seems to be with the last administration. We did exactly what President Bush did. We got the similar result. We are protecting America. And, I don't know-- it seems like Dick Cheney can't take yes for an answer.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Well, he did say many of those things in this interview, because we watched it this morning. But, I-- I just want to go back to this. We heard the former pres-- the former Vice President of the United States saying, torture, what we have-- many people to find is torture-- waterboarding, I'd think he calls it intent-- enhanced interrogation, should have been one of the options. Can you Mister Vice President, ever envision a time when waterboarding should be used on anyone?

JOE BIDEN: No.

BOB SCHIEFFER: No?

JOE BIDEN: No.

BOB SCHIEFFER: I want--

JOE BIDEN (overlapping): It's not effective.

BOB SCHIEFFER: It's not effective.

JOE BIDEN: Correct, it's not effective.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Let's talk a little bit about the trial of Sheikh Khalid Mohammed, which was--

JOE BIDEN (overlapping): Yes.

BOB SCHIEFFER: --scheduled to be-- be held in New York. The attorney general said they were going to do that. He thought this would set an example for the world. Then suddenly, after the election of Scott Brown in Massachusetts, who said we ought to be spending money catching terrorists not spending money to make sure they had a lawyer to defend them and talking about civilian trials and all of that, suddenly the mayor of New York said we don't need to do this--we don't want it in New York and all the other politicians came along. Now, we understand from the White House that they are going to move it someplace else. And the

attorney general, the other day, did leave open the possibility that they might go back and try him in a military tribunal. What can you tell us about that?

JOE BIDEN: Well, I can tell you two things. I don't know whether the new senator from Massachusetts understands, when you get tried in a military tribunal you get a lawyer too. So, for-- it's good if we begin to learn the facts about all these things. You get a lawyer whether you're in a military tribunal or whether you're in a federal court, number one. The attorney general decided that the court with the biggest-- with the greatest venue, with the best jurisdiction was the New York court. That was the right decision to make. In the meantime, the political the political search-- circumstances changed. The mayor came along and said the cost providing security to hold this trial is "x" hundreds of millions of dollars, which, well, I think is much more than would be needed. And the elected officials, Democrats and Republicans, said we don't want this tried here in New York. That creates a-- a political dimension to this, in the sense that the Congress can control the cost and the purse strings of how much money we have to try this case.

So, that's the only reason why the President is taking it under consideration to deter-- we-- we have no doubt that the best most effective legal way to put this guy behind bars for the longest time and get the most information, with the most certainty, is in an Article III court. But the President is now waiting for a recommendation from the attorney general, to see his after review, whether we have the option to continue there or have to consider another option.

Last point, Bob. We have significantly, with the help of some people like Lindsey Graham and others in-- in the United States Senate. We have beefed up these military courts so they-- they can pass constitutional scrutiny, so that if we have to have a trial in one of those courts it will pass the test of our constitutional requirements.

So it is a possibility. But, let me put in-- this in perspective. There have been three people tried and convicted by the last administration in military courts. Two are walking the street right now. There have been over three hundred tried in federal courts by the last administration and by us and they're all in jail now. None of them are out seeing the light of day. So, this idea that somehow if you get tried in a military court the punishment is greater and if you get tried in the civil court it-- a criminal court it is less is the opposite.

BOB SCHIEFFER: But are you leaving open the possibility that this-- that Khalid Sheikh Mohammed maybe tried in a military tribunal and not in a civilian court, because that's the question that most-- that people are asking questions about, right now?

JOE BIDEN: I think it's a legitimate question and that's what we're considering right now, based upon what our options are--

BOB SCHIEFFER (overlapping): You are considering that? You are considering that?

JOE BIDEN No, we are still-- well, we-- we have to consider because we don't know what political constraints can be placed on us in terms of the cost of trying the case in a criminal court in the federal system. But that is still our preference.

BOB SCHIEFFER: I'm going to play one more sound bite from the Vice-- the former Vice President here on this very-- very subject. He goes back to--

JOE BIDEN (overlapping): Good.

BOB SCHIEFFER: --what the-- the-- the argument he was making in the beginning. He said it's the idea of the mindset of this administration. Listen to this:

DICK CHENEY (This Week, ABC): It's the mindset that concerns me, John. I think it's-- it's very important to go back, and-- and keep in mind the distinction between handling these events as criminal acts which is the way we did before 9/11 and then looking at 9/11, and saying this is not a criminal act, not when you destroy sixteen acres of Manhattan, kill three-thousand Americans, blow a big hole on the Pentagon--that's an act of war.

BOB SCHIEFFER: So there you are. I-- I-- so why are we even thinking about trying them in-- in-- in civilian courts if it is an act of war, Mister Vice President?

JOE BIDEN: It is an act of war, what took place. Our objective is to make sure they pay the highest price possible for the inhumanity they visited upon our country. Whatever for is the best way to do that is what should be done. Now, look, the fact of the matter is the bulk of the people who were tried by a-- any court, in this country, under the last administration, were tried in a federal criminal court and they're still in jail. Those tried in military courts--some were not convicted, some were convicted, and they're now out. And others, the last administration released, and released them in the Yemen are the very people who were fighting now.

So I don't quite get what the objective here is. I don't care what you call it, I want that son of a-- son of a gun who was involved in harming an American and American interests to pay with being incarcerated and/or in some cases their live for the damage they did to an American citizen or to our country for as long as we can possibly make it.

BOB SCHIEFFER (overlapping): And you think--

JOE BIDEN: In the recent past that has been in the criminal court system that, in fact, is the envy of the world and the fear of the terrorists.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Do you believe that in whatever court Sheikh Mohammed is tried, this mastermind of 9/11, are you confident he'll be found guilty?

JOE BIDEN: Looking at the evidence that had been made available to me as part of the-- in a generic sense, the executive branches and the prosecuting team, I am absolutely convinced. I am absolutely convinced he would be put away for a long, long time.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Let me ask you this, Mister Vice President, you said the other night to Larry King in an interview that you thought Iraq could be one of the great achievements of this administration. And I must say a lot of people, when you said that, said their response was-- what? This administration didn't have very much to do with Iraq, and-- and your friend, Dick Cheney had had a-- had a thought about that, as well. So let's listen to this.

JOE BIDEN: I bet he did.

DICK CHENEY (This Week, ABC): For them to try to take credit for what's happened in Iraq strikes me as little strange. If they're going to take credit for, fair enough, for what they've done while they're there. But they-- it ought to go with a healthy dose of thank you, George Bush, upfront.

BOB SCHIEFFER: So, your responds to that one.

JOE BIDEN: Look, we're not-- we're not-- we're not taking credit, we had to take responsibility. When we took responsibility for the mess that were handed to us at the end of last year, an awful lot of very informed news people like you, Bob, were wondering whether or not that country could be put together.

From the beginning, I've been on your show so many times in the previous years, and my mantra was: This requires a political solution. I never once doubted that additional American forces would, in fact, meet the military objective of settling things down. But nothing would matter, we would not be able to leave unless there was a political accommodation.

What we did and we didn't responsibly from the day we took office is put that in motion. I have been to Iraq four times this year, fourteen times already. I have met with every single solitary one of the players in Iraq--Sunni, Shiate, Kurd, Christian. And we have been able to be a catalyst for them moving from settling their political differences on boundaries, on territory, on oil, etcetera, from the battle field to the political arena.

And so, I think, we've managed it very, very well. I think we're going to be able to be out of Iraq, with all of our combat troops--ninety thousand, by the end of August. I think we'll be out leaving behind an electorate that had just put in place a parliament that is viewed as legitimate across the board. And we'll be able to get out of Iraq at the end of 2011 leaving behind a stable government.

Now anybody who tells you, including Dick Cheney, that they knew how they were going to get there January of last year, I would find it somewhat surprising. I give him-- I don't care who gets credit. My generic point is--we have managed this very well thus far. The Iraqis have done really good work. It this works it'll be a great credit to the Iraqis and a great credit to our military and civilian leadership that we've moved to the point that a nation that was in chaos is now a nation not needing American forces, having a economic and--

BOB SCHIEFFER (overlapping): Well--

JOE BIDEN: --and political relationship with United States and a democracy.

BOB SCHIEFFER: --do you-- do you-- do you think also that George Bush would also need little thanks for that? I mean, does he share in the credit or not?

JOE BIDEN: Well, sure. I-- I'm happy to thank George Bush.

BOB SCHIEFFER (overlapping): Okay.

JOE BIDEN: I like George Bush, but I-- I think-- the thing-- and all the-- if you go back and think about it--

BOB SCHIEFFER: All right.

JOE BIDEN: --we've been on so many of your programs, it was constantly--what is their political plan?

BOB SCHIEFFER: All right. All--

JOE BIDEN: What were they going to do?

BOB SCHIEFFER: All right. We're going to have to break there. We'll be back in a minute.

(ANNOUNCEMENTS)

BOB SCHIEFFER: Back now live with Vice President Joe Biden. Mister Vice President, Barack Obama came to Washington and said he was going to change things, but I have to admit, as I look around, I don't see much change. The partisanship is meaner than ever. The congress is completely in gridlock now. You've got a jobs bill up there that even the Democrats can't figure out what they want to be in it. Whose fault is this, where we find ourselves right now?

JOE BIDEN: Well, I'd rather not talk about fault. I'd rather try to figure out how to change it. And, two things have to change, Bob. You and I have been around a long, long time. I think you would agree. I'm not trying to get-- I shouldn't say get you with it. Most people would agree that the United States Senate has never acted as consistently as they have to require a super majority--that is sixty votes to get any thing done. That's a fundamental shift. I was there for thirty-six years, I don't ever recall it being abused and used as much it has now--number one.

Number two, I think that what is happening now is we find ourselves in a position where everyone knows we've been brought back from the brink. We were hemorrhaging seven hundred and forty thousand jobs back in January, now it's down to a trickle. We're still losing jobs. And we'll be creating jobs on a monthly basis beginning this Spring, bring some hope to the American people that we're on the right path. And we're getting, you know, a new commitment to invest in creating jobs by investing in small businesses and tax credits so they hire people, etcetera. Our focus has to be job, but--

BOB SCHIEFFER (overlapping): But Mister Vice President, I could just interrupt you, I mean the congress can't even agree on that. Even the Democrats can't agree on-- on a jobs bill. It looks like that's going nowhere right now.

JOE BIDEN: Well, no, I-- I-- I think that's wrong. I-- I think it is going somewhere. What Harry Reid decided to do is take a jobs bill where he could get a bi-- the first bill he wanted to pass was a bipartisan bill where the Republicans signed on, I think, for the first time and said there's a need to do something here. And that's what Harry wants to pass first. That includes tax credits; that includes business incentives, etcetera. And his objective is, and no one ever thought, there'd be one single job bill. We thought this Spring it'll be a series of initiatives that promote American workers to provide access to good jobs and to provide access to credit, which a lot of small businesses that are creditworthy are being strangled. And so this is a process and it's-- it's-- it's beginning. In the meantime, the recovery act is moving on and we're continuing to create jobs there.

And-- but the bottom line here is that we've gone from inheriting economy that shrunk six percent the month we came into office to one that's growing at six percent now. We're beginning to turn the corner. And we got to focus on the needs of ordinary people. That's why--

BOB SCHIEFFER (overlapping): All right.

JOE BIDEN: --the President is talking about helping people with college education, retirement, etcetera.



BOB SCHIEFFER: Mister Vice President, we have to stop it right there. Thank you so much for being with us this morning.

JOE BIDEN: Thank you.

BOB SCHIEFFER: I'll be back in a moment with some final thoughts.

(ANNOUNCEMENTS)

BOB SCHIEFFER: Finally on Valentine's Day, a question to contemplate: What is the most powerful sentence in the English language? I think it is this one, and it's not a long sentence, but a very short one, only three words: I love you.

Like nearly all the things we value most in life it describes something that cannot be touched, only felt.

I wrote a little verse about it once in answer to a question.

A child's question asked of me, "If I can't see it, can it be? I see my toy. I know it's there. I feel my arm. I touch my hair. These are things I know to be, but of these things I cannot see? What of the wind? Where does it go? And are there other things to know?"

"Oh, yes, my dear, and soon you'll find they're locked inside the heart and mind. Sweet love's desire, a mother's prayer, more real than all we see out there, more real than sun and moon and rain, at first, much harder to explain. The only thing that I can say, I say it now in just this way: What is real and what is not? Love is real. The rest is not."

Happy Valentine.

(ANNOUNCEMENTS)

BOB SCHIEFFER: And join us next week when our guest will be former Secretary of State Colin Powell.

We leave you now on this President's Day weekend with a montage of illustrations by artist Mark Summers put together by our friends at Vanity Fair for their new book, "Presidential Portraits."