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



## **March 13, 2011 Transcript**

**GUESTS:** SENATOR JOE LIEBERMAN  
I-Conn.; Chairman, Homeland Security Committee

DAVID SANGER  
The New York Times

DAVID MARTIN  
CBS News National Security Correspondent

CELIA HATTON  
CBS News Correspondent

HARRY SMITH  
CBS News Senior Correspondent

BILL WHITAKER  
CBS News Correspondent

LUCY CRAFT  
CBS News Correspondent

**MODERATOR/**

**PANELIST:** Bob Schieffer, CBS News Political Analyst

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FACE THE NATION - CBS NEWS  
(202) 457-4481

## TRANSCRIPT

BOB SCHIEFFER: Today on FACE THE NATION, a triple disaster of unimagined proportions in Japan. First an earthquake, then the tsunami and the damage from what now looks like has set off a meltdown in one of the country's nuclear reactors. Our correspondents are spread across Japan, and we'll have the latest from overnight.

It's all ahead on FACE THE NATION.

ANNOUNCER: FACE THE NATION with CBS News chief Washington correspondent Bob Schieffer. And now from Washington, Bob Schieffer.

BOB SCHIEFFER: And good morning again. Though the news this morning is not very good, not good at all, but here is the latest. The Japanese Prime Minister Naoto Kan said today, the disaster that had hit his country and we're quoting him directly here, "is the worst crisis for Japan since World War II." The death toll is now likely to go beyond ten thousand in just one state alone. It turns out the quake damaged two nuclear reactors at a power plant on the coast, maybe three. One of them seems to be going through a partial meltdown, which means radiation could leak. We have a team of CBS News correspondents in Japan this morning. CBS News correspondent Celia Hatton is in Fukushima, the site of that nuclear power plant. Celia what is the latest there?

CELIA HATTON (on the phone): Well, Bob, it's been another day of grim news coming from the Fukushima nuclear plant. And just a few hours ago, authorities warned that the situation to prevent total meltdown at three faulty nuclear reactors is an ongoing challenge. They warn that if something happens to one reactor, it could affect the others nearby. The generator number three is now the most risk for an outer container explosion like the one that took place a day ago on generator number one. That's when officials did the only thing they could to prevent the entire reactor from blasting open. They released a bit of radioactive steam to reduce pressure in that generator number one, which led to a larger than expected explosion. So that's what we look for with that-- could be coming from generator number three in the next day or so. It seems likely that officials are going to have to do a similar operation on generator number three. So unfortunately, we're expecting more explosions from that nuclear plant.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Now how many people have been evacuated from there thus far?

CELIA HATTON (on the phone): At the moment, the total be-- the average number is a hundred and seventy although estimates do vary. I've seen as high as two hundred thousand people evacuated from that twelve-mile radius and even a little bit beyond that. Because frankly, nobody wants to be that close to these nuclear plants at the moment so there are large numbers of people who are on the move in the area trying to-- to escape.

BOB SCHIEFFER: And what about radiation sickness, any signs of that? I know they have started issuing iodine for people just in case. What's-- What's that's situation?

CELIA HATTON (on the phone): They're handing out iodine tablets to people who are within a certain air-- area around the nuclear plant. Not everybody is getting the iodine pills but they are trying to scan everybody for any affects of radiation. So far, again, there are varying numbers as to how many people are affected by radiation. But actually at this point, Bob, it's very difficult to

know whether their health has been affected in the long term. We-- We simply don't know enough about the situation at the moment.

BOB SCHIEFFER: How-- how are the people taking it there, Celia?

CELIA HATTON (on the phone): You know, it-- it's been really interesting watching the reactions over the past two days. Definitely anxiety and concern is mounting on this day two that I've been able to watch the people here. You-- you know, it's fascinating the televisions are on in every room and all-- well, any-- any place that has electricity, people are just gathered around watching these televisions twenty-four hours a day trying to find any news they can about the nuclear reactor. Of course, here that means the difference as to whether they can go back to their family home or-- or not. It-- it really is quite serious. But at the same time when there's a strong aftershock, nobody here seems to blink except for me, because I'm not as used to earthquakes here as the-- as the people who've grown up here their whole lives. So it-- it really is-- it's been a very sad and-- and frustrating situation for many of the people here.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Well, Celia, thank you so much. Obviously, you're going to stay on the job there. We really appreciate it.

CELIA HATTON (on the phone): Thank you, Bob.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Now Harry Smith, our man on the move, who was just back from the Middle East, is in Tokyo this morning, which for all the troubles he is returning to relative normalcy. Harry, what's the latest there?

HARRY SMITH (Senior Correspondent): Stunning difference Bob, between Friday and today-- Narita Airport, the big airport wide open, business as usual. The only difference that I would say we saw there was there were numerous crews, rescue crews that had clearly been flown in there and were about to be deployed up north. As far as downtown Tokyo is concerned, we didn't see a single vestige of earthquake damage. People were strolling through the park. It was a Sunday afternoon as if nothing had happened.

BOB SCHIEFFER: But that is very much in contrast to what is going on in the rest of the country?

HARRY SMITH: Yeah. That's for sure, Bob, because everything up-- up north is basically on kind of a lockdown. I'm not sure if you've heard this or not. But there are more than a hundred thousand troops that are going to be deployed here in Japan through-- through this disaster. As the Japanese prime minister said this is the worst disaster to hit Japan since World War II. And even people here as far away from-- from the earthquake epicenter as Tokyo was, they said this was the worst they had ever felt. They felt like they were literally rocking back and forth in-- in the buildings. And it also speaks to how earthquake proof Tokyo is because, as we say, as we came through town, we didn't see a-- a single vestige of damage, any place.

BOB SCHIEFFER: But as you go around the country, I mean the statistics that we're hearing from the government are-- are just almost unbelievable. Two hundred and fifteen thousand people living in thirteen hundred temporary shelters. One-and-a-half million households have not had water since the quake. You mentioned the sixty thousand or the a hundred thousand troops that have been deployed. It's-- It's hard to imagine something like this happening to this--

HARRY SMITH (overlapping): It really--

BOB SCHIEFFER: --country.

HARRY SMITH: You know and it's interesting because there's no place on the planet that is better prepared for this than Japan is. Earthquake is almost a-- a part of-- of people's daily mantra as it were. It's something they keep in mind all the time. There are all constant civil defense drills, there are constant drills for sirens and-- and-- and evacuations. So as-- this is maybe the place on the planet that is best prepared for something like this and then you see the kind of devastation and damage that has happened as a result and you wondered if it had happened some place else, it's hard to imagine but it would have been much, much, much worse.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Harry Smith. The coastal city of Sendai is closest to the epicenter. And our CBS News correspondent Bill Whitaker is there.

BILL WHITAKER: Hello, Bob. I'm in the offices of TBC television, here in Sendai city one of the few places in the city to have power. This television station is now running off of generator power. It took us fifteen hours to get here from Tokyo. And this is a ride that usually takes about four to five hours. But most of the roads coming in to Sendai have either been damaged or closed down by authorities. This is one of the hardest-hit cities in all of the Japan. Tonight, outside the night air is filled with the wail of sirens of fire engines racing down to a massive fire by the port, a fire so big that it's turned the whole eastern sky into a bright, orange red. When we got here earlier this afternoon we saw people running to high ground. They had just had another aftershock and another warning of another tsunami. People here are very frightened and very skittish. And they have good reason to be. Not only did they endure one of the worst earthquakes ever recorded here in Japan but people say it was thirty minutes after that that the huge tsunami swept through. And from what we could see the tsunami swept in several miles inland. It's really-- it's-- it's kind of hard to explain the power of that surging water. But we saw tanker trucks and eighteen-wheelers and cars and even planes flipped upside down, thrown aside, thrown around as if they were pieces of paper. And tonight here, the city is without power, without telephone, without water. It seems it will be sometime before Sendai to get back on its feet. Bob.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Bill Whitaker. Thank you, Bill. CBS News correspondent Lucy Craft has been covering this thing since it first hit. Lucy, how are the Japanese people taking all of this?

LUCY CRAFT: Well, the question on everybody's lips is, we're the most technologically advanced country in the world, one of them. We're one of the richest countries in the world. We know about disaster prevention. We have a state-of-the-art system. How on earth did this happen? And a lot of criticism is being leveled at the government for-- for coming at this flat footed but it has to be said that the one phrase that's on the lips of all the government spokes-- spokes people and a lot of the university professors who study disasters says "Sotagay," a phrase that means this was beyond our expectations. This was not in the textbooks. We had nuclear power plant that had back-up system upon back-up system, upon back-up system and yet it was helpless against this huge tsunami. Some-- some interesting facts, for example, the Kobe earthquake, which was a magnitude seven, the-- the-- this lasted for-- the tremors lasted for a matter of a few seconds. This earthquake that we just had the other day, lasted for five minutes. Again, beyond the experience of anyone in Japan. A tsunami, the textbooks say that a tsunami comes an hour after a-- a major earthquake. In this case, people had nine minutes

warning before the first giant tsunami started striking the shore. So this was well beyond anybody's planning design.

Another question is, you know, the-- the rescue teams have-- have been unable to get to all of the victims because they're spread over such a wide area. And Japan right now is terribly depopulated. We have people living in very remote areas particularly elderly people living in-- in homes that are that, you know, just fall apart at the-- at the first sign of an earthquake. Maybe we need to have people living more closely together out of areas that are at higher risk. So there's a lot of soul searching that's going to be happening. And as the prime minister said it's-- it's the worst crisis for Japan since World War II. Right now, I think the country is just in a state of shock. There's a lot of questions now, one of the newspapers the Yomiuri, this morning was saying that the stock market may crash on Monday, when it opens. Certainly, the-- the companies that are the pillar of the Japanese economy-- the Japanese economy as you know is-- is trade dependent. And the-- the companies that are the gold standard for the country, Toyota despite-- despite all its travails is extremely well run. Very profitable company, Sony, Honda, Nissan, all these companies that really are the backbone of the Japanese economy are at a standstill right now because their factories have been damaged or because their supply chains are-- are stopped. So the-- the country is really on hold right now its going to require a-- a vast amount of rethinking about how do we deal with the crisis?

BOB SCHIEFFER: Lucy Craft. And we want to say thanks to Lucy, to Bill Whitaker, to Harry Smith to Celia Hatton, all of our correspondents and there more on the way covering this story in Japan.

We want to go now to Atlanta. The chairman of the Senate Homeland Security Committee, Joe Lieberman is there. Senator, obviously our hearts go out to the people in Japan but I guess we had better turn to the local news here. Does this pose any kind of a danger for the United States? I mean, if this radiation gets into the atmosphere, is there a danger of it drifting here?

SENATOR JOE LIEBERMAN (I-Connecticut/Chairman, Homeland Security Committee): There-- there is some risk but I'd say right now from what I know, Bob, that it's remote, but what-- what this horrific natural disaster in Japan has to do for all of us is to go back and look at our-- our preparedness for such a catastrophe here. This-- this was an enormous earthquake. I-- just to put this in context the Japanese earthquake hit 9.0 on the Richter scale. The great San Francisco earthquake of 1906 was only 7.6. So you can see how hard it is to plan for something like that. I do want to assure Americans who are watching that after Hurricane Katrina and all the failures that we saw with FEMA, our committee investigated, we recommended, we passed a reform bill, FEMA now has ten regional offices that drill was state and local, officials for preparedness for any kind of natural disaster particularly the ones that are more likely in given areas. That the-- we have a hundred and four nuclear power plants in our country. Every year once a year FEMA, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, the power plants go through emergency drilling, evacuation planning to see what they would do if-- if a disaster struck. But the-- the-- the reality is that we're watching something unfold. And we don't know where it's going with regard to the nuclear power plants in Japan right now. And I think it calls on us here in the U.S. naturally not to stop building nuclear power plant-- plants but to put the brakes on right now until we understand the ramifications of what's happened in Japan. A final word of reassurance to the American people, since Three Mile Island, we upgraded safety standards for our nuclear power plants. And right now no plant can be built unless it can withstand the known highest earthquake in that geographic area, plus some margin of safety.

BOB SCHIEFFER (overlapping): So-- so--

SENATOR JOE LIEBERMAN: So this is part of what we do we do.

BOB SCHIEFFER: What-- what-- what you're saying here is that we should have a moratorium now on building nuclear plants, that we should just kind of stop and kind of reassess?

SENATOR JOE LIEBERMAN: Yeah. I've been-- I've been a big supporter of nuclear power because it's-- it's domestic. It's ours and it's clean. And-- but we've had a good safety record with nuclear power plants here in the United States. But-- but I think we've got to-- I don't-- I don't want to stop the building of nuclear power plants but I think we've got to kind of quietly put-- quickly put the brakes on until we can absorb what-- what has happened in Japan as a result of the earthquake and the tsu-- tsunami and then see what-- what more, if anything, we can demand of-- of the new power plants that are coming online. We've got a hundred and four nuclear power plants in America now. I was informed this morning that about twenty-three of them are built according to designs that are similar to the nuclear power plants in Japan that are-- that are now the focus of our concern.

BOB SCHIEFFER: And what about-- are we prepared for an earthquake like this. I mean, obviously, this is not something that is going to happen once a week. But--

SENATOR JOE LIEBERMAN (overlapping): Yeah.

BOB SCHIEFFER: --what about our buildings in this country? Is it time to think about reassessing specifications for that?

SENATOR JOE LIEBERMAN: It is. The Japanese has we've learned in the last few days because of the terrible earthquake around Kobe, back about fifteen years ago, have retrofitted old buildings, new buildings have high standards of withstanding earthquakes. In the West Coast, California, of course, we always think of-- of the area of our country most likely to be hit by earthquakes. New buildings have been equipped with earthquake-resistant systems. A lot of the old buildings have not been retrofitted. It's time, I think for states to look at their building codes and to see whether they want to take preventive action. The other thing I spoke this morning with Craig Fugate the director-- of administrator of FEMA. And, one of the things he said that he worries about is that the individual American people are not ready for what to do. The government is ready, about as ready as we can be, but what to do in the case of a disaster. And go to the FEMA website, because if-- if you live particularly near the coast you-- you got to have an evacuation plan. You got to have emergency supplies.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Yeah.

SENATOR JOE LIEBERMAN: So-- so you'll be safe to-- to respond to a disaster.

BOB SCHIEFFER: All right. Well senator, thank you so much for joining us. When we come back in a minute, we're going to talk to David Sanger of the New York Times and our own David Martin, our national security correspondent in just a minute.

(ANNOUNCEMENTS)

BOB SCHIEFFER: Back now with David Sanger, our chief Washington correspondent of the New York Times, six years the bureau chief for the Times in Tokyo and our own David Martin, of

course, our national security correspondent. David, what should we be looking for now in the next couple of days?

DAVID SANGER (New York Times): Well in addition to the rescue operation, which I'm-- I'm afraid has been sort of bad news getting-- getting to worse, I-- I think that the nuclear plants are going to be the-- the real focus of attention. And here the question is how much meltdown has happened? Sunday morning Japan time the government said that they had to assume that two of the plants were in partial meltdown. Now there's already been some detected amounts of-- of cesium in the area. This is a very radioactive material that gets into everything. And of course, it became the-- the big problem in Chernobyl. Nobody is expecting a Chernobyl-size issue here. But if the levels of cesium in the atmosphere continue to go up, then their problem of-- of evacuating people is going to be much higher and the problem of cleaning up is going to be much harder.

BOB SCHIEFFER: We're already involved, the U.S. military, in a very big way there, David. Just give me a little rundown on what we're doing there and what-- what's the Pentagon worried about here?

DAVID MARTIN (National Security Correspondent): Well, the U.S. military helicopters based in Japan have already evacuated six hundred people from the disaster zone. The aircraft carrier Reagan is on station serving in this, what the military calls a lily pad for Japanese helicopters to refuel that and operate off of it. As they go about disaster relief. There are about six other ships there that are searching the sea for anybody still alive who was washed out to sea by the tsunami. And there are several other big deck ships on the way. Some of them at least one of them anyway carrying Japanese troops because internal movement is a big problem here. And so the more the U.S. Navy can move these troops, the better off Japan is.

BOB SCHIEFFER: What is the main worry of the-- of our military about this?

DAVID MARTIN: Well, I think the-- the-- the U.S. military has the same worry about those plants that everybody else does. And they have no special capability to-- to deal with it.

BOB SCHIEFFER: And David, I want to ask you, the Japanese government, do you feel that they've come clean? Are they giving us the facts on this? Sometimes governments tend to try to coat things like this with good news. What-- what does the kind of the record of the Japanese government?

DAVID SANGER: Well, the record in the nuclear arena is not great. There have been some much smaller nuclear incidents over the years. And either the electric power companies or the government regulatory agency have been involved and gotten caught later on, sort of downplaying the worst of the news in one case editing a tape out to make it appear that an accident was not as bad as it was. Here you don't know how much of this is just the fog of confusion and crisis management and how much of it is trying to just make sure that people don't panic. And there's always in a situation like this, the sort of fine line between not wanting to worsen an already panicked situation and coming clean with everybody about what's going on.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Well, in line with that, Lucy Craft just said they had some of the papers. They are saying that that the stock market may crash tomorrow.

DAVID SANGER: Well it's possible it could. It's hard to know. You have to think though, that over the long term this could actually turn into an economic stimulus for Japan, because they're going to have to rebuild this beautiful and-- and quite historic area all north of-- of Tokyo. And that do bring a lot of-- a lot of investment back into Japan. You already saw the yen go back up on Friday. Just because of the thought that money would be flowing back into Japan. So it's very hard to sort of separate the short term from the long term here.

BOB SCHIEFFER: All right. Well, I want to thank both of you for adding a little perspective. I'll be back in a moment with some final thoughts on David Broder.

(ANNOUNCEMENTS)

BOB SCHIEFFER: Finally today, when they buried David Broder of the Washington Post last week they buried the greatest political reporter of our time, maybe any time. Until he died, David was one of the few reporters still working who was here when I came to Washington in 1969. And I shall never forget the first time I saw him. Here just a couple of weeks, I was sent to a news conference which turned into a shouting match. Not with the news source but among the reporters trying to shout down each other to ask a "gotcha" question. I happened to notice one reporter who had not joined in. He was just listening and writing down what the hapless official was trying to say. It was Broder, who I would later learn never talked when it interfered with listening. When I read his story the next day I realized he had more information and a more complete account than any of us who had been trying to shout down each other. He'd apparently pieced together the story with his own reporting before he got to the news conference and was just listening to see if the official deviated from what he already knew. And that was Broder. He did his home work before he went on a story, always did his own reporting and more important took the time to listen to what people said. In today's technology-driven journalism, that method is sometimes lost, but it still the best way. They buried David Broder but let's hope we never bury or forget his great lesson--talk less, listen more. We will really miss you, David.

(ANNOUNCEMENTS)

BOB SCHIEFFER: That's it for us. Thank for watching FACE THE NATION.