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



**May 10, 2009  
Transcript**

GUESTS: Dick Cheney  
Former Vice President

HOST: Mr. Bob Schieffer, CBS News

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## TRANSCRIPT

SCHIEFFER: Today on "Face the Nation," former Vice President Dick Cheney, and he's talking. His old boss George Bush has left town and is keeping quiet, but Dick Cheney is not. He's speaking out, and we'll get his take today on the future of the Republican Party, the controversial interrogation techniques, Iraq, Pakistan, and the new administration of President Obama.

Then I'll have a final word on a quiet kind of justice. But first, Dick Cheney on "Face the Nation."

Good morning again. The former vice president is in the studio with us this morning, as he has been many times over the years.

Mr. Vice President, thank you for being here. You're obviously here because we invited you here and we appreciate that, but I want to ask you something. President Bush has done what people normally do when they leave the Oval Office -- he has remained mum. He said very little. At one point, he said that he thought President Obama deserved his silence.

But you have taken a very different tack, and I must say a very unusual tack for somebody just leaving the vice president's office. You've been speaking out not just frequently, but often very pointedly. At one point you said, for example, the Obama administration has made this country less safe. That's a very serious charge. Why have you taken this approach?

CHENEY: Well, Bob, first of all, it's good to go back on the show.

SCHIEFFER: Thank you.

CHENEY: It's nice to know that you're still loved and are invited out in public sometimes.

The reason I've been speaking, and in effect what I've been doing is responding to press queries such as yours, is because I think the issues that are at stake here are so important. And, in effect, what we've seen happen with respect to the Obama administration as they came to power is they have moved to take down a lot of those policies we put in place that kept the nation safe for nearly eight years from a follow-on terrorist attack like 9/11. Dealing with prisoner interrogation, for example, or the terrorist surveillance program.

They campaigned against these policies across the country, and then they came in now, and they have tried, very hard, to undertake actions that I just fundamentally disagree with.

SCHIEFFER: Well, do you -- I mean, should we take that literally? You say that the administration has made this country more vulnerable to attacks here in the homeland.

CHENEY: That's my belief, based upon the fact, Bob, that we put in place those policies after 9/11. On the morning of 9/12, if you will, there was a great deal we didn't know about Al Qaida. There was the need to embark upon a new strategy with respect to treating this as a strategic threat to the United States. There was the possibility of Al Qaida terrorists in the midst of one of our own cities with a nuclear weapon or a biological agent.

It was a time of great concern, and we put in place some very good policies, and they worked, for eight years. Now we have an administration that's come to power that has been critical of the programs, but not only that, there's been talk about prosecuting the lawyers in the Justice Department who gave us the opinions that we operated in accordance with, or referring them to the Bar Association for disbarment or sanctions of some kind, or possibly cooperating with foreign governments that are interested in trying to prosecute American officials, those same officials who were responsible for defending this nation for the last eight years.

That whole complex of things is what I find deeply disturbing, and I think to the extent that those policies were responsible for saving lives, that the administration is now trying to cancel those policies or end them, terminate them, then I think it's fair to argue -- and I do argue -- that that means in the future we're not going to have the same safeguards we've had for the last eight years.

SCHIEFFER: Well, but why does that make the country less safe? You're talking about -- you say you don't think we ought to be going back and questioning those people, looking into some of these things. All right, I take your point on that, but how is that making the country less safe? How does that make the country more vulnerable to an attack in the future?

CHENEY: Well, at the heart of what we did with the terrorist surveillance program and the enhanced interrogation techniques for Al Qaida terrorists and so forth was collect information. It was about intelligence. It was about finding out what Al Qaida was going to do, what their capabilities and plans were. It was discovering all those things we needed in order to be able to go defeat Al Qaida.

And in effect, what's happening here, when you get rid of enhanced interrogation techniques, for example, or the terrorist surveillance program, you reduce the intelligence flow to the intelligence community upon which we based those policies that were so successful.

So I think before they do that sort of thing, it's important to sit down and find out what did we learn? Why did it work?

One of the things that I did six weeks ago was I made a request that two memos that I personally know of, written by the CIA, that lay out the successes of those policies and point out in considerable detail all of -- all that we were able to achieve by virtue of those policies, that those memos be released, be made public. The administration has released legal opinions out of the Office of Legal Counsel. They don't have any qualms at all about putting things out that can be used to be critical of the Bush administration policies. But when you've got memos out there that show precisely how much was achieved and how lives were saved as a result of these policies, they won't release those. At least, they haven't yet.

SCHIEFFER: Let me just ask you about that, because some people in the administration -- believe the attorney general says he does not know of such memos. Other people in the administration say, as a matter of fact, what we found out using these methods -- and I mean, let's call things what they are -- water boarding was one of the techniques that were used -- that they really didn't get all that much from that. You say they did.

CHENEY: I say they did. Four former directors of the Central Intelligence Agency say they did, bipartisan basis.

Release the memos. And we can look and see for yourself what was produced.

The memos do exist. I have seen them. I had them in my files at one time. Now everything is part of the National Archives. I'm sure the agency has copies of those materials, and there's a formal way you go through, once you're a former official, a formal way you go through requesting declassification of something, and I started that process, as I say, six weeks ago. I haven't heard anything from it yet. I assume...

SCHIEFFER: You have not -- they haven't responded to you as yet?

CHENEY: That's right. There's been -- up until now, I've got a letter of notification saying they had started the process, but I haven't seen anything by way of a result from this request for declassification. And if we're going to have this debate, it ought to be a complete debate, and those memos ought to be out there for people to look at and journalists like yourself to evaluate in terms of what we were able to accomplish with these policies.

SCHIEFFER: Well, Mr. Vice President, let me ask you this. I mean, I'm not asking you to violate any rules of classification, but is there anything you can tell us specifically that those memos would tell us? I mean, some information we gleaned, some fact that we got that we wouldn't have gotten otherwise?

CHENEY: That's what's in those memos. It talks specifically about different attack planning that was under way and how it was stopped. It talks about how the volume of intelligence reports that were produced from that.

SCHIEFFER: Does it talk about planning for attacks or attacks that were actually stopped?

CHENEY: Well, I need to be careful here, Bob, because it's still classified. The way to answer this is give us the memos. Put them out there. Release them to the press. Let everybody take a look and see.

What it shows is that overwhelmingly, the process we had in place produced from certain key individuals, such as Khalid Shaikh Mohammed and Abu Zubaydah, two of the three who were waterboarded, and Khalid Shaikh Mohammed is the man who killed 3,000 Americans on 9/11, blew up the World Trade Center, attacked the Pentagon, tried to blow up the White House or the Capitol building. An evil man that's been in our custody since March of '03. He did not cooperate fully in terms of interrogations until after waterboarding. Once we went through that process, he produced vast quantities of invaluable information about Al Qaida.

SCHIEFFER: What do you say to those, Mr. Vice President, who say that when we employ these kinds of tactics, which are after all the tactics that the other side uses, that when we adopt their methods, that we're weakening security, not enhancing security, because it sort of makes a mockery of what we tell the rest of the world?

CHENEY: Well, then you'd have to say that, in effect, we're prepared to sacrifice American lives rather than run an intelligent interrogation program that would provide us the information we need to protect America.

The fact of the matter is, these techniques that we're talking about are used on our own people. We -- in a program that in effect trains our people with respect to capture and evasion and so forth and escape, a lot of them go through these same exact procedures. Now...

SCHIEFFER: Do you -- is what you're saying here is that we should do anything if we could get information?

CHENEY: No. Remember what happened here, Bob. We had captured these people. We had pursued interrogation in a normal way. We decided that we needed some enhanced techniques. So we went to the Justice Department. And the controversy has arisen over the opinions written by the Justice Department.

The reason we went to the Justice Department wasn't because we felt we were going to take some kind of free hand assault on these people or that we were in the torture business. We weren't. And specifically, what we got from the Office of Legal Counsel were legal memos that laid out what is appropriate and what's not appropriate, in light of our international commitments.

CHENEY: If we had been about torture, we wouldn't have wasted our time going to the Justice Department.

SCHIEFFER: How much did President Bush know specifically about the methods that were being used? We know that you-- and you have said-- that you approved this...

CHENEY: Right.

SCHIEFFER: ... somewhere down the line. Did President Bush know everything you knew?

CHENEY: I certainly, yes, have every reason to believe he knew -- he knew a great deal about the program. He basically authorized it. I mean, this was a presidential-level decision. And the decision went to the president. He signed off on it.

SCHIEFFER: You said -- you said just a moment ago as you were talking about this, that -- you said that we have to realize what was at stake and we have to realize the circumstances. Do you have any regrets whatsoever about any of the methods that were taken? Any of the things that were used back in those days? Because there's no question the country -- it was a different time. The country's mood was different. We had just been -- something had happened here that had never happened before.

In retrospect, you -- years have passed. You're now out of office. Do you think we should have done some things differently back then, or do you have any regrets about any of it?

CHENEY: No regrets. I think it was absolutely the right thing to do. I'm convinced, absolutely convinced, that we saved thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands of lives.

In the aftermath of 9/11, we had all of these questions about who Al Qaida was, where they were operating and so forth. We didn't know nearly as much as we know today. We were faced with a very real possibility -- we had reporting that said Al Qaida is trying to acquire nuclear capabilities. We had the A.Q. Khan network out there, a black-market operator selling nuclear weapons technology to Libya, North Korea and Iran. We had the anthrax attack within a matter of weeks after 9/11. We had the kind of situation that meant that we were absolutely convinced, the country was convinced, that there was a very high likelihood of a follow-on attack, a mass casualty attack against the United States. No one then would have bet anything that you're going to go eight years and not have another attack. And we know, in fact, that they did try other attacks, and that we were able to stop them.

Now, if you'd look at it from the perspective of a senior government official, somebody like myself, who stood up and took the oath of office on January 20th of '01 and raised their right hand and said we're going to protect and defend the United States against all enemies foreign and domestic, this was exactly, exactly what was needed to do it.

I think if you look at this intelligence program that when things are quieter, 20 or 30 years from now, you'll be able to look back on this and say this is one of the great success stories of American intelligence. I think, in fact, what the men and women in the intelligence community and the lawyers in the Justice Department and the senior officials who approved this program did exactly the right thing. I think the charge that somehow there was something wrong done here or that this was torture in violation of U.S. statutes is just absolutely false.

SCHIEFFER: You -- you are speaking out. You say you obviously feel passionately about this. How far are you willing to take this approach? Are you willing to go back to the Congress and talk to people in Congress about this? There are all kinds of people talking about various kinds of investigations. Would you go back and talk to the Congress?

CHENEY: Certainly. I've made it very clear that I feel very strongly that what we did here was exactly the right thing to do. And if I don't speak out, then where do we find ourselves, Bob? Then the critics have free run, and there isn't anybody there on the other side to tell the truth. So it's important -- it's important that we...

SCHIEFFER: Senator Leahy, the chairman of the Judiciary Committee, was on this broadcast recently. And I said, do you intend to ask the former vice president to come up? And he said if he will testify under oath. Would you be willing to testify under oath?

CHENEY: I'd have to see what the circumstances are and what kind of precedent we were setting. But certainly I wouldn't be out here today if I didn't feel comfortable talking about what we're doing publicly. I think it's very, very important that we have a clear understanding that what happened here was an

honorable approach to defending the nation, that there was nothing devious or deceitful or dishonest or illegal about what was done.

SCHIEFFER: All right. We're going to take a little break here and come back and talk about this and some other things, in a moment.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

SCHIEFFER: We're back again with the former vice president, Dick Cheney.

Mr. Vice President, General Petraeus, our top military man out in that part of the world, said this morning he is confident that Pakistan's nuclear weapons are secure. But I want to ask you this, does the United States have enough information about the location of those weapons and the security of those weapons that we could take action should there be a collapse of Pakistan's government or a civil war broke out?

CHENEY: Well, I wouldn't want to speculate on that, Bob. I think the key thing from my perspective would be if General Petraeus, who is our commander in Centcom, covering that part of the world, knowing as he does how important that issue is, if he says they're on top of it, I believe it.

SCHIEFFER: So how do you feel about what's happening in Pakistan right now? Though, I mean, the Pakistani government continues to seem to have trouble sort of getting organized to fight the Taliban. Sometimes you wonder if they -- if they take the threat of the Taliban as seriously as we seem to take it in this country. Do you have faith that they can beat the Taliban in their country?

CHENEY: We had a problem, I'd say, a year or so ago, was one we worried about very much in the Bush administration, that you had in Pakistan Al Qaida, which had retreated there from Afghanistan. You had the Taliban coming back and forth across the border. And the feeling that the Pakistani government understood that the Al Qaida was a threat to the U.S. and that the Taliban were a threat to Afghanistan, but they didn't believe they were threatened.

I think that is gone now. I think they understand full well that those radical Islamists, whatever their stripe in northwestern Pakistan, would love to see the government in Islamabad toppled. And I think they're committed to do that. That's a major step forward, just to have the government in Pakistan understand that they are as threatened, if not more so, than are the United States or Afghanistan.

SCHIEFFER: What about Afghanistan? President Karzai said recently that maybe we ought to stop some of the air attacks there because of civilian casualties. Jim Jones, the new national security adviser, said he did not foresee air attacks being stopped there. How is that war going, in your view? What are we doing that we should be doing and what are we doing -- or what is not happening that should be happening, in your analysis?

CHENEY: I think we have to get our heads around the concept that there's not likely to be a point any time in the near future when you can say, oh, it's all wrapped up, we can go home. I think that's the wrong way to look at this conflict.

Afghanistan is a very, very difficult part of the world to operate in, from an economic standpoint, a geographical standpoint. It's a very tough place to do business.

What happened, of course, was that it became a sanctuary for Al Qaida, and they used it to train terrorists to come to the United States and kill Americans.

We can't allow that to happen. We can't allow ourselves to go back to a situation where Afghanistan is out there operating -- there's no U.S. presence, no foreign military presence -- until we're convinced that the Afghans themselves can control all their sovereign territory. When that day happens, I think we'll be happy to leave. But that's how I would define success in Afghanistan, is it no longer constitutes a threat to the United States.

I think we have to be committed there for a long period of time. I was glad to see President Obama commit additional troops to Afghanistan. I think we need to do whatever we have to do there to be able to prevail.

Air strikes are an important part of it. And a lot of times, the air strikes do generate controversy, but oftentimes we found in the past that these strikes are engineered by the Taliban. For example, a suggestion in the most recent case is that they used grenades to kill a lot of civilians, not American bombs.

SCHIEFFER: Let me ask you about Guantanamo. President Obama said it's going to be closed within a year. It's proved to be a little more complicated than perhaps some in the administration thought it was going to be. Now you've got Congress in a real uproar about if these people are brought to prisons in this country. We've had resolutions introduced up there on the Hill that unless the state legislature gives the go-ahead, you can't put them into a prison any place in that particular state. But can we ask other countries to take these people back, Mr. Vice President? If we're not willing to take them back in this country?

CHENEY: Well, we have asked other countries to take them back, and they've refused. I can remember a situation before we left office where we were trying to find a home for some Uighurs, who were generally believed not to be all that big a threat. They ended up in Albania, because Albania was the only country in the world that would take them.

What's left -- we released hundreds already of the less threatening types. About 12 percent of them, nonetheless, went back into the fight as terrorists. The group that's left, the 245 or so, these are the worst of the worst. This is the hard core. You'd have a recidivism rate out of this group of maybe 50 or 60 percent.

They want to get out because they want to kill more Americans. And you're just going to find it very difficult to send them any place.

Now, as I say, there has been some talk on the part of the administration about putting them in the United States. I think that's going to be a tough sell. I don't know a single congressional district in this country that is going to say, gee, great, they're sending us 20 Al Qaida terrorists.

It's a graphic demonstration of why Guantanamo is important. We had to have a place, a facility, where we could capture these people and hold them until they were no longer a danger to the United States. If you bring them to the United States, they acquire all kinds of legal rights. And as Khalid Shaikh Mohammed said when we captured him, he said I'll talk to you guys after I get to New York and see my lawyer. That's the kind of problem you're going to have with these terrorists.

SCHIEFFER: Let's talk quickly about your party, the Republican Party. A lot of controversy. Arlen Specter has left. He said there's no room for moderates in the party anymore. You said last week the party should not moderate. But what are you going to do? I mean, you can purify the party to the point that it's too small to ever get elected to anything. How do you broaden the appeal of your party, and yet do you think there's a place for moderates?

CHENEY: Oh, sure. I think there is room for moderates in the Republican Party. I think partly it's a semantic problem. I don't think the party ought to move dramatically to the left, for example, in order to try to redefine its base.

We are what we are. We're Republicans. We have certain things we believe in. And maintaining our loyalty and commitment to those principles is vital to our success.

I think there are some good efforts out there. Jeb Bush, I know, has been working on it. Eric Cantor, Mitt Romney, trying to find ways to appeal to a broader range of people. I don't have any problem with that. I

think that's a good thing to do. But the suggestion our Democratic friends always make is somehow, you know, if you Republicans were just more like Democrats, you'd win elections. Well, I don't buy that. I think we win elections when we have good solid conservative principles to run upon and base our policies on those principles.

SCHIEFFER: Colin Powell, Rush Limbaugh said the other day that the party would probably be better off if Colin Powell left and just became a Democrat. Colin Powell said Republicans would be better off if they didn't have Rush Limbaugh out speaking for them. Where do you come down?

CHENEY: Well, if I had to choose in terms of being a Republican, I'd go with Rush Limbaugh, I think. I think my take on it was Colin had already left the party. I didn't know he was still a Republican.

SCHIEFFER: So you think that he's not a Republican?

CHENEY: I just noted he endorsed the Democratic candidate for president this time, Barack Obama. I assumed that that is some indication of his loyalty and his interest.

SCHIEFFER: And you said you would take Rush Limbaugh over Colin Powell.

CHENEY: I would.

SCHIEFFER: All right.

CHENEY: Politically.

SCHIEFFER: Mr. Vice President, you promised some news. I think we probably made a little.

CHENEY: All right.

SCHIEFFER: Thank you, sir. We'll be back in a minute.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK) SCHIEFFER: Finally today, so David Souter, maybe the quietest and most low-key man ever to serve on the Supreme Court, has made it official. He is retiring to return to the New Hampshire woods from whence he came. By all accounts, he was a good justice, thoughtful, reasonable. For sure, he was the surprise to the man who nominated him, the first George Bush, who thought he was picking a conservative, only to discover he had chosen a liberal. But these things happen sometimes when people get jobs for life.

I had no problem with the justice's legal work, but as one who has lived 40 years in Washington, I'll be honest -- I didn't care for his attitude. He made it no secret that he hated the city, once describing his work as the best job in the world in the worst city in the world. Another time he called life here akin to an intellectual lobotomy. Really? Our nation's capital, one of the most beautiful cities in the world. Call me corny, but I have to confess I've run into some pretty smart people here over the years. But then again, I've tried to get to know the city and its inhabitants. Who wouldn't, if you were going to live in a place? Justice Souter, obviously. I've never known anyone who ever saw him outside the court. And now he is leaving. I take it he won't miss Washington, but my guess is Washington will hardly miss him.

That's it. We'll see you next week right here on "Face the Nation."

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