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*CBS News*

# ***FACE THE NATION***

*Sunday, April 15, 2007*

**GUEST: Vice President DICK CHENEY**

**MODERATOR: BOB SCHIEFFER - CBS News**

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***FACE THE NATION - CBS NEWS  
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BOB SCHIEFFER, host:

Today on FACE THE NATION, an exclusive one-on-one interview with Vice President Dick Cheney. He's been called the most influential vice president in history. Others call him the most secretive ever. But with the administration under siege on so many fronts, is he ready to work with Democrats to find consensus on what to do about the war? Does he believe the war on terror has changed him personally? What are his feelings about Scooter Libby, his long-time aide who was convicted of perjury? We'll ask about all of that this morning, and then I'll have some thoughts of my own on the country at war. But first, Vice President Dick Cheney 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.

SCHIEFFER: And good morning again. The president has invited congressional leaders to come to the White House on Wednesday to resolve the impasse over paying for the war in Iraq. The Democrats say no money unless the president agrees to a timetable to begin withdrawing American forces. The president says no timetable, period. But he wants to discuss it. Yet, when the vice president flew to Chicago on Friday, he seemed in no mood to compromise. On Air Force Two, he put the final touches on a speech that calls on Democrats to strip the withdrawal timetable from their proposal or face a presidential veto. And once in Chicago, he lit into the Democratic leaders in tough language seldom heard even during a heated political campaign.

Vice President DICK CHENEY: (From speech) The actions of the Democratic leadership have moved from the merely inconsistent to the irresponsible.

SCHIEFFER: In so many words, he went on to accuse them of putting the nation in danger.

Vice Pres. CHENEY: The Democrats' attempt to micromanage our commanders is an unwise and perilous endeavor.

SCHIEFFER: And the vice president joins us now in the studio.

Welcome, Mr. Vice President. I must say, hearing those comments from you, this does not sound like an administration that's in a mood to compromise here, which leads me to ask you, why is the president asking the congressional leaders to come to the White House? Does he want to talk to them--is he looking for a compromise or is he just going to call them there and dress them down?

Vice Pres. CHENEY: Well, I think we're trying to work out the procedures here, obviously, to get the bill passed, the urgent war supplemental. It's absolutely essential we have it. It's for the troops. Troops that are in the field or in combat every day. And the process has already run on far too long. We're already some 70 days since the president made this request. What needs to be worked out is that we need a decision, basically, from the Congress whether or not they're going to take the two bills that have now

passed the House and Senate and send--clean them up and send them down to the president in the fashion that he would find acceptable, with no limitations on the forces in Iraq and without all the pork that's in it. Then he'll get a bill he can sign, and we can get on with our business.

On the other hand, if they're going to insist on those bills containing those provisions that were in the--both the House and Senate bill, he'll veto it. And it's important, I think, to have that heart-to-heart, everybody understands where everybody is. Now, some of the leadership on the other side has suggested they won't pass any bill at all, or Harry Reid now has said he's adamantly opposed to any funding for the troops. On the other hand, Carl Levin, who's chairman of the Armed Services Committee, has indicated that they definitely do want to pass funding for the troops even if they don't have the votes to override the president's veto on the--on the limitation provisions and on the pork that's in the bill.

SCHIEFFER: I think what struck me, though, about your speech, was, I mean, you started out by calling these congressional leaders irresponsible, and I wonder how does that stay--set the stage for productive talks?

Vice Pres. CHENEY: Well, I think it's important they know where we stand. And the fact of the matter is I do believe that the positions that the Democratic leaders have taken and--to a large extent now are irresponsible. I mean, Harry Reid last fall said--this is after the November elections--that he would not support an effort to cut off funding for the troops. Then he changed that position to one in which he would support an effort to cut off funding for the troops, place limitations on--on the funding, and now he's to the point where he's saying he's going to support legislation that cuts the whole funding for the troops. He's done a complete 180 from where he was in five months. I think that is irresponsible. I think you cannot make the basic fundamental decisions that have to be made with respect to the nation's security, given everything that's at stake in the war on terror, and what we're doing in Iraq, and with the 140,000 American troops in the field in Iraq and with the 140,000 American troops in the field in Iraq in combat every day, and call that kind of--of rapid changes in position anything other than irresponsible.

SCHIEFFER: Well, serious people can have disagreements over serious things.

Vice Pres. CHENEY: Right.

SCHIEFFER: And this is certainly a serious thing. Are you saying it's irresponsible to disagree with this administration on how to prosecute this war?

Vice Pres. CHENEY: No. But I--I--I--there are members out there who didn't support the war in the first place and have been consistent over time, and--and that's certainly their prerogative if they want to do that. I would say, for example, that--there's a problem of consistency, if you will, if, on the one hand, you vote unanimously to confirm Dave Petraeus as the new commanding general in Iraq and then try to pass resolutions that deny him the

resources he said, during the course of his confirmation hearings, he had to have in order to accomplish his mission. That's the proposition that we've seen now develop in the Senate, where they did, in fact, vote unanimously--not one single negative vote on--on confirming him for that post--but then sending him out to take on this major assignment, turn right around and--and try to adopt legislation that, in effect, would tie his hands.

SCHIEFFER: How can long can this standoff go on before the combat units start to run out of money?

Vice Pres. CHENEY: Well, the way it--it'll work, the Defense Department has some flexibility in terms of reprogramming and so forth, but it begins to bite fairly early on. I mean, the concerns that've been expressed by the chairman of the Joint Chiefs and by Pete Schoomaker, who's the retiring chief of staff of the Army, that if we don't get the money flowing here shortly--say, by the end of this month--it'll begin to have an impact. What happens is, you'd have to pull money out of other accounts in order to fund the forces in combat. But it affects everything from training and readiness here at home of the units before they deploy, it affects our work of our depots that are heavily involved in refurbishing equipment that's been heavily used and needs to be refurbished before it can be used again. It begins to have a significant impact in a relatively short period of time on--on the forces. And again, remember, you know, we asked for this over two months ago. It is an urgent supplemental; it needs to be passed right away. Instead, it's become a vehicle, if you will, for the other party to try to load a bunch of provisions on it that we think are unwise.

SCHIEFFER: If the president has to choose between funding the war and a timetable for withdrawal, what happens? What does he do?

Vice Pres. CHENEY: Well, the president has the...

SCHIEFFER: I mean, obviously I know he's going to veto it the first time around...

Vice Pres. CHENEY: He is, indeed.

SCHIEFFER: ...but what happens after that?

Vice Pres. CHENEY: I think the Congress will pass clean legislation. I think there are enough Democrats on the other side of the aisle who--who, they may support the provisions that were written in in the House and the Senate, but if they don't have the votes to override the president's veto, that they will not leave the troops in the field without the resources they need to be able to carry out their mission.

SCHIEFFER: Well, what if they don't do that?

Vice Pres. CHENEY: Well, I'm--I'm willing to bet the other way, that, in fact, they will. I don't think there--there may be some people who are so irresponsible that they wouldn't support that, but I think the fact of the

matter is that the majority of Democrats on the other side of the aisle, once they've gone through the exercise and--and it's clear the president will veto the provisions that they want in, that they don't have the votes to override, that they will, in fact, give us the bill. It's absolutely essential. I don't think that a majority of the Democrats in the Congress want to leave America's fighting forces in harm's way without the resources they need to defend themselves.

SCHIEFFER: But a majority of Americans do want a timetable for withdrawal.

Vice Pres. CHENEY: Well, you can also get a majority who, I think, would prefer to have us win, and the--there's a fundamental debate going on here in terms of whether or not our objective in--in Iraq is to, quote, withdraw, or whether our objective in Iraq is to complete the mission. And I think a majority of Americans would prefer the latter, if we can get it done. Now, it's tough. It's no question but what it's a very difficult assignment, but we've got a new commander in the field, we've got a good strategy in place, and I think we will see positive results.

SCHIEFFER: Mr. Vice President, we also have a terrible situation going on right now. And--and that's what I want to ask you about. How do you explain what's happening now? I mean, all last week, tens of thousands of Iraqis out in the streets chanting, 'Americans go home,' a bomb goes off in the parliament. Then this weekend more Iraqis die, two big bombs go off on Saturday. You know, you said first that we didn't need a lot of American troops there, then--then you say we're going to put more in and that's going to change the situation. It doesn't seem to be getting better to me.

Vice Pres. CHENEY: Well, I think we are making progress. But the ultimate source of that, of course, is, in terms of that judgment, will be our commanders on the scene and Dave Petraeus. I don't want to underestimate the difficulty of the task, Bob, but just because it's hard doesn't mean we shouldn't do it. And, of course, the--the enemy will do everything they can during this period of time to try to halt progress on that...

SCHIEFFER: Well...

Vice Pres. CHENEY: ...so they send in a suicide bomber into the cafeteria in the parliament.

SCHIEFFER: Well, the bomb in the--in the parliament, who did that? Is that--is this part of the civil war? Is this part of the terrorists? Is it a combination of both? Do we even know what has caused this or who's caused this?

Vice Pres. CHENEY: We don't know. My expectation is--excuse me--that we'll probably find out. These kinds of attacks, in the past, have been attributed to al-Qaeda in Iraq. They're the ones, for example, who some years ago destroyed the--the UN facility in Baghdad. They're the ones who bombed the mosque at Samarra. These--these strategic--strategic strikes that are aimed at trying to foment strife, so I would expect we will find out who did it in

this case. Unfortunately, one member of parliament was killed, obviously. But just because it's difficult or complicated doesn't mean the United States should withdraw or that we should give up the task. Of course, it's hard. This is a very difficult assignment, but it's absolutely essential that we get it right. There's an awful lot riding on it, not only in Iraq, but in terms of the efforts we're making in that part of the world to deal with this global war on terror. It is a global conflict. This week we had attacks in Casablanca and Algiers, in Algiers by a group, an announced affiliate of al-Qaeda. We've seen attacks from New York and Washington all the way around to Jakarta and Bali and Indonesia. And we've got millions of people in that part of the world who've signed on to--to fight the good fight. People like President Musharraf in Pakistan and Karzai in Afghanistan and hundreds of thousands who've signed on with the security services. Millions who voted all based on the proposition that the United States is going to lead the way in--in conducting this fight against this evil ideology. And if we now decide Iraq's too tough and we're going to bail out, what happens to all of those folks who've signed on out there? Are they going to have any confidence at all that the United States is going to stay and complete the mission?

SCHIEFFER: Let me ask you, because it leads me to this question, Mr. Vice President, you have throughout this war been optimistic about how things were going. Two years ago you told Larry King, "I think they're in the last throes, if you will, of the insurgency." What did you base that on at that time? Because there were many people had a totally different view of what was happening and--and it, you know, it brings us down to where we are now. And, I mean, why should people believe you now when so many times, in the past, the statements from this administration have proved to be incorrect?

Vice Pres. CHENEY: Well, partly we have to respond to questions from the press, and we do the best we can with what we know at the time. My statement at the time that you referenced was geared specifically to the fact that we'd just had an election in Iraq where some 12 million people defied the car bombers and the assassins and for the first time participated in a free election. And we had three elections in 2005 in Iraq. We set up a provisional government, then we had a ratification of a brand new constitution, and then an election under that constitution of the new government, the new government that's in place now. I still think, in the broad sweep of history, those will have been major turning points in the war in Iraq. I do believe we can win in Iraq. I think it is a worthy cause. I think it's absolutely essential that we prevail, and I think the United States of America, at the beginning of the 21st century, is perfectly capable of winning this fight against these people and setting up and establishing in Iraq a democratic government that can defend itself. That's basically our mission. We need to be able to do it there. And there might have been a time in our history when we could retreat behind our oceans and not worry about what was happening in the Middle East--in Iraq or Afghanistan or Yemen or someplace else. But remember what happened in Afghanistan. In Afghanistan, we were involved in the 1980s, supported the mujahadeen against the Soviets, the Soviets withdrew in '89, everybody walked away from Afghanistan. In short order they had a civil war, the Taliban came to power, it became a safe haven for al-Qaeda. Osama bin Laden moved in. They set up training camps and

trained 20,000 terrorists in the late '90s, some of whom came here and killed 3,000 Americans on 9/11. But what happens over there is absolutely vital from the standpoint of US security, and we no longer have the luxury of turning our back on that part of the world and of ignoring what happened. We have to prevail in Iraq, and we can.

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

(Announcements)

SCHIEFFER: We're back now with Vice President Cheney.

Mr. Vice President, we were talking about credibility. The attorney general is going to Capital Hill this week to testify before the Judiciary Committee. There are questions about whether he has been truthful about what's been going on in his Justice Department. Again, it comes back to this question of credibility. We--we have the attorney general. We have optimistic statements about the war in Iraq. Your own top aide, Scooter Libby, was convicted of perjury. Does this administration have a credibility problem?

Vice Pres. CHENEY: Well, I don't think so, Bob. I think, obviously, we've got issues we need to work through. The attorney general will be doing that this week with respect to the US attorney question and the Justice Department. But you do the best you can with what you've got, obviously, and I think that on--on reflection, that, indeed, the record of the president and his administration will stand up well to scrutiny.

SCHIEFFER: But let me just get to the attorney general here. A new story this weekend, new e-mails show the department was selecting candidates to replace US attorneys--which of course is certainly the president's right, these are political appointees--a year before they were--these people in office were dismissed. now, before that they had said just the opposite. They had said these US attorneys were being replaced for performance reasons. That seems to be a direct contradiction. And--and it's--can the attorney general continue to serve and be effective when there are questions about he can't seem to get his story straight about what's going on in his own department?

Vice Pres. CHENEY: Well, Al's going to have the opportunity, I think Wednesday, sometime this week, as you mentioned, to go before the Congress and testify to all these matters. He's a good man. I have every confidence in him. The president has every confidence in him. But he'll--he'll have an opportunity to go address these particular issues.

SCHIEFFER: It sounds like you're leaving it to him to fix this problem.

Vice Pres. CHENEY: Well, as vice president, I don't know anything about the particular problem you're talking about. I mean, it took place inside the Justice Department. The one who needs to answer to that and lay out on the record the specifics of what transpired is the attorney general, and he'll do

so.

SCHIEFFER: I want to also ask you about Scooter Libby. He was your close friend; I assume is still your close friend.

Vice Pres. CHENEY: Yes.

SCHIEFFER: After he was found guilty of perjury in connection with the outing of the CIA agent Valerie Plame, you expressed disappointment in the verdict. You said you had no comment and would have no comment. But the prosecutor said the case left a cloud over the vice presidency. I'd just like to ask you first, have you talked to Scooter Libby since the trial?

Vice Pres. CHENEY: I have not.

SCHIEFFER: You have not?

Vice Pres. CHENEY: No.

SCHIEFFER: Why not?

Vice Pres. CHENEY: Well, there hasn't been occasion to do so. But I have enormous regard for the man. I believe deeply in Scooter Libby. He's one of the most dedicated public servants I've ever worked with, and I think this is a great tragedy. But I'm also constrained not to discuss it. It's still pending in the courts. The matter will be appealed, and, as I said the other day when the verdict was handed down, I'm not going to comment on it.

SCHIEFFER: Well, I mean, but as your friend, wouldn't you even call and express your regrets? I mean, I am surprised to hear you say that.

Vice Pres. CHENEY: I just--I haven't had occasion to do that.

SCHIEFFER: Do you, in any way, feel responsible for what happened to him?

Vice Pres. CHENEY: Bob, I'm simply not going to get into the case, and I think it would be inappropriate for me to do so.

SCHIEFFER: I ask you that because, as you well know, Senator Schumer said that he was the fall guy for you.

Vice Pres. CHENEY: Bob, the answer's the same. You can ask, but you'll get the same answer.

SCHIEFFER: Some of the people--you and I, of course, have known each other since the Ford administration...

Vice Pres. CHENEY: That we have.

SCHIEFFER: ...when you were President Ford's chief of staff. Shortly before he died, Bob Woodward revealed that President Ford had said you had become

more pugnacious...

Vice Pres. CHENEY: Mm-hmm.

SCHIEFFER: ...and had developed a fever about what he called the threat of terrorism. He suggested you had sort of changed. Do you feel, Mr. Vice President, that you have changed since those days?

Vice Pres. CHENEY: Well, I don't know that I've changed. I'm certainly older than I was when we worked together in the White House or you covered us in the White House 30 years ago. No, I think the thing that--that some people mistake for or--or categorize as 'Cheney's changed' sort of analysis, is 9/11. And 9/11 did have, I think, a remarkable impact on the threat to the United States, on what we're required to deal with as an administration. I deal with it every day. I look at the intelligence reports every day. Just before I came down here, went through an intelligence briefing this morning. The fact is that the threat to the United States now of a 9/11 occurring with a group of terrorists armed, not with airline tickets and box cutters, but with a nuclear weapon in the middle of one of our own cities is the greatest threat we face. It's a very real threat. It's something that we have to worry about and defeat every single day. We've worked hard now for going on six years to do exactly that. We've been successful of defending against further attacks. But it's not easy. It's not dumb luck. It doesn't just happen because we've got a lot of good people who've spent a lot of time, devote their entire professional lives, if you will, to this mission. Now, when you deal with that every day, you can't help but--but be very serious about the enterprise that we're involved in. And right now it's my job to be one of those people that worries about that.

SCHIEFFER: Senator Reid, who you mentioned earlier, the Democratic leader, said that he thought that President Bush had become more isolated over Iraq than Richard Nixon was during Watergate. You were around during those days.

Vice Pres. CHENEY: I was.

SCHIEFFER: Do you think that's true?

Vice Pres. CHENEY: I do not. I think that's a ridiculous notion.

SCHIEFFER: It's a ridiculous notion?

Vice Pres. CHENEY: Yes.

SCHIEFFER: Do you feel you have become more isolated?

Vice Pres. CHENEY: I don't think so. I spend as much time as I can, get out and--and do other things, be it home in Wyoming or, yesterday, I managed to go shopping with my daughter for birthday presents for granddaughters. But I, you know, I obviously spend most of my time on the job.

SCHIEFFER: Mr. Vice President, how's your health?

Vice Pres. CHENEY: It's good.

SCHIEFFER: It's very nice to talk to you this morning.

Vice Pres. CHENEY: Thank you.

SCHIEFFER: I hope we'll see you again soon.

Vice Pres. CHENEY: Well, I enjoyed doing the show, Bob.

SCHIEFFER: All right, thank you very much.

To accommodate the vice president's schedule, we taped that interview yesterday. It was unedited. Back in a minute with a final word.

(Announcements)

SCHIEFFER: And finally today, retired Air Force Lieutenant General Charles Roadman is part of a distinguished panel of experts investigating the problems at Walter Reed Army Hospital. What he said the other day caught my eye. 'One problem,' he told The Washington Post, 'is that Iraq is producing so many casualties. The nation,' he said, 'needs to realize we are at war.'

As I read that, I wondered how many of us lead lives completely untouched by this war? It is being fought by an all-volunteer force that accounts for less than one half of 1 percent of all of us. Nor do many of us feel the economic impact, since it's being fought mostly on borrowed money. If we closed our eyes to TV and newspapers, most of us could get through the day without knowing there was a war.

When I was a child, we all knew about World War II. It was fought by draftees, and everyone had a dad or an uncle or a cousin or a neighbor who was gone to war. Food was rationed, taxes were high. Every day brought something to remind us we were at war. These days some Americans may not even know anyone in the military, let alone have a connection. Our volunteer military is the best in the world, but again, I wonder should democracies fight wars with an all volunteer force? Should we ever go to war unless all of us are willing to share the sacrifice?

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