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Pelosi On Afghanistan – War on Terror

Speaker Nancy Pelosi, in an expansive sit-down interview with Charlie Rose:

Charlie Rose:
Okay, Afghanistan.

Nancy Pelosi:
Yes.

Charlie Rose:
What do you want the president to do?

Nancy Pelosi:
What is right.

Charlie Rose:
Well, clearly you want him to do what is right. What do you think is right?

Nancy Pelosi:
Well, the president -- we'll meet with the president tomorrow bipartisan way, House and Senate.

Charlie Rose:
Oh, you mean -- what does that mean. I mean, you and John Boehner and --

Nancy Pelosi:
Well, it's a more expansive group than that.

Charlie Rose:
[unintelligible]

Nancy Pelosi:
The leadership of the House and Senate, Democrats and Republicans, and then the senior Dem -
- or the chairman and the ranking member of the committees of jurisdiction on national security. So under 40 people, but a -- you know, tens of people.

Charlie Rose:
And what's going to take place in this meeting?

Nancy Pelosi:
We'll find out when we go there. But what I anticipate is the president will elicit the views of people there on the subject. We'll, perhaps -- at some point, we'll have to have an array of options put before us to see what the needs are. In other words, even general McChrystal has said unless there is a strategy, we shouldn't resource the mission.

Charlie Rose:

Everybody has said that. Everybody says you've got to have a strategy before you decide how many trips you need.

Nancy Pelosi:

Right, and the military's role is to say if this is the plan, this is how many troops we need to fulfill the mission. And so which plan will it take?

Charlie Rose:

So you don't have any problem with what General McChrystal said in his speech or in the press conference, do you?

Nancy Pelosi:

Well, I don't know exactly -- I don't know everything he said.

Charlie Rose:

Well, I'll tell you one thing he said. He said he couldn't -- they suggested the Biden proposal had been leaked with the Biden ideas. We ought to make al-Qaeda the target, not the Taliban, limited number of troops. And General McChrystal said in a press conference in London after he made a speech, that that wouldn't work.

Nancy Pelosi:

Well, let me say this, the vice president's views are ones that widely shared.

Charlie Rose:

By --

Nancy Pelosi:

Shared.

Charlie Rose:

By the speaker of the House? By the speaker of the House?

Nancy Pelosi:

By members of Congress and people across the country who talk to me about [unintelligible]

Charlie Rose:

So tell me what you think --

Nancy Pelosi:

My empirical --

Charlie Rose:

I'm trying to understand.

Nancy Pelosi:

My anecdotal beyond that to empirical data is that the approach that the vice president is taking is one that has currency among the American people. There's very grave concern about it before

we commit. Let me say this about McChrystal --

Charlie Rose:

There is very grave concern about adding more troops is what you are saying?

Nancy Pelosi:

Well, no, let me -- well, it depends on the mission. But let me say this about General McChrystal, with all due respect. His recommendations to the president should go up the line of command. They shouldn't be in press conferences.

Charlie Rose:

That's what Jim Jones said yesterday [unintelligible]

Nancy Pelosi:

[unintelligible] and again, I say that with all due respect for McChrystal.

Charlie Rose:

So essentially --

Nancy Pelosi:

That -- what the national security advisor said --

Charlie Rose:

So he should not have said what he said in London. He should have just simply told the [unintelligible]

Nancy Pelosi:

I'm at a loss because I haven't heard what he said. But I read what he was reported to have said.

Charlie Rose:

Which is essentially what I said, isn't it?

Nancy Pelosi:

Yes, it is. And maybe you said more than I have read. But the fact is I think that that's not where this debate takes place. The president gets the recommendations of the military. There are four areas, even in the McChrystal report, and what we have all seen when we visited there. What's a security situation, what is a reconstruction situation in terms of hearts and minds, what is the governance situation ending the corruption there, and what is the diplomacy among the countries and the involvement of Pakistan, India, other [unintelligible]

Charlie Rose:

So do we have an effective government partner there with the Karzai government?

Nancy Pelosi:

Well, that's -- that question is certainly a stronger one now. I would have said a couple of years ago --

Charlie Rose:

Maybe.

Nancy Pelosi:
-- I thought so.

Charlie Rose:
Right, right.

Nancy Pelosi:
But the legitimacy of the election has been questioned. The corruption is unquestioned. It's there. They have to do something about it instead of just denying that it's happening.

Charlie Rose:
So --

Nancy Pelosi:
So it's a difficult situation. But let's get back to how we got here.

Charlie Rose:
Okay.

Nancy Pelosi:
For seven and a half years, since 9/11 when we went in, everybody supported that because it was considered a safe haven for terrorists who could harm the United States and inflict terrorism on the rest of the world. For that seven and a half years, there hadn't been a plan. And now we have a new president who came in and so in the spring, the Congress voted to give him the authority to make a -- take the time to make a plan by voting to fund [unintelligible]

Charlie Rose:
And he said it's a the toughest decision he had to make at the present was sending, you know, those 17,000 men and women to Afghanistan.

Nancy Pelosi:
And I told the president that the budget, the recovery, the budget, the climate bill, you name it, they're all heavy lift. There isn't an easy vote in Congress. Nothing was as difficult as winning that vote on supporting the president on Afghanistan and Iraq. Never.

Charlie Rose:
Nothing was as difficult --

Nancy Pelosi:
As difficult as that. That was --

Charlie Rose:
Because?

Nancy Pelosi:
Well, first of all, we only had two Republican votes. The Republicans voted -- for all their talk of

supporting the troops, they all voted, by and large, against the bill. The -- and so we had to say to the House members who had really thought they had cast their last vote for a supplement, not regular part of the budget bill. We said the president's been in only a few months. Give him a chance to put his own plan together. Now we eagerly await the plan, and then we'll make a judgment as to what resources are appropriate.

Charlie Rose:

Would it be fair for me to say that I hear the speaker of the House not directly but indirectly having grave concern about adding more troops and having difficulty imagining a strategy that would justify more troops in Afghanistan?

Nancy Pelosi:

Tomorrow afternoon I may have a different view after I hear what the president has to say. But at this point, I share the --

Charlie Rose:

Appraisal I made of what you think.

Nancy Pelosi:

No, I share [unintelligible] the vice president is saying about the approach that he would take. Again --

Charlie Rose:

So right now you're with the vice president till you learn more.

Nancy Pelosi:

That's right. And the -- you have to be very agnostic about these things.

Charlie Rose:

That's right. No, I agree.

Nancy Pelosi:

You know, we all have our emotions in what we bring to it. But I've said to you before, we are passionate what you believe in, but you have to be dispassionate when comes to make the decisions, especially when our troops are involved. And so we have to listen carefully to the difficult decision I know for the president. But I've also made it clear it's a very difficult vote to get from the members. Their constituents don't like an escalated war in Afghanistan. They'd like to see a different approach. But let's see what the president has to say.

Charlie Rose:

But maybe --

Nancy Pelosi:

As I said, respect his judgment and want to give him as much room to make the decision he needs to make for our country's national security.

Charlie Rose:

I hear you. Without more information, though, it would be very hard for you to get the vote in

the House.

Nancy Pelosi:

Well, unless the Republicans will vote for it. But as I said, two of them voted for it before. They didn't like the IMF which was on the bill. They didn't want to vote for the IMF. Well, that's what they said was the reason they voted against it.