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PANEL ONE:

Introduction and Moderator:

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Panelists:

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CAPT. ANN GILDROY
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CARLOS PASCUAL
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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. O'HANLON: Hello everyone and welcome to Brookings. It's an exciting day here. We just had the Australian Prime Minister, but from my point of view we can't do any better than what we're about to hear here from panelists on Iraq including two panels: one that you see here before you and then a second with foreign policy advisers of the three presidential candidates. I'm Mike O'Hanlon, a Senior Fellow here. I'm going to keep these introductions brief because each panel is going to have to do its job fairly quickly. We have a total of 60 minutes for each panel.

I'm joined today starting from my left by Ken Pollack who is one of the top Iraq experts in the country, and I was privileged to travel with him last year in Iraq in July during which time Captain Gildroy was our bodyguard as well as really our teacher on much of what was going on in Iraq. That was the beginning of her third tour which has continued until just last week in the south of Iraq. So you have come

to the right place to hear about as good as a hands-on and from-the-ground perspective as you could possibly hope for on what's going on in the south. Ann was not mediating with Mr. al-Sadr over the last few days and she was not in the thick of the Basra fighting, she was in Dinwaniyah and she left a week ago. So you're not going to get necessarily every single angle of this from here, but there is no one that I've ever met who is better placed to understand the nature of the American effort in the south in Iraq than Captain Gildroy and we are just honored and delighted to have her here.

Then to my right is Carlos Pascual who as you know is the Vice President and Director of Foreign Policy Studies at Brookings and will be speaking about broader efforts to cultivate political process inside of Iraq. Then we have Jeremy Shapiro, another Brookings Senior Fellow, who in addition to many other areas of expertise and responsibility has been to Afghanistan twice in the last 18 months or so including just in the last few weeks. And because

Iraq and Afghanistan are so linked in the broader war on terror not only by virtue of both being related to al-Qaeda elements in some aspects of their fighting and by virtue of being in the central command combatant theater zone, but also because of the debate about U.S. forces and forces you deploy to Iraq you cannot deploy to Afghanistan -- and so we have the ongoing question of where do we need the forces more and what should the future of military operations in the broader Middle East region be.

I'll speak about panel two as we wind down, but just to preview for you, Rick Klein of ABC will moderate and we will be just delighted to have Randy Scheunemann of the McCain campaign, Lee Feinstein of the Clinton campaign, and Denis McDonough of the Obama campaign, each of whom holds a similar position as the top foreign policy adviser for his respective candidate, but we'll get to that soon.

The order of speaking will be as I've introduced people and so we'll start with Ken Pollack. Each person is going to speak for about 5 minutes and

we look forward to your questions in the second half-hour. Thank you. Ken?

MR. POLLACK: Thank you, Mike. Thank all of you. It's a real privilege to be up on this dais once again especially with Captain Gildroy who as Mike points out covered Mike's and my asses both intellectually and literally many times when we were over in Iraq together.

I thought I'd begin my opening remarks if you'll allow me to refer back to a piece I wrote 3 or 4 months ago in the "New Republic" where I pointed out that while the progress being made by the surge was very real and very important, it was nevertheless very fragile as you've heard other people say, and that there were still a lot of hurdles left before us, hurdles that were very important to overcome if this endeavor was really going to capitalize on its success and continue to move forward. And I think all three of the hurdles that I identified in that piece you've actually seen manifested in the events of the last few weeks.

The first one that I talked about was the need to unlock the logjam in the central government and I think that we're already seeing that. Over the last few months you've seen the Iraqi parliament, the Iraqi presidential council, beginning to move forward on a whole series of pieces of legislation in very important ways. All of this of course is being caused by the changes from the grassroots from the bottom-up approach. As Iraqis feel more secure as they're beginning to see services delivered by some form of Iraqi government in many cases by local government, by provincial government or U.S. forces working with those Iraqis, people's needs are changing, people's desires are changing, and it's having a very profound impact exactly as predicted on the senior leadership in Baghdad.

Most of those people of course were elected because they were warlords, because they were militia leaders, who were providing the protection willingly or unwillingly to the Iraqi people that their government and the coalition forces previously hadn't

been. Now that the people are getting it from somewhere else, it's putting a very important set of pressures on them and the breaking of this logjam just beginning as it is is an important element of that, an important ramification of it because the political leadership in Baghdad for the first time is feeling under pressure from its constituents to actually do things and in particular to make the compromises that most of the Iraqis want to see happen. That's very important and it is a very positive change.

But what you're also seeing over the last few days is that those positive changes can also have very negative ramifications and we need to be in a position to deal with the negative ramifications of that. In particular, it is putting this pressure on these different groups, on these leaders in Baghdad, and causing them to do things in some cases positive like make compromises on these different laws that are now being debated. In other cases though it's causing them to try to move to secure what they already have and to prevent the progress of the surge and the other

developments in Iraq from further undercutting them. And this is the second issue that I raised in this piece which was the issue of the south and that's where you've obviously seen it most manifest.

And I think that one of the things that we need to recognize is that what's going on in the south is kind of a multiplayer game. There's a lot of different things going on. It's a multilayered problem in the sense that, yes, there is an element of the Iraqi government versus radical groups like the special groups of the Jaish al-Mahdi, that fight is going on there, but there are other things going on as well. In particular you're also seeing the overlay of a fight between at the very least ISCI, the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, and to a lesser extent its coalition partner the Dawa Party, with elements of Jaish al-Mahdi, with elements of the Fadilah Party, and even with local leaders all across the south. One of the things that you've seen over the last 3 or 4 months is the real erosion in the political power of ISCI. As the surge begins to deliver services, as it

begins to empower local governments to deal with their own lives, deal with their own protection, deal with their own services, they're no longer as beholden to the central powers in Baghdad which is where ISCI was really drawing its strength. The Badr Brigades are increasingly unpopular, the military wing of ISCI, and there is a real fear it seems in ISCI that they are losing their dominant position, and they have been using their powers in the central government as best they can to try to hold onto those powers. Part of the reaction that you seem to have had in Jaish al-Mahdi over the course of the last week seems to be reaction against that, against ISCI trying to use its powers within the central government to try to protect its position at the expense as best we can tell of Jaish al-Mahdi's position. Jaish al-Mahdi itself has been under pressure. You've seen fragmentation there. It is very noteworthy that Muqtada al-Sadr was largely quiet until he finally weighed in and said everybody off the streets and we'll go back to a cease-fire, something that as of the last news I saw hasn't been

fully respected by everyone in Jaish al-Mahdi which again speaks to these tensions, these frictions, these stresses that are being caused in Jaish al-Mahdi making that organization less responsive, less unitary than it was, and even then I think that it's clear that it was never as unitary an actor as it was often portrayed here.

So the south is a very important problem lying out there and I will simply say that I don't think that it is the case that we can simply assume that the south can fend for itself or that the Iraqi government is going to be able to deal with the south by itself. My great concern, and I've had this concern for a while now, is that at some point in time we are going to have to extend the strategy that has been so successful so far in the north and the center and the west at some point into the south because the problems down there are not going to solve themselves and if we don't then there is a very real risk that the south will begin to undermine the progress that we made in the north and endanger the entire operation.

Final point, the concern that I have, the need that I sense, that we are going to have to make a much greater effort in the south brings me to the last hurdle that I identified in this piece which was this question of whether the surge strategy will be able to continue to make progress or even simply maintain the gains that it had made without the surge brigades. We don't know the answer to that question yet and obviously MNFI I think has very good evidence and very good reason to believe that certainly the progress in the north, in the center, in the west, can be maintained even after the 25 percent reduction in forces that we're going to experience this spring. But what makes that situation so much more complicated is when you add the south into the equation. The south is very fluid. It is undergoing exactly these kinds of changes that I talked about before. Pressure is being placed on the main political parties down there because of what's been happening as a result of the surge which are fundamentally changing the dynamics among these different political parties and

creating tension, friction, even conflict among them, conflict which can be very destabilizing for gains we've made so far in the south, all of which creates both opportunities and the south but also real risks. One of the great concerns that I have, or I think I would put it this way, one of the biggest issues that we are going to have to tackle certainly in the next 6 months but likely in the first year of the next presidency is going to be how we simultaneously consolidate the gains in the northern half of the country, don't allow them to slip away from us, and begin to push into the south, expand the ink spot down there, take advantage of the opportunities and prevent chaos in the south from increasing and threatening the progress that we've made in the north, and how do we do that in a situation when we are in a position of declining resources, how do we keep enough resources in the northern half of the country to maintain the gains that we've made there while simultaneously finding ways to shift at least some of those resources and hopefully more than just resources like Captain

Gildroy, but more meaningful resources down into the south to take advantage of the opportunities there and prevent the real risks that we see down there from becoming something more meaningful, something more dangerous, and damaging to the entire future of the reconstruction of Iraq.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you, Ken. Captain, please.

CAPT. GILDROY: Good afternoon. It's certainly an honor to be here. I will let you know that all of my comments are just the opinions of one Marine captain who has spent some time in the south. They are also relative to the assumption that we are looking for a certain end state in Iraq and what I mean by that is if we're just looking to withdraw, then none of my critiques would be applicable. So I'm assuming that we would like to be victorious in Iraq, to have representative government there, and to have potentially an ally that would serve our national security interests.

I'm very worried that we're losing the south. I am extremely worried that the United States has not just had a hands-off policy but actually has sided with ISCI. We have brought Abdul Aziz Hakim into our Oval Office which is something that I don't think that you can do exclusively. We created what happened last week because we squelched the voice of many of the Iraqis in the south. We have entered the south. We have kinetic forces that are focused almost exclusively on targeting the Jaish al-Mahdi, breaking down their command structure, and we are not focused on gathering intelligence about ISCI's operations in the south. So from the perspective of an Iraqi who lives in the south, they feel that we have placed a government that's largely influenced by Iran that will bring back extremist religion into their lives and we have not presented them with any viable options. So they're striking back. They're saying we need something nationalistic and this legitimizes Sadr and it legitimizes the militia. We need to make a very

large effort to be careful of not siding with ISCI and not squelching the voice of the Iraqis in the south.

I think one way to do that which we have not done to date in the south is to try to separate the legitimate Sadrists, the legitimate political party, from the militias. The militias have become largely criminals and thugs. They are not wanted by the people. They do not have popular support from the people. But they will gain that the more that the people feel that ISCI will win the provincial elections in October. So if we do not make a very, very strong effort to actually bolster the Sadrists in the south and separate them and help them to be more representative and to break away from the militias, we'll continue to see the problems that we have and I think incredible violence after the provincial elections.

If ISCI does take the provincial elections, you'll see a strong reaction from the local populace and you'll also see Iraqis who are moderate join the Jaish al-Mahdi in reaction to this. So it's a very

large concern. Iran's influence in the south is tremendous and we really need to I think refocus our strategy there. Fortunately I think the south is something that could be done actually without a lot of forces but we need to start doing the right things down there, and the best thing we could do would be to try to create a third large political party down there that would be an independent political option for the people to vote for in October.

MR. O'HANLON: Actually, that is very, very good and hugely provocative. I'm sure we're all going to have a lot of benefit from that and others will feel free to follow-up later before we go to the Q and A, but I want to ask you one thing on that, Captain Gildroy. How do we the United States create a third party without it seeming like it's just an American contrivance? Is there already the beginning of such a thing that we just need to help or are you really talking about creating something out of nothing?

CAPT. GILDROY: I think one thing is you have a very difficult situation in the south right now

because the ISCI party is starting to infiltrate the police forces with party loyalists. If Baghdad could put pressure on the ISCI government that they will allow hiring into the police force of independent tribesmen or independent citizens so that they do not create their own armed force to support their political goals. So we have ways to reduce their influence and to provide enough security with independent Iraqi army forces to let political candidates actually stand up and be free to campaign without worrying about assassination by ISCI.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. Carlos?

MR. PASCUAL: Mike, thanks, and actually Captain Gildroy, thank you. It's extraordinarily helpful in understanding the complexity of the situation there because the information that we can get is so limited.

I think that by almost every statistic that people have seen about reductions by the surge in attacks, reduction in bombings, reduction in civilian and military casualties, there has been a reduction in

violence in Iraq and the question that we have to ask ourselves is is it sustainable and how should that influence the way that we conduct our policy. In order to answer that question I think we should go back to some of the reasons why we've seen the reduction in violence and I will draw on some of the insights that we've gotten from briefings from a number of senior military commanders over the past weeks.

First, all of them have pointed to the importance of Sunni militias cooperating with the United States. That process began in November 2006 actually before the surge. In effect, the Sunni militias decided that it was better to cooperate with the United States against al-Qaeda in Iraq than be subjected to al-Qaeda in Iraq and as a result of that now there are 85,000 participants in what has become known as the Awakening Movement which is in fact actually seeking to expand itself beyond just the Sunnis. So in a sense there has been a rise of strength and cooperation and consolidation of the

Sunnis. The United States has been paying them. We have not been arming them. Whether they have actually been using that money to buy arms is another question that's open for debate.

Another key factor that we've seen is that among the Shia there has been generally a cease-fire against coalition troops or U.S. troops and the reasons for that might vary, whether or not they feel that they can actually win if they engage the U.S. directly, another argument may be that they have actually refocused attention on the south particularly around Basra because it is the wealthiest and most important part of the country economically and therefore there's a power struggle for who would actually obtain control over the wealth and resources there. We've just heard from Kathy the volatility of the situation there and the complexity of it where in fact the Maliki government and the Iraqi security forces against the Iranian Supreme Council or the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq may be seen as demonstrating support for a pro-Iranian group which

then potentially results in the Jaish al-Mahdi taking out actions in Sadr City against the Green Zone by bombing the American compound. So the complexity of what we might actually be seeing is of having as a result of the American engagement there being perceived as support for the principal pro-Iranian group and getting as a result of that attacked.

Even if that's not exactly the case, what it does underscore is the fragility that we see even in the cease-fire among the Shia. What we've seen over the past weeks is the limitations in the performance of the Iraqi security forces, and especially by the police. There was a particularly dramatic I think interview this morning on National Public Radio that talked about how reporters were being escorted into Sadr City by the police forces and when they asked the question, 'Do you know where the roadside bombs are?' there was a chuckle, and they said, Of course we know where they all are, implying that they were actually part of the process of putting them in place to begin with.

Then we have to look at the political base below this and I think Ken is right to point out that there have been some areas of progress. There has been the passage of an amnesty law, not surprising given that all of the militias would prefer to have amnesty. There has been some legislation to reverse some aspects of the de-Baathification process. Probably the most important has been the passage of the 2008 budget although that doesn't necessarily fix the broader structural question of the sharing of resources internally within the country. And then there's been the passage of a provincial election law which will result in provincial elections in October, and whether that's a good thing or a bad thing is something that we can debate or discuss.

What we've also seen is that in conjunction with this reality that at least 25 percent of the cabinet is unfilled, we've got a tremendously volatile situation in the Kurdish areas as we've already seen with Turkish incursions, we don't know exactly what role Iran is going to play but certainly it could be a

spoiler at any given time, there's the prospect of what will happen with the Kirkuk referendum and how that will play itself out in the Kurdish-Turkish dynamic, we will haven't been able to get clarity on federal-regional relations, on revenue sharing, on how to deal with the demobilization and disarmament of militias, and finally, the protection of minority rights. So here you have in the midst of all of this increased Sunni power, some for a Shia stand down against the United States, what in theory should be absolutely contradictory factors, with a somewhat fragile and fractured political base, and it's the U.S. military forces in the midst of this that are holding it together to some extent which presents a totally untenable situation because on the one hand one can argue that it is absolutely unsustainable if you do not get political progress, and on the other hand it will result in a conflagration, yet a greater conflagration, if you pull that out, and that is the situation I think that we're placing the next President of the United States. I would hope that one

would agree that it is a totally nonpartisan perspective, that it is something that both Democrats and Republicans should welcome, that there should be an unmitigated effort to launch some form of a focused diplomatic process that helps to achieve some form of political settlement or truce among the parties.

What is that not? Let me start with that. It's not necessarily what we've seen thus far which is the hope that you will get a process of sequentially passing laws on the part of Iraqis who are in the midst of a war with one another in order to fix their political situation, it's not that Iraqi action isn't important, but to simply expect that this is going to be fixed through a sequential passage of legislation would be an ahistorical outcome in resolving a major international conflict. It's also not a process of ad hoc international meetings whether they be in Baghdad or Sharm El Sheikh or Istanbul. It's going to take a concentrated and focused effort. There are some of us, and Ken and I have written about aspects of this, who believe that the U.N. can play a role not because

the U.N. is a panacea but that it can provide at least the banner for some mechanism of having a major international figure with a small team talking with all of the key Iraqi groups beginning to develop a map around where they stand on critical issues, beginning to discuss with surrounding neighbor states whether there might be some potential for compromise, and then coming to the point of making a judgment of whether they can be brought together in some form of structured negotiation to achieve a truce among the parties. It may simply not be possible to actually succeed and I would guess that the chances of success are probably 10 percent or less and yet I would still try it because at this stage there needs to be something that is injected into the political process that begins to show that we are giving diplomacy an active and structured chance and we need to begin to be able to pull in our friends and allies and recognizing that they have a stake in the political and security spillover from the war in Iraq if you can't get stability internally within Iraq.

So we're at a critical stage right now, we're sustaining what we have right now, it's simply I think not going to be possible in straight military terms. The chances of success politically and diplomatically are not high, yet at the same time we need to be able to do things which begin to put political and diplomatic options on the table and start bringing in other friends and allies who potentially might be able to help us address the spillover in the region if in fact we can't actually get some form of sustainable outcome internally within Iraq.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you, Carlos. Jeremy?

MR. SHAPIRO: Thanks for having me. I guess I want to staggeringly add a little bit of complexity to what's been said and to introduce the question of Afghanistan which obviously as Mike pointed out meshes with this because U.S. troops that go to Afghanistan aren't in Iraq and vice versa.

I think the general perception these days is that the war in Afghanistan is going badly, that in

the last 2 years or so especially suicide bombings, long unheard of in Afghanistan, have increased dramatically, that coalition casualties are increasing, and that public support for the operation among NATO allies is slipping. And this is particularly true of the Canadians who are particularly hard pressed in Kandahar in the south of Afghanistan and have said that they will withdraw next year if they don't get reinforcements to the tune of about a thousand soldiers.

It would of course clearly be foolish to minimize the challenges in Afghanistan. There is an active insurgency there. Actually there are several active insurgencies there that have sanctuary in Pakistan and as long as they do have that sanctuary they're clearly not going to be able to get fully defeated. Still I'd like to be sufficiently foolish here both analytically and politically to make the case that we don't really need large increases in U.S. troops in Afghanistan, that at the very least they are

not the best answer to the difficulties that we face there, and this is for several reasons.

The first reason is that I'm not as convinced I guess as everyone else that progress isn't being made in Afghanistan. Violence is not the only or even the best indicator of progress in a situation like Afghanistan. Governance, the reach of the Afghan government, the capacity of the service services, the public perception of security, economic growth -- all these things also play a role. Clearly stability and security in Afghanistan is a local phenomenon and you see a patchwork of security with some places improving and some places getting worse. And certainly the movement of the insurgency toward using landmines which the military has referred to as improvised explosive devices and especially suicide bombings represents a degree of desperation tactics for the Taliban albeit effective ones and it hurts their popularity with the population.

What we're seeing is that the Taliban can no longer mass against coalition forces or even against

the Afghan National Army. We are seeing fairly impressive economic growth in Afghanistan. What we are seeing, interestingly one indicator is an influx of refugees to Afghanistan which is quite a contrast to Iraq in 2004 and 2005. Of course, one of the reasons for this is they're being forced out of Iran and Pakistan, but also there is a perception of opportunity there. Another reason for thinking that there might be some progress is the inability that the insurgency has to fan sectarianism in Afghanistan which was a key, let's say, force multiplier for the violence in Iraq a few years ago. I would say all in all this is very controversial and you could take different approaches on this, but the point is we really don't have very good measures of the progress in Afghanistan and I think we should resist the temptation to conclude the worst.

The second reason I would recommend against large troop increases is that however you feel about the progress in Afghanistan, what's really lacking in the international effort is not military forces, it's

civilian capacity. Clearly you can always use more troops in a situation like Afghanistan and they could be put to good effect in specific areas, there's no question about that, especially some very badly needed niche capabilities like helicopters. But you can't secure Afghanistan with any imaginable troop levels and if the situation in Afghanistan deteriorates, it could easily swallow increments of five- or ten-thousand troops without any appreciable difference in the situation. I would say, rather, as our counterinsurgency doctrine implies, troops are just providing a measure of security within which improvements in governance and development can occur. The problem in most parts of Afghanistan, not all, is less security than that we don't have the civilian capacities to make those improvements even when the situation is reasonably secure. For this reason the military is already providing a lot of these civilian capacities but this is expensive, it diverts military resources that are already stretched, and most insidiously, I think it contributes to the idea

present in Afghanistan as it is in Iraq that this is a foreign occupation. The counterinsurgency doctrine stresses minimizing the number of troops because they are inherently obnoxious to the local population and although the foreign troops are reasonably popular in Afghanistan, this is always a potential problem.

So what we need are civilian capabilities, aid workers, civilian advisers, et cetera. These are I think it should be pointed out actually harder for the international community to contribute than military troops and we clearly as an international community need to build up our capacity for it, but the fact is that in this operation it is very possible for increased military commitments to serve as a band-aid for incapacity on the civilian side and I think we have the space in Afghanistan to try to address this problem directly.

The third reason is that new troops contributions to the extent that they are necessary I think should really come from allies. There is a lot of frustration from the U.S. on the performance of

NATO in Afghanistan. The first problem is these caveats we hear so much about that the troops aren't able to operate in the ways that would be most militarily efficient and that this is particularly true of contributing countries like Germany and Italy, and there are estimates from the U.S. side that lifting these caveats would be the equivalent of sending 5,000 troops to Afghanistan. But beyond the caveats is the usual sort of coordination difficulties and even frustration at the performance of key allies particularly in the south of Afghanistan, the British and the Canadians. And clearly the east of Afghanistan where the U.S. is in charge is going better than the south, although they are still both very perilous areas.

U.S. commanders would clearly prefer to take over the south from the NATO allies and put in a couple of more brigades there and this would probably help in the short-term. The U.S. troops there have really imbibed the counterinsurgency doctrine or are getting quite good at it after several years there.

But I think that the problem with this is that it would cut against the effort of building capacity in the alliance for these types of missions. If you believe that the missions in Iraq and Afghanistan will end soon and that we'll never see their like again, I suppose it doesn't matter whether we build capacity in our partners to help us in these missions. I would say that recent history has implied that these types of missions and perhaps these specific missions will probably continue and so we should be interested in building capacity in our allies.

I would also add that despite the perception that European allies are losing faith in this mission which is indeed a very serious concern, it's nonetheless the case that there are 5,000 more NATO troops in Afghanistan this year than there were last year and there are decent prospects that more European troops will be pledged at the summit this week in Bucharest. I think we'll see French, Polish, and perhaps even some more British troops pledged. Political constraints within Europe also mean that

when there's a new administration in the U.S., putting this as kindly as I can to the current administration, that it will be easier for Europeans to make commitments to Afghanistan, so I think there's some greater hope into the future.

I think if you sum up these points what you'll see is what I'm really calling for from these recommendations is patience, strategy patience, with the plans and the forces already set in motion in Afghanistan. In the best of circumstances, Afghanistan is going to take a long time to show clear progress. Patience is clearly in short supply in Washington and in other NATO capitals and even in the military commands on the ground. One hears constantly in Afghanistan T. E. Lawrence's injunction about counterinsurgency in Arabia. He was talking about, "Better that the Arabs do it tolerably than you do it perfectly. It is their war and you are here to help them, not to win it for them." In fact, this quotation is inscribed in a monument in the Kandahar Air Base. Nonetheless we seem as an international

community even in Kandahar unable to accept the implications of that injunction, that progress in a counterinsurgency is going to move according to a local timetable and not according to our political timetable back home, and this requires patience, it requires patience even with violence which is very hard to do politically.

I should close by saying that all of this of course depends on the judgment that Afghanistan isn't seriously deteriorating. I think one important milestone to assess whether or not I'm right or wrong over the coming year is that election in Afghanistan next year. This is a real moment to assess whether the situation is getting so out of hand that they can't even do what they did 4 years ago and run an election. It needs to go off well and if the security situation in Afghanistan makes that impossible then it's probably the case that Afghan governance has progressed so little that most of the injunctions I said about putting troops in are no longer true. But

if it does, I think we need to continue to have a degree of patience and not panic.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you, Jeremy. Before we go to all of you for a brief Q and A period, I'd like to give Ken the opportunity to ask Captain Gildroy a question or two he may have about the south of Iraq which is obviously such a dynamic area, and please be preparing your questions in the meantime. Ken?

MR. POLLACK: Thank you, Mike, for the opportunity. Ma'am, the question I wanted to ask you which I think is a really important one for Americans back here to try to get at is an issue which I mentioned in passing and then you started to develop, but I think we really need to dig into it a little more, and this is this issue of again the tensions, the stresses that we're beginning to see among the Shia militias and how do we take advantage of it. And particularly, you talked about the stresses that we're starting to see, some of the fragmentation if I can use that term, within Jaish al-Mahdi and the idea that there are actually some more moderate elements of

Jaish al-Mahdi who are not unreceptive to the direction that we'd like to go in, but it leaves out there that great question of how do you get those people to actually act on those impulses. And given your experiences in the south, I think it would be enormously helpful to all of us to get a sense really of how you might go about doing that. If someone came to you and said 'Captain Gildroy, you've got the flag, run with it,' what would you do?

CAPT. GILDROY: I think the first and probably most important thing at the strategic level is to ensure that Iran does not trick Muqtada al-Sadr into asking his followers to boycott the provincial elections in the fall. You're all aware that they did boycott the last elections, and as we've seen in Iraq with the Sunnis, any group that boycotts these elections, we will have follow-on problems. So Muqtada being as simple-minded as he is, we need to ensure that those measures do not convince him to prevent his people from voting.

Secondly, and this is very basic because we just haven't started this process at all in the south, is taking a convoy down and knocking on the office of Muqtada al-Sadr's door, they do have political offices there, and saying we'd like to meet with you. What do you need? How can we help your party to participate in this election? How can we provide some of our information operation resources to let you advertise to your fellow Iraqis that you do not condone the special group's operations, that you are not a proponent of (inaudible) types in the south that are causing so much violence on your fellow Shia. We need to start traveling with them. So we do travel with ISCI because they're in power, we need to bring these guys down to see the poverty in Iraq and say where do you want us to spend our money. We need to begin to legitimize them and allow them to break from the criminal groups and to be able to publicize that fact. And again to be very careful with how Iran plays Muqtada al-Sadr which they absolutely do.

MR. O'HANLON: Fascinating. This is going to be a good conversation with you too. I hope that you can respect the following couple of ground rules. Please identify yourself. Please also ask a very specific brief question. We only have about 15 minutes. And please direct it to one specific person if you could. If somebody else up here feels the terrible need to chime in, they may, but we're going to try to keep the questions to one person, and I'll take two at a time. I'll start with these two gentlemen over here, please. Two questions at a time.

SPEAKER : I'm with the India Group Asia Today. My quick question is that as far as those groups from Iran or pro-Iran, what they're doing in Saddam Hussein's regime and how Saddam was dealing with them and how different now the U.S. should deal with them. And second, as far as Afghanistan concerned --

MR. O'HANLON: Let's stick with one question per person because of the time. Please, sir. And I assume that was for Captain Gildroy, right?

MR. BAYGENTS : Yes, also for Captain Gildroy, Ron Baygents with the Kuwait News Agency. You opened with the statement about you're assuming that everyone wants victory in Iraq, that assumption was what your presentation flowed from. My question is, given that the leading Democratic presidential candidates have talked about fairly quickly withdrawing from Iraq, you know the number, 16 months, so many brigades per month. How does that mesh with your assumption about victory in Iraq assuming we get a Democrat who follows through and does that?

CAPT. GILDROY: Let me answer your question, sir, first, which is I think most of the troops on the ground are no longer political, we want to win this war for the Iraqi people we love and also for our country. I think if we don't change the strategy, if we don't start to bring economic development into Iraq, then certainly you could make a case for withdrawal because why would you just remain in the static position where you're not going to make appropriate gains? However, I don't think that's the

right choice for Iraq or for our country at this point in time. I think we should refocus our strategy. We've made great, great progress the security piece. But as you were saying, that's just one piece. So I think that we're a smart enough country to figure out what we need to do and we should stick this out. It has incredible implications for the future not to mention the liberation of a nation. So that's critically important. But I would agree with a candidate who says we're not going to change then, right, we're wasting money and blood.

And to your point, sir, I think it's very important to realize that the overwhelming majority of your provincial governors in the south have spent upwards of the past 17 years in Iran. Most of them were POWs that were captured by Iran. They did not come back to Iraq until the fall of Baghdad. As far as the new influence of the Iranian special groups, it's far stronger than anything Saddam particularly had to deal with so this is something new for us and their ability, they're an extremely manipulative

party, they put on a big smile and a good face to the U.S. in Baghdad and in Baghdad they look a lot nicer than Jaish al-Mahdi. So we need to be very careful. They're very calculating and they sealed the deal in the elections in 2005. They're something to watch out for. And a little piece of me when this uprising broke out last week was saying to get them because they do not represent the interests of the thousands of Iraqis that I've met.

MR. OWEN: I'm Henry Owen. I'd like to ask Captain Gildroy a question. I ask her because my experience when I was serving in the Pacific in World War II is that Marines knew more about anything of what was happening than anybody else. What do you think of the proposal that Senator Biden and Les Gelb have made for devolving power from the central government and more to the regional governments which are actually running most of the country, the Sunni, the Shiites, the Kurds. The central government would have a few functions such as oil and running Baghdad, but the great bulk of the population of the country

would be in charge of the regional governments.

What's your view of that?

MR. O'HANLON: And we'll take one more from Gary, please.

MR. MITCHELL: Thanks. Gary Mitchell from the "Mitchell Report." A question for Ken Pollack or Carlos, however wants to take it, and that is the Iraq narrative has been an interesting one to follow over the years. There was a period of time not so long ago when the Iraq narrative was essentially there are no good solutions left. My question is, is that still true or has something changed so that perhaps there are some solutions that are better than the others or are we just kidding ourselves?

MR. O'HANLON: Ann, do you want to start with the first question?

CAPT. GILDROY: Sure. First of all, sir, thank you for your service. I would say that at this point in time whether the central government holds the power or it's diffused out to the provincial level, we'll still experience the problems that we are now

because, for instance, the ISCI Party is in lockstep with whatever goes on in the central government. You have to understand this is not a country where the political parties are used to a lot of autonomy and we'll really cede that. Even if they do, because this political party is the way they are, it will still not be beneficial, i.e., nothing will happen for the Iraqi people just because the powers at the provincial level versus at the central level.

MR. O'HANLON: Ken, do you want to start the next question?

MR. POLLACK: Sure. Gary, the words that you uttered I think are words that I uttered on this dais any number of times and because you do seem to be a regular devotee of my various statements, I know that you're familiar with the change in my perspective. What I'll say is that, yes, I think that what we've seen over the last year, again, I suspected that this was certainly possible, but as you've heard me say, I was really surprised by how quickly the change has occurred and how quickly the positive

developments occurred. The historical record would never have predicted this fast in terms of the security and the bottom-up successes that we've seen so far recognizing that nothing is complete and we're still a long way from actual success in Iraq.

But what those successes, what that progress has done to me is said that the best-case scenario is now actually a real possibility out there. I still won't bet my salary on it, but given the trajectory that we've seen so far, it is definitely a prospect and obviously that is the best thing for our country, for Iraq, for the entire region. I would also say that what the progress over the last year has also opened up is a very real possibility that even if we don't get the best-case scenario, we can get a second-best scenario which is an Iraq that is not in a state of all-out civil war, that is continuing to grope forward with all kinds of different problems, but a situation where over the course of time you've had a more stable, more representative government develop with more capable Iraqi security forces which allows a

diminution over the course of time of American commitment to Iraq although not in the short-term eliminating it altogether, but that keeps the country from simply falling apart. And I think that the successes over the last year have opened up both of those prospects and certainly increased very significantly the odds of both although as I said, we are not on a glide path to success, I completely agree with Ann's blanket statement right now that I am just as concerned about the south. You've heard me say any number of times if we don't find a solution to the south, I am very concerned that the problems of the south will ultimately swamp the progress in the north. But again, if we do make these changes, if we do continue to evolve in our strategy in our approach to Iraq, what I think that the progress we've made so far does is it does open the possibility that maybe we don't just have a bunch of really bad alternatives.

MR. PASCUAL: I think there are a couple of things that we've seen that are important. One is that Iraqis as you might expect actually want a

country that's at peace and more prosperous and where they have some degree of normalcy. And I think it may seem like a fairly straightforward thing, but one of the things that's emerged is there's been some normalcy in some areas, that Iraqis are saying that they actually want to hold onto that, and so that's an important message against al-Qaeda in Iraq that they simply do not want the disruption that they've experienced in the past. I think what has also emerged from the experience with U.S. forces is that it's not U.S. forces at this stage that are the principal cause of instability in Iraq, that they have in fact actually been a factor for stability right now, and so we should be able to learn from that.

The flip side of this is that we've seen that a military solution in and of itself isn't possible. The military can actually help achieve some security, but without a focused, concerted effort on the political side, that military intervention isn't going to succeed, and that's where I think we have

still been lacking and why I tried to focus my comments in that particular area.

On the earlier question about Senator Biden's proposal along with Les Gelb, and Mike has written about this as well, and we've had a number of debates on this, but I think I've certainly talked to Senator Biden about it on this stage and Mike and I have had numerous discussions about it, that even to get a political partition of Iraq you would need to get some negotiated settlement among the parties. You simply can't just divide the country and force it upon them. And so if you in fact actually need to get some political settlement in order to that, then why not bring the parties into a political process and let them make that decision or that choice. If where they end up is in fact a partition, so be it, but don't predetermine that in advance.

MR. O'HANLON: We've got time for one more round. We'll go a little further back in the audience. Yes, sir, and then one more over here next.

SPEAKER : -- Voice of America Afghanistan Service. I would like to ask about Afghanistan. What are the strategic and operational gap that the U.S. and the NATO allies or NATO countries are making in dealing with Afghanistan? And how would you recommend the next administration of the United States to address that?

MR. O'HANLON: And then, sir, over here for the last question, please.

SPEAKER : -- with the Syrian Institute. Just a real quick question about the Assyrians. We have about half a million as refugees nearby and they're not because of the danger, they're more afraid of having to live under an Islamic type government, and the Prime Minister has offered a number of suggestions. One is an area or a province where they could go back to. Have you had any dealings with the Assyrians? And your feelings toward the minorities in terms of what they should do in the future divisions.

MR. O'HANLON: Sir, if you could kindly ask the gentleman to repeat his question, but on your way

over, because Ann was in the south, I'm not sure she's going to have a long answer on the Assyrians, but we'll give her the chance. Could you give this guy one opportunity for our final question because he was very patient as well, if he could be brief and then we'll repeat your question on Afghanistan and then finish off.

SPEAKER : -- reference has been made to the 85,000 Sunnis I believe that are on our payroll and I believe the "Post" this morning said we're paying them \$300 a month which is about \$25-1/2 million a month. How long are we going to pay that, and if we stop paying it, is all hell going to break loose?

MR. O'HANLON: Who is that question for? Do you care?

SPEAKER : The Captain or anyone.

MR. O'HANLON: Sir, could you please repeat your question? We didn't hear it very well up here.

SPEAKER : The strategy policy-wise and operational-wise what are the gaps in handling the

case of Afghanistan and how the next administration could address it and deal with it.

MR. O'HANLON: Jeremy, do you want to start with that? I'll give each person a chance to comment on whatever they want going very quickly down the line.

MR. SHAPIRO: Sure. As I tried to point out, I think there are many gaps in Afghanistan. I think the nature of that country and of course the nature of a counterinsurgency is that there always would be many gaps. Far and away the biggest gap is the question of what to do about Pakistan, but since that's an entirely different country which is six times as large as Afghanistan, I don't think that you can make the solution to the problems in Pakistan a prerequisite for dealing with Afghanistan. But it's quite clear and it's a very consensus opinion that you don't really get a definitive solution to Afghanistan without dealing with Pakistan so certainly my primary recommendation for a new administration would be to

attempt to deal with that and unfortunately I don't have any great recommendations.

The second gap is one that I already pointed out which is civilian capacity which is an endemic problem for the U.S. and for the rest of the international community which is getting into the field people who are good at agriculture, people who are good at building local governance, people who are good at urban planning. We have plenty of these people in the developed world, but we don't actually have an expeditionary capacity for them and we've had a huge problem getting them onto the ground in Afghanistan and everywhere else and I think that that really shows in a mission like Afghanistan.

MR. O'HANLON: Carlos?

MR. PASCUAL: Just a couple of comments on Afghanistan. I'm less sanguine than Jeremy is about the security situation. I think yesterday's front-page article in the "Washington Post" that outlined some of the difficulties and challenges facing the British, looking out from Helmand Province underscored

some of the difficulties, that as a result of the lack of security presence that it's led to a great reliance on air power, that that has then caused greater numbers of civilian casualties and it's made it more difficult to sustain a civilian presence on the ground, so the security issue and the civilian issue are I think indeed interrelated.

The other issue which I think is particularly critical in Afghanistan that we haven't really had a chance to talk about and there's a long discussion and debate is what's happening with narcotics, because by most accounts it's somewhere between 30 and 40 percent of GDP, corruption around the narcotics regime has extended from the national government to provincial government, to in fact even in some cases payments to the Taliban for maintaining protection. Somehow that link has to be broken, and eradication is probably the worst way to probably try to do it. The experiences that we've seen with eradication in Nangarhar Province for example have resulted 2 years later with a 200 percent increase in

the production of poppies. It's a lot easier to destroy a crop one day, it takes a lot longer period of time to actually build something up.

The only final thing I would just say about Iraq is that over the next 6 to 7 months we have an opportunity when we probably have the most significant force presence that the United States is going to have there and the question is how do we want to take advantage of that. If we want to take advantage of it in a way that basically continues the same trend that is focused around military solutions and military outcomes, I think we're wasting an opportunity. If we in fact can actually use that to link it with a more effective diplomatic strategy, then we potentially have the potential to build up the foundation for the next President of the United States whoever that is to then be able to build on that and act on that diplomatic opportunity with a much more cohesive and focused political strategy than we've had so far. So that's why I think we particularly need to keep pushing this issue and I hope that when General

Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker are in for hearings in another 10 days or so that this will be the issue that actually dominates or focuses the debate and not the military question.

CAPT. GILDROY: I'll touch briefly on the Syrians. Most of my Iraqi friends that flee Iraq do go to Syria and as far as how would they get out from underneath the extremists, that would be very difficult at this point in time. We're seeing cab drivers be forced to play only religious music, governors will not touch me because I'm a female which is by the way not representative of the Arab men, and it's until we change that party or we get a more moderate party in power there will be no way for them to escape that.

Finally, to clarify, sir, we are paying the Sons of Iraq in far more parts of Iraq than just the west. I myself paid about \$350,000 a month to many of these Shia Sons of Iraq. The idea originally was to transition them into the police forces in the Iraqi army. We're having tremendous problems with the

central government resisting that. I think that's reflective of the fact that they are not fully on board with reconciliation so they have a very big problem not only hiring Sunnis, but you should not hiring their very own Shia who I had hired into these police and army forces. Again, this is a very interesting point because it allows them to manipulate who enters the Iraq security forces and that is something that's very dangerous and something for us to really be careful with, and we're facing a lot of resistance.

MR. POLLACK: Since there's been far too much comity, comity, c-o-m-i-t-y, not c-o-m-e-d-y, on this panel, I will take my final lines to maybe disagree a little bit with Carlos. While I think, Carlos, you're being a little bit unfair to Ambassador Crocker and the other team out there, I actually think that they've been doing quite a good job on the politics in the part of Iraq where they've been making the effort. One of the things that I found most heartening both when Mike and I were there, but just

seeing the stories in general and seeing the reaction of the Iraqis, is how much, as this gentleman suggested, the effort has not just been to secure the communities in the center, in the north and the west, but also to develop local politics as a substitute for the incapacity of the central government, and they have had quite a bit of success there and I think that you were seeing their success at the local level again put these tremendous pressures on the central government. The simple fact is again groups like ISCI are really in electoral distress because they are losing so many constituents because they don't much care for ISCI and they're seeing that there is another way to get the security and the basic services that they desire and that is opening up politics.

I share your concern about the future, but for me it's more because I am very concerned that we have not yet thought through in all honesty the next step in this process. If you want to put it this way, we didn't bother to plan for success. On the one hand you can say that when we started the surge, success

seemed to unlikely, so far-fetched that who would ever sit down and think through what do we do next if the dog actually catches the car. But the fact is that we actually have done reasonably well in the north and the center and the west and things are moving more or less in a reasonable direction. But what has done is thrown the situation in the south into start contrast. It is very clear to Iraqis in the south that they are not getting what is going on in the center and the stresses that we are creating by these changes in the north are having their ramifications in the south. And I am very, very concerned that we don't have a plan to move forward, that we have not though through the strategy let along the commitment of time and resources that are going to be necessary to deal with the south. And as you heard me say, I am very concerned among other problems that if we don't get the south right, the south can descend into the same kind of chaos and that can suck the north back down with it.

MR. O'HANLON: Before you join with me in thanking panel one, and by the way, your applause will be your break, so I'm sure it was going to be long anyway, but just so you know, we are then going to make a transition to panel two. Rick Klein will moderate from ABC. We are delighted to have the campaigns represented. Rick will say a bit more about each of them, and then get right into a discussion. I just want to underscore that as you know this is an Opportunity 08 and Brookings Iraq Project event and of course we want a substantive discussion of the different candidates' positions and I'm sure you'll get that, and ask your questions accordingly. We are delighted here, and I hope you will join me in thanking panel one as we get ready for panel two.

(Applause.)

MR. KLEIN: Thank you everyone for joining us for this second panel. My name is Rick Klein. I'm a senior political reporter with ABC News. I write "The Note" at abcnews.com. We're hoping today to have a little bit of a debate or discussion about Iraq as a

campaign issue. We have today with us just a great panel, the top foreign policy advisers of all three of the major campaigns. They've become familiar to each other as they've met at formats like this over the course of the campaign, but we're hoping to make it a really interesting and substantive and meaty discussion, and we'll leave some time at the end for questions.

Just to introduce our panelists, down at the far end at my right is Lee Feinstein from the Clinton campaign, the national security director of the campaign, a Senior Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, and a former adviser to Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. Next up is Denis McDonough representing the Obama campaign. Denis is a Senior Fellow at the Center for American Progress and worked for Senate Democratic Leader Tom Daschle as well as Senator Ken Salazar of Colorado. And directly to my right is Randy Scheunemann and Randy is a top adviser to the McCain campaign, founded the Committee for the Liberation of Iraq to promote freedom for the Iraqi

people and obviously got what the organization was looking for after the war began.

In lieu of opening statements or anything like that, I'd like to just throw out sort of an open-ended question and have our panelists go down the line and answer it. We saw the 2000 congressional elections turn on the issue of the Iraq war, we saw that it played a major role in the 2004 presidential election, we saw it play a role again in the 2006 congressional elections. You guys are all quoted in the story in the "New York Times" yesterday, "Iraq Offensive Revives the Debate for Campaigns" was the headline on the front page, and once again it looks like we could have a top issue in 2008 in the war in Iraq. I want to ask you, starting with you, Lee, if we can, to talk about how big an issue this should be in the campaign and what the contours of the issue are, if we're talking specifically about the Iraq war or if this has to be put in some kind of a broader context.

MR. FEINSTEIN: Thanks. It's a pleasure to be here with my colleagues and with all of you. We were both commenting, or Denis and I were commenting in the hallway, that it's nice to get into the daylight, so it's very nice to be here, and I'm next door to where I used to work at the Council on Foreign Relations so it's a real pleasure to be here and to talk ideas, which is also a nice change.

Obviously this is a national security election. The last election was a national security election. There are other key issues that are at play, increasingly the economy as well, but these are also increasingly intertwined. So there's no question that although the interest in Iraq has ebbed and flowed and although there have been studies about how much media coverage the Iraq war gets and doesn't get, I think it's very much foremost in the minds of Americans and will be very much in the minds of Americans. It has been in the primaries and it will certainly be so in the general election where I think that the differences between the candidates whoever

the Democrat is and the Republican will be fairly stark.

In terms of the current situation, there seems to be a lull in fighting and that is very welcome. My assessment of the situation is we've seen renewed intrasectarian fighting between and among Shia groups and this is taking place in the context of more than 150,000 American troops on the ground. And this shows I think the fragility of the situation we are facing in Iraq despite the very welcomed reduction in violence that we saw in the second half of 2007 which was still nonetheless the most violent year of the war.

It shows the limitations and weaknesses of the Maliki government which had to call in the United States for support. It shows the weakness of the Maliki government in the fact that instead of being able to win a military victory, it needed to negotiate. And I think it points to the missed opportunity, the squandered opportunity, over the past year of the surge where the Bush administration has

not matched the military effort with commensurate political effort. I think that Petraeus and the troops are doing everything we've asked them to do, they've been doing a great job, they deserve tremendous credit for the progress that we have been seeing, but clearly as events of the last week show, this is very, very fragile and in our campaign's judgment the surge is failing even on its own terms.

MR. KLEIN: Denis?

MR. MCDONOUGH: Thanks, Rick, and thanks, Lee. Let me just thank you all too for coming out this afternoon. It is good to be with you. I want to thank Mike O'Hanlon. He and his team do the country a great service in the work that they're doing here on Iraq. I spent a lot of time over the weekend, Mike, with the latest iteration of the Iraq Index. I appreciate your work on that.

Let me just say the fact is that whether we determine here in Washington or whether the press determines that Iraq is a major factor or a minor factor in this upcoming election, I think that we all

recognize as each of us has had the opportunity to travel around the primary states that this is foremost in people's minds. The fact is that regardless of whether it's on the first page or the third or the fifth or seventh page of the newspaper, people are very concerned about what's happening in Iraq, the impact it's having on our standing in the world, and the impact it's having on our security. And we don't need to put it in some kind of context for you because I think the context is quite clear. First of all, there is not a family in the country that doesn't have either someone in their family, their extended family, or someone in their neighborhood who has not deployed for the effort. Secondly, I think we've seen this now very strongly in the last several weeks, the impact on a slowing economy of the kind of outlay that we're making of \$10 billion a month in Iraq is not debatable.

Then thirdly you have a public that feels, I think it's fair to say, that they want to see some change in Washington, that they feel disillusioned

that sometimes policy debates in Washington are too far removed from their concerns or their desires, and they want to have some fundamental change. I think you're right, Rick, to point out the impact that Iraq played in 2002, 2004, and 2006, but there is also a piece that is woven through the fabric of each of those which is the American people wanting to be heard about these concerns. So I think that again regardless of whether we put it in a particular context here in this debate this afternoon or whether the candidates do in their debates going forward, it is not debatable that this is having an impact across the board and therefore will continue to have a very big impact on the debate.

MR. SCHEUNEMANN: Rick, thanks. It's good to be here. I want to also reinforce my respect for Brookings and what they do, and in particular for Mike O'Hanlon and Ken Pollack who took a stand I think late last summer that probably made them get a few less invitations to certain Democratic functions but was a brave stand, and it was based on conditions in the

ground and their honest assessment that when you looked at what happened over the first few months of the surge, that conditions were getting better. That seems commonplace now, but it has not been commonplace in the course of the last 12 or 13 months. Senator Obama, for example, said in January of last year that he didn't think the addition of 15,000 or 20,000 troops would make a difference in the level of sectarian violence. Clearly the addition of additional troops and a change in strategy had a dramatic impact on sectarian violence. Lee said that security is better because of the great job the American forces are doing, yet Senator Clinton's position seems to be let's remove the troops that made the improved security conditions possible. I think Iraq is going to be a central issue in this election and it's going to be a central issue not just because of its cost or the cost that Americans have paid in treasure and especially in blood, but it's going to be a reflection on the judgment of the candidates and how they view the national security interests of the

United States because we have huge interests in the Middle East and beyond. We have an Iranian nuclear program we need to address. We have moderate regimes that are under threat from Iran in its desire for regional hegemony. We have Israel's security to be concerned about. We have the situation in Pakistan and Afghanistan. And I would submit to you, and I'm sure we'll have an interesting discussion over this, that choosing to lose in Iraq will make achieving our goals in any of those other areas far, far more difficult to achieve.

MR. KLEIN: I want to kick things off to get engaged with the two Democratic campaigns that are up here. In case you haven't noticed, there is still a Democratic primary campaign going on. It may not end anytime soon, and we'll continue to hear about this in forums like this as well as on the campaign trail.

Something that came up recently, when a new former Obama campaign adviser said that of course you need to reassess the situation before you decide whether you implement the plan. You reassess the

situation not based on what's going on in March 2008, but what's happening in January 2009. The Clinton campaign was quite critical of that as you know, Lee. I want to ask you though, what's wrong with that? What's wrong with saying we don't know exactly what we're going to inherit, we know what it looks like in March 2008, but I'm not going to be the president until January 2009.

MR. FEINSTEIN: No, I think that's a good question and I think it's an important question to raise in this circumstance. Particularly in the early states, Senator Obama ran with a hard exit date and it depended, and I mean this with all respect to Denis, and Denis and I haven't done this together before but we'll probably be doing a lot of it in the future, but Senator Obama talked about 16 months for the withdrawal of all troops at some points, he talked about 16 months for the withdrawal of combat brigades at certain points, that's what's on his website now, and this was a difference between the candidates which everybody noticed, which was that Senator Clinton

talked about her determination to get out of Iraq swiftly, responsibly, and safely and made it very clear that that was her goal and clear intention, but she did not put a specific hard ending on it and that was considered in the beginning of the campaign to be an important difference, and Senator Clinton did that notwithstanding what the difference prevailing political winds were particularly in the early states. So that's the position that we continue to hold. So we thought it was significant when an important adviser to Senator Obama said that he didn't really mean what he said and that the 16-month pledge wasn't in fact what he planned to do and that he wouldn't follow plans that he had put forward as a presidential candidate or a senator. So we thought that that was a significant difference and we thought that we were prepared to pay the price for not making that kind of a commitment early on in the campaign and so we just thought it was important to point that out later on when the arc of this debate shifted somewhat.

MR. KLEIN: But that moved in your mind closer to what Clinton's position was originally, no?

MR. FEINSTEIN: Yes, we do think that it is a lot closer to what Senator Clinton's position is, correct.

MR. KLEIN: Denis, the campaign backed away from those comments after they were made and said, no, this is still what the plan is. But won't all the plans be reassessed based on the circumstances in January 2009?

MR. MCDONOUGH: Rick, let me just reiterate what Barack has said throughout this conflict including starting in October 2002 when he announced his opposition to the invasion because it would be a diversion from our effort in Afghanistan and to the principal front in this fight against al-Qaeda. He has made very clear that to choose to invade Iraq which at the time did not have operational ties to al-Qaeda which was not associated with the attack on this country on 9/11 would be a diversion and throughout the course of this debate has continued to argue that.

He has also put on the table a plan that would get us out of Iraq as responsibly as we were irresponsibly getting into it.

Let me just try to react to the comments from both sides here that somehow to choose to leverage our various elements of our national power to urge Iraq's leaders to come to some kind of political reconciliation to resolve the civil war in that country is to choose to lose as my friend from Minnesota suggested fundamentally misses the point. There is one candidate who has put on the table a strategy to leverage both our presence as well as our continued assistance to the Iraqis to urge them to a political reconciliation. I think we have seen in the course over the last several days the impact of our inability to have a political reconciliation on the ground in Iraq. There is nobody here I don't think who could argue that what's happened over the course of the last several days is ultimately to learn as Senator McCain just suggested an hour or so ago that we learned about the offensive in Basra after, or as

it was starting, and knowing the impact that it would have in our strategic position that that's in our interests.

But the fact is you can have two views of what's happening on the ground. That is to say you can believe somehow if we through great investment of blood and treasure create space that the Iraqis could then because they really want to reconcile, that's one way of viewing the situation. That's continuing to manage a mistake, the mistaken invasion. Of you can choose as Senator Obama has to leverage our presence by making clear that there is a timeline for our presence and also make clear to incent action on the part of Iraq's political leaders by saying continued American support for training for example is dependent on your ability to resolve the political differences. That's another route. Senator Obama has chosen not to manage the problem, but to lead on it, and he's sketched that out over the course of this entire debate, not just during the campaign, not just since

he's declared for the presidency, but since he opposed this as a diversion from the beginning.

So at the end of the day, the question is we have as Randy suggested tremendous issues at play in Iraq, but not just in Iraq, and what's going to continue to happen there will have implications across the board on our interests. So it's time to get out in front of it, to lead on it, and not just to manage.

MR. KLEIN: Does that leadership include as you mentioned this timeline, definitely starting the troop withdrawals right after taking office and up to the 16 months?

MR. MCDONOUGH: This is exactly what Senator Obama has said time and again, that he will begin the withdrawal immediately and that based on his best assessment and in consultation with military leaders we can get that done at the rate of one to two combat brigades per month. Knowing what we know today, if we have roughly 19 combat brigades there, we can get those combat brigades out in the course of 16 months. But he's also said, and he's said this time and time

again, that he will listen to his commanders on the ground and react to developments on the ground. We've seen what happens when you ignore the advice of your military commanders and we don't want to go down that route again. He's also said that we will have enduring interests in this region and for that reason he has outlined a position that says we should retain a follow-on force in Iraq, a force which he will construct based on consultation with his military leaders and developments on the ground.

So I think the record is splashed with his views on this, Rick. It's been consistent throughout and I think it's pretty clear.

MR. KLEIN: Randy, obviously Senator McCain comes at this from a much different direction. A comment he made a few weeks ago that lot a lot of coverage about the possibility of staying in Iraq for 100 years, he has made clear the context of that, that we're not talking about active warfare for that, that it's more akin to Korea or Germany where you stay, but is Senator McCain and does Senator McCain feel a need

to offer the American people some kind of an end game? To feel like the progress means something in terms of our investment in troops, in blood and treasure?

MR. SCHEUNEMANN: Absolutely. And he has offered an end game. And the end game is an Iraq that is stable, free, at peace and an ally in the larger struggle against radical Islamic extremism and no threat to its neighbors. And the question is how do you get there?

Now if you follow, if you set as your strategic goal getting to that point, you have a certain set of decisions you make. If you set as your strategic goal a politically driven appeal to the Moveon.org wing of Democratic Party, you have a different strategic goal. It's withdrawal. And it becomes almost withdrawal at any cost, although maybe you might listen to military commanders, you might do this, but you ignore the consequences of withdrawal, which if you think the past couple of days in Basra were a problem, just see what happens if we start withdrawing in amounts. We're pulling out one to two

brigades a month. And frankly it defies logic that we would somehow have more leverage if we tell the parties in Iraq we're leaving, we've had enough, we're pulling out two brigades a month. So somehow you're going to have more leverage to solve the very difficult problems that Ken outlined in the south, the problems of Kirkuk, the problems of securing the gains that we've already made in the west, in the north and in Baghdad.

And Senator McCain's been very clear in pointing out the kind of future he wants to see in Iraq and how we get there, and it's not as a caricature from -- my colleagues' candidates have said, 100 years of war, 100 years of occupation. That's not what Senator McCain said. He was clearly talking about a post-war presence and that's been validated by various impartial fact checkers, and I appreciate your comment that he's made clear. He's talking about a post-war presence that may be agreed upon between two sovereign governments as we've had a post-war presence in places like Germany or Japan or

South Korea.

MR. KLEIN: Let's get Denis first, and Lee, if and when Senator McCain is on the debate stage with one of your two candidates, what's the response going to be when Senator McCain says yours is a prescription for outright defeat?

MR. McDONOUGH: Let me just try to insert some facts in the debate for a second. The cost of the Korea model as Randy just talked about have been calculated by the Congressional Budget Office at the request of the Senate Budget Committee Chairman. And the cost was roughly a trillion dollars. And so I think what we want to have is a debate focused on the impact of the decisions that we're making. And let me just say that, again, there's two ways you can approach the situation as it's developing in the lack of any concrete political reconciliation on the ground.

The President gave, I thought, a very good speech. But, if you line up several of the indicators in the speech and then the other side be Mike's Iraq

Index, and see that the President talked about the beginning of increased business -- new businesses registering in Iraq, which is positive. No question. The problem is Mike's Iraq Index suggests that unemployment in Iraq has been held steady at 25 to 40 percent for the last dozen quarters. And I think 40 percent might underestimate it. I think it's very difficult to get your hands around a counterinsurgency if you have 50 percent of able bodied people out of work.

And so you can continue to manage that situation and say that we are going to, at great cost. In the Korea model, a trillion dollars. We are, at great cost, going to continue to manage this problem and hope that the Iraqis come to some political reconciliation.

Or you can say, on the contrary, those of you who believe that somehow we are undermining your national sovereignty by continuing our presence here, we have a timeline on our presence.

And for those of you who know you want to

continue to be trained and to have security forces funded by our presence, we are ready to (inaudible) that, provided you come to a political agreement.

So this idea that somehow the most forward leaning and complete strategy offered by any of the candidates is to precipitously withdraw, when what we are looking at is sometime after 7 years after this conflict has started, is a disservice to the debate.

And so, I think Senator Obama's view of this is that he welcomes the opportunity to have the debate.

MR. KLEIN: Let's get a response from Lee and we'll come back to Randy.

MR. FEINSTEIN: Sure. Well, look, I think Senator Obama gave a very good foreign policy speech recently. It was very well written and it was very eloquent. And it talked about a lot of the different challenges that the United States faces, strategic challenges around the world.

But, you know, we had some differences. And one of those were on what the tradeoffs would be of

maintaining an indefinite commitment to Iraq. Denis has talked about some of the costs. You know, it depends how you do your bookkeeping. There's the book that's out now about the trillion dollar war -- three trillion dollar war. Senator Clinton has talked about one trillion dollars. The monthly expenses vary, depending again on how you do your bookkeeping, between 10 and somewhere under \$13 billion.

This is a significant commitment. A significant commitment in life. A significant commitment in dollars and it's a significant commitment in terms of our strategic choices. And that's what this is really about.

Senator McCain's speech described a world of tremendous international challenge. And the issue is what's in America's broadest strategic interests? So, for example, if we maintain an indefinite commitment to Iraq, are we going to be able to address the forgotten front line in Afghanistan?

Now, Afghanistan, by all accounts, the Afghan Study Group, NATO commissioned reports, our own

senior military leadership, is going poorly and worse. The Taliban is regrouping. Al-Qaeda is as strong as at any point since 9-11. Suicide bombings, which were once really unheard of in Afghanistan, are now happening at the rate of almost every third day. The south is becoming increasingly violent. Our allies are unwilling to follow us. So, we're facing a very, very difficult situation there. And, of course, there is also the interconnected conflict in the tribal areas with Pakistan, where there's now an opportunity with a new Pakistani government, but where we face really serious problems of people who seek to attack and hurt the United States and plan for it every single day. Now if we are going to address those interconnected conflicts with the seriousness we need to do, we need to set some priorities.

As Senator Clinton said a couple of weeks ago in her Iraq speech, defeat is not a withdrawal. A swift, responsible, safe withdrawal from Iraq, accompanied by intensified diplomacy. Defeat is staying in Iraq for 100 years, because that will have

very, very serious consequences for us in Afghanistan, for us in Pakistan and also for us in terms of our economy. And, of course, our economy is what makes it possible for us to have the kind of military force that we need -- the first class, strongest military force that we want. And we only have to consult the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs and General Casey to look at the serious strains that our Armed Forces are facing as a result of these two wars. And his strategic concern about our ability to be ready for these other kinds of unexpected challenges which will develop.

MR. KLEIN: Randy, I'd like you to address that and talk specifically about Afghanistan. As you know, President Bush is headed to Europe as we speak for a NATO meeting where Afghanistan is going to be one of the main issues discussed, trying to get more of a commitment from some of our allies in Afghanistan. But, how is it connected in Senator McCain's mind and are the concerns that Lee is raising valid?

MR. SCHEUNEMANN: Well, I think, in Senator McCain's view, it's not an either or situation. And I think both the Democratic candidates have tried to make it an either or situation. You can either fight in Iraq or you can fight in Afghanistan, but you can't do both. It clearly strains the force. There is absolutely no doubt about it. But as Senator McCain has made clear, what is the ultimate strain on the force is defeat.

He served in the military in the aftermath of defeat and saw first hand how difficult it was to recruit and retain personnel to keep aircraft flying and so on. And you can say withdrawal isn't defeat as many times as you want to, but at the end of the day, it will be seen as a defeat.

I mean I think we learned in the 1990s that we needed to take al-Qaeda at its word. We needed to take al-Qaeda much more seriously than we did. Al-Qaeda has seen and argued that the United States cannot stand casualties. They have harkened all the way back to Vietnam. They have harkened to the

withdrawal from Lebanon in the 1980s, the withdrawal from Somalia in the 1990s, and they have said themselves that Iraq is the central front in their view of the war they are waging against the west. And if we leave without defeating al-Qaeda in Iraq, it will be seen as a victory for al-Qaeda.

And, yes, there are costs to this war. There are also costs to defeat. And the cost of an emboldened al-Qaeda, the cost of an emboldened Iran, who just the other day I see that former Secretary of State Albright, a Clinton supporter, said she thinks Iran has already won the war in Iraq. So, between the combination of Iran winning and al-Qaeda winning, even though you say it's not a defeat, it's pretty catastrophic and I don't see how we're going to be able to achieve our goals better in Afghanistan if we're defeated in Iraq.

MR. KLEIN: I'll give you a chance to respond, but I'd like to get some questions from the audience. We've got about 20 minutes left. If you could, when you ask your question, just introduce

yourself. Say where you're from and who you'd like to ask the question. Yes, sir. In the second row right there.

SPEAKER: (Inaudible) and I'd like to ask Mr. McDonough. Oh, thank you. I agree with you. The war is going to come to an end. It'll have to come to an end, not only for the human losses. If you've ever been a casualty in a war, you know what your family goes through. Human losses are a lot worse for the wounded than those who are dead. But because of economic losses. And I can't conceive that we're going to deal with our economic problem unless we can reduce the budget deficit and you can't reduce the budget deficit just by increasing taxes. You have to cut expenditures, which means you have to cut military expenditures.

MR. KLEIN: Can you try to talk a little more directly into the mike?

SPEAKER: Pardon?

MR. KLEIN: More directly into the mike.
We're having trouble hearing in the back.

SPEAKER: Oh, I'm sorry. Yes. I'm saying you have to cut military expenditures to reduce the deficit. Without reducing the deficit, you can't reduce our dependence on foreign borrowing, which creates many of the problems which now accumulate in our economy. So we will have to get out.

To get out, the only way to get out is to set a clear deadline, not one which depends on circumstances. Bush just tells the Sunni, the Shiite, the Kurds and others, we're getting out on such and such a date. Either we get out and leave you fighting each other, or you make the deal beforehand.

Now if you're going to follow that policy, you have to specify the clear deadline and say it isn't going to depend on circumstances. It's fixed. And what is Senator Obama's position on that issue?

MR. McDONOUGH: Thank you for the question and let me -- I just want to, let me answer your question, then I want to just put a couple things on the table for Randy to take a swipe at.

Senator Obama has made clear that basically

it's hard to think of anything in private industry, in government, otherwise that hasn't gotten done without a timeline. And so Senator Obama has made very clear that we should make clear to the Iraqis that there will be a deadline of our presence. He has also made clear, and I think Lee earlier skated over this a little bit, that as Commander in Chief you will retain the right to react to advice that he gets from his military commanders.

But, let's take it back for a second to the costs of this. It's not just foreign borrowing. Randy says he doesn't believe it's and either or, but the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff just said the other day that he would be love to be able to put another brigade or two into Afghanistan, which is exactly what General McNeil has asked for for the south. And I think his exact quote was well, we don't just have those guys sitting on a shelf. They're otherwise occupied at the moment.

This question of how our presence and our strategic choices to focus on the priorities we have

will be seen in the region. Randy is talking about that that will automatically be interpreted as loss. I don't understand how us saying we will stay in the heart of the Middle East for 100 years to advance our interest is being interpreted in that region.

And then lastly I just put into context, one of the things you ticked off, Randy, was Lebanon. And I reread the other day Senator McCain's very impassioned speech about the need to make a different choice about Lebanon.

So these are intensely difficult questions. But, the fact is that you can choose to manage the problem, or you can choose to lead on it. And I think Barack has put on the table a very responsible plan that gets us out as responsibly as we were irresponsible getting in.

MR. KLEIN: Yes. Right there. Red tie.

MR. HURD: Nathaniel Hurd with the International Rescue Committee. This is a question for Randy. Senator McCain in Los Angeles talked about a humanitarian crisis in Iraq in the future tense.

This is what might happen if there was a large scale, near term withdrawal. There already are millions of Iraqis who are displaced within the country. There are millions of refugees in the region as well. Health indicators, economic indicators for a lot of people are going in the wrong direction. Does Senator McCain agree with the international humanitarian community, that there is a humanitarian crisis right now for Iraqis inside the country and in the region? And what's his vision as a candidate and a potential president for how to respond to that crisis for civilians?

MR. SCHEUNEMANN: Senator McCain certainly agrees there's hugely difficult humanitarian problems. I don't know if I've heard him say the word crisis or not. I'd be happy to use the word crisis if that makes a measurable difference. The reality is, and his view is, the situation is not just likely, it is virtually certain to get far worse if there's a precipitous withdrawal of American forces. And you can look at each aspect, whether it's the situation in

the north with the Kurds. You can look at whether the Sunnis will continue to keep cooperating with a central government. You can look at the problems that already exist in Basra and with this non-conditions based, one to two brigade a month withdrawal that both of my colleagues are talking about, I think it defies, it would require, let's say, a willing suspension of disbelief to think that somehow the humanitarian situation is going to get better if we proceed with a forced withdrawal.

And the last point I want to make, just to bring another set of facts into the debate, is for all of the measured talk about withdrawal that's going to be safe and swift and reasonable, you have to look at the record. In 2005, Senator Clinton said it would be wrong to set a timetable for our withdrawal. Senator Obama said it would be wrong to deny funds for our troops on the ground. They needed to have the funds to continue their mission. Yet last year, 2007, they both voted no to provide much need supplemental funding to the troops on the ground. Had their votes

been the fifty-first vote, or the sixty-seventh vote if it was to override a veto, would have cut off funding immediately. It would have been the most radical, precipitous form of withdrawal. That's the strategic choice they made in their vote last spring.

MR. KLEIN: Yeah, right here.

MS. DELILLY: My name is Amanu Delilly. I'm Foreign Policy Advisory for Mr. Haddidi of Lebanon. Thank you, Mr. McDonough, for mentioning Lebanon. And this is my question. I would like to ask about Lebanon. This other place, where whatever the United States will do from now to the next year when there's a new president, will decide the future of American presence in the region. Lebanon, now for 3 years, has been a hostage of Iran and Syria's policies in Lebanon. They're preventing the election of a president. They closed the Parliament now for more than a year and the Prime Minister is a prisoner in his offices.

I was wondering what is the policy of each of the candidates on Lebanon and coming next March, if

we still don't have a president and no elections, what would each of the candidates or new president will do to solve the situation towards Syria and Iran? Thank you.

MR. SCHEUNEMANN: I'm happy to start.

Senator McCain has been very outspoken on Syria's consistent undermining of Lebanese sovereignty through its assassination, through its continued support for Hezbollah and acting as an Iranian proxy in the region. There is no doubt that this is in an outrage and that we can and should do more diplomatically, not just with our European partners who have been helpful as you well know -- France, in particular -- but also within the Arab world. To have fostered much greater isolation of Syria on behalf of the legitimate government in Lebanon, it should be something that we could marshal far more support in the Arab world than we have today.

MR. McDONOUGH: I would just add to that to say that it was a disappointment that the Summit was not able to bring that kind of pressure to bear and

it's another in a series of missed opportunities.

MR. KLEIN: Lee.

MR. FEINSTEIN: Well, I would just agree with that. I think, you know, frankly we saw some of these problems back at the opportunity to create a follow-on to the (inaudible) force. We saw a very slow response by the Bush Administration. We saw a very slow response, frankly, by the international community to turn out and provide peacekeepers. We saw a mission which frankly the United Nations can't possibly fulfill with the forces that are provided. So we need far more American leadership in order to address these issues.

MR. KLEIN: Yes, sir.

MR. GOYAL: Thank you. Raghbir Goyal, India Globe. I had a quick question that this week, like you said, that NATO is meeting and Bucharest and President is there. And one of the three candidates will be the next President of the United States, whether he or she. How they will deal with the situation in Afghanistan and terrorists in Pakistan,

also how they will deal with the world's largest democracy in India and world's largest Communist China? As far as --

MR. KLEIN: That's a pretty broad one.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE SPEAKER: -- their growing energy needs and economic growth.

MR. SCHEUNEMANN: Let me try to take a stab at part of that. Senator McCain has proposed the creation of something he calls the League of Democracy as a call for much greater participation of the world's democracies in solving common problems based on the common values that democracies have and it explicitly mentions countries like India in that. He's also called for the expulsion of Russia from the G8 because it is neither a free market nor a democracy and advocated the inclusion of countries like India and Brazil in the G8. And Afghanistan, Pakistan -- we've talked Afghanistan. Not so much Pakistan.

A couple weeks ago I was at a similar forum and right as the elections had taken place in Pakistan and I made the point that whatever one thought of the

Musharraf regime, it did allow the elections and the result of the elections to stand and that both the parties that now make up the coalition had a previous track record in government and neither one of those parties showed demonstrably good governance in terms of running public finances, or aggressiveness in fighting terrorism. So I think the easy assumption that sometimes my Democratic colleagues make that if we just get beyond Musharraf and get on the side of people of Pakistan, we'll have a much better time addressing our interests is not necessarily true. It's going to be very difficult as some recent statements from the new government have pointed out on areas, and the most important area of antiterrorism cooperation.

MR. KLEIN: Lee, go ahead.

MR. FEINSTEIN: Well, I would just say, I mean the Bush Administration is still kind of clinging onto Musharraf sort of amazingly. I think what the United States needs to do in situations like this, which is something that I think Senator McCain said in

some other circumstances about other countries, is to demonstrate that the United States is on the side of the people of Pakistan in their fight against terrorism and in their struggle for democracy.

I mean Pakistan is an incredible example of a country where the overwhelming majority of the public is a public that is moderate and supports greater democracy. Now, you know, obviously an election does not a democracy make, but this is a real opportunity for the United States to be able to work more cooperatively with the Pakistanis who are themselves victims of terrorism and can work much more closely with the United States against terrorism.

I wanted to, in that regard, also point to a suggestion that Senator Clinton has been making for a long time, which would be the appointment of a special envoy who would work both with the Afghan government and the Pakistani government to resolve the issues in the tribal areas as well as other issues. This is an essential issue. There has been fundamental lack of cooperation. With the new Pakistani government, there

may very well be an opportunity to take advantage of this.

And then finally since this is kind of grab bag, on Russia I admire a number of the things that Senator McCain has said about Russia policy, and certainly Senator Clinton has been very, very strong and critical of Russia's direction in a range of areas. She is a strong supporter of giving map status to Georgia, for example, and Ukraine. And she will look with great interest at how President Bush and President Putin make out when they get together. But she feels that the relationship, in spite of the free pass that the United States has given to President Putin, has not produced results. And what the United States needs is a much more productive relationship with Russia.

There's a way to be very strong and critical of Russia and clear about what you're strategic interests are and where you diverge without kicking it out of the G8, which we think would be a huge mistake and interfere with a large number of the other

strategic priorities that the United States has.

MR. McDONOUGH: Rick, let me just add one word here. Part of the reason I think that Senator Obama welcomes the continued debate on national security is because I think he -- it's been fairly evident that he's been leading this debate on a number of these key issues here now for the course of this campaign, and I think Afghanistan and Pakistan is one of them. He was very clear last summer in calling for, as I mentioned earlier, the deployment of two additional U.S. brigades there, that we would use the moral suasion that our increased commitment to that country brings to press our NATO allies to step up to the plate, not only in terms of additional commitments, but also in terms of reducing the caveats. And we'll obviously be watching Bucharest very closely in the hopes that President Bush is able to have some diplomatic success on that question. He also did call for an increase in nonmilitary assistance to Afghanistan to try to extend the writ of the Karzai government out of Kabul. And then, of

course, he has been calling for a fundamental shift in Pakistan policy.

I think Randy did, for the most part, accurately describe the differences on this issue. That is to say that there is in this, as in other issues, two choices. One, you can stick with the status quo and suggest that sacrificing democracy in the name of security with Musharraf and getting neither is a tenable position. Or you can seek a change and recognize, I think as Lee said, that the great majority of the Pakistani people are interested in democracy, are disinterested in the tyranny of the extremists and that there is great space for us to collaborate on working with them to press the extremists. And hopefully we'll see that out of the new Parliament with President Musharraf, to get down to results.

You know, we've had a lot of debate about posture and ideas and proposals, but I think Washington misses something in these debates, which is what does it add up to in terms of the results on the

ground. And as we learned now, almost a year ago, in July 2007 NIE, which warrant in the consensus view across 16 intelligence agencies that the next attack on the homeland is being planned in the sanctuary of northwest Pakistan. We don't have the kind of time to sit around and to hope that strategies heretofore unsuccessful will somehow become successful.

MR. KLEIN: We have time for one last question. Right here in the front right here.

MR. BAYGENTS: Ron Baygents again with Kuwait News Agency. Randy, I'm trying to elicit a response about assuming Senator McCain is elected president and in the four years of his first term he deals with Iraq and Afghanistan according to his vision of how it should be done. Is there any scenario that would lead him to conclude that the U.S. actually cannot militarily solve these two problems no matter how much blood and treasure is invested and no matter how much good will is provided in these areas?

You have repeatedly referred to that withdrawal is a signal of defeat, but is there not a

tipping point that becomes possible, if you use Vietnam as an example. We were there 11 or 12 years and ultimately the country went Communist despite all the investment of all the blood and treasure. Is there not some limit in Mr. McCain's mind as to how much we can invest before he himself as president would conclude that this is not something that the United States can win?

MR. SCHEUNEMANN: Well, the first thing I'd say is he's already concluded we can't win this militarily. It's not, it is not simply a military struggle. No effective counterinsurgency is. You've got to incorporate all the elements of national power and that means economic development. That means greater diplomatic effort, as Ambassador Pascual talked about within the region, as well as providing the security that is necessary from which all else flows. That's what's happened in the last 12 months or so of the surge.

In terms of a tipping point, I mean I think we were very close to one in the end of 2006. I mean

Senator McCain was very forthright in saying we are losing. And that if we don't change strategy and add additional resources, we will lose and the consequences of that would be grave for all the reasons I've mentioned and all the reasons he regularly mentions. So I think we were very close to that. I think we're very far from that now. As you've heard about the significant gains in security as well as the more limited but important gains on the political front. So I can't answer a hypothetical three years out about what happens at a tipping point, but can simply say it's not strictly a military struggle and we are in a far better position strategically now than we were a year ago in Iraq thanks to the efforts of General Petraeus and the American men and women of our Armed Forces.

MR. KLEIN: Final word from either of our Democrats.

MR. McDONOUGH: Well, I'll just say thanks again for being here. I thank Randy and Lee. And this is a very spirited debate and it's long overdue

because the interests at stake here are monumental and the question is do you want to continue with policies that, as I mentioned heretofore, have been unsuccessful or is it time to change and try something that will produce results.

MR. KLEIN: Lee.

MR. FEINSTEIN: Well, I just want to thank everybody here. I want to thank Strobe Talbott, Carlos Pascual, Mike O'Hanlon and Ken Pollack for creating the open space for the three of us to talk about these issues with a few elbows, but mostly with the opportunity to really exchange our views and I want to thank you as well. This has been a good discussion.

MR. KLEIN: Thank you all. It's been a great talk. And will be continued. Thanks.

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