

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

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1:30 p.m. CST

Moderator

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for standing by. Welcome to the Analysis of the Security Council Debate on the Blix Report. At this time all participants are in a listen-only mode. Later we will conduct a question and answer session and instructions will be given at that time. As a reminder, today's conference is being recorded.

I would now like to turn the conference over to our host, Mr. Ivo Daalder. Please go ahead.

I. Daalder

Thanks for joining us all. With us here is Martin Indyk, who is the Director of the Saban Center at Brookings and a senior fellow, and I'm Ivo Daalder, myself a senior fellow in foreign policy studies.

What we thought we'd do is be very, very brief. I'll spend a minute or two just reviewing what has happened in the past couple of hours and where that leaves us. Then Martin will reflect on how that relates to what the President said yesterday at the press conference that he did in the East Room at the White House. We'll then go over to your questions.

First, of course, we had the third report from the inspectors this morning, and we have seen a trend here where the inspectors continue to say that things are improving as regards to Iraqi cooperation. On January 27th Blix basically said that the glass was half empty and on February 14th he basically said the glass was both half empty and half full. You could say that today he said that the glass was, in fact, half full. As usual, Mohamed ElBaradei, the IAEA head, was more positive still than Mr. Blix was with regard to Iraqi cooperation.

Given that set of reports, it's not surprising that there was no change really in the opinion that one could hear within the council one way or the other. We still clearly had four countries that wanted a new resolution and to do so quickly, five countries, including three permanent members – France,

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Russia, and China – that were against a new resolution and wanted to give inspectors more time, and six other countries that remain on the fence.

There was, however, one notable movement, which was the amendment proposed by Great Britain on behalf of the other co-sponsors, which reportedly says that the Security Council agree that Iraq will have failed to take advantage of the final opportunity to disarm afforded to it by the 1441, which was the original language. But then added, “unless the Security Council decides on or before March 17th that Iraq has shown full, unconditional, and immediate cooperation on disarmament.” That is, they now add as of today a ten-day deadline to this, but puts the decision on whether or not Iraq has fully, completely, and unconditionally cooperated in the hands of the Security Council.

If the Security Council fails to make that decision, then Iraq will have failed to take up the final opportunity afforded by 1441, and presumably the serious consequences that were mentioned in that resolution would follow; that is, war would come.

There were also hints both in the council and outside it that we might see even further amendments to the resolutions possibly with this set of specific benchmarks for Iraq to demonstrate how it could meet that cooperation requirement by March 17th, but we haven’t seen either the specifics or indeed there’s no indication yet that that will happen.

In any case, we can expect the resolution to be voted upon sometime early next week, presumably earlier rather than later. As the President said yesterday, we are going to have a vote, or so he said, whether or not he thinks he has the votes. Before the actual vote he wants people to stand up and show their cards.

Notably also, finally was the fact that France clearly does not want anything to do with this. Perhaps in the most direct indication of a forthcoming French veto, French Foreign Minister deVillepin said that, “We cannot accept an ultimatum as long as inspectors are reporting cooperation.” That’s a direct quote. He called a deadline “a pretext for war,” and finally he said in the strongest statement I’ve seen so far that France will not allow a resolution to pass that authorizes the automatic use of force, which when asked in the press conference afterwards whether that meant the veto he said, “Well, you know what it means.” Therefore, it’s clear that France, as indeed the Russians, again said that they will not support this resolution and they will vote against it if necessary.

With that, let me turn it over to Martin for some thoughts on how this relates to where the U.S. is given the President's press conference, and then we'll take you questions.

M. Indyk

Thank you, Ivo, and good afternoon. You'll have to bear with me because I'm suffering from what we used to call in the government policy whiplash. Certain cognitive dissonance about what exactly is happening here. I'm sure you, like I did, watched the President last night in his unflinching determination that Saddam had not disarmed and would, therefore, have to be dealt with by force and the regime would have to be removed.

In addition to that, we heard Secretary Powell just two days ago making clear in the speech at the AAI, I don't know whether you all saw the last Q&A, the question came from Brezinski, but it was specifically a question about whether there was any room for a deadline with specific benchmarks to make it clear that Saddam would have one last opportunity. Powell answered this way, "I'm not sure that even some of them would find that over there if we laid out such a series of benchmarks now, and a month or two or three months later we found some have been met and others have not been met. We'd be right back in the same boat in my judgment. They'd say, let's give them more time and I don't think it's a question of additional benchmarks."

So what we have today is a process that is going to produce an amended resolution with benchmarks of some kind or another. The language of the resolution that I've seen now actually refers to vague benchmarks. A record has to get arms inspectors all weapons delivery support and structures prohibited on the UN resolutions, as well as all information regarding the destruction of such items. That's the language authority in there. You may have noticed that the Foreign Secretary Straw referenced the Blix report and Blix's catalog of 167 pages, in effect, of benchmarks. When we see them there will be some reference to that as well in the resolution.

So in order to get the votes, which we clearly do not have at the moment, they're going to open themselves now to a negotiation of language, which I believe will produce the benchmarks with a short deadline of ten days. Then it's by no means clear, and if you heard Colin Powell respond to the question just after the session today, he was very unclear as to what the process of decision will then be on March 17th, assuming this resolution

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passes, as to whether Iraq has actually complied with the new more specific demands, and presumably he won't have. He will have done some more just like he's done up until now, but he won't have done it all or presumably sufficient for the United States to be satisfied. Yet everybody else that has been arguing on the other side, whether it's the French, Russians, or the Chinese, or Germans will say, "Well, it's working; we've got to give it more time," precisely the argument the Secretary Powell made two days ago.

I'm having a little bit of trouble understanding the coherence of the American approach at the moment. I think it is born of three sectors. Number one, the failure to round up the votes that would make it possible to parcel this resolution; number two, a Blix report, as ... said, that basically gave more ammunition to those who don't want to pass this resolution; and number three, the continuing need of the British for a resolution that would give Tony Blair the ... release and cover to enable him politically to survive an act of war.

So that's where we are. It's a kind of confusing situation. In effect, the Security Council bazaar has been opened up again. They're going into informal consultations and it's by no means clear what we'll come out with, whether there'll be a longer deadline, whether they'll be more specific benchmarks, and whether that resolution will pass or not.

The one advantage of this situation, to my mind, and it may be why the President was prepared to indulge this kind of return to the inspections trap, is that it gives us a little more time to get the troops deployed and in position and, perhaps more importantly, it gives us a little more time to get Turkey's permission to open that second front.

I won't go into great details on that at the moment, but let's just say that it's very important that all this bravado about plan B doesn't amount to very much. The Turks are showing signs of a greater interest in a re-vote, understanding the consequences of not approving this. I saw reports today that they've actually allowed some equipment to be offloaded and moved to the bases closer to the border. The virtue of playing it out in the Security Council is that it would give us time, another week or so to get that approval, which I think is very important as to the we fight the war and what happens afterwards. Let's leave it there and we'll go to the questions.

Moderator Our first question comes from Geneive Abdo from the *Boston Globe*. Please go ahead.

G. Abdo I want to pose the question on a slightly different topic. As both of you have laid out, this amended resolution doesn't really move this whole situation forward in any significant way. On March 17th we'll still be where we are today more or less. So my question is how does this benefit the United States in terms of the huge risk that has resulted from this division within the UN, both in Europe and even in the Middle East? Is this going to help the United States on the diplomatic front by waiting these ten days?

I. Daalder I think the intent here is to get the nine votes. It's not any longer a passage of a resolution, though that would be nice, but given where France, Russia, China, and Germany are, what the U.S. and Britain want is a moral victory if not a legal one; that is, they would like to have nine votes. The Chileans said today, and there are other hints from the Pakistanis and others, that benchmarks are something they're looking for. They want some indication that in some sense people are going to be able to give just a little bit more time in order to seem slightly more reasonable, and that's what this new amendment is all about.

It is fundamentally about getting enough votes. It's not about changing the course of history. It's certainly not about giving disarmament truly one more chance, because clearly the United States and Britain and those who support them don't think that this is going to lead to disarmament. It is all now a last minute maneuver to get the ninth vote or in some sense the eighth vote that is necessary in order to at least declare to the world that there is moral authority and that the UN Security Council was blocked only by what Tony Blair has called an unreasonable veto from one of the permanent members. That's really what this is about.

I'm not sure that this is enough. I would argue that if the kind of resolution that is being introduced now had been introduced six weeks ago with the same deadline, that is March 15th or March 17th, it would have seemed a lot more reasonable. It is a little late down the road, particularly having said that you first weren't going to introduce a second resolution and then did, then said that you weren't going to have deadlines and benchmarks, and now we're appearing to do so.

It's a little late, it's a little hesitant, and it's probably not going to be enough to convince even nine members to vote for it, but there you have

it. It is an attempt to try to get those nine votes because that is important for Britain and in some sense it's important for Bush.

M. Indyk

Let me just add on to that. The search for the elusive nine is also a search for the elusive one amongst the permanent members, that one being Russia. Putin was assumed to be "in our pocket" by the administration. He was taken for granted and, therefore, ignored and he went off to Paris and joined up with France.

Now according to the Security Council mass of the permanent five, we have two on our side, Britain and the United States; if we have Russia then we have a majority. China will, as it always has before, go with the majority. That will give us four and France will be isolated, thereby reinforcing the argument that ... has just made. Notably last night President Bush did call President Putin and today, I don't if Ivo agrees with me, but the Russian language of Foreign Minister Ivanov was much less categorical than the French.

I do think with some patient diplomacy, but it will need compromise in terms of language, deadlines, and benchmarks, we could get the Russians back on board and that would put immense pressure on the French not to block it. So there is a way forward here that could work in my opinion, but it's going to require more compromises than just the ten-day deadline and varied benchmarks.

I think that this administration, which has always been deeply divided about the wisdom of getting into this game in the Security Council, will end up fighting amongst themselves and failing to undertake the necessary diplomacy adroitly enough to come up with a deal that could be gotten in this situation.

Now let me just say a couple words about the Arabs quickly. They have basically tossed their rock with the United States, with the exception of Syria that happens to make a lot of noise within the Security Council. The others are on board. The Arab position has always been, in my experience, basically if you're going to do it and you're really going to get rid of Saddam this time, we will be with you, but don't drag it out and don't leave us out on the limb and back off if you expect us to be with you.

They've all become convinced that the President intends to take Saddam Hussein out and that's why they've all lined up, including in the last week

or so the Saudis, from all reports that we can read. So delay for them creates a lot of nervousness and time for public opinion to express itself. They feel already quite exposed, and I think they will feel quite uncomfortable with this negotiation unless in the end it produces a resolution that would give the President cover for taking out Saddam. Their problem is they're committed now to taking out Saddam. If we don't go ahead and do that, then they've got big difficulties on their hands.

J. Abdo

Thank you. Can I ask a follow up? I guess I'm also interested in your opinion about the long-term effect of this. Assume they do get the nine votes and, as you mentioned, there's a certain moral authority to the war. How is this going to affect our relationship, particularly with the Europeans, once the war begins? Will it depend upon the outcome whether we're successful by some measurement or do you think that this risk with Europe will continue?

I. Daalder

My sense is that the outcome is going to be very important. If this war goes badly, Tony Blair will be out of a job whether he gets a resolution or not. But if it goes well, he will stay in his job whether he has a resolution or not. I think all the signs I'm hearing from the Germans are that they want to get this debate over.

Once the decision is made, the die is cast, the war is started, and they want to get on to the new level of cooperation. They're already starting to talk about, informally, what it is they could do in a post-war situation. They don't like the situation that they're in now, which is isolated away from the United States and too close to France. They have an interest in trying to basically get away from the situation they're in right now.

As for the French, these are highly realistic people who will fight the fight on the basis of principle, but once the reality has moved on they too, I think, will come and say let's see what we can do collectively in the post-war and the post-Saddam Iraq. They will insist undoubtedly on a new UN resolution in order to provide an international imprimatur to whatever happens, and I'm sure we'll have lots of debates over those kinds of issues which, by the way, I think the British will be much closer to the rest of the Europeans on those issues than they will be to some of the Americans.

In many ways this is going to be a pretty pragmatic follow-up. What it does show it seems to me is a need fundamentally to have a real debate

between the United States and Europe, and even within the United States itself about what are the conditions under which one uses force because we have now laid bare here that some of the rules that exist within the UN charter and within the UN Security Council mechanism are no longer working. This may well be the second war we fight almost in a row, one in Kosovo and second here Iraq, in which we failed to obtain the Security Council approval even though we thought this was the right thing to do.

It poses a major problem for us and for the Europeans under what the conditions are and when and how to use force. I think that is an issue that is for a later date. Right now the question is how do we get through the war and once the war is over how do we get back together?

Moderator Our next question comes from the line of Bob Hillman from the *Dallas Morning News*. Please go ahead.

B. Hillman I wonder if both of you could talk a little more about some of the other risks that Bush faces. Clearly he indicated last night and before that war is quite imminent and most likely the political risks, other risks around the world that such war might bring.

M. Indyk Why don't I start on the Middle East because one of the issues that a lot of critics of war point to is the risk that war will cause an explosion in the Middle East, more instability. This is one of the main arguments that the French make. I actually think that's somewhat exaggerated; that in the short term the regimes in the Middle East have essentially battened down the hatches. They have proved over the years to be quite effective in dealing with demonstrations, riots and the like.

One of the most remarkable things, given the instability that we would have expected to be generated by the ongoing ... of the Israeli reoccupation of the major cities and towns of the West Bank, continued operations by the Israeli army in Gaza causing high loss of Palestinian lives, all of it being broadcast by Al Jazeera and other satellite televisions throughout the Arab world in the most horrendous gory detail, nevertheless have produced very little response other than an anger that's certainly there, but there's very little response in terms of any political action against regimes because of their failure to do anything about it.

So I think that in these circumstances of war in Iraq against Saddam Hussein, who is universally disliked in the Arab world, he has no sympathy, is given the circumstances within these Arab countries, is not

likely in the short term to create any serious instability. Put that down as famous last words.

Over time I think we may see a different kind of phenomenon, and so much depends on whether there are serious casualties on the Iraqi civilian side, whether the post-Saddam situation is stable in Iraq or whether things start to come apart there, and you get a kind of ripple effect. Perhaps, most importantly, of all the arguments that have been made and you've probably seen is that effect of what we need to worry about in the Middle East is not the street but the basement.

Those angry young men, and maybe in some cases women, who are so alienated, don't go out into the streets to get their heads bashed in by the security police, but rather go into the basement, join the Islamic militant terrorist organizations like al Qaeda and its affiliates, and go and blow themselves up taking innocent civilians with them. That's a phenomenon that I think that in general, the consensus amongst the experts that the phenomenon of terrorism is likely to increase.

Moderator We have a question from the line of John Parker from *The Economist*.
 Please go ahead

J. Parker I'd like to ask a question about the press conference last night. I wonder what you made of the President's willingness to ask for a vote, even in the teeth of what seemed at that time like a very strong and now even stronger threat of a veto. My understanding is that this is almost unprecedented, that countries have been extremely reluctant to push for a vote when there was a threat of a veto, and when that happened it was almost always the case that you withdrew the resolution. ... saying the resolution of some kind, we don't know what it is, will go ahead. I wonder what you made of what seems like a very great increase in the stakes for the UN by the President.

I. Daalder My sense, John, is two things. One, I always have sensed a certain sense of bravado here where he basically said: Come on, let's see what you really are made of. We think this is important for you to be on record. Let's see whether you truly dare stand up to the United States at this critical hour about this critically important thing. By the way, whatever you do I'm not going to listen to you anyway, which he also said quite bluntly and quite straightforwardly — the disconnect between the two was remarkable.

Also, a belief that if you really force it out into the open and have each of these countries sit in front of the Security Council and having to actually put up or shut up, at that point he may win. He may, in fact, get his nine votes. I think there's a difference. I don't think they care. Frankly, I think that Britain has agreed now to the point if the French want to veto that's the French problem. The issue is not whether you get a "full passage of the resolution." The issue is whether you get at least a moral victory, which is nine votes.

They will regard a nine-vote victory even if others, if you have three permanent members against you, they will regard that as a moral victory, and there is a certain sense Bush is a risk taker. He's audacious when it comes to these kinds of things. He believes strongly that when it comes to the point that we have arrived at that you really have to put up or shut up. Then he'll get the Mexicos, the Chiles, the Angolas, and the Pakistans to side with him, which is all he needs. I need one more, a Cameroonian or Guinea, let alone Russia, of course, which I think Martin is exactly right. He still very much hopes that he can get Russia.

The way you maybe really do that is to try and do it quietly and diplomatically. If that fails, you can do it openly, and this is an administration that does this consistently. It basically says do you really want to defy the United States openly because if there is no vote, there's no cost to these countries. It's very difficult to say to Mexico at that point that if there is no vote the Mexicans can say we would, of course, have voted for you quietly. So we don't get that same kind of pressure, and that's the kind of game he played.

Which leads me to another thing. De Villepin proposed a head of state mission meeting of the Security Council. If I were Bush I'd take it. I think it's fully consistent with what he's trying to do here. If one takes seriously the fact that he really does want to go for a vote and this wasn't a flippant moment but a calculated moment, I think if Bush were sitting there with Blair he can stare them down, and at that point is Putin really going to say no. It's a high risk, but it's a high drama, and high drama and high risks are something that this President seems to get his energy from.

M. Indyk

I thought part of the reason for the willingness to take such a risk and confrontational approach and be prepared to go down is because he's fully prepared to go on his own, unilaterally. He made the case for unilateral action last night to the American people. He made the case repeatedly that Saddam Hussein represented a direct threat to the security of the United

States. He did not make the case that he represented a direct threat to international peace and security. He's focused on the threat to the United States.

The Security Council is a sideshow for the sake of Tony Blair, and I think that that is part of the explanation for why the United States did not engage in any serious diplomacy over the last four weeks except for a few phone calls and tried to heavy the Mexicans. It was amazing how little effort was made to actually line up these folks because I don't think he really cared that much about it. I think that's part of the explanation for this attitude. I've heard it for months in your ... official that it doesn't matter if you break the crockery in the Security Council because it's an empty vessel. If you have that kind of attitude, then you can afford to put everybody on the spot and force them to take a stand. Even if you go down you go unilaterally anyway.

J. Parker

I guess coming to ... the reason I was asking that question was it seemed to me to be a real challenge, a longer-term challenge almost to the Security Council. It's essentially as Ivo said. He thinks we're going to go ahead anyway. So it was essentially a demand which sort of validated the claimed criticisms which says the U.S. is saying to the Security Council you support us or you're completely irrelevant.

The President kind of exaggerated the threat, not exaggerated, but posed it in the most dramatic way he could by making some precedented move to say we'll demonstrate that you are completely relevant by requiring you to take an unprecedented or to force something that we know that you'll veto, which I think it would be very, very unusual.

I. Daalder

Yes. In many ways what he's doing is saying if you really care about the UN you have to vote with me, but if you vote against you are just assigning yourself to the dustbin of history. How more dramatically can you demonstrate that than doing it publicly? If you don't particularly care about the outcome, exactly as Martin says, we don't care whether we get a UN Security Council resolution, other than the fact that we care that Tony Blair cares.

M. Indyk

This is why I started off by saying I'm having a bit of a sense of whiplash here because if you don't care, then why go along with this game now of more time and open it up to benchmarks and the like? I think the reason for that is, basically the way to reconcile these two things, is to say if he doesn't care and he's ready to force the issue, but Tony Blair does care

and Aznar of Spain also cares, and so for the sake of them we go through the motions. The bottom line is that when we're really ready to go, which presumably is around March 17th, there won't be a tolerance I think for playing this game anymore.

Moderator

Our next question is a follow-up from Geneive Abdo from the *Boston Globe*. Please go ahead.

G. Abdo

The question was answered. Thank you very much.

Moderator

We do have a question that just queued up from Sayed Arikas from Iraq's *Al ...* Newspaper. Please go ahead.

S. Arikas

My question is to Mr. Martin Indyk on the case that the President made last night. Do you think he made a convincing case that Iraq is really an eminent and present threat to the United States of America beyond just the pronouncing or saying that?

M. Indyk

I don't think he last night really tried to lay out all the details or argumentation. It was interesting. The style was much more of this somber President unflinching in his determination, who in body language and words basically had made up his mind. I think he didn't feel the need to go through all the argumentation again. He's basically saying to the American people I'm your leader; I've decided this is a threat. We're going to take care of it, that's my responsibility to you, and thank you for praying for me.

I don't know whether you would agree, but I think for the majority of the American people that's good enough, Hail to the Chief. He clearly was not trying to make a case to international public opinion, which he doesn't take seriously and you could see that in his answer last night. He's not concerned about that, which I think is a mistake because the failure to take international public opinion into account is part of the reason why we are screwing up the diplomacy here in the lead up to the war.

That will have consequence later. It narrows its own margin for error, but that is certainly, I think, the attitude of the President, which is that the only public opinion polls that matter, the only focus groups that matter are American focus groups, and what he's getting from Carl Rose in that regard is a certain uneasiness. But basically the numbers are holding for the pretty solid majority in favor of taking Saddam Hussein out by force so I don't think he felt the need to make the argument.

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S. Arikas

I have a follow-up. Do you think if the U.S. goes to war, as the President made it very clear and his almost dismissal of global opinion and global positions and so on, how will that affect really the conduct of the war and the day after, the proverbial day after?

I. Daalder

It certainly won't affect the conduct of the war because global or even American public opinion isn't particularly important in the conduct of the war other than to emphasize, as the President emphasized yesterday and every military briefing keeps on emphasizing, the importance of minimizing casualties, not only on the American side, but on the Iraqi civilian side. I think they're acutely aware that the kinds of pictures that we had in the 1991 Gulf War with the baby milk factory and others are things they want to try to avoid. More important even than that is winning the war, and they're going to do what needs to be done to win the war.

On the day after the administration is betting that a combination of a quick victory, a quick find of massive quantities of weapons of mass destruction, and a sense by the Iraqi people that they have been liberated by welcoming American soldiers in ways that liberated people will do, that that will sway enough public opinion both in the region, and equally importantly elsewhere, to take the rebuilding, reconstruction, stabilization, and ultimate democratization of the region as a collective international task.

Those are big bets though, particularly given that in the preceding four or five months the administration has done very little to mold international public opinion in the ways that Martin suggested it should have. Under those conditions if things go wrong, if the Iraqis do not celebrate their liberation, but immediately turn around and try to engage in warfare among themselves, if there are not a large number of casualties or if any other thing that can go wrong and may well go wrong, we may be standing there virtually alone after the war under those conditions.

Germans, however much they would like to come back to a better more stable situation, are going to say we're not going to be part of this. You created this problem, now you solve it, and we're certainly not going to pay for it. So there is a lot riding on not only going to war, which the President has made his only foreign and, in fact, domestic policy at this point, but doing it and everything going right.

What was, I think, in that sense truly remarkable about the press conference yesterday was that every opportunity he had to talk about things possibly going wrong, costs that might have to be incurred, he just walked away from it, leaving the very clear impression, which is consistent with how they have dealt with it, that this is going to be easy; that there are only benefits at the end of the road. There are no costs. There are only costs by doing nothing; there are no costs by acting.

The danger here is, while Martin is exactly right, public opinion is with us so long as things go well. Public opinion is also uneasy, and if things do go wrong we will not only lose international public opinion, but the President stands to lose a domestic public opinion. That's why this for him politically is a risk that on the one hand he cannot avoid, but on the other hand he has to take with possibly severe consequences for his presidency.

M. Indyk

I'll just add one thing briefly on this, which is it seems to be kind of basic Politics 101 that you don't raise expectations when you're going into an uncertain situation. I think when we look back at it it would have proven much wiser for the President to level with the American people and say there could be problems here. Things can go wrong. We're going to do everything to minimize it. Essentially to lower expectations, but both he and even the military spokesman have created this impression that everything is just going to be fine. It's going to be a cakewalk. This shock and awe strategy for pulverizing Baghdad is based on the assumption that this is all going to be very easy.

When it doesn't turn out that way, I should say if it doesn't turn out that way, then the President is going to have some explaining to do to the American people. So I find it hard to understand why he would set himself up like that, except for a kind of hubris, just an overconfidence about how this is going to go. Maybe it'll work out fine in the end, but it is, as Ivo said before, a big gamble.

Moderator

There are no further questions at this time. You may continue.

M. Indyk

I think we'll wrap it up then, Ivo, unless you had something else to say.

I. Daalder

No, that's it for us. Thank you all very much.

M. Indyk

Thank you.

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