

A Brookings Iraq Series Briefing

**THE QUEST FOR STABILITY IN
IRAQ AND THE MIDDLE EAST**



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MR. KENNETH M. POLLACK: Good morning. Why don't we get started?

I am Kenneth M. Pollack, Director of Research at the Saban Center for Middle East Policy here at the Brookings Institution. I welcome you to another one of our series of briefings on Iraq, the war in Iraq and the reconstruction of Iraq.

I am joined today by a wonderful panel. Starting off on my far left we have Shibley Telhami, who is the holder of the Sadat Chair at the University of Maryland and also a Distinguished Fellow at the Saban Center for Middle East Policy here at Brookings.

To Shibley's right, my left, is my boss, Ambassador Martin Indyk who is the Director of the Saban Center for Middle East Policy here at the Brookings Institution.

To my right, the first of our guest speakers today, Eric Schwartz, who is a Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations and is the Former Senior Director for Democracy and Peacekeeping Operations at the National Security Council.

To Eric's right, we have Professor Seyom Brown, who is a Professor of International Politics at Brandeis University and author of *The Illusion of Control, Force in Foreign Policy in the 21st Century* from the Brookings Press and which is available in our Brookings bookstore at a 20% discount for those who are interested. [Laughter]

Finally, Roberta Cohen who you've all seen before, who is a Senior Fellow here in the Foreign Policy Studies Program at the Brookings Institution.

We're going to start off with Roberta this morning. Roberta, if you could tell us a little bit about the security situation in Iraq and how it's affecting the humanitarian efforts and the reconstruction. That's a good way to start off.



MS. ROBERTA COHEN: Thanks, Ken. Good morning.

I will make some comments on the security situation and the impact on humanitarian concerns.

I'd begin by saying that the U.S.' extraordinary performance in the military arena has not been matched by how it has dealt with humanitarian issues. The failure to stop looting and destruction of public services has set back humanitarian development and reconstruction goals, which are essential to the building of a stable Iraq.

The health sector was hit particularly hard. During several days of rampages, most hospitals were stripped bare of medicines and equipment. Red Cross ambulances were hijacked. World Health Organization storage facilities were emptied. Food stocks were also plundered from World Food Program warehouses. The offices of most if not all of the UN agencies were ransacked, and despite the critical shortages of water and electricity in so many cities, electric generators and water pipelines were vandalized.

While the toppling of Saddam Hussein's statues and palaces was to be expected, the damage to humanitarian infrastructure could have been stopped. The International Committee of the Red Cross had to appeal to coalition forces to assume their responsibilities under the 4th Geneva Convention.

Many reasons have been put forward for why U.S. forces were so ill prepared or reluctant to assume police and peacekeeping functions to protect the civilian population: insufficient numbers, lack of training, too fast a transition from combat to peacekeeping, the fear that acting as an occupying power would meet with resistance, and disdain for non-combat operations.

There's a great need to understand this not only for the future stabilization of Iraq but also for other post-conflict situations in which we are or will be involved. Just take Afghanistan, where an absence of security still remains one of the biggest obstacles to reconstruction and development in that country. The U.S. has long refused to support an effective countrywide international security force in Afghanistan to protect the civilian population.

In Iraq, the U.S. has been moving toward reestablishment of security -- vetting local police, bringing in U.S. police, and turning to NATO allies for peacekeepers, but presence and time are of the essence. When security vacuums are allowed to develop, the most radical elements are given the opportunity to assert themselves. If we're not ready to maintain our own troops, should the proposal be resurrected for a rapidly deployable international civilian police force for post-conflict situations?

In Iraq right now the single most important issue for humanitarian operations is a secure environment, which means safe roads, protecting warehouses and health facilities from plunder, and safe access to the center and the south of the country.

On April 21, a convoy of World Food Program trucks traveling from Jordan to Baghdad was fired upon 100 kilometers outside of the capital. Yet WFP needs to start bringing in large-scale food deliveries because supplies will be very low by early May. Indeed, WFP will need to bring in 480,000 tons of food each month for at least 16 million Iraqis who depend on it.

Not only will the food need to be stored in safe places, but the distribution system will need to be reinstated. Under the Oil For Food Program, there were no less than 44,000

distribution points throughout Iraq, many of which no longer exist. To get this system running again security is essential. Yet a good part of the center and south of the country is still not safe for humanitarian staff. The UN has not yet given the green light for its staff to go in and stay in those regions, and USAID staff avoids traveling to the center of the country. NGOs on the ground are also restricted in their movements and their access, and thousands of roads in rural areas are a no-man's land.

It goes without saying that welcomes wear thin without a prompt response to the humanitarian situation.

A second security problem I'd like to draw attention to is the need for the U.S., as an occupying power, to prevent ethnic conflict among Kurds, Arabs, and Turkmen from escalating in the north of the country around Kirkuk and Mosul, which have an estimated 40 percent of Iraq's oil.

U.S. forces are spread very thin in this area. Not only did they not stop the initial looting in these cities, but they have also not been trying to stop the daily expulsions of Arabs that have begun to take place in and around these cities.

To be sure, Saddam Hussein's regime as well as earlier Iraqi governments had expelled tens of thousands of Kurds and smaller numbers of Turkmen and Assyrians from these oil-rich and fertile areas by means of an Arabization campaign. But it was to be hoped that there could be some management of this problem, namely so that returns to the land could be coordinated, that An official body should be set up with representative ethnic and religious makeup, to enable Kurds, Turkmen and others to return and retain their land and property, while also assuring fairness to the more than 200,000 Arabs brought into the Kirkuk area.

Although Kurdish leaders and U.S. officials have reassured that there will be some sort of body to adjudicate claims and that everything will be decided by the rule of law, the facts on the ground are beginning to establish their own reality. Indeed, the Kurds are now governing Kirkuk and problems between Kurds and Turkmen are beginning to surface, with the Turkish press saying that the Kurds have destroyed property records and the Kurds denying this.

The United Nations, of course, would be a qualified candidate to assist. It has long experience in organizing returns of displaced persons and refugees, and setting up claim commissions and courts to deal with property disputes.

So to conclude, policing Iraq and creating a rule of law will be essential to fulfilling the humanitarian and reconstruction roles that the U.S. has undertaken. Although the U.S. clearly got off to a bad start, let's hope it will demonstrate the staying power and some creative arrangements internationally to carry this forward more effectively.

Thanks.

MR. POLLACK: Thank you, Roberta.

I think next we'll turn to Eric Schwartz. Eric was also the Principal Director of a report issued by the Council on Foreign Relations that came out recently that gotten a tremendous amount of attention. A wonderful report.

Eric, I think it would be useful to hear some thoughts from you in terms of how you feel the Administration has been doing so far and to complement some of the things that Roberta has said so far.



MR. ERIC SCHWARTZ: Thank you, Ken.

I was indeed the Project Director of this CFR report. One of our distinguished task force members sits immediately to my left.

Let me talk a little bit about the report and then talk a little bit about how I would assess the Administration's performance in relation to the conclusions of the report. I will do so, very briefly, since I'm only going to be speaking for about ten minutes.

The task force itself was chaired by Tom Pickering and Jim Schlesinger, and included specialists on the Middle East, on the Gulf, on diplomatic and security issues, in the rule of law, accountability, economics, reconstruction, energy, and a broad range of areas.

Four major themes came out of the Council on Foreign Relations sponsored report. It was an independent task force report, relating first to the critical importance of a political commitment from the Bush Administration to stay the course in post-conflict Iraq. Secondly, the need to establish and maintain public security. Third, the value of sharing the burden for post-conflict peace stabilization and reconstruction. And finally, the importance of making Iraqis stakeholders in their own political development. Other issues the report dealt with were -- the rule of law, accountability, regional security, the role of oil, and a number of other issues.

On the first issue, the importance of a political commitment to the future of Iraq, we recommended that the President should build on his statements in support of U.S. engagement in the pre-war period by making clear to the Congress, to the American people, and the people of Iraq that the U.S. will stay the course. That he should announce a multi-billion dollar, multi-year post-conflict reconstruction and peace stabilization program and request formal congressional endorsement.

We thought it was important, that by announcing such a program the President would give Iraqis confidence that we are committed to contribute meaningfully to the development of Iraq and would enable U.S. government agencies to plan more effectively for a long-term U.S. engagement.

We thought it was very important that the President do more to explain to the American people our interest in Iraq's future so that Americans and the American Congress would be willing to bear the cost of peace stabilization and reconstruction in the years ahead, after the attention of officials had turned to other crises.

In addition, we felt it important that Iraqis believe that the United States will not walk out before vital tasks are completed, and that Americans know the costs of reconstruction, because they're going to be considerable if we're going to do the job right. They could amount, we suggested, to on average about \$20 billion a year for several years. I say that's on average, because I think that the up-front costs might be higher.

The report also indicated for a variety of reasons that we can discuss that oil will not enable us, and oil revenues will not enable us to avoid the commitments of this magnitude.

The second key conclusion is protecting Iraqi civilians, which is key to winning the peace.

In the context of conflict and its immediate aftermath, we argued that Iraqis would be at considerable risk and that from the outset of the conflict, and in particular in the immediate aftermath, the U.S. military should deploy forces with a mission to establish public security and provide humanitarian aid.

Admittedly, the nature of the war deployment may have mitigated against our ability to lay down large numbers of forces in the post-conflict period, and we can discuss whether it was adequately accounted for in the planning.

What we said in the report was that none of the other U.S. objectives in rebuilding Iraq would be realized in the absence of public security. If the Administration failed to address this issue effectively, it would risk fueling the perception that the result of the U.S. intervention was an increase in suffering of the Iraqi people.

Our third major conclusion was sharing the burden for post-conflict transition and reconstruction. We urged that the Bush Administration move quickly to involve international organizations and other governments for two basic reasons. First, that it would lighten the load on the U.S. military and on U.S. civilian personnel, and help to diminish the perception that the

United States seeks to control post-transition Iraq.

We recommended support of Security Council resolutions that would endorse U.S. leadership on security and even on interim civil administration in post-war Iraq. We also envisioned meaningful international participation and the sharing of responsibility for decisionmaking in a range of very important areas, from humanitarian assistance to reconstruction to oil, and I think significantly to the organizing of the process leading to a new Iraqi government.

Finally, we suggested making Iraqis stakeholders throughout the transition process. We felt it very important to avoid the perception of American control over the process and promote the notion of Iraqi ownership as early as possible, and we can talk about this, but not precipitously. We can talk about how you balance that tension, how you manage that tension.

The Administration, we said, should ensure that Iraqis continue to play key roles in administering public institutions, subject to vetting. And that all the effort be made quickly to establish consultative mechanisms on political, constitutional, and legal issues, so that the period of interim governments would be characterized by growing Iraqi engagement on the political as well as administrative effort.

The report made some 30 recommendations in these and other areas. Relevant to some of the discussion today, I should mention that one recommendation was that the Administration should consider encouraging a regional security conference to examine confidence-building measures, external security guarantees and non-proliferation in part due to the critical role, both positive or negative, that Iraq's neighbors might play in its future political evolution.

So in a nutshell that's the report. Let me speak just for a couple of minutes about assessing the Administration's performance.

Speaking as an ex-official now with no responsibilities but any ability to tell them what they're doing wrong, I think you have to make these sorts of comments with a fair degree of humility, to use a term that President Bush has used. Because people are working very hard within the Administration on these issues, and I give them an enormous amount of credit. At the same time, this sort of give and take in dialogue is very critical. So let me start with the positive side.

The United States has gotten rid of Saddam Hussein and offered the people of Iraq the prospects for a brighter future. What we knew of Saddam's crimes, the killing of hundreds of thousands of his own people, horrific torture, other abuses, was horrendous enough. And I think what we will learn in the months and years to come as information flows from Iraq, may reveal even more despicable acts.

Secondly, the quality, determination and commitment of those Americans who have been put in charge of the rebuilding effort is very high, and whatever your view is of putting responsibility for these tasks within the Department of Defense, the decision will mean that the buck stops with the Department of Defense which happens to be, as we all know, the very deepest pocket by far in the U.S. government. And the Administration is also working to engage the support of other governments, principally on public security issues, and has begun to move forward on critical post-conflict issues.

At the same time it is clear that the Administration, as Roberta said, was far better equipped to win the war than to win the peace. The post-conflict civilian planning process was late. We're now playing major catch-up, and far too little thought had gone into the requirements in particular for the immediate aftermath of conflict. As a result we have paid a high price. The looting and general sense of disorganization that has accompanied the post-conflict period has impacted our overall goals for Iraq. We may be able to reverse that, but I think there have been costs.

Secondly, that general sense of confusion combined with equivocal statements by officials about the duration of the U.S. presence, with some suggesting it could be as little as months has, I think, raised questions about the nature and extent of our commitment in the post-war period.

This is illustrated, in the media. A nurse yesterday during General Garner's rounds was quoted on McNeil Lehrer saying about the Americans, "They're supposed to provide us with a better life, the party opposition in exile. Why don't they come and create a government to rule the country?"

In a funnier way, if you will, this concern was also reflected by a former Director General, which I presume was with the Oil Ministry in which he said, "We have a lot of experience with coup d'etats and this one is the worst. Any colonel in the Iraq army will tell you that when he does a coup he goes to the broadcasting station with five announcements. The first one is long live this, down with that. The second one is your new government is this and that. The third is the list of people to go on retirement. The fourth one, every other official is to report back to work tomorrow morning. The fifth is the curfew."

This is not by any means intended to suggest a return to the past, but rather I think to capture the sense of uncertainty on the ground and the costs of that uncertainty to American objectives.

My recommendations in this area: I think the President should ensure that we don't talk about a commitment of only a few months, speak in greater detail to the American people about

the magnitude of our commitment, move forward quickly on public security, make clear that U.S. troops will carry the load until others come on board, begin to promulgate some sort of interim law and regulations to govern posts even before we sort of stand up proper transitional mechanisms, actively recruit foreign constabulary units, and move quickly on the issue of training.

Finally, the Administration I think needs to take actions to remove the ambiguity in our own position about the role for the UN so as to more quickly encourage support that will be necessary to lighten our load.

My view is that we ought to be looking toward an Afghan-type model, in which the United States does not have to sacrifice its influence but can involve the United Nations in a post-transition process of forming new institutions. These institutions will make those organizations far more legitimate in the eyes of a number of other governments who matter to us and will ease the way for international support of our other objectives.

Based on my general principle of not making recommendations that really aren't in the realm of reality, I think I'm going to. This may be the last time I make this particular recommendation, because I do sense the Administration is heading in a bit of a different direction on this issue. But in light of the wide variety of claimants and claims to power and the suspicion among some of U.S. motives, this particular recommendation seems to me to be all the more important in the current context.

MR. POLLACK: Thank you, Eric.

I'd like to turn now, to start broadening the perspective a little bit, I'd like to turn to Shibley Telhami and ask Shibley to talk a little bit about this whole process of building democracy in Iraq and also give us a little bit more perspective on how the rest of the Arab world, Arab public opinion, is seeing this entire enterprise.

Shibley.



MR. SHIBLEY TELHAMI: Thanks.

About a month ago, I actually spoke here to report about a public opinion survey that I had done in early March in six Arab

countries in terms of why people oppose the war. Let me start with that in terms of identifying what people are looking for now to see what judgments to make about the war.

Clearly the vast majority of the public in the Middle East oppose the war in large part because of suspicions of American intentions. When you look at that there were really several issues that came up, not only in my surveys, but in other public opinion surveys as well. One was a judgment that it wasn't only about Iraq. That Iraq is episode one of a new policy that affects Arab and Muslim countries and targets Arab and Muslim countries. You found a lot of resentment of U.S. policy broadly in Arab and Muslim countries specifically because Iraq was seen to be only step one in a new policy.

The second, which was very present in the public opinion surveys, was that most people believed this was about oil and certainly no one believed it was about democracy or about bringing about peace or economic development in the region. Oil was seen to be the critical factor.

And third, people thought it was about Israel and helping Israel establish an order that was more advantageous to us. Those were the perceptions.

When you asked people about their expectations, what they expect after the war, the vast majority expected that there would be less democracy in the Middle East, more terrorism, and that the prospects of Arab-Israeli peace would diminish, not increase. So their expectations were pessimistic about what might happen.

So now as they're sort of coming out of the shock, and there was a tremendous amount of shock in the Middle East after the war and some denial and some reflection and some reassessment, no doubt, and that will continue. But really it's more back to the norm of focusing on American foreign policy and making judgments. Clearly no one has, although one of the things that came out of the war was much awareness in the Arab world, a much more reluctant recognition of the extent of brutality of the regime, which a lot of people sort of shoved aside in the context of these bigger concerns and worries, and I think now no one can deny them, although some still do. But by and large that part is there.

That has not translated at all into a favorable view of America. The judgments so far are based on these issues that I've articulated. First, what is the shape of American policy beyond Iraq? Here people are looking for cues to tell them where is America going from here? Is this going to be episode one? Then Syria, then Saudi Arabia, then Egypt? Or is this going to be an episode that stands on its own. Is the U.S. now going to build bridges, repair some of the damage to relations, and focus on Arab-Israeli peace?

The focus on Syria certainly in the past few weeks has frightened people, not so much

because of Syria itself, although that is an issue, but because that confirms in their view that maybe the winning hand in Washington is that hand which says forget about the Arab-Israeli issue as such, and let's focus on changing the Middle East through force.

There are people on the margins of the Administration who have influence but on the outside of the Administration, who are even saying anarchy is good, stability is bad. So that's frightening to people, particularly as they're watching the anarchy in Iraq as it exists today.

So clearly one of the measures in the next few weeks is going to be what signals the Administration sends more broadly about its policy in the Middle East. Not just about what happens in Iraq, what happens on Syria, but how the region interprets the debate in Washington which is still ongoing and to my mind unsettled within the Administration about what direction to take after Iraq in foreign policy broadly.

Second, on the issue of oil. It is clear that that is a factor in regional minds. People think to this day the U.S. is there for oil. If you look at the regional media in the past few weeks it has highly focused on the fact that much of the looting took place even in hospitals and in museums, and those were not protected, but the installations that were protected, the ministries that were protected were the oil installations and the ministries. That is a focal point of much of the regional media debate. In that sense it's sort of highlighting the issue of oil as a critical factor.

Secretary Rumsfeld's statement I think yesterday to say that we have no intention of leaving American forces in the long term, I think it's a good one in terms of addressing some of the fears in the region, but the U.S. has a dilemma on this issue of oil. The dilemma isn't about oil as such. I think the dilemma is that on the one hand the U.S. clearly does not want to withdraw and leave an anarchy in Iraq without a structure in place. Look at what happened after the first Afghan problem of overturning the communist regime in Afghanistan, leaving and what happened down the road in Afghanistan. That's the model the U.S. wants to avoid. So in that sense the U.S. doesn't want to withdraw too early without some structure stability in Iraq. On the other hand, you don't want to appear to be staying there for the long term to protect all interests. How you manage that is going to be a complex issue and it's hard to do in this environment of mistrust and suspicion, unless you bring in other parties, particularly multilateral organizations to give you a cover and to play some of the role.

A third issue on Arab-Israeli peace. Clearly, whether or not there is momentum to revive the Palestinian-Israeli negotiation and ultimately the Syrian-Israeli negotiations is going to be a major factor in the relations between the U.S. and the Arab world. To my mind the Arab-Israeli issue remains the prism through which the Arab world sees America. Not the only issue, but it is the prism that defines almost all other issues. Obviously what the Administration does in the next few weeks in relation to that issue is going to matter a lot.

Finally, the issue of democracy. Clearly one reason why people in the region were suspicious about the American intent to bring about democracy was that they were witnessing, just as we were talking about democracy, increased suppression in the Arab countries. In part because we're asking governments to do things that were unpopular and to go against the public opinions, and governments were in essence doing what we wanted them to do but only by employing their security services to be more repressive. So they were experiencing more repression in this conflict and probably will continue to do so in the foreseeable future because of the increasing gap that came out of this war between the governments and the public. The governments in the short term have no means of addressing that except by being more repressive. That's one fear.

But the Iraq issue, looking at the Iraq issue and what might come out of Iraq, they may certainly come to the conclusion that the regime of Saddam Hussein has been the most brutal and anything will be better. But they are also frightened by the divisions that they see already existing, and by what the U.S. may or may not allow to take place, whether or not the government is going to be seen to be imposed from the outside or not. We have already seen the complexity of the issue in Iraq.

Most experts who look at the Iraq issue understood that fighting the war was the easy part of it. The difficult part was when the war ends and you try to win the peace. Everybody understood that going in. It has started, and one reason about the concerns for "democracy" in Iraq was the reality on the ground. Not only the factionalism that we have been experiencing and watching within each community. Sunis are not unified, Shias are not unified, Kurds are not unified, let alone across communal lines. That's become obvious from day one of this issue.

The second layer of problem is that when you look at Iraq, even beyond the fact that it has never had a real democracy, but when you look at what has happened in the past 35 years, essentially every institution, every organization, political organization, has been destroyed in order to monopolize politics through the Ba'th party. Civil society has certainly not taken root except for those that are related to the center of power. The middle class has all but disappeared in the past dozen years.

So what you have in Iraq now is, in terms of organizational capacity, is largely religious organizations, and the fact that you have over a million Shias going yesterday to Karbala is not surprising. But the reality of it in the short term is you're going to have an election, whether it's going to be this year or next year, any time soon, most likely the people who are going to be able to mobilize the largest numbers are going to be the clergy, and many of them clearly want themselves to play a bigger role in politics.

How do you create an environment where you have true competitors for the clergy? Where you build institutions that can mobilize people to come to the voting station? That is

going to be a trick that is I think almost insurmountable in the foreseeable future if by democracy we mean a truly free electoral democracy. Because if we have a fully free election at any time soon, the outcome is not going to be what Washington will interpret to be a favorable outcome.

Let me end on that optimistic note. [Laughter]

MR. POLLACK: Thank you, Shibley.

Shibley touched on the two big, even more complicated issues out there that are still looming for the United States in the Middle East, the issues, the Arab-Israeli peace process and the general prospect for reform in the Arab world.

Let me turn to Martin and ask Martin, how does the U.S. fix these two problems?



MR. MARTIN S. INDYK: Thank you, Ken. Good morning.

Essentially the way we fix these two problems is that now that we have our feet or our boots on the ground in Iraq we need to employ both of our arms in a strategy that would see us putting our arms around, first of all one arm around our friends in the Arab world, particularly Hosny Mubarak in Egypt, and the other, putting our arm around our friend in Israel, Ariel Sharon. By the way, I should perhaps explain what I mean by putting our arms around. It's like this. You put your arm around them and you push them forward. But it is very much in that context that I wanted to talk about how we deal with these two problems.

First of all, it's worth doing this in terms of beyond getting Iraq right, which is a big enough problem for us, because there is a real opportunity here.

The removal of Saddam Hussein through our military intervention, with some help from our friends, has been an earthquake in terms of Arab politics and in terms of the balance of power within the Arab world and in terms of the balance of power in the Arab-Israel context.

To state the obvious, we are for the time being the dominant power in the region. Of course we are the super power and we're dominant throughout the world, but now as a result of our intervention we are in a position to wield immense influence in the region.

Secondly, the rogues, the erstwhile members of the axis of evil, those who oppose our interests and the interests of our friends in the Arab world or in Israel are now on the defensive. We only have to see how the Syrians have come to understand the new realities of the balance of power in the last week to understand the truth of that statement.

Iran too is on the defensive, and plays a more sophisticated game than Syria in this regard. It sees very big stakes for itself in the outcome in Iraq, and that's where it is focused. I do not see Hezbollah, or for that matter Islamic Jihad, the two proxies for Iranian policy in the [levant] in the Arab-Israeli arena doing much of anything at the moment because of Iran's understanding of the shift in the balance of power.

Secondly, in terms of the opportunity created, taking out Saddam Hussein's regime in such a quick and effective way in Iraq I think has had a powerful impact on the Arab world. Shibley has already detailed some of that and I won't elaborate on that except to give you one example of this. Anecdotal to be sure, but I think representative.

I was just at a conference in Doha, Qatar on democratization and free trade in the Arab world. I've been to a number of these kinds of conferences, and I know Shibley and others have over the last two years or year and a half since September 11th. Usually it's impossible to have a serious discussion about anything but the Palestinian issue. It's all Palestine all the time. Everything is explained in terms of the Arab intellectual discourse, in terms of our failure to do something about the Palestinian problem -- at least that was the case up until the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime.

Suddenly it's like the bubble has burst and the same Arab intellectuals are now confronting the reality of the failure of their system to produce and meet the needs of their people, and it expresses itself in this willingness for the first time to try to come to terms with the failings and the possible use of greater political freedoms, greater democratization, more political reform in their own societies as one important part of the answer.

The language has changed in their discourse. The willingness to admit the failings of their regimes is I think a clear by-product of what happened in Iraq. That too creates an opportunity for us in the Arab world.

Finally, there is the impact on the Israeli-Palestinian situation, which also benefits from what happened in Iraq.

First of all, as I've already pointed out, because the balance of power in the Arab world has shifted in favor of those who support the idea of reconciling with Israel. Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and against those who oppose it like Syria, Libya, and Iran, of course, not in the Arab world but very much opposed to it.

Secondly, and this is something that has been little remarked upon, Israel's specter of an Eastern Front threat has simply evaporated with the destruction of the Iraqi Army. Israel took the West Bank and held the West Bank and has held it for 30 years, not because of ideology, not

because this is the land that God gave to Israel. About 20 percent of Israelis believe that the West Bank has to be held for that reason. Eighty percent of them support holding onto the West Bank because of the security threat from a potential Eastern Front coalition. It doesn't exist any more and it's not likely to exist for the foreseeable future. What exists now is American control of Iraq and no Iraqi Army, a peace treaty with Jordan that is holding with a capable regime there to ensure security, and a ramshackle army in Syria that whatever Bashar Al Assad understands about the realities of power politics, his military surely understands that they can be taken down even more quickly than Saddam's army.

So that is going to impact on the Israeli calculus about what is possible these days. It comes also at a time when independent of what happens in Iraq, the Palestinians and Israelis are exhausted by the violence and the terrorism of the Intafada over the last two and a half years, and both sides are looking for a way out of this situation and looking to the United States to help lead them out of it.

The point here is that there is a symbiotic relationship between what we do in terms of advancing the democratic agenda in the Arab world and advancing the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and what happens in Iraq.

The more we succeed in Iraq in terms of post-war reconstruction the more that will help both by example and because of this broader impact on the balance of power in the region, advance those other two issues. And the more we succeed in the other two issues, the more that will help us in terms of our agenda in Iraq.

What's the strategy? Let me just quickly say.

First of all, the arm around Mubarak. You need to understand that what we've done has also created a great deal of insecurity and confusion amongst the Arab leadership, and amongst our friends in the Arab world, whom we have for the last two years wanted to do something about what we call the swamp that generated the terrorists who attacked us back on September 11th. And one of the conclusions that we have reached that is manifested in the Bush Administration's Middle East Partnership Initiative is that there needs to be greater political reform in the Arab world and nowhere is this more important than Egypt, because of its leadership role, because of its size, because of its influence in the Arab world.

But we have in Hosny Mubarak a leader who is confused and scared about how to move forward. We need to engage him personally and show him the way to open up his society, to allow civil society institutions greater freedom of expression, to reform his media, and to allow the political party process to develop in a way that will empower these other parties and open the political space for a democratization agenda.

Secondly, the arm around Sharon. He too, like Hosny Mubarak, is feeling insecure these days for a different reason. His concern is that Israel will be made to pay the price for our victory in Iraq and that concern is heightened by comments from our friends like Tony Blair who talks about even-handedness, who talks about the way in which Israel must be forced to make concessions.

On the other hand, as I've already suggested, there is an opportunity here and Sharon himself has indicated that he recognizes the opportunity by putting on the table a card which we need to pick up. The card, of course, was expressed in an interview which he gave last week in which he said he was prepared to evacuate some settlements in the context of a negotiated agreement.

The way we have to move forward here is just like with Mubarak, to sit down with Sharon and reach an understanding not about the road map. The road map is a side issue. The road map is simply another manifestation of the ceasefire plan worked out by George Tenet or the Mitchell recommendations of reciprocal steps in which the Palestinians act against the terror and violence and the Israelis start to withdraw their army and freeze their settlement activity. That's what needs to start happening on the ground. That's what could happen if Abu Mazen is successful in thwarting Arafat's attempts to undermine him, and appoints a Minister of Interior who is capable of acting on the security situation.

But beyond that, we have to reach an understanding with Sharon in particular about what is the objective here, the political objective, as opposed to these reciprocal confidence-building steps. Is it a summit of leaders that try to jump immediately to the implementation of a two-state solution? Or is it an interim agreement that would lead to the establishment of a Palestinian state with provisional borders but would put off for final status negotiations the final agreement?

If we go for an interim agreement I believe that if the President is serious about that and he sits with Sharon he can reach agreement with him on that in a way that would meet Palestinian requirements in the short to medium term for a viable first step of a Palestinian state with provisional borders in perhaps 55 percent of the West Bank and most of Gaza involving evacuation of some settlements, freezing of others, contiguous Palestinian territory from which the Israeli army would leave and not come back.

Thank you.

MR. POLLACK: Thank you, Martin.

Finally, I thought we should take an even broader perspective. We've just seen a manifestation of overwhelming American power and I think for many people this is a concern and for many others it is an aspect of hope. I thought we would turn to Seyom to ask why it is

that perhaps we ought to be a little bit more concerned about this manifestation of U.S. power than we might take at first glance.

Seyom?



MR. SEYOM BROWN: Thank you, Ken.

The complexities that my colleagues have pointed to I think point up the need to reopen the pre-war debate on when war is justified, how it should be fought, and what are the responsibilities post-war of the victor?

Wars, rationally calculated, premeditated wars, preventive wars, the kind that the United States has waged in Iraq or the war on terrorism are fought in order to establish control over otherwise chaotic or threatening situations. Wars of such kind, a premeditated war as distinct from wars of self defense after having been attacked or to counter imminent attack, look particularly tempting when one has overwhelming superiority in the instruments of warfare, giving one confidence in being able to quickly and decisively gain control over the battlefield to shock and awe the opponent, to make them throw down their arms, to flee or to surrender, and to do so with minimum casualties on our side and without great harm to non-combatants or to civilian society in the targeted country. Hey, we seem to be doing pretty well at that, huh? But caveat emptor, let the buyer beware.

The result of such triumphalism is to loosen the constraints against resorting to war, to reduce the burden of justification that says war must always be a last resort, must always be raised by proper authority, and must always pass the test of proportionality before the war is initiated.

We should be asking whether the new confidence in force as an instrument of diplomacy is a tool, is an appropriate tool, for exerting control over a chaotic world, whether the disposition to use force is warranted.

Now putting aside for a moment the issue of ragged military operations, somewhat sloppy infrastructure targeting in the Kosovo campaign, the mistaken bombing of the Chinese Embassy, the Tora Bora failure in Afghanistan, letting Osama bin Laden get away, and the paramilitary ambushes in Iraq, and the friendly fire casualties. Some of this can be chalked up as minor glitches.

We should, however, be focusing as my colleagues have been focusing, more on the aftermath of the war in each of the success cases in our evaluations of the efficacy of force in the first place, asking for example has a viable civic order been instituted? Has it been actually

emerging in Kosovo? Has reverse ethnic cleansing been averted? How stable is the peace in Bosnia? How stable is it going to be once the outside forces are removed? We should be asking about Afghanistan now that the TV cameras are turned away. What's really happening there? Is control worth the name really present in most of the country outside of Kabul? Are we sure the Taliban and even the al Qaeda have not been returning? And in Iraq, we're just beginning to experience the control problems of the aftermath. Here we won't be able to avert our eyes as quickly. The TV camera lenses will not be able to be taken away as rapidly as happened in Kosovo and Afghanistan.

We need to be wary, to guard against the illusion of super power control, which is a compound of four O's, I guess. Four illusionary O's. The illusion of omnipotence, the illusion of overwhelming force, the big O, the new cult of the offensive, and finally the illusion of omniscience.

The illusion of omnipotence, the first O, the uni-polar illusion, is that although others may scream and holler when we coerce them to do what we demand of them, they have no real alternative but ultimately to follow our lead. This illusion should have been shattered by the inability to get Security Council support when we needed it, and by Turkey's balking during the war.

Here I may be taking some issue as I go on with these illusions with the more optimistic assessment of Ambassador Indyk, but maybe we can have out at that in the discussion period.

The illusion of overwhelming force, the second O. Having demonstrated our military prowess and our will to go all out to get our way, the assumption is that others -- North Korea, the Syrians, perhaps the Cubans, maybe the Chinese in some future Taiwan crisis -- will back down. That what we've done is not to make war more likely, but to make war less likely. I suggest that is perhaps a very dangerous illusion on the basis of what has happened.

It's based partially on the success of the big O, my third illusion. The new cult of the offensive. Preemption plus shock and awe. That we can prevail quickly if we do have to fight by paralyzing the enemy with the speed and surprise of our military operations.

Then finally there is the illusion of omniscience, that we have found the answer to how to construct a stable, just and decent society and that we can teach it to others.

We heard a lot of criticism before the new Administration took power of mission creep associated with nationbuilding. It appears to me that now we're embracing the concept of civilization building. Perhaps mission creep should be transmuted into missionary creep for what we've taken on.

So I guess what I would like to end with, to leave as the imperative and then we can discuss it some more, is that rather than loosening the constraints against the resort to war, we ought to be retightening them. We ought to be enhancing the burdens of justification, to demand that war indeed be a last resort. Not necessarily chronologically a last resort, but the last of the legitimate alternatives after we have explored all other alternatives, and that it must always be waged by proper authority, and to make sure before engaging in the war that we have fully assessed the proportionality of what we are inflicting, including what happens in the aftermath.

MR. POLLACK: Thank you, Seyom.

We will take questions now.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

QUESTION: Peter Ganz, Refugees International. Thank you for your comments.

On the post-conflict security gap we have seen this before, it happened in Panama and Haiti and Kosovo. I think one thing that wasn't mentioned though that did happen and is a serious problem that's ongoing in Kosovo is the organized crime issue. Smuggling and other activities took place prior to the bombing campaign in Kosovo. Those same sort of activities have been taking place in Iraq. So my question is how is that going to play out?

A second thing is, Fundamentalist forces and factions have been filling some of the gap on this post-conflict security and civilian administration in the absence of it from anywhere else. We destroyed or took out the secular half of it. How is that going to play out as you have that ongoing?

MR. POLLACK: Eric, do you want to take a shot at the first, and Shibley do you want to talk a little bit about the second?

MR. SCHWARTZ: Sure. Thanks for your questions, Peter.

On the first issue I think post-conflict peace stabilization specialists, literature, people who have studied these issues carefully and those who are veterans of the post-conflict exercises of the '90s largely conclude that this issue of addressing criminal syndicates in the post-conflict environment may be the most challenging and most important of all the post-conflict issues because rule of law gaps and security gaps create enormous opportunities for basically the hijacking of post-conference societies. So while the Administration is moving forward over time on contracting out rule of law and administration of justice surveys and efforts to, there was in the paper the other day a request for proposals for contracts on these issues, those contracts and these efforts are going to have to include a very strong component dealing with this issue of

crime.

But my other concern about it is that these efforts are months away. Opportunities to create and to utilize these networks are going to come to the fore much sooner than that. So in any interim public security setup that the United States puts in place, there's going to have to be a strong focus on dealing with these crime issues. All the more important to get moving on interim law, interim regulations, and clearly establishing who's going to be doing law enforcement over the next six to twelve weeks.

MS. COHEN: I would add one small thing to that, and that is generally about criminality in Iraq right now. One wonders where are looters who are arrested, and some are arrested. Where are they being put? Who's holding them? Are there trials? What sort of legal system? How long will we be waiting? You never see that mentioned in the papers and it's a concern. We know that we're holding 6,000 POWs, but how do we deal with crime? There seems to be a slowness to get onto this. Criminal syndicates are down the road. Right now you have criminals being able to do a lot of other things in anarchy, so how are we going to deal with this?

Also when you speak of legal issues there's also the question of whether there will be created an international criminal tribunal for those who committed war crimes, crimes against humanity before the war, even during the war, and there will be debates about this that are important as well. Do we want to have a separate international tribunal set up for Iraq or do we want to have one that's both national and international?

QUESTION: My name is Malcolm Brown. I work for Feature Story News here in D.C.

I'm wondering on the issue of weapons of mass destruction which haven't been mentioned at all by anyone on the panel so far this morning, how important it is that weapons of mass destruction be found in Iraq or the capacity to build them in a substantial quantity for U.S. credibility in the region? And more broadly, when it addresses future issues.

MR. TELHAMI: I think it's extraordinarily important and I think frankly there are two reasons why people haven't yet focused on them much. One is the shock and awe, so to speak. People are still stunned into disbelief. Second is the focus on the brutality of the regime which I think is an important issue and clearly more is coming out on that and that's the reason.

But ultimately, as the dust settles, everyone obviously will remember what the actual explanation for this war was from the beginning, was they were hiding weapons of mass destruction and that the U.S. wasn't finding them. Even, by the way, if we find some, unless we find large quantities, it's still going to be a problem of faith in the evidence given that one have been found so far and especially if you look at the reality of it.

The fear was that this man would use them. There he was under three weeks of incredible bombardment. Probably if he survived he barely survived a couple of times at least in bombings, and there was not only no use of them, but obviously no preparation for use of them or else they would be readily discoverable.

So I think there is a major problem here and this problem is going to come back not only to haunt the U.S. in terms of how to explain what transpired, but also as you gear up to confront other countries who are being accused of having weapons of mass destruction, the issue of the evidence is going to become extremely important. The confidence in the intelligence, Blix yesterday was raising doubt about all the reliability of the intelligence information that was coming to the U.S.. The verdict is still out. There may still be something that we haven't discovered and everybody might be surprised.

But I think at this point frankly, given that none have been discovered the U.S. credibility is going to be enhanced by allowing international inspectors to join in the search at this point, rather than after they are discovered.

MR. POLLACK: Seyom, do you want to put this in a broader perspective for us in terms of credibility and use of force?

MR. BROWN: I actually would like to narrow it a little bit rather than broaden it.
[Laughter]

It appears to me that credibility is one problem, but there is also the reality of the possibility, the very real possibility, that not having discovered them they still exist. Not so much nuclear, but chemical and biological. And that casts doubt upon the earlier assumptions that moving in quickly with force is a better way to get at these weapons of mass destruction and allow for an enhanced and strengthened inspection regime in the first place. I think that is a problem that goes back to the original plans for the war but also creates a new security threat that we are not prepared to deal with perhaps adequately.

QUESTION: I have a question to ask about this morning's papers. On the one hand we read about General Garner and the change in the Health Minister the U.S. has made in the last week or two, and on the other hand we read of a million people in the streets of Karbala saying this is going to be our government. I wonder if any of you are willing to posit a guess on the likelihood of this U.S. transitional government ever actually taking over, and what your guess is of who in four months will be running Iraq?

I say that because I was in Iran a few years ago and I remember the folks there said they had no idea when they overthrew the Shah that they would end up with the Ayatollah, and they went through this era of fighting over these middle class secular alternatives and ended up with

the theocracy they have.

I'd be curious about your thoughts.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Realizing that cameras are rolling and my words are going to come back to me four or five months from now, with the understanding that I could be hopelessly wrong with respect to what I'm about to say. But number one, I believe that if there isn't a relatively strong transitional administration that is for some considerable period of time sort of non-Iraqi. Not that Iraqis shouldn't begin to stand up an interim authority, not that that authority shouldn't begin to be given responsibility by a transitional administrator, but ultimately I think for some considerable period of time there's going to have to be a strong transitional process leading ultimately to Iraqi sovereignty.

I think there is an alternative to that which is a quicker handover of sovereignty, but I think that will be an alternative that will frustrate United States objectives and I think also will be a greater invitation for a prolonged period of unrest in Iraq. So there, that's my view.

From that I would say that given, as I said before, the many conflicting claimants to power. Everyone and his brother standing up and saying I am mayor of this town, I am mayor of that town. That strikes me as all the more reason to put in place a process of forming an interim authority and moving toward ultimately a transfer of sovereignty that has a high degree of international credibility and credibility within the region. Especially when you have large numbers of people saying we're not going to recognize what the United States government does.

Finally, let me emphasize that our decision to do that does not mean that the United States forgoes its ability to influence the process. Look at the bond process relating to Afghanistan where the UN was the convener. And that process has a great deal of international legitimacy, the United States government played an overwhelmingly important role in influencing that process. That would be my answer to your question.

MS. COHEN: I would add that I was in the State Department in 1979 at the time of the Ayatollah Khomeini's coming in and the problems in Iran. I don't think it's necessarily inevitable, but I also have been reminded. Because as I saw the moderates being either killed or marginalized and put by the wayside one after the other, people that the State Department were grooming to take over Iran, I can't help but remember. But as I say, I don't necessarily think that's an inevitable sequence here.

I would agree with Eric, that you really need a multinational process if you want to have credibility and any staying power. Even the estimates given by the Pentagon of how long its own interim authority will stay in seems to be reducing by the day when you hear things like "Get out or we'll kick you out." It's gone I think from six months to three months.

I think it would really speak to having an international process. It doesn't have to be exactly like the Afghanistan one, but something that would bring in international authority, legitimacy so there would be some kind of confidence and credibility to this. Then you move on carefully to an Iraqi government that also will have some democratic credentials and so we don't just walk into a new Ayatollah situation.

MR. INDYK: I agree with Eric and Roberta but I think there's another dimension to this that we need to be focused on which is that we wield immense influence on the ground in Iraq as long as we're prepared to stay the course, as Eric and Roberta point out. And if you read those stories from the newspaper this morning you'll see in the details something very interesting, that those who would aspire to lead the Iraqi people seek to build their legitimacy in one of two ways.

The first is by being able to influence us. The mayor of Baghdad builds his legitimacy by being able to meet with us apparently, as he claims, at 5:00 o'clock every afternoon so he can deliver through us the needs of his would-be constituents.

The second way that influence is wielded we see in the newspaper reports is through the Shia clergy who have a parallel system of organizing their followers. This is developed over many years. It runs on money and the mosque system and the social and infrastructure system, that they have an ability to deliver on. They are in effect competitors with us in terms of delivery.

So we have to get rid of this naive notion that by turning on the lights and fixing the hospitals we are going to be able to build a moderate representative government in Iraq. We're going to have to play the old imperial game of divide and rule and the stakes could not be higher. Iranians intend to have a major say in who rules in Baghdad and we see that already. Our candidate for leadership of the Shias, Ayatollah Khomeini was murdered 24 hours after he hit the ground in Najaf. We put him in there, we failed to protect him. A major screw-up on our part. Why? Because he is a religious leader with secular thoughts. He believes in the separation of mosque and state and he's gone. We don't have another good candidate, although we could find them. But we have to play the game understanding that this is a dirty game at one level and that it's a game about delivering to the people, who delivers, who can build legitimacy. We have to play the different Shia leaders off against each other and we have to start to build leaders in the Sunni community who we can rely on in this regard.

MR. TELHAMI: Let me just say something sort of a little different than Martin. I think if that's the game we have to play, why stay? The real issue is you say --

MR. INDYK: Because we don't want an Ayatollah --

MR. TELHAMI: The reality of it is if we're going to have a non-democratic system with trouble down the road of being seen like the imperial powers who have had trouble playing this divide and rule, why even go that path altogether? I think that there are ways of avoiding that. In the short term you're going to have to allow Iraq to go through a process of pain. Democracy is a painful process and some people we don't like are going to be elected and they have to have space. The main thing is to have some safety guards planted into the system that will protect the interests of the outside powers in the short term.

I do think that what the U.S. does in providing service in the short term is important. I think providing humanitarian services -- food, electricity, water, all the essentials -- I think it will have an impact and I think that I am not really so sure that a divide and conquer strategy has a strong potential in Iraq, in part because I don't think -- Martin said very clearly at the outset, we have the staying power. I don't think we have the staying power. I don't think the American public has the imperialist stamina of a Britain.

And interestingly, by the way, not only is that shown here in America and we see it in sort of the public opinion in America, but in the Middle East actually. Why do people think the U.S. is out there maybe to weaken Arabs and Muslims or to protect oil? When you ask them about imperialism, they don't think America is an imperialistic nation. They actually don't have that.

I would say that looking at it from the point of view of grassroots politics, no question that in any foreseeable future what you're going to have is the religious groups are going to have the upper hand. Now you're right, ultimately it's resources, and resources matter, and the U.S. has a lot of resources. That's a lever. That's an important lever of inducement to influence the process in important ways. But we're not the only ones who have levers. There are a lot of foreign governments who are going to interfere. We mention Iran only as one. But every single neighbor of Iraq's, every single neighbor has a vital interest in what happens in Iraq. And they don't want us to succeed in a way that would hurt them.

We're going to be playing not only against factions within Iraq itself but outside of Iraq as well. The stakes are enormous and the task is very complex. It's much more sensible from my point of view, rather than to play that game down the road, is to have a much more modest objective. Bring in more multilateral institutions, not have free elections quickly. I don't think democracy is about having elections. Elections have also been used to legitimize authoritarianism, to legitimize dictators. It's a process. That's what democracy is. People want freedom a lot more than the actual trappings of democracy, and what you need to do is have a process in place perhaps starting off with local empowerment. Local empowerment rather than centralized empowerment. Having services provided, having representative institutions short of a full national election. There are all sorts of things that could be attempted that I think would get

us through, but the challenge is enormous and I think there is no silver bullet here. It's going to be tough no matter how you look at it.

MR. BROWN: I just want to echo Shibley's comments about the risks of a divide and rule strategy and we should be learning from our colonial brothers here. The French we don't like to listen to very much these days, but both the French and the British had their colonial experience. I think we will find that divide and rule strategies have not worked. They've created exactly the opposite kind of situation, and in this area of the world divide and rule is likely to produce bloodshed. Do we want that blood on our hands also? I would suggest that that is really the wrong way to go and we ought to be building connections with the majority population in Iraq.

To be sure, a lot of it is secular, but the influence of the Shia clergy is something that we can't simply dismiss. It appears to me that we have to learn how to work with it. We're new at this imperialistic game. Our only successful occupations have been Japan and Germany and I doubt that we played a divide and rule strategy in those two situations.

MR. INDYK: Let me just respond quickly. There's high politics and there's low politics. We're talking about the Middle East here. If we do not have a combination of both high politics and low politics, we will lose the game. We are engaged in the imperial endeavor. We have blood on our hands already. And the blood of the leaders that we wanted, reasonable people that would fit our framework are dead. So we need to wise up. If we are innocents abroad in this game, we will lose the game and that will redound not only to our disadvantage but to the disadvantage of moderate forces in the region.

QUESTION: Miles Benson with Newhouse Newspapers.

I hear repeatedly references to the rule of law as an essential part of this eventual rebuild. What body of law exists or what body of law is there going to be that is going to reflect this rule of law?

MS. COHEN: First of all, I couldn't tell you exactly what law exists in Iraq, but whatever law does exist for the past whatever years, it's certainly been violated every day and not implemented in any way. Those in charge of the legal system there, either judges or lawyers, I'm sure they are making themselves very scarce these days.

So I think what you do need to find are perhaps untainted lawyers and judges to first of all look at their own laws and then I think there has to be a process whereby that law is expanded to reflect what I would say are some international standards of law, and that would be international human rights law, basically; international criminal law. Then bring together—and this will also require some kind of laws, and constitution—a whole process that will bring

together, and train, of a new legal system. It's very important.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Iraq had a system of laws. They had I guess about a dozen courts, don't quote me on that. There was a Ba'thist constitution that eliminated separation of powers and the courts were under the thumb of the regime. There is an earlier constitution which I expect would serve as the basis of any review of Iraqi law.

In the near term what the military administrator in Iraq is going to have to do, what General Franks is going to have to do, he's going to have to issue a proclamation indicating what laws is applicable with what sort of variations, what it's going to be based on in the short term, and then over time they're going to get together with Iraqi jurists, some exiles as well as Americans and others and sort of go about looking at the Iraqi legal code, the Iraqi constitution and make judgments about what they're going to keep and what they're going to get rid of. Then that process would be ratified in some sort of political constituting process that ultimately results in a permanent Iraqi government. That's the long and short of it.

QUESTION: Mohammed Wahby, a columnist with the Al Mussawar Magazine.

Actually I would like to prompt some of you to talk about in what direction do you think this Administration is heading towards in the Arab-Israeli conflict. It's very important. This particular Administration. We all hear about the division inside. So which direction is it going to take?

Also the other one is there has been a tremendous release of religious fervor, even frenzy the last two days, and the head of the Hezbollah made an incredibly gripping speech yesterday, I hope Shibley might have heard of it, really trying to exploit this religious frenzy much beyond Iraq. So it's very very important.

MR. INDYK: Mohammed, you're right. This is a deeply divided Administration when it comes to foreign policy issues and none moreso than on the Arab-Israeli front, but what we've also seen in this Administration is when the President decides he wants to do something they usually fall into line. Usually.

It appears the President has decided he does want to do something on the Israeli-Palestinian front. Not just because Tony Blair has been telling him it's very important in the wake of the toppling of Saddam Hussein's regime and he is listening to Tony Blair because of what Tony Blair did for him in the run-up to the war. It's also important to him and he wants to do something because he sees in the appointment of Abu Mazen a vindication of the policy that he announced on June 24th last year in which he called for the Palestinians to appoint a new leadership. He sees them doing that now.

Of course if Arafat succeeds in undermining Abu Mazen in this process that's going to reach some kind of climax at 5:00 o'clock this afternoon when the deadline expires, then the President may have some second thoughts about it. But if the Palestinians come out with an empowered Prime Minister and Cabinet, with a reform-minded Cabinet capable of presenting a new leadership and a new partner for Israel and the United States, then I think we will see the President engage.

As I understand it he's told his principal advisors he wants not just to do something, but to do something big and they're now scratching their heads as to what exactly that would be. But you will notice that the Administration is not pushing the road map per se. They're saying look, the road map involves reciprocal steps. Both sides need to get moving on that. They are thinking about doing something bigger than that to jumpstart a negotiating process and so what happens in the next 24 hours on the Palestinian side I think will be critical in this regard.

There is one other factor that will be important, which is the domestic climate here. After all this President is very conscious of the fact that his father lost the elections after winning the last Gulf War and he's moving into an election season, and he has spent the last two years cultivating the Jewish community and solidifying his support in the Christian right. And he does not want to go into an election season, I think, with serious tensions with the government of Israel.

So if he doesn't get the empowered leadership on the Palestinian side and he sees major problems in trying to push ahead with the Israelis, then he may also back off. But if he gets the empowered leadership and if he does as I suggest and sits down with Sharon and works out an arrangement with him in which he makes it clear to Sharon he wants to move forward but that he will respect certain of Sharon's red lines, that is to go for an interim agreement rather than a final status deal, then I believe that he can resolve the problem of tensions with the Jewish community and therefore with the Christian right as well.

So there's a way forward but it depends on these developments.

MR. TELHAMI: I agree with Martin on two very important issues. One is there is an opportunity that comes out of the war. I think the Israelis and the Palestinians are looking for something and there is a chance for moving in some way. That I think is probably a three to six month opportunity that comes out of the war.

Second, that in our own debate, the factor is going to be the President. No question. There is a debate and there are differences within the Administration and they're obvious, but I think Martin is absolutely right about the President. Once he makes up his mind he seems to win the debate, the debate is over, and on this question the real issue is whether he in fact has made up his mind or not.

I think he probably has in the sense that clearly he has made a commitment to implementing the road map, he's made a commitment to a Palestinian state and things seem to be falling his way on the Palestinian side if a government emerges.

My worry is different. My assumption is the following. It is impossible to succeed in diplomacy, in mediation, unless this is a priority issue for the United States of America. It can't just be something to pursue.

The costs are enormous, the obstacles are too many. If you look at the road map, I think Martin and I probably could sit here and find about the 50 junctures in which you're going to have a crisis. Very quickly, just by looking at it. Every juncture you know you're going to have a crisis. And you're not going to overcome these crises, whether they're overseas or here, unless you are going to put the power of the presidency behind it.

Is this president willing to make this a priority not only for the next three months, but beyond the next three months, beyond the six months? Given not only that we're going to be entering into an election, but also given the fact that there are a lot of other issues on the agenda. Iraq isn't over yet and there will be a tremendous set of issues related to that. The issue pertaining to North Korea is obviously going to come back. We'll see what happens with diplomacy, but clearly that's a crisis that's not going to go away.

You're going to have the economy which is a major issue for the President now, obviously talking about President Bush One losing that was the other issue over which he lost the election and clearly it's going to matter a lot. Talking about broader debate within the Republican party, within the Administration about the shape of American foreign policy beyond that. What are we going to do? What is America's role in the world? Those issues I'm afraid are going to trump the Arab-Israeli issue and that's why I'm somewhat less pessimistic, I'm optimistic that something will start, but I'm not optimistic that something will be finished.

MR. POLLACK: Let me thank all of our panelists very much and thank all of you for coming and remind you that a transcript will be available on the Brookings web site later on today.

Thank you all very much. Have a good day.

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