THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

Press Briefing

THE ROAD MAP AND THE RECONSTRUCTION OF IRAQ:

WHERE DOES THE UNITED STATES GO FROM HERE?

Wednesday, September 3, 2003

Moderator: JAMES B. STEINBERG

Panelists: ROBERTA COHEN
MARTIN S. INDYK
FLYNT L. LEVERETT
KENNETH M. POLLACK

[TRANSCRIPT PRODUCED FROM A TAPE RECORDING]

P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. STEINBERG: Okay, well, good morning and welcome to Brookings, the first briefing of the new school year. I'm glad to see you all here. I hope you all had a good summer.

We have a very busy schedule of events coming up through the month of September, a lot of important foreign policy issues front and center right now, not least of which, of course, is the situation in the Middle East, in the greater Middle East. And we are fortunate this morning to have to talk about Iraq, the Middle East peace process, and the broader set of developments in the region our very strong Brookings team from the Saban Center and the Brookings Foreign Policy Studies Program to discuss the issues of the day.

But we're going to begin by talking about the situation in Iraq, first with Ken Pollack, who's the director of research at the Saban Center; and with Roberta Cohen, who's going to talk about the U.N. role there--Roberta's been very close to the people who have been involved in the U.N. operation--and discussing some of the challenges that the U.N. faces going forward in trying to carry out its role in the region. Then we'll turn to the Middle East peace process, with Martin Indyk, the director of the Saban Center, and finally, talk about the broader implications for the region of both Iraq and the developments in the peace process with Flynt Leverett, who's a visiting fellow here at the Saban Center at Brookings.

So rather than taking up more of their time, let's turn first to Ken, who's going to talk about the overall situation, political situation in Iraq.

MR. POLLACK: Thank you, Jim. Thank all of you for coming out this morning to talk about a whole number of dreary topics on a dreary day.

I thought I would talk a little bit about Iraq--where I see things going, where I'd like to see the United States heading. Let me start with the headlines; let me start with Najaf and the bombing and what it may mean.

Obviously, the bombing in Najaf was a very serious incident, and it has the potential to have a very serious impact on the country. That said, I think that the people who are already screaming Henny Penny, the sky is falling, this is the start of civil war, are really jumping the gun, to say the very least. There's no question that the event in Najaf could be the beginning of a process that leads eventually to civil war. That is certainly a path that we could see followed. I could come up with scenarios that take you from the Najaf bombing to an eventual Iraqi civil war. But I will also say that I see plenty of scenarios that lead in a whole variety of other directions.

Now, a key issue out there is who was responsible for the bombing. A better way to put it is who do the Iraqi Shia believe was responsible for the bombing? You're probably all aware that they've got a number of people in custody. It looks like there are as many as 19 people in custody. The claims are that all of them have confessed to being part of al Qaeda and confessed to being part of the bombing.

That's possible. It is conceivable that these guys were all part of the plot, and it's certainly conceivable that al Qaeda was behind the bomb. By the same token, I don't think that we should take this as a certainty. It certainly wouldn't be past the locals in Najaf to be coercing confessions out of people, coercing associations with people. So I don't think at this moment we can be certain that al Qaeda was responsible for the bomb.

If not, there are other possibilities. It may have been Saddam's loyalists; it may have been disgruntled Sunni tribesmen who don't believe that the reconstruction of Iraq in a peaceful fashion will be to their advantage. Alternatively, I think we need to continue to hold out the prospect that it could be another Shia group. We have seen quite a bit of intra-necine Shia conflict within Iraq, and that's not out of the question either--although the fact that it was outside the shrine of the Imam Ali does give me pause. That's one that I think any Shia group would be very reluctant to do; much more likely a Sunni group.

And in fact, the idea that it was al Qaeda does make more sense, because al Qaeda--for those of you who know anything about the group, have checked out their Web sites or their literature, you know that they're absolutely obsessed with Shiism. They believe that Shiism is apostasy. They regard Shiites with the same hatred--in fact, in some ways a greater hatred than they reserve for Jews, Christians, and others. So there is something to be said for al Qaeda being the ones behind it. It certainly does make sense.

In addition, I'd also say that if in fact al Qaeda was responsible for the attack, it may be, strange to say, the most benign of the possible explanations for what happened. If al Qaeda was responsible, it suggests that it was a foreign element, it was something outside Iraqi society that led to this attack. In some ways, that's about the best outcome that we, the United States, and anyone who is interested in the peaceful reconstruction of Iraq, can hope for. If it were something internal to Iraq, it would be much worse. If it were Saddam and his followers, if it were other Sunni tribesmen, that would be exactly the kind of thing which would undoubtedly cause other Shia inside of Iraq to seek revenge on Sunnis inside of Iraq. And it's that kind of a situation which are the kind of scenarios that I would see leading most easily to civil war.

Whereas if it is al Qaeda, as I said, if it's a foreign presence, if it's something external to Iraq, it will be possible for Shias--and most of the Shias are moderate--to look at most of the Sunnis, who are also moderate, and say they were not responsible for this and, therefore, while we are angry and want revenge, we should not be seeking it from our Sunni Iraqi brethren. It is from something outside. And in fact, it may be something that galvanizes greater Shia involvement to help the coalition effort to try to better secure Iraq's borders and to try to drive out these foreigners who are coming into Iraq.

And reports are that there are several thousand foreigners who have moved into Iraq associated with al Qaeda and other foreign terrorist groups. So if the bomb is seen to be the work of al Qaeda, it is entirely possible that it could move things in a more positive direction for exactly that reason.

Now, that's not to suggest that the situation in Iraq is rosy by any stretch of the imagination. You're already hearing lots of Shia very angry, very frustrated, blaming the United States indirectly for the bomb--recognizing that the United States wasn't necessarily responsible, although there are conspiracy theories that are out there that suggest the United States was directly responsible. But most of what you're hearing is Shia very angry and saying the United States was indirectly responsible because it created a climate of lawlessness in the country, because it tore down Saddam's security controls over the country and opened the country up to this lawlessness. It opened the country up to the foreigners moving into Iraq, who are able to perpetrate this kind of attack, and that therefore this is another sign that the reconstruction is failing.

To me, that is the most dangerous element of what's going on. And when I look out at the events over the last couple of months, the things that really stand out in my mind as being most troubling are not necessarily the bombing of the Jordanian embassy or even, for that matter, the bombing of the U.N. headquarters, tragic as each of those events was.

In my mind, what stands out are things like the riots that happened in Basra about six weeks ago and the kind of anger and frustration that you're hearing from so many Shia. Because what they're expressing is not antipathy to the United States. They're not expressing the desire, which I think you see caricatured in a lot of our media, that the U.S. should just get out. Instead, what you're hearing from them and what seems to be the consensus among the Shia is that the U.S. isn't doing enough, that the U.S. isn't doing the job right--that we're not committing the resources that we-- we don't know what we're doing, or that maybe we're doing it on purpose. And you're seeing those conspiracy theories as well: The United States is omnipotent. So if the lights aren't on, it must be because the United States wants the lights not to be on. This is the kind of thing which I see as being much more problematic for the United States.

These kind of terrorist attacks, they make headlines; certainly, they are tragic when people are killed. But they're not the kind of thing necessarily which could really undermine the cause of reconstruction itself. These other issues are exactly that. The growing disaffection among the Shia and the moderate Sunnis, who are the vast majority of the country, the growing sense that the United States doesn't know what it's doing and isn't going to be able to get the situation under control, those are the most dangerous trends for the United States. Because it's out of those kinds of sentiments that a sense could build within Iraq that the Americans are not making the situation better, that, yes, it may be wonderful that we got rid of Saddam for them, but clearly we are not going to do what it takes to stand Iraq back on its feet as a stable and prosperous society. And that is the kind of a trend that could cause the vast majority of Iraqis to at some point in time turn against the reconstruction effort as being simply incapable of providing for them what they feel that they should have, what they deserve.

A couple of quick points I'll close on in terms of where I think the United States should be going next. I'm not going to spend a whole lot of time on the need for an international presence. I've said this publicly any number of times going back many, many months, other people have as well, I think at this point in time it's a no-brainer, it's a very simple point. We don't have the troops, we don't have the personnel to deal with the reconstruction of Iraq. And, you know, we focus on the troops and that's critical because security is job one--and I know Roberta's going to talk more about this--but it does go beyond that.

You also have to look at things, like, in terms of building democracy in a country. We don't know how to do it. Where has the United States actually ever built democracy? The U.N. has done it. They did it in Cambodia, they did it in Timor to a certain extent; Kosovo, not nearly as well, but it was because of Kosovo that they learned about other places. The U.S. just doesn't have those people--Arabic speakers. We need Arabic speakers desperately. We simply don't have enough. So it's beyond just the troops. It's the full panoply of U.N. capabilities to rebuild a country, that the U.S. simply doesn't have, which the U.N. has built over the course of the last 10 or 15 years. All of that is necessary, and I don't see how you get that if the U.S. isn't willing to cede a considerable extent of the political control over this operation to the U.N.

A second point. There are successes out there. I hear from friends in the military -- friends in the Army and the other services--on a regular basis. They call me, they send me e-mails. And what I hear from them constantly is there are all kinds of local successes. You know, for me, that is really what's stood out about our military, how magnificent the United States armed forces is has been illustrated to me not so much by the conduct of the war, which I knew would go easily and quickly and smoothly, but by the conduct of the reconstruction, where you have soldiers out there in all of these Iraqi towns and villages who are frustrated because they see the problems and they want to do something about it, and they simply take matters into their own hands. And there are dozens and dozens, if not hundreds and hundreds of examples of little local success stories, where U.S. soldiers are getting out and interacting with the Iraqi people and helping them and turning on lights and purifying water and helping them to start up local democratic councils. They're all over the place.

But the problem is there's no one coordinating it. There is no one who's directing the operations, there is no one who is feeding them resources, there's no one who's learning from it, who's saying, you know, we heard about a battalion from the 101st Airborne who tried this out here in Amara, and it seemed to work really well; so you guys up in Beiji, why don't you try the same thing? No one in Baghdad, no one in Washington is doing that. So these guys are all left to their own devices. And as I said, there are lots of little local success stories. No one is really knitting those things together.

And the final thing that's out there, the last thing that I will mention in my opening remarks, is the absence of a plan. There's no plan. The absence of a plan is critical for a whole variety of reasons. No one has sat down and said here is how we intend to move

Iraq from where they are now to where we would like them to be two or three or five years down the road. That plan is problematic for the U.S. personnel who are out there in the field trying to make this stuff happen, because they don't really know where people want to go, they don't have a sense of what that long-term plan is, and so they're just kind of making it up as they go along, and coordinating with Baghdad or coordinating with Washington as best they possibly can on a very ad hoc basis.

It's very problematic, I think, for the rest of the world, who--they hear our rhetoric and they see what we're doing on the ground, but again, they have no idea what it is that we'd like to see happen, how we envision this process operating. So it makes other countries skeptical, it makes NGOs skeptical about what they can do, how they can fit into it, and what our intentions are.

And finally, it's also deeply problematic for the Iraqis, who just have no sense of how things are going to unfold. Many Iraqis are deeply frustrated because they don't feel like they have any control over the process. Now, I'll be honest with you. This idea of Iraqization, of turning things more and more over to the Iraqis is a lovely idea, but I'll be honest with you, I think that it in many ways is a very dangerous idea, because in every one of these countries over the last 15 years where we've seen a similar kind of reconstruction effort, the biggest problems were in turning things over to the indigenous populations too early. It's one of the reasons why Bosnia's a basket case today, because things moved too quickly there. And in fact, the lesson that we learned and applied in other places, like East Timor, was to do things slower.

But the absence of a plan really exacerbates this problem, because the Iraqis don't understand how it is that we intend to rebuild their country, and they see our efforts as being very high-handed. We don't tell them what we're doing, we don't tell them what we're going to do, we don't tell them what their future is. And that absence of a plan, I think, reinforces the sense among many Iraqis that they hope we're going to do the right thing, but they're not sure that we will. And that ambivalence leaves them in a position where they're not quite as willing to help us and support the reconstruction effort as we're going to need in the future.

MR. STEINBERG: Ken, on that last point, how is--what is the reaction within Iraq to the appointment of a new cabinet? Is this seen as a representative, effective way of beginning to bring in an Iraqi role? And in connection with that, the decision under the new interior minister to try to stand up an Iraqi security force--what are the prospects of that?

MR. POLLACK: Yeah, I want to be very modest here, Jim, because I think the honest answer is none of us really knows what Iraqi public opinion is at this point in time. You know, we've had, for example, the NDI study that went into Iraq and, I thought, did an excellent job at trying to gauge Iraqi public opinion, and most of the little snippets that I'm seeing do seem to conform to that. And the basic impression seems to be that the Governing Council itself is seen as--how do I put it?--there are very mixed feelings about that group. First of all, there are a whole lot of people on that group who most

Iraqis just don't know. They don't know who any of these people are, so they don't really know why it is that they're in these different positions.

Second, they don't know what authorities they're going to have, and so even the idea that you're going to stand up a cabinet, my guess is that that hasn't done a whole lot to convince Iraqis that this governing authority is actually going to have real powers.

And beyond that, they haven't seen them deliver anything. And from what I can tell from the little snippets that we're seeing from the NDI survey, from other things out there, that is the biggest problem that Iraqis see with this interim governing authority, which is that they're just not producing anything. They don't deliver on anything. So as a result, why on earth should anyone pay attention to what they're doing? I think there are probably some people who see this as a facade, as a sham that the United States is trying to put up. I think there are other people who see this as an effort by exiles in particular to grab control of the country and grab power.

And I think for other people, they look at it as just something that's out there but they really don't know what to make of it. And certainly they're not affecting the lives of the average Iraqi. And the one thing that does scream out from every little bit about Iraqi public opinion that we can find is that that's what really matters to the Iraqis. Until someone can actually affect their day-to-day life, they couldn't care less who they were--American, Iraqi, Brit, U.N., or otherwise.

MR. STEINBERG: Roberta?

MS. COHEN: Thank you. Well, mine are remarks that are mixed with personal sadness, because I knew Sergio Vieira de Mello and was a close colleague of Arthur Helton.

Before dying in the rubble at the Canal Hotel, de Mello is said to have called out, "Do not let them drive the U.N. out of Iraq." And U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan reinforced this by declaring that the U.N. will not be intimidated.

But the fact of the matter is that the deteriorating security situation in the center and south of the country is driving U.N. agencies and NGOs out of Iraq. The World Food Program, which has been overseeing food distribution to more than 60 percent of the population, has now sent much of its international staff to Jordan and has put on hold a vulnerability analysis to find out how many Iraqis will continue to need food rations after November, when WFP is supposed to turn the system over to the Ministry of Trade.

Other international humanitarian and development agencies have pulled out substantial international staff as well, including those working on health and water issues, on programs with refugees and displaced persons, on repairing electric power networks, on collecting data on reconstruction needs like the World Bank. Even the International

Committee of the Red Cross, which courageously stayed in Iraq before and during the war, has cut its international staff by half. "We cannot protect a population if we ourselves are not secure," it said. Of the nongovernmental organizations, Oxfam has pulled out and many others have evacuated international staff as well.

The impact will be considerable even though many of these organizations have local staff on the ground. Bear in mind, too, that the coalition authority's failure to date to adequately restore basic services--water, electricity, gasoline, sanitation, medical supplies--has already produced seething resentments overflowing into demonstrations. This can only get worse with the evacuation of international personnel.

While some American commentators complain that Iraqi expectations are too high, administration officials from the President down loudly promised Iraqis that their lives would be better once Saddam Hussein was gone. For now, at least, that is not the case in most of the country. Indeed, one can hardly speak seriously about the reconstruction of Iraq when the ICRC publicly states, "We cannot work in current conditions"; when insecurity makes it difficult for aid agencies to have full access to the country, including even in Baghdad; when roads are unsafe; when banditry and organized crime take a daily toll; and while terrorist acts have now begun to deliberately target the humanitarian and development community.

International pledging conferences for Iraq's reconstruction, should they take place, could easily go the way of Afghanistan, where millions--billions, rather, were pledged, but did not materialize, in large measure because of the absence of security.

What are the steps to take to protect aid workers and move reconstruction forward? Well, first, is an obvious one, that the United States must fully carry out its responsibility as the occupying power to create a secure environment for humanitarian relief and reconstruction. To be sure, the Governing Council and the Iraqi police should be strengthened and encouraged to assume more of a security role. But neither the Council, which has little authority, nor the unequipped and largely untrained Iraqi police, which also contain untrustworthy elements, can be expected at this time to fulfill this responsibility in the center and the south.

A statement of the World Food Program is most telling. Issued in mid-July, it points to a rise in shootings, lootings, attacks on its trucks after a handover by U.S. troops to Ministry of Trade guards, who have "insufficient" training, motivation, and equipment to effectively guard warehouses and silos. Moreover, some have not been paid. The WFP appealed to the coalition authority to intervene as the authority responsible for law and order in Iraq.

The U.S. has been far too slow and ambivalent about acknowledging that the current level of troops and police in Iraq is not enough to stabilize the country and protect major roads, food and medical installations, oil pipelines, borders, and the Governing Council itself. The U.S. has also been far too slow to acknowledge that an accommodation should be made with the United Nations so that the world community can become more

involved, especially Islamic countries, in helping to restore peace and security and move Iraq more quickly toward self-government. Indeed, the administration's reluctance to cede authority is drawing out the process of giving the U.N. a serious role in peacekeeping and reconstruction, even though it could be a means of enhancing legitimacy and security for the entire operation. And as Ken has already mentioned, the U.N. certainly has the expertise in this area.

It's also not clear in the U.S. whether there's any willingness to cede authority to the U.N. on the political reconstruction of Iraq. Calls for an international civilian police force for Iraq should be considered, because even accelerated recruitment and training programs for Iraqi police, military, and, now, paramilitary forces could take several years. Greater Governing Council involvement with the local population in community policing and security programs would be important. Despite the little success stories that Ken has mentioned, the Governing Council and also the CPA are always reported to be far too isolated from the population.

Coalition forces could also contribute to the protection of aid workers by collecting information relevant to their security. At present, the coalition evaluate security conditions on the basis of threats to coalition forces. But this information is often not relevant to the security issues facing the U.N. and NGOs.

The U.S. could also make security training and telecommunications equipment available on a voluntary basis to international humanitarian workers.

Finally, turning to the U.N., it itself must do a better job of protecting its own, not just in Iraq, but around the world. Since 1992, 243 U.N. personnel have been killed by what the U.N. calls malicious acts, and 270 have been taken hostage. Some of these incidents are unavoidable, but others could be prevented. I myself remember being sent by the U.N. to the Kenya-Somalia border in the mid-'90s, where I stayed several nights in a tent with pitifully little security during a time of high tension. Although the organization has become far more security conscious over the past few years, the United Nations Security Office still remains understaffed and under-funded.

There is also a mindset that requires reevaluation. Both U.N. and NGO personnel have long believed that their emblems, their neutrality, and their good works could guarantee their safety. But in today's conflicts, that's proving not to be the case. At the same time, humanitarian and development staff cannot just hunker down behind barricades and armed guards and expect to carry out their mission effectively. The balancing of security considerations with needed independence and access to populations has yet to be resolved.

There are at present 173 NGOs operating in Iraq. Most of their staffs have little training in security, and some are poorly equipped. Only seven are reported to have professional, full-time security advisors. Both the United Nations and the United States rely on these groups, as does the Iraqi population. Isn't it high time some serious efforts were made to enhance their security?

MR. STEINBERG: Thank you, Roberta. Roberta, the--you know, you talk about the concerns of the U.N. about the coalition forces not doing enough to provide for security, but there's always been this sort of ambivalence about the U.N. relying on forces like the coalition forces. Would it be different if the coalition were to have a U.N. mandate? Would that make the U.N. feel more comfortable about relying directly on those forces for security, or are they still going to have this uncomfortable relationship that may have contributed to the security problem at the U.N. headquarters?

MS. COHEN: In the first debate that goes on, I mean, with all the blaming between each side, I still do feel that the main responsibility in Iraq, as far as security goes, lies with the United States and that they really must take--should have taken more of a role in providing security for the United Nations and for all the groups that come in there that are there, really, to support what it is they're doing. I think they definitely have responsibility.

Yes, it's also true--I've mentioned that the humanitarians and the U.N. have a mindset where they don't want to be seen as so closely tied to the United States, and they certainly didn't want a lot of U.S. troops around there, although I understood there were U.S. troops in the front of the U.N. building. But as Kofi Annan said, even if the U.N. staff had declined more help, the U.S. really should have seen to its security. But that's not to say that the U.N. shouldn't see to its own. It very much has to see to its own.

As far as the U.N. going out there again, I would think they would need perhaps their own blue helmets to offer some protection of their staff. And I would think the U.N. would need a far more prominent role, because right now the U.N. in Iraq is in a secondary--it's sort of a sidekick to the United States, which I think is a--undermines their security, frankly, in this environment with a growing resentment of the occupation. If there were U.N.--if there was more of a clear role for U.N. peacekeepers and more of a sharing of responsibility with the U.N., and so that the U.N. could actually take ownership also of the political process in the country and have some of its peacekeeping forces out there, I think, yes, I think the U.N. would be in a better position to at least feel that they might be better protected under those circumstances. But nobody entirely knows.

MR. STEINBERG: Are we likely to see a successor to Vieira de Mello playing that same kind of role going forward?

MS. COHEN: Well, I would hope that any successor to Vieira de Mello would have a much stronger and more delineated role in what they would be doing. I mean, de Mello is one of the brightest and the best that the U.N. had to offer. And he could take the kind of mandate that was given him, which was extremely vague--I mean, to "assist," to--the language, even--you would really have to be quite shrewd to figure out what it meant that you were supposed to be doing out there. I think you really need to have a clear mandate, with the United Nations given the primary role, in my opinion, over the political transition process and with a role as well in the peacekeeping part; and I think

that the successor ought to have this very clear piece of paper, unlike the terms of reference for Sergio that--I mean, people would joke about what does this mean and how could you possibly carry this out?--but where the U.N. really has a full partnership.

And I would note, I mean, as Ken mentioned, the various places in the world--there really is no other conflict situation where the U.N. is put in this utterly almost contemptuous secondary role. And I think part of the problem is that there's been a confusion between the Security Council and the Administration's misgivings about the Security Council and the U.N. proper and all its agencies, humanitarian and development, that are absolutely essential to the whole reconstruction of the country.

MR. STEINBERG: Well, turning from one bright and optimistic portrait that our scholars have painted to another--Martin, the road map.

MR. INDYK: Well, in comparison, things are going great. Yasser Arafat just declared last night off-camera, to CNN, that the road map is dead. I find myself in the awkward position of agreeing with him.

If in fact it's dead, who killed it? If we try to address that question, we come up with familiar explanations: The Palestinians and Israelis failed to live up to their commitments under Phase 1 of the road map; the United States was unwilling to call them on those failures; and as a result, the process was vulnerable to the next terrorist attack, which wasn't long in coming. It's in a way just exactly what has been said about why the Oslo process collapsed, although that took a lot longer.

But this road map was supposed to have been different to the Oslo process. There was a new Palestinian leader in Abu Mazen, who spoke out against terrorism to his own people. There was an Israeli leadership, not of the left but of the right, with broad political support, with a prime minister who was arguing that it was in Israel's interest to establish a Palestinian state with contiguity, meaning that in fact settlements would have to be evacuated. And of course we had the involvement of the--personal involvement of the President of the United States. That was true under the Oslo Agreements, too, with President Clinton, but in this case there was a new strategic context, a new opportunity, the President told us, because of what had happened in Iraq. Condoleezza Rice was given responsibility, the action moved to the White House, a new ambassador was sent out there, separated from the embassy in Tel Aviv or the consulate in Jerusalem. So the whole structure of U.S. involvement was supposedly trying to be different.

And yet, we still ended up with the same result. And I think the reason for this comes down to one very straightforward flaw in the process, which was not addressed, and that was the lack of capacity and the lack of political will on the Palestinian side to confront the terrorists and dismantle their infrastructure as was called for in the road map.

That fundamental flaw, the fundamental lack of capacity, produced a Catch 22 situation. Abu Mazen, lacking the capacity, facing an effort by Arafat to undermine him at every step of the way, needed Palestinian popular support to act against the terrorist organizations. He could only acquire that popular support if Israel were prepared to pull the army out of Palestinian cities and towns, remove the check points, remove the settler outposts, and release significant numbers of prisoners. But Israel could and would only act to do those kinds of things if Abu Mazen acted against the terrorists.

So what we had was this vicious circle, which the United States failed to break. One could argue that perhaps it was impossible to break it, but we certainly didn't try very hard. The CIA did a fairly miserable job of trying to build the Palestinian security capacity. The White House did nothing until just last week, when it was too late, to try to force Yasser Arafat to hand over control of the seven out of nine of the security services that he retained control for by making it very difficult for Abu Mazen to develop the capacity to act against the terrorist infrastructure. And despite the fact that we created a new mission under Ambassador Wolf, we really didn't do anything to develop the kind of small reciprocal steps that both sides would take to break this vicious circle, and that we would guarantee that they would take, that we would monitor the taking of these steps and that we would call them on it publicly if they didn't take those steps.

Indeed, it's hard to fathom exactly what we've been doing over the last couple of months. The reversal of the hope that lay in the road map did not start with the new round of terrorism and Israeli responses, it started here at the end of July, when President Bush hosted both Prime Minister Sharon and Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas, and nothing was done as a result of those meetings. They turned out to be photo opportunities. There was no greater U.S. involvement nor of momentum instilled in the process, and you can see very clearly--I won't bore you with all the details--how the process began to unravel from that moment of demonstrated ineffectiveness on the part of the United States. But even if we'd been effective, it seems to me, still it's very hard to see that we would have been able, in the short time available, to correct this fundamental flaw in the road map.

So I'm afraid that it's back to business as usual--the Israelis pursuing a policy of targeted assassinations against the terrorist organizations, talking again of going into Gaza with tanks and APCs in some kind of major operation to uproot the terrorist infrastructure there, and of course talk again in Israel of getting rid of Yasser Arafat. Hamas is busy avowing that it's going to take revenge. Arafat is doing his best to undermine Abu Mazen--he might just succeed tomorrow in the legislative council. President Bush walking away from the process, understandably focused on Iraq. And Egypt quietly trying to broker a new cease-fire between the various Palestinian factions. It seems to me that none of these things are going to do much to reverse what seems an inevitable slide back into the abyss of violence and terrorism.

And here, the problems we face in Iraq--I won't pre-empt Flynt, because I assume he'll talk about this--but the problems we face in Iraq is also reinforcing this negative trend,

because our efficacy in this process is affected--the image of our efficacy is affected by the problems that we're having in Iraq as well.

But short-term pessimism I want to try to relieve a little by what I see as a longer-term optimism that is based on my observation at close hand. I had the opportunity to spend six weeks in Jerusalem over the summer, and there, closer to the ground, it's possible to see a longer-term trend developing on the Palestinian side, which I believe will address this fundamental question of a lack of an effective and responsible partner on the Palestinian side. And it's a process that is going ahead, in a way, regardless of what it is that we do or don't do.

This trend is what I would call a quiet revolution in Palestinian politics. It is visible, if you look closely, in the alliance that has been developed between the what I will refer to--is commonly referred to over there--as the young guard amongst the Palestinians and the Palestinian reformers.

First of all, the reformers. They're most visible in the Palestinian finance minister, Salam Fayyad, and the other reformers in the legislative council who support him. Fayyad is the only one in the Palestinian Authority who has been able to do anything effective on the ground. It's actually an interesting contrast with what Ken was saying about the ineffectiveness, or the fecklessness, of the Iraqi Council, their inability to do anything to affect the lives of Iraqi people. Well, Salam Fayyad is actually doing things that have a direct impact on the lives of the Palestinian people.

He's taken control of the monopolies--monopolies of petroleum, gas, concrete, imports of flour--and taken away that control from Arafat's cronies. The impact is to deliver a much better product to the Palestinian people at a much lower price. And Salam Fayyad, as a result, is becoming quite popular amongst the Palestinians. They like this kind of economic reform. He's also taken away the system whereby the 30,000 Palestinian security people and the other 70,000 Palestinian civil servants now receive their pay directly from the Palestinian finance ministry directly into their bank accounts. So the system whereby they receive their pay in paper bags, in which half the cash was taken out by their bosses, or the bosses of the bosses, is no longer functioning anymore. People are getting more pay, and that, of course, is improving morale.

Salam Fayyad was the one who froze the Hamas and Islamic Jihad bank accounts last week while Palestinian security services were still trying to hire taxis to get their people to Bet Hanoun in northern Gaza to try to, ineffectively, stop the rocket fire into Israel.

This is part of a process that has been underway for several months now of, in effect, cleaning out the economic stable. And that process, if backed by a political reform process, actually is a reason for hope that the situation amongst the Palestinians is going to change.

Salam Fayyad, it's very interesting to watch him operate. He drives around in a taxi. He has no bodyguards. And yet, he's taking away real power from the abus, from the old

guard around Arafat. He's able to do this because he has the backing of what's called the young guard. The young guard are the Tunsian [ph] youth--younger generation; not youth anymore. They were the ones who launched the first intifada back in the 1980s, with stones. They were the ones that launched the second intifada. In between times, they were cut out of the political process by the Oslo Agreement, which brought the abus under Yasser Arafat back into the territories and established this corrupt and tyrannical regime under Arafat's control.

The second intifada which this young guard launched was an intifada, an uprising not only against Israeli occupation but also against the rule of the abus, Arafat's arbitrary and corrupt rule. And now, they negotiated the hudna, the cease-fire, with their erstwhile allies amongst the Hamas and Islamic Jihad. And they are determined to get a piece of the action this time, in effect to take control of the Palestinian political institutions. And that's why they have formed this alliance with the reformers. The reformers do not have much legitimacy amongst the street, the people, although Salam Fayyad is beginning to build that for himself. But the young guard has legitimacy because they fought, they struggled, they spent time in prison, and they have a much greater support amongst the people.

So this combination of reformers and young guard, this alliance, has the potential to change the political balance of power amongst the Palestinians in a way that could have, I think, some very positive consequences.

The interesting thing about the reformers and the young guard is that they agree that what is needed now is not negotiations with Israel. They have little time for the road map. Negotiations with Israel only helps to relegitimize the very people that they were rebelling against. It's the abus who come to Washington or go to Aqaba and get all the attention; it's the young guard who are left out in the cold in this process. But more than that, they argue, all that Israel will give them through negotiations in these circumstances is the crumbs--a few prisoners, a few outposts, a few check points, but Israel will never be prepared to respond with a spirit of generosity as long as the old system is still in place.

And they're right about that. What they want to do is to take responsibility, clean out the stables, push this political and economic reform process so that they will become empowered, and then take responsibility. Instead of playing the victim, which the others have become experts at, the reformers and the young guard talk about taking responsibility. Because in the process of taking responsibility, they argue, that then Israel and the United States will have no choice but to respond to them as responsible partners.

So in my view, while the United States should do what it can to resurrect the road map, should be prepared for greater intervention if the situation explodes, as it probably will in the next few weeks, it's much more important to support this longer-term process of reform in the political and economic institutions on the Palestinian side, because we have people to work with who have the right stuff, who have legitimacy amongst their

people. And in the process, even though it may take quite some time, we can correct the fundamental flaw in the road map and indeed in the Oslo process itself by producing a responsible partner and a legitimate partner that is committed to making peace with Israel, to which Israel and the United States can then respond.

Thank you.

MR. STEINBERG: Martin, coming back to the short term for a minute, as you look at the coming weeks and months, if the road map is in fact over, is there any future for Abu Mazen absent the road map? And also absent the road map, what happens to the sort of cycle that existed before the road map, that is, the pressure on the Israelis to go in--every time there's a new attack, go further into the West Bank, maybe this time to go into Gaza? You know, we just--is this, sort of, are we going to be back to Arafat and the Sharon-Arafat dynamic?

MR. INDYK: Well, as far as Abu Mazen, I mean, he probably will survive--famous last words, but I suspect he'll survive the vote of confidence if indeed one is taken. And they will find a way, and the abus are very good at this, of reconciling, having a [inaudible] between Arafat and Abu Mazen--Abu Alla is already working this--and then it will be kind of return to business as usual. Abu Mazen may get a little bit more of a boost from us. We may take a greater hand in trying to direct him to do the kinds of things--the very things that Salam Fayyad is doing on his own. We may get more active in terms of building their capacity to confront terrorists. They may be prepared to do more in that regard, but it's, I think, very marginal. It may just kind of go on life support for awhile. But it's very hard to see how this process is actually going to produce the kind of meaningful steps that are going to get us into Phase 2 of the road map and the Palestinian State with provisional borders and so on.

And don't forget that the United States is preoccupied. It would be different if things were going fine in Iraq. But Iraq is obviously going to be Topic A here, and there's going to be very little time and very little willingness to spend political capital. I think it's unfortunate, but it's true to say that along with the president's preoccupation with Iraq has come a disillusionment with Abu Mazen. So I don't expect that we're going to see a major effort by the United States to kind of pump him up in a way that would give him great chances here.

As for what happens, then, in--I think there's--that other dynamic that you talked about, is very real. The Israelis believe that targeted assassinations is putting heavy pressure on Hamas, and they may well be right in this; but the pressure that it's putting on Hamas may lead to some mega-terrorist attacks like we saw in Jerusalem a couple of weeks ago. And then the Israelis will go into Gaza, I think, this time, and they probably will kick Arafat out. So we could have, just when we don't want it, an explosion. And that would require us to intervene more actively just when we don't want to. But even if we do intervene and even if we do kind of patch things up again in Israel, get the Israelis to pull out and get another cease-fire going and so on, unless we do something about correcting

the structural floor, it's just going to be back to the same problem we've been plagued with for the last 12 years.

MR. STEINBERG: Flynt, the war in Iraq was supposed to unleash a new era in the Middle East. It was supposed to be the inauguration of the spread of democracy, a new impetus for peace around the region, greater willingness to accept the visions of the United States for the region--what's happened?

MR. LEVERETT: Well, I think, to say the least, that that strategic assumption has been called into serious question by recent events.

I think what I'd like to do is play off of the presentations that we've heard this morning on both the Arab-Israeli situation and Iraq, and look at the region through precisely that prism, a kind of broader strategic prism of the war on terror. That is supposed to be what is animating the Bush administration's policy throughout the region. It's obviously the justification for the war on Iraq, it is the justification for what we're trying to do to promote democratization and other types of liberalization in the Arab world, and what we say we're doing on the Israeli-Palestinian front is also linked to that as an exercise in building a democratic Palestinian state that could live in peace and security with Israel.

And I want to ask the question, do all of these pieces add up to a coherent strategy for the war on terror? And my answer at this point is that they do not. If you look at the various pieces, look first of all at the states where we have intervened militarily to depose terrorist-supporting regimes in Afghanistan and in Iraq, what we see at this point is the same pattern in both places: We fight the war very well, but we display a mix of indifference and incompetence at managing the post-war environment.

And I don't just want to engage in some gratuitous bashing of the Administration in making that argument. I think it is traceable to a serious intellectual deficit, or conceptual deficit, at the heart of the policy. There is no single, over-arching concept to guide our use of military force in the war on terror.

In Afghanistan, we seem to be employing what I would describe as a failed-state paradigm. Afghanistan seemed to be emblematic of the kind of failed-state environment in which terrorist movements such as al Qaeda could take root and flourish. The Taliban seemed emblematic of the kind of horrible regime that could establish itself in that sort of environment and link itself to a transnational terror movement. And the war in Afghanistan seemed to be about rectifying that sort of situation, about overthrowing the regime, rooting out the terrorist network that had taken root in this failed state, and building something better in its place.

That also seemed to be, in the immediate aftermath of Afghanistan, the paradigm we were going to follow elsewhere, possibly in Yemen, possibly in the Philippines, where we were going to work with regimes that were, in varying degrees, perhaps willing--but

not really able--to deal with terrorist-supporting environments within their own borders. But we abandoned that paradigm, I think prematurely, in order to ramp up for the war in Iraq. And we shifted the paradigm from a failed-state paradigm to a paradigm that focused on the nexus between WMD capabilities and a regime that had links to terror networks. That seemed to be the new paradigm for using force in the war on terror.

But obviously a paradigm that only covers single cases isn't really a paradigm. And I think part of the problem that we have is we don't have an over-arching conceptual framework to guide our use of force in the war on terror. And as a result, we find ourselves in situations where we fight the war well, but we really don't seem to know what we're doing in the post-war environment. I think that characterizes what's going on in Afghanistan and what's going on in Iraq.

Look also at our dealings with states that we've designated as state sponsors but where we've not--at least not yet--intervened militarily. Iran and Syria loom very large in this climate. I think the administration would like to try to link Iran and Syria to the difficulties that it's facing both in Iraq and on the Arab-Israeli front, but it doesn't really have a strategy for dealing with either of these states in order to get them to reverse problematic behaviors--behaviors that make it more difficult to make progress on the Arab-Israeli front and behaviors that may be contributing, at least at the margins, to the difficulties that we face in Iraq.

Both Syria and Iran have been very impressed, to say the least, by the effective display of our military prowess in both Afghanistan and Iraq. But I think it's also true that those states have seen the kind of mess that we've gotten ourselves into in Afghanistan and in Iraq, and they see the lack of a coherent alternative strategy for trying to induce them to change their behaviors. And certainly in the Syrian case, and I think possibly also to some degree in the Iranian case, these regimes are judging that, at least for the moment, they have dodged the bullet. There really is no coherent pressure, no coherent strategy at work to get them to change their problematic behaviors.

On the Arab-Israeli front, I agree overwhelmingly with everything that Martin said. The only thing with which I might take some issue--and it's really a matter of nuance--he talked about the road map being dead. I certainly agree it was dead, but I'm not really sure it's all that useful to talk about what killed it because, as someone who had a fairly significant hand in putting the road map together when I was in the administration, I think quite frankly it was stillborn. It was never really a live prospect.

The road map was created, really, it was drafted--most of the diplomatic work was done on its substance in 2002, before the Iraq war. And it was done with an eye, frankly, to giving the Administration a defensible position on the Palestinian issue that would help it with the pre-war diplomacy. But the Administration, for various reasons, backed off of promulgating a road map before the end of 2002 and put it on the shelf, to be taken off several months later, almost six months later, in fact, after the war in Iraq had been fought. And again, as Jim Steinberg pointed out, there is kind of an assumption, the

cause or logic of which always eluded me, but there was an assumption that after you fought the Iraq war it was going to be easier to do this.

Well, in fact, I think the timing was exactly backwards. The road map might have served a constructive purpose if it had been put out before the war as a kind of place-holder and an indicator of what the Administration would be prepared to do once the war was over. But the way it was handled, it didn't come out until after the war, and it came out in an environment in which it was too late and not up to the task that it was being asked to perform. So again, I think there is also very poor strategic construction going on in the way that the approach to handling the Palestinian issue was related to the way that the Administration planned for the war in Iraq.

And I would just conclude, if my basic argument here is that at this point the Administration doesn't have, really, a coherent strategy for the war on terror or its larger project in the Middle East, I would just ask if Phase 1 of the war on terror was Afghanistan, Phase 2 in the war on terror was Iraq, can anyone tell me at this point what is the administration's simple, coherent answer for what Phase 3 on the war on terror is? I don't think that they have one. And I think that we're seeing the lack of a strategy in the kinds of difficulties we're encountering in the Arab-Israeli front, in the Iraq situation, and in the failure to relate those developments to one another or to other important issues that are boiling out there in there region--Iran, Syria, other issues.

Thank you.

MR. STEINBERG: Flynt, one potential candidate for that third phase of the war, at least in the minds of some, I think, in the Administration, is Saudi Arabia. And I wonder how you see the efforts of the Administration to deal with the Saudis now and how events in both Iraq and the Middle East peace process have affected the ability of the Saudis to try to take on that challenge.

MR. LEVERETT: Well, I think the Administration has both an immediate issue with Saudi Arabia, namely counter-terrorism cooperation, and it has a larger issue with Saudi Arabia--how to encourage the kinds of internal reforms in the kingdom that are going to be essential to keeping some kind of stable and pro-Western regime in place over the long run.

On the counterterrorism front, I think that they have made some progress. I think even before the May 12th bombings, we had been able to achieve some useful things with the Saudis--more action on financial controls, more action to impose oversight on charities. Obviously there's more to be done on both of those fronts, but I think the trend line was positive. After May 12th, I think, the Saudis themselves have shown a willingness to do things that they weren't willing to do before, because they realized this is a problem that's directed at them. But again, I don't really see a coherent vision or plan for what it is that we want to achieve with the Saudis on the CT front. And I think in terms of encouraging an effective reform process in the kingdom, we really don't have a strategy or plan, or plan at all, and I think that's a big long-run danger for U.S. interests.

MR. STEINBERG: Okay, let's turn to the audience. I think we have mikes coming around, if you could just stand and identify yourself when you're called on. Susan?

QUESTION: I'm Susan Page with USA Today. For the Middle East side of the panel, I wonder are there consequences for the Bush administration if the road map is dead and the Administration is either unwilling or unable to get re-engaged in an effective way in that process, at least for the rest of President Bush's term, this first term?

MR. INDYK: Well, I think, obviously it being the political season, the first question is are there political consequences here. I don't think they're very serious. It adds to this sense of inefficacy, the argument that the Administration doesn't have an effective foreign policy. And since that has been the President's strong suit over the last couple of years, it doesn't help in that regard. But it's not really being seen as a major issue. And it, of course, has always had the downside of, if it was really moving forward, it might involve the United States' intentions with Israel, which in a political year might not be very welcome--the President might not be prepared to run that gauntlet.

So I don't think that that's been decisive in anything that's happened, but on the political front, I'd say it's more or less a wash. If it explodes, as it may well, then there's going to be pressure on the President to come in and do something. And he'll manage to tamp it down again, I guess, but beyond that I don't see that he's going to come under a lot of political pressure to produce the two-state solution that he put out there as his vision in the next year.

Do you want to respond on the--

QUESTION: [Off microphone, inaudible] repercussions [inaudible]?

MR. INDYK: Yeah, I was going to kick it to Flynt to talk about a regional implication.

MR. LEVERETT: Yeah, I think there are implications in the region in that--and this gets a little bit to Jim's question on Saudi Arabia as well. For our dealings with key moderate allies in the Arab world--our dealings with Egypt, our dealings with the Saudis, for example--I think that the failure of the road map, particularly failure that is attributable at least in part to a kind of lackluster effort at implementing the road map on the part of the Administration, is bound to have an impact on the ability and willingness of these moderate regimes to cooperate with us as much as we would like on other issues.

I think it also reinforces the impression, not just for publics throughout the region but also some of the more problematic regimes like those in Iran and Syria, that the United States is--at least this Administration--is not really serious about pursuing anything other than, let's say, a neocon agenda in the region. If you talk to Arab intellectuals, if you talk to Iranian intellectuals, the dominant critique of this Administration that you get is that it is dominated by neocons. This is why they can't see their way clear to do

something serious on the Palestinian issue; this is why they won't try and reach some kind of diplomatic resolution for the Iranian nuclear crisis, for example. And it reinforces that impression on the part of Arab and regional publics. And I think that has an implication, too, in that it reinforces a sense that it doesn't really pay to try and work with or cooperate with this administration--because on the issues that matter to us in the region, they're not going to come through.

QUESTION: Randy Mikkelsen with Reuters. Apparently President Bush has decided to give Colin Powell the go-ahead to negotiate a new U.N. resolution on Iraq. I'm wondering what you see as the prospects for a meaningful resolution, and what's been lost by not having one sooner?

MR. POLLACK: I think, actually, Randy, the second part of your question is a good place to start, which is that, you know, it's nice that the Administration is kind of finally coming around to what was blatantly obvious to everybody else for, you know, at least a year beforehand. I think that there are still things that can be done along those lines. I think that it is still possible to make real progress and bring in the U.N. in a meaningful way.

But it's important to recognize that the hand that the U.S. has to play right now is much weaker than it might have been had we done this either beforehand or, at the very least, immediately afterwards. In those few weeks after the fall of Baghdad, most of our allies were coming back to us and saying, look, clean slate; we had our differences before the war, but the war is now over; we want to mend fences, we want to be part of the reconstruction, we want to help. And the Administration stiffed them and basically told them it's our way or the highway.

Now it's several months later, and we're having a hard time in Iraq. And there are a lot of countries which, A, feel like we're getting our come-uppance for our arrogant behavior immediately after the war, and who also feel like, well, you know, gee, do we really want to get involved in this--things have deteriorated considerably. And I will just say that I don't think that this was inevitable by any stretch of the imagination. I do not think that the situation that we are in now was inevitable. I think that if we had handled things differently right from the get-go, we could be in a very different position today. But the fact of the matter is that we are in a very difficult position inside of Iraq and there are a lot of countries which I think would have been much more willing to contribute ahead of time than there are going to be today.

And I think that kind of frames the answer to the first part of your question, which is I think that unless the administration is willing to surrender very real political power to the United Nations, which, as I think Roberta and I were both suggesting, would actually be beneficial--because the U.N. knows how to do things that we don't necessarily know how to do, and also can call on resources that we can't call on--unless the Administration is really willing to do that, it is going to be very difficult to get meaningful support from the United Nations.

You know, the initial tactic that the Administration tried last week or the week before, right after the U.N. bombing, was they said we're going to go back to the U.N. and we're going to ask for more troops--which, you know, I equated with basically when you're in a foreign country and you don't speak the language, you try saying something repeatedly but louder and slower in the hope that somehow that's going to be meaningful. It was the same thing. The Administration wasn't changing what it was saying; it was simply doing it louder and slower. Now it sounds like they're actually going to try to use a few words in the foreign language. But, you know, we have yet to see what that actually means.

You know, I remember when the administration told Colin Powell that they were going to give him a meaningful chance to really bring the United Nations on board with the war. That didn't quite work out as I think that Colin Powell believed when he first got that green light from the President. So if we're all waiting to see what this actually means, if the Administration is serious and they're willing to go back to the Security Council and say, all right, we're ready to bring in a new SRSG and give that person real authority over the political development of Iraq, under those circumstances I think that you will see Security Council members coming back and saying, all right, that's good, now let's talk about how we make this work. On the other hand, if the Administration is still not willing to be realistic about that, my guess is that you're going to see the countries like France and Germany and Russia and India continue to say the Americans are just not serious yet.

MR. STEINBERG: Just for those of you who are academically challenged, and SRSG is a special representative of the Secretary General.

MS. COHEN: That's good. I agree with what you said.

QUESTION: Jim Burne [sp], Community Development Publications. I'd be intrigued to know the views of both Mr. Pollack and Mr. Leverett--given your CIA background, I'm sure your sources there are very excellent even today, what's your feeling as to--are we getting, as an intelligence operation, are we getting our arms around really being able to go after al Qaeda and the other major terrorist organizations?

MR. LEVERETT: I think that there have been some significant problems in the way that intelligence has been handled in this administration and the room that intelligence has been given to influence decision making in the policy process. Al Qaeda, obviously, any terrorist network but certainly al Qaeda, is a very, very hard target. Nevertheless, there has been a really dramatic upgrading in the level of intelligence effort that's gone into the al Qaeda target and into the counterterrorism problem generally over the last couple of years. I mean it really has been dramatic in terms of bringing more resources in, shifting resources within existing structures, creating new structures in the intelligence community. There has been a really serious effort.

But there is--intelligence always operates in a policy vacuum--in a policy context, and that's true whether there is--you're talking about operations, where you're actually trying

to take down some kind of terrorist capability, or whether you're talking about the analytic side of the intelligence business. And I think on both those fronts, both those levels, there have been some problems in the way that policy makers in this administration have interacted with the intelligence community.

And, you know, many of the problems that we're dealing with in Iraq right now, it's not as if the intelligence community didn't warn, didn't advise, didn't write all kinds of papers and other sorts of finished intelligence before the war about some of the very problems that you're dealing with now. But if policy makers don't want to pay attention to that intelligence, you know, it's not going to have the sort of impact on policy and policy outcomes that it should.

MR. POLLACK: I'll just add that, you know, what I basically hear, kind of similar to what Flynt is saying, is, on the one hand, they've never felt like they've had such a good picture on al Qaeda as they do today--which also tells you about the paucity of our information before September 11th. We have captured a lot of people who have given us interesting tidbits. We are getting cooperation from foreign countries in ways that we never did before September 11th. Again, that's not to suggest that it's perfect or exactly what we'd like, it's just much better than it ever was.

On the other hand, there are two problems. One, that all these revelations about al Qaeda and now what they know, they're beginning to realize how much they don't know, which is always, I think--the inevitable outcome of new information is you realize at first how much else you don't know. And beyond that, because of the fact that al Qaeda has really gone to ground since September 11th, since the war in Afghanistan, it's even harder in some ways to get at the information that you really need now about future operations. Most of what they're getting has been about past operations and about the past organization of al Qaeda.

But, you know, Peter Bergen has this wonderful line, you know, "We're now into al Qaeda 2.0." And it's a really nice way of thinking about it, which is that al Qaeda has had to re-think its operational strategy, its logistics because of the destruction of its base--pardon the pun--in Afghanistan. "Al qaeda" means "base," for those who don't know Arabic. And as a result, it's morphed itself, it's transformed itself into something somewhat different. And that in some ways has made it even more difficult because we now have all this information about al Qaeda 1.0, not al Qaeda 2.0.

MR. STEINBERG: Just two related thoughts. I mean, I think part of what that reflects is that there's been a tendency to reify al Qaeda as a thing. And it's never been a thing. It's been a lot of different organizations, a lot of different individuals with multiple agendas, multiple organizational bases that have come together around some common interests, and certainly cooperate and exchange personnel and techniques, but have always existed as a network of networks, as it were. And we've seen this with the JI in Southeast Asia, we see it with some of the Mahgrebian groups and some of the groups that are developing in the West itself. And so when you have the kinds of successes that we've had against elements of al Qaeda, which have been real, it doesn't necessarily

disrupt this other set of ways in which the group forms and acts, and the motivations for their actions haven't changed. So it is hydra-headed in that sense.

It is very difficult to win this war tactically. And I think that's the fundamental problem, is that there have been great tactical successes but, for the reasons that Flynt has suggested, you need to think about a strategy that would reflect something like winning--and recognizing that winning isn't like winning a military battle, where the enemy is defeated, runs up a white flag--but thinking about what would be the conditions under which you could say that you had significantly prevailed? And I think that's the problem here, is you're not going to significantly prevail by picking off individuals one at a time. It's a little bit like the Israeli strategy on Hamas--can you through a targeted effort to get leadership really break up this kind of effort? And I think the answer is it's a necessary but not sufficient condition.

QUESTION: Gary Mitchell from The Mitchell Report. As I sat and listened to the conversation unfold this morning, I was reminded of the definition of insanity, which is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result. It strikes me that that's maybe kind of where we are in the Middle East.

MR. STEINBERG: You said it.

QUESTION: Which leads me to the question that if we take these three--Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Israeli-Palestinian situation--and define them either as failures or, you know, on their way to failures, or incompletes, to what extent is this a reflection of the performance of a specific administration; to what extent is this a reflection of something inherent in the American political landscape and political calculus at this point? And I just want to go one step further and say it is hard for me to believe, for example, that if we were to elect one of the half dozen or so people running on the other ticket in 2004, I ask myself is it going to be that--is it going to change?

MR. INDYK: Can I jump in on this one, because I've been thinking about it myself. We in the Clinton administration tried to transform the Middle East by using the engine of the peace process. The Bush administration's tried to transform the Middle East by using the engine of the war process. And we seem to have failed in both ways. And yes, it has something to do with inherent problems in the administrations themselves--different ones, of course; yes, it has something to do with the nature of the American approach to the Middle East, which I'll come back to in a moment.

But there was a third factor which you didn't mention, which also has something to do with the nature of the Middle East itself. And it is that clash between American naivete and Middle Eastern cynicism--and one could go a little further than that in terms of the kind of ruthlessness of the politics in that part of the world--that produces failure upon failure upon failure.

Now, it's not to say that we don't have successes along the way. But overall, it's not a good track record, let's say over the last two decades, of opportunities that did not come

to fruition. And I think part of the explanation--and we really don't have time to go into all of it--but part of the explanation is that we really function on a different timetable to the Middle East. Change comes very slowly there even if you have dramatic shifts in the kind of tectonic plates, with the overthrow of a regime in Iraq or a breakthrough to peace in the Israeli peace treaty, and so on. Or a revolution in Iran. You know, from time to time something dramatic happens in that part of the world, but the change itself that comes from that takes a lot longer than a presidential term.

And we are developing policies, to the extent that we develop policies or strategies, that are designed to effect dramatic change, because that's what America the superpower is about when it brings its influence to bear in different parts of the world. But we're trying to effect dramatic change on our timetable. And the Middle East simply doesn't work like that.

And so I think, bottom line that I take away from it, that requires a much greater exposition, is that we can shape the strategic context by our interventions. We can change a regime here, we can achieve a peace treaty there, and that shapes the broader context. But the actors in the region have a tremendous ability to resist our influence, and that resistance is much harder to overcome and takes a longer-term strategy than presidents on four-year timetables effect.

MR. STEINBERG: Plus if you have the patience to wait for the longer exposition, you're going to read all about it in Martin's soon-to-be-forthcoming book.

I regret to say we're out of time. I appreciate your all coming. We had terrific expositions today, great questions, and thank you all.

[End of press briefing.]

- - -