THE SABAN CENTER for MIDDLE EAST POLICY

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Press Briefing

FIRSTHAND VIEWS FROM IRAQ

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. INDYK: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to this Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution press briefing. We're delighted to see you all here.

We have a fairly unique opportunity today to hear from three people with diverse expertise, all of them, I think it's safe to say, experts in one dimension or another of the situation in Iraq. But what brings them together, what they share in common, is that they have all recently been in Iraq.

Charlie Duelfer, who is now a visiting scholar at the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars, previously worked for the U.S. government and, before that, was the deputy chairman of the U.N. Special Commission, UNSCOM, that was charged with finding Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction. Charlie was in Iraq from April to July, spending quite a lot of time out in the countryside, getting a feel for what was happening there.

Mike O'Hanlon, who is, of course, a senior fellow here in the Foreign Policy Studies program at the Brookings Institution and the creator of the Iraq Index, which I hope he'll tell you something about, but you may have read about it in the New York Times op-ed page or on the Brookings website. Mike was also in Iraq recently, in September--spent some time there and had a chance to check out the situation.

And most recently, our very own director of research at the Saban Center, Ken Pollack--and, of course, a CNN analyst--was there the last couple of weeks, also on the ground talking to people.

So what we thought today was to give you three different perspectives on what's happening in Iraq, because, as I am sure you feel--certainly I feel--it's very hard

to get a sense of who's spinning and who's not and what the situation is and what it's likely to be, where it's trending at the moment in Iraq. Nothing could be more important, I think, at this point for American foreign policy, let alone for the American elections. It was a vital question, and we are very fortunate to have the three of you here today to enlighten us.

We're going to ask Mike to speak first, then Charlie, and then Ken. And then we'll open it up for questions. Mike, welcome.

MR. O'HANLON: Thanks, Martin. It's an honor to be on this distinguished panel and to be speaking before you all today. I am the guarded optimist on the panel, and it'll be up to you to judge whether that's because I know by far the least of the Middle East of anyone on this panel. I'm much more of a general security specialist than a Mideast expert. But I'll give a couple of reasons why, on balance, I still think that we will ultimately succeed in Iraq, and make reference as well to this Iraq Index.

And I want to quickly tip my cap to Adriana Lins de Albuquerque and Stacy Rosenberg in particular at Brookings and others who have helped with this index.

But before I do, I want to say that, for me, the threshold for success has to be clearly defined before we start talking about whether we'll prevail or not. And for me, the threshold is not Mr. Wolfowitz's image of a democratic Iraq bringing about a broader transformation of the region. I'm sure we would all love that. I doubt very much whether most of us on the panel or in this room expect it, and I would not require it as a definition of acceptable outcome or significant improvement in the situation.

Something like Atatürk's Turkey would be, to me, a perfectly acceptable kind of outcome, and in fact that's even perhaps optimistic and higher than I would insist

on, achieving political stability and a new kind of government, before I would deem the operation to have been worthwhile. I think we need a stable Iraq that does not attack its neighbors, does not develop weapons of mass destruction, does not ally with al Qaeda, and does not slaughter its own minorities. And that's, for me, already pretty hard, but it's a much lower standard than what's sometimes been discussed.

Having said that, there are two broad sets of reasons why I am guardedly optimistic that we can prevail here. The first has to do with just thinking about this as a counterinsurgency, one of many counterinsurgencies that the world has seen in the past. And when I look at this from broad brush, from the distance of Washington, D.C.--and admittedly, not being greatly informed about the realities on the ground in Iraq, despite the two and a half days I spent there in September--when I think about this from a distant altitude, what I see is a resistance of several thousand fighters. Maybe General Abizaid was wrong when he said 5,000; maybe it's really 10,000. Maybe it's 15,000. I don't know the exact number, but I do know it's likely to be primarily Saddam's Fedayeen, the Saddam Fedayeen forces, the special security organization, parts of the Special Republican Guard--the surviving elements of all of these pieces that were not either killed in the fall of Saddam or killed in the six months since that time. It's five, ten, fifteen thousand people versus the most highly trained military in the history of the world, that's also--with due respect and due apologies to the American military of the Vietnam era--much better than the military that we've used in previous counterinsurgency campaigns in this country. So the broad structural elements here look, to me, relatively encouraging.

I also have a hard time believing that the Iraqi resistance will snowball into a mass movement. That's obviously a big question. The CIA, obviously, has its

worries that it could snowball as Iraqis in general become frustrated by the occupation and even pick up arms against us--general Iraqis, Iraqis who had nothing to do with Saddam's regime and who are not terrorist extremists. To the extent that happens, most of what I'm saying is clearly wrong. But I believe there's a very high probability we will avoid seeing that kind of a snowballing effect because we have a political strategy for getting out that I think will be rapid enough that we have a very high probability of preventing that outcome.

So the broad structural elements of the counterinsurgency look pretty good to me--a very capable outside force, a small insurgency, increasingly good human intelligence even if it's not excellent, and American and coalition forces that are very good at understanding the inherent political nature of this conflict and using force in, I think, a fairly discriminating and careful way.

Now, the bad news--and for every one of my points I'm making, I could immediately make the caveat. I'm trying not to, in the interest of brevity. An obvious caveat to the point I just made is even if we are using force carefully, the Iraqis don't necessarily believe it and they're telling stories about how many of their own civilians we're killing, and there's a perception, fueled to some extent by the broader air of political debate and media, that we are not being very discriminate in how we use force, not being very careful. And to the extent that perception is pervasive, then it doesn't really matter completely that we're being careful. But I think on balance people know that the U.S. military is not killing thousands or even hundreds of Iraqis. There are individual losses in daily raids and daily operations, but the losses, I think, are relatively modest--way too high to be acceptable, but we're still at war, and let's call a spade a spade.

So in broad structural terms, the counterinsurgency is of a type that I think we should be able to win, based on the quality of the two sides' forces, the appeal or lack thereof of the Iraqi resistance to the rest of its population, the quality of our forces, the size of the forces, et cetera. That's one set of arguments.

The second set--and I'm just going to make a few points here and then stop, and look forward to the discussion later--the second set is largely covered in the Iraq Index. And here I'm going to sound a little bit like Mr. Rumsfeld's representative, and I apologize for sounding a little too optimistic or Pollyannish, if I come across that way. But there really is a lot of good news in Iraq. And I don't want to in any way pooh-pooh the bad news. The bad news is bad, and there's a lot of it, and it is serious. But if I look at the good news, I would just like to tick off a few points that I think still get insufficient coverage in the United States. Despite Mr. Rumsfeld's three or four months worth of complaining about the media, this is still a reality. And even he doesn't always talk about some of the good news that I'm now going to mention.

Let me start with some of the points that are most under-covered even by Rumsfeld himself. The whole body count issue. The Pentagon doesn't want to get into Vietnam-style discussions about how many people are being killed, on either side, in Iraq. But when I was in Iraq in September, meeting with Gen. Odierno at the 4th Infantry Division in Tikrit and talking to other commanders, and in the data I've seen since, it's become apparent to me that we have arrested or killed somewhere between 5,000 and 10,000 Iraqi extremists. Now, I'm sure we sometimes shot the wrong person. I'm sure we sometimes arrested people who later were found to be innocent, and released them. But in broad terms, we have already neutralized a number of resistance fighters roughly comparable to the number that Abizaid thinks we have left to still contend with.

Now, when you get into cross-over points and other sorts of terminology that harken back to Vietnam, you get a little nervous. And I don't want to make too much of the fact that just because we theoretically have already killed a certain number and there's only a certain number left, that therefore victory is inevitable. But it's still worth taking note of the fact that we have perhaps 5,000 people who remain, maybe 10,000, maybe 15,000, but we have already arrested or killed somewhere in the general neighborhood of 10,000 Iraqi resistance fighters.

That's pretty encouraging news, and I think it's pretty well substantiated. Sunday's firefight is only the most visible manifestation. But the Pentagon has not wanted to talk about this for fear of getting into a body count sort of debate. I understand its logic, but it's allowed the perception to be fostered that in most of these ambushes and firefights, we're getting beaten. We're not. We're doing very well in most of these firefights and ambushes. And Sunday was just an exception in terms of the size of the engagement, not in terms of the basic nature of the outcome.

A second point would be that, from what I can tell--and again, the Pentagon is reluctant to discuss this--from what I can tell, crime rates are beginning to diminish inside of Iraq. Charles and Ken may want to comment on this--I may very well be wrong. There is no good data on this. But from what I can tell, even as casualties have gotten much worse among the coalition in the last few weeks, they have actually gotten better this fall among Iraqis in terms of Iraqi-on-Iraqi violence. We all know that Iraqi security forces are now being targeted by the resistance more than they were before, but the general Iraqi on the street, I believe, is beginning to see a little bit of hope for a somewhat safer and more stable Iraq. And that begins to play to our advantage.

Whether that is true or not, it's incontestable that we're seeing improvements in other quality-of-life indicators, including everything from electricity availability, water availability, telephone availability, schools and hospitals being opened. You've all heard Mr. Rumsfeld say this a dozen times, so I won't test your patience any longer. And I don't want to suggest that this by itself is conclusive. But it is information that has to be juxtaposed with all the bad news about casualties.

And I'll just stop on one final point and then I really will be done, and that's to say--this sounds a little bit like the old, you know, "Mrs. Lincoln, wasn't the play pretty good despite the assassination?" So I don't want to sound too much like this. But when I look at all the casualties in November, I actually see that there were some either careless tactics on the part of the coalition, or tactics that I think we can correct. And if it weren't but for five or six really unfortunate incidents--several of which, I think, were preventable and can be prevented in the future--we would not have had nearly as bad of a month.

And so here I'll risk being a little controversial in saying a few things that are meant to be somewhat provocative. And I don't want to push this too far. I know that these kinds of casualties do happen in war and not all of it was preventable, but I am still not quite sure why the U.S. military flew so many transport helicopters around in daylight over population centers in the Sunni triangle. I think they're going to be more careful about that in the future. I frankly think they should have been a little more careful before November. But granted some things are not going to be preventable--the Blackhawk crash in Mosul was just very bad luck combined with enemy fire--but some of the helicopter tactics can be modified, have been modified, and I don't expect to see

these number of helicopter crashes in the future. Obviously, we all hope I'm right. I could be wrong. But I think, to some extent tactical adjustments can help us there.

And finally, our coalition partners have to realize that they are targets. I think this should have been obvious to everybody by August. Unfortunately, it's taken a lot of people too long to figure it out. We keep seeing different vulnerabilities allowed to remain. People should not be traveling around, as far as I can tell, in quite as many unescorted and unguarded convoys inside of Iraq and assuming that, because they're not American and not wearing a uniform of the U.S. military, that therefore they are safe. I think the coalition's going to gradually--let's hope quickly--realize that everybody's a target. And I think, therefore, December, January, and February will be much better months from the point of view of U.S. and coalition casualties.

Again, there are a million things I could say to quarrel with my own optimism and point out all the caveats. You're all aware of them. I'm not going to take any more of your time. This is a guardedly optimistic message as opposed to a proclamation of imminent victory. But I do think over time we will see a gradual improvement. We'll still be in Iraq with large forces in a year, we'll still be in Iraq with large forces in two or three years, but we will see progress on the Iraqification at least of police, of political leadership. We'll see gradual economic recovery. And I think, on balance, things are going to start to go a little better.

MR. INDYK: Thank you very much, Mike. Somehow as a result of your optimism, more people have come into the room. So we're just going to interrupt for a moment. Can I ask people who are sitting next to an empty seat to just put up their hands and people at the back may want to take a seat before we move to Charles. There are three seats up at the front and then only a couple elsewhere.

So on the optimism index, you're about a 7 out of 10?

MR. O'HANLON: Yeah, maybe 6-1/2.

MR. INDYK: Six and a half. Well, now for something completely different. Charlie.

MR. DUELFER: I'm not so optimistic. But let me divide my comments into two parts, one of which to address the weapons of mass destruction issue, about which I have some experience, but then also address the broader political questions and where we're headed and how we got here.

Let me begin by saying that I think the president made a correct strategic decision, if you assess the decision to be that this regime had to change. And I say "strategic" purposely. I think it's a very difficult thing in a democracy to make a decision based upon long-term assessments about costs and benefits. Democracy tends to drive you to more heavily-weighted near-term political costs, economic costs, et cetera, and it tends to make you discount long-term consequences, be they threats or rewards. But I think that the president made a correct decision that this regime, under the set of circumstances that prevailed a year ago, or two years ago, was going to be an unacceptable threat in the future. And I say that even in light of the fact that it appears that no existing weapons have been found in Iraq. And let me say why I believe that's the case.

It will probably turn out, in my judgment, that there are no existing weapons in Iraq, and that mildly surprises me. I would have expected to find some small number of long-range missiles with either biological or chemical warhead capabilities. But otherwise, it had been my judgment and, I think, other long-term weapons inspectors' that the decision had been made by the regime to sustain the *capability* to

produce weapons should the decision be made. So I think the strategy and tactic of the regime was to outlast the inspections, outlast the U.N.

There will be those who will argue that because no weapons have been found, that that's evidence that the inspections were working and therefore the war was unnecessary. I would respond to that by saying that if you argue that the inspections were working, you're looking at one slice of time. The set of circumstances, which caused Saddam to be concerned about the inspectors, to comply to the extent that he complied with the U.N. strictures, was not a sustainable set of conditions. In other words, the array of forces which were deployed around Iraq, the unity of the Security Council, and certainly the sanctions which were imposed upon the Iraqi people, those things coming together could not be sustained for the long haul. And, I think, if David Kay and his team are able to accomplish anything in the next several months, they should be able to demonstrate the policy, and the tactics to implement the policy, of the regime to outlast the U.N., to outlast the international coalition, and to then proceed forward with their weapons programs. I feel highly confident that they should be able to do that through the revelations in documents and, in fact, in interviews, because I believe quite strongly that there was a strategy and there were certainly tactics to divide the Security Council and to thwart the inspectors. And I think that will be one of the most interesting things that will emerge from the work of the Iraq Survey Group.

On the broader political issue, I think, again, President Bush made a correct decision that the regime had to go. I think every step to implement that decision was faulty. And I base this largely on my discussions with Iraqis. I've spent a lot of time with them over the last 10 years and have come to know both intellectuals--all sorts of Iraqis, not just the weapons people but others, and I would point to two decisions

which some Iraqis claimed to me were fatal. And they were the first two decisions made by the coalition provisional authority.

The first, which was to eliminate the Baath Party. And I'm not suggesting that the Baath Party is good or we should have kept the Baath Party. But the decision, and the way it was written, had the effect of implying to all members of the Baath Party and their families that there was no room for them in the future Iraq. That's certainly what they heard. The second decision was to eliminate the army and all the security services.

The combination of these two took a large portion of the secular middle of Iraq, it took a lot of the technocrats, the bureaucrats, the professional classes and their families, and what they heard is that there is no future for you in Iraq; you are now a bad person; you now have to defend yourself; you may have to be brought before a court. So we took a large, key part of the Iraqi population and turned them into enemies. And unfortunately, I think, many of the tactics and steps that we have taken have had the effect of turning people who would--their inclination was to support the U.S.--turned them into enemies.

One of the things which I heard regularly in May was, Look, what happened? We listened carefully to the answer given by Secretary Rumsfeld and the president, to the question of how could Saddam avoid conflict, how could he avoid war? That question was posed in January and February. And the answer which was given was, Well, if Saddam and his top two or three dozen cronies left, then the war could be avoided. What the Iraqis heard--and I'm generalizing; this is what I was told by many, many groups--what they heard was, Great, separate the interests of Saddam and his

thugs from the interests of the Iraqis and Iraqi institutions who will be making the key decisions ultimately about how many Americans die in the conflict.

But somewhere along the line, in April, May, the decision was changed--or at least that's the way it appeared to the Iraqis, and they felt there was some sort of a bait and switch. The decisions were made by the coalition provisional authority that all Baathists had to go and all the army had to go. Now, I'm not suggesting, again, that the Baathist Party was certainly used by Saddam to imprison the Iraqi people. But it's not the case that all Baathists were supportive of Saddam and his thugs. And in fact there was a lot of them who would argue and say, Look it, to pursue the careers which many in this audience would have pursued, you would have joined the Baath Party if you were in Iraq. In any case, these decisions caused a lot of people to say, Wait a second. We thought that we were going to be part of the new Iraq. Now we've got some questions.

Additionally, let me just make one other point about the military tactics that we've used, which I think, I'm sure are defensible on military terms, but there is an unfortunate side effect. And again, that is to, I think, cause resentment by a large number of Iraqis. These raids, which happened regularly in various neighborhoods, looking for weapons, you know, they are highly embarrassing and insulting to a lot of Iraqis. And they happened for inexplicable reasons, many times. I mean, people I have known--and admittedly, I know a lot of people in the former regime, many of whom are now in jail--but, people you would think are strong American supporters, for one reason or another their houses are raided in the middle of the night, their children are taken out, people are handcuffed, taken away. And this, the echo of this has permeated not just in Baghdad but other places and created a feeling that the United States, A, doesn't know, really, what it's doing; and B, it's making a lot of enemies.

So these tactics are not necessarily helpful in terms of winning over the population that we're going to need. And I'm deeply concerned that, aside from the quantitative indicators which Michael has correctly pointed to, but there is an intangible effect that is permeating the Iraqi population, particularly the population that has the greatest experience in running Iraq. We're turning them into enemies. And I think whatever we do in the future, we need to be more inclusive and try to extend the flaps of the tent and not make them more exclusive.

MR. INDYK: Thank you, Charlie. I just want to clarify one thing. You were very careful not to say we lost the Sunnis but not the Shias, and so on. So you see this as some kind of secular middle class that we've alienated here, rather than--which is across ethnic lines? Or is it really --

MR. DUELFER: I think one of the things we have done--and I learned this over the years in our inspections--we have in our minds a certain operating system, a way of thinking. And we bring that with us when we go to Iraq. And I found this-- Let me give two brief examples.

We thought we understood how Iraq was enriching uranium because we found that they were doing one thing, and it made sense and it was logical. So then we stopped looking. What we found was that it was not this implicit cost-benefit analysis going on in their heads that was going on in ours. They actually were trying all different kinds of ways. So you shouldn't rule things out just because we think it's illogical.

Second example. We have, correctly, this sense that there should be proportional representation in governance. Well, implicit in that is a sense of identity, which we're now exporting to Iraq, where we're saying, You Iraqis belong to some sub-national group, your membership in which gives you some sort of rights and privileges

based on your membership in that group. So, it's very logical for us to go and say, Look, the Shia are the majority but they have been under the thumb of the Sunni minority. It's not that simple. Because Iraqis will identify themselves, yes, as Shia or Sunni or some flavor thereof, but they have other identities. They're a member of a clan or a member of a geographic region, and they accrue the benefits and privileges of those other identities as well. And the Saddam regime, for all of its horrors, at least understood how to balance those interests and to manipulate them a certain way.

So if we go in and say Shia-Sunni, it's black and white, but it's not that easy.

MR. INDYK: Okay, thank you. Ken.

MR. POLLACK: My own experience in Iraq and also listening to everything that I hear talking to other Iraqis--because I'm very careful to recognize that my time in Iraq, while I may have seen a lot, tried to speak to as many people as I could, was only the views of one person. I think you have to temper that. I tried as hard as I could to speak to as many Iraqis as I was able to. And I may have spoken to a hundred Iraqis in the little more than a week that I was in Iraq. And, you know, at the time, that seemed like a lot of people, and I think, compared to most travelers, it probably was. But a hundred people is not a very good representative sample of Iraq. So I try to be a little bit careful of that.

Now that said, my own sentiment about Iraq is that this could go either way. There is a great deal of good going on inside of Iraq, but there's also a great deal of bad going on inside of Iraq. And I think that ultimately it really comes down to what the United States wants to do. If we are willing to stick this operation out and if we're also willing to make some changes in how we're doing things, I see no particular reason why

Iraq cannot become a perfectly stable, prosperous, pluralist society. Because there is all kinds of good in Iraq, and there are all kinds of good building block that you could work with.

And some of the things that Mike was talking about are absolutely true. The electricity is in much better shape than it was. And whereas three or four months ago the greatest Iraqi complaint was the electricity, when are you going to get the power on?, it no longer is. Now the biggest complaint is security, and I'm going to come back to that in a second. There are lots of good, smart Americans and other members of the coalition out there working in the field with Iraqis and doing all kinds of really good things.

And some of the kind of raw statistics that Mike was citing that the Pentagon has cited, when you actually see them in operation, they're really meaningful. Rebuilding those schools is really important. It's given a livelihood to the teachers. It means that they now have sources of income and they're getting paid much better than they were being paid under Saddam's regime. It means the kids are off the streets and they're back in school and they're learning. They're no longer a burden; they're not out there playing in the mine fields; they're not out there where they can be shot, killed, maimed by U.S. forces under their operations. It means that life is beginning to return to normal. And you do see that around the country.

Markets are back and functioning. All across Baghdad the markets were stocked, chock full of goods. All kinds of stuff is coming into Iraq. Plenty of food--not always the best quality, but lots of it. And the prices were not at all horrible. In fact, one of the most amazing things is how Iraq's inflation has not been worse than it actually is.

And a further point, which the operation in Samarra may be the first sign of undermining but something I heard constantly from U.S. military personnel--I think it's absolutely right--the insurgents in Iraq are not terribly committed. By and large, we had, you know, 30 or 35 attacks a day. And the vast majority of those attacks are these IEDs by the side of the road, they're an RPG round fired from a crowd and then the guy dashes off. There are a few mortar rounds against the military base at night or, you know, a few rockets fired at the Rashid Hotel--which, of course, is terrifying for the journalists, but not terribly significant beyond that. By and large, on most of these occasions what the soldiers kept painting out is that the Iraqis who were mounting the attacks are not willing to stay and stand and die for their cause. And that was a very important distinction that they drew.

One grizzled sergeant who I spoke to, who was a veteran of the Vietnam War, used the line--actually, it's interesting because I had heard this from someone else, almost the identical line many, many months before--basically said, you know, if this were the Vietcong we'd have a hundred dead every day, because they would stand and fight with us. These guys won't.

Now, as I said, the Samarra battle, where the Iraqis did stand and fight and die, that could be very meaningful if that is the start of a new trend. But so far, most of these guys are doing it because they have orders to, because they're being paid to--$250 to kill an American. And, you know, if all you have to do is pull up in a Toyota, park it, lob a few mortar rounds and then dash off, and if you get lucky you may get to claim much more than $250, there are guys who are willing to do that. But they so far have not really been willing to put their lives on the line. That's also very important.

Public opinion. Most of the Iraqis I spoke to--and I tried to speak to as many as I could, from all walks of life--what I consistently heard, and I think this is echoed by the polls, conflicting as they are, was that they didn't really like us there. They didn't want us in Iraq. What I heard many times was, you know, if it were up to us, we'd rather you weren't here. But they were terrified that we would leave, absolutely terrified. I heard this unanimously: Please don't leave.

The number one question that I got asked by Iraqis was, What does Mr. Rumsfeld mean when he says he's pulling 30,000 troops out of the country? When I was there, it was just two weeks after Rumsfeld's speech, and that was the thing that they all wanted to know about. They were terrified that we were going to leave because they all believed that if we left, Iraq would slide very quickly into civil war. And I'll say that I think they're right. I think that if we do leave, it will slide very quickly into civil war.

And you could see even then some of the underlying ground rules being laid out for what that civil war might look like--different members of the Governing Council who were starting to create their own militias with their own arms caches and their own uniforms and everything; other groups who were starting to kind of hedge their bets about where things might go after the Americans left. And I think that is the greatest fear out there, not only on the part of the Iraqis, but it should be our fear as well, that if we walk away from this problem, Iraq will slide very quickly into chaos and it will look very much like the Lebanon of the 1970s and '80s, with all of the attendant disastrous ramifications for all of the countries that border Iraq, just as Lebanon destabilized Israel and Syria, Afghanistan has destabilized Pakistan and Iran, and the Congo has destabilized every country that it borders.

That said, I don't think everything's hunky-dory in Iraq. I think that there are some real problems in how we are doing things. And as I said, I think it really does come down to us. Right now, we hold Iraq in the palm of our hands. There is enough good there that I think that if we were to do the right things, as I said, I see no particular reason why over the course of time--and it will be a long time--but over the course of time why Iraq can't be stable, prosperous, and pluralist.

If we continue to do the things that we're doing now, if we continue along our current course, I think Iraq will continue to stay where it is and in fact it will start to get worse, because the Iraqi people will increasingly become disillusioned. And in particular, what I heard many people were frightened of was that they were hearing their own leaders, their local leaders, beginning to wonder if the Americans would actually be able to make it work. And in particular I heard this from Shia, and what they were saying was that the Hawza, the main Shia religious establishment, had basically agreed to allow the Americans to put their plan in motion because they hoped it would work. Because they believed that if the American plan worked, it would be the best possible thing for them, for all of Iraq.

But they were beginning to wonder, because they kept seeing us fumbling and fumbling and fumbling, and didn't understand why we weren't doing better at these things. And there were a lot of people wondering how much longer the Hawza would continue to support the U.S.-led reconstruction and at some point in time, might not the ayatollahs decide, you know what, we tried the Americans but they clearly can't do it, so we're going to have to do it ourselves.

Now, what I want to do is I want to just mention fairly briefly some areas, the most important areas where I think that change needs to come. As I said, I've got a whole long list and I'm only going to give you the real highlights.

The first is in the military arena. I think that we are making a lot of mistakes militarily. I am deeply concerned about our military strategy in Iraq. In particular, what I'm most concerned about is our obsession with force protection. That seems to be, as best I could tell in my time with the U.S. military, also interacting with U.S. military forces when I was on the outside of the U.S. military bubble, job number one for them is force protection.

There are three security issues in Iraq right now. There are the general lawlessness in Iraqi society--and here I would differ with Mike. If there is a decrease in the crime statistics, I don't know how on earth the CPA would know that, because there's no one out there talking to Iraqis to gather those statistics. And what I heard from Iraqis is they are terrified of the streets at night. And that was the number one complaint I heard. And this is what I most heard from just working-class Iraqis, is when are the Americans going to make it safe so that our women, our wives, our daughters can go out on the streets at night, so that we can go out on the streets at night? You know, when are we going to get to a point where we've got the criminal elements under control? And that was their number one security concern and it was their greatest gripe against the U.S., was that we were doing nothing to deal with the general lawlessness inside Iraq's cities, in particular in Baghdad.

The second security issue out there are the attacks by former regime figures on the Iraqis themselves, a point that Mike made. That was a huge problem. One of the biggest problems that the CPA is trying to overcome is the general apathy of

the Iraqi population. Now, this is something longstanding. It goes back long before Saddam. These are people who don't necessarily think, you know, they need to take matters into their own hands. And of course it was reinforced by Saddam because he didn't want the people taking matters into their own hands. But it is being further reinforced by the former regime loyalists who are going around and killing people who are collaborating with us. And for every person they kill, they make threats against another 10 or 20 others. And there are a lot of Iraqis who are saying why on earth should I collaborate with the Americans if they can't protect me? This is a huge problem.

And the third problem, and it is absolutely third, it is tertiary, is the attacks on the Americans themselves. And obviously, there are ramifications, but it is far down on the list. And we have elevated that to job priority number one. And as a result, we are neglecting the other two security problems. And that was the biggest problem I saw out there and the biggest complaint that I heard from Iraqis. When you see American patrols in Baghdad, it's a couple of Bradleys or three or four Humvees racing through a neighborhood at 35 or 40 kilometers per hour. And obviously, if they see trouble, they'll stop; but they don't see trouble. And they're gone, like that. And the Iraqis are always saying why are you not out on the streets, why aren't there foot patrols?

And I'll tell you something else. The British soldiers who I spoke to were all saying the same things: You guys have got it wrong. We figured it out in Belfast in Northern Ireland, there has to be presence on the streets, you've got to be out there talking to the people, finding out who the bad guys are, finding out what their problems are and addressing them. You cannot police a city at 25 or 30 kilometers per hour from the back of a Bradley. It just won't work.

And this obsession with force protection pervades the entire climate inside Iraq. It is why our people are locked up inside the green zone. They don't come out. They have very little interaction with the Iraqi people--why they don't really know what's going on with the Iraqi people and why the Iraqi people are so angry, because they don't feel like they've got any contact. They don't know what the Americans are doing, they have no source of redress, they have no ability to talk to the Americans, because we are so obsessed with force protection.

And this is the problem, that, you know, if force protection is our greatest concern, you know what, let's get the troops out and put them back in Texas. Because they'll be safe in Texas. They're in Iraq for a reason. They're in Iraq to guarantee the security of the Iraqi people, and right now they're not doing a very good job of that.

Second. The political situation. I think Jerry Bremer's latest plan, the November 15th plan, is a very good one. It may not be the ideal, but, you know, the fact of the matter is we made a lot of mistakes going in and I think we've now figured it out. It is a very complicated plan. I don't think that any of the media reports have done justice to what he has worked out. But the most important thing about the plan is that it is not about getting us out fast. In fact, it's exactly the opposite. It's about creating a political structure that will enable a U.S. presence to remain for the two or three years that is going to be necessary before the Iraqis can have full, genuine political elections and establish a truly legitimate government.

That's the key to the plan. It is an extremely complicated system to try to do that. But that's what it's intended to do. And as I said, you know, it may not be perfect. No plan is. Certainly nothing that ever comes out of any government is perfect. But it is very good. And what I'll say is there, I think the biggest problem is just making

sure that we stick to that plan. My greatest fear is that either the United States or the Iraqis are going to jump ship on the plan. And all kinds of statements like Mr. Rumsfeld saying he's going to pull out 30,000 troops, that's exactly the kind of thing that frightens the Iraqis, that we're about to jump ship, and causes them to start making preemptive moves against us.

Another problem, communications. I started talking about this a little bit. It is an absolute disaster. It is a disaster in the sense that the ability of the CPA, of the personnel in Iraq to communicate with the Iraqis is incredibly limited and it doesn't seem to be getting much better. And the folks at CPA know it. And they're having a tremendous amount of difficulty remedying the problem. But it is a huge problem.

One of the things I heard from one Iraqi was, he said to me, Look, I know the streets aren't safe tonight, but no one has told me when they are going to be safe. If you told me it would be two weeks, that would fine; if you told me it would be two months, that would be fine also. Effectively what they were saying was we need a sense of where things are going. Let us plan for our lives.

I mean, think about, you know, here is Washington. After Isabel knocked out the power, how many people were on the phone calling up Pepco wanting to know when the lights were-- and all anyone wanted to know was when are the lights going to be on. Pepco, you know, in some cases said it'll be on in an hour, in some cases they said a week. And you could gripe about that, but at least you could make plans accordingly.

In Iraq, they never know. They never know when something is going to happen or when something is going to change, and it is a tremendous source of frustration to them and reinforces to them the sense that we are another arbitrary

occupying power, that maybe we're a little bit more imperialist than we say or that they want to believe, because we don't let them know what our plans are.

And then a final point. We need more people. We desperately need more people. We need more civil affairs officers. A lot of time I spent with the military, I spent with our civil affairs personnel who are out in the villages working with the Iraqis. And they're doing wonderful work. They make mistakes, but they're over the course of time figuring out what works and what doesn't work. But there are not enough of them. They are horribly under-staffed. And for every village that has a team of two or three civil affairs officers that's working with them, there are five or six that don't. And that needs to change.

Translators. You all know this. We are desperately short of Arabic speakers in Iraq. I'm not going to say any more than that.

Infantry. We desperately need infantry. If you're going to do what I talked about and actually police the streets of Baghdad, you are going to need lots more infantry than what we have got right now. And unfortunately, because of how we've structured our army, we've got a lot of soldiers over there; we don't necessarily have a whole lot of infantry. And we are in desperate need of people to do that.

And don't think that the Iraqis are going to take up the slack. That, I think, is kind of a hoax being perpetrated by the administration. The Iraqi police are horribly corrupt--so corrupt that I had CPA officials saying to me that if they encountered an Iraqi policeman in the street at night while they were alone, they didn't know if they'd stop, because they weren't certain that they could trust that person. And all the Iraqis say the same thing as well: the Iraqi police have become-- Everyone says

since Bernard Kerik left Iraq, the Iraqi police have gone to hell. And they are not part of the solution right now.

And the other security forces, they're coming online but they are half-trained. And I had people who are working with them say, you know, if you gave me six months, I could turn out a decent soldier for you. But I'm being told to give them two weeks and get them out there on the street. And that's just not going to be enough, either.

And the last one, bureaucrats. We need more bureaucrats in Iraq. Paul Bremer is trying to run Iraq with 1200 people in the CPA. It is a tiny little group of people. Originally the plan was that he was going to have regional versions of the CPA all throughout Iraq and then local ones beyond that, and you would have an entire hierarchy, an entire pyramid. There are so few people that none of the regional- or provincial- or local-level CPAs exist. They just don't exist. And for that reason, communication between the people in Baghdad and what's going on out in the field is also terrible.

And for all of these reasons, for me it comes back to this other question of internationalization. It would be fine for me if we could find these people on our own, if you could come up with the thousands of American civil affairs personnel, the tens of thousands of American infantry, the thousands of bureaucrats and translators that we would need, and do it all from within the United States. I'd say that's fabulous. But I don't know where those people are. And since we haven't got them here, I think we need to start looking fast to our friends overseas.

Let me stop there.

MR. INDYK: Thank you, Ken. Mike, do you want to comment on the question of more infantry? Do you want to jump in on that?

MR. O'HANLON: Don't have a quick judgment. Ken's pretty compelling, in general and in this case.

MR. INDYK: Okay. Let's go to the audience. Please remember to wait for the microphone and to identify yourself and to make your question short and sharp, please. Said.

QUESTION: Thank you. My name is Said Arikat. My first question is to Mike O'Hanlon. You said that you're guardedly optimistic. Today, Jeff White at the Washington Institute, he called what's going on in Iraq a resistance, and he said that it's likely to increase, likely to get more organized, and likely to get in battalion forces, and so on. So how would you reconcile that?

And to Ken, I remember during the Middle East Institute conference you suggested that Iraq could be Japan, Bosnia, or Lebanon. After your assessment, where do you see it going? Thank you.

MR. O'HANLON: I don't know if the resistance--I think we can concluded that the resistance is a little more organized than it was a couple of months ago, and there's more of a national strategy. I think, clearly, having attacks in Nasariya, Mosul, Kirkuk, and elsewhere has been a manifestation of some level of national coordination. And I think we've seen a broadening of the tactics used by the insurgency as well. So I do think there's been a bit of a worrisome trend in that area over the course of the fall.

But I would also say--this is both good news and bad news--that most of the tactics being used by the insurgency are sort of classic textbook. They're not coming

up with creative new things. Now, unfortunately the classic things work pretty well, as the Mujehadeen proved in Afghanistan against the Soviets, as Hezbollah proved in Lebanon against the Israelis with IEDs, as al Qaeda has proven with truck bombs in the past. The good news, if there is any in this, if I can look for a silver lining, is I don't expect to see a hugely innovative set of new tactics. And to the extent we can partially adjust to the ones that are already being used, then I think we can begin to turn the corner on this. That's not meant to be some prediction of a casualty-free December, but I do think that things will get gradually better.

MR. POLLACK: On the question of where do I think things are going, given where we are now, if there are no changes, my guess is it will probably be Bosnia--which is to say, nobody's example of a success story, but also, you know, definitely better than it was before the war started. It will kind of continue to clunk along.

The one, you know, real kink there--maybe, actually, I'll add two, a plus and a minus--the potential negative is this kind of expectations gap, which I mentioned already, which is that the Iraqis expected us to come in and within a few weeks have the water running, have the lights on, have changed everything, have an efficient government set up running and doing all of these different things. And we clearly haven't done that. And they're beginning to adjust and recognize, okay, maybe it was a little bit more--harder than we thought, but they still feel like we are not delivering on many of the promises that we made to them. And it's just unclear how long they will be patient with us. No one knows. I certainly don't have any idea; the people I spoke to made all kinds of predictions from two days to two years and everywhere in-between. We just don't know.

That potentially by itself could drag down into Bosnia. In other words, even if we continue doing exactly what we're doing, that growing expectations gap, by itself, could pull things in a very ugly direction as people decided, you know what, the Americans aren't going to be able to do it so we have to do it for ourselves.

A potential plus is that Bremer's plan is a really clever one, all things considered. And if it can really be put into effect and made to work, you know, that's one that could take us in a much more positive direction, maybe balancing it out.

That said, if we leave, if these rumors that there is an 18-month plan to simply withdraw all U.S. troops, if those turn out to be the case, then I think we're going to have Lebanon. And as I said, if we are willing to make some changes, and there is a bunch more beyond the four that I laid out here today, I don't see any reason why--well, you know, maybe it won't quite be Japan, but again, it could be a perfectly stable, prosperous, pluralist society 10, 12 years down the road.

MR. INDYK: Sam Lewis.

QUESTION: This is a question for Charles and Ken, I think. We've had several of the best Arab experts in the U.S. government actually working in Bremer's operation almost from the beginning and, presumably, dealing with the Shia, whom they know pretty well from other assignments. How do you assess the current possibility of the Bremer plan being carried out more or less as planned without any effective success in bringing Sistani and his colleagues along?

MR. POLLACK: My understanding of Sistani's opposition, what we've seen voiced in the papers, is this is more political maneuvering. Now, I could be absolutely wrong on this, but this is consistently what I heard from all of the various Shia interlocutors I spoke to--everyone from secretaries up to, in one case, a member of

the Governing Council. And they all said this. And they could all be wrong; there's no question they could all be wrong. But their consistent theme was this is maneuvering on Sistani's part, that in fact what Sistani is most concerned about is exactly what we saw happen over the weekend before Sistani's call, which was members of the Governing Council coming out and reneging on the deal, saying, You know what, we don't like Bremer's plan so much, we want the Governing Council to continue.

Because what I heard from any number of Iraqis and people in the CPA was that, in fact, many members--and this is not so hard to believe, there are a number of members on the CPA--and I'm going to name names--starting with Ahmed Chalabi, who really did not like Bremer's plan because it meant that people were going to have to go out and find constituencies and get themselves elected to this new board. And Ahmed wasn't interested, and a number of other people on the Governing Council weren't interested. They were not building up constituencies. What they were trying to do instead was to get themselves appointed to the new interim Iraqi assembly. And that's how they want to--and they wanted to be grandfathered in. And when it became clear that that wasn't going to happen, then they wanted to preserve the power and the existence of the Governing Council.

And again, my understanding from my various Shia interlocutors was that this was Sistani pushing back, that his original hudna was all about pushing back on these different unelected representatives who really have not built any kind of popular support but who were trying to use their ties to the Americans to simply get themselves grandfathered in or established as-- that this was his way of pushing back and saying no way, I'm not going to let that fly.

So again, all of my interlocutors were saying they thought that Sistani would be willing to make compromises on the ultimate decision, but that he wanted to make sure that Ahmed & Co. didn't get what they wanted and simply get appointed to the new Iraqi interim assembly, and this was their way of pushing back. I hope that's right. Because if that is right, I think that that puts Bremer in a very good position to be able to say to the guys on the Governing Council, hey guys, you know, it ain't gonna work because Sistani isn't going to buy it.

MR. INDYK: Charlie?

MR. DUELFER: Let me make a couple of comments. One, we don't want to make Sistani our counterpart. The way the internal security services described to me the way they balanced the power amongst the Shia was by making sure there were a number of voices so that they didn't all coalesce in back of one. One way of affecting that dynamic is by--and I think this touches on what Ken is saying in terms of the role of the Governing Council or what evolves out of the governing councils--can you provide something for these groups outside of or around these roles.

There's a lot of other tensions going on there. For example, is it Qomwho's running the show, or is it Najaf and Karbala? And is there a shift of power among the Shia from Iran to Iraq? I don't pretend to be an expert on that, but, people who--Iraqis who have described it said there are a lot of currents and dynamics going on there which you have no clue about.

Finally what I'd say is I'm not sure that the CPA really is deeply involved or has its tentacles out to these various areas. I mean, it was--certainly when I was there, they tended to be in the palace. And, Iraqis would make a lot of snide comments about, this is just like Saddam. At night all the lights are out except in the palace. In fact, it's

worse than Saddam because the guards and everything else around the palace when Saddam was there were actually in closer than the green zone now. I mean, these are gratuitous comments, of course. But I think, again as Ken has said, we don't have enough people who are really out on the streets and really interacting, so that not only do they hear what are the other flows and dynamics among the Shia and other communities, but they're not also able to communicate, too.

I mean, these people don't feel like they have anybody to talk to. Leaders of clans would come to me and say, hey, you know, I'd like to go see someone at the CPA. They're just--they feel an absence of an ability to interact. I think it manifests itself in exactly the problem you're talking about.

MR. INDYK: Let's take a question down in back--National Journal.

QUESTION: Thanks, Martin. Jon Rauch of Brookings and National Journal. For Ken Pollack, could you elaborate a bit on what it is you think is so smart about the Bremer plan and what it is we're not hearing about it and should be in the media?

MR. POLLACK: Sure. How do I put it? I think there are two elements of it that are very important and very clever. First, there is the phasing of things, which is that you are going to create an interim Iraqi assembly to which sovereignty will be divested. And the question is, of course, what on earth is sovereignty? What exactly does that mean? Let's put it aside, because ultimately it's an irrelevant point. The question is what authority this new IIA is going to have. And that is still being worked out. And this is one of the devils in the details. But that question is still being worked out, but there will still be a residual American presence even after the interim Iraqi assembly is created.

So the United States will be able to stay, but you will have an Iraqi face that will have much greater authority. Many of the Iraqis-- I spent a morning over at the Ministry of Water, because the new minister of water is an old friend of mine. He and I spent time; I also spent time with some of his staff. And, you know, what I heard constantly from them is, look, let us do this. We know how to do this. We know better than you do how to do this. And what they said is our ministry works well because our American advisors recognize that. And what they do is they serve as liaison with the rest of the American occupation forces, with the military, et cetera, and they also just serve as kind of overseers to make sure that all the contracts are above-board and nobody's skimming money and they make sense. But they mostly allow us to make most of the decisions, and we really do know what we're doing. We have a very competent staff of people.

And it's also important--you know, the point that Charlie was making about humiliation. It's a really important one that I just don't think anyone over here recognizes, how important this is to the Iraqis. They want to see Iraqis making these decisions even if they know--and again, they want to know--that there are Americans somewhere in the background making sure that this doesn't all get out of hand. But they want to see Iraqis in the foreground.

And so this new arrangement will do that. It will allow the Iraqis who really do know what they're doing to make much more of the day-to-day decisions. It will give them the Iraqi face on their government, but nevertheless there will a residual American presence that will allow for this longer political process.

Because this is the point that Charlie was making, and he's absolutely right. Iraq is not ready for direct democracy. They're just not. And most of the Iraqis

recognize it. It's one of the reasons why they say please don't go, because we understand it's going to take some time. They don't have political parties organized, they don't have the people educated as to what exactly is entailed in all of this, they don't have a structure that can do it--they don't have a census yet. And a whole bunch of other problems. It is going to take two or three years to get to the point where they are ready for that kind of democracy, and they know it.

And so what's clever--one of the things that's very clever about Bremer's plan is it creates a mechanism by which you've got this Iraqi face, but you also preserve the longer-term process with a U.S. presence in the background to make sure things don't come off the rails.

It's also clever--and there are a lot of clever things about it, but I'm just going to mention these two. Another clever aspect is how they came up with the formula that they came up with for electing the members of the Iraqi interim assembly. And it's too long to go into details in, because it's extraordinarily complicated.

But what they did was they created a system which should allow for the creation of a much more representative and therefore much more legitimate body. Again, these won't be parliamentary representatives directly elected by the people, but I think most Iraqis are going to look at them and say this is a much better group certainly than the Governing Council, whom they had nothing but disdain for--except, of course, for their own tribal leaders there. Obviously, the Kurds loved Talabani and Barzani and Hoshyar. That's not a problem for them. But for the vast majority of the Shia, the Sunni, they look at the folks on the council and they say--literally, one woman said to me, who are these people? Where do they come from? Why should they be ruling over my life?

You know, they don't have it. The Governing Council doesn't have it. And this very complicated formula that the CPA has come up with--and, you know, they've come up with it over time as they said, well, let's do this and someone said, well, there'd be that loophole and said, well, we'll try this and someone pointed out there'd be another loophole. And they've created this very complicated system to try to deal with these different problems and different loopholes. And it won't be perfect. There will be problems. But you look at it and, at least on paper, it's actually quite clever.

QUESTION: Hello. Ron Vagence [sp], Kuwait News Agency. If I could get you briefly, the three of you, just to touch on this one question. How do you see the upcoming election year driving the U.S. foreign policy in Iraq, good or bad?

MR. INDYK: Mike?

MR. O'HANLON: I'll be the cheerful guy again, I suppose, maybe the most naive one as well, in saying that I understand Mr. Bush needs to have significant change before November 2004, but I think most of the decisions he's making to expedite that process are the right ones anyway, largely for the reasons that Ken has said. Maybe I'm twisting his words, but I think the idea of trying to restore as much sovereignty as possible to the Iraqis in some kind of an interim basis by next summer is necessary to win the counterinsurgency, not just to help Mr. Bush in the fall campaign.

And for those who think I'm defending Mr. Bush too much or acting like his RNC chairman even though I'm a Democrat, I would simply say that he's going to be able to get anywhere close to out of Iraq by next November. As Ken points out, much of Bremer's plan is designed to help us be able to stay for awhile. I just don't think we have the luxury of even talking about being below, let's say, 60 to 75 thousand Americans at a

minimum in Iraq next fall and still taking several Americans killed in action per month undoubtedly. And that's a relatively optimistic case.

So this is not trying to suggest that things are going to be great for Mr. Bush. Most of the decisions he's making now he would have to make anyway, regardless of the impending election.

MR. INDYK: Anybody else on that?

MR. POLLACK: I'll just add I hope it doesn't, is what it basically-- I hope that politics don't affect Iraq. Because if they do, I think we're going to just--we will screw it up. Iraq is extraordinarily important to us today. It is much too important to be determined by American domestic politics.

MR. DUELFER: I'll just add that the Iraqis will be very sensitive that the election's coming up, and they will try to play that one way or the other, both those who want us to move forward in one direction and those who want it all to come off the rails.

MR. INDYK: Will Marshall?

QUESTION: Thank you. I wonder if you all could elaborate a little on how we win the counterinsurgency. Charles said that our raids tend to create more enemies. And that makes sense, but the idea of simply more infantry out on street patrol to enhance Iraqi security would also create more American targets. So I'm left wondering if the inescapable conclusion is that a lot more American troops have to die in order to begin to dry up the sea in which remnants of the Saddam regime are now swimming with apparent popular support, at least in some regions of the country. So I'm looking for guidance here on how we can actually--what are the right military tactics that minimize our cost and maximize our chances of success.

MR. INDYK: Maybe I can just add one point that question, which is this concept of a learning enemy; are they actually adjusting their tactics faster than we are?

MR. O'HANLON: I'll start. As to Martin's last point, again, I think that the enemy is using tactics that are mostly developed elsewhere and mostly predictable, although obviously the competence with which they use them and the degree to which they use them can vary, and that's a very important indicator. So I'm less worried about them thinking of clever new things that have never been done before than simply sustaining this, which is bad enough.

As to your question, Will, about how do we avoid this Catch 22: you go in heavy and you get no human intelligence and you don't help the Iraqis improve their security; you go in light and you make yourself vulnerable. It is a quandary. I do think more Americans are going to have to die. If there's anything that's--you know, at the moment, we're getting used to a higher casualty toll. And in a way, maybe it's the right moment to make the adjustment that Ken has suggested, because that adjustment will lead to more casualties but in a sense we are becoming more nationally prepared for it. Maybe I'm wrong; maybe we're reaching our point of national exhaustion with casualties. But to the extent we're going to have to get through a difficult process of transition, maybe now is the moment.

I would add one more point, which is we have to do this with Iraqis as well on the foot patrols. When I try to think of an image of an American or a few Americans just walking down the street, we can't let ourselves be the only targets and we can't go in so small that we can just set up an easy killing of one or two Americans a day on foot patrol for Iraqis in Baghdad. And the British have it easier in Basra, and they

had it easier in Northern Ireland compared to what our situation is in Baghdad or Ramadi.

So I think we're going to have to go in with somewhat large foot patrols, including Iraqis to share the casualties and to share the intelligence gathering. And that may be the best scenario I can think of.

MR. POLLACK: Just picking up on Mike's last point, because he's absolutely right. The best way to do it is with mixed patrols. And in fact, when I was hearing this from various Iraqis, I actually went back to one woman and said are you telling me you want American soldiers on every street corner in Sadr City? And she said, not just Americans. Have Americans with Iraqis. I mean, she very specifically--and I think she's absolutely right. And that is the right way to do it.

And there is a plan out there, this new force, the ICDC, the Iraqi Civil Defense Corps which is being set up. They are supposed to do exactly that. And if they get started and if they get some decent training, we can get enough numbers of them and we've got enough of our own infantry, I think they'll help a lot.

My point, Will, was that we need the infantry to deal with a separate issue. It's not so much with the insurgency, it's to deal with the general lawlessness of Iraqi society. But as you pointed out, in dealing with that, which is the much more important security problem because that is really what's hampering the economic and political development of Iraq far more than the insurgency itself, in dealing with that, you're right, we are going to open ourselves up. And unfortunately, I think it is likely that moving in this direction will increase the number of casualties that we have. As I said, that is inherent in this process. If all we want to do is drive down American

casualties, then let's move the boys back to Texas, because that's where they will probably be safest. But we have a mission out there in Iraq.

A second point. We keep saying this, and it sounds like a cliché, it is a cliché, it's also true, which is the only way that we're going to deal with the insurgency is to deal with the hearts and minds. We've got to get the Iraqi people to the point that they are actively cooperating with us. And that is starting to happen in a number of places throughout Iraq. Some of the folks that I was speaking to up at Balad Air Base were saying exactly that. They were very heartened by the fact that the people in the villages where they were working and bringing all of this progress has responded by saying to them, you know, hey, we've got a couple of guys who are hiding down in a water pipe in one of the irrigation ditches and we think they're bad guys; why don't you go pick them up? That was exactly the kind of thing that we needed to-- the direction we needed to move in.

My point is we need to do that in much greater areas of Iraq, and we need the people and resources to do it. And then we've got one last question, that one [inaudible] out there, which is that, you know, as Charlie was saying, we've alienated a chunk of Iraq's population. And I would put a label on it to say that I think in particular who we have alienated are the Sunni tribals, who we've just convinced that we are hell-bent on destroying them, completely keeping them out of power. And they have furnished that very useful, very conducive sea in which these insurgents are swimming. And until we start to engage with them--working with their tribal sheiks, buying them off the way Saddam did--you know, until we're willing to start giving them benefits and letting them see that they're going to have a stake in the future of Iraq, they're going to continue to oppose us.

MR. INDYK: Steve Solarz.

QUESTION: Thank you, Martin. One question for Charles, perhaps Mike, and then one for Ken. For Charles and perhaps Mike: You indicated that it was your sort of working hypothesis with respect to the weapons of mass destruction that Saddam probably didn't have existing stockpiles when we went in, but did maintain in place an infrastructure to produce particularly chemical and biological weapons when the opportunity arose. You also said that it's very important to look at the situation from their perspective, not ours, and what makes sense to us may not make sense to them.

So let me ask you to look at the situation from Saddam's perspective and with his logic. Once the U.N. inspectors left in 1998, but before the new inspectors returned, what would have been Saddam's logic in maintaining an infrastructure for the production of these weapons but not producing them themselves when the inspectors were out, when presumably it would not have been difficult for him to produce those weapons? This, from our perspective, seems illogical, but perhaps there's some logic from his that you could explicate.

And the question for Ken, you indicated that Sistani's call for direct elections as a way of selecting the constituent assembly was really a negotiating tactic to get the members of the Governing Council to back off any effort to maintain control for themselves. And you may be right. But let's assume for the moment you're not right and that Sistani really does want direct elections.

I just have to say, parenthetically, I'm amazed that Bremer would have come out with a plan without first in effect clearing it with Sistani, because his objections are obviously a major political problem.

But if he does insist on direct elections, it's not clear to me what the problem with that is. There may not be voter rolls, but there are ways of dealing with that. You can put indelible ink marks on everyone who votes, to prevent them from voting more than once on the same day. You have the [inaudible] registration cards, which provides another way of dealing with repeated voting. You can even combine both systems. You can have Bremer's system for nominating candidates and then let the nominees be subject to a vote of people who go into the voting booth, which would be a way of getting around your problem of no political parties.

But my question is, if Sistani really insists on direct elections, would it be wise to move in that direction, or should he be told to buzz off and they'll proceed without his consent?

MR. DUELFER: Let me start. That's a great question, and probably going to be unanswerable even if we had Saddam sitting here. But let me make a couple of comments about it.

One, I think Saddam, the regime, was intentionally ambiguous, in some ways like Israel. In June of 2000, he gave a speech, which said you cannot expect Iraq to give up a rifle and live only with a sword until its neighbors give up rifles and live only with swords--implying that he still had the capability of rifles. At the same time, he would be declaring within the council in the U.N. and to his friends in the U.N. that, look, I've done everything, we need to get the sanctions lifted, et cetera.

I think--and through some discussions with former senior Iraqis--there was amongst them on exactly this point. On the one hand, you know, the inspectors are gone-- and one guy I know very well, who was a very senior Iraqi, once told me two weeks after the bombing in December of '98, said, jeez, if we knew that was all you guys

were going to do, we would have thrown you out a long time ago-- because all they got was four days of bombing.

But the two sides of the debate were, one, these weapons are useful. The Saddam experience-- he's got two life experiences where these things saved him: in the war with Iran, where they used 101,000 chemical weapons, et cetera, et cetera; and in the first Gulf War with the United States, where they argue that it contributed to the decision not to go to Baghdad in 1991. So there was a body of thought which said, yeah, we ought to be going ahead on this stuff. The countervailing body was, look, we're close on getting this yoke off of us forever with the U.N. We've divided the Council, we've got good friends on the Council, the allocation of oil contracts and so forth, and a lot of this is going to be coming out. Those oil contracts to countries and individuals were working.

So, I'm not being-- I'm not giving you a concrete answer, but there was a debate. And I think what Saddam did was he kind of muddled through a bit. He said, okay, I'm in missiles. Missiles, they're not really weapons of mass destruction. He seemed to have it in his head that missiles were actually okay. They had development programs in guidance and propulsion embedded in permitted programs. And evidently, it appears they were in fact going beyond that in terms of design. So they were working to be prepared for long-range missiles. It appears that they really did put the nuclear program on ice, in spite of the fact that, as I observed before, there were five locations where their nuclear people tended to be congregated according to their specialties.

But in terms of actually producing weapons, in that period of two years, evidently they were not producing a lot. Certainly in February of 2002, when Saddam took the decision to accept inspectors, that's when he made the decision to begin a

dialogue with the U.N., Kofi Annan. They had a meeting shortly thereafter with some of their key people to say, okay, these guys are going to be coming in, they're not going to find anything, right? And they took those preparations.

I haven't given you a categorical answer, but I think those are some of the elements of it. But even if Saddam were here, I think he's say, eh, I don't know.

MR. INDYK: Ken, should we tell Sistani to buzz off?

MR. POLLACK: Yeah, that's also another great question. First, you know, your point about the fact that it's inconceivable that Bremer wouldn't have checked with Sistani first is part of the reason I actually believe all my Shia interlocutors, who are saying that this was mostly a negotiating position by Sistani, because--and I absolutely [inaudible] and this is a point that I made also--there isn't a great deal of contact between CPA and [inaudible], but they do make contact with Sistani and Hussein al-Sadr and other important members of the Hawza, and it was my understanding that they went behind the scenes and said are you guys going to be okay with this, and heard yes, we're going to be fine with that.

If this all turns out to be wrong, we've completely miscalculated, we've completely mis[inaudible]--or maybe he's just changed his mind, which is also a possibility--then I think you're absolutely right, you know, the right way to handle this is to go back with a compromise. And the last one you mentioned is something that I've heard talked about by people at CPA and I think is the right one, which is, you know, one possible compromise is that Bremer's process selects a slate of delegates for each province, and the people vote up or down, do you want this slate or not? And that way, you kind of split the difference.

And I think that, you know, as you point out, there are lots of compromises you could come up with to still make the basic system function. And that's where I would go. I don't think it's a good idea to tell Sistani and the Hawza to buzz off. If we could avoid doing so, it would be great. Because they really have been extremely cooperative and extremely helpful in getting us as far along as we have been.

MR. INDYK: Okay, we only have a few more minutes left, so I'm just going to ask two people to ask questions and get the three of you to respond. First of all, right at the back, from al-Ahram.

QUESTION: My name is Khaled Dawoud from Egypt's al-Ahram newspaper. I was just wondering, Mr. Pollack didn't really answer the question on the election system, which is not basically an election in the point of view of Mr. Sistani or others because it does not really--it starts with either the CPA or the Iraqi Governing Council appointing the 15 members who are going to choose the caucus, you know, people who are later going to choose the members of the general assembly. Which is apparently not acceptable for Sistani as a starting point. So I just wonder, like, how you can overcome this point, you know, from your perspective.

And then just one last thing. Since the three of you visited Iraq, I was just wondering what's the mood there concerning the concepts which are sometimes being expressed in U.S. papers here about dividing Iraq into three states--Sunni, Shiite, and Kurd? Thank you.

MR. INDYK: The second question, right here.

QUESTION: Thanks. Gary Mitchell from the Mitchell Report. When you were--listening to this group talk about the confusion among Iraqis about Americans' intentions and policies, it seems to me that we may have some of the same

problems going on in the country, in America, today. And the CNN poll flipping from 70-30 in May to 30-70, roughly, in November suggests that may be the case.

The question goes something like this: The vocabulary that seems to be emanating from various points in the administration includes things like "long slog," talk about troop reductions, the president talks about staying as long as we must, we talk about the sort of short-cut to democracy, hurry-up Iraqification. And I guess my question is, is there a policy lurking in there; and if so, what is it and what will it take for someone to bring all those strands together so that, in a crucial year in American politics, the president will have what he needs, which is a stronger base of domestic support?

MR. INDYK: Okay. Mike, do you want to start?

MR. O'HANLON: I'll just start with the last question. I don't know enough to answer the previous ones. My only hope is that we actually do, I think, have a better strategy now, and not a bad strategy. But we're also characterized by a growingly polarized American political debate on this subject, for many reasons that I won't go into here but we're all familiar with. And this is to me one of the great consequences of the polarization of the American political debate. We should be listening to figures of both parties talk about how the pieces are beginning to come together, and willing to, if you're a Democrat, acknowledge what Bush has finally gotten right even if it took him too long, and if you're a Republican, admit where they've made some mistakes.

You don't have that feel. I don't hear the kinds of voices that I used to hear when Sam Nunn and people like that were the dominant figures on Capitol Hill in security. And this has become an incredibly political issue in the United States. And so I am depressed because I actually think in a way our strategy is better than we are able to recognize as a country, not because it started well, because it's gotten pretty passable.

And we've just got to finally resolve to stick with it. Conveying the impression that we don't have that resolved is one of the few ways in which we could fail.

MR. INDYK: Charlie?

MR. DUELFER: Well, I'm not quite clear what the strategy is. Not because I don't think there is one, it's just--perhaps I have been looking at it from the Iraqi perspective too long. I mean, I think it would be interesting if the Iraqis came around in the United States and conducted a survey to see what people really thought so they could make some judgments about how long they really thought the United States was going to stay there.

But the sense I get--really, to go to the first question--there is a sense of a kind of despair among many of the Iraqis with something to lose. I repeatedly hear from people I know that people are leaving, and they're not returning. There is a brain drain going on. Last week I heard about a guy I know who's a physician, he and three or four of his colleagues left. And why did they leave? Well, yes, it was the security issue, but it was a new twist on it, something like we hear about in Colombia, where they were concerned about hostage-taking. Evidently, they were put at risk not because of political--or because they were some group that somebody else didn't like or they were on a death list, but simply because it's evidently becoming a business to take people hostage and charge them between 50 and 100 thousand dollars to get free--again, because there is no particular security there.

So the sense I've gotten on that first questions was just that there is a bit of--they're not optimistic.

MR. POLLACK: Let me start with the first question that I was asked, which is--I think I've answered that question perfectly adequately. First, your

characterization of how the process is going to work is incorrect. The Governing Council only appoints five of the 15 who are going to [inaudible]. And again, they are simply selecting other delegates who are actually going to be the representatives in the Iraqi interim assembly. And there's a mechanism by which 11 of the 15 have to agree on any candidate, for that candidate to be approved. Again, it's a very sophisticated system that will create checks and balances to, hopefully, minimize the ability of any particular group to use this process.

And true, you will never have-- this will not produce as legitimate a government as direct elections. But as I think every educated Iraqi agrees, Iraq is not ready for those direct elections. And Sistani's objections, as you've heard me say numerous times, it is my very strong sense that this is principally a negotiating position. And I certainly hope that's right. If I'm wrong, I think that the various work-arounds that Steve Solarz suggested would be a perfectly good way to start on that issue. I think that there are ways to deal with this question. And I actually think that, by and large, the Shia leadership recognizes that this process will be a good one for them and one that they want to participate in. And that's been my sense all along.

As for Gary's question, you know, my simple answer is I think we have several policies contending within this administration, which strikes me as kind of the norm with this administration. What was interesting for me out in Baghdad was the uncertainty there both among Americans and Iraqis as to which policy was going to prevail. I think for the first time the folks in CPA really felt like they had a good policy, that, you know, this plan represented the right approach. And they convinced me. I think that it does represent the right approach. It is about a long-term commitment and building institutions over time. And don't be wrong, I think there are all kinds of other

problems, which I talked about, and in particular the military problems out there, I think, are just terrifying. Because if we don't deal with the security situation, nothing is going to ultimately work. But I think these are all things that we could work with if we wanted to do so.

But the problem is I think you've got other people with very different policy agendas. And, you know, I have heard the same rumors that other people have, that there are people who want to get out, you know, before the election, right after the election, take or pick. Or they want to turn things over to this person or to that person. I don't think we know yet.

What I heard, interestingly, from a number of different people at CPA is that Bremer, when he went back to Washington, convinced the president that he had the right approach and the president bought off on it 100 percent and made clear to his NSC that this was the way that he wanted to go. And what I heard constantly from those folks at CPA is, I hope that that's actually what happens.

MR. INDYK: We're going to have to call it quits at this point.

I hope you're right, too, Ken.

Let me just announce for all of you that tomorrow we're having another press briefing. Yossi Beilin and Yasser Abed Rabbo and some members of their delegations will be coming in from their Geneva signing ceremony yesterday. This will be the only public briefing that they do in Washington. It will be under our auspices, at 11 o'clock, but it will be at the Mayflower Hotel, not here in Falk, which is being used for other purposes. So that session tomorrow will be 11 o'clock at the Mayflower Hotel.

Let me in conclusion thank Ken and Charlie and Mike very much for enlightening us today on a very difficult situation. We appreciate it very much.

[End of press briefing.]