

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

INSTABILITY IN IRAQ; INITIATIVES IN THE MIDDLE EAST HEARTLAND

A Look at the Latest Iraqi Developments and a
Preview of Upcoming Visits by Mubarak and Sharon

10:00 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.

Monday, April 12, 2004

Falk Auditorium
1775 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036

[TRANSCRIPT PREPARED FROM A TAPE RECORDING.]

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QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

PROCEEDINGS

MR. STEINBERG: We are here to discuss the very challenging events that are taking place in the so-called Greater Middle East. They've obviously had a very difficult week for the Coalition forces, both on the military and political front as they struggle to deal with military challenges, both around Baghdad, and the Sunni Triangle and in the south; a lot of political questions about the process of the handover leading to June 30th; and at the same time the president facing two very important visitors this coming week, with President Mubarak and Prime Minister Sharon coming to discuss not only the crisis in Iraq, but more importantly some of the developments in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, notably Prime Minister Sharon's plan for unilateral disengagement from Gaza.

And so we thought it was an appropriate time to really take a fairly comprehensive look at events in the region, what's going on, on the ground, what are the potential strategies going forward, what are the pitfalls and opportunities, if any, for the administration, as it faces what I think is clearly a critical period in the evolution of its policy towards the region.

We have a very distinguished group of Brookings and Saban Center scholars here to discuss these issues. They are well-known to all of you. We are going to begin with Michael O'Hanlon, who is going to talk about the military situation; then, Ken Pollack, the director of research at the Saban Center, who is going to talk about U.S. options going forward, and particularly what to do with the upcoming June 30th handover; and then we'll turn to Ivo Daalder, senior fellow at Brookings, to talk about the implications of recent events for U.S. relations with its allies and the role of the troop

contributors on the ground and potential future roles for NATO and the U.N.; and then to Martin Indyk, the director of the Saban Center, to talk about Prime Minister Sharon's initiative and the meetings with the president; and, finally, Tamara Wittes, who is going to talk about President Mubarak's visit and the Greater Middle East Initiative, which is going to be a centerpiece, hopefully, for the administration, of its meeting with the G8 allies later this spring.

So a busy schedule. We'll each take a few minutes to begin the discussion, and then we'll turn to questions from the audience.

So, Mike, if you would kick us off.

MR. O'HANLON: Thanks, Jim, and thanks to everybody for being here. It is a sobering time to talk about military issues in Iraq. I guess the only light way to put it is if Phil Mickelson can finally win the Masters, let's hope a western power can finally win a counterinsurgency operation in the Arab world, but I have to say it looks less promising to me. I've been an optimist throughout this for a long time, and I'm less optimistic now and perhaps reassessing some of my earlier conclusions. So it's definitely a dark period.

I'm going to talk mostly in just the couple of minutes I have about the numbers of troops we have, how those might evolve. Ken is more of an expert on Iraq, clearly, and since counterinsurgency is so much a political undertaking, I think I'll leave to him more of an assessment of the strategy, but I'll say a couple of words about that as I finish.

A few points on the numbers of troops, whether we have enough, whether we did have enough, whether we should increase now. Let me state just a few broad observations.

One is there is no good methodology for estimating the number of troops to use in a stabilization mission. People who want to say we use too few will extrapolate from Bosnia and Kosovo, but frankly in Bosnia and Kosovo, we had the luxury of putting in more than we probably needed. Therefore, there is only so far you want to extrapolate from those numbers.

Afghanistan is the other extreme of putting in way too few, I think demonstrably way too few for the initial goal that was set out to stabilize the country.

I think that in Iraq, if we use one of these broad methodologies, for example, that the Rand Corporation has recently done to try to say how many troops per 100,000 inhabitants you need to restore order, to police, et cetera, you're not going to get a very satisfying answer because the problem is there's a margin of error of about 50 to 90 percent in what these projections are. So it's going to tell you something like 200,000, plus or minus 100,000, if you just sort of churn through the numbers and the methodology. You really have to, therefore, get beyond this broad metric.

However, there are ways, I think, to be concerned that we've been too light all along and that we're probably on the verge of being too small and too light right now. One is that if you look at previous CENTCOM plans for overthrowing Iraq's government and stabilizing the country thereafter, plans that were created in the period prior to General Frank's running of CENTCOM, you see that we always assumed we would need five to six divisions to do this job.

Part of the reason was for the aftermath, not just for the war fighting. This was not just General Zinni, under the Clinton administration. This goes back to the base force scenario of Dick Cheney and Colin Powell, when they ran the Pentagon. And back then, as you may recall, they actually thought that this scenario might require even

more troops than the Clinton administration later assessed. So there was a strong bipartisan consensus that you needed to go in big if you were going to do Iraq.

To use one of my favorite lines from Ken Pollack's book, "You don't win points for style in military operations." You might as well win decisively and be ready to stabilize the country thereafter. So we should be wary that we were trying to do this on the cheap, too small to begin with.

On top of that, we can state demonstrably that there were certain missions not being done last summer. Commanders may have said they had enough troops for the mission at hand. That begs the question was the mission the right one? Was it comprehensive enough? When you see ammunition dumps simply unguarded, when you see border regions simply being unguarded, which was the situation through much of last winter, you have to say we didn't have enough troops. Okay. But that's all pretty much the history. What about where we stand today?

Frankly, I think that most of the country does not need more Coalition troops. That may be wrong. I'm not sure. I admit I'm making this judgment from a great distance. I haven't been to Iraq since September. Things change there quickly, so I don't know, but my impression is most of the country does not need more troops, but clearly some parts of it probably do.

Whether the increase from 110,000, the projected draw-down number for the United States, up to 130,000 is enough, I can't say from this tactical distance. My impression is at least we're moving in the right direction, but I'm still nervous that we haven't yet developed a serious strategy to restore order in the Sunni Triangle, where we have essentially taken ourselves out of many of these cities. The Marines are now trying to correct that mistake and get back in at a terrible price to their own troops and to the

image of this war in much of the Arab world, where you see U.S. troops shooting at mosques, at least that's the al-Jazeera imagery, and that's obviously harmful to us in a broader psychological sense.

But in terms of numbers of troops, my impression is we may still not be quite high enough. The good news is, if we went up to a higher number, if we do need a few thousand more than we've got now, you're not going to have to stay at that level indefinitely. At some point, the Iraqi security forces will be good enough to help us. They clearly aren't very good right now. But if you look at the history of stabilization missions, you tend to be able to reduce by 25, 30, 35 percent per year once you get the situation underhand. But you don't start reducing until you get the situation in hand, and we haven't yet accomplished that.

So, thankfully, we're seeing a correction to what I think was a premature draw-down. I was wrong. I thought it would be possible by this point to begin the draw-down, but you have to stabilize the situation before you do and, if anything, we're going to have to go up even higher. So, if I had to project, I'd say the number might want to be around 130- to 150,000 right now, and maybe by next year we can get down below 100,000. In terms of the numbers, that's about the best you can do with the broad methodologies, but we have to also be wary of listening to the military commanders. They are sometimes, in a way, giving us an answer that I think they're pressured to give, which is for the mission at hand we have enough troops. That's a very, very hedged statement that you have to listen to carefully and assess carefully before you can really conclude if we have enough forces in Iraq today.

In terms of strategy, I'm just going to say one word and then wrap up. I, frankly, have no broad critique of the strategy at this point. I think we're in a bit of a

mess because we lost the initiative last summer. We didn't have enough people or the right rules of engagement to keep order. We came in as the liberators. We did not remain as the champions of the Iraqi people for very long because we quickly allowed the country to descend into chaos, and then we refused to bring in the international community, so we lost the benefit of legitimacy, as many of my colleagues at Brookings have been arguing and you'll hear about I'm sure later on in the panel.

And therefore those mistakes, allowing the country to descend into chaos, demobilizing and not reconstituting the Iraqi security forces, and not seeking legitimacy through the international community have really hurt us in the counterinsurgency operation. But at this point, frankly, I do not have any major critique of the strategy going forward. I think what we're trying to do is use sort of the right amount of force, not too much, not too little, in broad terms, is about all you can ask for.

I'm sure Ken will have some more thoughtful and detailed comments, but I'll leave it at that.

MR. STEINBERG: I want to come back to this, but let's get Ken's take on this.

Ken?

MR. POLLACK: Thank you, Jim, thank you, Mike, thank all of you for coming out on this very rainy morning.

My time is brief, so I'm just going to hit some highlights. Let me start with the lessons that I take away from last week.

The first point I would make is last weeks' fighting, last week's events, have to be a wake-up call to the Bush administration that everything in Iraq is not rosy, that there are real problems.

I think, to some extent like Mike, I don't necessarily believe that this is catastrophic, I don't necessarily believe that the game is up in Iraq and that everything is hopeless there. I think that there are things that the United States could do to turn them around, but we have real problems, and if the administration is not willing to start turning things around, those problems are going to get much, much worse in the future.

I'm just going to tick off three of the problems that we've got right now that I think need to be addressed immediately:

The first of which is the growing resentment of the Iraqis against our presence. I think you saw this in the strength of Muqtada al-Sadr's forces. There seems to be no real indication that Muqtada al-Sadr's core forces, the people who believed in him right from the start, has grown significantly. The people who always wanted him to be the *mahdi*, the leader of Iraq, whatever he's aspiring to at this particular moment, seems to have remained relatively constant. It seems to have grown a little bit.

But what has grown considerably are other people who are looking now to Muqtada al-Sadr simply as the great voice of resistance against the United States. What I am hearing from Iraqis, what I am hearing from reporters and other Americans coming from Iraq is that increasingly the frustration of Iraqis with the U.S.-led reconstruction is driving people into the arms of people like Muqtada al-Sadr.

People who when we first came in were very hopeful, who wanted the U.S.-led reconstruction to succeed, are increasingly coming to the conclusion that we either can't or won't do what is necessary to actually rebuild Iraq the way that we have said that we were willing to do so. And these people are becoming frustrated, and they are becoming recruits for the cause of Muqtada al-Sadr and others. They are not yet a

majority, as best I can tell or I think anyone else can tell. They are still a minority, but the number is growing, and that is deeply troubling.

Second point. The security forces, as Mike was saying, have revealed themselves to be absolutely hollow. For those of you who have sat in this room before, you have heard me say this time and again, so please indulge me for repeating myself. The forces have not been properly vetted. They have not been properly trained. They have not been properly equipped. They should not have been out in the streets in this manner, and we are seeing large-scale defections, large numbers of Iraqi security forces who are just not willing to take on either the Sunnis out in Fallujah or Muqtada al-Sadr's people in the south. This is not necessarily a problem with them. It is a problem with how we handled this, and it was a problem all along. It was a problem identified by U.S. security personnel who recognized this. That is also a huge problem we have got to address.

Third point. With the Sunnis, once again, this is more proof that we have not yet dealt with the Sunni Triangle, with the Sunni tribal leaders, who we alienated by our actions immediately after the conclusion of the invasion, by excluding them effectively from the new government and by throwing them out of all of their positions through this very arbitrary process of de-Ba'athification. The Sunni Triangle still believes that reconstruction is, pardon the cliché, a knife poised at their heart, that reconstruction is about putting the Shi'a in power to let the Shi'a oppress them the way that they oppressed the Shi'a. And until we correct that problem, Fallujah, and Ramadiyah, and Haditha, and Habbaniyah, and all of these towns in the Sunni Triangle are going to continue to be tremendously supportive of the various insurgents, and it is going to make clearing operations, like what the Marines are trying to do in Fallujah –

which honestly I think is long overdue – it's something we probably should have done 12 months ago – but it's going to make those kind of operations extraordinarily difficult, extraordinarily painful.

What do we need to do? When I look at these different problems, and obviously there's some other ones out there, which I'll come to in just a moment, I think the first thing is obviously security. Again, those of you who have heard me say this any number of times, indulge me. Security is job number one.

And here I think this is one of the few areas where Mike and I do have a bit of a disagreement, although it's mostly just in splitting hairs in terms of, I do believe we need more forces for exactly the reason that Mike stipulated, which is that I don't think we have the right mission. My time in Iraq, and everything that I have heard from people since then, American soldiers, American officials, reporters and Iraqis, is that we continue to not provide the Iraqis with day-to-day security.

The ABC News poll that came out, was it last week, the week before, showed that in spades. Iraqis, overwhelmingly--overwhelmingly--saying the number one problem in the country was the absence of security, and that is both about how we are using the troops in-country. We are not using them to patrol. We are not putting them out in the neighborhoods and the villages to make the Iraqis safe, but it is also about the numbers.

And now that we have these twin insurgencies to deal with, I think that we probably will need to put quite a bit more troops in there, capable troops to do this. What's more, I also think it is now manifestly clear that we have got to pull the Iraqi security forces off-line, unit-by-unit, to re-vet them, re-train them, and re-equip them properly before we put them out on the street. The worst possible situation is what

we've got now, where we're throwing these troops out into the street, and they are dissolving. That gives no one any confidence. It does not give the troops confidence. It doesn't give the Iraqis confidence. The only people it gives confidence to are the insurgents themselves. And so I think, unit-by-unit, they have to be pulled off, re-trained, re-vetted, re-equipped and not put back out onto the front lines until they are in a position to succeed because it is critical that they be seen as successful, and I think that is going to take time. And the need to pull these units off-line, again, in my mind, raises the issue of even more troops. We're going to need more troops to take up the spaces that are going to be left absent by pulling these Iraqi units off-line.

Second, we have got to do something about the economic situation, and here, as well, security is job one. One of the principal reasons, probably the most important reason, that Iraq's economy continues to founder is because of the security situation. That is the number one impediment to employment, to all of the other problems in the Iraqi economy.

As best I can tell, it is the combination of the economy and the political situation, but I would say probably more the economy than anything else, that is causing this deep-seated resentment that is growing among Iraqis, that is causing the Iraqis who started out very supportive of the U.S. reconstruction effort to slowly begin moving in the direction of the Muqtada al-Sadr of Iraq. We have got to solve that problem.

One help out there, in addition to getting the security situation right, is going to be releasing the \$18 billion, which continues to be held up. If we can release the \$18 billion, my guess is that we will be able to create, at the very least, some short-term work programs that will start to help alleviate these problems.

With the \$18 billion, what I'm most concerned about is not the short term, but the long term. As I've said elsewhere, I am nervous that the \$18 billion, if not spent properly, will simply create the mother of all sugar rushes, which will mean that for six or eight months the Iraqi economy will be buoyed by this enormous amount of money flowing in, but if we have not set up security, if we've not dealt with corruption, if we don't have long-term programs in place to get Iraq's economy restarted, the money will simply go down a rat hole, and after six or eight months, it will all be gone, and the Iraqis will come down in a huge crash, which will be extremely deleterious to our interests.

Next point. We've got to deal with the Sunni Triangle. As I said, the Sunni Triangle is completely alienated. Again, those of you who have sat in this room before have heard me say this. Again, I think that we have got to start a massive education program with the Sunnis to convince them that rule of law, that representative government, that transparency, that all of the aspects of democracy that we want to see in place in Iraq will benefit them just as it will benefit the rest of the country and will ensure that they are not oppressed the way that they treated the Shi'a for the last 80 years or eight centuries, your choice.

In addition, obviously, we have got to reach out to the Sunni tribal sheikhs who, while not all powerful in the Sunni Triangle, have a great deal of influence, could probably do a great deal to alleviate our problems there. That is probably going to mean reaching out to them and saying to them what kind of resources can we put into your hands--and a lot of that is just going to be cold, hard cash--to get you to call off your boys, to get them to calm down and to get people to come out and help us with the case of reconstruction? All of this is not going to be easy.

And then, finally, we are going to need to deal with the political situation, which has been left unmentioned in the last few days. For me, one of the most upsetting things about the way that the United States handled Muqtada al-Sadr and the last few weeks is the fact that Lakhdar Brahimi has just arrived in Baghdad, on a long-planned trip, to try desperately to pull our chestnuts out of the fire.

Brahimi is probably our last chance to get some kind of an acceptable compromised political solution for a new interim government that would be acceptable to Sistani and to all of the other moderates inside Iraq. And in the midst of his going to Iraq, we start this campaign against Muqtada al-Sadr, which cannot possibly help him in his negotiations. And I am very concerned that Brahimi's mission has been fatally compromised as a result of this fighting. I think we have got to do everything we can, starting going to Brahimi, and then going to Sistani, as best we can, and saying to them: We need a political solution. What will it take to get you on board? What will you accept, in terms of a new interim transitional government? Because if all we do is prolong the existence of the current Iraqi Governing Council, maybe even add a few names, I don't think that's going to solve anything. In fact, Sistani has already given his answer to that. He has said publicly that if that's what the Americans do, that that new government will not have any legitimacy and any of its actions will have no authority and no validity.

Now, I think what Sistani is hoping is that Iraq will simply kind of ignore the Governing Council and wait until the December 2004 elections when they can get a fully legitimate government, but that's a long time. That's six or eight months when Iraq will not have a functional government that is accepted by the people and is capable of actually taking actions that are considered authoritative and legitimate by the people.

That kind of a situation is going to foster, is going to increase the Iraqi resentment against the United States. It is going to make it extremely difficult for us to fix some of the economic and security problems that are out there, and it is going to lead us to a situation where, by December 2004, Iraq may not be stable enough to have the direct elections which we're hoping will save us from the current situation.

MR. STEINBERG: Thank you, Ken.

Before I turn to our colleagues on the left, I just want to pose two questions to the two of you.

First, to Ken, on this question of al-Sadr, do you have any insight into the question as to why the administration and Coalition decided to take on al-Sadr directly, when he seemed to be so marginalized from the other Shi'a leaders and why they didn't sort of look to the other Shi'a leaders to keep him as sort of a bad boy off in the corner, rather than appear to empower him, as they have done now?

MR. POLLACK: It's a great question, Jim. It is the thing that has been going through my head because, as you're pointing out, the textbook solution for dealing with extremists in a foreign intervention is you get the moderates in the country to deal with their own extremists. That's the textbook solution, and we had that in Iraq before two weeks ago.

Sistani and the *Hawza* had effectively marginalized Muqtada. And, yes, he was out there, and he was establishing his control over certain neighborhoods, and he was doing everything he could to recruit people, but he wasn't having a great deal of success, as far as anyone can tell, and, in fact, he was completely marginalized. And by taking him on the way that we did, we have now inserted ourselves between the Iraqi

moderates and the Iraqi extremists, one of the stupidest things we could have possibly done. I am hoping we can pull ourselves out of it very quickly.

As to why, I mean, I'll be honest with you, I don't have a great answer. I have spoken to a few friends in the U.S. government who dealt with this, and what I have basically heard from them are reflections of a sense that Muqtada was starting to get "uppity." There was an attack--actually, the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* mentioned it --where Muqtada's forces went in and razed a gypsy village, and there was a sense that he was getting a little bit out of control, a little bit uppity. The newspaper was saying more and more virulent things against Paul Bremer and the CPA, and they basically decided we need to take him down before June 30, and this is as good a time as any.

Again, I think that if the left hand had been talking to the right hand, the right hand would have said, "We've got Brahimi coming in, we've got a U.N. elections team coming in, now is not the time to do this." But I see this as a sign of the real communications problems within the U.S. occupation of Iraq, which I've talked about in this forum before, and that's about the best I can do; is that they thought that he was getting a little bit too big for himself, and for some reason this was a propitious moment before June 30 to take him down. I think it was a mistake.

MR. STEINBERG: Mike, you said your judgment was, the best you could tell, that it was not too much, not too little force. As you look at the situation in Fallujah and in the Sunni Triangle, you have some pretty vicious attacks on the American civilian contractors, an initial pullback by the United States, and then an announcement that we're going to do whatever is necessary to go after the people, and

then this weekend the United States basically had offered to negotiate a cease-fire with them.

Thinking about it as a counterinsurgency strategy, is this smart to avoid a confrontation or does this empower the insurgents to think that they've got a seat at the table with the United States to negotiate over whether we're going to be present or not in the Sunni Triangle?

MR. O'HANLON: I don't have a great answer, Jim, but it seems to me one thing, of course you can negotiate over some things, not others, and you have to be clear on that, and we're not looking to allow the Ba'athists to become the next mayors of Fallujah or Ramadiyah or any place else. And so negotiations mean that perhaps we can try to get the moderate Iraqis more involved. If that's ultimately what the negotiation leads towards, I suppose it's fine.

I think the counterinsurgency strategy in the Sunni triangle has been, overall, pretty poor because we've rotated so many units through there and so many philosophies of applying military force, within a U.S. military that's actually I think pretty good at using force selectively, and yet we've had this complete confusion as to whether you try to keep order in these cities or essentially back out.

And, ironically, we put our best Coalition forces in the easiest parts of the country to handle--Petraeus up north, the British in Basra--and we put our forces that were a little more unsure of how to conduct themselves in the most difficult area, and I think the results have spoken for themselves.

MR. STEINBERG: Before we turn to the Mubarak and Sharon visits, Ivo, it's been tough on the allies. We've not only had the Spanish election, but we've had hostage-taking among our Coalition contributors. Vice President Cheney is out

talking to the East Asian partners. How does it look from the perspective of the allies and the prospects of keeping multilateral support?

MR. DAALDER: Well, if you aren't sufficiently depressed after what you've just heard, let me just reassure you, you will be even more depressed after I am finished because I am certainly depressed about not only what is happening in Iraq, but how this is playing abroad and what that means for how we're going to solve the problems there.

The interesting thing about the reaction abroad is that there is a combination of fear and glee, probably the worst combination you can have. There is a fear of Iraq thoroughly unraveling, of the United States having absolutely no idea what it has gotten itself into and, worse, no idea of how it can get out without making things even worse than they already are.

There is no one, perhaps, except for the person who wrote Tony Blair's piece in *The Observer* on Sunday, outside the United States who actually doesn't think that this is a total and utter, unmitigated disaster. That's the fear part.

The glee part is that there are some people who actually warned about this, who said that this is exactly what is going to happen if you start the war in Iraq, and there is a glee that an arrogant superpower may, in fact, now be cut down to size.

I don't find any of those reactions, though I understand both of them, particularly reassuring.

For those who are part of the Coalition, the doubts are growing about whether they ought to continue to stay. You don't only have the Spanish who have already decided to pull out, and frankly after last week, it's going to be really difficult to convince them to stay in one form or another, but you have other Coalition partners who

have not yet committed themselves to replacing the forces that they are about to rotate out.

The Dutch government, for example, even inside, when the prime minister was here in the Oval Office, was unwilling to commit to put another 1,900 troops in, as they pulled out the troops in July, and there are other governments who are not, including the Polish government, who are not yet committed to replacing the forces that will be rotating out.

So, at best, what you're going to have is that you're keeping what is there, 25-some-thousand troops, but you're not going to get any reinforcements, if you need more troops--and I'll get back to that in a minute--you're not going to get them from any of the Coalition partners. But, at worst, you will find people taking their troops out because the rotation is up and not replacing them with new and fresh troops. So that you, in fact, will reduce the number of Coalition troops that are there.

For those who are not part of the Coalition, I'm not sure there is an incentive now to start putting in forces to getting involved. I don't understand how one would, I don't see how a country like India or Pakistan, let alone France or Germany, will now finally decide that this is the time to start sending troops in, this is the time to getting fundamentally involved in Iraq.

So here's Bush's dilemma: Never has it been clearer that America needs international support and engagement in Iraq, and never has it been less likely that it will get that. That's the dilemma that we have created--by starting the war and continuing the way we have acted in the last year for all of the reasons that Mike and Ken pointed out.

It is evident, from whatever methodology you want to use, that we need three things in Iraq if we have any hope to succeed: we need more military power, we need more legitimacy for those who are there internationally, and we need more expertise in helping Iraq get back on its feet.

Now, the critics of the Bush administration, of whom I am one, have all along argued that the way you get more military power, the way you get more legitimacy and more expertise, is to turn to NATO and the United Nations.

Unfortunately, I don't think that's going to solve our problem. This is not a problem that NATO or the United Nations will solve for us. There are very few countries that, in fact, have the capability militarily to provide the extra forces that we need, and there are fewer countries still that have the capacity to fight the kind of counterinsurgency campaign that we are now engaged in. At best, as I can see it, we can find maybe another 5,000 or, if you're lucky, 10,000 Brits and 5,000 or so Frenchmen to help. That's it. There isn't anything else out there. It doesn't exist to fight this kind of campaign.

So we will need, if we have to have more troops, to rely on U.S. troops because they're the only ones there. They don't exist. It's not if you turn this over to NATO, you all of a sudden have 100,000 more troops. There aren't 100,000 more troops in NATO. In NATO today, there are 80,000 deployable troops. Once you start deducting what they have in the Balkans, what is in Afghanistan, and what is already in Iraq, you are left with about 5- to 10,000 more troops. That's it. It's not there.

So anybody who's out there telling you let's turn this over to NATO so we can have more troops is smoking the same thing that the administration is smoking.

The problem that we have with the Coalition forces that are already there is that they're not capable of conducting the operations that we need to conduct. The Ukrainians left as quickly as the Iraqi police forces. The El Salvadorans will now need American protection. So now we have a Coalition that not only reduces our ability to maintain security in Iraq, but in fact is reducing the American capability because the Americans are being diverted to protecting the Coalition forces that are supposed to help us in Iraq. That's our problem.

What about legitimacy? We need legitimacy. Legitimacy has a power all of its own. Many of us have argued that we need legitimacy. Brahimi can talk to Sistani. No American official can talk to Sistani. That is what legitimacy is all about. Now, Brahimi has been written up in many profiles as a magician, but Iraq today, unfortunately, needs more than magic. The problems that I think Ken alluded to, but frankly glossed over, in terms of how you create a viable political situation that is both legitimate internationally and, more importantly, legitimate at home, are extraordinary, and Brahimi ain't going to solve it in the next two-and-a-half months or even two-and-a-half weeks.

His three options of relying on handing over sovereignty to the IGC, to an expanded IGC or some Loya Jirga kind of conference are wonderful on paper, but they're not going to resolve the fundamental problem of how you create a Governing Council, a government that in fact can, one, govern and, two, have the support of the Iraqi people. None, indeed, will be legitimate for the reasons that Ken has argued. Sistani won't support any of them unless there are elections.

So Brahimi being there, the international community now being in control or being handed control by the United States and trying to resolve the political

situation hasn't solved our fundamental problem. Handing it over to the United Nations is no panacea, even if, frankly, this administration has now decided not to be involved in solving the political problem and handing it over to the United Nations. The United Nations can't do the magic that is needed in Iraq.

Finally, what you need in Iraq is more expertise. No other country that I know of would have done the kind of police training that we did in the way that Ken described. If we want to have Iraqi security forces, let's train them well enough so they can do their job, so that when there is a mob that approaches a police station, they don't run away, but they take, in fact, care of the mob. I don't blame these Iraqis for running away. I would have run away if I were in their situation and if I had been trained in the way that they were trained.

We need training. That takes time. We need expertise in helping to put elections together, in helping to figure out how the political transition is going to work. We need humanitarian and economic reconstruction assistance, all of which are capacities that other countries have and can develop. We can't do it all by ourselves. That's why we needed the international community there on day one. It's one of the problems that we created when we went to war in the way that we did.

But all of this, whether it is training for police, whether it is preparing for elections, whether it is delivering humanitarian aid requires, as Ken said, security-- security for the international presence, security for the average Iraqis--security. So the bottom line is we need more security, and there is nobody out there, except for the United States, who can provide that security.

And, frankly, just disagreeing with Mike, the notion that we have, with 130,000 troops, we have a sufficient number of troops to provide that security is patently

wrong. We at least need twice as much, at least, to provide the capacity to make sure that the streets in Baghdad are safe enough for people to go out and shop, let alone take care of the counterinsurgency.

We don't have Iraqi security forces, for the reasons that Ken said, that are out there, that are going to solve them, and we are not going to get Europeans or South Asians or Africans or Asians to provide those 130,000 extra troops. We will have to do it ourselves, and only if we provide that security will we have the time, will we have the luxury, to figure out a way for the Iraqis, for the Coalition forces, and the U.N. to develop a political process that puts Iraq back on track.

So, if you're not depressed yet, then I don't know what it is that it takes you to be depressed.

MR. STEINBERG: Let me just conclude this portion by saying that I think it's important not to forget, for all of the challenges, that--and it has been mentioned by some of my colleagues--that it is still the case that there are a very substantial majority of the Iraqi people who are still are happier about where they are than they were before and that, therefore, the door remains open to a strategy--however difficult it is--to try to deal with this problem. And I think the coming weeks are such an urgent time because it's a small window to walk through, but it's still one that presents an opportunity, and we'll have a chance to talk about this in the weeks ahead.

We'll turn next to Martin Indyk, who is going to talk about Prime Minister Sharon's visit and maybe a little bit about his future, but also his plan for Israeli withdrawal from Gaza.

AMBASSADOR INDYK: Good morning. There's probably a book to be written about the multiple ironies of the Middle East. Here's one for you. Just at the

moment, when things look so hopeless in Iraq, who would have thought that we would end up with some sense of hope in Gaza of all places?

But that's what's on the agenda this week, as President Mubarak and Prime Minister Sharon, and later next week King Abdullah, come to Washington. Naturally, there will be some discussion about Iraq, but the main focus will be on the initiative that Prime Minister Sharon has announced that he will take to withdraw all of the Israeli forces from Gaza and evacuate all of the Israeli settlements in Gaza.

In recent weeks, he has made a decision that it will be a total withdrawal from Gaza, both settlements and forces, and that provides an opportunity for the United States, for the international community, but it also provides an imperative to deal with this situation in a way that produces a positive impact on the efforts to seek a final agreement, a reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians.

Whether Sharon's unilateral initiative can be used as a springboard in this way, depends very much on the way in which the United States and Egypt respond to this initiative. There's a complex interplay here, and what I wanted to do this morning, in the short time I have, is give you a sense of what to look for in the meetings and in the outcomes that you will be able to observe today and on Wednesday, in the Mubarak and Sharon meetings with the president.

Sharon, essentially, is coming here at this time--and he actually wanted to come earlier--because in order to promote his initiative, he needs America's blessing. He needs the blessing of the president of the United States. Why? Because to do something which, in Israeli political terms, is revolutionary, that is, to evacuate even one settlement, let alone all of the settlements in Gaza, and four or five outlying settlements

in the West Bank, which is part of his plan, is something that is quite revolutionary in Israeli political terms.

No Israeli prime minister--not Rabin, not Peres, not Barak, and certainly not Netanyahu--has dared to confront the settler bloc, and its political support in the nationalist and religious bloc, in this way. And it is of course another irony that Sharon, who's seen as the father of the settlement movement, should be the one to actually do this.

But in order to do this, he has to justify it. You see, Israelis hate being suckers. They don't believe in giving without getting. But since this is not going to be negotiated with the Palestinians, it looks awfully like territories for nothing, rather than territories for peace, and territories for an agreement. So the recompense has to come from the United States, and that's what Sharon is looking for. He wants not only Bush's support for this initiative, but he wants payment, not in the terms that you might immediately think about--more foreign aid payment to resettle the settlers from Gaza--by the way, there are I think 19 to 20 settlements in Gaza, and there are only 7,500 settlers involved.

Sharon is not looking for money. What he's looking for is some reassurances that will appear in the form of an exchange of letters that the president and Sharon will undertake, which will enable Sharon to justify to his right wing giving up Gaza, in terms of getting a shift in U.S. positions on the final status issues, particularly as applies to the West Bank.

He would like, in the best case, American endorsement of his annexation of the three major settlement blocs that run along the 1967 lines that would incorporate

about 70 percent of the settlers. He would like a commitment from the president that Israel will not be expected, in a final agreement, to withdraw to the '67 lines.

He would like from the president a commitment that there will be no right of return for Palestinian refugees to Israel proper in the final settlement.

And he would like a commitment that there will be no other political initiatives undertaken--the United States will stop any other political initiatives--while his unilateral initiative is going forward.

And, finally, he wants an assurance from the United States that the United States will not oppose Israel's reentry to Gaza if it needs to take care of terrorist attacks arising from there, subsequent to Israel's withdrawal.

President Bush is caught in another dilemma here. On the one hand, he wants to endorse Sharon's initiative. Why? Well, it's a political season. An Israeli prime minister coming to Washington in an election year is necessarily going to be embraced by a president, particularly a president who has, for the last four years, been courting the American Jewish vote.

On the other hand, President Bush has his vision of a two-state solution which he has put out there, but done very little so far, to support. What he doesn't want is, as part of his two-state vision, that Sharon's "Gaza First" initiative will lead to a terror state, a failed terrorist state, in Gaza as a result of the vacuum that Israel will leave behind. The image that haunts the Bush administration is that in the wake of Israel's withdrawal, Hamas terrorists, with their green bands on, will be dancing on the rooftops of the settlements in Gaza.

So, first of all, he has sought and received an assurance from Sharon that nothing will happen on this initiative until after the elections here; and, secondly, he has

been seeking to do what he did not do in Iraq, and that is to secure international support for an international effort that would fill the vacuum in Gaza.

In particular, Bush administration officials have consulted with the quartet, that is, the European Union, the United Nations, and the Russians, and made it clear to them that they want consensus support for what is going to be necessary to fill the vacuum. That means an economic reconstruction plan for Gaza that would be led by the World Bank;

It means some undefined arrangement for an orderly handover of the settlements to somebody other than Hamas and assorted extremist factions in Gaza;

And it means, in the case of Egypt, understanding about what Egypt will do to secure the border between Egypt and Gaza, from which, at the moment, a lot of smuggling takes place into Gaza of arms, weaponry; and an Egyptian role in reconstructing the Palestinian security services in Gaza so that some authority that emerges under this kind of U.S.-led international effort, so that the security forces in Gaza will be able to assert control rather than enable Hamas and the other terrorist organizations to do so.

In order to get that kind of international support, Bush cannot meet all of Sharon's wish list because that will not be acceptable to the quartet and the Egyptians, whom he is now depending on for support. So what you are going to see is a delicate dance between the desire to send Sharon away happy and a desire to keep the international community, particularly the European Union, the United Nations and the quartet, sweet when it comes to taking care of the aftermath.

Now, this has implications, of course, for Mubarak's visit. He too has an interest in ensuring that there's no terror state emerging in Gaza on Egypt's borders.

But, on the other hand, he doesn't want to be the policeman of Gaza. That, in political terms, would be unacceptable for the Egyptians vis-à-vis the Palestinian cause. And so he will be prepared to do something, but the extent of how far he will go in this regard will depend on his own political calculations and the extent to which he can use his willingness to help Bush and Sharon in Gaza to deflect Bush's pressure for political reform, which is the other major agenda item in the Mubarak-Bush meeting. And I will leave that to Tammy to deal with.

As far as Sharon is concerned, what exactly will come out of these letters of assurance is still not clear. How exactly Bush will walk between the raindrops remains to be seen. They are still negotiating the last pieces of the language.

The question will be will he get enough from Bush, given the constraints that Bush is operating under, to be able to go back and in three weeks--because that's all he has before there's a Likud referendum--convince the 200,000 members of the Likud Party that what he got from George Bush is sufficient to justify what he's prepared to do in Gaza.

And I believe that, on the one hand, he will not get what he wants from Bush, but his spin merchants will go into overdrive in a way that will create enough momentum to enable him to pass it in the Likud. If he doesn't pass it in the Likud, by the way, he's finished as prime minister. It will, in effect, be a vote of no confidence in him. And not only the Gaza initiative will go out the door, but probably Sharon will go out the door, sooner rather than later, as well.

But I believe that the power of the prime minister, in terms of leadership on this issue, combined with the fact that Israelis don't want to be in Gaza, a majority of them don't want to be in the West Bank either, they're exhausted by this *intifada* and by

this conflict and would gladly give up Gaza, will lead him to achieve a majority, regardless of how far Bush goes or doesn't go in this meeting. And in the end, that will enable the initiative to go forward.

In other words, as the Rolling Stones say, "You can't always get what you want, but if you try sometimes, you get what you need." Bush will get a little help from Mubarak, a chance to embrace an Israeli prime minister in an election year, a sense that something positive is happening in the Israeli-Palestinian arena, at a time when nothing positive seems to be happening in the Iraq arena. Mubarak will get back into our better books, if not our good books, and will be able to relieve some of our pressure for political reform in Egypt, and Sharon will get a kiss on the cheek, if not the full package, but enough to move his initiative forward.

And in the Middle East, given the alternatives, that won't be such a bad week.

Thank you very much.

MR. STEINBERG: Thank you, Martin.

I've argued, as you know, before that if you look at the question of who gets to visit Crawford, you get a Powell test of how the administration sees its foreign policy.

We now have President Mubarak coming to Crawford. It's an interesting time, obviously. It comes on the heels of this spectacularly failed Arab League Summit. It comes at a time when, as Martin has suggested, the president needs all of the help he can get--not all of the help he needs--and he's going to have a very rich agenda with Mubarak, not only with respect to Sharon's initiative, but also to the president's own objectives for the greater Middle East.

So, Tamara, lead us through it.

MS. WITTES: Thank you, Jim. And, indeed, I think that the visit to Crawford is significant. It's meant to be symbolic of a close partnership with a strategic ally and friend, as the State Department called him this week.

I think though that this visit is taking place at a moment when relations and the U.S. and Egypt are increasingly contentious and likely indeed to be more so in the coming months. And that is because, while Iraq and the Middle East might be top on the American agenda for the visit--Iraq and the Middle East peace process--on the Egyptian side, there is this question of the Greater Middle East Initiative and indeed Bush's commitment to the broad policy of democracy promotion in the Arab World.

So, while Egypt is not that directly involved in Iraq, of course, it is concerned about the reputational issues, both for the U.S. and for Egypt as an American ally, I think the Greater Middle East Initiative may, in fact, top Iraq on Mubarak's agenda for the visit.

Mubarak has actually been one of the leading or most outspoken opponents of this initiative in the Arab World, joining with Saudi Arabia to oppose a strong reform proposal at the Arab Summit, which ended up being delayed. It was supposed to have taken place at the end of last month.

Mubarak is also the only Arab leader who has actually faced a U.S. government decision to tie assistance to his country to his human rights record in 2002, and that was something that I don't think he'd like to see repeated in the coming years.

The Egyptians have been uncomfortable with this American project from the first. Mubarak, as many of you know, rules with the benefit of emergency decrees. He has no designated vice president who would be his successor constitutionally, and

he's 76 now, and he's widely viewed to be grooming his son to take over his position, although, of course, that's a claim he denies in public.

Moreover, I think the Egyptians, as close American allies, were particularly stung by the way in which the Greater Middle East Initiative was launched, which was unintentional. Indeed, it was leaked to the Arabic press, after a draft had been circulated among the G8 for internal discussion, and that was the first that most Arab leaders have heard of it. So that a lot of what the U.S. has done in the weeks since that leak has been reassurance, rather than developing and formally launching the initiative, as it had hoped to do.

So I think you can say that at this point the Bush administration's commitment, both to the Greater Middle East Initiative, which was to have been launched with European allies at the G8 Summit, but also to the broader policy of democracy promotion, I think you can say that commitment is still in question, and Mubarak is going to be seeking to probe this commitment during his visit.

The Europeans have responded in a very lukewarm fashion. And as I said, there's been fierce Arab opposition in some quarters. At the same time, in the region, there is an increasingly bright line being drawn between pro-reform activists, some of whom are in governments, many of whom are not, and more conservative, recalcitrant governments.

Last month, there was a conference held of Arab liberal activists at Alexandria in Egypt that produced a really remarkable document calling for the repeal of emergency laws, the abolition of state security courts, freedoms of press, and speech and association and other major structural changes in the conduct of Arab politics.

So the U.S. is facing a choice, and a choice that it's going to have to make before the G8 Summit, which is whether to embrace this activist vision, this rather ambitious vision of democracy for the region or whether to embrace a vision that's being put forward by more conservative leaders like Mubarak of gradual reform that may or may not ever lead to real democracy.

Now, in facing this choice, the Bush administration feels--

[Tape change.]

MS. WITTES: --caught. It's a tough choice because it involves a tradeoff between short-term interests in getting our government cooperation on issues like the peace process and like Iraq and our long term interests in fixing what the Bush administration has come to view as pretty dysfunctional politics in the Arab World, which the president believes helps to produce extremism.

Egypt is seen as sort of the example par excellence of this kind of tradeoff because they do have a very important role to play both in the peace process and in U.S.-Arab relations more broadly. And Mubarak, as Martin has said, is going to play on this sense that there's a necessary tradeoff between short-term interests and long-term interests.

I guess I would say two things with regard to that tough decision facing the administration:

First is I think the Arab World will be watching today rather closely and seeing how Mubarak is treated on the question of political reform to judge the depth of Bush's commitment to the broader democracy promotion policy. When the last Arab leader visited with President Bush, that was the president of Tunisia in February, he was greeted with some rather forthright words in public on freedom of the press and on

democracy, and that was a message that hit home with him and that he took to the inter-Arab negotiations over a reform document for the Arab League Summit.

I don't know whether we will see similar words from Bush today for Mubarak. If so, they will doubtless be stated much less publicly, and this tradeoff will be on both men's minds. But I think the Arab World is going to be watching, and there will be a judgment made on the basis of what happens today.

But, secondly, I would say that this perceived conflict between our short-term interests in cooperation with governments like that of Hosni Mubarak and our long-term interests, that kind of conflict is inevitable, but it's not one that is insurmountable. And I think the U.S.-Egyptian relationship provides us a good opportunity to see how that tension between short- and long-term interests can be mediated.

This is a really multi-faceted relationship. It involves defense cooperation, economic assistance, close consultation on a wide variety of issues, and it's a relationship that has deepened over time, a relationship that is built on strong common interests in regional stability, in Arab-Israeli peace, and I think a relationship like that can withstand a degree of tension. We've already seen it withstand that tension successfully in one confrontation over human rights issues involving the case of Saad Eddin Ibrahim. And I think we might well see it face some more tension on this issue, if not today, given the imperatives in Iraq and Gaza, then in the coming months and years.

Thanks.

MR. STEINBERG: Thank you, Tamara.

Well, we've covered a lot of ground, and now it's your turn to press our experts here.

MR. NIR: Thank you. I'm Ori Nir, with *The Forward*.

I'd like to ask this side of the panel to explore the link, to the extent that it is there, between the Sharon initiative and the situation in Iraq, particularly the attempt to garner international support for the campaign in Iraq. In other words, the Roadmap was supposed to do that. The question is, if Sharon-made unilateralism has the power to do that if it's endorsed by the U.S. and sold as maybe something more multilateral.

AMBASSADOR INDYK: It's an interesting question. I'll give you one specific example of the way the two theaters play off each other.

Kofi Annan has to make a very difficult decision about how far he's prepared to commit the U.N. to the enterprise that the Bush administration now desperately needs U.N. involvement in Iraq at a time when he is facing a lot of criticism internally within the U.N. for the last engagement in Iraq. And so it's a very tough decision that he's got to take and not simple, given the situation, the circumstances in Iraq.

If Bush goes too far in Sharon's direction, in terms of Sharon's wish list, it may actually undermine Kofi Annan's willingness or ability to do what we need him to do in Iraq. So you have that kind of concern.

The fact that the Bush administration has told the U.N., the E.U. and the Russians that they want consensus in support of what the United States is going to do on the Sharon initiative, the fact that next week, I believe, or soon thereafter there will be an effort to have a quartet statement blessing what the United States agrees with Sharon on. This visit is an indication of how far the Bush administration has come in recognizing what it should have recognized at the beginning of the Iraq War, which is that it needs international support. So, in that sense, it's a kind of, I think, interesting indicator of how far the United States has come--the Bush administration particularly has come--in

the last three years, from unilateralism to multilateralism. And so you see the kind of lesson of Iraq playing itself out in this context. Whatever is said in this letter of assurance from Bush, I can assure you it will say that this initiative is consistent with the Roadmap and nothing that the United States will do will be inconsistent with the Roadmap. So the Roadmap itself will be resurrected in this meeting, which is also I suppose typical of the Middle East which has seen resurrections before.

MR. STEINBERG: I think another irony that you can see in this is that before the war there was great debate about whether the road to Baghdad lay through Jerusalem or whether the road to Jerusalem lay through Baghdad. I think what we're now seeing is that the road to Baghdad lies through Baghdad and the road to Jerusalem lies through Jerusalem and that, at this point, the problems are so profound in each area that progress in one doesn't really help progress in the other and that, as Martin has said, the administration needs multilateral support not because doing one will help it with the second, but rather because each requires support from allies in the international community.

MS. WITTES: I will add just one thing to that, which is that, while as a practical matter progress in one is not necessarily tied to progress in the other, I think the administration does recognize, at this point, that looking engaged on the peace process, looking like it is making a difference, is very important to getting Arab and international support.

MR. STEINBERG: I think that's right, but I have to say, at this point, and I think a number of our colleagues, and Mike, Ken, and especially Ivo have made the point that even spectacular success in the Middle East peace process now is not

going to generate significant support on Iraq, that Iraq has become such a problem in its own right that there may be some things you can do on Iraq policy to get it.

But unlike a year ago, when a really significant initiative on the Middle East might well have brought in some allies, I just think that Iraq has become such a big problem in its own right that the ability to leverage the one for the other has been dramatically reduced.

Said?

MR. ARIKAT: Thank you. My name is Said Arikat, and my question is to Ambassador Indyk.

Ambassador Indyk, the administration keeps saying that the trio, the team of Burns, Hadley and Abrams, they have no designation for them. They just call them “the team,” and they go not to negotiate, but to discuss. But are they, in fact, really negotiating, instead of the Palestinians, with the Israelis so it is not really a separation, but actually a negotiated thing between the United States and Israel? That is one.

And, second, two weeks ago, Senator Lugar suggested to expand the quartet into a sextet, to include Saudi Arabia and Egypt. What do you think of that?

Thank you.

AMBASSADOR INDYK: Well, we can call them the “Three Amigos.” Of course, they’ve been negotiating, and that, by the way, is not unusual. Likud prime ministers have always had a preference for negotiating with the United States rather than negotiating with the Palestinians. And in Sharon’s case it’s particularly important because a negotiation with the Palestinians would necessarily involve him in having to deal with the West Bank, and that’s where he essentially is making a deal, somewhat like Menachem Begin, with a calculation. When Menachem Begin gave up the Sinai, he

figured he could keep the West Bank. Sharon is giving up Gaza, all of Gaza, to try to hold onto as much as possible of the West Bank, and it's therefore convenient, in those circumstances, that there is no Palestinian partner that's capable, and responsible and willing to live up to its commitments, so that Sharon can therefore be free to negotiate with the Americans rather than with the Palestinians.

And by the way, that's why, notwithstanding all of this talk about removing Yasser Arafat, Yasser Arafat will have a long life in the Mukata as long as this initiative is alive because his survival in the Mukata, in Ramallah, is the perfect way to ensure that there is no Palestinian partner to negotiate this with.

So, in terms of the negotiations, the "Three Amigos" have been engaged in a very detailed discussion. If the United States had been prepared to go further in the direction of Sharon's desires on the West Bank, in terms of recognition of the settlement blocs or adjustments to the '67 borders, no right of return for the Palestinians, then I believe that you would have seen Sharon being prepared to do more than give up four or five West Bank settlements.

He had talked at one time of giving up 17 settlements. I think he would be prepared to lay the basis for a kind of 50-percent arrangement for a Palestinian state with provisional borders in the West Bank in the future. But because the administration has not been willing to go that direction, for the reasons, the constraints that I've outlined, he's cut back on that, and the focus has been much more on this delicate dance about the language of the letters of assurance, which I think falls far short of what he had hoped to achieve, but, as I said, will give him enough to sell the deal and go forward.

MR. ARIKAT: The quartet?

AMBASSADOR INDYK: I'm sorry. Look, the more the merrier, you know. Why exclude Jordan? Let's have four plus three. No, I don't want to be flip about this. It's very important. In the context of Gaza, there is a real problem of what happens when the Israelis withdraw. Who will fill that vacuum? And this requires Egyptian involvement, and it requires international involvement, as I've already outlined.

And therefore expanding the quartet, which is in fact already happening, de facto, is I think very necessary to ensure not just an orderly transition to prevent the Islamic extremists from taking over in Gaza, but also to use Gaza as a basis for creating a new Palestinian leadership there, that could then be used to take over authority there and work as a kind of template that could then be applied to the West Bank in the future.

MR. KALB: Marvin Kalb, with the Shorenstein Center at Harvard. I have two questions about Iraq.

The first is do you think it still makes sense for the president to insist upon the June 30 transfer of sovereignty in Iraq?

And, second, given what we have all learned, and I do pick up the vibrations of unhappiness in your comments, given what we've all learned in the last year, does it remain realistic for the United States to believe that it can, in time, encourage the development of democracy in Iraq?

MR. POLLACK: Great questions, Marvin. I'll start with your first question first.

I, as I said before, I think that it is still possible to get a compromise solution by June 30, and I think that that should be our first preference because June 30, it was an arbitrary date, it seemed reasonable, back on November 15th. As an old

bureaucrat, I know that you need a deadline to force people to actually do things, and June 30, back on November 15, was sufficiently far enough away that it seemed reasonable.

As we get closer, I think that you do have to start to examine that more carefully. If it is the case that Brahimi is not able to pull a rabbit out of his hat, to use the “magic” metaphor that Ivo and I have both been using, if he is not able to, then I think that we should look hard at that date.

And I will actually say I don't, you know, the problem here, and the administration is right when they point this out, there are a lot of Iraqis who have now invested a lot in June 30. They want sovereignty, they want a greater sense of control over their own destiny. It is the part of the problem we have in Iraq now. It's something that I think that Bremer and his team at CPA were right and sensitive to, and it was one of the things that led to the November 15th process.

So passing June 30 is problematic. Forget about our own political issues which I don't care about at this point in time, but from the Iraqi perspective, there are also problems there.

That said, I think that if we did have a solution in mind, we could go to Sistani, in particular--and he really is the key--and say to him, “Look, we've got this solution out there. It is going to take longer than June 30 to make it work. If you will stand up and say you're comfortable with this situation, when it's going to require a delay in the transfer of power,” I think we could live with it, and I think the Iraqis could live with it. But it's under those circumstances we'd need it.

With regard to can we still pull this thing off, I think that we still can. And the point that Jim made is absolutely critical about Iraqi public opinion. To me, it

is, on the one hand, remarkable and also heartwarming that so many Iraqis still have confidence in us and in the process of reconstruction, given how badly we fumbled so many times.

When I wrote my book, I said I think that this is where the Iraqis will be. I think they will be glad to be rid of Saddam. I think they will be resentful of our presence, but I think that they will be cooperative on the issue of reconstruction. But I also said I don't think that we should assume that we've got more than six months, more than a six-month honeymoon, to prove to them that we know what we're doing and that it is going to benefit them.

I think you were there when I came back from Iraq in early December. I said, you know, what was amazing to me is that that honeymoon seems to be going on more than the six months that I expected. The Iraqis don't think we know what we're doing, but they're still very confident that we are the right answer for them, which to me was stunning.

It's now 12 months, and as I just pointed out, we're starting to lose that. It's starting to erode, but it is still the case, as Jim pointed out, that the majority of Iraqis still feel that way, which is just stunning to me, and it leads me to remain hopeful that we could make this work. It goes to the point that there is enough good in Iraq that it should be possible to do this.

But, of course, as time goes by, as we continue to close off options, as we continue to miss opportunities, and as we continue to alienate Iraqis, I am nervous that at some point in time we're going to reach a tipping point, and it's not today, but I don't know how far into the future it's going to be when we are going to lose that opportunity.

PANELIST: I'd go further than Ken on June 30th. I think, I think we face, potentially, the worst of both worlds on June 30th; that is, a handover to an Iraqi interim government, which has neither legitimacy nor capability of governing, and an abandonment on our side of a legitimate basis for providing that authority. And we'll have an ambassador in Baghdad who will be, de facto, the most powerful figure, but no legal basis for his or her exertion of that authority. So I think we're going to have an enormous vacuum on June 30th which neither side, that is, neither the two centers, can fulfill.

I don't know how far Brahimi can go pulling a rabbit out of his hat, but I believe that we didn't know how far Carl Bildt could go either in Bosnia when we set up our political structure to deal with the post-Dayton arrangements.

I think we have no choice but to go, as Ken says, to Sistani, to invest in Brahimi and to tell the U.N. and to tell the secretary general that we are prepared to back that in a meaningful way. It's not going to be a perfect answer at this point because he won't have either the facilities or the capability to do it, but I think that we can no longer hold the con ourselves. The era of Bremer has to pass because it's simply no longer going to be acceptable.

But I think that to believe that we're going to meaningfully turn this over to the IGC on July 1st is also not true. So we've got to fill that vacuum, just as we're trying to figure out how to fill that vacuum in Gaza. I see no alternative but for the U.N., and to some extent NATO, to play that role. And I think we need to work very hard between now and June 29th to see whether that's possible.

MR. DAALDER: I think it depends, your answer on your first question depends on the answer on the second question. That is, if you think there is still a

possibility to put Humpty Dumpty back together or make a new Humpty Dumpty, then the question is how do you do that?

The worst way to do it, in my view, is to stick to the June 30 deadline, frankly, because the June 30 deadline is, one, it's artificial, but, two, there is nothing you can do between now and then that guarantees that stability will happen in the six, seven, eight months before elections will take place. So I think the June 30 deadline is now our problem, and we ought to get rid of it.

We ought to understand that there is no government, there is no solution--Brahimi magic or not or whatever--that is going to give you a governing structure in Iraq that is capable of keeping it together, other than us, so why not just keep it? The problem that that creates is exactly as Ken said, is that it makes it even more unlikely that people are going to cooperate with the occupation.

But this is the thing we created. It is now our baby, and either we try to make this work-- the answer to your second question--in which case we have to make it work because there is nobody else that could do it for us. Yes, we need to get as much legitimacy. We ought to get the international community in, in helping the political transition. We ought to make the CPA less American, more international. Yes, we need to get the U.N. in, in order to advance the prospect of elections as quickly as possible because it's that that Sistani has insisted on as the price for his continued support for the occupation.

Yes, we ought to bring NATO in, to the extent we can, but let's not kid ourselves. It's going to be us who is going to stand behind that international CPA, who is going to stand behind the U.N., who is going to stand behind NATO. And unless we

are willing to do what it takes, but frankly we haven't been willing for the last 12 months, then it's not going to work.

So, to insist on the June 30 deadline, a deadline that is as artificial and as unreal as anything else that we have insisted upon in the last 12 months, while hoping that you would thereby be able to maintain the momentum to succeed in Iraq, doesn't strike me as realistic. The only way for us to demonstrate that we are truly committed is, in fact, not to hand over sovereignty to a nonexistent entity because there isn't anybody to hand sovereignty over to.

MR. STEINBERG: You see the diversity of views that we have. Unfortunately, we have time for only one more question that I'm going to take right there.

MR. DARABYA: Good morning. My name is Ghaleb Darabya. I'm from the Palestinian Mission in Washington, D.C., here.

I really would like to provide you with my reading of--

MR. STEINBERG: I'm sorry. I'm not going to do that because you know the rules here. This is a question-and-answer thing.

MR. DARABYA: Yes, I'm going to end it with a question.

MR. STEINBERG: No, I'm sorry. Because, really, Mr. Representative, we don't have time for speeches.

Gary, can you--

MR. DARABYA: I have a question.

MR. STEINBERG: No, I'm sorry.

MR. DARABYA: I have a question to ask.

MR. STEINBERG: If you have a quick question, please ask the question.

MR. DARABYA: Yes, I have a question, but I'm trying to provide you with our reading, first of all.

MR. STEINBERG: No, I'm sorry. I'm going to have to call--

MR. DARABYA: Okay. I'll ask a question.

Martin, I really would like--

MR. STEINBERG: You're doing a disservice to all of the other people in the audience here.

MR. DARABYA: Okay, a question, then.

MR. STEINBERG: Then, please ask your question.

MR. DARABYA: Martin, don't you think that really Sharon has managed, in the previous two years in power, to further radicalize the Palestinian people entirely, and he managed to kill every opportunity, and he's trying to use--his disengagement plan is really to preempt the Roadmap from its essence, which in the third phase of the Roadmap clearly indicates that a final status agreement should lead to end the occupation that started in 1967? So by the mandate--

MR. STEINBERG: Okay. Thank you. We'll answer that question, and then we'll bring this to an end.

AMBASSADOR INDYK: Well, as we say in a lot of other crises in the Middle East, there's a lot of blame to go around. I don't think we can simply blame it on Sharon. There is a major effort by Palestinian terrorist organizations to advance their cause through violence and terrorism, and that has led to Sharon's use of force in response, and the consequence of those interactions, which was started by Palestinians in an attempt, in the first place, to try to extract a better deal than they were being offered after Camp David, the consequences of that is that we now have, whether Sharon wanted

it or not, and you could make the argument that he wanted it, but what we now have is the collapse of the Palestinian Authority.

And he is now in a situation where, forced by Israeli public opinion, which wants a way out of this crisis now, he is forced to take an action, and he's therefore following his plan which, as I've already outlined, is designed to give up Gaza in order to hold onto as much of the West Bank as possible.

How the Palestinians respond to this is I think critical for their future. The fact is that he will not be able to, and we'll see that this week, he will not be able to shut off the prospects for a final agreement based on the Roadmap. I believe that that will be very clearly stated in the letter of assurance from the United States.

So the question is not whether it's going to shut off that hope. The question is whether an Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, which is total, which involves for the first time the evacuation of settlements, establishing that principle, which involves the prime minister of Israel confronting the settlers and their supporters in the Israeli political system, and which gives Palestinians an opportunity to establish a government for themselves in Gaza, with the support of the international community, whether that can be turned to the advantage of the Palestinian people.

So that's a challenge for the Palestinians, as much as it's a challenge for the international community, and I think that there are people on the Palestinian side--serious people, including in the Palestinian Authority--who see this as an opportunity. And it's why, I believe, that the Palestinian Authority has actually welcomed it. How can they oppose an Israeli withdrawal and evacuation of settlements?

MR. STEINBERG: I want to thank all of our panelists. I know there are a lot more questions out here. But I appreciate your all coming, and I look forward to seeing you all again.

Thank you.