

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

A LEADERSHIP FORUM SPONSORED BY  
THE SABAN CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST POLICY

"WINNING THE WAR IN IRAQ:  
A STRATEGY FOR SUCCESS ON THE BATTLEFRONT AND THE HOMEFRONT"  
SENATOR JOSEPH I. LIEBERMAN

Monday, April 26, 2004

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

(TRANSCRIPT PREPARED FROM A TAPE RECORDING.)

**THIS IS AN UNCORRECTED TRANSCRIPT.**

**PROCEEDINGS**

MR. STEINBERG: Well, good morning, ladies and gentlemen. A very distinguished audience. I see some of our trustees here, which I'm always delighted to see, and a very distinguished group of visitors to join me in welcoming Senator Joe Lieberman here to this forum sponsored by the Saban Center here at Brookings. I'm also delighted that the Senator's wife, Hadassah, could also join us this morning.

As always, this is one of those embarrassing things in which you're asked to give an introduction to a person who clearly needs no introduction, but I think it's only appropriate to remind us all of the very distinguished career that the Senator has had, beginning with his stint as a graduate of Yale School--I always like to put that in there--and his term as Attorney General of the State of Connecticut, a three-term United States Senator, obviously a candidate for Vice President in the year 2000, and a candidate for President in this past primary season, ranking Democrat on the Government Affairs Committee in the Senate, a member of the Senate Environment Committee and also the Senate Armed Services Committee--really an extraordinary and broad-ranging career in public policy across a broad range of issues, but perhaps best known, and certainly in our family here at Brookings, deeply respected on questions of national security. And not only trying to deal with the complex question of national security, but to try to develop a bipartisan consensus in the post-Cold War period to try to make sure that the United States remains strong and effective abroad.

The Senator was one of the principal promoters of the idea of a Department of Homeland Security and helped make that a reality. He has throughout his career been extremely vocal and effective on the question of U.S. policy towards Iraq as

one of the principal cosponsors of the McCain-Lieberman Iraq Liberation Act of 1998, played a big role in changing the direction of U.S. policy towards accepting the basic concept of regime change, a concept that was embraced by the Clinton administration; a very strong supporter of the President's efforts to replace Saddam Hussein and try to develop a new future for the people of Iraq, but also a very vocal spokesman for the need for an effective policy to deal with the aftermath of the war itself and the need for a strong and effective policy, a position which has been reflected in his most recent piece of legislation which he has introduced with Senator Hagel called the Hagel-Lieberman Marshal Plan for the Muslim World, an ambitious set of proposals focusing on how to mobilize the private sector to bring opportunity and hope to the people in the Muslim world.

It is, I think, very timely that we have a chance to hear from Senator Lieberman today as we watch the very difficult challenges that the United States is facing and the coalition is facing in Iraq on both the political and the military front, and we look forward to his views about how we can succeed in achieving our objectives in Iraq and in the greater Middle East.

After the Senator speaks, we'll have a short panel discussion with several of my colleagues here from Brookings, seniors fellows Mike O'Hanlon and Ken Pollack, the director of research at the Saban Center, and then we'll turn to your questions.

So, without further ado, Senator Joe Lieberman.

[Applause.]

SENATOR LIEBERMAN: Thank you very much, Jim, and thanks to the Saban Center for Middle East Policy here at the Brookings Institution for inviting me to speak this morning.

We meet at a most important, dangerous, and difficult time in Iraq. Americans, Iraqis, and other nationals are dying in increasing numbers there. The outcome of the current conflict will have an enormous effect on the security of the American people, the freedom of the Iraqi people, and the stability and peace of the Middle East and the world. The days and weeks immediately ahead are fateful and they are perilous.

Yet, here at home, it is mostly politics as usual. Today, I am pleading with members of both political parties, with the Administration and the Congress, in the name of the hundreds of Americans who have already fallen in Iraq, and the thousands who continue to serve us there, in the interest of our nation's security, and in pursuit of our nation's highest ideals, to stop the bickering, to overcome the mistrust, to appreciate how similar are our current goals in Iraq, and to work together to achieve them.

In short, I am calling for a bipartisan political truce on the homefront that will greatly help us achieve the victory we all desire on the battlefield.

From the beginning, I was a strong supporter of the war in Iraq against Saddam Hussein. He was a dictator, warmonger, terrorist, outlaw, murderer, torturer, thief, and thug. As long as he remained in power, Saddam was a clear and present danger to the United States, the Iraqi people, the Middle East and the world. By his evil, inhumane actions and his decade of defiance of UN resolutions, he proved that he could only be dealt with and defeated by force. He was a ticking time bomb that had to be stopped before the next explosion. That is why we went to war last year in Iraq - to end Hussein's regime of terror, and to build in its place a better, freer future for the Iraqi people.

Thanks to the brilliance and bravery of American and allied forces, we won that war. But the final test of war is the quality of the peace that follows. Today we are clearly engaged in a new war in Iraq. From the day of Saddam's fall, the Iraqi people's hopes for a better life and the Coalition force's lives have been attacked by an evil alliance of remnants of Saddam's regime who refuse to accept defeat and of fanatical foreign and Iraqi terrorists who are part of the same jihadist movement that mercilessly attacked us on September 11, 2001.

I repeat, the outcome of this new war in Iraq will have enormous consequences for the people of Iraq, America and the world. If our enemies prevail and America retreats, Iraqis will face chaos, or a dictatorship, or both. The Iraqi domino could fall backwards as easily as it could fall forwards, and topple hopes for democracy throughout the Middle East. The region would be profoundly destabilized, which would gravely endanger American security, and the fanatical Islamic terrorists will be emboldened to take more aggressive actions against people in America, Europe and the Islamic world. The safety of our children's future would be greatly endangered.

On the other hand, if the Coalition prevails over the terrorists in Iraq, and a stable, democratizing, modernizing Iraq emerges, we will have dealt a significant blow to the worldwide jihadist forces and thereby improved our security. We would have created a new hopeful model for a better future throughout the Islamic world, stabilized the Middle East, and advanced America's historic mission of bringing the blessings of liberty, which we believe are the endowment of our Creator, to the Iraqi people.

With the consequences of victory or defeat in the new war in Iraq so clear, it should come as no surprise that there is almost no one here at home calling for an American retreat or withdrawal. No matter whether they supported the war against Saddam, as I did, or opposed it... or whether they criticized some of the Bush Administration's policies before and after that war, as I did, or supported them... just about all of America's elected leadership understand why we must win what I have called the new war in Iraq.

There is a real but unfortunately too often overlooked or concealed bipartisan American consensus in favor of this new war. We agree on the goal, if not always on the way to get there. Unfortunately, you would not know that if you just listened to much of the rhetoric about Iraq in this great capital city whose prevailing tone ranges from partisan to poisonous, or if you just followed the media, which reflexively stress conflict, not consensus. But the reality behind the rhetoric is that a bipartisan consensus is there. The question is no longer why we got in, but how we and the Iraqis can win in Iraq. We must quickly acknowledge that consensus and then find ways to work together to advance it.

Listen to these two statements, one by President Bush, the other by Senator Kerry, and tell me if you know who said what:

First: "We have to succeed in Iraq. We simply can't allow it to become a failed state. That would mean a victory for extremism, new dangers in the Middle East and a breeding ground for anti-American terrorism. To succeed, we are going to need more forces."

Second: "America's commitment to freedom in Iraq is consistent with our ideals and required by our interests. Iraq will either be a peaceful, democratic country or it will again be a source of violence, a haven for terror and a threat to America and to the world."

The first is from Senator Kerry. The second is from President Bush. These statements, and many others by both men, and by many others in both parties, show there is now a broad and growing bipartisan agreement on our basic purpose in Iraq today.

Both parties and both Presidential candidates agree that America cannot cut and run from Iraq. It is important to our security and our values.

Both parties and both Presidential candidates agree that we should send more troops.

Both parties and both Presidential candidates agree that we must seek and welcome greater involvement in Iraq from the international community.

Of course, there remain many important tactical and policy questions on which debate continues within the consensus. These include:

Is our goal in Iraq stability or democracy, or both?

Should we negotiate a truce with our enemies in places like Fallujah for domestic Iraqi political reasons, or use our power to take full control of those troubled places?

Should we rehire some of the Baathist military and government leaders?

Should the transfer of sovereignty to the Iraqis occur on June 30, and what should be the authority of the new Iraqi government?

What is the role we desire for NATO and the UN? Will they consider accepting it?

Should the Administration send to Congress a supplemental appropriations request for the cost of the war in Iraq as soon as possible, or wait until later this year or next?

Should we be allowed by the Pentagon to see the flag-draped coffins of Americans who have fallen in service to our nation in Iraq?

The answers to each of these questions - many of which I hope you will ask me this morning - can conceal the fundamental bipartisan consensus over how critical and worthy our purpose in Iraq is today - if we allow them to.

In the normal course of contemporary American political conduct, these policy questions become further occasion to create partisan, public disagreement and division. Campaign pressures can provoke and intensify it - and the media often perpetuates and exploits it. Each side grows increasingly distant from, and suspicious of, the other. The political debates last week surrounding the cost of the war, and the limited powers that might be transferred to the Iraqis on June 30, simply highlight our challenge.

My point here is that the homefront affects the battlefield. Politics as usual at home can and will have unusually bad consequences in Iraq. It encourages our enemies to believe they are succeeding in their attempts to influence our policy. They clearly seek by their hostage taking, by their desecration of the bodies of our dead, and by their terrorism to break the will of the people of America. And although we all say repeatedly that we support the 135,000 Americans who are serving in Iraq today, the more our troops hear the partisan division at home, the more they will, at best, be confused, or at worse, be demoralized. The world is also watching our political debate on Iraq, and gauging the depth of our resolve and the strength of our leadership.

I am not suggesting that for these reasons robust debate be stifled or that healthy questioning be stopped. That's not the American way. What I am suggesting instead is that we find a way to continue the debate and questioning without doing damage to our shared national values and goals. We must separate the conduct of the new war in Iraq from the normal politics of Washington and the hyper-politics of a Presidential campaign year. Because what is happening in Iraq today is that important to the future security of the American people and the lives of the American military who are serving in Iraq.

In some nations during such times of war or crisis, a unity government would be formed. That is not American tradition or practice. But our history does contain many proud moments when

American leaders have put politics aside to work together to protect the nation's security. One of the most famous examples was the bipartisan cooperation in the Cold War that began with the collaboration between Democratic President Truman and Republican Senator Vandenberg.

During the 1990's, the Clinton Administration worked with Republican and Democratic leaders in Congress to create the NATO Observers Group, a bipartisan body that met regularly with the President and high-ranking Administration officials to discuss the enlargement of the alliance. This Group was critical in forging a strong consensus in Congress that resulted in an overwhelming Senate vote in favor of expanding NATO.

During the Iraq wars, last year and this year, the Bush Administration and the Pentagon have regularly briefed Congress, but we need more than that now to cut through the distrust and stop the political sniping.

One option I want to suggest this morning is for the President and the Republican and Democratic leaders of Congress to agree to create a Bipartisan Congressional Consultation and Cooperation Council on Iraq, which would meet weekly with members of the President's war cabinet, and frequently with the President himself, to discuss the latest developments and decisions in Iraq.

Ideally, members of this bipartisan Council would also travel together to capitals throughout the region and the world to give public expression to America's unity of purpose on the new war in Iraq, and to enter into dialogue with leaders in those countries. Ultimately, the bipartisan Council could help achieve consensus on policy decisions before they become open domestic political wounds with international consequences. The distrust that increasingly separates the parties and the branches of our government would be overcome.

I recall here the words of Henry L. Stimson, Secretary of War during the Second World War, who said that sometimes the only way to make a person trustworthy is to trust him.

On the costs of the war, for example, many Democrats are convinced that the Administration refuses to ask for the appropriations needed to fund the war until later in the year for purely political reasons. On the other hand, the Republican Administration resents this suspicion, sees it as partisan, and argues that it will obviously not allow the military to run out of funds. The debate grows louder and the distrust grows deeper. My estimation is that if the Administration and the bipartisan Congressional leadership discussed and agreed on an early request for the money in a Council such as the one I am suggesting. And when they did, the vote would reveal exactly the strong bipartisan support that is there for the new war in Iraq.

Our troops on the battlefield deserve and require such support and solidarity from the homefront. Our enemies deserve to be shaken by it. Our allies need to be encouraged by it. And our founding ideals of freedom and opportunity will be so much better served by it at home and in Iraq.

Now, more than ever, politics must stop at the water's edge, because now, more than ever, our politics here at home have profound consequences for security within our borders as well as beyond our shores. That is the urgent challenge we face today - as Democrats, as Republicans, as Americans. It is a challenge we must and will best meet together.

Thank you very much.

[Applause.]

MR. STEINBERG: Thank you for that terrific speech, very much in the spirit of bipartisanship and nonpartisanship that we like to try to promote here at Brookings. You've raised a lot of questions about whether there is such a consensus as to how to go forward. I'd like to invite Ken and Mike to join us here and have a seat, and we'll try to explore--why don't you sit in the middle, I'll sit with you there.

I'd like to begin by exploring some of the specific questions that you raised in the speech because I do think that whether, in fact, there is a possibility of consensus may depend to a considerable degree on whether there is enough broad-based support in terms of answering those things. And I'd like to start by asking Ken to reflect on the question about what our objectives ought to be for Iraq. Where should we set the bar? You raised the question should it be stability or democracy. Ken, what is achievable? And what should we set as our objectives? And what might command broad-based support if we were going to have that kind of bipartisan approach?

MR. POLLACK: Sure, thank you, Jim. And thank you, Senator Lieberman, for such a thoughtful speech. I think you're absolutely right. At this moment, where it is clear that we've gone into Iraq and we have stumbled, it is critical that we come together, recognize the common goal, but then figure out together how we move forward.

Let me start by saying that I think the challenges that you've posed to us are absolutely critical ones, and I'll lay out my own thoughts in terms of where those



goals are. And I'll say that I think at kind of the level that I'm going to first present them, I don't think that anyone in the administration would necessarily disagree with the goals I am going to lay out. There's obviously a great deal of debate, within the administration, outside the administration, over the methods that you use, as the Senator outlined in his speech.

But I think that we also ought to all recognize and it is very important to recognize that at this moment I don't think there is a clear winner in terms of what needs to happen. I think that we all now can focus on what we should have done a year ago, but the simple fact of the matter is that that is water under the bridge. And now we are all trying to figure out, given where we are today and given the importance of doing this and doing it right, where do we move forward in the future? Exactly as the Senator has portrayed it. So let me give you my thoughts.

First, I think that overall the most important goal for the United States over the medium term, as (?) described it, is to restore public support among Iraqis for reconstruction. Going into this, that was the most important thing that we had going for us, the fact that the Iraqis wanted change. And though they might not call it democracy, they wanted what we would look at as a democratic system and a new economic system and a new kind of state and a new kind of society. That was absolutely critical.

And, unfortunately, what we've seen in the events of the last few weeks is that increasing numbers of Iraqis are beginning to question our commitment to that goal or, perhaps, our ability to deliver on that goal. And that loss of Iraqi public confidence is the most important problem, the biggest problem that we have right now. It is contributing to all of the other problems that we have out there. And so I think that has

to be the key. How do we do that? I'll talk just very quickly about the three realms of security, economics, and politics.

In the security realm, we have got to make putting the security of the Iraqi people first. Unfortunately, we have not done that yet. We've got to do it. That is probably going to require more troops. It is certainly going to mean changing how we have done things in Iraq. If we can do that, if we can make the Iraqis feel safe, comfortable, it will increase their support for reconstruction. The absence of security is probably the greatest detriment that we have. It will make it easier to do away with the militias, which are becoming an increasing problem through the course of reconstruction. And, of course, as we all know, security underlies everything in Iraq. The economic problems, the political problems, every other problem that we have in Iraq is either caused by or exacerbated by the security problems.

In the economic realm, the most important thing, we've got to get Iraqis working. And part of that just means getting the rest of the \$18 billion released. It means cutting through the bureaucratic red tape and getting money out there and getting it into the country and getting Iraqis working again so that you've got them off the streets and feeling like they've got some income, they can take care of themselves and their family, they are no longer starving or dependent on the United States or aid workers, they have a sense of their own selves, they have confidence in the future, and you don't have a lot of unemployed young men wandering the streets angry and looking for something to do.

It is, of course, also important that we use the rest of the \$18 billion not just for quick fixes in terms of immediate job programs, but also to create longer,

sustainable growth so that when that \$18 billion is gone, we don't just come right back to the Congress and ask for another \$18 billion.

And then on the political side, we have to rebuild the faith of Iraqis in a political process. We've got to find an interim government that they can trust. That is what's critical. It is more important than an interim government that we can trust. It is certainly much more important than having our friends in Iraq take part in some future Iraqi government. We've got to bring Iraqis back into the political process and make them feel that the political process is one that reflects their views and is ultimately going to serve their desires.

In this sense, June 30th is an important date, but it has become something of a Catch-22 for us, and here I will try to answer in my own words one of the Senator's important charges, which is, on the one hand, June 30th was a date created back in November at a time when there was a process to create a new interim Iraqi government. It was a perfectly reasonable process, although it was complicated and always was going to be difficult to make work. Unfortunately, that process is gone, and we have yet to find a new process that is clearly going to produce a new government, one that Iraqis can have trust in. Brahimi is there. Hopefully he will be able to create that process. But we haven't done it just yet.

On the other hand, June 30 is a date that many Iraqis have invested a great deal of their own emotion in, and simply doing away with it, simply saying can't happen, June 30th is too soon, let's just toss it out the window, that's not a great option either because that will be seen by many Iraqis as another arbitrary American decision to take their political system out of their hands.

And then, finally, we do have to be thinking in this medium term about the long term, about creating an Iraqi process that I believe will have to produce democracy, not because I like democracy and think it's the best system of government in the world, or, to quote Churchill, "the worst system except for every other system," but simply because as an Iraq expert, I don't think any other kind of government will produce stability and prosperity in Iraq. And what we have to remember there--and I think it's critical to move forward--is that when I say democracy, I don't mean what we have in this country, because I am absolutely convinced that democracy in Iraq is going to look fundamentally different from what we have here. And one of the challenges for us and for the Iraqis over this medium term is going to be figuring out, helping the Iraqis discover what a democratic system of government can look like in Iraq that they can accept, one that is consistent with their values and their history and their traditions and their aspirations, rather than those of the West or the East or Japan or some other country that really has no particular bearing for what the Iraqi people want.

MR. STEINBERG: Senator, any response?

SENATOR LIEBERMAN: The short response to Ken is I agree. I agree with just about all particulars. One, we are at a crisis in Iraq insofar as it obviously has gone in a way other than almost anybody had hoped. And I think each of the items that you point to is an occasion for further agreement among people in Congress, certainly on the need to establish security, on the need to show economic progress for the people there.

It's hard to find reasons to be optimistic about Iraq if you just follow the daily events, but if you want to occasionally feel some hope, follow what I call the O'Hanlon index. It's Michael's Iraq-Brookings index on life in Iraq. And the fact is that

on the ground there is--he can describe it in more detail--more health care, more education, some of the Iraqi security forces are doing better; basics--water, electricity--are much more available to people; cooking oil, an essential of a better life, much more available. Those statistics have to be improved even more, but they will not be without the security that is not there now.

You know, as I from a distance watch this and try to get some sense of what's happening on the ground in Iraq, it seems to me that by anybody's estimate, the number of those who are committed on a daily basis to killing Americans, to kicking us out, is a minority of the Iraqi population. I would say that most of the people there, it seems to me, from everything I've learned and heard and seen, want a better life and are restless and in some senses are holding back to see how events go. And that's why it's so critical that we act together.

I was thinking as I was listening to Ken that to achieve some of the consensus, bipartisan consensus I've talked about, without acknowledging--of course, no one ever acknowledges that they've changed their position in Washington, right? But, you know, there were a lot of people in the Republican Party or at least the administration who didn't think we needed more troops and were hesitant about internationalization. Well, now more troops and internationalization are a key part of our policy.

There was some dispute at the outset about the June 30 date among a lot of Democrats. I think almost all the Democrats now feel that that date has--that promise has to be kept, as Ken said. And it's very important to know what that means. It doesn't mean we pull out, as I am afraid some--we, the American military, et cetera, pull out, as

some may think and suddenly there is an Iraqi self-governing body fully in control. It means that we take the first step toward that democratic--small "d"--end.

So this is a situation which together we can make better in our interests, but it's not going to come together unless there are occasions for us, the administration, Congress, Republicans, Democrats, to be sitting in a room talking about some of these issues before we start sniping at one another, either through press releases, press conferences, or across the space that exists in a congressional hearing room.

MR. STEINBERG: Thank you, Senator.

Mike, in the months before the war, you spent a lot of time talking about the potential military challenges of having to perhaps fight an urban war if Saddam had decided to pull his troops into Baghdad and we had to fight from house to house and the difficulty that would pose and the risk of casualties, the implications of that. In some ways, it looks like, as we look at the military situation now, with the Sunni opposition in Fallujah and potentially Muqtada al-Sadr's militias in Najaf, that the urban war that we didn't have during the main phase of the military operations may be looming right now.

What's the right way for the military to think about this insurgency problem? How effective can force be in trying to deal with a small number of people holed up in cities but very determined? And how do we think about strategy in both the political and military sense of dealing with this problem?

MR. O'HANLON: Thanks, Jim, and thanks, Senator Lieberman. It's a tremendous honor to be part of this. We also appreciate the plug for the Iraq index, which is going to be available outside, and it's also on the Web, [www.brookings.edu/iraqindex](http://www.brookings.edu/iraqindex). And Ken Pollack and my colleague Adriana Albuquerque and others have done a lot to make that possible.

To answer Jim's question, my basic take is that, yes, we are having the urban war that we hoped--or we feared we might have last spring, but it's actually worse to be having it now, in many ways, and the chief reason is because of the politics and the symbolism of what this kind of combat now represents. If it had happened last March and April, it would have been expected as part of the operation to overthrow Saddam. It would have been before we had lost much of the good will that Ken was talking about earlier, and the fact that the Iraqi people have in many ways been quite supportive of this effort in the last year, but they're less patient, less supportive now. And so everything we do militarily has to be interpreted much more through a political ends than would have been the case if this had been part of the invasion phase. And, of course, every student of counterinsurgency knows this. Every student of counterinsurgency knows that using military force in this kind of a setting is an inherently more political act than even Clausewitz talked about when he talked about armed forces always being a political instrument.

And so, to be specific, my basic bottom-line take on Fallujah in particular, I'm hopeful that the al-Sadr problem can be defused, although we're all nervous about what's going on in Najaf. But he does seem to represent a very small fraction of the Shia population; therefore, I'm slightly more optimistic there.

But, in Fallujah, my strong view, increasingly strong view, is we have to avoid using force if there's any way to avoid it, for the following reason: The way I'd put it is what conditions would have to pertain and apply for me to support the use of force, even if it meant another repeat of what we saw in early April, with really almost a taking down of the city and the way that plays across the Arab world, across the Iraqi world, across the Iraqi media?

If we know that most of the Baathist resistance was in Fallujah, most of the leaders, most of the fighters, most of the weapons caches, perhaps I could be persuaded that almost taking down the city and killing inadvertently hundreds of civilians at the same time was worth the cost--worth the benefit. But I don't think we have any reason to think that. We have no particular reason to think that Fallujah has most of the ring leaders, most of the fighters.

We see sometimes General Abizaid estimates 5,000 hardened resistance fighters countrywide, which is a number basically that he's been giving for six months, so we have to all be a little bit wary of the precision of that number, as I'm sure he is, too. We've seen estimates that Fallujah may have a couple thousand out of the 5,000. So it may be the principal stronghold, but it is not the only one. And, therefore, even if you could take down much of that 2,000-strong force, you would still have to contend with major pockets of resistance and weaponry elsewhere. And you'd have to say: Is the benefit militarily of taking down that group worth the huge public relations cost that you're paying as this operation looks more and more in the eyes of Iraqis like essentially an American colonization of their country?

I agree with Senator Lieberman and with Ken, this is not a colonization. This is overall, on balance, something the Iraqi population wants and still supports. But let's face it, the way this plays in the media, the way this plays in the politics of the Iraqi population right now is much less fair.

And that brings me to my second point. Our forces are very good at urban warfare. They think a lot about urban warfare. They train a lot about urban warfare. And I would recommend to all of you an op-ed written by my colleague Sam Mundy, who was one of the battalion commanders for the Marine Corps last year in the



invasion phase, is now at Brookings. It was a New York Times op-ed late in 2003--it's on our Web page--showing how much marines were thinking about the tactics needed to win an urban war. They're good at it. They can do it. But the problem is we are not getting a fair evaluation of those efforts. As the world watches, as the media watches, as the Iraqi population watches, what they see, even though it's really not true, is Americans killing Iraqi civilians, taking down a city to go after their nemeses, these former Saddam loyalists. That's increasingly the perception. And I hope that Ken or Senator Lieberman will challenge me if they think I'm wrong on this, but to my eyes, that's increasingly the perception of how this plays in the Iraqi mind.

Therefore, it's different than if we had fought this battle last spring, when we expected it, when I expected it, anyhow, because now it's much less favorable in terms of how it's evaluated. And anything we do right is quickly ignored or accepted as obvious because our military is so good, our country is so powerful, of course, anything we do right is automatic. Anything we do wrong is magnified tenfold over and viewed as an act of willful disregard for Iraqi life.

So this is a very pessimistic message, even though, as Senator Lieberman has pointed out, our Iraq index points to a lot more optimistic developments on the economics front, and I'm still hopeful on the politics front as well. But answering your specific question, Jim, on the military front, I'm quite nervous about where we stand. I don't think the situation is even as favorable as it would have been in an urban fight last spring. Urban fights are never what we really want. But at least last spring we might have been able to pull this off with a fair reading and a fair viewing by the rest of the world. Unfortunately, we're not in that situation today.

So if I had to conclude, I would say the last 12 to 24 hours in news makes me a little more encouraged. I like the idea of thinking about joint patrols, helping establish the kind of security that Ken Pollack's been arguing for for six months, and he's been right all along. We have to try to get security on the streets for Iraqis. We have to start improving through on-the-job training the Iraqi police. And, therefore, the kind of joint patrolling and gradually marginalizing, gradually weakening the extremist resistance in Fallujah, and going after individuals in targeted raids like we've been doing for 12 months, that's the right strategy. Taking down the city again, except under the most extreme of circumstances, I think would be the wrong strategy.

MR. STEINBERG: Senator, the President has said that we're not going to let the thugs derail the mission here. Mike has obviously proposed a very moderate course. But are you worried that that sends a signal to the resistance that we won't take them on? And do we need a more forceful view, or do you agree with Mike that this is something we have to do?

SENATOR LIEBERMAN: Notwithstanding the rhetoric, for now the administration seems to be following Mike's more moderate course. I agree with Michael that, one, we should have had more troops in Iraq earlier; and, two, we would have been much better if we had faced this kind of crisis in a city like Fallujah earlier on.

But the fact is we are facing it now. It's a very difficult decision to make. Here is a classic case, if you'll allow me to repeat very briefly, why we should all be in a room together--the administration, Congress, Democrats, Republicans--talking about it, because it is difficult and it is consequential. And let me just phrase it this way, picking up from what both Ken and Michael have said.

If our goal now is stability in Iraq, to get to democracy, clearly we have to stop those who are threatening the stability, namely, the foreign fighters, the jihadists and the remnants of the Saddam regime. But if the way in which we do that, according to some, creates more instability politically, you've got a tough decision to make.

My own bias here, based on, you know, my own sense of conflicts like this and human nature, is that we are doing the right thing to give us a little more time and see whether we can hold it and contain it within Fallujah without going to all-out combat, which I sense that the military on the ground there would like us to do sooner than later because it will be easier sooner than later. But this can't go on forever, particularly if we have reason to believe that the enemy is building up its strength within the city.

And, you know, ultimately, there are some people with whom you can't negotiate because, you know, it's the old story: If somebody's coming at you with a gun and wants to kill you, it's pretty hard to negotiate with that person.

So I'd say this course is appropriate under the difficult circumstances for a while. But I don't think we can let it go for very long.

MR. STEINBERG: Senator, before we turn to the audience, I'd like to get your thoughts on the question about this turnover on June 30th and what kind of authority the interim government ought to have. We've had a lot of back-and-forth both over the composition and the responsibilities. The administration was up testifying last week suggesting that it was going to be limited sovereignty. On the one hand, there's obviously a strong need for Iraqis to feel some identity and some sense of empowerment; on the other hand, we've got 130,000 troops there whose lives may be put at risk by an Iraqi government which has a different set of imperatives and interests.

How should we think about the question of what kind of authority this interim government should have? And what kind of authority should the UN have as part of that overall mix?

SENATOR LIEBERMAN: Two big questions. Deputy Secretary Grossman was up on the Hill before the Senate and the House last week, and he was the one who talked about the limited authority that would be given to the new Iraqi government, presumably taking the shape that Mr. Brahimi, Ambassador Brahimi, from the UN works out. That immediately seemed to engender some skepticism and opposition as if this was the Bush administration holding back.

My own understanding of this is that this is being done consistent with negotiations that have gone on with very important Iraqi leaders, like Ayatollah Ali Sistani and others, who don't want an interim government which is inherently undemocratic because, whether Brahimi selects it or we select it, it's not been selected by the people. They don't want that interim government to have much power.

It's the government that's elected next January, and certainly the one that follows it, that will be a democratically Iraqi-selected government that ought to exercise most power.

So I think that the most important thing to do is transfer sovereignty to a government because it keeps the promise we've made and makes the point louder than anything else we can do right now and in the foreseeable future that we intend to liberate and empower the Iraqis, not to occupy for the long term.

The United Nations has a very important role to play here. NATO does as well. But, you know, I know that one of the things that a lot of us have done for a long time is to call for greater internationalization of our effort there. But if any of you

have spent any time talking to folks in NATO, for instance, they're not going to rush to come in with troops on the ground. So any hope that that is going to happen soon--I hope I'm wrong, but my impression is exactly that, that stability and security will be provided in the short run primarily in two ways: one is by American forces, and we undoubtedly will need, if we're serious about it, more troops on the ground; and the second is by hopefully an increasingly improved, trained, and well-equipped Iraqi security force.

MR. STEINBERG: Thank you for that.

Let's turn to the audience. We have microphones, so after I call on you, if you could wait until you get a microphone, and then introduce yourself and ask your question, and we'll start over here.

MR. DEANS: Bob Deans (ph) with Fox Newspaper. Senator, there will be an early test of the bipartisanship beginning tomorrow with Ambassador Negroponte's confirmation hearings. I wonder if you anticipate any difficulty in him passing through the Senate, given his past in Honduras.

And if I could ask you, Ken, to imagine that you're his DCM, given the priorities that you ticked off, what sort of a first-level to-do list would you provide with Ambassador Negroponte as he prepares to go to Baghdad?

MR. STEINBERG: I'd just say for the record that we'd hate to lose him. They could do worse than have Ken as the DCM in Iraq.

SENATOR LIEBERMAN: I agree. Ken's nomination would sail through the Senate.

[Laughter.]

SENATOR LIEBERMAN: Obviously, as you know, I'm not on the Foreign Relations Committee, so I can't give you a fully informed judgment on this. But my sense of it is that while there may be some tough questioning by some members of the Senate of Ambassador Negroponte about decisions he's made in the past, there's general respect and support for him as a Foreign Service professional, and that his nomination will move smoothly and quickly through the Senate.

MR. POLLACK: First, I thought you guys were my friends, sending me off to Baghdad to fix things there.

Obviously, there would be a whole range of things that I think that the new American embassy in Baghdad are going to have to accomplish. Let me just point to two of them, and I will answer the question exactly as you posed it.

If I were there with Ambassador Negroponte saying, you know, here's what we need to do fast, two things: First, on the security side, I would say to him we've got to have--we've got to deal with security. And as we've all been suggesting up here, that is going to mean American troops, and American troops fast, because exactly as the Senator has pointed out, nobody else is willing to come right now.

Now, I am willing to believe that if we got control over the security situation first and if we were then willing to go back to the United Nations for a new Security Council resolution that gave a new SRSG and the Security Council itself greater authority over the reconstruction of Iraq, I think under those circumstances we could get much greater European and Asian participation in reconstruction. But we need to recognize that the first issues, the first steps, as the Senator was suggesting, are our own.

So the first thing, we need to get U.S. troops over there. We need to get them out on the streets. We need to get them providing security for Iraqis to start to stabilize the situation. At the same time, part of that, we need to be retraining the Iraqi security forces, again, to echo Senator Lieberman's comment.

Right now the Iraqi security forces are just not up to the task. But the simple fact of the matter is someday they have to be, and given the fact that we can't keep our troops there forever, and even if we can get foreign support, the rest of the world isn't going to be willing to keep their troops there forever, the sooner that we start taking Iraqi units offline, revetting them, retraining them, re-equipping them, the sooner we can get them back out onto the street participating. And I think that's part of it, because one of the problems that I recognize is that a year after occupation, the Iraqis themselves are ambivalent about our troop presence. Many of them want greater security, and they understand, I think, intuitively that that's going to require a greater U.S. presence. But truth to tell, they don't like seeing lots of American troops on their streets, and they would really rather at this point in time see other Iraqis.

So I think part of getting the U.S. troops there is going to be saying to the Iraqis, look, for the moment we've got to have more American troops to give you the security you want, but we're doing this with your security forces to allow them to start taking over from us at some point down the road.

And on the second point, on the political side, I would say to Ambassador Negroponte: "Ambassador Negroponte, you need a new boss, and that new boss has got to be a UN High Commissioner," because, unfortunately, a new U.S. embassy--and this is something that Jim and I have been talking about on a number of different occasions. A new U.S. Ambassador is not going to have the legitimacy, the legal or moral authority

to deal with a new Iraqi interim government. As Senator Lieberman was saying--and he's absolutely right--the new interim Iraqi government cannot have full authority. And here I think the administration has shot itself in the foot by talking about limited sovereignty.

I don't know what limited sovereignty is because, honestly, I don't know what sovereignty is. And every Iraqi I speak to says the same thing. They don't care about sovereignty. They care about administrative authority. And what I think we should be saying to the Iraqis is full sovereignty, whatever the heck that means, you're going to get it, full sovereignty. But as Ayatollah Sistani and others have said, because this is not an elected, legitimate government, it can't have full authority. The problem is a U.S. Ambassador is not going to have the standing to prevent that interim government from going off and usurping the authority of the permanent government. And I think only at this point in time a UN High Commissioner--because we can't keep Bremer. He's already made his plane reservations for July 1st. And putting a new American in won't solve the problem.

A UN High Commissioner I think is the only alternative that will allow some outside for to check this interim government and prevent it from usurping the authority of the permanent Iraqi government, which, as the Senator points out, isn't going to happen until January of 2005, at the earliest.

SENATOR LIEBERMAN: I want to make two quick points that Ken evokes in me. The first--and I promise to look forward and not backward, but I did in October of '02 and then in February of '03 talk about what I hope the shape of post-war Iraq would be. And it seemed to me, because our goal was to liberate Iraq from Saddam Hussein, that we would have been better served if we had an international administrator



on the civilian side in there from the beginning instead of an American viceroy, if you will, or colonial government, which it's looked like to many.

The second is I want to come back to what I said about NATO, to just clarify to this extent: I don't expect troops on the ground from our allies in NATO in any great numbers that are not there now in the near future. But if we get the kind of UN resolution that Ken just talked about, our two closest allies in Europe who have not been involved as we wanted--of course, France and Germany--I think both have made clear in conversations I've had with them that they would be very actively involved in training Iraqi security forces.

Now, that's not the same as troops on the ground, but it could be a big help.

MR. STEINBERG: Gary?

MR. MITCHELL: Senator, Gary Mitchell from the Mitchell Report. I want to ask the 800-pound-gorilla question. But--

SENATOR LIEBERMAN: Which one?

[Laughter.]

MR. MITCHELL: In this case, it's the 400-pound tag team in the White House. And it really goes to your question about the bipartisan Council, and I think the question is whether this President and this Vice President--what will it take to convince them to take the step that you've outlined today to create such a bipartisan Council? And what would it take to persuade them to actually listen to that Council and share some power so that something positive comes out of it?

SENATOR LIEBERMAN: I don't know. This is one of those nothing ventured, nothing gained. But I think if you think about the difficulties that the

administration has had with Congress on a series of questions related to Iraq and the way it doesn't get better as we go on, notwithstanding this consensus that exists now about what we want to do in the future, then it seems to me that this kind of Council would be very much in the administration's interest. It in some sense might, if I can put it this way, be a nuisance. But it's a better nuisance to have than the kind of open, divisive debate over every issue related to Iraq that then does send a negative message to our troops, to our enemies, and to our allies.

I spoke this morning with National Security Adviser Condi Rice, and I told her that I was going to make this proposal, and she thanked me for letting her know and said she'd like to talk more about it.

The folks in the administration are spending a lot of time at committee meetings, hearings on both sides of the Capitol, and those are important. But when you get there, you're very often at the point when everybody is posturing. And we need to go back--again, it was a very different circumstance, but the NATO Observer Group during the '90s, there was a less frequent and regular but also very constructive series of meetings that President Clinton convened with a broad group of bipartisan leaders of Congress. There must have been 30 or 40 people in the room--The President was there, the Vice President, the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, et cetera--about the Balkans. And I think they were occasions for very constructive discussion and progress. They're not going to eliminate all differences, but they're going to reduce the unnecessary conflict that exists now, and -- [tape ends].

One of the points of agreement here is that we all agree we have to stay the course. The goal is not to stay the course. The goal is to be successful in Iraq. And

the goal is to give the Iraqi people a better future and protect ourselves from the terrorists who threaten Iraq's future and ours today.

So, you know, I'm hopeful, and I'm going to keep pushing it. And a final word. Sorry.

I don't know whether this is accurate, so I repeat it, but since it was already asked of me on national television this morning--or told me, on CBS Morning News somebody--Harry Smith said that he had heard or read somewhere that Dick Lugar had said, I gather in public, that he had not seen the President personally to discuss Iraq since September. Again, I don't know whether that's true. But if it is, that story, a Republican Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, who supports the war, not having those kinds of conversations, that reveals how desperately we need to break through and create dialogue.

MR. STEINBERG: Henry?

MR. AARON: Henry Aaron, Economic Studies at Brookings. Like most people in the room, I'm old enough to remember the Vietnam War and its role in the 1968 presidential campaign. I could imagine a Senator Lieberman in the midst of that campaign making a proposal similar to the one that you have just made today.

I think it would have been treated at that time as, in a sense, out of spirit with the American democracy, which is launched on a presidential campaign the purpose of which is to choose a leader to execute national policy.

To be sure, we can all agree that having jumped out of the plane, we don't want to crash into the ground. But the essence of the debate today, as much within parties as across them, concerns how to effectuate these goals.

The comment that you just made about the unwillingness, possible unwillingness of the administration to consult even with a senior member of its own party on this issue suggests that there is a problem here that is quintessentially a proper political question, which is how an administration carries out the most important policy. Let's agree on the importance of the outcome, stipulate to that. To suggest that this is going to somehow be taken out of the political year and in a way neutralized by a bipartisan commission seems to me to be calling for something that simply cannot conceivably happen in the American democracy.

SENATOR LIEBERMAN: We'll see. I would just say real briefly that the circumstances in '68 were in a couple of major regards different--I know this doesn't go directly to your point--than the circumstances now, which is clearly there, there was a substantial, very substantial group of people in the country and in at least one of the great political parties who felt that we should withdraw as quickly as possible from Vietnam, that the goals for which we were there were not worth it. And that's not the case here.

Obviously, there was great disagreement about whether we should have gone in in the first place, great disagreement about what the Bush administration did before the war and after. But what I'm saying now is two things. One is not only is there agreement about what our purpose is and that we are now engaged in a new war that is critical to our future security because it is all about stability and freedom in the Muslim world and stopping the terrorists who are attacking it and us. It's not just about that. It's really about the future, and it is our future on the line, and it is being decided in the near term.

So here's part of what motivates me, a big part. The next six months are going to be critical to what happens in Iraq. The next six months in Iraq are going to be critical as to whether we have a chance ultimately of succeeding, and succeeding means achieving stability, putting the country on the road to democracy, raising economic standards, and pushing out the terrorists and the fanatics, the jihadists who are there.

That six months happens to coincide with our presidential campaign, and I'm saying that the consequences of failure in Iraq are so profound to our future, to our kids' and grandkids' safety, that we've got to do something which, I agree with you, is not natural. And it is to try as best we can to separate our policy in Iraq today, about whose goals we all do agree, or most of us agree, from the reflexive back-and-forth of the political campaign. Shame on us if we don't try to do that and events run out of control over the next six months in Iraq, which will destabilize the region, embolden the terrorists, and make the future of the next generation a lot safer than it would otherwise be.

I'm an optimist by nature. I don't think that everything I would hope for in the way of bipartisanship will be achieved. But this much I know: that if you get the administration, the key people together in a room with 15, 20, 25 leaders of Congress of both parties, and instead of sniping at each other, we're talking about common goals and how we reach them, we're going to much better serve the interests of our nation and the security of our people, and, incidentally, the freedom and security of the people of Iraq and the Middle East, which is as much and more on the line in what happens in Iraq in the next six months than our security is.

MR. STEINBERG: Let's go all the way in the back there.

MR. CLARKE: Jonathan Clarke from Cato. Another Vietnam era-related question. I was struck by your use, Senator, of the word "domino" in your presentation. I don't know whether that's the first time you've used that word. But one thing I think that we learned from that time was--the mistake was that the identification of the people with whom we were fighting. And that's what concerns me about some of the--

SENATOR LIEBERMAN: Was the identification--

MR. CLARKE: The concern about our analysis of the enemy in Vietnam, and that's one of the things which gives me a little bit of concern about, in fact, all the presentations from the panel. Do we really understand the nature of the opposition? We're still talking about it in terms of terrorism, thugs, jihadists. But when do you think there will come a time when we, in fact, look this in the eye and start talking about Iraqi nationalism?

SENATOR LIEBERMAN: To the best of our ability, in a very complicated situation in Iraq, which is now part of a larger, complicated, very serious situation throughout the Arab and Islamic world. I think we have some sense--I say this with humility--of who they are and what they want.

John McCain and I, a few months after September 11th, visited Central Asia and a lot of the Arab countries in the Middle East. And I came away with this vision, which is that there's a civil war going on in the Islamic world between a small group of fanatics, extremists, violent terrorists and the rest of the people who are basically like you and me. They want to live better lives, and they want their kids to live even better lives than that. And they're living in countries where the population is

expanding, where the government is almost always dominant and/or dictatorial, where the economy is weak.

This is the great security challenge of the next period of our history because, on the one hand--you know, just read what bin Laden writes. This is all about creating a caliphate throughout a large part of the world, an Islamic caliphate. And it is an act of revenge in many ways, violent and brutal.

I don't believe that the overwhelming majority of Muslims wants that to happen, but we've got to present a different alternative. That's why Senator Hagel and I introduced our so-called Marshall Plan for the Muslim world. We're proposing setting up three international institutions to aid the development of civil society and democracy, to make grants to groups within those countries, and to make loans. But the point is we're creating structures and not dictating. As a matter of fact, Chuck Hagel and I are holding a meeting this week, which may be unprecedented--I don't know. We have invited Ambassadors from all the countries within the Middle East and Central Asia to come and talk with us about our proposal before it hardens. And I think it's that kind of combination of the sword, which inevitably you have to use against the fanatics that want to kill us, and the plowshare, which we must also use if we want to create hope and a better life long term and stability longer term among the majority of people there. That's our challenge.

MR. STEINBERG: Ken, do you want to comment on the character of the opposition, whether this isn't just Iraqi nationalism a la Vietnam?

MR. POLLACK: Yes, I think it's a very important question.

First I'll say I think your charge is an unfair one. I will speak for the entire panel in saying that we have all spoken and written on this question many, many

times, and there's not one of us who believes that this is only al Qaeda, only former Baathists. We believe, all of us, that there are a large mix of different people who are opposing us right now in Iraq. And I would actually suggest that your characterization of Iraqi nationalism is also too narrow a definition.

In point of fact, there are a wide variety of people in Iraq taking up arms against us for a whole variety of issues and reasons. In the Sunni Triangle, I would describe most of them as Sunni chauvinists. They probably would describe themselves as Iraqi nationalists, but I would suggest that the 80 percent of Iraqis who are Kurd and Shia would violently disagree with that claim. In the South, you look at the people who are increasingly gravitating toward Muqtada al-Sadr. Who are those people? What are their sources of grievances? In many cases, I don't think that any of them have a defined set of ideologies that they are adhering to and that is motivating them against us. In many cases, it's simply a sense of grievance of one kind or another.

And look at who they're responding to. They're responding to Muqtada al-Sadr. Is Muqtada al-Sadr an Iraqi nationalist? Is he an Islamic fundamentalist? Is he simply a political opportunist? He's probably all of those at different points in time.

I think for me this is the most important problem that we have in Iraq, is that you can find all kinds of different people taking up arms against the United States. And the problem that we're encountering is that, as we move along, because of a series of mistakes that we've made over time, more and more people from different parts of Iraqi society are taking up arms against us for a whole series of different reasons. And as I said, the ones that are of greatest concern to me are the people who probably could not identify a specific ideology that is motivating them to do so, but simply the sense of grievance, the sense that the United States has failed them in one way, shape, or form.



Those are the people I am most concerned about in Iraq, because those are the people who six, eight, ten, twelve months ago started out saying, "I may not like the Americans here, but I understand that what they're trying to do would be the best thing for me, and, therefore, I'm not going to oppose them." It's the loss of those people, the slow--and, again, we've all said it. It's not the majority of the country. The majority of the country does still seem to still favor reconstruction. But the sense of fragility in that popular opinion and the fact that you are having increasing numbers of Iraqis turning to violent opposition to the United States I think is of deep concern to me, and I think to the entire panel.

SENATOR LIEBERMAN: Well said.

MR. MIAZZO: My name is Mike Miazza(ph). Senator, I have a question about targeted killing or targeted attack on individuals, like Mike O'Hanlon put it.

Pan Am Flight 103 was bombed and 270 people, including some 190 Americans, were killed. Colonel Qaddafi was not assassinated.

At home, about 160 people were killed during the Oklahoma City bombing, but the perpetrator was not assassinated.

There have been many other serial killers--Unabomber or D.C. snipers and so on--but none of them have been assassinated. Instead, all of the masterminds or perpetrators of those massive, indiscriminate killings have been subjected to due process of law.

Now there are three exceptions: al Qaeda, Iraq, and Hamas.

My question is: What is the rationale to justify this distinction or inconsistency with regard to extrajudicial execution of individuals?

SENATOR LIEBERMAN: Obviously, it's always preferable to capture and try people who our nation feels are criminals. But there are times when you cannot do that, and the consequences are so severe that it justifies taking action against those individuals. As you've observed, in the September 11th commission hearings and other public bodies, there's been an interest, for instance, in the case of Osama bin Laden to eliminate him, to kill him if the opportunity arose, because of all the danger that he has represented. Obviously, you would choose to capture him first. We proved that with Saddam Hussein. We could have killed him. The American forces could have killed him. But they had the opportunity, fortunately, to capture him, and he'll now be tried.

Incidentally, the same is true of al-Sadr. You know, there's a warrant out for his arrest for killing, for ordering the killing of another Shia cleric. And at some point somebody ought to execute that warrant, and he ought to be arrested and tried and given the opportunity to defend himself.

MS. ZACHARIA: Janine Zacharia from the Jerusalem Post. Hi, Senator Lieberman. I wanted to ask you about another potential transfer of power in the Gaza Strip. Who do you think should fill the security void there? Also, if you could just comment on the implications of the U.S. assurances that President Bush gave to Prime Minister Sharon, specifically the implications for a two-state solution, U.S. standing in the region, and maybe perhaps Senator Kerry's efforts to maintain the Jewish vote. You were in Florida stumping with him when Senator Kerry blessed the Bush initiative.

Thank you.

SENATOR LIEBERMAN: How much time do I have to answer that?

[Laughter.]

SENATOR LIEBERMAN: I'll say very briefly--and I'm happy to talk to you on another occasion--that, you know, the question of who governs in Gaza after the Israelis withdraw has got to be ultimately up to the Palestinians there. That's the thrust of the latest Israeli Government proposal.

The second thing I'd say is that--talk about bipartisan consensus. There remains within the American Government a very strong bipartisan consensus that the best way, perhaps the only way, to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict peacefully is with a two-state solution. And the latest Israeli Government proposal, which has now, as you said, been endorsed by President Bush and Senator Kerry--and I'd say by most members of both political parties here in this country--is being seen as currently the best hope for getting to a two-state solution and getting back to the negotiations that can bring that about. And I hope and pray that that is exactly what happened, because the alternatives clearly have not worked. So let us hope that this does.

MR. STEINBERG: We have time for one more question. We're going to go all the way to the back on this side.

MR. SWISHER: Good morning, Senator Lieberman. My name is Clay Swisher. There has been much discussion this morning--and it's yet another 800-pound gorilla, and we just touched on it a little bit with Janine's question. But I'd like to ask you how you feel the Israeli-Palestinian front and the increasing amount of parallelisms that are being made between the occupation of the Golan Heights, West Bank, Gaza Strip, and the occupation in Iraq, how is this affecting our U.S. national security interests? And do you think that the Bush administration has done enough to move the Mideast peace process forward to pick up from where President Clinton left off and

explore initiatives out there right now like the Geneva Accords and other plans that have been put forward by the peoples themselves?

Thank you.

SENATOR LIEBERMAN: Thanks. The gorilla got lighter in weight as it went to the back of the room. If it was 800 pounds up here, it got to be 100 pounds back there.

Let me say first, just in passing, building from the last question, that the Israeli plan that was endorsed by both Bush and Kerry last week looks very much like the proposal that President Clinton made to Iraq and Arafat in 2000.

Look, if you read bin Laden--and you've got to read bin Laden to understand what's going on here. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict was not at the center of his ideology and purpose until recent times. That's a matter of history, but it doesn't diminish the significance here. The terrorist war against us is about much more--much more--against us, incidentally, against the existing leadership in Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia, and as the Times front page suggests today, against other countries, for instance, in Europe. That battle is much larger than the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. But there is no question that the continuation of that conflict is fodder, if you will, for the fanatics, the jihadists to use to try to recruit and arouse more enmity toward the West among the Arab and Islamic populations.

Therefore, the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict should remain at least what it's been for the last periods of our history, which is a primary American foreign policy goal. And my critique, my criticism, if you will, of the Bush administration here is particularly that we have not done enough in recent years to carry our message through something like the proposal that Senator Hagel and I have made

and to build--to raise up the standards of living and freedom in the Arab world, and to create the bridges there that we need to create.

So I hope that as we move forward that's something else that we will agree on. And while it's hard to be optimistic about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the events of the last couple of weeks do challenge the Palestinians to come forward with a new, obviously, non-Hamas leadership. And there are some very able, honorable people in the Palestinian community who want to achieve the two-state solution. And this is their moment, if I may say so, (?) -allah, to come forward and show that leadership. And I think when they do, they'll find a lot of support here in the United States.

I thank the Saban Center, I thank Brookings, I thank all of you for what has been a very helpful discussion to me, and I hope to you as well.

MR. STEINBERG: Thank you, Senator. You've wrestled all the gorillas to the ground, and we appreciate your time.

[Applause.]