THE SABAN CENTER for MIDDLE EAST POLICY

at THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

IRAQ: LOOKING AHEAD TO A WATERSHED YEAR

A Policy Luncheon with

KENNETH POLLACK

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. INDYK: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you very much for coming to the Saban Center at Brookings luncheon. Please start your salad.

It's a great pleasure for me to introduce my colleague Ken Pollack.

They didn't give me your resume, so I'll have to kind of--

MR. POLLACK: Make it up.

MR. INDYK: Ken is director of research at the Saban Center.

MR. POLLACK: Enough said.

MR. INDYK: A former official in the National Security Council and the Central Intelligence Agency, where he worked on the subject of Iraq and Iran, and author of two amazing books, one on Iraq and one on Iran, that I think you're all familiar with.

The reason that we are gathered here today is to essentially hear a trip report from Ken, who's just been to Iraq and thence to Israel. But he's done that as part of a new project we are launching, which he's running, on, for want of a better word, the future of Iraq. He keeps on telling me I can't call it that, but that's what it's about anyway.

So I thought it would be very useful, given Ken's recent experience, to have an opportunity for him to talk both about what he found in Iraq and what his thoughts are about its future.

MR. POLLACK: Thank you, Martin. Thank all of you for coming out on the Monday after Thanksgiving. I know that it is a tough time to think about--

MR. INDYK: You're on the record?

MR. POLLACK: Yes. This is all on the record, absolutely. There's nothing that I'm going to say that's somehow sensitive or secret. Feel free to quote me as you like.

As Martin explained, I did just come back from Iraq. I got back the Monday--the week before Thanksgiving, basically. Or actually, the week before the week before Thanksgiving, sorry. The jet lag is still catching up with me.

What I wanted to do today is to give you sense of my own thinking about Iraq and use some of the things that I saw in Iraq, some of the vignettes, some of the evidence that I gathered there, to kind of flesh out the picture that I've been building. As Martin pointed out, we have this very big project on U.S. policy toward Iraq going on right now. So the trip that I took over there was an effort to gather some information about that,

and I used the experience of the trip to kind of flesh out my own thinking as it's been derived from this larger project.

What I thought I would do is kind of run through a number of different issues on both the military, the security, and the political fronts, based on some of the things I saw over there and based on some of the thinking that's been deriving from the group.

A little bit about the trip. I was about six days in Iraq. Almost got cut to three days, thanks to Kurdistan Airlines, which is actually doing quite well but it's operating kind of on a shoestring. I made the mistake of actually going right at the end of the Eid, and so they decided, you know what, on second thought they really didn't want to fly on the Eid, and that required a little bit of juggling and, you know, a little bit of dodging around, and finally did manage to get up there. But it was a trip that almost got cut short.

I spent the entire time up in the north of Iraq. Much of my time was with the Kurds, but I also spent a couple of days with some Iraqi army units that were training south of Mosul.

I'm going to be a little bit sketchy about those units--who I saw, who they were, what I saw--just because the guys I spoke to were very candid with me. And I'd like to share with you some of their insights and I feel like the only way that I

can do that is to make it as difficult as possible for their superior officers to figure out who exactly it was said what to me.

The idea behind the trip was basically to go up to the north of Iraq, which is obviously in many ways the best part of Iraq, and ask the question are there any ideas, any examples, any lessons that we can take away from what's going on in the north of Iraq and apply it to the rest of the country; look at the Kurdish Regional Government and say is there anything to be learned from the KRG that could be applied to the rest of the country; and look at some of the better Iraqi army units that are being trained up and ask is there anything that can be taken away from this that ought to be applied to the rest of the country?

And I'll be honest with you. I actually went with very low expectations. My feeling was that the right answer to those basic questions was if you have 70,000 Peshmerga and a separate language, everything is easier. And what I actually found was that there really was more to the answer than that simple answer, although that simple answer actually did apply. I'm going to try to talk about both aspects of it in my talk.

First, let me start with a big-picture issue. One of the things that struck me most about my trip to Iraq was the sense of fear about civil war. When I was first in Iraq, in

November 2003--so almost two years to the day from this trip--what I heard from people all across Iraq was, you know, we need to get this right because we know if we don't, at some point we might wind up in a civil war. But civil war was very much kind of a distant prospect. It was something that was out there on the horizon, it needed to be a motivating force, it needed to be something that did push them forward, but it wasn't a looming threat, it wasn't a real tangible presence in Iraqi lives.

And what really struck me was, in speaking to Iraqis, to Americans--and Americans in the military and outside the military and even a number of Americans working in NGOs--what struck me was how much people are talking about civil war as a very tangible prospect--as I described it to several people when I came back, as "something that could happen on Tuesday." And that sense is just very much there. For me, that was a very big change between November 2003 and November 2005.

And obviously, as a friend of mine pointed out the other day, well, we actually are farther down the road, and it was easy to say in 2003, if we don't get this right in two or three years, we might have civil war. And it's now two years down the road and we haven't gotten it right, and therefore it is realistic to think that we actually may have a civil war.

But it's also realistic because there are lots of other signs, lots of other developments that have occurred. I'm going to talk about a number of them that I think are convincing people that civil war is a much more real prospect in their future than it once was.

Let me start with the security picture. I think the only place that you can start with the security picture is to start with the recognition, the most important fact, which is that we created a security vacuum, in the words of my friends Rick Barton and Sheba Crocker. We created a security vacuum in April 2003, and we have never properly filled that security vacuum. That security vacuum is the fundamental issue in Iraq.

That security vacuum allowed two things to happen. First, it allowed an insurgency to develop, derived largely from the Sunni tribal community but also incorporating a number of other different elements--foreigners, some radical Shi'a, a variety of other groups as well. But it also allowed the creation of, or whatever the opposite of creation is, the destruction--the creation of a failed state to emerge in Iraq.

And it is the combination of these two things that are plaguing Iraq today. It is the combination of an insurgency and a failed state that we're grappling with. And I think, unfortunately, too often both in the media and also in U.S.

government--certainly in talking with a number of senior U.S. officials--they tend very much to focus on the insurgency and they're not really grappling with the issue of the failed state. Even if they are tangibly trying to deal with manifestations of the failed state, it tends to be described largely in terms of the insurgency. Arguably it is the failed state that is the greater problem in Iraq than the insurgency.

The existence of this vacuum and allowing it to create these two problems of the insurgency and the failed state are undermining every other problem in Iraq. And it's why, on the one hand, it is certainly a truism to say that the war in Iraq, the problems in Iraq are not going to be solved by military forces alone, that it must be a combined political, economic, and military solution; but it's also true that it all starts with security because the security vacuum is undermining everything else that's going on. The economy can't revive because of the security environment; infrastructure repair is generally doomed--you can do it over and over and over again, but it's mostly just pouring money into a sinkhole if you don't have security; and it perverts the political process. It gives those with guns power out of all proportion to any power that they should have purely based on political measures. And it makes the Iraqi people far more concerned about basic needs--security, jobs, electricity,

clean water, et cetera--than about anything else. So it completely determines their own priorities simply because until you start to deliver on those things, they couldn't care less about anything else, by and large.

There are three components to the security issue in Iraq right now, and I'm going to discuss them in what I think is the actual order of priority that we have set--that is, the United States has set--but it's actually the reverse order of what it should be in terms of priorities.

The first of these is fighting the insurgency. We're doing a lot of fighting the insurgency. This is a problem. Talking with some of the U.S. military officers who are training these Iraqi forces south of Mosul--most of whom were Special Forces officers, but by no means all of them--what I heard from them consistently was that at the top level, at the kind of Abizaid-Casey level, they will say that our highest priority ought to be training the Iraqi army, with fighting the insurgency second. But in practice, it's exactly the reverse. In practice, the guys on the ground are putting much more emphasis on fighting the insurgency and much less emphasis on training the Iraqi army. Which is not to say that there isn't a lot of training of the Iraqi army going on. It's just to say that there is, unfortunately, still too much of an emphasis on fighting the

insurgency. And it comes through in allocation of resources, of personnel, et cetera--things that really do matter.

Part of the issue out there is that this is kind of a "patchwork" war. We've taken decentralization of control, decentralization of authority to, I think, an unhealthy extreme, to the point where basically every division and every brigade commander gets to fight his own war. So you can move from part of Iraq to part of Iraq and find completely different approaches to the military operations there, with some commanders being very good, understanding the issue, implementing a very traditional counter-insurgency strategy; and then you can move to another sector and find a commander who doesn't get it at all and completely focuses on conventional military operations, fighting the insurgency, these big offensive sweep operations, which frankly don't do very much and often are very counterproductive.

As I said, it varies from division to division, from brigade to brigade. And it also varies over time. A division leaves a sector and a new one comes in, and oftentimes there's very little transition, there's very little overlap, there's very little learning from one division to another. So you can have a division that was doing a great job pick up stakes, go home, to be replaced by a new division that simply doesn't understand the

problem or isn't interested in fighting a traditional counter-insurgency strategy.

And that's part of the issue, is you're still dealing with a lot of, in particular army, officers who just don't like counter-insurgency operations. They want to fight conventional military operations, for a whole variety of reasons--it's what they were trained in, it's what they know; they don't like counter-insurgency, they don't understand it, it focuses on modes of operation that they don't care for and, as a result, they don't implement it.

There are a lot of Special Forces guys in Iraq these days, probably not enough. And also in many cases the Special Forces guys--who do get it, because this is what they're trained in; they are trained on how to fight counter-insurgent warfare and how to train indigenous forces, the exact set of skills that we need. But oftentimes these guys get shunted aside, you can't find them in the high commands in Baghdad and elsewhere around the country, and oftentimes they get badly misused.

So a lot of the Special Forces teams get used to do reconnaissance for big sweeps operations. They get inserted into situations--because these guys have the language skills, and they're the ones who can actually wear civilian clothes and they can go blend into the community, which makes them very valuable

for finding out this kind of reconnaissance, digging up little bits of intelligence, which then go back and they hand over to the battalion and brigade commanders who then mount these big raids. Which, as I said, is not a very good use of their skills and frankly, because it's enabling these big raids which are oftentimes counterproductive, also is not very helpful to us.

Another thing I heard repeatedly from U.S. military officers was that--again, and this gets to this problem of not understanding how to prosecute a counter-insurgent warfare and not really being interested in doing so--was a huge emphasis on the detainee count. I had several American military officers say to me that, you know, we can't use the body count anymore because that did get discredited in Vietnam. But we've got the same emphasis--we've just replaced body count with detainee count.

And for me, overall this gets to a bigger problem out there, which is that the military leadership--and I don't know how to describe it any better than that, because I have not been able to fix on where the problem actually resides--but the military leadership is not yet taking this war seriously. I know that's a very nasty comment to make, but I can't express it any other way. And I don't know what military leadership this is--Vines, this is Casey, this is Abizaid, this is Schumacher, this is Pace or Myers or Rumsfeld. To a certain extent, I suspect

that all of them bear some degree of responsibility. But there is still a sense in Iraq that this war is not being treated like, you know, like an honest-to-God war, like World War II, where everything had to be geared toward it.

Let me give you some examples. Bad commanders are not punished. You do a bad job in Iraq, it doesn't seem to affect your career prospects, in large measure because--it seems to be a combination of things. In some cases, the commanders don't understand what doing this right would mean. Again, this gets back to the detainee count. If you are measuring the success of a commander based on how many detainees he takes into custody, you can have bad commanders coming out with great detainee counts. The fact that they actually haven't done anything to advance security in their area of operations become irrelevant because the metric that you're using is wrong.

But to a certain extent, I suspect it's because, again, you have senior officers who really aren't interested in counter-insurgent warfare and regard the counter-insurgency that we're having to fight in Iraq as an aberration. And therefore you shouldn't judge the commander based on how well he did this, you should base his performance on how well he did out at the NTC fighting a Soviet-style army or some other measure. But bad commanders don't seem to get punished in Iraq.

By the same token, the best commanders--and there does seem to be a broad consensus about who the best commanders are--are not left in place. We've had some very good division commanders and very good brigade commanders. And when they're done with their tour, they leave with the rest of their brigade or the rest of their division. Rather than saying, you know what, you guys are doing the right job, you're staying here--and I've spoken with a lot of different military officers, both former and serving, who've made the point that, you know what, if we're serious about this war, when we identify a good commander who knows what he's doing, knows his job, is getting results, keep him in place. You know, he signed up for this thing. You want to go on and be a general officer or you want to keep moving up and getting more stars, the price for that is you're not going to have a 12-month tour in Iraq, you're going to have a 24-month tour in Iraq. We're going to let you stay in place and do the job properly.

For a lot of commanders there's a sense that this is just a ticket-punching exercise. You go, you do your 12 months, and you get the hell out and you move on to your next assignments.

There's no effort to learn and disseminate lessons. This you see across the board. There is no one sitting in some

central location, whether it be in Baghdad or Tampa or Carlisle or somewhere else, collecting all of the lessons from all of the brigades and divisions and coming up with best practices and then disseminating it back out to the divisions as they deploy to Iraq. This is a problem that I saw back in November of 2003; it is still there today.

There's too much of an emphasis on things that are seen to advance careers as opposed to advancing the cause of fighting the war in Iraq. I heard lots of stories about what are called block parties. A block party, in U.S. military parlance, is when you get some tidbit of intelligence. Typically, the intelligence is garbage. It's a single source claiming that somewhere in some house there's a guy who's been dealing with the insurgency. And so what do they do? They encircle the entire block, they go in, they take down every single house, they drag out every male. In many cases they flexicuff half, maybe even all of the males, and they bring them in for questioning.

And they do so in typically over-the-top, very aggressive, very disrespectful fashion. A lot of guns being waved around, a lot of flash and bang, a lot of knocking down doors, a lot of breaking furniture--which does nothing but piss off every single Iraqi in that block. And you may come away--you take 300, 400 people into custody and you may come away with five

or six people who you've got some honest-to-God interrogations that turn up some evidence of actual participation with the insurgency.

In many cases, I heard from U.S. military officers, a lot of this stuff goes on because commanders are looking to get decorations and get commendations. I heard a lot about CIB raids--combat infantryman badge raids. This is guys who want to go up in the chain of command, they know they really need a CIB, they need a combat infantryman's badge. Well, in Iraq, the only way to get a combat infantryman's badge is to get into a big firefight. So you get a lot of commanders who go looking for big firefights so that they can get those CIBs, despite the fact that big firefights are not the way to win counter-insurgent operations, or only in very specific circumstances.

In many cases, we have problems with U.S. military personnel treating the Iraqis like subhumans. This goes on--and, you know, honestly, you can't fault the grunts themselves. They're learning it from above. And until we start treating the Iraqi people like human beings and recognizing that the whole point of counter-insurgent operations is to protect the people, it's very hard to see how we're going to start to have real improvement there.

Now, I will say that there is some evidence that some of these tactics are changing. What we've done at Tal Afar-- we're not just going to clear, but we're going to clear and hold. That's some progress, if it actually works out. In many cases, the real problems with the holding operations, we don't commit enough troops for long enough, we don't bring in enough economic assistance to follow on, we make a lot of promises, we don't fulfill them.

But a broader point I would make just before moving on from this point is that in many cases we may have gotten the tactics right, we still have the strategy wrong. I had friends who called me up and said to me look what we're doing in Tal Afar, this is exactly what you and Krepinevich and the others have been talking about, this is real counter-insurgent operations. And I said, yeah, you know, it's nice, I'm glad that you're finally getting it at the tactical level. The problem is Tal Afar is about the last place in Iraq where you ought to be implementing this. Tal Afar is a community of people who are going to take 10 years to come around to our point of view. Why aren't you doing this in Nasiriyah, why aren't you doing this in Amara, where we could actually have some impetus? So still we've got this misplaced strategic emphasis.

All right, training the army. The training of the Iraqi army is very uneven. That said, I would say it's probably going better, I think, than most people in D.C. think. You know, the truth of the matter is that when General Abizaid got grilled over how many battalions were rated at Cat 1, and the fact that it went from 3 to 1--you know what? That's not a very useful metric, and it's not very useful for a variety of different reasons.

First, one of the things I found out over there is that every echelon in the military chain of command has its own system of rating. None of them seem to understand what the other echelon system of rating is. They all use different ones, different criteria, there's no matching. So at the lowest levels, they may use colors. Then the next notch up, they use letters. Then after that, numbers. And, you know, it just keeps switching every echelon you get up. And as I said, no one seems to know what the criteria are at every level, it's just that every level has different criteria. So saying that, you know, a unit in Category 1, is not terribly helpful, all things considered.

Second point. You don't need Category 1 units, by CENTCOM's measure, to actually contribute to counter-insurgent warfare. Truth to tell, Category 2, Category 3 units are

perfectly adequate for a lot of different counter-insurgent operations. So just saying that we have to get all of these units to Category 1 isn't very helpful. In many cases, it's setting the bar too high.

But another problem that's out there is that in many cases for a lot of these guys Category 1 means basically training an Iraqi unit so that it could just substitute for a U.S. battalion in a U.S. line division. That is, can you do armored combat on the North German plains? And until you can do armored combat on the North German plains, you're not Cat 1. Which again, is not a terribly useful metric. And there are a lot of Iraqi battalions out there at Cat 2 and Cat 3 that can do local area security, which is the most important thing for counter-insurgent warfare.

So if I had to take a swag, I'd say of the 200,000 that the Pentagon claims are trained up, I actually think there probably are 30,000 to 40,000 Iraqi forces which would be useful for counter-insurgency. Not enough, not as much as we need, but certainly a lot better than the one battalion that certainly Jon Stewart took away from the hearings with General Abizaid and General Casey.

Now, again, there are many caveats to this, and let me start with some of the caveats. Many of the units, as I said,

are being trained by conventional army, conventional U.S. Army, to fight as conventional army. That's not very helpful. As I said, the conventional army tactics themselves are not very helpful to what we're trying to do in Iraq, and training Iraqi units to do it ain't helping them either.

That said, there are certainly a lot of units out there that do get it. The units I saw were outstanding. They had great morale, they had great tactics, they had great leadership. They really understood what it was that they were supposed to be doing. And they were operating in ways that were really helping to build security and build a new economy and a new political system in the environment they're working in. It was just brilliant. If you could replicate it all across Iraq, we'd be in great shape.

The problem is we haven't replicated it all across Iraq, and there are some other problems. Pretty much all of the personnel I saw were Kurds. All of them. There were a few Sunni Arab officers sprinkled in among the command structure and they did very well. And again, the Kurds were very sensitive about this and they were very good at working with the few Sunni Arab officers they work with. I would also say they had mixed areas. They had both Kurdish and Sunni areas of operation under them, and they seemed to do just as well in the Sunni Arab areas as

they did in the Kurdish areas. But they were all former Peshmerga. And at the end of the day, there is only so much you can do with these units. And we are deploying them to places. You know, when we talk about how there are 3,000 Iraqis participating in the operations at Tal Afar, they're basically all Kurds. And again, that has its advantages and it has its disadvantages, and many of them are pretty obvious.

Honestly, virtually all of the good units in the Iraqi army seemed to be single ethnicity. They're either Kurdish or they're basically Shi'a. I'll get to some of the problems with the Shi'a in a second, but I couldn't find anyone in Iraq who was aware of a decent mixed Iraqi formation, where we had actually integrated Sunni, Shi'a, Kurd all together.

There are also big problems beyond the combat battalions. There are 34,000 trained Iraqis who seem to know what they're doing--that's actually a useful number. Again, it gets discounted a bit if you realize that there's basically no support for them. The Iraqi army has no logistical infrastructure, no command, no communications, no training system, nothing really beyond those combat formations. If we were to walk away from Iraq tomorrow, those combat formations would become ineffective and useless very quickly because there is no indigenous support structure for them.

Now, that's a problem that is recognized. I mean, it was recognized even back when Paul Hughes was back in Iraq and, you know, we've been working at it. But it's very problematic to get at it because it means, in large measure, dealing with the Iraqi ministries and reforming the Iraqi ministries. And that is a very tough nut at this moment. There is enormous corruption in the ministries, something I'm going to come back to in a minute. You simply do not have the infrastructure and the institutions on the civilian side that could start to allow you to really build up an Iraqi infrastructure that would allow you to support these forces out there in combat.

A lot of these guys don't have the equipment that they need. In some cases it's because our logistical system is failing to provide it; in other cases, it's because we've got a Hobson's choice. As I said, there is rampant corruption with the Iraqi Ministry of Defense and there's a lot of corruption in the Iraqi army units themselves. No surprise. And the problem is, do you give these guys equipment only to have them go and sell it all on the black market to the insurgents?

You know, one of the questions that I asked--and again, I was with one of these absolutely superb Iraqi army battalions. And they're all driving around in open trucks. And I said, have you guys got any Hummers? And one of the SF guys looked at me

and said that is a major bone of contention with higher echelon, because we're constantly saying these guys are good, they're straight, they're not corrupt, they're ready for Hummers. And higher echelon constantly gives us a couple of Hummers, or a handful of Hummers for these guys to use only to have another battalion sell its Hummers on the black market and then they immediately pull back all of the Humvees. And he said this is a constant issue that we go through.

And, you know, it is ultimately a Hobson's choice. There are tons and tons and weaponry, equipment, et cetera on the black market from Iraqi army and Iraqi security forces. This is a very real problem. By the same token, you have Iraqi security forces saying--and they're also right--how do you expect us to do this job if you're not going to give us the equipment? How do we go into these environments where you guys are all, you know, suited up in your body armor and we got nothing? How can you ask us to do the same thing that you're doing without the same kind of equipment that you have?

As I said, a lot of the training is bad. And it's bad for two reasons. One, in some cases you've got Americans who are training the Iraqis on the wrong tactics and doctrine; in other cases, it's because you don't have the best people doing it. As I said before, one of the manifestations of the fact that we are

still putting too much priority on these offensive operations and not enough on training is by and large our best people--again, with the exception of some of the SF guys--by and large our best people are being assigned to the raids, are being assigned to the offensive operations and not being assigned to training, they're not being embedded with the Iraqi forces. If we wanted to make training the higher priority, we ought to be embedding our best personnel with the Iraqis.

In many cases, there aren't enough trainers. We don't have enough SF in-country, as I said before, but in many cases we are trying to come up with work-arounds, these MITT teams, which Paul and I, I think, puzzled out as being Military Instructional Transition Teams. You get MITT teams assigned to a lot of Iraqi army units, either in addition to or in place of Special Forces. The MITT guys are just conventional army officers, in many cases with some enlisted personnel, usually NCOs, assigned to an Iraqi unit.

One of the battalions I was with had a MITT team. They had 10 guys. You cannot--you are not allowed to go anywhere in Iraq in less than a two-vehicle convoy, which means at least four people in that convoy because you've got to have a driver and guys manning the heavy weapons. Now, if you're actually talking about doing something, really in most cases you're talking about

needing six, eight, 10 men. Which means that MITT team on any given day gets sucked up, those 10 guys, in just two operations, because that's the only way that they're able to travel in Iraq. As a result, they just don't do enough. You've got a battalion of 600, 700, 800 Iraqis and you've only got two elements, in many cases just one element, that can do anything with them. That is a big limitation on the amount of training they're able to provide even when they're providing the right kind of training.

We also have problems--as I said, we have problems with not replacing bad leaders on the American side; we have the same problem, maybe even worse, on the Iraqi side. There are lots of bad Iraqi leaders out there. And we are not replacing them. In many cases, they are deeply corrupt, we know they are deeply corrupt, and we are not making enough of an effort to get those guys out. As a result--as always, fish rots from the head down--they corrupt the rest of the units.

Beyond that, huge problems--organized crime, the insurgents, and the militias, all of which have deeply penetrated the various security services. As kind of a final point on this, the big unknown out there is, even where you've got some of these better units--and again, the units that I saw looked outstanding; I just wish that we had a hundred more like them--but the big unknown is that we've seen what look like very good Iraqi

security forces at least twice before. In April 2004, we thought we had some very good Iraqi security forces, which unfortunately collapsed in Southern Iraq when Moqtada as-Sadr's forces rose up. And in November 2004, we thought we had some excellent security forces deployed around Mosul, only to have them collapse when the insurgents made a major effort around Mosul.

And the question that I kept asking the Americans who were training the Iraqis that I met up with is how do you guys know that this is not another Potemkin Village? How do you know that we're not going to have another November 2004 and these guys, who look great and seem to be doing all the right things, aren't going to collapse as some Iraqi forces did in April and November 2004? And the answer that they gave was, We don't. We just can't tell.

And the only answer we have to that question is time. The more that you give these guys the opportunity to train together, to train with Americans, to learn to build unit cohesion, to operate in permissive environments, hone their skills, get comfortable with their equipment, with each other, with their personnel, with their leadership, with us, the more likely it is that they're going to be able to survive another test like April or November 2004. And the more you try to rush them, the less likely it's going to be.

Which is why, frankly, whenever I hear American--in many cases, very well-intentioned--legislators and critics stand up and say we have to accelerate the training of the Iraqi army forces, I cringe. Because the right answer is we actually have to decelerate the training of the Iraqi forces. We need to give them the time so that they can actually stand on their own.

Okay, filling the vacuum. This gets to the issue of civil war. We're not doing a very good job filling the vacuum. In our panic to come up with Iraqi formations, you know, when we realized that we didn't have enough troops in Iraq come about, you know, June, July, August of 2003, our answer to the problem was, all right, well, we'll train up Iraqi forces; we said we'll get Iraqi forces stood up as quickly as we can. We've not done a very good job from that. Again, it was never the right answer because trying to train Iraqis quickly was always going to mean doing it badly.

And in our continuing panic, one of the things that we've done is we've brought in a lot of formations wholesale from the militias. Frankly, I'm not terribly concerned with the Kurds--and I'm going to come back to why I'm not terribly concerned with them. To begin with, when you look at the Kurds, they're really trying, they know what they're doing, they're doing a good job with the Arab Sunnis. The problem is mainly

with the Shi'a, and in particular with the Badr Brigades. We've brought a lot of Badr Brigade units wholesale into the Iraqi army.

I'll just tell you a quick story. I flew into Baghdad and then into Erbil with a guy who's working for one of the NGOs. As he was traveling around the south a few weeks before, he got stopped at a checkpoint he'd never seen before, a bunch of guys in uniform--clearly Iraqi army uniform, but no insignia on it. And he has fluent Arabic. And he said to them, So who are you guys?, as they were checking his papers. And the guy who was looking at his papers said, Oh, we're Badr Brigade. And the guy standing next to him elbows him and says, No we're not, we're the special police battalion. The guy says, Oh, yeah, that's right, we're the special police battalion.

And this was his way of kind of drilling home to me this problem, which is you've got a lot of guys we just kind of took wholesale and put into these units and yet--technically, they're special police battalion this or that or whatever, but really they're just Badr Brigade. And things like the story about the torture chambers being run by the Ministry of the Interior fit perfectly with this, that you've now got the Badr Brigade very firmly in control over parts of Iraq's security forces, and in many cases they are pursuing their own agenda.

This is happening all across Iraq. I mean, it's kind of one of the strange things, that security in kind of a weird way has actually increased in a number of places inside of Iraq, largely because of the growth of the militias. And the militias do enforce some degree of security wherever they are in control. The problem is it's not the right kind of security. It's not the security that you want, and it's leading to all kinds of other problems.

Everyone in Iraq seems to have a story about a friend, an acquaintance, a relative who was stopped at a militia checkpoint somewhere in Iraq and was never heard from again. How many of these are true I have no idea. But the simple fact that everyone seems to know the story and everyone is afraid of these checkpoints is in and of itself a very problematic development. And again, go back to Lebanon. These are the same kinds of developments that paved the way to the Lebanese civil war.

Everyone also knows stories about ethnic cleansing, and there is ethnic cleansing going on. On October 14, if you want to get the transcript, Anne Garrels of NPR did a superb story on ethnic cleansing going on in a village outside of Samara. And the punchline to the story, the most important point, you had a small group of Sunni militiamen who came into a mixed Sunni-Shi’a village where people got along fine, the way they do in most of

Iraq, and started killing Shi'a. And in so doing, they drove the 200 Shi'a families out of this village. And at the end of the story, Anne sits down and interviews one of the Shi'a who was driven out. And his closing line is, you know, I never liked Moqtada as-Sadr. I never liked what he stood for. But now, he looks pretty good to me because he takes action. Not like this bunch of guys in Baghdad who just sit around and talk.

That is the classic way that civil wars break out. You create a vicious cycle, there's no security, people on the fringes become fearful of ethnic cleansing by these small militias who just start taking the law into their own hands, and it drives them into the arms of their own militia--not because they want to, but only because their own militias are the only ones that will protect them against the adversary militias.

In addition, another reason why security is a little bit better is because organized crime, in many cases, has replaced random crime. There's still a lot of random, but in a lot of cases it seems to have become collectivized, organized. Not necessarily a good thing. There are kidnap rings, the black market is thriving, businesses have to pay protection money, and oil theft is everywhere. I'm not going to get into this in any detail, just to say that in speaking with State Department officers, what I've heard from them is they are hopeful that a

third of Iraq's oil revenues will actually make it into Iraqi public coffers and be spent on Iraqi reconstruction this year. That will be a good year, if we get a third of Iraq's revenues going into the public coffer, because there is such massive graft all throughout the system.

And it's everywhere. You know, it's at the very top, at the ministerial level, but it runs right down to the bottom. I heard stories about guys pulling up in empty tanker trucks and paying off the guards at the local refinery or even the local oil fields, and filling up the tank and then driving back out.

The police, of course, who ought to be the first line of defense in all this are an absolute disaster, as best I can tell. Everyone I spoke to said the same thing, they are just a disaster. They are completely corrupt, they are heavily involved with organized crime, they are deeply penetrated by the militias and by the insurgents. You know, this is why the Brits decided to bust their guys out of that police station in Basra, because they were expecting these guys were going to get sold at some point to the insurgent groups or maybe just tortured by the police themselves.

By the same token, the police have some legitimate gripes. They're not getting the training that they need, they're not getting the equipment. But again, if the police don't show

up for the training because they've been paid off or they just don't feel like doing it, and if they sell all the equipment, again, you get this kind of a Hobson's choice.

This is actually one of those areas where sitting and talking with the Kurds I found actually beneficial. Because the Kurds--and I just kind of raised the issue of corruption of police, but a couple of Kurdish ministers say to me, you know, we had this same problem in 1991. They said, you know, the police force that we inherited from Saddam in 1991 was completely corrupt. And what's more, it had been trained under Saddam's system that their job was basically to oppress the people and steal from them whenever they could. And they said, We had to teach these guys that your job is to protect and serve the people, not oppress and steal from them.

And they said this was a very long process. The way that they did it--and it actually sounds like the right answer--the only way that you're going to be able to get at this kind of endemic level of corruption, is it requires long periods not just of training but of education. And they said a lot of what they did was teach their own police civics, basic civics--how a democratic system is supposed to function, what the role of a police force is in a pluralist system.

And what they said is, over time, you got the guys divided up in three groups. There are the guys who picked it up immediately and liked it, and you could immediately put them back out onto the street. There was another group who were kind of on the fence, but they were willing to learn. And over time, you got more and more of them and you brought new people into the system and you trained them and they also could be put out onto the street. And then you had another group who were just incorrigible. They were never going to learn.

And in the course of a lengthy period of training and education, you do vet it. This is one of the mistakes that we make when we talk about vetting. We think it's something that happens mostly beforehand. You don't bring a guy into a training program unless you're certain that he's going to be good. Not at all the case. Vetting is mostly done during the process of training and education, where you differentiate the good apples from the bad apples, and you try to get the bad apples out.

And what the Kurds said is it took them years, but it paid off and they now have a very competent and, they believe, very good police force. And they said they couldn't find any other answer. Frankly, I don't think there is one.

Let me turn briefly to politics and just talk a little bit about that. But I'm really going to make this quite brief,

because I want to wrap up and give you a chance to ask your questions.

I think we need to recognize--I started off talking about the security vacuum. We compounded the problem with the security vacuum because, when we were first confronted with it in that summer of 2003, we largely panicked. And we decided to quickly form up an Iraqi government thinking that this would be the way, is that you appease all of these very angry Iraqis--angry about the lack of security, the looting, all of the other problems, the fact that there weren't any basic services. We said, all right, we'll form up an Iraqi government. And the idea was that this way we'll put an Iraqi face on things and that will make the Iraqis happy because they are very nationalistic. And what's more, these guys have to know--they're Iraqis, they'll know better than we do, and what's more it will deflect some of the pressure off of us.

This was a terrible idea. It was a cardinal mistake, as Joe Siegle [and others will tell you, of nation-building. You don't want to do this. And the problem was that, of course, at that moment in time there were no truly representative, progressive, liberal Iraqi leaders yet. It was always going to take several years to allow those people to emerge from the population.

And so instead, the people who we wound up empowering were the people we had available--exiles, who had basically no political base inside of Iraq, and a bunch of Shi'a chauvinists, who had something of a political base in Iraq--not nearly as large as we made it out to be, not nearly as large as they make it out to be--and who wanted control over the government to impose their own particular vision of what Iraqi society ought to look like. And we're still saddled with those two groups. And the worst thing about it is that the only solution that we've come up with is let's try to bring a bunch of Sunni chauvinists into the government and hope that they can somehow counteract the Shi'a chauvinists. Obviously, not a good outcome for either.

As a result, most of the exiles are merely lining their own pockets. I mean, there's just enormous corruption in the Iraqi ministries. And the Shi'a chauvinists to a certain extent are lining their own pockets as well, but even the ones who aren't or even the ones who are, are also trying very hard to use their control over these ministries at this moment in time to reshape Iraq's political system, and even to a certain extent its economic system, to suit their very narrow ideas.

You know, remarkably, I think one of the things that is so striking to me is that the Kurds, who all of us recognize have in many ways the least stake in the future of Iraq, have proven

to be Iraq's greatest statesmen. If you want to look for Iraqi leaders who are standing up and are trying to do the right thing for Iraq, it's Jalal Talabani, it's Barham Salih, it's Hoshyar Zebari--you know, it's all the people we've known for all these years. These are the guys who are fighting in Baghdad to do what is best for Iraq. And in many cases, they are doing it and alienating their own political base in doing so, because their own political base really wants nothing to do with Iraq anymore.

The problem is, of course, that it creates a situation where you've got a constitutional process which is looming large over the next six months and could easily implode, and implode for a whole variety of reasons I'm not going to go into right now.

What I want to say is a different point. We're looking to this political process as a way of bestowing legitimacy on a new Iraqi government. And it's absolutely true that legitimacy is a very important aspect of this new Iraqi government. The problem is I think we have legitimacy absolutely wrong. We're looking at legitimacy as something that will be bestowed by having fair and free elections with a high degree of participation. In point of fact, for most of the Iraqis legitimacy is only going to be conferred if this new government

can actually deliver on the things that they care about--on security, on basic services, on jobs.

That's what they've been looking for the last four governments. And they've not gotten from the last four governments-- [inaudible], CPA, the Alawi government, and the Jafari government. And in every case, what you saw was a spike in Iraqi positive attitudes about this, hoping that these guys would now be the ones who actually deliver on all that stuff, only to have it plummet when they realized that it wasn't going to deliver.

And honestly, one of my great fears is that's what we're going to get with this new government. We will get elections that probably will be reasonably fair and reasonably free. And I think you actually will see a fair degree of Sunni participation. But the problem is going to be that the Iraqis are now to expect, once they're in place, the Iraqis are going to expect them to deliver on these things. And frankly, they can't, because they don't have the institutional capacity to do it, they don't have the resources to do so.

Unfortunately, the only ones who can is the United States of America. And unless we're willing to make some very fundamental changes, my guess is that in six months after the election, the Iraqis are going to wind up being just as

disappointed with this government as they were in the last, especially, as seems very likely, we're going to get largely the same cast of characters and they are going to squabble over the division of the political spoils in Baghdad the way that they have for the last two and a half years.

And there is a very real risk that if that's what happens, you're going to see more and more Iraqis voting with their feet exactly the way that Iraqi that Anne Garrels interviewed was talking about doing, you know what, I've had it with this group of guys in Baghdad who do nothing but talk; I'm going to sign up with someone who actually will do something for me, someone like a Moqtada as-Sadr. And there are lots of Moqtada as-Sadrs out there. He's just the biggest and the best now.

Let me stop there and take your questions.

MR. INDYK: Oy veh. We're going to be handing out Prozac as you leave today.

I suggest, Ken, that we take the discussion off the record, partly because all the press here have all the quotes they need at this point. Because there are other people in this room who may not want to be quoted, who I think we could benefit from them participating in the conversation.

Let me start by asking you to put into this rather complex but almost universally depressing assessment the home front here. And I think perhaps the best way to ask the question is how is this process that you're describing going to be impacted by increasing impatience at home, which is already forcing the administration to start to set its own deadlines for bringing the troops home?

MR. POLLACK: I'll put it this way. I think that if the current situation simply continues to stumble along, it's very hard to see how we reconcile the problems that I've described and the only solutions that are out there available to them with the current trajectory, I think the current American political zeitgeist with regard to Iraq which is that we don't have many more years there, maybe 1, maybe 2, maybe 3.

The fact of the matter is, there are solutions to all these problems, and there is a whole bunch of other problems I didn't talk about, and there is a whole bunch of solutions that I didn't talk about, but the common denominator in every single one of those solutions is time. None of these things is going to be solved quickly, and in point of fact, many of the reasons that we have compounded these mistakes or simply not solve these problems is in every case we've not been willing to give the solutions the

time that they need to actually act. Even when we've had the right solution, we've short-circuited it.

Quite frankly, I think the training program that Paul Eaton put in place way back when in July or August 2003, that was a perfectly good training program.

MR. INDYK: Who is Paul Eaton?

MR. POLLACK: Paul Eaton was the predecessor to David Petraeus who was charged with training up the first Iraqi army. It was a perfectly good training program. The only problem was there was political pressure from Washington to short-circuit it, to turn out more and more battalions and that's what killed it.

What that says to me is that the administration if it's going to stay the course, and I think I'm one of the few people in Washington who actually takes the President at his word, I think the President means it when he says that we're going to stay, whether or not Karl Rove does, whether or not Andrew Card does, I don't know the answer to that. That's a different issue. But I think the President absolutely believes it. But I think the only way he's going to be able to stay unless he basically just wants to destroy all of the political standing of the Republican Party is by changing things in a very dramatic fashion.

Here for me this is about your own views on American public opinion. I take the view that I think is widely shared among academics who actually study American public opinion which is that American support for wars and American support for casualties is primarily determined by a sense that the mission is important and there is a strategy that can be successful to achieve the goals of the mission. As long as you've got those two things, the American public is actually very willing to bear much higher casualties than we've so far sustained.

However, when either of those two things is lacking, then there is an unwillingness to bear any casualties. Then 18 Rangers dying in Mogadishu becomes too many. And I think that that is somewhat different from many of the Democratic Party leadership, I'll put it that way, who I think has a much more absolute idea of casualty levels.

What that says to me is the problem that the administration has had, and I think I saw it in the public opinion polls over the summer is that the public lost faith in their strategy, the public lost faith in their ability to prosecute this war because they didn't see any progress and, frankly, because all the talking heads, and there's a lot of evidence that actually the wonks matter in this and I take great comfort in that, that elite attitudes have been very negative on

the administration's conduct of the war and that is informing public opinion. It's giving the public a sense that the administration doesn't know what it's doing, compounded by the fact that the administration sounds like it doesn't know what it's doing whenever it tries to explain what it's doing.

What that says to me is if the administration were willing to stand up and say we have a brand-new strategy, they would have to implicitly be saying we've gotten it wrong all this time. I actually don't think they need to explicitly say that, but they would need to implicitly admit that they have had it wrong and be willing to say we've got a completely new strategy and here's what it looks like, and do all these different things that I and a bunch of other people have been talking about.

You had all the wonks say that actually might work. This is what they should have been doing all along. I think at the very least that will buy the administration some time with the American public. I think under those circumstances that the American public will say let's see if this works.

If it's seen to not be working in 6 to 12 months, then I think we're done and I think it just speeds up the process. But I think that's the only way that we can stay, and if actually the administration does it and it is seen to be working, that under those circumstances I think that the administration will

actually find that the American people are much more comfortable with staying in Iraq for a lot longer than they are right now.

MR. INDYK: Mark Paris?

MR. PARIS: Ken, throughout your presentation there was a bright thread that civil war is a clearer and more present danger than it's been and seems to be coming up fast. What are the sign posts that you'd expect us to see as that gets clearer and more present, assuming your scenario more or less holds?

And what is civil war? What does it mean in terms of geographic scope, in terms of tactics, in terms of how it breaks out, those kinds of things?

MR. POLLACK: Thanks, Mark, and actually that is the entire topic of the second part of the Saban Center Iraq Project which once we've laid out what the strategy ought to be, then we're going to look at what we do when we don't do what the strategy ought to be, which is also a way of saying that I've thought about this to a certain extent, but my ideas are not fully formed on this one and I want to be a little bit careful here because once I actually start doing some of the research, my views may change.

What is civil war? How does it start or how would we know it's starting? What are the benchmarks? More and more ethnic cleansing, more and more movement of civil population.

People like these 200 families who fled this village outside of Samara, the more than you see that, and it is going on. Right now it's going on along the lines of kind of white flight in the United States where people sell their home and move to a part of Iraq that is much friendlier to them. When they start just leaving, just picking up their valuables and getting out of town, that's obviously a sign of civil war. Where it's gone from I'm not comfortable in this village because I don't know what it's going to look like in 6 months, but I think I've got 6 months so I can afford to wait and actually get some money for my house, to I've heard a rumor that there's a nasty militia in the next village over and I just need to get my family out of here. That's an obvious sign.

Another sign will be when the militias start actually taking over bigger chunks of Iraq. Again, right now there are parts of Iraq that are very much in the hands of the militias. Basra from everything that I hear is largely in the hands of one militia in particular. But if you see that in other areas, that will be another sign. Like Lebanon, if you see more and more checkpoints starting out. Right now there seem to be a lot of checkpoints in Iraq, but many of those checkpoints are Iraqi army. The more those are replaced by militias, that will be another sign.

And a related one, the more that you see Iraqi army units disintegrating and just becoming the militias that they always were, that will be another sign. The fact that those guys at that roadblock, one of them actually elbowed the other and said, no, no, we're the Special Police Battalion, in some ways that's a good sign because it says we know we still have to play by the rules and we have to play by the system. When those guys are ready to say, we're the Badr Brigade, God damn, it, are you a Sunni or a Shi'a, that's another sign that this is all breaking apart.

That all leads very nicely into your next question because in some ways it is hard to see this, and in looking at some of the other cases out there, at Lebanon, at Yugoslavia, this seems to be one of those things where it's kind of asymptotic, it starts out very slowly and imperceptively, and then all of a sudden it just tanks because you get this momentum and you get a sense of fear which is entirely psychological, it's not like you can plot the incidents on a trajectory, or even if you did you might plot the incidents as looking like this, but as I said, public opinion will look like that.

What does it look like? I think it very much looks like Lebanon. You have a deeply intermingled population. I love Les Gelb dearly, but every time he talks about dividing Iraq up

neatly, my first question is, what are you going to do with Baghdad? Then my second question is, what are you going to do with Mosul? There are lots of places in Iraq where the populations deeply intermingle. My back of the envelope calculation was that probably about 30 percent of Iraq's population live in thoroughly intermingled communities. Those people are going to have to sort themselves out, and that's probably going to be very bloody. You will have enclaves that are universally Shi'a, universally Sunni, universally Kurds, they'll be fine, but the sorting out process is going to be very bloody.

The second point to make is, it is I think a tremendous mistake to talk about the Shi'a and the Sunnis. I don't know who those people are. Sistani has a certain ability to speak for the Shi'a, but only a certain ability, and I think that if there's civil war he is going to become irrelevant very quickly. SCIRI probably has the largest claim to representing the Shi'a, but I don't think they represent anywhere near a majority of the Shi'a, and there are lots of smaller militias out there that are going to fight them. Clearly, the Mahdi Army is going to fight them, Yakoubi down in Basra I think is going to fight them. So I think part of the process just as in the Lebanese civil war you had Gemayel fighting the Phalangists early on as well as fighting the

Sunnis and the Druzes, I think you're also going to have a lot of Shi'a fighting Shi'a and Sunnis fighting Sunnis until over a process of time strong men emerge, the Samir Geagea, the Michel Aoun, will emerge through military conquest. A lot of people are going to die between then and now.

The last point, what does it look like for the rest of the region? It will be spilled all over the place like Lebanon, like Yugoslavia.

MR. INDYK: Over here. Could you identify yourself, please?

MR. HUGHES: I'm Paul Hughes and I've worked with Ken on his project, and as a retired Army officer I just have to say a couple of things to correct the record about the CIB status. The CIB is not one just because one incident. You have to be assigned to a combat battalion in order to get that. You have to be there for at least 30 days in combat, but that's a moot point.

I also want to just enlighten folks about the lessons learned. Company-grade officers in the U.S. Army, Captains and Lieutenants, have taken it upon themselves to build websites, and you can go to lessons learned websites where company commanders are exchanging information about their experiences in Iraq without U.S. Army oversight. So if you want to see ground truth,

you go to those websites and you're going to get it about what it's like to be a young commander.

Ken, what I would like to pose to you though is something that in military terminology we've called operational art, and operational art is that mind set, that leadership technique, that connects tactical outcomes of battles to strategy goals, something that we did not have in Vietnam. Hence, we won every battle but still lost the war. And as I've said before, that's a real danger in this case here.

We now have the Secretary of State proposing an operational art tool called the Provincial Reconstruction Teams for Iraq, and it implies not just the military perspective, but a political-military perspective for the U.S. government. I'd be interested in your thoughts about what you think about the PRTs and if you think that they're appropriate for Iraq.

MR. POLLACK: Thanks, Paul. I like the idea of the PRTs. We tried them in Afghanistan and they seem to be having some degree of success there, and I've been trying to do some readings about what they've been doing in Afghanistan. Obviously Afghanistan is very different from Iraq. They will have to be applied differently in Iraq from how they were applied in Afghanistan.

But if they are adapted, and I see no reason to assume that they won't be adapted at least in some way, I think it's certainly the right approach. Whether they're going to do it right, whether they're going to be the tactics right on the ground, is a little bit harder to tell before we've actually seen them in operation.

I know the point I could have made is you don't really see much of a civilian presence, certainly not a civilian political presence, out beyond Baghdad. There still is unfortunately too much of a Green Zone mentality on the civilian side which leaves way too much to the local military commanders some of whom are doing a brilliant job at making this stuff up as they go along and learning how to be civilian engineers and peacemakers and teachers and whatever the heck else is required of them. Others are not doing nearly as good a job. So the idea that you would try to undertake this on a systematic level, that you would get guys out into the provinces, that you would have them working hand in glove with the Iraqis and with the military, is absolutely the right idea. I wish we had made a much greater effort to do so early on.

Two last points though. One, again, as I said, we don't know what the tactics are going to be and, unfortunately, the devil is in the details, and it would be terrible if we sent

these guys out there with absolutely the wrong tactics with the wrong approaches and they made the situation worse.

The second point is, as I started to say early on, they're not going to be able to do anything if there isn't security for them. It all comes back to it's why the political personnel have become this Green Zone force, because they don't think it's safe for them to travel out there.

And to a certain extent we have to say you're going to have to accept some level of personal risk to go out there, but I don't think that we can expect them to accept the same kinds of levels of personal risk that we expect from uniformed military officers and uniformed enlisted personnel. And until we can create more secure environments where these guys can operate, function, and also can have lasting results, and this is a point I made, we're pouring all this money into infrastructure and a part of it is we've poured it into the wrong places. People told me stories about how many schools we built in an area which didn't need any schools. What they really needed were sewers, and we didn't build any sewers, but we built all these schools. That's an obvious kind of problem that needs to be corrected, too.

But let's say we did build the sewers and the insurgents blew them all up or the local militia blew them up

because they wanted to say to the people you're not going to get anything from the Americans, you're going to have to come to us if you want anything, then all that money was wasted and the PRT team's efforts will be wasted also.

MR. INDYK: We have a lot of people who want to engage here, so I'm going to take three at a time and ask you, Ken, to make your responses brief so that we can get to everybody. Hala Dawoud [ph], Sam Lewis and Charlie Wilson.

MR. DAWOUD: Mr. Pollack, thank you very much for this on the situation in Iraq. I just have a question, probably you've been there before this reconciliation meeting that took place in Cairo among the Iraqi parties, so I was wondering whether you see any prospect for that leading towards and solution. And then also about the restoration of the Saddam army, the previous army, if this is happening, how it's happening, or will this be helpful at all. Thank you very much.

MR. LEWIS: Ken, I thought after reading James Fallows's piece in The Atlantic that it was kind of pessimistic, but I'm glad you're more optimistic today.

Two questions quickly. First, what would you predict would be the date more or less on which the next Iraqi government will set its own time table for our withdrawal, if any? Secondly, did you hear or learn anything more about Iran's role

during your trip? Iran is kind of the bogeyman in the closet on this issue and a lot of people exaggerate it and some don't think it's nearly as great as others. Some argue that we really had the same goal which is more or less a stable, weak Iraq which is friendly to us. That's their goal, and that's also our goal. What did you find out about the Iranian role, if anything?

MR. WILSON: How can you dismantle all these militias and create a national army in the next 12 months?

MR. INDYK: Twelve weeks?

MR. WILSON: Twelve months.

MR. POLLACK: I'd love it if the Arab League actually did anything on Iraq. So far they haven't. To some extent that's our fault, to some extent that is their own fault. I will fault the U.S. government that I think we should have had a contact group among the neighbors right from the get-go. I think it was a huge mistake not to have done so. I'd like to see us do it now, and I'd like to trade information sharing and maybe even a little bit of buy-in in terms of taking into account some of the concerns of the neighbors in return for them actually providing support of all different kinds.

I think there is a whole range of different support that they could give. They can give money. They promised a lot of money. They actually haven't ponied up much of it.

Translators would be fantastic. We desperately need Arabic English speakers. In some cases we need Arabic to other speakers. Trainers might be helpful in many cases. Noah Feldman was talking to me the other day about how it might be nice to have some Egyptian judges because there are some actually very good Egyptian judges and it might be nice to have some of those in Iraq to flesh our the judiciary and also to teach Iraqi judges how to do things. So there is a whole lot of different support that they could give.

MR. INDYK: What would the Iraqi judges think of that?

MR. POLLACK: Noah's ideas are pretty good. They go back to some other places where you've done this sort of thing. The Iraqi judges know that there's a lot of corruption, and one of the things that Noah has pointed is they all know who the corrupt ones are. You can take 15 judges independently and say to them who are the corrupt judges and they will give you identical answers. In fact, he said we have done this. When we first came in everyone knew who was a Ba'th Party member, what level, what their relationship to Saddam was.

The problem is, pulling these guys out can be difficult, and vetting and also monitoring them. We know something that's worked in other places you have three-man panels, two Iraqi judges and one foreign judge, and an Egyptian

judge would be perfect. If it were someone who is well known and well respected and spoke Arabic, that's all you need.

Restoring the Iraqi army. I will tell you while I did believe it was a mistake to disband the army the way that we did, I never believed that Saddam's army was something that was going to be useful to us afterwards. My concern was much more about turning more than 400,000, a half-million people out onto the street with no skills other than how to use a gun or a shovel and no visible means of support, and also putting out a whole lot of Sunni officers with no means of support and no prestige anymore, alienating that whole community.

I'm not wild about restoring Saddam's army to think that they could do the job. I don't think they're going to do any better job than we're doing now. I would have preferred not to have disbanded the army the way that we did, and I'm willing to call back to the colors individuals, but I'd want them to go through the same processes of training and vetting and embedding with U.S. forces before they go anywhere. And frankly, I'd probably break many of them up.

Sam, the date of the next government's withdrawal. I suspect you could have a request from them for some kind of a time table fairly early on. I suspect it will also be something that is a lot more than meets the eye. It will be a very

conditional set of terms. I've not yet encountered an Iraqi politician, again, I haven't met any of Moqtada as-Sadr's people, but none of the folks who I've met believe that the U.S. needs to leave. In fact, they're terrified we're going to leave too soon. They want us to stay. They understand they have problems in some cases with some of their constituents, although, again, I think we are overstating the degree to which the average Iraqi wants us to leave. They may not want us to stay, but they certainly don't want us to leave which is part of their problem and ours.

Iran's role. I was up in the north, so the information that I was able to gather on Iran was very limited. I will say I personally am of the opinion that while the Iranians are doing both good and bad, in the net, the good is still outweighing the bad.

The Kurds. I didn't talk about this, but it was one of the more interesting things that I learned up there. The Kurds are terrified of civil war in a way that I think most Americans are not focused on. They understand that civil war would be the perfect opportunity for them to declare independence. They also I think very clearly recognize it would be a terrible situation for them. The Iranians they believe are going to come after them hammer and tong, that the Iranians will arm a whole variety of Shi'a militia, we'll see them as enemies and we'll go after them,

and they see all kinds of evidence that the Iranians are preparing to do so.

By the same token, just to fill out the point on the Kurds, the point that they made to me over and over again is if there is civil war, yes, we can secure Kurdistan and, yes, we can declare independence and, yeah, we'll probably be okay. What do we do about the quarter-million Kurds in Mosul and the half-million in Baghdad and all of the other Kurds all around? There is going to be enormous pressure on us to start moving Peshmerga units forward to try to secure these people, and they said that is a disaster for us. We do not want to see that happen.

How do you train this army in 12 months? You don't. That's the problem.

MR. WILSON: Dismantle the militias.

MR. POLLACK: I'm sorry, right. I apologize. That's my answer. The only way that you can dismantle the militias is by displacing them. The problem is that as long as there is no other force to fill out those checkpoints and provide security on the streets, the militias are going to do it. And as long as there is no force doing that to make the people happy, the people are going to look to the militias and support them.

So, step one, the most important step in dealing with the militias is making them irrelevant by having a central

government that can take over the missions that they are currently performing. And by and large, we have not seen the militias with the exception of the Mahdi Army, want to mix it up with either U.S. or Iraqi Army formations. They've been very respectful, and when we move into a place they move out. The problem is we don't have enough troops, Iraqi and American, to fill out the whole country. If we did, I think that that would create a real dilemma for the militia. As I said, the people in many cases don't like the militia, they just don't have any other choice but to support the militia. So step number one is making the militias irrelevant.

Once you've made them irrelevant, then disbanding them a lot easier, and that's about the best answer I can give you. But as I said, the problem is we're not going to have the forces to do it in 12 months.

MR. INDYK: Thank you.

MS. OMAR: Lena Omar from the Iraqi Embassy. I would like you to just make something clear for me regarding the civil war. Speaking as an Iraqi Kurd and I've lived in Iraq all my life, with the past wars we had, I don't think Iraqis now from the north to the south are ready for any kind of wars. Iraqis are now more committed and eager to build a new country, and helping now with the new election coming on December 15th we've

received a lot of welcoming from the people who live in the Washington area. We are expecting more participants in this election coming. So this is my strong belief for what's going to happen next. We did not have a civil war in the past 35 years and the past two critical times with the past election in January and the referendum. So we expect more welcoming support from the Iraqis for this in the coming election.

My question is, which part of Iraq do you notice the fear of civil war? Thanks.

MS. STOCKMAN: I'm Farah Stockman with The Boston Globe. My question is about oil. It has been estimated by the Special Inspector for Reconstruction that Iraq loses something like $6 billion a year in oil that they've been subsidizing which is being stolen, and it has been suggested in his most recent report that perhaps a cause of this was the decision of the CPA not to meter the oil. I'm wondering if you can say anything about that and if you see any signs that maybe that might change. I don't know of you've spoken already about Syria, but I have the same question on Syria as they had on Iran.

QUESTION: Ken, after reading several articles, and Fallows's article and others, the *maa leish* mentality that seems to permeate the U.S. high command, not in Iraq but here in the United States, on not treating this as a war to be won, it's

deeply disturbing to hear that irrespective of the President's point of view.

I'm wondering what's going on here. What do you really sense is the reason for that perception? Is it because of incompetence, indifference, inability to understand exactly what needs to be accomplished, or the problem is so big that there is just no way to get your hands around it?

MR. POLLACK: Lena, I completely agree with the points that you make which is why it's to me one of the positives that is still out there in Iraq, one of the absolutely critical positives out there that's still in Iraq that says to me this doesn't have to all go south. And to me, if it does, that will be the great tragedy of Iraq, that it didn't have to. To me, it is stunning how much the Iraqi people reconstruction to work still after all this time.

The problem is that historically most of these civil wars have not broken out because the vast majority of the population wanted a civil war. They broke out because there was a security vacuum and a very number of people on the periphery wanted a civil war. That's what happened in Lebanon, that's what happened in Yugoslavia, that's what happened in Afghanistan. You can keep going down the list.

Typically, it is this combination of a security vacuum and a group of people on the fringes who decide that they're going to pursue a virulently chauvinist agenda that creates civil war. My point is, I see that happening in Iraq. That's not to say that it's irreversible, it's not to say that this is all doomed, it's a foregone conclusion. I think that there are ways to reverse it, and because the Iraqi people so desperately don't want things to do in this direction, that says to me this is still reversible and we could do things a different way. But it's going to require us to change the circumstances and to fill the security vacuum and to give the Iraqi people that opportunity.

As I said, I think we might some day at some point have a political structure that can actually do the right thing for Iraqis, but unless we build it and give them a base on which they can stand that's firm, it doesn't matter what their intentions are. If they can't deliver, and quite frankly, I think Ayad Alawi's intentions were very good. I listened to what Ayad was saying. He made those great speeches right after he took over on June 28th talking about the need for security and how he was going to deliver on jobs and clean water and electricity and gasoline and all this stuff, and he was clearly listening to the Iraqis.

The problem wasn't that he didn't want to do the right thing, the problem was he didn't have the ability to because the governmental institutions weren't in shape because there was way too much corruption, and because the U.S. which was the only entity which had the ability to deliver on those things didn't do it, and unfortunately, Ayed paid the price for what were in many cases our mistakes. So for me, that's the tragedy or what could be the tragedy of Iraq and I hope fervently that it doesn't come to pass, I'm just very concerned about which way we're going.

MS. OMA: If you'll allow me, I agree with you. I also would like to mention that you should not forget that everything that's happening now is only 3 years, compared with 35 years torturing the country. Not only Iraqis, Iraqi leaders, yes, we may have Iraqi bad leaders and also the training for the army, everything is new to the country. The same thing for the U.S. government here and the U.S. Army, they are facing something new and never happened before in the history of the United States. Iraq is not like Afghanistan or anywhere else, so we should keep this in our minds.

MR. POLLACK: As far as questions, I don't know if they're thinking about doing anything with the metering. I knew there were a lot of people, at AID, at State, elsewhere in the U.S. government, who were very concerned about this problem.

They're talking about the need to privatize the downstream Iraqi oil sector and install monitors, metering, all this kind of other stuff that needs to happen to deal with the corruption in the oil sector. I've not seen much evidence to indicate that they're actually making progress with it, but there clearly is a recognition.

Part of the problem though, again to go back to this, is it's very hard for us to do this. It goes back to some of those original sins. We created a power vacuum, then we panicked and we put a bunch of Iraqis in charge and said, you guys are sovereign which greatly restricts our ability to then force them to make changes, and the oil ministry is horrendously corrupt. But if you've basically given the sovereignty, how do you go in and clean house? It's very difficult. And if you've got a government that's arguing over should Kurdistan be independent or autonomous, how do you get them to focus on the fact that the oil ministry is largely manned by a bunch of crooks?

Syria? I don't think Syria is helping the situation, but by the same token, I think we make way too much of the problem from Syria. If the only problem that we had in Iraq was a bunch of guys infiltrating from Syria, I would be a very happy man. Yes, that's an issue out there. It is such a minor side bar issue.

Unfortunately, I think while we constantly say Iraq is not Vietnam, and that is the right answer, we're trying to apply a lot of lessons from Vietnam and in many cases we're doing it the wrong way. I think one of the problems is that one of the lessons from Vietnam was do not allow a sanctuary like North Vietnam to exist, and Syria ain't North Vietnam, but in many people's minds we've created, Syria and to a certain Iran, we've turned them into the North Vietnams of this problem and we're fighting them as it were North Vietnam when it's not. That's not a reason to say forget about Syria, don't worry about it, it's just to say I think we're putting way too much of an emphasis on that.

And Mark, what's going on? Is it incompetence? Is it indifference? What is it? I suspect at some level it's all of the above. My sense is there are different problems at every different level of the hierarchy. That said, I will follow the Pied Piper's lead and blame Rumsfeld which I think certainly is the common wisdom, but I actually do think that it is merited in this case.

A fish rots from its head down, I think I've said that at least three times in the course of this talk. Donald Rumsfeld, say what you like about him, is an extremely intelligent and capable man, and we have seen him make the

Department of Defense stand on its head and spin when he's wanted them to. Many of the problems, unfortunately, that we now have are because Rumsfeld forced the military to do things they didn't want to do, torturing Tommy Franks' campaign plan, screwing with the Tipfid, the time-phased deployment schedule, it's one of the reasons why we don't have the forces in Iraq that we needed and have never had.

It is very clear that if Secretary Rumsfeld wanted to fix this problem, maybe he couldn't fix it, but I think it would be a lot better. Certainly there would be a lot different. I have not seen a willingness on the part of Donald Rumsfeld to use those enormous bureaucratic skills to deal with this issue, and everything that I hear, it's the same thing that I guess Jim put in his piece, I have not yet the piece, that basically Rumsfeld has checked out. I've had any number of friends on the Joint Staff say to me OSD has basically punted on this issue and it is our problem and John Abizaid's problem, and General George Casey's problem. They may share part of the blame also, but you have to start with Rumsfeld. If he wanted to, I think he could make changes, and the fact that he doesn't want to is allowing a lot of other problems, the fact that the Army basically doesn't like counterinsurgency operations and the fact that they probably don't have a sense that the political leadership is going to give

them the resources to do this, and all those other problems to manifest themselves and be exacerbated.

MR. INDYK: The last two questions quickly, Alan Makovsky [ph] and then Hisham Melhem.

MR. MAKOVSKY: [Off mike] would you increase troop levels, keep them the same or decrease them? And what would be the consequence short-term, immediate and longer-term, were the U.S. to announce an unconditional 12-month time table for departure?

MR. INDYK: That's a short question, and I'm sure you can do a short answer.

MR. MELHAM: Hisham Melhem. I think most people would agree that what we have in Iraq today is a kind of low-intensity civil strife. What would trigger it to become full-fledged civil strife? Since everybody is talking next year as the year of hard decisions, to quote Anwar Sadat, would it be a new government that fails to deliver basic services? Would it be inability to amend the constitution to bring in more Sunni participation?

And why can't the United States live with a long, protracted civil war? We've seen the civil war in Lebanon lasting for 15 years, in Angola, 17 to 18 years, in other places, and then maybe declare victory in Baghdad and Mosul and leave?

MR. INDYK: After a decent interval?

MR. MILHAM: We need a decent interval, right. In this case it will not be decent.

MR. POLLACK: Alan, if there were no domestic political considerations, yes, I would increase the troop level. The issue is about filling the security vacuum. We don't have enough troops to do that. As I said, the only way that you deal with the militias is to displace them. All of these problems can in part be solved with more troops, and the lack of troops makes it harder to solve all these problems.

So, yes, if I could wave my wand and put another 100,000 troops in, I would damn well do it and it drives me crazy when I hear people like George Casey saying that the American troops are the problem. I think that is absolutely ass-backwards. We are part of the problem to some extent because we're not doing what we ought to be doing. We're not actually demonstrating to the Iraqi people that we're there to help them. But that needs to change, and if that can change, then we are the only part of the solution.

Again, the solution is about how do we get from where we are today to a point probably 3, 4 or 5 years down the road where the Iraqis really can take over the mission. And that's what we're talking about, it's that interim period that's the problem.

The consequences of withdrawal? I think there would be civil war the moment we leave, and I think that all of the sides will start preparing for civil war the moment that we announce it. This is already part of the problem. They're listening to the debate going on here and asking are the Americans going to be here, and my sense is, and I hear lots of rumors of this, that people are already starting to cut these side deals because they feel like the Americans aren't going to be here to support me a year from now and a year from now I'm going to have to get in bed with the Badr Brigade, so the best thing I can do is cut that deal right now and bring the Badr Brigade in and make nice with them, and that is already having ramifications. And if we announce it, I think it becomes a free for all. Everybody is going to want to cover his ass by going out and finding someone that they can align with.

Hisham, what would make things worse or what would make things get worse? It's kind of the corollary to Mark's question. I think there are a number of things. The Sunnis walking out of a parliamentary process could be it. The Kurds walking out could be it. The Shi'a walking out could be it. But in many ways for me, the biggest issues out there, and this again gets back to Mark's earlier question, the civil war in many ways for me starts

with the internal fighting. You're right, there already is a low-level internecine conflict.

MR. MILHAM: [Off mike.]

MR. POLLACK: Right. Exactly. It's already starting. And it's a little bit hard to see how much more the Sunnis could ratchet it up. If they get pissed off, they walk out, they might ratchet it up a little bit, but they're doing I think as best they can to ratchet it up and it make it as bad as it can be. The real issues are intra-Shi'a and intra-Sunni fights, and the moment I think that people start to think that the whole place is going to come apart, that's when you could see this real bloodshed come together.

But it could also be spurred by someone making a bid. Frankly, Hakim's efforts to try to carve out the Shi'a provinces as a separate region under his control, I see that as the potential start of civil war, and you saw it.

MR. MILHAM: [Off mike.]

MR. POLLACK: Exactly, and you saw the fights in Najaf, Kufa and Karbala when the Badr Brigades and when other people associated with Hakim tried to push the Mahdi Army out. If Hakim makes a bid, and I've heard from a number of people that he's thinking he can because of how well he did in the municipal elections, that could be the start of civil war.

Last, why can't we live with it? The problem with civil wars is that they spread, and again, this gets back to that second half of the Iraq project that we're working on. Again, I don't have it very clear, but there are lots of different ways that they spread, and when they spread they destabilize the countries they spread to. Lebanon destabilized Israel. Look at the damage it did to the Israeli political system and to Israel's economy. They fought a however long it was, 16-year Vietnam, 18-year Vietnam of their own in Lebanon. It had tremendous ramifications on the Israeli state.

Look at what Lebanon did to Syria. There is a direct line between Hama and the Lebanese civil war, and it took Hafez al-Assad going in and killing 25,000 people in the middle of Hama to put that down, and the whole time he was terrified of the problems with the Muslim Brotherhood, and those were actually two very strong states.

Now imagine spill-over in weak states like Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Syria. And Turkey has its own problems, and Iran has its problems, and Kuwait. These are not countries that I want to start rolling the dice with. Already there are people who argue about whether or not Saudi Arabia is going to last for another 10 or 15 years. You add to that the spill-over impact of

civil war in Iraq and I think you're talking about a very, very big set of risks.

MR. INDYK: Ken, thank you for a fascinating but deeply disturbing analysis. I'll bear it in mind next time I hear from people who say things are actually going well in Iraq, we just have to stay the course, but thank you all, ladies and gentlemen, for coming.

[Applause.]
[END OF RECORDED SEGMENT.]