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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. PASCUAL: Good Morning. I'm the Vice President and Director of the Foreign Policy Studies Program here at the Brookings Institution. I'm very pleased to welcome you today for this discussion that we will be having on Iraq.

This is an event which is jointly sponsored by the Foreign Policy Studies Program at Brookings together with the Saban Center on Middle East Studies, which is part of the Foreign Policy Studies Program and in collaboration

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with our colleagues in the Government Studies Program as well. And it's a reflection of the attempt that we're trying to make at Brookings to look at these issues related to Iraq in a broad foreign policy context in the context of the Middle East and in the context of American politics as well.

Today we really want to focus attention on the President's strategy that was announced last night. And the reasons for this are at least threefold. One is that I believe that chaos and instability in Iraq have the possibility for being a huge security and humanitarian tragedy not just in Iraq but the region and globally and that the mistakes that we have seen in Iraq and that could still occur may be among the most consequential in the history of US foreign policy and the international security of our nation.

The second is that the courses of these actions themselves will have consequences, so the strategy itself will have its consequences on American lives, on American resources. And how this strategy is handled could actually make the situation worse. So a great deal is at stake in the strategy itself.

And thirdly, we really believe that it is incumbent on the Brookings Institution and the scholars who are here to do what we can to understand the situation, to assess it, to provide honest feedback, to provide constructive suggestions as best we can. This will not be – today's event will not be a one time event, and I'm pleased to announce today an Iraq Policy Project, which we will sustain at the Brookings Institution over the course of a year. This

project will have a number of focus seminars that will look at the policy or the strategy that the administration has put on the table, its military implications, the economic and diplomatic dimensions, its viability for success, the consequences of what might happen if it fails, and what the alternative strategies or approaches could actually be.

We will look at things like simulations of future scenarios. We will have other large events which will allow us an opportunity to share some of the insights to engage a wider audience and to be able to get feedback on some of the ideas that we're putting forward.

During this process, we will welcome engagement with the Administration and with the Congress. We will do this on a strictly nonpartisan basis. We are not approaching this from "what is the right political solution." We are approaching it from the perspective of what is the best strategy and policy for the United States.

If I might, I'll just take a second on a few of the key points from last night just to again reinforce what we're talking about. The President consistently emphasized yesterday that the Iraqis must lead. And in fact, in slides that were handed out by the White House, they called it an Iraqi conceived and an Iraqi lead security plan.

The President began his discussion about the solution, not with what the United States would do, but what Iraq would do, that they would have a

commander and two deputy commanders based in Baghdad, that there would be one Iraqi Army brigade and one national police brigade in the nine districts of Baghdad, in other words, a total of 18 brigades in the Baghdad area, and that in this context that there would be a surge of 20,000 American troops.

Later in the speech, he talked about 4,000 new troops in Anbar, so presumably this means 16,000 in Baghdad and 4,000 in Anbar. The President also set Iraqi benchmarks, which are more indications of expectations of Iraqi policy including spending 10 billion dollars of Iraqi money on stabilization and reconstruction projects, passing new oil legislation, provincial elections later this year, and by November, Iraqis taking over security of all provinces in the country.

On the diplomatic side, the President said that we would rally support for the Iraqi national government. And I just lay out those points to remind everybody the context of what we will be discussing today.

Today we have, I think, an excellent panel. The panel will consist of Phil Gordon, who is a senior fellow in US foreign policy, who has written widely on issues related to Europe, the Middle East, and Turkey. He has previous experience serving on the National Security Council staff.

Martin Indyk, who is the Director of the Saban Center of Middle East Studies here at the Brookings Institution, a senior fellow in the Foreign Policy Studies Program. Martin has also served twice as US Ambassador to Israel and as Assistant Secretary in the State Department for the near East.

Ken Pollack, who is the research director at the Saban Center. Many of you are familiar with Ken's extensive writings on Iraq. He's a senior fellow as well in the Foreign Policy Studies Program and has served on the National Security Council staff.

And Sarah Binder, who is a senior fellow in the Government Studies Program and a professor of Political Science at George Washington University with a special expertise on congress and legislative politics and has written widely on the legislative branch and issues of partisanship.

We're going to start today by looking at the broader context of how we got here and what the context is for this Presidential decision. The President himself put it in the context of the February 2006 on the Golden Mosque at Samara. But in fact, there are other ways that the strategy could have evolved. And the Iraq Study Group Report, which has now almost become a historical document, laid out an alternative of how one might have proceeded.

And to begin the discussion, Phil Gordon will take a look at what brought us to this point, what influenced the President in coming up with the proposals that we heard last night. Phil?

MR. GORDON: Thank you, Carlos. There's an awful lot to discuss, and we want to have an open conversation, so I'll try to be brief and just make my five points in seven minutes if I can.

And my first point about the new Iraq strategy is that I don't think

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it's new. What struck me most about it – there were other options out there. Carlos just referred to one, the Iraq Study Group this afternoon at the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and the hearings are focused on alternatives, which could include draw downs.

It could include a diplomatic offensive talking to Syria and Iran and the ISG. It could include a federation as in the sort of Biden Gelb Plan. There are alternatives to what the President laid out, but it seems to me that the strategy spelled out last night wasn't particularly new. It was more an intensification and a supply of greater resources to the strategy already articulated.

It reminds me, Carlos and others in government, you know, often you come up towards a ministerial; you need to give the impression of doing something new, and so you announce the intensification of what you're doing or an enhancement of what you're doing. And that's what it felt like to me in the speech last night.

I – go back and look at in November in 2005 the last new strategy, which was called the National Strategy for Victory in Iraq, helping the Iraqi people defeat the terrorists and build an inclusive Democratic state in which clear hold and build was outlined, support for security in Baghdad, later sending new troops to Baghdad all for the purpose that it seems to me was equally laid out last night.

So really I don't think this is a new strategy. I think it is adding resources and even there, not an extraordinary amount of resources. As Carlos said, the number of new troops, if you add to the 130,000 that are there, is an increase of about 15 percent. That doesn't seem to me to be dramatic.

And similarly, on the economic side, a clear component of what I think is not a new strategy but new resources, even if it's up to 1.5 billion, which is one of the numbers we here, it's also a little more than one and a half percent of the total that has been spent on Iraq so far. So the first point of context is that it doesn't seem to me particularly new.

Second, getting back to Carlos's question about how we got there, I would say, you know, if you were surprised that the President didn't follow the recommendations of the Iraqi Study Group, you shouldn't have been. For the past several months, there's sort have been this buildup or expectation that the ISG was going to provide an alternative and political cover for the President to dramatically shift gears and then, he would have the political cover because this distinguished group of Americans said it was okay.

I was always skeptical about that notion. I mean imagine what would that speech have been like had he given it last night? Ladies and gentlemen, I'm dramatically changing course; I'm beginning a withdrawal of troops; I'm going to talk to Iran; and this is largely because, you know, some of my dad's friends said this was the right approach. That's political cover? I think

the opposite. This is a President who has said all along this is the most important thing facing the United States; we have to stand up to the terrorists. And he was never likely to finish the last two years of his second term with some new approach which would be effectively acknowledging failure in Iraq.

Upping the ante and adding resources and giving this one last shot is entirely consistent with this President's MO. And he had to give it one more try it seems to me. Just as it seems to me, by the way, the Democratic response to it is in the perfect logic of things looking towards '08 and the attitude of most Americans and what I think will be the neo-conservative response to it, which will also be consistent. Because they will have the opportunity to say that the attempt was right, but there wasn't enough done; there should have been even more troops.

So everyone, in a way, can see in this speech what they want to see. I think Bush is, as I say, this is entirely consistent when faced with a challenge whether it's tax cuts or Iraq or the War on Terror, he tends to up the ante rather than back off. That's what he's doing here.

And I think there are two reasons for it. One is the hope and expectation that it will work. I mean, you know, who knows? This is hard to foresee, and he hopes that this will, as some advisors have suggested, turn the tide. But secondly, and Sarah will no doubt come to this, it's in his political interests or it seems to me at least to be in his political interests along the lines,

frankly, of the suggestion Senator Biden has made that Bush or those around him would rather finish this term staying the course, seeking victory, and then let whoever follows absorb defeat if necessary, rather than saying okay, we tried it for five years, it didn't work, and now I'm going to admit defeat.

That seems to me likely, which raises the point about the assumptions behind this new or not so new strategy. And just a brief word about that. When I say that it may be that this is a last shot and even if it doesn't work, it's in the President's political interest to pass it off to his successors, that's not entirely cynical in the sense that there is, and again Ken will probably address this in talking about whether it will work, but you can make the case that this can work, providing security in Baghdad, the case that the President laid out last night.

But what I want to say about it is it really reflects a set of assumptions, unproven assumptions about how to think about Iraq. One is that this is the central front in the War on Terror. The way the President talks about this issue — we have to fight them there, so that we don't have to fight them here. He said last night that it was a struggle that would determine the direction of the global War on Terror and our safety here at home; it's the decisive ideological struggle of our time.

The assumption behind this is that there are terrorists out there; we're fighting them in Iraq; and this is a central part of the War on Terror. If

that's true, then sending more troops to Iraq seems to me to make sense. If, on the other hand, what is happening in Iraq is mostly an internal power struggle between different pieces of Iraq, it has much less to do with Islamic terrorists versus the United States, then it makes no sense.

Similarly, the way that the President talked about this last night and always talks about it is what's going on in Iraq is a battle between the Iraqi government and the insurgents. Again, if that's right, and there is such a thing called the Iraqi government that we can support and there are insurgents against it, you can understand the logic of sending troops. If on the other hand, the Iraqi government is just one more player in a very complicated mix of players and what they're doing is struggling over Iraq, then it is unlikely to make sense.

And then finally, an assumption behind the speech and the whole approach is that the presence of the United States and US troops helps quell violence rather than provoke it. Again, who knows and we can have a debate and no doubt there are elements of both. But, the strong assumption here is that more American troops reduces violence rather than provoke it. To the degree that that's not true and this is perceived as occupation, then the opposite is the case.

Fourth point, I was – what surprised me most in this speech – as I said, I wasn't particularly surprised that the President upped the ante. What did surprise me was the admission of error. We haven't heard that from this President before. If upping the ante was his MO, admitting errors is not. I mean this White

House is – has been unique in its unwillingness to accept mistakes. And the President not only did that last night, which I think was commendable and refreshing – he said if there are mistakes, the responsibility is mine, a bit late, but nonetheless refreshing and commendable.

But, the White House, I think extraordinarily followed it up with a statement of all of their misplaced assumptions over the past few years, that they felt they had enough troops, but they didn't really; they thought that training of Iraqi security forces was going well, but it wasn't; they thought that the neighbors were going to be constructive; they thought that Iraq was a united place, but in fact, there are a lot of divisions.

That was an amazing admission of error. It's the sort of thing that a sort critical think tank might put out about the administration, all of the errors. It's what's been written in Tom Rick's book and Woodward and all of these other books, but it certainly hasn't been admitted by the White House, and it was last night, which I thought was quite stunning.

Last point, looking forward a little bit, what – the biggest question in my mind – in a way, looking forward is fairly easy. We're going to send more troops; we'll hope it works. If it does, it would surprise me. But if it does over the next two years, things tend to stabilize, and we turn the corner. If not, then things continue to be very difficult in Iraq, likely, a Democrat is elected in '08, and the United States leaves Iraq. I don't think we're going to stay. If things

continue to go badly, we're not going to stay after '08.

The question I have and I don't really know the answer to it is can Bush really sustain it for that long. I mean, two years is an awfully long time. What you sort of felt last night was this is a last chance; we're going to try it. And as I said in quoting the Biden suggestion, and we're going to stay the course and the next guy or the next woman can accept defeat. But two years is an awfully long time, and I just wonder if it really is possible.

My last sentence is just a quote which struck me as quite opposite. It's a quote from 40 years ago, but since there are Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearings this week, I thought it was quite relevant to quote George Kennan in 1966 at the SFRC, who said, "There is more respect to be one in the opinion of this world by a resolute and courageous liquidation of unsound positions than by the most stubborn pursuit of extravagant and unpromising objectives." Forty years old, but it seemed to me relevant to quote this week. I'll stop there.

MR. PASCUAL: Phil, thank you. You've given this one label the intensification of a strategy, of a strategy that's failing in fact, which seems to have implications of what further intensification might do and whether it actually overcomes the mistakes that you've outlined were, in fact, acknowledged and laid out by the White House in a series of slides that they put out in conjunction with the speech.

I want to move from that to Ken to explore further what the strategy actually is and whether in fact it can work or where its shortcomings might be.

Ken, in your discussion, I would just ask you to think about or comment on a couple of things. One is the absence of four words that you and I have used in a piece that we wrote together, Civil War and Failed State, and I think that those are significant in what the prospects are to in fact actually come up with a viable solution and especially on the failed state side.

The President casts this entire strategy on helping the Iraqis and that this will only work if the Iraqis do certain things. Can the Iraqis do those things? Can they put out 18 brigades, 9 of those being police brigades that have, as you have well noted, been dominated by sectarian militias? What are the prospects of something like this actually working?

MR. POLLACK: Thank you, Carlos. Because this is Brookings and not one of the other think tanks around town, I'm actually going to start by basically disagreeing with one of Phil's main points. But at the end, I'm going to come around and agree with one of his other main points.

But for me, it does get to this question. And the way that I was thinking about organizing my talk was to talk about the difference between theory and reality. And I think for me that was very well laid out in the President's speech.

First, I thought the President's speech itself was quite a weak speech, much weaker than we've heard from the President in the past. And as both Phil and Carlos have pointed out, the administration is actually putting out reams and reams of paper on this plan. They're also doing a lot of background briefing. We all got background briefings by all kinds of different members of the administration.

There actually is a lot more to this than what you heard on TV. And I would start by disagreeing with Phil by saying that I don't think that this is at all an intensification of what we're doing now. What they are proposing, and I am choosing my words very carefully, but the plan that they are laying out would be something very different from what we are doing today and what we have done for the last three and a half years.

And so to answer your foremost question, Carlos, can this plan work, my answer would be yes. Yes, this plan could work. Okay. It is a plan that, as Phil pointed out, has been around for a long time. It's the kind of a plan that people like Tom Donnelly and Andrew Kapanevich(?) and myself and a number of very well known and well regarded military officers have been pushing since at least 2004.

And when you look at the essential elements again that the administration is laying out, is writing about, is talking about, there's a lot of really good stuff in it, the new emphasis on protecting the Iraqi people rather than

chasing insurgents, the emphasis on pairing US and Iraqi units, the emphasis on decentralizing power away from Baghdad and putting in place a new oil revenue sharing arrangement, a new financial controls to deal with corruption, on building up a local level of government in Iraq, of pumping more and more civilian personnel into Iraq and getting them outside the green zone.

These would all be radical departures from what we're doing today and what we have been doing for the last three and a half years. And they're all positive developments. And what I would say to you is can this work? It can. I'd put it perhaps a different way, which is that it's probably the only plan for Iraq that could work at this late date.

We talked a little bit about Baker Hamilton. Some of you were at a press briefing that we did when that came out. You heard both myself and Michael O'Hanlon say that basically the military suggestions in Baker Hamilton leave a lot to be desired. They're not going to produce stability inside of Iraq. The ideas, the strategy contained in the new proposal of the administration could do that.

And, you know, here again, I would focus you not so much on the increase in troops. In many ways, the increase in troops is the least interesting and least important aspect of what the administration is proposing. The most important change that they're proposing is a change in strategy.

Now, there are obviously things missing. Carlos, you eluded to

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two of them. Here, I don't know whether the problem is simply rhetoric and ideology or actual misconception. And Phil got to this as well, and I think he's absolutely right. I too chafed – I kind of bristled at the President once again trying to make the problems of Iraq and the threat from Iraq to be all about terrorism. Yes, there is a terrorist threat from Iraq. In many ways, that's the least important of the threats that could come from failure in Iraq.

I also bristled at the President continuing to hold up a Jeffersonian democracy as what we ought to really be striving for in Iraq. Who knows? Maybe if we get our fondest wishes, we will someday get there. But I think much more realistic, we now need to be looking for stability in Iraq.

And again, the plan that the administration is proposing, the plan that they are preaching right now is a plan that has a reasonable prospect of achieving stability. And as I said, it's probably the only one out there that could do it.

To go back to your point, Carlos, about Civil War and Failed State, here's where I begin to get a little bit nervous. Because here is where I start to worry about the theory diverging from the reality.

When I look at what they're – when I looked at the President's speech and when I hear them talking, it seems to be the same old language that we heard before. When I look at what they're proposing, it does look very different. For instance, one of the most important things about the failed state is the fact that

you really don't have an Iraqi partner. When I hear the President saying this is up to the Iraqis to do it themselves, that says to me they don't recognize yet that they don't have that partner and that we are going to have to shoulder much more of the burden until that partner is around to help us out.

But when you look at the plan, the plan suggests that they actually do understand that, that they aren't going to rest as much weight on the Iraqi government as they have before, that we are going to bear much more of a burden. That's the point about the increase civilian presence and the new civilian programs that the administration is talking about bringing in.

And that for me gets me to where I want to end this, which is that while I look at the plan, I say it's about time. This is long overdue. This is a plan that we should've adopted at least six to eight months ago, which was probably the last time we had a real good shot of making it work. But it is the only plan that has any prospect of bringing stability to Iraq.

But the problems that I see are not the — not problems of theory, not what the plan looks like; although, as I said, there are problems there. Some of these we talked about. Another big one is that there's absolutely no international component to this plan and that will be a very big problem if there isn't that international component.

But for me, the bigger problems lie not in the realm of a theory of the plan being presented from the administration but the reality that we're going

to confront. And there are three aspects to that reality that I wanted to bring up today, three big reservations that I have, three big concerns.

And the first is the most obvious, which is it may just be too late. Okay. Civil wars have a psychological dynamic of their own. And most often times it is the case in history that a civil war gets to a point where it has picked up enough steam, where the vicious cycle has become so great, the snowball is rolling so fast that it would require an absolutely enormous commitment of resources on the part of some other country to bring it to a halt, far beyond anything contemplated by this plan. And we just don't know if Iraq isn't beyond that point already.

Again, this goes back to my point about this is a great plan and if we had adopted it even in the spring of last year when Lieutenant General Peter Corelli proposed a version of this plan, I think it still had a reasonable chance of working. Today it may just be too late. We just don't know.

Iraq is in a very difficult situation. Its government is completely locked up in a horrible political logjam. There are all kinds of very bad things happening on the ground, and we just don't know. If even the perfect plan executing by the most brilliant personnel with all of the resources that they need can still work.

That brings me to my second point, which is competence. Even under the best of circumstances, this kind of a plan is an extremely complicated

one. It is an extremely demanding one. It requires not just a tremendous military effort, but far more so – and again, I think it’s an area where the public debate has missed the point. The civilian dimension, the political, the economic, the social engineering aspects of it are huge.

And so far, this administration has not demonstrated a level of competence that would be needed to pull off a plan like this. Now, I will caveat that caveat by saying that we’ve had some very important changes in personnel recently, having Mr. Rumsfeld out and Mr. Gates in, who is hyper competent, whether you like him or not; bringing in a man like David Patraeus, who knows the right answer, who has done it on the ground in Iraq. These are important shifts.

And it may be that we now have a much more competent cast of characters who will actually implement these operations far better than their predecessors in this administration already have, but that’s going to be another very important consideration. And as I said, the track record of this administration is not a good one in terms of basic competence, of basic execution of what in some cases have been good plans, although in many cases have not been good plans.

And then the final issue is the one that Phil already mentioned, which is that he’s right in saying that we have heard all this before, and we shouldn’t forget that. In the fall of 2005, the President did stand up – and you’re

right, Phil. He didn't go as far as he did last night in terms of admitting to mistakes, but even then, he admitted to mistakes. And he proposed a new strategy, and he made all kinds of statements, some of which were actually quite good.

And you'll remember that Condi Rice went before the congress and said we're going to adopt the policy of clear, hold, and build, which is shorthand for exactly what we're talking about now. It's exactly what the administration is proposing right now, exactly what the President talked about last night. That's a shorthand term for it. And she said clear, hold, and build is going to be our strategy.

And she held up the absolutely tremendous operations conducted by HR McMaster's team at Tal Afar and said this is going to be the model. And they didn't do any of that. And all the lovely parts of the plan went nowhere. And we didn't do clear, hold, and build. We did a little clearing. We certainly didn't do any holding or building. And HR McMaster's operations at Tal Afar stood out as being mostly the exception. We're now actually doing a pretty good operation at Ramadi as well. But there as well, they are the exception, not the rule.

And the Baghdad security plan that Phil also mentioned is a perfect example of that. The Baghdad security plan designed by Lieutenant General Peter Corelli could have been taking the Tal Afar operation and actually applying

it on a much bigger scale to a much more important part of the country, and the administration simply didn't do it.

Right now, I look at this plan and as I said, it looks like a lovely plan, much better than anything we've seen from them before, certainly much better than anything we've seen them do before. But I got to say on this one, right now I'm from Missouri. They got to show me that they're actually going to do what they're saying, because we've heard them say the right thing too many times.

And let me just finish with one last sentence, which is to say this. I know there's a lot of animosity and a lot of vitriol toward the Bush administration. I'm not a very big fan of theirs, but I think that we all need to, all Americans, Democrats, Republicans, independents, libertarians, whatever you are look at this and say I really hope that they can pull this off. I hope that it's not too late. I hope that they actually demonstrate much greater competence than they have in the past, and I hope that they actually live up to the promises that they are now making.

Because the fact of the matter is, as I said before, this is the only plan that's got a chance of actually working. And we will be far better off, Democrats, Republicans, whoever you may want to win in 2008, if we actually stabilize Iraq, if this plan is actually implemented properly and has the appropriate impact on the country than we will be if it fails.

MR. PASCUAL: Ken, thanks. Before we leave you, let me just come back to with one point. The President characterized the military component of this as a surge from 132,000 troops where we are now, bring us to plus or minus 150,000. One of the things that was acknowledged as a mistake was the incapacity to do the hold and the build. Is this really a surge or if in fact you – if you get into the strategy, is this what you've got and do you have to sustain this for a long period of time?

MR. POLLACK: You certainly have to sustain it. I mean no one should think that this is something that we – I'll put it this way. If we're only going to it for six months, we shouldn't bother because it's not going to have an impact for six months. Again, the key issue is the strategy. And if you do the clear, hold, and build, if we want to keep using that terminology properly, it is the kind of thing that could – and I stress could – start to reverse the trend. It could start to pull Iraq out of its nosedive. It could start to create areas of stability in Iraq.

The troop numbers are principally related to the size of where you can do that, how much space you can do that in, and how quickly it all works. So, if you're only going to add 20,000, well, that expands the area that you can actually clear and hold but not by a tremendous amount. The President last night, I don't think put it nicely. Administration officials are putting it in a better way, which is effectively, when we look at the number of competent Iraqi troops,

troops that we think we can actually rely on, we look at what is needed for Baghdad, and we basically say we're just going to start with the Baghdad piece of this, 20,000 troops is actually a meaningful number. Because that ought to give them the troops that they need to do the Baghdad piece of this.

But, go back to your point. Baghdad is not going to be stabilized in three or four or even six months. And if we put those troops in and we clear it and then we hold for only three or four months and then these troops leave, we're going to have the exact same problem. The bad guys will return. Holding means holding for probably more like 12, 18, 24 months before you can start to move beyond that, and that's the second point worth making.

And the President didn't talk about it last night. We just don't know what their thinking is. But Baghdad is critical. Baghdad is necessary but it's not a sufficient part for stabilizing Iraq. If you don't stabilize Baghdad, you cannot stabilize the country. But if all you do is stabilize Baghdad, you won't stabilize the country. So you have to think about going beyond Baghdad as well.

MR. PASCUAL: Ken, thanks. Martin, I'll come back to you. You've just been in the region. You've had an opportunity to talk with some of the key actors there, get their perspective of what their expectations are, what they would like to see happen in Iraq, how they put it in a broader regional context.

It was interesting listening to the President last night and the contrast with the Iraq Study Group Report, which, you know, calls for a

diplomatic offensive. And the President says well, we're going to rally support for the Iraqi national government. And then he talks about we're going to rally support from Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan, three Sunni states, rally support for a government of national unity, which is dominated by Shiites.

Are they going to in fact provide that kind of support? What did you hear when you were in the region?

MR. INDYK: Thank you, Carlos, and thank you for your leadership in getting us to put together this Iraq policy project.

I too, like Ken, hope that the President's new strategy succeeds, but I'm far more pessimistic than he is about his chances, and he was pretty pessimistic, I guess. And it's precisely because I'm looking at it from a regional dimension that I have this deep pessimism.

In my view, it's like Humpty Dumpty. Iraq is now in pieces, sectarian pieces, and all the President's horses and all the President's men cannot put Humpty Dumpty together again. And part of the reason for that is because what has happened in Iraq, this breakdown to the most horrendous sectarian warfare is reflected in a broader regional dynamic that reinforces it and by turns, is reinforced by the sectarian conflict that's going on in Iraq.

The President last night spoke about the challenge playing out across the broader Middle East, which he defined as the decisive ideological struggle of our time. He said on one side are those who believe in freedom and

moderation; on the other side are extremists that kill the innocent and have declared their intention to destroy our way of life. And he spoke about the need to advance liberty across a troubled region as a way to resolve this problem.

Well, unfortunately, there is a great disconnect between the ideological struggle of our time that the President defines and the struggle of our time that the players in the Middle East have now defined. Our struggle may be between moderates and extremists. Their struggle is between Sunnis and Shias. And if you want to get a sense of this, just look again at the way the Maliki government that we are now working with and trying to support handled the execution of Saddam Hussein. It was designed specifically deliberately as a message of a Shia government to Sunnis in Iraq and throughout the Middle East that we are here and we are going to treat you with the humiliation and brutality that you've treated us for so many generations.

If the reports are accurate and you read it in David Brooks' column in the New York Times today, the Maliki government's plan as opposed to the Bush strategy is a plan in which Shia dominated units of the Iraqi army would take over Baghdad. And the US Army would simply hold the perimeter against Sunni insurgents. That is a very far cry from the plan that the President has in mind. And yet, we are defining the Maliki government as moderates that we're going to support against the extremists, be they Sunni or Shia.

You saw it again across the region in another part of the Middle

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East in the streets of Gaza last weekend when 100,000 demonstrators came out in support of Fatah , the nationalist movement lead by President (off mike) and they – the slogan that they chanted was that Hamas is Shia. That was their way of denigrating their opposition.

The Sunni Hamas movement, which is now in bed with Shia Iran. And that larger struggle that's going on in the region is defined as an attempt by Iranian lead Shias aligned with an Alawite regime that is a non-Sunni regime in Syria and the Shia Hezbollah in Lebanon, an attempt by this alliance to dominate a region which has for many centuries been dominated by Sunni Arabs.

And the Sunni Arab leaders represented by, as Carlos mentions, the King of Saudi Arabia and the King of Jordan, and the President of Egypt, in particular, cannot accept, cannot accept that Persian Shia Iran and its allies in the region will be the arbiters of Arab interests. We see the struggle playing out in Iraq. We see it playing out in Lebanon where Hezbollah is overtly seeking to topple the Sunni-lead government of Hamas Siniora. And we see it playing out in Palestine where the Iranians and their proxies are doing everything they can to block a Sunni President in Mocomabus(?) from moving forward to negotiate peace with Israel.

The Iranian nuclear program adds a highly disturbing additional dimension to this struggle because the Sunni Arabs don't have nukes. Saddam Hussein, who was identified as the kind of wall that would block the Iranian effort

to move across the gulf during the Iraq Iran War is gone and his nuclear program is gone as well. And the fact that Iran is now pursuing a nuclear program and that the international community is unable to stop it is again a deeply disturbing concern for these Sunni governments. And it's not surprising that they are now talking about getting their own nuclear weapons to balance Iran.

It's in that context of Sunnis versus Shias that we need to understand what's going on in Iraq, not the context of moderates versus extremists. And in this context, an American surge strategy in reality is going to find when the rubber hits the road, American forces are going to find themselves in a very complicated and difficult situation. For if we go in in support of the Shia lead government, we will have the Sunnis across the region against us. Even while we'll be taking on Sunni extremists, their view is there are extremists.

If we instead take on the Shia extremists of Muqtada al-Sadr, we will find ourselves with Shias across the region against us. And that's the heart of the problem that we face here in a sectarian conflict, the obvious question of whose side do we choose. It's something that cannot be avoided by our naive assumptions that in fact the battle is of a different nature. And this goes to the heart of assessing what the regional response is now going to be to the American plan.

Yes, the Sunni Arab leaders of Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia do not want to see their ultimate protect of the United States weakened. But by the

same token, they do not want to see a Shiite government in Iraq that takes its orders from Iran, assisted in its efforts to establish control over Baghdad and then beyond.

And that's how they see the struggle in Iraq. They make no fine distinctions here between moderates and extremists. They see the government as an Iranian controlled operation. They will be happy that the President, unlike the Baker Hamilton recommendations, has now taken the gloves off against Iran.

In a little noticed and certainly it wasn't commented on part of the speech, the President actually made clear that as part of the strategy we will disrupt Iranian attacks on our forces; we will interrupt the flow of support from Iran and Syria; and we will seek out and destroy the networks providing advanced weaponry and training to our enemies in Iraq, that is, from Iran. And as part of this, we're sending a new carrier battle group to the gulf and providing patriot missile systems to our allies in the gulf. In other words, we are signaling to Iran not that we want for them to help us in Iraq, but we see them as the enemy in Iraq, and we intend now to take them on.

Today, there was an operation in Iraqi Kurdistan that shut down the Iranian Consulate. The office arrested five Iranians. And so, if part of the strategy is to take on Iran, we will have the Sunni Arab leaders happy about that. But if the other part of the strategy is to bolster the Iranian backed Shia government in Iraq, they will be unhappy about it. In any case, there isn't a lot

that they can do to help us. So this invigorated diplomacy to try to bring the Sunni moderates in the Arab world on board is, I'm afraid, going to come up short.

On the other hand, the de facto declaration of war on Iran is going to have a predictable reaction. Even before the President's speech, the Iranians were doing everything possible to complicate our mission in Iraq and ensure that their proxies there would have control. Now they have the opportunity to deal the United States a decisive defeat in Iraq. And I believe that they will go for it.

They can see very well the opposition in this country in congress and the American public. And I think they will probably conceive of this as the last decisive battle. Those who argue that the Iranians will restrain themselves because they won't want to see chaos in Iraq that will drag them in, I think underestimate the extent to which a defeat for the United States is of greater advantage to them than the risks of a chaotic situation on their border, which they will find ways of handling.

Syrians will see it in a similar light. They do not want to see more American troops on their border. They understand very clearly, have understood for a long time, but will see again in the speech further vindication of their view that the policy of the US government is to overthrow the regime in Syria. And they certainly in those circumstances will have no interest in helping us prevail with this new strategy in Iran. And beyond, of course, the larger struggle between

an Iranian Syrian Hezbollah alliance and our allies in the region, gives them an additional reason for wanting to see us defeated, so as to confirm their dominance in the region.

And so, the failure to understand or to compute put it into our calculations the fact that what we're facing in Iraq and in the broader Middle East is this sectarian struggle for power means that I'm afraid we are more likely to fail than to succeed.

One footnote to end on, you will have noticed that notwithstanding reports to the contrary, the President made no mention of a new peace initiative in the Middle East. Again, this was a rejection of one of the recommendations of the Baker Hamilton Report.

Condoleezza Rice will be going out to the region this weekend. She will be stopping in Jerusalem and Ramallah, but she will find, I think, what I found when I was there this last weekend, is that the partners to an Israeli Palestinian peace process are simply not ready, either on the Palestinian or Israeli side.

The Palestinians are engaged in their own struggle for power between Hamas and Fata, which will play itself out over the next six months. And at the moment, they are preoccupied with that and not really focused on any kind of new peace initiative. And the Prime Minister of Israel is involved in his own struggle for survival and is not in these circumstances in a position to pursue

a peace initiative.

So, if you thought that that was important in terms of winning the War in Iraq, I don't blame the President in this regard for not announcing a new initiative. Because for the time being, there is not much that can be done there.

MR. PASCUAL: Martin, thank you. Your characterization of the nature of the struggle, whether it's our struggle between moderates and extremists versus their struggle of Sunnis and Shias, I think is absolutely crucial here in understanding what the prospects are for success.

Let me turn this around and ask you whether that has implications for whether there is any possibility whatsoever in your view for some kind of a political truce. And the reason I raise this is because on the one hand, the President says very clearly that we can only do this by helping Iraqis; it will only work if Iraqis take the lead, if they are putting forward the necessary army and police brigades.

Certainly the police brigade, the Iraqi police brigades are dominated by Shia militias. The Sunnis in the region will not want to see that and, as you lay out, they're not going to want to support that. They're not going to want to see "that kind of victory." So, from that perspective, the Sunnis may not have an interest in supporting this and in fact, may see a US intervention there as more likely to advance something that is counter to their interests.

Is there some way to build around these dynamics to actually try to

get the various parties, Sunni and Shia within Iraq and those outside, to see some utility in an alternative, some form of a political truce that is in effect a cease-fire to be able to grapple with some of the tougher political questions that are facing Iraq right now or do you think it's just too far gone?

MR. INDYK: I do think it's too far gone. But the time will come again when the parties exhaust themselves in an orgy of violence that we're already witnessing, eventually, two years, three years, five years down the road, a political solution may become possible.

But, you know, in some ways, it may not have been Washington's policy, but I think it's Al Halilouzod's(?) policy was to attempt sometime of political compact in Iraq — you call it a truce; I'll call it a compact, but an attempt to bring political leaders of Shias and Sunnis together to try to work things out.

And I think that the Iraqi Kurds have also been trying to play that role, the Talibanian(?) and Bahhamsalensa(?). But it hasn't worked, and I'd just — and the reason it hasn't worked is that the schism is generating a mistrust in the intentions of the other, which makes a political compact, in my view, impossible at this time.

And I think that the new strategy, in so far as it looks to try to get a new oil revenue law or other factors that would help to bolster a political compact between Shias and Sunnis will meet a bad fate, because, as I say, we cannot now put the pieces back together again.

MR. PASCUAL: Thank you.

Sarah, let me come back to you and ask you to help bring this back to a domestic context. The – what you’ve heard from the panel is a scenario which ranges from the pessimistic to the extraordinarily pessimistic of what we might actually see coming in front of us, a yet harsher environment in Iraq and the region, a limited likelihood that this increase of troops could actually have an effective impact. The President’s got to continue to sell this strategy to the American people, to the congress.

First of all, can he do this on his own? Is the congress – are they in a position to object, to block? What do you expect is the role that the congress might take on these kinds of issues? And what do you expect to see the political reaction – what kind of political reaction do you expect to see at a grassroots level?

MS. BINDER: Great. Well, thanks so much for including me. And for your questions, it certainly looks today that the President’s proposals will face very strong Democratic opposition on Capitol Hill. But it’s an open question to me whether in fact Democrats will have the capacity to actually block what the President wants to do, even given the pessimistic predictions of whether or not the troop increase would in fact work.

To give us a sense of why I think it’s an open question here and to give a sense of how we should expect the President’s proposals to be received, I

want to talk a little bit about the political context in which the proposal goes to the Hill and a little bit about the institutional context in which Congress will have to work in facing or evaluating the President's proposals.

First, in terms of the political context, the shape of public opinion here at the grassroots, as Carlos has suggested, is incredibly important. There's plenty of old polling data, new polling data, even survey data from last night suggesting that a clear majority, albeit perhaps a bare majority of Americans oppose adding troops to Iraq and in fact, consistent with numbers we've seen over the fall, a good 50 to 60 percent of Americans in fact would prefer to bring troops home altogether from Iraq.

Now, it seems to me more important than this aggregate opinion, in fact, is the partisan distribution of opinion. What do partisans think at the grassroots and at the elite level about the Bush proposal? I've been looking or working with individual level data from the major congressional election survey that was in the field in November and in December, and the partisan differences that emerge from those surveys are incredible. Ninety-five percent of Democratic voters when asked supported withdrawing troops within a year. Sixty-six percent of independent voters supported taking troops home within the year. But if you look at the response of Republicans, in fact, the Republicans who turned out to vote, 18 percent, at best 20 percent supported bringing troops home within the year.

In other words, basically all Democrats, perhaps but Joe Lieberman, are on board for blocking what the President wants to do. Independents overwhelmingly support bringing troops home, but again, roughly at best, a fifth of Republicans supporting withdrawal. And that is going to put a tremendous pressure and put the spotlight on Republicans on Capitol Hill to see what they're going to do with respect to whether to back the President to try and generate support for the President's proposal or whether they're going to fall in with more Democratic opinion.

That said, we should keep in mind here that in the '08 elections, there are 21 Republican Senate seats up to be defended and barely half of that for Democratic seats up for being reelected. Thus, we shouldn't be surprised to see that the initial Republican voices we hear here are from senators representing states with moderate opinions, Susan Collins from Maine, Hagel to some extent from Nebraska, Gordon Smith from Oregon. The voices are here coming from Republicans who are reflecting at moderate and Democratic opinion from back home.

Within that political context, it seems to me that Democrats both in the House and Senate, they know what they are against. And it seems pretty clear that the surge proposal is generating opposition from those Democrats. But it's not clear to me that Democrats yet are united on what they are for and what active steps they should be taking vis-à-vis the President and his work plan.

And that political context, I think, is going to complicate Congress's institutional response to the President's proposal. So turning to that institutional context, what are the options for a Democratic-led Congress? What could they do in reality? Four options. First, power of the purse, quite simply and a range of options there, limit funding for the war, cap troops, place conditions on the spending of money to send more troops.

Second, they could exercise oversight, attempt to hold the administration accountable for the progress in the war, for what the Iraqi government is doing, in other words, to see how well conditions are being met. Third, they could use the War Powers Resolution, although that's so mired in constitutional conflict that there's very low chance that congress would turn to that direction. And fourth, they could take symbolic action, expressing opposition to the President, but in fact, not moving to stop his plan in the increase in troops.

And clearly the movement out of the block this week seems to be in that symbolic direction, some sort of non-binding resolution, right, a concurrent resolution that in fact doesn't go to the President for his signature, expressing the sense of the House and Senate in opposition to the President's plan.

House Democrats, it appears this morning, clearly want to do more than that. There seems to be much more support within the House Democratic caucus for in fact making moves to limit funding and to consider legislation to do that. But the Senate Democrats don't really seem to be united that quickly on

such a plan.

So the question I think for us is why, why shouldn't we expect to see a much more substantive successful effort from the Democrats' perspective to block the President's proposal. Why is it quite conceivable that there will only be symbolic action here? And there are at least three reasons to think about.

First, as I mentioned, Democrats, I don't think, are yet cohesive and united on a single plan here on whether or not this is the right thing to do. And certainly, we see bicameral differences in how Democrats are approaching that question.

Second, remember that Democrats hold the House and Senate by slim majorities, and in the Senate, it's by exceedingly slim majority. Democrats are going to need to pick up if they want to cut off funds or cap troops or anything substantive, they need Republican votes. All right. They're going to need at least 10, by my count, Republican votes to avoid anything resembling a filibuster. And it's not clear that they have those votes yet to do anything substantive in blocking the President.

Remember, Bush is in perfect position to veto any legislation coming from the Hill. And certainly, Democrats don't have a veto-proof majority in neither the House nor the Senate to overturn a Presidential veto.

So, first, Democrats are not united. Second, I don't think they have the votes yet for substantive action. And third, of course, as others have

suggested, there's a political danger to being cast as undermining troops which are already in the field. Even if legislation is very tailored, very carefully to apply only to an increase to new troops, unless a sizable number of prominent Republican senators join the effort to limit funding or to cap troops, Democrats, I doubt they will muster sufficient political will in fact to try to block the President on their own.

And in that context, an immediate non-binding resolution makes a lot of political sense, a strong Democratic action to show action against the war; a chance of picking up Republican votes, at least in the Senate, where they count more; and it allows the Democrats to try to isolate the President.

Now, let me just conclude with a couple of observations about the historical precedence that Democrats and others have been pointing to, particularly from the 1970's when Congress did successfully place limits on Presidential spending and troops being put in Southeast Asia. Congress did not just take symbolic action. And if we're going to look at those efforts in the 1960's and the 1970's and to argue that look, Congress has precedent, Congress has the capacity to challenge presidents in the actual conduct of the war, then I think we need to keep in mind the political and the institutional context that led to those Congressional efforts, successful efforts to block the president in Southeast Asia some 30 years ago.

First, on political dynamics, just briefly, remember, it took a

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number of years for Congress in fact to substantively block spending and cap troops in Cambodia, in Vietnam, in Laos, and elsewhere.

Second, when Congress did succeed, these were generally typically small majorities but they were bipartisan majorities. If you look at votes in the 1970's, in '73, in '74, Democrats are split down the middle; Republicans are split roughly down the middle. You could not portray those actions by Congress as a partisan action against the president, against even a President Nixon.

Democrats in control of congress had political cover. In fact, many of those efforts were pushed and succeeded with a majority of Republican votes rather than Democratic votes. The parties have so polarized on these questions over the past 30 years that Democrats are going to have a much tougher time corralling Republican support for making a substantive effort to block the president's plan, even given the president's diminished public standing.

Second, on institutional dynamics, I think it's important to keep in mind the legislative vehicles by which congress acted 30 years ago. Sometimes vehicles were appropriations bills. And that's all that has been talked about in the current Iraqi context.

Other times, major action, in fact, took place in authorization bills, foreign aid authorization bills, and State Department authorization bills. If those bills don't sound familiar to you, they shouldn't. Because Congress has rarely

mustered the political will in recent years, if not decades, to actually find political and bipartisan support for those authorization bills.

Authorization power has flown away from the Foreign Relations Committee, away from the Foreign Affairs Committee over the past 30 years. It's been picked up by the Armed Services Committee, right. We talk about the must-pass defense authorization bill, right. We talk about must-pass appropriations bills. Power has moved away from the authorizing committees that have power over foreign relations and foreign affairs. And those panels, in fact, have really been mired to a large degree in partisan, in ideological disagreements over foreign affairs.

Senators understand this. Senator Dodd in the 1980's once said his own Foreign Relations panel had been turned into a largely irrelevant debating society. Republican control in the 1990's with cuts at the committee staff level varied – also efforts which have limited the institutional capacities of those foreign relations panels.

So, although we look to the 1970's for precedence and to say look, some substantive action, some involvement of Congress in substantive terms could happen. I think we have to understand that the political context has changed with polarized parties, and the institutional context has changed where we really need to ask whether Congress has the institutional capacity at the committee level to build bipartisan support for challenging the president.

I, for one, am somewhat skeptical that recent years show us that it can happen. And second, I don't think we should all be surprised that the initial out of the blocks reaction of Democrats is to marshal support for a symbolic action rather than a substantive move at this point.

MR. PASCUAL: Thanks very much. So in effect, the bottom line is that this strategy that's been laid out is going to move forward; it's not going to be stopped. And whether it stops is going to really depend on what happens on the grounds and whether it's seen as a success or failure. And if it is a failure, whether at that stage it causes yet another reevaluation.

MS. BINDER: I think Democrats on the Hill expect the President to go forward even if there's a non-binding resolution expressing the sense of Congress that the administration shouldn't. And I think Democrats will try to work on legislation. Whether it comes to the House or Senate floor is yet an open question.

MR. PASCUAL: Thank you.

Let me open this up for discussion and turn to the audience for your questions. If you would be kind enough to both introduce yourself and keep your questions short and focused if possible. Thank you.

Over here, please.

MR. EMERY: My name is Tom Emery, and I'm an independent analyst. Martin Indyk, you have discussed the distinctions between the Shia and

the Sunni and you have posited that that's probably the main issue in their struggle there, and that's the way we ought to look at it more so. But, the Iranians, predominantly Shia are also Persian, not Arab. And in addition, their government is facing many economic problems. They're dependant. Though they have much oil, they're dependent on the West more or less for refined products.

To what extent do those issues, do you think, provide us something that we can use to – that modifies your view that it's simply a Shia Sunni distinction in the area?

MR. INDYK: Let me just correct one thing. What I'm – I'm also an independent analyst. What I'm analyzing is how the region views this, which is very different from the way we view it. That's the point I'm trying to make here. It's not whether I see it as Sunnis versus Shias, but they see it as Sunni versus Shia. And they operate – they make their calculations of their interest now much more in terms of sectarian identify than they do in terms of the normal way in which we see this region divided up.

In that context, however, Iran is seen by them and by us as the prime mover in this anti-American, anti-Sunni coalition. There is an overlap. And therefore, the question that I think you're getting at is what is the best way of getting Iran to either change approach or to weaken Iran to the point where it's not able to exercise this kind of epithet at hegemony in the region or dominance

in the region.

And that's a very problematic situation. Yes, you're right, Iran is economically vulnerable when the price of oil goes down, so at the moment, it's relatively more vulnerable to economic pressure than it was, say, last year. But it still has an ability to divide those in the international community that would be able to put economic pressure on them.

And we've just seen that in two years of vigorous diplomacy by the secretary of state to try to get economic sanctions on Iran that came up short, very short, because essentially Russia and China have economic interests in Iran that Iran is able to play on. And so that option in a sense has been tried. It doesn't mean we shouldn't keep on trying, but it's not working.

And you have to face the reality that Iran's ability to make a play for dominance in the region is a direct function of the fact that our actions took out the counter, the traditional counter to Iran, which was Iraq. Iraq is no longer capable, given the fact that it's descending into civil war, to act as a balance to Iran.

So by definition, Iran grows stronger as a result of Iraq becoming weaker, and especially in circumstance where, as I've said, the Iranians are able to essentially have their way in Iran through the Shia government that we brought to power out of a belief that liberty and democracy was the way to advance our interests in the region, our only strength simply.

It's not a hopeless situation, but I think we have to recognize that there's reason for them to think that their moment has come. And we are going to have to work long and hard over many years to build a counter to Iranian dominance. And the one thing we have going for us in that regard is what I said before, is the total unacceptability of that to the Sunni Arab powers in the region.

MR. PASCUAL: Other questions? Yes.

MR. MILLER: Hello. David Miller from the Australian Embassy. I would like to know in what way the coalition forces will support the new US strategy.

MR. PASCUAL: And maybe if we might take one or two other questions together, please.

MS. AHMED: Nina Ahmed from (off mike) Council. I never heard you so pessimistic, Martin. I have two questions. One, we're supporting a Shia lead government. We have a commitment to support them, but the US friends, the Saudis, don't particularly want to see a Shia lead government in Iraq. So, how are we going to reconcile that? Are we going to stay there forever? I mean, obviously we can't. The public won't want that.

So, how do you see this fanning out? When we leave, does that mean the Saudis get involved and you know, do they back a Sunni lead government? What is the solution here or is it what I sense that 70 percent of you think, that we're beyond the point of no return? And if it is, should we be there?

MR. PASCUAL: Let me – let's start with the question of the coalition role and maybe look at this from a perspective of what the role of coalition troops are and the capacity to sustain that role. And Ken, if you might start that.

But then, I'm going to turn to one of our colleagues, who's in the audience. Peter Singer has done quite an extensive analysis of the role of the US military or the capacities of the US military and some of the strains faced by the US military. And Peter, if you could follow up on that and comment as well.

MR. POLLACK: Sure. And at the moment, the coalition effectively consists of the United States along with the British and the Australians. There are still some other contingents, but in terms of actually doing heavy lifting, that's really it. It looks very likely that the British are going to draw down their contingent under any sort of circumstances. Phil is nodding; that makes me feel a lot better.

But that's certainly what I'm hearing from British military officers is that they're drawing down. They'll retain a commitment wholly to Basra, but the 8,000 troops that they had in Basra were never able to hold that city of a million people under any kind of stability. So, it's important in a symbolic sense. It's not terribly important in terms of what they actually bring on the ground, because there just aren't very many of them.

I suspect the Aussies will stick it out longer. They've got smaller

commitments. Their politics is somewhat different. I don't think the British will leave altogether. What they've said is they will leave perhaps one – we would call it a task force. It's basically a reinforced battalion. And that would previously be there. My guess is the Australians, which have effectively the same force, they'll leave their units there.

So, we don't have much to begin with. We're not going to get very much. There is a Korean brigade that sits up in Kurdistan, which is more – you know, has more troops than the Australians. But all they do in Kurdistan, as best I can tell, is set up financial deals for when they all leave the Korean armies with the Kurdistan regional governments. And it's wide.

There doesn't seem to be any pressure on the Koreans to bring that brigade home because quite in point of fact, they're probably safer sitting in Kurdistan, where they are themselves guarded by the Peshmerga, not the other way around, than they would be if those guys were sitting on the DMZ between North and South Korea. So, my guess is that those guys stay, but we shouldn't expect a whole lot.

And again, it's why it really brings this back to this is a US Iraqi problem, and really in the short-term, it is a US problem. Because, as Carlos has suggested, as he and I have written, as you've heard me say, the Iraqi government simply doesn't have the capacity to do most of what needs to be done in the short and medium term.

And what the United States has to do is to create the space to help build that capacity before we're going to have a partner there, which is why there are some tools in Iraq, there are some Iraqi tools that the US can use, but it is up to the United States to employ them.

MR. PASCUAL: Peter, do you want to?

MR. SINGERON: Thanks, Carlos. I agree with Ken on don't expect anything out of the other coalition forces. I think the only statements that support his speech were Australia, Japan, and South Korea, so it sort of points to that.

The question as to what's the impact of this on US Forces, I think there's two key areas to look at. One is morale. The other is do we have sufficient equipment. On the morale side towards the positive, you could say this is really about Sadr and that there's been a lot of frustration among US Forces that they've been forced to hold off against Sadr and not go into Sadr City and that the key in this is that the gloves have come off.

And one of the generals in Baghdad said, you know, the difference with the past surges was that there were neighborhoods we didn't go into. We only went into Sunni neighborhoods. This time we're going into Shia neighborhoods. So, that's the key here, and you'll see some people happy about that within the military.

On the flip-side, I think there are some long term morale issues to

worry about. The first is that you basically told a number of troops you were going to be in here, we told you 12 months, now it's 16 months. That's in the Army. If you're in the Marines, you were going to be in here 7 months, now it's 12 months. That's not going to be good for morale obviously.

The second is that what happens after this surge, this initial six months, we're pulling in forces that will now be on their third or fourth deployment, and the only way to really carry that out is to call up people from National Guard and Reserves, which will again go past the limit that they set before. So, this will be something to be concerned about in the long term, not in the initial six months, but what happens next.

The third—and I think this is the big key—is is there any civilian follow-up to this. Basically, the frustration among forces is they go in, they clear out a building, they clear out a neighborhood, and then nothing happens next. Where's the rest of the government there?

And, you know, as Ken pointed out, I'm not sure that we have that capacity there. I think the announcement was that we would double the PRT's, which basically means we're going to have 150 more civilian US government employees come in. I think you're going to see a lot of troops say, you know, this is the third or fourth time I've cleared that building and no one else shows up, and the Iraqi government doesn't show up.

And what the bottom line for me is that the troops will serve,

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they'll fight, they'll die. The resolution on this is going to be two-three years from now. Do they walk from the military? Do they vote with their feet? That's the question that we're not going to see. That's where morale really kicks in.

On the equipment side to this, basically, this is surge light. We're only getting to the numbers that we are close to have been at a high point before. So you have the equipment there, but the key to focus on is that you don't have sufficient numbers of the top line equipment.

The strategy in the Army so far has been send your best stuff out there to the guys in the field. And that's where we're at right now. If we send more guys, you don't have enough of the stuff. Now, let me be clear. It's not going to be, you know, we hear stories about flak vests and the like.

It's going to be things specialized. You're going to hear for example, you know, there's not enough of the cougar vehicles. These are the new vehicles that are designed to deal with IEDs and landmines. They're better than the regular Humvees. We don't have enough of those. And so we add more forces and we have more forces operating without those or warlock jammers. These are used to basically jam IEDs so the bomb doesn't blow up when convoy goes near it.

All those are already pushed out into the force. So you're going to have more forces out there without them. And they're not like they're sitting back in depot. Now the reason we don't have enough of this newer equipment,

this better equipment is two reasons.

The first is that the strategy, the plan has always been that we'd draw down. And so you didn't have ramped up production of these two years ago, a year ago when it would've been online now.

The other is that the supplemental has basically been misused. The supplemental has been used in a large case for equipment needs and wants down the line and a lot of stuff that should have been repaired hasn't been. For example, there was a recent report that over 1,000 Humvees and 800 60APC's are sitting in depots right now to be repaired, and that's in part a funding issue. So that's a concern for me here.

The other part of the equipment issue is that basically because we've searched our best stuff out there, our best equipment out there, units haven't had training time on that new equipment. And now they're going to have even less training time as they push off. So, it doesn't mean it's not doable, but these are some of the stories that we should look out for in the next weeks and months.

MR. PASCUAL: Okay. Peter, thank you.

Just to add a quick note on the civilian capability side, one has to recognize that there are on the order of about 6,000 Foreign Service officers around the world, another 1,000 or so Foreign Service officers in the USAID. That's everywhere in the entire world. So the base that is there to actually work

with is extraordinarily small. And when people talk about doubling these PRT's, what they're talking about is having small contingents of civilians that could embed with military units who will go out. And their intent is to be able to provide support for civilian based activities, but then to draw in NGOs and contractors and others who can actually carry out the activities. If there is no security, there will be no civilian response. And one can't expect suddenly for a magical civilian set of activities that suddenly cause a re-blossoming of the economy if you haven't had security imposed first.

I want to come back to the question that Nina raised a second ago about the implications for future leadership in Iraq and also in the region.

Martin, do you want to comment on that? Or Bruce might want to add to that as well.

MR. INDYK: Well, let me just say quickly in terms of alternatives here, you know, a realist approach would say okay, the Iranian lead Shias are now dominant; we have to back the Sunnis to balance them in this struggle for power. So, a strategy in Iraq would be to support the Sunnis and try to level the imbalance out, and in that way, get the Shia government to be more mindful of Sunni interests.

But, I don't believe that we're capable of playing that kind of game, because in a sense, we'd have to ease up on the Sunni insurgency, which is killing American troops. So, we don't have when we return to a kind of realist

balance of power game, we have as complicated options as we would otherwise. What the Saudis want us to do is to do that, basically to support the Sunnis.

And what we are going to do is on the model of moderates versus extremists, we're going to go after Sunni extremists and Shia extremists. And what we'll succeed therefore in doing is making sure that both the Sunnis and the Shias are against us.

And so, you know, it's – you said I was pessimistic. The reality in the Middle East is sometimes as Americans, it's extremely hard for us to accept this, but sometimes there are no solutions. And we have to find a way as best we can to protect our interests in a very complicated situation. And that kind of approach looks much more towards containment of the implosion that's taking place, so that we avoid an explosion to the region that will do even greater damage to our interests than a policy of trying to double our bets to achieve success, which, as I've said before, is beyond our reach.

MR. PASCUAL: Let me ask one of our colleagues, Bruce Riedel, who is a senior fellow in the foreign policy program, to build on that.

MR. RIDEL: I just want to pick up on the point Martin left with, doubling the stakes. The President very much increased the stakes last night. In the classic cowboy movie when they're playing poker and you've lost a lot and you then put everything on the table, everyone else in the region now knows we put everything on the table.

Shia extremists, if we're going to go into Sadr City, well, Muqtada al-Sadr doesn't need to just fight us there. He has the south of Iraq. If there's no British soldiers in Basra, you can be sure that's where he's going to respond. The Sunni extremists will do the same. If we want to take over Sunni neighborhoods in Baghdad, they'll look to strike in other places.

They're not the only ones. The happiest people in the world today, I would suspect, are the Taliban and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan. Because if there are 22,000 Americans going to Iraq, there are no more American forces going to resist the coming Taliban offensive in Afghanistan, which they've promised will be their biggest ever.

When you put all your money on the table, you make the stakes extremely high. And that's what I think we've done here last night.

MR. PASCUAL: Bruce, thanks.

Two more questions, Gary and Scott.

MR. MITCHELL: Thanks. Gary Mitchell from the Mitchell Report. I want to ask – I want to speak to the point that Democrats don't have a position on this and make the point that I think Democrats, per se, probably have about as much of a position on this issue as Republicans. The difference is only one of them has a president.

My assumption is that Democrats and more Republicans than may have shown their hands thus far are essentially on the side of getting out as

opposed to getting in, certainly getting out of Baghdad, pulling back, playing a different kind of role in Iraq. And where they differ is exactly how and in what time frame, which are essentially details. Now, having said that, that's a premise unproven.

Here's the question that I want to ask. Four years ago when we were sitting in this room and rooms like it, most of the people in this town and a fair number of them at this institution were in favor of this war. Later, after it was clear that there were no WMDs, most of those same people were asked if you'd known that, would you have been for the war, and with the exception of one presidential candidate, most of them said no, I would not have been for the war.

So, my question today is if you knew that there would not be – what I think can and his colleagues have called spillover – if you knew today that there was not going to be significant spillover if America essentially pulled out of or back from Iraq and didn't support the President's plan, would you be in favor of the ramping up that the President is recommending, which is I think Kenneth characterized it as this is the only plan that could work?

MR. PASCUAL: Okay. Scott?

MR. HERALD: Scott Herald, Brookings. This is a question for Ken and Martin, but I want to draw on points made by Phil and Carlos. Phil has kind of given us a picture of the Iraqi state, not as a single actor, but as a site of contestation.

And it seems to me that this is somewhat in contrast to Martin's description of the region, seeing things as you're either Sunni or you're Shia, actually seems to me and I think to most analysts who look at this that actually the Shia are – can be desegregated into many different groups. And Carlos's point all along has been that civil wars end with political solutions.

So, Ken, my question to you is in the speech last night, it seemed to me that the President declared war on two new targets: Iran for arming people who are going after our troops with shape devices and Muqtada al-Sadr.

Now, if we go after Iran, we're basically helping or potentially helping Skeeri(?) and Daawa to separate themselves or at least giving them a strong incentive to. And if we undermine Muqtada al-Sadr, we're definitely undermining the main nationalist Shia, who is very much an opponent of Daawa and Skeeri.

So, I'm wondering if given this constellation of political actors, if we're pushing Iran out, if that's even possible, and if we're actually degrading Muqtada's capabilities to influence events in Iraq. Is there any chance, Ken and Martin, that you can see that our military activities can give the space for a political solution to actually take hold? And I ask this in light of the fact that about three weeks ago, we tried to get a new center in Iraq, and unfortunately, Ayatollah al-Sistani said no, I'm not willing to break the Shia alliance.

Thank you.

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MR. PASCUAL: Let me suggest this if Ken and Martin – if the two of you want to start any final comments you want to integrate with your comments and then I'll give Phil and Sarah any final word if they would like to.

MR. POLLACK: Martin.

MR. PASCUAL: Martin, he's passing it to you.

MR. POLLACK: You sign my check, so.

MR. PASCUAL: Oh, really? That's why you need to shield him.

MR. INDYK: Look, you're right to – or perhaps I should just quickly answer Gary's question. I think I already have. It's basically regardless of what governing assumptions are there, I think game is up. My view is that game is up. And we should be using our energies for a very different kind of strategy, so to say. It's a containment strategy. And so, that's my short answer. Whatever we would know about what might be happening.

You're right that there are distinctions within the Shia alliance and within the Sunni alliance. And we need to be cognizant of those. And we need to try to forge a strategy which obviously seeks to split the Iranian lead coalition and strengthen the Sunni moderate coalition.

But as you yourself said, the attempt to use Sistani for that purpose didn't work. And as long as we don't have the sense of efficacy on our side, that is to say, people who don't, in the other camp, who don't exactly identify with the extremist objectives or the Persian objectives or whatever of the leading players

there, as long as they don't see us as effective and influential, they're not going to side with us. If they reach the conclusion as I have that the game is up for the United States, then they're not going to side with us. They're going to side with the stronger force.

And that's unfortunately the circumstances we're in. If I'm wrong and I hope I'm wrong and yet the surge strategy stumbles, it is going to reinforce that sense that we don't want to be on the side of the United States because that's the losing side here. And so, it – the question of efficacy, when we were the dominant power in the region after the first Gulf War or when we were dominant after we toppled Saddam Hussein's regime, you saw everybody in the region, including the Iranians, pull their heads in, lower their – stop their operations, pause, look around. The Iranians came knocking on our door looking for a negotiation.

And contrast that with the situation now and you can get a sense of the way in which the problems we've faced in Iraq — if you don't want to call it failure — I'll call it the failure we've faced in Iraq has affected our ability to influence those who might otherwise be prepared to work with us.

MR. PASCUAL: Thanks.

MR. POLLACK: Let me take on Scott's question first, kind of the internal to it. And I think you're right, Scott, in that one of the things that concern me about the President's speech and what I'm hearing from the administration is

this kind of focus on this actor versus that actor, failing to once again recognize that we've created a set of structural problems in Iraq that are allowing these bad actors to come in and that you have to deal with those structural problems, not just go after this bad guy, go after that bad guy.

And it's why for me, yeah, Jesha al Maqdi(?) is terrible, but there's a reason that Jesha al Maqdi exists. And the way that you deal with the problem is not go after Jesha Al Maqdi but eliminate the problem that's giving rise to it. If all you do is smash Jesha Al Maqdi but you don't deal with these underlying central problems, they'll be another one tomorrow. And it will be called something else, but it will be functionally the exact same thing.

And it's why really what we need to be doing is about dealing with the militia's overall. And again, it's not about do we go after this group or that group or can we even get them all to disarm, which is something that we ought to be going for eventually. At first, it's just again about taking the streets back, dealing with the structural problem of the security vacuum that we created, which is the first, the original sin and is giving rise to every single one of these other factors out there.

And I think, you know, you're right. Focusing on Jesha Almakde, that's not the right answer. And you know, I would agree that you absolutely have to go into Sadr City. This is the point that Peter was making. You must go into Sadr city, because the mistake we're making there is we're making Jesha al

Maqdi an exception. That's also wrong. Again, we've got to deal with it as a structural problem, not this bad guy, that bad guy, et cetera.

Now, let me come back to Gary's question. While I don't agree with all of Martin's analysis, I do actually agree with quite a bit of it, in particular about how the region is viewing things and where this could go.

And you're saying if there was no spillover, you know, would I have any degree of support for the President's plan is a little bit like saying, you know, if pigs had wings, they'd be eagles. I think it's very hard to see how we get around spillover in this. I mean, the problem is we are already seeing it. There is a regional war already being fought in Iraq. It's exactly the point that Martin was making.

The Iranians are in there backing every Shia group who will take money from them, including Jasha Al Maqdi, which as Scott was pointing out, is lead by a family who despises the Iranians. And yet they're taking money from the Iranians because they know they have to. They need weapons from the Iranians because they're expecting to fight this massive battle, not just against the Sunni Arab Iraqis but against the entire larger Arab world, which they know is already starting to pour money and resources into them as well.

So I don't think you can get around spillover, but I will make this one point. You know, Martin was talking about containment, and as you well know, and as I think many people still know, we've been working – I've been

working with my colleague, Daniel By man on massive project which we're going to unroll in just a couple of weeks on what containment of the civil war in Iraq would look like. And the bottom line answer is it's really, really hard. And I don't know if it can work because most governments in history haven't been able to make it work.

But the point I'd make to you, Gary, is to me, it's not just the issue of spillover. Because when Danny and I debate this and we debate this constantly, one of the things that always looms large in our thinking is that even if we could make spillover work brilliantly, make it work better than we actually suspect that we could, we're still going to wind up in a situation where Iraq is in all out civil war and millions of people are likely to die.

And you know, I'm one of these liberal interventionists. I believed in going into Bosnia and Kosovo. I wanted to find a way to go into Rwanda. I would desperately like to do something about Darfur. We have intervened in other civil wars all around the world to stop levels of violence less than what we are likely to get in Iraq if containment works.

And Martin is right that we got to be thinking about our interests. But you're asking me personally, you know, I – there's a strategic component. Containment may be able to solve that strategic component. Containment will never be able to deal with the humanitarian component if we care about that stuff.

MR. PASCUAL: Thank you. We're out of time, so maybe just a

very brief concluding comment.

MR. GORDON: I won't get into, Gary, this whole question of, you know, if you had known this, would you have supported that and so on. I was personally skeptical before the war. I think skepticism has proven warranted.

But what I would say is it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter what position you had before the war it seems to me. We're in a situation that we have described that is dramatic for the country. And we are where we are, and we have to decide what is the best strategy from here moving forward.

Indeed, it is coherent and possible to have taken the view before that this would be a colossally stupid idea but that now we have to say and maybe even surge. That's possible. I happen to think it's not the case. I mean, regardless of whatever you thought before, if you just start here, you got to decide what to do.

And in my own view for reasons that I think a number of people have expressed, there's very little chance that upping the ante will make things better. One of the things I think we learned from this Iraq experience is that there are some problems that can't be solved and secondly, there are some problems that you can actually make worse by trying to solve.

And I fear that that's where we are now. That's why I quoted the Kennan citation from the SFRC in 1966, which was you know, whatever, six

years before that war ended. Had that wisdom about liquidating untenable positions been adopted then, it would have saved an awful lot of trouble, money, and lives. To go back to Bruce's poker analogy, you sometimes have to know when to fold them.

MR. PASCUAL: Sarah?

MS. BINDER: I would just add to conclude that Democrats, no matter how unified they may be, they can't and in fact, I suspect many don't want to influence the conduct of the war unless they have support from Republicans and in particular from Republicans in the Senate. The rules of the game dictate Republican support here, and I don't think we're yet at that point.

MR. PASCUAL: I think one of the things that has been particularly helpful from this discussion is focus that was given on the question of who is fighting whom and why. Because when you interject a third external force into that context, do you in fact influence the reasons why they're fighting one another or can you in fact actually stop them from fighting one another?

And I think that's a longer question that we're going to have to give further thought to and I think we'll have an impact on some of the thinking that many of us will have on whether it's more effective to go to a containment strategy now or whether in fact there still is a prospect of actually bringing some stability to the current Iraqi environment.

But these are the kinds of questions that we will continue to take

up in our Iraq policy project. We will be having some smaller sessions and seminars related to these issues, and probably in about two months, we will come back with a larger event like this for a fuller public debate.

Thank you very much for joining us and for your attention.

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