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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. RIEDEL: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to the Brookings Institution. Today we have a somewhat different event than we usually do. In part it's a reunion, thanks to many of you. We're going to be talking about the Kuwait crisis of 1990, looking back 25 years in retrospect. This is a joint event sponsored by the Brookings Intelligence Project and the Brookings Center for Middle Eastern Studies.

Twenty five years ago this summer, like almost a summer storm, a crisis developed in the Middle East. It came as a surprise to many, particularly to President George Bush, as I think his memoirs make very clear. What we're going to do today is talk about that crisis, looking at it from the perspective of 25 years later.

I'm very pleased to have my colleague of then and now, Ken Pollack, with me to talk about it. The game plan is really pretty simple. We're going to each talk for maybe 15 minutes or so, then we might have a little dialogue between us, but then we're going to open it up to you, both for commentary and hopefully also for some questions which we'll do our best to answer. We are not focusing initially on events of today, but certainly there is much out there to talk about with the new Iran nuclear deal. And if you want to bring those questions up during the Q & A please feel free to do so.

As I started to say this crisis was in many ways like a summer storm. I had the pleasure of visiting Baghdad in June 1990 and spent a week there speaking to everybody. I don't think a single person in the U.S. mission or any of our allied missions, and certainly nobody in the government of Iraq ever mentioned the word Kuwait once, other than in the fact that it's on the way to the Persian Gulf from Baghdad. This was a crisis that developed literally on the 17th of July when Saddam Hussein announced that unless Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates cut oil production back to their OPEC quota he was going to teach them a lesson. Within 48 hours we at the CIA had detected the

mass movement of the Iraqi Republican Guard of over five divisions to the Kuwait border and we began warning I think pretty explicitly that the Iraqis were not bluffing. On the 1st of August they demonstrated they weren't bluffing when instead of simply trying to intimidate the Kuwaiti bank they decided to rob the Kuwaiti bank, and not only rob it but keep it in perpetuity. By the 5th of August we had detected the Iraqi build up was continuing on the Saudi border and in a meeting in the Cabinet Room, President Bush famously asked the then Director of Central Intelligence when will the Iraqis be ready to invade Saudi Arabia, and Judge Webster said, “Now, Mr. President”. And from then flowed the decisions that led to Operation Desert Shield and ultimately Desert Storm and the liberation of Kuwait.

The first issue I'd like to look at is why was the United States so surprised, particularly why was the White House so surprised. I think the intelligence community did what it could do in reporting the capability of the Iraqis and in making some judgments about the intentions of the Iraqis, but if you read George Bush's memoirs it's pretty clear he felt himself to surprised on the evening of the 1st of August and had not been prepared in his mind for the crisis. And I think it's a classic case of the intelligence community being very good at assessing Iraqi capabilities. It's actually not all that hard to find armored divisions in the desert, especially if there are no storms or anything to cover them up. It was a lot harder of course to make questions about intentions and capabilities. And on the one hand, the Bush White House was getting pretty dire warnings from their intelligence specialists, but from people who actually knew Saddam Hussein, like Hosni Mubarak, King Fahd, King Hussein, even the Kuwaitis, all of them were saying don't worry about it, he's an odd egg but at the end of the day he's not going to do anything all that dangerous. He certainly won't invade and take over the entire Emirate of Kuwait. None of them assessed what Saddam Hussein was going to

do. And in Bush's mind trying to judge who he should listen to, in the end he thought that the Arab leaders were probably more attuned to what was going on.

The lesson from all of this I think is particularly important for the CIA today as it was then, which is the urgent necessity for real human intelligence collection capabilities. In 1990 the United States had zero agents in Iraq, zero, not a one. Nobody to tell us, even to give us a rumor of what Saddam Hussein might be doing, let alone someone who would actually have access to Iraqi decision making. This is a perennial failing of American intelligence. We're very good at a lot of other things; we're actually not that good on the whole of the business of recruiting people.

The second point I'd like to talk about is how the war transformed America's relationship with the Middle East. I think it's easy to see in retrospect that 1990 was the pivotal date in changing American thinking and American policy towards the Middle East. Now, I'll put it to you this way, prior to 1990 the Middle East was a secondary, maybe even a tertiary area of interest for the United States. Of course the primary area of interest prior to 1990 was the Soviet Union and the Cold War. And by a lucky coincidence the Cold War was coming to an end at the same time as the Iraq war and the Kuwait crisis developed in 1990. That's much more clear in retrospect than it was at the time. Prior to 1990 the United States had dealt with the Middle East as largely a backwater. Good example, American military involvement -- prior to 1990 the United States had engaged in one significant combat military mission in the Middle East, the 1958 invasion of Lebanon, which was kind of joke because as the United States Marines charged up the beach of Beirut the swarm of vendors charged down the beach (laughter) trying to sell Pepsi Cola, and the young ladies in bikinis tried to get out of the way of these two advancing armies as they approached each other. It wasn't a very serious military endeavor. Other military endeavors we had in the region like the failed rescue

mission, the failed peace keeping mission in Beirut were as I just said all failures and very brief and didn't leave much of a legacy for the American military. The Iran-Iraq war began that transition, but it was really the 1990-1991 experience that changed it in perpetuity.

In 1990 the United States had one military base in the Persian Gulf in Bahrain; today we have military bases virtually throughout the Persian Gulf. Before 1990 the United States had brief episodic military exchanges in Saudi Arabia, after 1990 we stayed until 2003, and in fact have actually stayed longer than that if you look at training missions and logistic mission and the like. And the Yemen war being a very, very good example of that. The Royal Saudi Air Force could not be carrying out the missions it's carrying out in Yemen today without concrete American military support on the ground.

So in terms of military missions 1990-1991 marks a whole transformital moment in the U.S. military's approach the region. The same is true as well in American diplomacy. Prior to 1990-1991 American diplomacy episodically got involved in the Middle East, episodically tried to deal with elements of the Arab-Israeli conflict, almost always dealing with the symptoms of the Arab-Israeli conflict, trying to put cease fires in place or to get partial peace agreements. 1990 and 1991 in that regard as well. After 1991 of course came the Madrid Peace Conference, which was not particularly effective, but which set the stage for the diplomacy that would follow since then. Partially because of the request of our Arab hosts in 1990, particularly the Saudis, the United States pivoted to become fully engaged in the Palestinian issue in the year since then in a way it had never been before. Now, not with a whole measure of success, obviously, but with a whole lot of engagement. And every American president since then, including Bush '43, somewhat reluctantly in his case, has devoted a great deal of attention to dealing with the Palestinian issue.

The third issue that I think this marks a major transformation in is the United States relationship with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. When you think about it inviting a half a million Americans to come to Saudi Arabia to defend the Kingdom was an extraordinary decision. A country which as its raison d'être for a long time had been keeping the foreigner away, was now inviting a half million infidels into the Kingdom. And we can see that it not only transformed the U.S.-Saudi relationship, but this is also a transformative moment for the Kingdom itself. One good example, the young Saudi who until then had been a loyal supporter of the House of Osama Bin Laden begins his disillusionment with the Kingdom because of the decision to bring in a half a million Americans. He probably more perceptively than most understood that this was going to mean a whole different kind of Saudi Arabia after the war than Saudi Arabia had been before. The diplomacy as I've already mentioned also was transformed. We began to take up some of Saudi Arabia's agenda in the region, such as supporting a resolution of the Palestinian question, such as a relationship with Iran, which we had had a hostile one before then, now became one much more us against them, the Sunni Gulf States against the Shia Iranian threat.

One man in particular kind of epitomized this whole transformation in the U.S.-Saudi relationship, and I'll close by saying a few words about him, Prince Bandar bin Sultan. Prince Bandar, the Saudi Ambassador to the United States in the days of August and September 1990 became essentially the Second Deputy National Security Advisor. He even had an office in the West Wing. He was provided with not just executive protection, but actually was provided with Secret Service protection and was put on the Secret Service radio network allowing him to come in and out of the White House at any time he wanted to, a privilege that I don't believe any other diplomat before or since from a foreign country has ever been given, in fact a privilege which most members of the

Cabinet are not given in almost any administration. And he became the symbol of this new U.S.-Saudi relationship, and for the next 15 years was involved in virtually every major American negotiating operation and diplomatic move in the entire region, some of them with some success, others with less success than that. In short the U.S.-Saudi relationship that had been epitomized by one individual in particular was transformed by this war as well.

I'm going to stop there and turn it over to Ken to say a few words of his own about the Gulf War in perspective. And then as I said we will open it up to questions from the field.

MR. POLLACK: Thank you, Bruce. Thank all of you for coming out to rehash a little ancient history. I want to start by saying that it's an incredible privilege for me to be up here with Bruce. Bruce was being kind to me when he introduced me. He was my boss at the time. I was a very junior analyst under the tutelage of Steven Ward who is sitting toward the back of the room. I said a lot of things that I had absolutely no business saying at the time and Bruce was kind enough to listen and even say to people, you might want to listen to this kid as well for which, you know, he's had to take endless grief and on that as well I thank him. And I will simply say that I got a lot of privileges in my career, and working with Bruce Riedel is very much up at the top of them. So it's great to be up here with Bruce.

I wanted to just give you some of my thoughts about the war as I see them now. And one of the things that is so striking, and again as a student of history and as a person living in real time in history I'm always struck of how my views of past events change from time to time. I think that if we had had this panel five years ago, if we had had this panel ten years ago, what I would say, I suspect what Bruce would say, would also be very different because of course the light of the past looks very different, or the

past looks very different in the light of the present, let alone our expectations of the future.

I wanted to start with a point that Bruce already made. I won't belabor it because I think Bruce made it nicely, but I'll just add a tweak which is that I do think that we need to be thinking about the Gulf War as this really quite remarkable moment when America's approach to the Middle East changed fundamentally. As Bruce pointed out, before 1991, 1990, we really were trying to have as little to do with the Middle East as we possibly could. I would argue actually we've tried the same ever since (laughter), we've just recognized that it required a higher level of effort than we believed was the case before then. If you remember, up until 1971 basically we left the Middle East to the British. After '71 the British unceremoniously dumped it in our lap, and our first response was to kind of try to push it off our lap as quickly as we could. And it really isn't until 1990 that we recognized, you know what, this region isn't stable, it is very important to us and to the rest of the world; we have to engage with it. Now, of course, since then we've struggled to find the right approach to the region. We've tried any number of different policies toward the region. Some have been somewhat more successful, others somewhat less successful, but we've never really succeeded. The one point that I wanted to make on that is that I'm struck by the fact that I actually think that today, at this moment, we finally have figured out the right answer to what was the question back then in 1991. The problem back then was interstate war and interstate deterrents. How do we deter Iran, how do we deter Iraq? Right, we first thought well, we deter Iran by building up Iraq, and then we learned that any Iraq strong enough to deter Iran is also strong enough to invade the GCC -- that ain't good. I actually think we finally have it right. We've got a presence in the Gulf which honestly is quite small, but more than capable of deterring the actual conventional threats out there, which right now are really just the

Iranians. And it's a pretty small threat and that's why our presence is more than able to deal with it. And there really aren't too many political problems with that presence in the region as it stands. So kind of ironically we've actually finally figured out the right answer to that question. The problem is that a whole different set of questions has emerged since then, a set of questions that we really weren't paying attention to in '90-'91, although some people were starting, just starting to put them on our radar screen. And that was the internal problems of the Middle East, of the dysfunctions, of the political, economic, and social systems of the Gulf, which I want to come back to in just a moment. And that's of course the issue that we weren't thinking about then, that's the set of issues that we're struggling with today. And so again it's kind of one of the great paradoxes, one of the terrible ironies of the Middle East that just when we figure out the answer to one set of problems a whole different set of problems of even greater magnitude, even worse, even more complex and problematic than what we saw in the past, you know, now emerges and completely washes away all the stuff that we tried to do in the past.

Second thing I wanted to talk about, just highlight, was the role of the United Nations and how that changed as a result of this war. You know, we all have -- I think we all have a very good feeling about the George H.W. Bush administration. I share that. In my lifetime I think that they were the most competent foreign policy team certainly that I've ever seen. And I don't think a lot of us think really about exactly why we believe that, we just believe it. And I want to give a few specific kudos to that administration. One of them is how they handled the United Nations. Now, truth in advertising, they came to the United Nations in a roundabout, cynical fashion. They were very frightened about whether or not they could get the Congress to go along with the war. Some of you may remember that even though in retrospect the war was wildly popular, at the time it was very divisive. We were still dealing with the overhang of

Vietnam. And if you remember the vote in the Congress was razor thin. Right, that resolution passed by the narrowest of margins, especially in the Senate. And the administration very cleverly came up with this idea of we will go to the United Nations and we will get a Security Council resolution to authorize the war and when we have that international support then we go to Congress. And I think it was very clever legislatively, but it was of enormous importance beyond that. No one had thought of this before. The United Nations had not authorized a military action since 1950, all right, when the Russians and Chinese were conveniently absent and we ran the Korean War resolution through the quorum in the Security Council. No one had ever touched it. And for those of you who can remember, the UN was meaningless in 1990, before the Bush administration reached out to them. They were nothing. In fact the Israelis used to call them that -- the UN used to stand for United Nothings, right. The Security Council was feckless and useless, they presided over some of the most corrupt and incompetent agencies on the planet. Right. there were third world dictatorships that looked to the UN and aspired to that level of laziness and graft. (Laughter) It was utterly moribund. And along comes the United States and completely transforms the United Nations. Now the United Nations ain't a perfect organization by any stretch of the imagination. There are still lots of problems with it, lots of things it still doesn't do well, but it's remarkable to me how far it's come. Look at the Iran agreement, it's a perfect example. The United Nations is a major player in the Iran agreement because the resolution in favor of the war then set up following resolutions, the administration then struck on the equally novel idea of having the United Nations oversee the disarmament of Iraq and create the mechanisms for arms control that were going to be employed. If you remember arms control agreements before 1991 were all bilateral or multi lateral in the case of things like the Washington Naval Treaties, right. We monitored each other directly. There weren't

international monitors to do this. Occasionally the U.N. would send a peace keeping force which was always a joke whenever they did it, but this idea of using the United Nations, the IAEA, creating this thing UNSCOM, right, to actually handle arms control, that all started in 1990-91. And when we think about the Iran agreement, to me it's kind of unimaginable that we would have even gotten the agreement that we did, as imperfect as it is, without that. I don't know how the hell you get a U.S.-Iran bilateral arms control agreement in current circumstances. That is a bridge too far. And there are so many other things around the world. Again, the UN is not the greatest institution in the world, but you think of the role that it played in Haiti, in Cambodia, in Somalia, in Afghanistan. You know, think all around the world, in the Balkans. In none of these places has it been perfect, but in all these different places it has played a useful and important role. And my god to me it was fascinating as I was going through the Iran agreement yesterday, you know, one of the great victories of the Obama administration was actually making sure that the Security Council didn't have the final say over when there would be a violation and when sanctions would get re-imposed, right. Which again, a very strange turnabout from 1990-91, but again attesting to the fact that the Security Council now, in a way that it did not have in June of 1990, now has an independent standing, now has value, now has the ability to take action that's meaningful in the world. That's pretty remarkable. And that was all the Bush administration.

Another point I wanted to make, and this is something that's really stood out to me a lot, both as I've watched successor administrations, but also as I've been able to, you know, learn much more about Saddam's regime based on all of the stuff that we've gotten from Iraq since the fall of Baghdad, whether it be the records that previously were housed at NDU, that unfortunately are now being forced to migrate elsewhere, but also the interviews that we got, my own interviews with Iraqis. And one of these that's

really striking to me, and again just as a student of international relations, something I think worth all of us keeping in mind is how much groupthink always pervades every government on the planet. It is ubiquitous. Every government -- you know, look, especially in democratic societies, democratic governments, what these people have to do is very hard, I'm not giving them a free pass, often times they do it badly, but nevertheless what they do is very hard. There are enormous pressures on them and there is always a tendency to start to kind of see the world the way that you'd like to, right, and to tell each other stories, as Bruce used to say on a regular basis. And they tell each other stories that are much more comfortable for them than maybe what's really going on. And you get lots of groupthink. And it's interesting to me looking at Saddam we now know that there was a lot more of it. Now it's interesting, Judy Affay, Jay McMann, you know, two people I worked with at the time, worked more closely on this issue, you know, we were constantly trying to figure out Saddam. And at the time I think our feeling was -- you know, I wrote this in my book in 2002 -- that Saddam was not insane, he was not irrational. He was rational; he simply proceeded from a different set of assumptions and a different history than we have. And I believed that very staunchly for a very long period of time. I confess that I'm having to revisit that. And in fact I'm no longer sure that that's true. In fact I increasingly believe that Saddam was clearly delusional and he may have actually been, depending on how you want to define the term, irrational, even insane, especially by the late 1990s and early 2000s. The more that we listened to what he had to say, the more that we're able to talk to the people who were talking to him, the more that the things that he seemed to believe and want to do and how he saw the world and how he thought things were going to work out no longer makes sense to me in a way that I thought that they did. But I still have this very important I think lingering question worth thinking about as we think about dictatorships

broadly, was Saddam born that way, was he always like that? There certainly is some evidence out there, some antecedents of that, or was it a process again of the groupthink? How much of having everyone in the country tell you that everything you think is brilliant, agree with pretty much everything you say, how much does that warp your thinking?

Again, it's interesting as we listen to Saddam's tapes, he actually had people disagreeing with him. On all the key issues of the day he had very important advisors say to him invading Iran is dumb, boss, don't do it, it ain't gonna work out. He had important advisors say to him, don't invade Kuwait, boss, it ain't gonna work out, it's a dumb idea, right. Don't fight the 30 nation coalition led by the United States, it's a dumb idea. But most of the people in the room seemed to be saying you go, guy. You know, everything you want to do is going to work out fine, you're brilliant, nobody understands the way that you do. So how much of that was going on?

But I also just wanted to say a word about the Bush administration, which is that when I think about the Bush administration, and I think about the administrations that followed, including the administration that I worked for Bruce in the White House with, the Bush administration is the one that stands out to me as the one that had the least groupthink. It's not that there was none, but they seemed to have the least of any of them. They seemed to be the ones who were most clear eyed about the world, most willing to take the world on its terms rather than trying to make the world into what they wanted it to believe. And I think that a lot of their real successes in foreign policy -- and again people would criticize them, pointing out that actually if what they had wanted to do on Russia had turned out we wouldn't have gotten a democratic Russia, even temporarily. And that's probably true; I think that that's right. But nevertheless, I still think it's the case that they suffered from this groupthink the least and that's a very big thing.

The last thing I wanted to talk about is the place where the Bush administration did the worst, didn't do the best, and that's post conflict planning. And they certainly are not alone in that, but especially in light of our experiences in Somalia and Afghanistan and obviously Iraq, this looms larger and larger. We're really bad at doing post conflict planning. And I think that all of us, certainly Bruce and I, and everybody else, I think we were all struck by how ad-hoc the post conflict planning was for the Gulf War. We did an enormous amount of work setting things up for the war, we did an enormous amount of work on the war itself, but what was going to happen after really got short shrift. Now it's not that there was nothing, it's just that it didn't get nearly the same level of attention, level of debate, level of research, as the going in and waging of the conflict itself. And I think history has made very clear that that's a mistake, that you have to put in at least as much effort on the post conflict as on the pre and the during. And again it's something that the United States does very badly. For those who are interested, my friend Gideon Rose has a wonderful book on the subject called *How Wars End*. And his chapter on the Gulf War I think is absolutely superb. Now I also want to say that I don't put too much blame on the part of the Bush administration. And this is another are where my thinking on this has changed because especially from this vantage point, especially post 2011, I'm not sure that there was any outcome to the Gulf War that would have actually led to a really good outcome overall. The more that I think about the different roads that we could have taken, whether it was toppling Saddam in '91 or not toppling him in 2003, the more that I think that we may have still gotten to exactly this place, just through different pathways. Again, don't hold me to this in five years, I may have a different view on this. But I've spent a lot of time trying to think through the roads not taken and why we didn't take them and which were the right ones, as a way of trying to learn for the future. And, you know, I'm struck by how bad everything still looks. You

know, if we don't go into Kuwait in 1990-91 Saddam sits there, he's in power, he's in control of Kuwait, that's a really bad outcome. If we don't invade in 2003, again he survives. By 2011 either he is still in place, or I think again the most likely alternative, certainly our sense and I think it's in retrospect what would have been the most likely scenario is if he isn't there his son, Qusay, is in charge. They might have survived the Arab Spring by mass slaughter. Again, not a good outcome. Again given what we know about Saddam's post '91 thinking, and even his thinking about what would happen after what was going to happen in 2003, which he didn't think was going to be an American invasion, that's not at all reassuring. This is a guy who absolutely was committed to rebuilding his WMD someday, who thought about war all the time, right, as a really useful instrument of state craft, right, and was still trying to do it even as late as 2000. So that's not a great one. And when you play out all the different scenarios, you know, the idea that Iraq is somehow a stable democracy at this point in time, or even a more benign dictatorship at this point, I think both of those are such long shots. I think that even if Saddam had fallen in '91, if we had done a better job bringing about his collapse in '91 and put a better dictator in, I think that better dictator would have fallen in 2011. And like Gaddafi's Libya, and like Assad's Syria, and like Saleh's Yemen, I think Iraq is in civil war at this point anyway. That's my thinking right now.

So for those reasons, I don't put as much blame on the Bush administration as I did even five or ten years ago, but I nevertheless think it's the case that that was the one piece where we needed to do a lot better. And in particular, you know, we came out of the war, the administration was just convinced in part because of what we heard from the other Arab leaders that Saddam was doomed, he could never withstand the defeat of Desert Storm, so we didn't have to go to Baghdad. And don't get me wrong, I'm not saying that that was the right thing to do because -- well, in some ways

it could have been better, in other ways it could have been worse, right. We would have had more international support and a better administration to do it. On the other hand we didn't have any planning for occupying Baghdad and we actually knew less about post conflict reconstruction in '91 than we did by 2003, right, when the administration ignored it, but nevertheless we knew it. At that point in time we didn't even know about it. Nevertheless it does seem clear to me that we ad-hoc'd things, we got a containment regime which was not properly thought through, and as a result people like Bruce and I later on were left with really imperfect tools to try to hold that containment regime in place. And that's the one we've got to do better.

So my last lesson, you know what, the more I think about this war, you know, it may be the best war that we've fought in the last 50 years, but it was hardly a perfect war. We never have a perfect war; there is no such thing as a perfect war. I don't think we can let the fact that there is no such thing as a perfect war stop us from ever going to war. We can't let perfect be the enemy of good enough. But we ought to be thinking about this, and when we do go to war we obviously have to do much better on post conflict reconstruction. And for me the Persian Gulf War, it was a good enough war, and that's probably about the best we're going to do.

MR. RIEDEL: Let me make one comment that I want to follow up with a question on the UN role. The comment is it goes to where you ended. If you think back to how Americans thought about war in the 1980s we were dominated by the Vietnam war syndrome. The notion of putting boots on the ground had pretty much discredited first by Korea and then especially by Vietnam. The good enough war as you described it, and I think that's a good way to put it, transformed the way Americans thought about war. We'd sent a half million men over to Iraq, we had been told that there would be catastrophic results when they went in, that this would be chemical warfare, that the

drinking water of the Arabian Peninsula would be destroyed, that terrorists would rise up around the world, that American embassies on a global basis would be torched and burned the day after American troops went in. And for a lot reasons, including very good planning by the Bush administration on all of these issues, especially the terrorism one for example, none of it happened. And while we suffered casualties -- I don't want to say that they were significant, obviously to the families of those who lost loved ones in the Kuwait War or who had them injured, they were terribly significant, but compared to Vietnam on our previous conflicts they were a whole order of magnitude different. As a consequence the American vision of war changed in 1991 to one in which it became far more willing to use the military instrument than we had up until then. And I think it's taken the 25 years since then to kind of push us back in the other direction where we are now much less eager to see the use of military force than we had been in the 1990s.

I'm very intrigued by your comments about the UN, in part because I worked for the UN briefly before 1990 and if there was all that slush money lying around I never saw any of it. (Laughter) Note to self. Would you characterize that the Bush administration not only used the UN but created a precedent which now locks in the American government, perhaps much more than it wants to be in the future?

MR. POLLACK: And I get to ask you a question after this.

MR. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. POLLACK: Yes, I think you're right, Bruce. And again I think that, you know, we've all seen it, right, where we've now set a precedent that when you go to war you're supposed to have the UN. Now we forget that we haven't always had the UN, and in fact two of the best, most popular, most justified wars we've fought since then, Kosovo and the invasion of Afghanistan, both were fought without one, right. Kosovo, there's nothing, and in fact most of the international lawyers are claiming that the Kosovo

war was illegal, despite the fact that Kofi Annan says, yeah, it was probably illegal but it was also the most justifiable during his term. And Afghanistan, we go to war based on Article 51 in self defense. And I think that it's certainly the case that it has become more difficult for us to do things without that Security Council imprimatur. And again I think that the proof of that is what we're going through with Iran. Now at some level I don't mind it, it works for me because I think a war with Iran would be a terrible idea. You know, having worked through this any number of different times, I keep coming up to the position of I don't think that a war with Iran makes any sense for us. But part of my rationale for that, you know, is the self fulfilling prophecy of part of the rationale is that I cannot imagine we ever would get a UN Security Council resolution in favor of going to war with Iran, and I think that's part of why we wouldn't have any international support for going to war with Iran absent them doing something incredibly stupid, which of course they're fully capable of doing. It's just, you know, unlikely and hasn't happened and I don't think necessarily will happen anytime soon.

And as I said I think the fact that we've had to work so hard in this deal with Iran to limit the role of the Security Council speaks to exactly that point. That, you know, the truth of the matter is that the UN as I described it has a lot more independent authority and standing than it did before 1990-91, but it's not, you know, completely independent, it's certainly not fully sovereign, it is not a world government, no matter what the folks in Texas think. And at the end of the day it mostly is a vehicle for other states. And what we've found is we can make the UN work well when we work with it or work within it, when we get it to work for us. But other states can also do that and they can use it against us. And it's not always we're right or necessarily they're always wrong, but it is still that struggle for it's now got some degree of influence, but not an enormous amount. But in some ways that's made it a political football.

MR. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. POLLACK: Now let me ask you one. I want to go to your point which again I think was spot on, I didn't even feel the need to comment on it because I thought it was so spot on, about how the Bush administration took the war and the political capital that they had gained from the war and decided to invest that in the Madrid process and in the Arab-Israeli peace process. Which, you know, I will say at the time I thought was exactly the right thing, I thought it was a brilliant move on their part -- another thing I give them great credit for. I still think in retrospect was the right thing to have done even though it hasn't worked out completely. But I want to ask that back to you, Bruce, as you think back on it do you think that that was still the right use of that huge amount of political capital that we had accrued, or was there a better use? Could we have used it to deal with the internal problems of the Arab states or something else entirely?

MR. RIEDEL: It's a very good question. This is why it's so useful to do this kind of exercise because looking back 25 years later you can see things that you didn't see then. I don't think in 1990-91 there was an appreciable recognition in the United States government, in the United States security bureaucracy, or in the think tank community that is its symbiotic cousin or sister or whatever we are to the United States, that the problem was governance in the Arab world. We accepted it. We accepted the governance we had. Certainly nobody in the Bush administration said well before we say yes to King Fahd shouldn't we say to King Fahd we'll do it but you've got to let girls drive, you know, you've got to do something. I don't think it even registered. The only place that that really registered, and, Ambassador, you can speak to this more than I can, was in the notion that the Kuwaitis after the war were going to have to be a different kind of monarchy than they had been prior to the war. And on that I think the Bush

administration did a pretty good job of leveraging without overdoing it, and getting just the right amount of pressure to persuade the Kuwaitis that they need to change some of the fundamentals of their society. But certainly more broadly I don't think that even registered.

What did register is the Arab-Israeli conflict. And I'll say another word or two about that. You know, the 1991 experience is the first time American combat troops went to Israel to defend Israel. Now they were patriot, anti-ballistic missile system. It wasn't, you know, people in infantry, it wasn't in tanks, but it's the first time the American-Israeli relationship saw the United States directly take over responsibility for the defense of Israel. It was also really one of the first times that the United States -- not completely the first time, but one of the first times in which the United States said to Israel no, you can't do that. It was very traumatic actually when the SCUDs started falling on Tel Aviv. Prime Minister Shamir wanted to retaliate and the United States military, and particularly Secretary of Defense Cheney -- it's probably not one of the moments he likes to remember the best -- told Israelis we will not give you the IFF codes to allow you to fly over Iraq. And if you fly over Iraq we will regard you as hostile aircraft and shoot you down. Very few times in American history has the United States said anything like that to Israel.

And then the Madrid process. I think it's safe to say in retrospect, the Madrid process was done over the dead body of Yitzhak Shamir who had absolutely no interest in any kind of political process and did everything he could over the course of the next two years to sabotage it.

The other are that the Bush administration I think thought about transformation but in the end did very little was the Iranian relationship. The war had the unintended side benefit of persuading the White House that the Iranians were not crazy,

suicidal maniacs. It's hard to recognize in retrospect that the beginning of the process back in August and September 1990, the American military assumed that if they attacked Iraq they were also going to be at war with the Iranians. Now this is a good example of groupthink. It made no sense why the Iranians want to do that, but that was the starting in proposition of CENTCOM at the time. Not only did the Iranians not support the Iraqis, they were pretty helpful to us in everything that they did. And out of that I think the Bush administration in 1991 was looking for a way to transform the U.S.-Iranian relationship. In the end nothing came of it and it would take another 25 years for a real opportunity to change all of that to come about.

I'm going to close off our dialogue here and invite comments and questions from the audience. Please, if you would, identify yourself and your affiliation beforehand. And we also have a microphone here. Let's take a question here in the back.

MS. MAROOF: Thank you. I'm Hanar Maroof from Iraqi Kurdistan. You have been talking about the after 1991 and how American foreign policy has changed and shifted to the Middle East. So if you talk about nowadays and the situation of ISIS, I would like to hear from both of you your perspective on American foreign policy toward Iraqi Kurdistan. Thank you.

MR. POLLACK: I think U.S. policy toward Iraqi Kurdistan has been consistently very short sighted. We've tended to accept the situation as it is without recognizing how problematic those circumstances are for everybody. The truth of the matter is that Iraq is very problematic for the Kurds and the Kurds are very problematic for Iraq. These guys have been fighting on and off basically since before independence. The Kurds have never wanted to be part of Iraq, they make endless trouble, right, and they Iraqis always regard them with a certain degree of suspicion. I think that the truth is

that both would be much better without each other.

Now there's always been a reason not to find a way to enable, not find a way to support the partition of Kurdistan from Iraq. Always good reasons. The problem is that those are always short-term reasons and we've missed a number of opportunities where it probably would have been better to bit the bullet and just say, you know what, these people -- you know, this marriage needs a divorce and now is the time to do it as difficult as it is. I actually think in retrospect at this moment that the best opportunity for that was in 2003. In 2003 the Bush administration could have come along and said look, Iraqi Kurdistan is de facto an independent country, has been since 1991. This is what the Kurds want, we will recognize that, we will help it happen with no expectation that Iraqi Kurdistan was suddenly going to become Switzerland in any sense of the imagination, but nevertheless that this was a divorce that needed to happen. We didn't. As I saw it, my sense of it, we did it for mostly domestic political reasons that the Bush administration felt that having the Kurds go independent would be seen as, you know, a major blow to their policy as them allowing Iraq to fall apart, as somehow undermining the accomplishment of the invasion of Iraq. Interestingly, my sense at the time was it wasn't about the Turks, right, because the Bush administration was so pissed at the Turks for not allowing 4th ID to go through Turkey, and that wasn't the issue at all. But it was about -- and even then there was a sense that things weren't going the way that they were supposed to, and the administration didn't want to create the impression that things really were -- by having the Kurds go independent, which I think they felt that their critics would use as see, here is a sign that things are not going well, Iraq is falling apart. Again I think that that was a mistake. I think that everybody would have been better off in some sense of the word had that divorce taken place then. Although again, I don't want to suggest that everything would be fabulous, right, that Kurdistan would be thriving and

peaceful and democratic and that Iraq would be in a much better situation. It's just that it would eliminate this problem which is still a problem for both sides, and which I think is going to remain and could easily get worse as we move into the future.

MR. RIEDEL: Just to add one point, just to Ken's argument about groupthink. Nobody in the Bush White House in January and February 1991 even conceived of the idea that within six months they would be the fathers of a de fact independent Kurdistan. They didn't want to be, but it wasn't a question of want or not, it wasn't even on the horizon. When the Iraqi people rose up after the war in the south and then in the north, it came as a complete surprise to the Bush White House. That's not a criticism of them it's just a symbol that their presumption at the end of the war, and Ken alluded to this earlier, was Saddam will fall, it's only a matter of time. That presumption stayed with the Bush White House until well into 1992. And I recall having switched hats at that point delivering a special National Intelligence Estimate that the Intelligence Committee prepared in the fall of 1991 that said Saddam Hussein is securely in power and will likely remain in power for the next five years to the Oval Office where I was more or less told thank for your interest in National Security affairs, but why don't you take a walk in the park for a few hours because you don't know what you're talking about. Completely unintentional, and yet I would hope that most Kurds in grammar school and high school are today taught that George H.W. Bush is the father of their country rather than Mr. Talabani or Mr. Barzani.

Let's take another question. Over here.

MR. MACK: I'm David Mack and I'm a scholar part-time at the Middle East Institute. And in 1991 I was a diplomat in the State Department dealing without about 13 countries, but ended up dealing primarily with Iraq and Kuwait for about a year. My question is for both of you, but it hones in on a point that Ken had raised, which is the

intentions of Saddam Hussein and how they could have been modified. I'm just as convinced as Judge Webster was that the intention -- once he found that the occupation of Kuwait was easily done, that his intention at that point probably expanded to at least dominating the whole peninsula through intimidation. But so my real question is was there any way that his intentions could have been affected in a positive way prior to his invasion of Kuwait? I know that on the 17th of July I warned the Iraqi government through their ambassador and then that was followed up with delivering the same warning in Baghdad, that they were on very risky ground with what they were about and that they risked a serious confrontation with the United States, so much so that I had somebody from the White House call me later and say you went too far, you were threatening war.

Now as it turned out no risk of that since Saddam Hussein clearly thought that David Mack and April Glaspie were just pounding sand and that it was a total bluff and they didn't have to worry about that. My belief subsequently was that he came to that conclusion because he didn't see us doing anything beyond the over flight exercise with United Arab Emirates, which April says did -- that was the one thing that got their attention. But so my guess is that short of a major naval deployment, and we were told by the Pentagon -- or Jim Baker was told by the Pentagon that it would be against naval doctrine to put a carrier group into the Persian Gulf. Of course in January we had three carrier battle groups there, so naval doctrine changed. The Kuwaitis and the Saudis both said, 'for God's sake, don't even think about deploying aircraft in our countries.' So it's just that one little event down there where were we were actually seen to be doing something concrete.

So my question is, was there anything short of those kind of actions which did not seem possible, was there anything that we could have done to change his

thinking?

MR. RIEDEL: You know, my answer is I don't think there was. Not so much because we couldn't think of things to do. I think we could have come up with military exercises, deployments. But the host states weren't interested. In the spring of 1990 the relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iraq was still quite close and quite intimate, worrisomely some close and intimate to some intelligence communities. We were wondering what's going on between these two countries. In retrospect we now know not a whole lot, but I don't think so.

There is one intriguing point though I would take from that, and it goes back to President Bush's memoirs which were co-written or co-published with Brent Scowcroft's. They are not really written together, they are two sets of memoirs stapled together. But in that I was reminded that on the evening of the 1st of August the recommendation from the National Security Council staff to the President was that he call Saddam Hussein. In the end he never did because by the time they had gotten to the President the Iraqis were already in Kuwait and it was too late. But let's pretend for a minute that they had made that recommendation to him the day before. What could George H.W. Bush have said to Saddam Hussein that would have significantly altered his thinking? He certainly couldn't say if you do this I will send a half a million Americans to Saudi Arabia to defend it, assuming I can get Congressional support for that. He wouldn't have said it because he had no clue and neither did Brent or anybody else that's that what they were going to end up doing.

And as I think you've alluded, anything short of a significant demonstration of American military might would not have influenced Saddam's thinking.

MR. POLLACK: Yes. I'll answer the same way, David. And I'm going to have to restrain myself because there's a lot of interesting stuff on this and let me just

give a few highlights. And the first point I think is worth making is that, you know, before the war we were trying to reach out to him in different ways, shapes and forms. You remember this, Art Hughes remembers this, Skip remembers this. We were trying to see if we could have a better relationship, called a constructive engagement at the time. And I think that we had differences of opinion about how Saddam was responding to that. I think that some people thought that okay, Saddam did see us trying to behave well and that we're trying to have a better relationship, and others were saying well, he had a more mixed opinion because maybe he sees that and the support we gave to the Iran-Iraq war, but he also saw Iran Contra, right, and so perhaps a mix. What's really striking is in the actual archives, from the tapes that we have of these conversations, there is none of that. He is convinced from start to finish the United States is out to get him. We are out to get him. Everything that we are giving him is for our own purposes, it is ultimately about setting him up, undermining him, something. He never believes it and when Iran Contra happens that's the proof to him that we were never going to be with him. And increasingly -- and, you know, we did see this in speeches afterwards, but we could never figure out whether this was just rhetoric to justify other things or he really believed that, but he starts to say, right, the Soviet Union is gone, I have got to become the new super power to oppose the Americans. And again what we're getting from the tapes and from the interviews is he really believed that, right, he truly believed that. And he believed it both -- and, you know, that has two implications. One is he's planning on taking us on at some point in time and the invasion of Kuwait is clearly about building himself up so he can take us on at some point in time, but it also gives a sense -- again I think we had it at the time -- of his own inflated sense of his own military capacity. I actually think that even if we had moved the entire sixth fleet from the Med to the Gulf he would have written that off. He had no interest in air power, naval power, he did not think

it was terribly relevant, says that on any number of occasions. In fact even after Desert Storm he is saying that it was exaggerated, the impact that the air campaign had. The only thing he seemed to understand was boots on the ground. So the one thing that maybe did he -- if George Bush could have said, you know, I'm going to send 500,000 troops and Saddam had believed it, maybe. Or if we had actually started deploying an armored division, right, that might have caught his attention. I don't think anything else would have mattered.

Now again it gets a little bit squirrely; we don't have perfect information about what he's thinking, but again I think that the circumstantial evidence that we have both from immediately after the war and reinforced by stuff that we've learned since was he felt we were likely to intervene in Kuwait, he just thought it would be small and he'd be able to deal with it. And as he told April, yours is not a society that can accept 10,000 casualties, right, mine is.

And so again from my perspective I think that April gets a very bad rap. I don't think there is anything that April or you, or probably George H.W. Bush could have said that could have convinced Saddam otherwise because he did have this utterly delusional view of what he was doing, how he'd be able to do it, how we would respond, what our capabilities were, how the rest of the world -- you know, it was 90 degrees, or 180 degrees opposite of the realities in each of these different circumstances. And it would have been very difficult. And April wasn't going to do it in that conversation. And the only thing that I blame April for is I think she missed what Saddam was saying to her, which was in effect I'm taking Kuwait, don't get in my way. That's what I -- and I remember at the time -- I mean I can remember sitting at my desk and seeing April's comeback cable and thinking, ‘Oh, my God, what April is reporting is, you know, is completely different from what Saddam is saying.’ But in terms of issuing a warning,

deterring Saddam, that's not April's fault. She's not responsible for this war. There is nothing she could have done to have affected his thinking.

MR. HUGHES: Hi, I'm Art Hughes. I was a State Department guy, Foreign Service Officer for a long time. And while David Mack was a diplomat at the State Department I was a diplomat at the Defense Department. And I had a somewhat different view than my colleagues and friends across the river through a lot of this and I don't think it was because where I was seated at the time, but just because I had some different experiences.

But first a comment on the UN. In 1988 after the election and President Elect Bush was staffing his Cabinet and so forth, he called Tom Pickering in Tel Aviv and said, Tom -- Tom was the ambassador there -- he said I don't think the U.S. has done much with the UN and we could do a lot more and I'd like to you go up there. And Tom said I'd be glad to do it, but why don't you check first with some people on the Hill to make sure that this would not be a failed nomination. Well, the reason I'm saying this, because I think unless there was a Tom Pickering or somebody like Tom Pickering at the UN, and I don't know if there is another person like Tom Pickering, that we could have gotten done at the UN what happened. So just that little history point.

I think with respect to the question of Saddam, Iraq and U.S. and Iran, one of the problems was -- and I agree that '90 was a pivotal time, but before that even in spite of the history of what we'd done in the region in World War II and thereafter, even Carter's State of Union message of 1980 said that we had vital interests out there and we would act accordingly. But later on in the '80s there was never a clear view in the U.S. government about what were those interests and what were we prepared to do about them. And in my opinion though it's probably true because that Saddam's mind could not have been changed because looking at his stuff over the years and reading the

translations every morning of what he was saying, it's clear he was setting himself up to be an alternative leader to the Arab world to the Egyptians who had sold out to the West, who had sold out to Israel. And then you've got the history in Iraq as the guardian of the gate to the east and all that. And so he had a very egocentric and a very exalted view of Iraq and his role as a leader. And so his objective was to be the leader of the Arab world.

And at the same time it seems to me that our messages to Saddam did not really indicate that we had any fundamental interest there. You can read them and I can remember sitting in the morning like Ken says, reading that message at seven o'clock in the morning and I said to myself oh, shoot -- although I didn't say shoot -- that it just looked like we had very little interest and it was an Arab issue and you Arabs work it out and that's going to be fine. But then even after that -- so I think that maybe we couldn't have change it and I think that's probably right because he was on a roll, he thought he was on a roll. And go back and look at the record of the last OPEC meeting in which he basically said the Saudis are no longer going to set the tone, no longer going to set the limits, we're going to do it. And he didn't need to take the rest of the Gulf to -- as David Mack said intimidation was all that was needed. So I think we set ourselves up to a bad situation because it wasn't clear in Washington what our interests were, and we weren't signaling the others what our interests were.

And then afterward the muddle I think largely was the civilian military thing. A lot of resistance in the military even to do any planning. I mean I sat in Sachdev's office and listened to Cheney and the Chairman argue back and forth and -- anyway a lot of that's a matter of record.

But anyway just to add a few comments, so I don't really have a question at this point. Thank you.

MR. RIEDEL: I would make one comment on that. If we had certain

misplaced ideas about Saddam or didn't understand Saddam, our Arab friends were in a far worse state. King Hussein, who I think is probably perhaps the smartest Arab leader of the 20th century, was the dumbest of them all when it came to Saddam Hussein and didn't really appreciate who his friend was until long after the liberation of Kuwait and well into the -- and maybe never appreciated it then, but realized at a certain point he had to change policies. And the Saudis the same. And the question of the Saudis, we went from a very paternalistic attitude towards Saddam, towards one that now saw a great conspiracy organized by Saddam against them. We spent an inordinate amount of time in the fall of 1990 looking for Iraqi divisions supposedly hiding in Yemen or in Jordan or even in the Sudan that were supposed to be part of a conspiracy to divide up Saudi Arabia between Iraq, Jordan, Yemen -- I don't know what Sudan was supposed to get out of it but for some reason they were thrown into the mix as well. A conspiracy that with the possible exception of Ali Abdullah Salla, who I think is possibly guilty of almost any crime, none of the others were involved in it whatsoever. And I certainly don't think that King Hussein had any fantasies of recovering of the Hijaz. But the Saudis were absolutely convinced of that and as I said we spent hours and hours trying to prove that the conspiracy was not there. In the end events proved that it was not there.

Let's take another question. In the back.

MR. ALSWATER: Thank you. My name is Mohammed Alswater from Yemen. My question is could Yemen war be Gulf War III and how it's related to the Iranian agreement? Thank you.

MR. RIEDEL: I don't think it's going to be Gulf War III, but I think it's a terrible tragedy. Twenty million people are at risk of starving to death of they don't die from dehydration first. It's a reckless ill thought through war. Probably has much more to do with Saudi internal family dynamics than anything to do with Iranian spheres of

influence. I am deeply troubled that the United States has become a co-belligerent in this war. Without our support the Royal Saudi Air Force would not be doing what it's doing. From what I read in the papers we're supposedly providing intelligence for Saudi targeting. If that's the case there will be I think unfortunately very harsh judgment by history about some of the targets we've provided.

You mention what is its relationship to the P5+1 deal. I think -- and I may be too cynical on this, but I think basically they've been given a blank check to do whatever they want to do in the Yemen in return for keeping relatively silent about the P5+1 agreement. I think the agreement is a good agreement. I think it's a very ugly bargain to sacrifice 20 million Yemenis to get it. Hopefully I'm being too cynical and hopefully behind the scenes the Obama administration is trying to bring some sense to Riad and I hope that they succeed sooner rather than later.

MS. COLLINS: Thank you. I'm Sara Collins; I work for the Institute for Defense Analyses and we work very closely with the Conflict Records Research Center, so we have a lot of those documents that you're referencing.

So my question is for you, Ken. You talked about how the Bush administration didn't have a lot of foresight for the post conflict planning, and I was just wondering out of curiosity what we thought was going to happen if and when Saddam fell? You know, early on in the war they thought maybe it would be a year or two maximum. So you said Qusay could have been the logical choice. Were there other people that were maybe being groomed to take over or, you know, was there any talk of setting up a democracy or -- you know, you have the insight so I'd love to hear it.

MR. POLLACK: There are others in this room who have even greater insight than I do into that, but I won't put them on the spot by putting them on the spot. I can remember one briefing in particular where someone said I don't know the last name

of the person who will succeed Saddam, but I know his first name, General. (Laughter) That was the assumption, was we would -- Saddam would be overthrown effectively by his own power base by the Sunnis who supported him and there would be another Sunni power broker, almost certainly a Sunni general who took his place. The expectation was actually that Qusay and Uday would also be killed, hopefully along with Ali Hassan al-Majid and Tariq Aziz and a number of other loathsome creatures. But that was -- you know, and this is the point that Bruce and I were both making, it was not just the hope, it was the expectation. And it was what the policy was predicated on. When I was talking about Qusay, you know, that was getting more toward the period later on, you know, when we were writing things saying he ain't falling. And I'm going to refrain from telling my famous Colin Powell story about that. But he's not going to fall and then the question became, all right, what does the long-term trajectory of this government look like, of this regime look like. And most thinking was, I think there was no reason to doubt it, I think even in retrospect it was probably right, was that Saddam was going to rule until he died, then the most likely successor was Qusay, right. Obviously Uday would be in there and there was always a question mark as to whether Uday would kill Qusay before his father died to ensure that Qusay didn't succeed him. But the expectation was that Qusay would succeed him. And there was also I think an expectation that it was either Qusay or there was a good chance of chaos, right, that either Qusay would take over, maybe Uday would, maybe it would be another general, but you could just have a scramble for power if none of those guys did. But the most likely case was Saddam lives and then it's Qusay.

MR. MCGINNIS: Thanks very much. Sherwood McGinnis. Like David and Skip, former Foreign Service Officer, retired; last couple of years teaching at the Army War College.

The issue for me, and you've laid out a number of lessons, and also to your book, Ken, where our long-term strategy is now. We look back 25 years, there have been a number of events, our emphasis changing and the relationships, et cetera. We are in a situation where we are going to see that entire region have questions about the leadership and where they head down the road. What can we do -- and I'm talking about the United States or the international community -- to deal with that issue that you talk about and you talked about today as well, which is governance? We have a new king in Saudi Arabia, we don't know what's going to happen in Iraq with that government, we don't what will happen in Syria. We need I think to have that long-term vision. So I'd just appreciate some thoughts on that. Thanks.

MR. POLLACK: I'm glad you asked. This is hardest question of all, and as you know I wrote a book in 2008 saying that we needed to reshape our grand strategy to put the issue of reform, governance, economics, social, everything much more in the forefront of our policy. Nobody wanted to listen then. Doesn't seem like anybody really wants to listen now either. It's either in the too hard category or, you know, that you've got a lot of other people just saying I don't care. We've got both -- it's interesting, out of the far left and the far right are both now in the mode of don't care, not interested, not interested in the Middle East, probably not interested in foreign policy at all. That also makes it very difficult.

A third piece that makes it very difficult is that as a result of not doing anything about that, and we're not completely culpable, and we're not the arbiters of what happened in the Middle East, but we were at least culpable in some way, partially to blame, we get the Arab Spring, right, which is exactly the response to those underlying problems and the lack of reform. And what we wind up with is state failure, state collapse, and civil wars. And we've now got the problem of -- and I'm thinking about this

a lot -- and just so you know Madeleine Albright and Steve Hadley have stood up this big task force, I'm leading one of the working groups, so I just wrote 15,000 words on exactly this topic. And one of the problems that we have right now is that even before you can get back to the question of how should the U.S. and hopefully our allies try to help encourage, enable, push, foster, whatever, reform across the most of the Middle East, we first have a whole bunch of problems that really do need to be addressed first, and in particular the civil wars. Those civil wars are, you know, just gigantic engines of calamity, and until they're dealt with nothing else can reasonably happen. Nothing else will happen because the governments aren't going to do anything because they're facing all the spillover from the civil wars. And nothing else is going to happen because we need to get them under control to deal with the spillover which is a direct threat to our interests.

And so, you know, we've got that on top of it. Now I'm hopeful that things this task force and preferably a lot of other work that needs to go into it are going to bring us around to this question which I started out by laying the table of we've really dealt with what the old problem with the Middle East was. The new problem in the Middle East is burning out of control and it's actually bigger than the old problem. And my hope is that if we can deal with this, and that's going to be really I think a task for the next administration because I think we now know where the Obama administration is. You know, they've said a lot of stuff but I think it's pretty clear they're not going to deal with the civil wars. If the next administration can deal with the civil wars, hopefully with a lot of help from allies, including Bruce's points about Yemen, then maybe we can kind of put this issue back on the table and say look, the way that we got here was because of these underlying dysfunctions across the region in all of these different states. We need to head those off. We can't have more civil wars and more state failure. You guys don't want it, we don't want it, how does that happen.

The last point I'll end on -- and in some ways it's a hopeful point, but it's also one that I'm concerned about, and Bruce has heard me on this many times, is Saudi Arabia. Because Saudi Arabia under Abdullah actually was kind of the model. You know, we didn't see it, but by Saudi standards Abdullah was this incredible, reckless reformist. And when you're talking to Saudis and polling Saudis what they talk about is the reason that they didn't have their Arab Spring overthrow is because they had Abdullah and his reforms. And they felt exactly the way the social science literature predicts, that Abdullah was actually concerned about these grievances and was moving to address them. My fear is with a new king is that going to go by the boards. If that's the case then I think we do have to worry even about Saudi Arabia. But, you know, Abdullah at least furnishes something of a model and I'm sure someday we'll get back to it.

MR. RIEDEL: Just to make one brief comment and then we'll take another question. If you read what the President says, he's actually quite attuned to this. He said it at Camp David to the Gulfies and in today's New York Times he said again to Tom Friedman, which he said the real threat to our friends in the Middle East is not Iran, it's not the Islamic state, it's their own internal situation. But I agree with Ken that I don't see any sign that we're going to beyond the hortatory on this. And it's very hard to see what we could do because our two closest allies in the region are not interested in it. The Saudis in particular are the leader of the counter revolution of the Arab Spring. They are not one of the counter revolutions, they are the leader of the counter revolutionary movement and been quite successful from their standpoint. Our other ally, Israel, occasionally gives rhetorical support to the idea of supporting democracy in the Middle East, but when it actually had an opportunity in Egypt to be sympathetic toward a revolutionary regime they made it absolutely clear that they wanted a return to a military

autocracy as quickly as possible.

It doesn't give you a lot of work there. I mean there's not a lot of leverage in this situation for us to find partners to work with on this issue.

Let's take a couple of more questions.

MR. JADE: My name is Jade; I'm a student at the George Washing University. I just have a question regarding the new threat. So before it was a state problem, it was a state concern. So now our new threat is from within. I just wanted to know, you said our little presence of CIA on the ground, our small intelligence on the ground was a big problem. And I just wanted to know if the new issue could be like better handled or better resolved if we had more intelligence and what role the intelligence is playing now with our new development problems.

MR. RIEDEL: Let's take a couple of questions and then we'll close out because we're reaching close to the witching hour here. Right down in front.

MS. GIOVANNI: Amanda Giovanni, DDTC. You mentioned that it was a lucky coincidence of the end of the Cold War and beginning of the Gulf War. In the intelligence community we don't believe in lucky or coincidences. On September 11, 1991 President George Bush the first said to Congress and the American people, this is the beginning of a new world order. That combined with the Iran Contra happening and us supporting Saddam during the Irani-Iraq war, do you think that Saddam saw that in his mind as we were calling the Kurds to uprise and revolutionize against him, and that was the support that he got? And also for some of Bin Laden in Saudi Arabia, that was his statement that said they're going to take over the Saudi Kingdom. And as you know, we were attacked on September 11. So I'd like to hear your views on that.

MR. RIEDEL: One more over there.

MR. VIDIKOL: Hi, I'm Nikolai Vidikol from the Embassy of Denmark. I'd

like to go back to the regional dimension and hear your take on the question of the implications of the UN deal, obviously with voices stressing the need to push back maybe even harder on potential increased destabilizing activities from Iran and others being more hopeful for some kind of rapprochement between the Saudis and Iranians and so on. Thanks.

MR. RIEDEL: Ken?

MR. POLLACK: Sure, I'll say something about each of the three. And I'll start -- I'm going to address the intelligence question to you, but I will start by saying we always want more intelligence, the more intelligence the better. The problem is that there is no such thing as every having enough intelligence. And we can't allow the lack of intelligence, the lack of the ideal piece of information or the perfect picture to stop us from making decisions. And that for me is a very important lesson. And unfortunately I have seen in my career administrations that refuse to make a decision because they kept wanting better intelligence because they kept thinking that somehow if they only knew the answer to this question it would allow them to make the right choice. And the problem is in the world that we live in there -- and especially the questions that senior policy makers are forced to answer, there aren't perfect answers to any questions. That's why they have to make those decisions, that's why they're -- pardon the cliché -- paid the big bucks, is because there are only imperfect answers. So, yes, great to have more intelligence and that will help, but that's not really the solution to our problems in the Middle East.

I'll take the Kurdish piece. And I'm just going to be very straight forward. I don't know what Saddam was thinking because I've never seen it anywhere in the record. I wouldn't be surprised -- you know, what we do know is that he did believe that the United States continued to back the Kurds and was going to back Kurdish

independence as another way to get him, as another way to weaken him. And he went back to the American support to the Kurds in the 1970s, right, as the proof that this was the case. So again I don't know of any information in the archives, I've never seen it revealed, about, you know, his thinking specifically about that, but it wouldn't surprise me at all.

And then to the last question about, you know, the regional piece. Again I have to start -- and many of you have heard me talk about this -- I have to start any answer to any question about Iran by saying I don't know and it depends. (Laughter) We don't know how the Iranians are going to react to the deal. My guess -- I've written this in many places -- is that the Iranians are going to keep doing exactly what they're doing because my sense has been that the leadership sees the deal as transactionally. You know, this is a line that I used, and my friend Karim Sadjadpour of course made it more profound by pointing out the difference, you know, we saw it as transformational, they see it as transactional. I don't think they were ever expecting the nuclear deal would affect their regional status one way or the other. I think that this is a very straight deal for them, sanctions relief for limits on their nuclear program, that's it. I think they will continue doing what they are going to do. If that is the case I think that that creates some very significant challenges for the United States because what they are doing in the region is not good, it is mostly unhelpful to us. Not everywhere, there are places where they are being helpful or sort of helpful. That's the Iranians, there's nothing straight forward about it. But nevertheless there is a lot of stuff that they're doing that's unhelpful. And if that's the case I also worry, or put it this way, I'm concerned that we may need to signal to the Iranians that we're not walking away from the region. And first I just hope we aren't walking away from the region as part of the deal, that's part of it, but I do worry if they're going to wonder if we're walking away. If we're going to use this as I keep

saying as a get out of the Middle East free card. If that is the case we will need to push back on them somewhere.

In addition I'm very concerned about how our regional allies act, particularly the GCC. As we've already seen in Yemen, but it is their history, when they are fearful they lash out, they overreact, they get in Iran's face in ways that really they're not equipped to do. And so again I think that we're going to need to show them that we're serious about not letting Iran run the table as they are fearful. That too I think will require us to push back. I don't think that anything we proposed at Camp David had, you know, really a bit of impact on the GCC states. You know, my -- if we need to push back is do it in Syria not in Yemen, because as Bruce points out that's not where our interests lie, it won't be helpful to Yemen. But also not in Iraq because in Iraq we actually need the Iranians and Iraq is too fragile to withstand a U.S.-Iranian war over their soil.

MR. RIEDEL: I just want to make one final point. First, thank you, Ken, for coming here today and sharing your thoughts. (Audio interruption) I referred to during the Gulf War as my secret weapon in some places. As some in the audience will remember, through the fall of 1990 we were in a constant pissing contest between the CIA and DIA over how many divisions Iraq had in the Kuwait theater of operations. We turned out to be 100 percent right in every case. At one point I was sent by the management of the Central Intelligence Agency, which didn't have the courage to go themselves (laughter) down to the Pentagon to explain why we were consistently smarter than they were, and I was confronted with the accusation that you obviously have a source in Baghdad which you are not sharing with us, which is a pretty serious accusation to make. I said no, I don't have a source in Baghdad, I have Ken Pollack. (Laughter) But I had a lot of other really great help on that as well.

The last point I would leave you with is I think we've demonstrated today

the pivotal role of 1990-1991. Another way to think about it is inadvertently in 1990 and '91 we helped create a culture of dependency in the Middle East, a sense that if there is a problem the Americans will fix it, not always well, not always on time, and often in a clumsy counterproductive way, but we can engage in dangerous, foolhardy adventures confident that at the end of the day Washington will come over the horizon and straighten it out. I think that culture of dependency is very, very dangerous and I hope that the President in his remarks about understanding the lack of good governance in the region also understands that he is too often expected to fix problems for which there is no made in America solution to. The wrong answer of course is to simply wash our hands of this and say forget about it, you know, we don't need the Middle East anymore. We unfortunately can't walk away from it as much as we might want to walk away from it. But we also can't continue to encourage a culture of dependency that sees the United States as the ultimate solution to all of the Middle East's problems.

On that note, thank you very much for coming to this reunion. And who knows, we'll do another one in five more years. Thank you. (Applause)

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