



THE CENTER ON LAW AND SECURITY AT THE NYU SCHOOL OF LAW
presents:

IRAQ, IRAN, AND BEYOND

AMERICA FACES THE FUTURE

JANUARY 24, 2007



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The Center on Law and Security is a unique kind of think tank, bringing influential practitioners and intellectuals together to debate matters of critical importance to global stability. To the end, the Center's frequent conferences include professors, policy experts, journalists, officials, and those engaged in the daily practice of national security. The diversity of our participants provides rare insights into the nation's political and cultural life with the goal of inspiring new policy solutions at home and abroad.

This conference, "Iraq, Iran, and Beyond," is the second in our *America Faces the Future* series. The Center assembled leading experts to discuss the potential regional consequences of current American foreign policy decisions in the Middle East. Our participants focused to a large extent on the future role of the U.S. in Iraq, on Iran's nuclear ambitions, and on the threats to regional peace and security posed by the Taliban and al Qaeda. The speakers shared a number of common themes, including the United States' lack of information and understanding about Arab and Muslim cultures, the fragility of alliances, and the increasing destabilization of the Middle East. There was some consensus that aggressive diplomacy, founded upon well-informed and realistic assessments of the balance-of-power and strategic complexities in the region, offers an opportunity for a constructive route forward.

These edited proceedings represent the Center's effort to contribute to the enhanced understanding required for the public to understand the challenges that lay ahead. We also hope that they will help enable politicians and diplomats to craft wise and constructive agendas, both now and in the future.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Karen J. Greenberg". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Karen J. Greenberg
Executive Director

IRAQ, IRAN, AND BEYOND

AMERICA FACES THE FUTURE

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Daniel Benjamin was named director of the Center on the United States and Europe and a senior fellow in Foreign Policy Studies at the Brookings Institution in December 2006. His scholarly interests include American foreign policy, European affairs, terrorism, the Middle East and South Asia. Together with Steven Simon, Benjamin has written two books. *The Age of Sacred Terror* (Random House, 2002) was named a *New York Times* Notable Book of 2002 and won the Arthur Ross Book Award. *The Next Attack: The Failure of the War on Terror and a Strategy for Getting it Right* (Holt/Times Books, 2005) was named a *Washington Post* Best Book of 2005.

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Patrick Clawson is deputy director for research at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. He has published Op-Ed articles in major newspapers including *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The Washington Post*. In addition to his

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Steve Coll is a staff writer at *The New Yorker*. His professional awards include a Pulitzer Prize for explanatory journalism for his series, with David A. Vise, about the SEC in 1990. His South Asia correspondence won the 1992 Livingston Award for outstanding foreign reporting. He received the 2000 Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Award for his coverage of the civil war in Sierra Leone, as well as the Overseas Press Club Award for international magazine writing. His latest book, *Ghost Wars*, won the 2005 Pulitzer Prize for general non-fiction, as well as the Council on Foreign Relations' Arthur Ross award for the best book on foreign affairs during the last two years.

Steven Cook is the Douglas Dillon fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations. He is an expert on Arab and Turkish politics as well as on U.S.-Middle East policy. He is the author of *Ruling, But Not Governing: The Military and Political Development in Egypt, Algeria, and Turkey* (Johns Hopkins University Press, forthcoming). He has published widely in a variety of foreign policy journals, opinion magazines, and newspapers including *Foreign Affairs*, *Foreign Policy*, *Journal of Democracy*, *The Weekly Standard*, *The New Republic Online*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Financial Times*, and *The International Herald Tribune*. He is also a frequent commentator on radio and television.

Noah Feldman is the Cecilia Goetz Professor of Law at the New York University School of Law and an adjunct senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations. He specializes in constitutional studies, with particular emphasis on the relationship between law and religion, constitutional design, and the history of legal theory. Feldman is a contributing writer for *The New York Times Magazine* and the author of three books: *Divided By God: America's Church-*

State Problem and What We Should Do About It (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005); *What We Owe Iraq: War and the Ethics of Nation Building* (Princeton University Press, 2004); and *After Jihad: America and the Struggle for Islamic Democracy* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003).

Fawaz Gerges holds the Christian A. Johnson Chair in International Affairs and Middle Eastern Studies at Sarah Lawrence College. He is a senior analyst and regular commentator for ABC News and a commentator for *Morning Edition* on NPR. He appears on many television and radio networks throughout the world, including CNN, CBS, NPR, BBC, and Al Jazeera. He is the author of *Journey of the Jihadist: Inside Muslim Militancy* (Harcourt Press, 2006), and *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global* (Cambridge University Press, 2005). His books also include: *America and Political Islam: Clash of Interests or Clash of Cultures?* (Cambridge University Press, 1999); *The Superpowers and the Middle East: Regional and International Politics, 1955-1967* (Oxford and Westview Press, 1994); and *The Clinton Administration's Approach Toward Islamist Movements* (The Council on Foreign Relations: New York, 1999).

Karen J. Greenberg is the executive director of the Center on Law and Security. She is the editor of *Al Qaeda Now* (Cambridge University Press 2005) and *The Torture Debate in America* (Cambridge University Press, 2006) and co-editor of *The Torture Papers: The Road to Abu Ghraib* (Cambridge University Press, 2005). She is a frequent writer and commentator on issues related to national security, terrorism, and torture and has authored numerous articles on the United States and Europe during World War II.

Stephen Holmes is a faculty research advisor at the Center on Law and Security and the Walter E. Meyer Professor of Law at the New York University School of Law. His fields of specialization include the history of liberalism, the disappointments of democratization after communism, and the difficulty of combating terrorism within the limits of liberal constitutionalism. His new book, *The Matador's Cape: America's Reckless Response to the War on Terror*, will be published in the spring of 2007.

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Farhad Kazemi is a professor of politics and Middle Eastern studies at New York University. A leading scholar on issues of the Middle East, Kazemi is a member of the Advisory Group for Public Diplomacy in the Arab and Muslim World, appointed in 2003. He is affiliated with several notable organizations, including having served as president of the Middle East Studies Association and the Society for Iranian Studies. Among his many accomplishments, Kazemi is a leading member of several organizations including the American Political Science Association, the International Studies Association, the International Society of Political Psychology, the International Political Science Association, the Council on Foreign Relations, and the Atlantic Council.

Colonel W. Patrick Lang is a retired senior officer of U.S. Military Intelligence and U.S. Army Special Forces (The Green Berets). He was trained and educated as a specialist in the Middle East by the U.S. Army and served in that region for many years. He was the first professor of the Arabic language at the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York. In the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), he was the defense intelligence officer for the Middle East, South Asia and terrorism, and later the first director of the Defense Humint [human intelligence] Service. For his service in the DIA, he was awarded the Presidential Rank of Distinguished Executive, the equivalent of a British knighthood. He is an analyst and consultant for many television and radio broadcasts, among them the *The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer* on PBS.

Dafna Linzer is a national security correspondent at *The Washington Post*, where she focuses on nonproliferation and intelligence. Before joining *The Post*, she spent a decade as a foreign correspondent for the Associated Press, based in Jerusalem and at the United Nations. She won the U.N.'s 2005 Gold

Medal for international reporting for her coverage of Iran's nuclear program and the Bush administration's policies on Iran.

Salameh Nematt is the Washington bureau chief of *Al-Hayat* international Arab daily (London) and the LBC, the Lebanon-based Arab satellite channel. Throughout his journalistic career, he has contributed to several Arabic, English and other foreign language publications, including *The Economist*, *Middle East*, *Jane's Defence Weekly*, *Mideast Mirror*, *Die Zeit*, *Newsweek*, BBC World Service (English), DPA, UPI, Oxford Analytica, as well as international broadcast media such as BBC World, ITV News, ABC news, PBS, CBC radio and TV, Al-Jazeera, Al-Arabiya and Al-Hurra.

Paul Pillar is a visiting professor and member of the core faculty of the Security Studies Program in the Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University. He retired in 2005 from a 28-year career in the U.S. intelligence community, in which his last position was national intelligence officer for the Near East and South Asia. He is the author of *Negotiating Peace and Terrorism and U.S. Foreign Policy*.

Barnett Rubin is the director of studies and senior fellow at the Center on International Cooperation at New York University. He is currently deputy chair of the Conflict Prevention and Peace Forum, a member the Steering Committee of Human Rights Watch/Europe and Central Asia, the Executive Board of Human Rights Watch/Asia, the Board of the Open Society Institute's Central Eurasia Project, the *Conseil Scientifique of the Fondation Médecins Sans Frontières*, and the Board of the International League for Human Rights. Rubin is the author of *Blood on the Doorstep: The Politics of Preventing Violent Conflict* (2002). Among the publications he has authored, co-authored, or edited are *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan: State Formation and Collapse in the International System* (2002; first edition 1995) and *Calming the Ferghana Valley: Development and Dialogue in the Heart of Central Asia* (1999).

Gary Sick is a senior research scholar at the Middle East Institute at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs and an adjunct professor of international affairs at SIPA. He is also a member of the board of Human Rights Watch in

New York and founding chair of the Advisory Committee of Human Rights Watch/Middle East. He is the author of *All Fall Down: America's Tragic Encounter With Iran* (Random House, 1985) and *October Surprise: America's Hostages in Iran and the Election of Ronald Reagan* (Random House, 1991).

Steven Simon is the Hasib J. Sabbagh senior fellow for Middle Eastern studies at the Council on Foreign Relations. He is the co-author of *The Age of Sacred Terror* (Random House, 2002), which won the Council on Foreign Relations 2004 Arthur Ross Book Award, and co-editor of *Iraq at the Crossroads: State and Society in the Shadow of Regime Change* (Oxford University Press/IISS, 2003). He is also the co-author of *Building a Successful Palestinian State* (Rand Corporation, 2005) and *The Arc: A Formal Structure for a Palestinian State* (Rand Corporation, 2005). Most recently, he co-authored *The Next Attack* (Henry Holt, 2005), which examines the evolution of the jihad since September 11, 2001, and America's response, and was a finalist for the Lionel Gelber Prize in 2006.

Craig Unger is an author and analyst. He appears frequently as an analyst on terrorism, Saudi-American relations and the oil industry on CNN, the ABC Radio Network and many other broadcast outlets. He has served as deputy editor of *The New York Observer* and was the editor of *Boston* magazine. He has written about George H. W. Bush and George W. Bush for *The New Yorker*, *Esquire*, and *Vanity Fair*.

Lawrence Wright is a fellow at the Center on Law and Security, an author and screenwriter, as well as a staff writer for *The New Yorker* magazine. His book on al Qaeda, *The Looming Tower* (Knopf, 2006), has been named one of the top ten books of 2006 by both *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* and was nominated for the 2006 National Book Award. A portion of that book, "The Man Behind Bin Laden," was published in *The New Yorker* and won the 2002 Overseas Press Club's Ed Cunningham Award for Best Magazine Reporting. He has also won the National Magazine Award for Reporting as well as the John Bartlow Martin Award for Public Interest Magazine Journalism. Currently, he is working on a script for MGM about John O'Neill, the former head of the FBI's office of counterterrorism in New York, who died on 9/11.

INTRODUCTION BY PROFESSOR GARY SICK

It is commonly said that the United States has no Middle East strategy. That may not be true much longer. The United States has begun to establish the framework of a new coalition strategy in the Middle East that could rebuild tattered alliances, shift attention away from the Iraqi catastrophe, and provide a touchstone for policymaking that could appeal across party lines.

The organizing principle of the new strategy is confrontation with and containment of Shia influence – specifically Iranian – wherever it appears in the region. The United States' allies in this endeavor are Israel and the traditional (authoritarian) governments of predominantly Sunni Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan. One unique feature of this otherwise unremarkable set of long-standing friendly governments is the possibility that the Arab states may subordinate their hostility to Israel, at least temporarily, out of their even greater fear of Iranian/Shia dominance of the region.

One of the products of the United States' armed intervention in the Middle East since 9/11 has been a shift in the fundamental balance of power. In the name of fighting terrorism, the United States empowered Iran. By removing the Taliban (Iran's greatest threat to the east), then removing the government of Saddam Hussein (its deadly enemy to the west), and finally installing an Iran-friendly Shia government in Baghdad for the first time in history, the U.S. virtually assured that Iran – essentially without raising a finger – would emerge as a power center rivaled only by Israel. It is one of the great ironies that U.S. policy would inadvertently make it possible for these two non-Arab states on the eastern and western flank of the Arab Middle East to dominate the traditional Arab heartland. The process was further accelerated by U.S. democratization policies that put its traditional Arab allies on the defensive.

Although these were unintended consequences of U.S. policy, the effects dismayed friends and foes alike. From Iran's perspective, it was a strategic gift of unparalleled proportions, tarnished only by the fact that its two major enemies had been replaced by a pugnacious U.S. military giant looking for new worlds to conquer. That tarnish was gradually removed as the United States found itself increasingly bogged down in the Iraqi quagmire, with a public fast growing disillusioned with the ugly realities of empire building in a hostile and unforgiving environment. Erstwhile U.S. allies in the Persian Gulf, Jordan, Egypt, and elsewhere privately viewed U.S. actions as a failure at best and a betrayal at worst. They were ripe for a change.

The origins of the new cooperative undertaking are murky, but they appear to have been galvanized by the Israel/Hezbollah war in Lebanon during the summer of 2006. This event was perceived by Israel, the United States, and the Sunni Arab governments in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan as an Iranian attempt to extend its power into the Levant by challenging both Israel and the Sunni Arab leadership. Whether Iran in fact had any direct control over the decision by Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of Hezbollah, to kidnap Israeli soldiers is far from clear; however, the perception of growing Iranian strength and reach – a fundamental shift in the Middle East balance of power – was unquestioned and hugely menacing to the traditional power brokers of the region. They initially had to swallow their words of discontent as Hezbollah acquitted itself very creditably and entranced the Arab “street.” But once the war was over and Hezbollah began challenging the predominantly Sunni and Christian Lebanese government of Fouad Siniora, their initial misgivings reemerged.

In the following months, we have seen a number of indicators of a new coordinated policy approach. Senior Saudi officials have met privately with equally senior Israeli officials, which was itself a remarkable new development. The content of the discussions has not been revealed, but one of the participants is rumored to be Prince Bandar bin Sultan, the former Saudi ambassador to Washington and presently Secretary-General of the Saudi National Security Council, one of the architects of the U.S./Saudi collaboration against the Soviets in Afghanistan, and a wheeler-dealer of legendary reputation. During the same time period, Bandar began a series of private visits to Washington, meeting with U.S. officials at the highest level. Apparently these meetings occurred without the knowledge of the Saudi ambassador, who abruptly resigned after the information became public.

The United States successfully shepherded a resolution through the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) denouncing Iran's nuclear program and imposing limited sanctions. It was unanimously adopted, and it gives Iran 60 days to change its policies or the issue will be revisited. In President Bush's speech on January 10, 2007, announcing a troop increase in Iraq, he focused a surprising amount of attention on Iran. The announced increase of the U.S. naval presence in the Gulf region together with the supply of Patriot anti-missile batteries to the Gulf were widely interpreted as warning signals to Iran. The United States is taking an expansive view of the UNSC sanctions by prohibiting a major Iranian bank from operating in the U.S. and by leading a campaign to persuade others to do the same. In the meanwhile, Israel has maintained a drumbeat of criticism of Iran's nuclear program, including suggestions that it may be called upon to launch a strike against Iran on its own if no one else is willing to act.

There have not been (and probably will not be) any formal announcements, but the accumulating evidence suggests that a major new strategy is being pursued. It is still in its early days, but here is my own interpretation of the division of labor that seems to be emerging:

The United States will:

- Drop any further talk about democratization in the Middle East;
- Use its influence in the United Nations Security Council to keep the pressure on Iran (and to a lesser extent Syria) with sanctions and coordinated international disapproval;
- Provide military cover for the Arab Gulf states as they take a more confrontational position vis-à-vis Iran (Patriot missiles, additional naval aircraft, etc.);
- Undertake a more vigorous diplomatic effort to find a settlement of the Arab/Israeli dispute, recognizing that even limited visible progress will provide diplomatic cover for the Arab states if they are to cooperate more closely with Israel;
- In Lebanon, provide covert support for efforts to support the Siniora government to thwart Hezbollah, probably in close cooperation with Israeli intelligence;
- Organize dissident movements in Iran, primarily among ethnic groups along the periphery or other targets of opportunity, to distract and potentially even destabilize the government in Tehran; and
- will do the following in Iraq:
 - (1) keep attention focused on Iran, including raids and general harassment of its representatives;
 - (2) keep U.S. forces in country to prevent the situation from descending into a full-scale civil war or a breakup of the country (or, as Henry Kissinger presents it in a recent article, combining both points: "They [U.S. troops] are there as an expression

of the American national interest to prevent the Iranian combination of imperialism and fundamentalist ideology from dominating a region on which the energy supplies of the industrial democracies depend”); and

(3) consider engineering a more Sunni-friendly government, especially if Prime Minister Maliki is unwilling or unable to control the Shia militias.

The Arab states (the six Gulf Cooperation Council states, plus Jordan and Egypt, or “6+2”) will:

- Provide major funding and political support to the Siniora government in Lebanon and work to undercut Hezbollah’s influence and image;
- Attempt to woo (or threaten) Syria away from its alliance with Iran with promises of money and support of Syrian efforts to regain the Golan Heights;
- Provide facilities and funding to assist the various U.S. initiatives above; and
- Attempt to bring down the price of oil, which will remove some political pressures on Washington and make life more difficult for Iran.

Israel will:

- Provide intelligence support to U.S. (and potentially Arab) anti-Hezbollah efforts in Lebanon;
- Keep international attention focused on the Iranian threat as a uniquely dangerous situation that may even demand Israeli military intervention;
- Use long-standing Israeli contacts, especially with the Kurds in Iraq and Iran, to foment opposition to the Tehran government; and
- Be prepared to make sufficient concessions on the Palestinian issue and the Golan to provide at least the perception of significant forward motion toward a comprehensive settlement.

A tripartite strategy of this sort has a number of appealing qualities. By keeping attention focused as fully as possible on Iran as the true threat in the region, it tends to change the subject and distract public attention from the Iraqi disaster. It provides something of real value to each of the participants, while most of the distasteful parts of the plan are plausibly deniable so they will not have to be explained or justified in great detail to skeptical observers in any of the countries involved. In the United States, the antipathy to Iran as a result of the hostage crisis in 1979-81, among other things, is so strong that such a strategy is likely to have widespread appeal to Democrats and Republicans alike, with enthusiastic endorsement from pro-Israel lobbying groups.

Perhaps most important of all, it provides a single, agreed-upon enemy that can serve as the organizing point of reference for policies throughout the region. Like the Cold War, this can be used to explain and rationalize a wide range of policies that otherwise might be quite unpopular. The holy grail of U.S. Middle East policy has always been the hope of persuading both Arab and Israeli allies to agree on a common enemy and thereby relegate their mutual hostilities to a subordinate role. Trying to get the Arabs to conclude that the Soviet Union was a more immediate threat than Israel was always a losing proposition, though it did not prevent several U.S. administrations from trying. But Iran, as a large, neighboring, non-Arab, radical Shia state, may fulfill that role more convincingly.

The advent of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in Iran, with his extravagant rhetoric and populist posturing, makes that a much easier sell than it was under President Mohammad Khatami. More than anyone else, Ahmadinejad is responsible for the appeal of this strategy. He has done immense – and perhaps irreparable – damage to Iran’s image in the world and its genuine foreign policy objectives. The fact that Iranian parliamentarians are

banding together in opposition to him and his policies is evidence that this has not gone unobserved in Tehran, but it may be too late.

Will the strategy work? Well, it does *not* necessarily mean an immediate recourse to military conflict, as some are predicting. The underlying fundamentals have not changed: none of the tripartite protagonists stands to gain by an actual war. Especially after the Iraqi experience, it is widely understood in Washington that a war with a country as large and as nationalistic as Iran would be immensely costly and almost certainly futile. Moreover, there is no halfway solution. You cannot do a quick air strike and realistically expect it to end there. The situation would inevitably escalate and ultimately require boots on the ground. That is a bridge too far for the United States at this juncture. However, the strategy is deliberately provocative and risks prompting a belligerent Iranian response (or perhaps it is deliberately looking for a belligerent response) that could quickly escalate into an armed exchange. So the threat of military action is not insignificant.

Will the new policy persuade Iran to change its policies? Probably not, although knowledgeable Iranian political observers say that Iran is actually ripe for a deal that would include both the nuclear and Iraqi issues. Iran will have a celebration in a few weeks about its initial success in running a linked series of centrifuge cascades. That would be the moment when they could accept at least a temporary suspension of enrichment activities without renouncing their national “right to enrich.” If the Europeans (and Americans) are interested in moving to a settlement of the nuclear issue, that would be the moment to revisit and/or creatively reformulate the array of proposals – Iranian and European – that are already on the table.

The new tripartite strategy is not really about Iran, however, but rather about the three protagonists. It brings them together, gives them a common purpose, offers an alternative to the current misery of reporting about Iraq, and provides a focus for future planning that might gain a wide measure of support. Unfortunately, that suggests that actually finding a negotiated solution with Iran is very much a secondary priority.

OPENING REMARKS BY COLONEL W. PATRICK LANG

Most of the difficulties that we have experienced in the Middle East are of our own creation. They are largely the product of a lack of comprehension of the situation we are facing. Several years ago, at a seminar in Washington, I offered the opinion that the major problems we have in Iraq are caused by the fact that we did not intervene in the Iraq of the Iraqis – the Iraq that they lived in, understood in their guts, and provided the basis for their existence – but instead we had invaded the Iraq of our dreams. This fact is beginning to become more and more evident. The Iraq that we entered in 2003 was largely a construct of a lot of well-meaning people who simply either could not see or refused to see that the country was not what it was expected to be.

It may be difficult for you to understand how America’s current situation in Iraq came about, but I think that it is very simple. You see the results of it everyday. The president of the United States has now admitted that there were many mistakes made in the early days in Iraq and perhaps in the not-so-early days. In many ways, these mistakes continue to occur. I do not think for a minute that people willfully intended to do things that were egregious and would lead to disastrous results, as has been the consequence in many cases. It

is just that they failed to understand what was going on.

I continue to be asked by the U.S. Army and the Marine Corps to try to explain to them, and to consult with them, about why it is that their expectations in Iraq are so seldom met with regard to how the Iraqis are going to behave and what the relationships are between different groups. If you talk to them about the kind of things that I am going to talk to you about today, in the end some senior officer with two or three stars on his shoulder says something like, “So this culture thing is really important, is that right? Is that what you’re saying?” And you hesitate to agree, because the “culture thing” has come to have a bad name in the last couple of years in academic circles. I belong to the board of a foundation here in New York. I have noticed that the academic people who are on the board – when they are voting on proposals for research and matters of that kind – will often say, “Well, surely this is not just an appeal to the culture argument.” There is a handicap in using that term.

“The Iraq that we entered in 2003 was largely a construct of well-meaning people who could not see or refused to see that the country was not what it was expected to be.”

But what I mean by culture is the totality of the worldview of the people of a particular area, or an ethnic group, or an ethno-religious community. It is based upon their history; their religious sciences; the economics of their area; their tribal customs, if there are any; and local laws derived from the experience of this people over time. All of these things wrap together to produce a certain worldview.

I think that the basic error we have committed in going into a number of these places is believing that our own particularly American attitude toward culture is predominant in the world. We have a tendency to believe, through the experience of the melting pot in the United States that has produced a fairly homogenous culture throughout the country, that there is a certain common thread to the existence of humanity, and that everybody is basically the same underneath. We tend to believe that, while there may be circumstances involved that make people appear to be different on the surface, underneath everybody basically wants the same thing. We believe that if you scratch the surface of any human being anywhere, you will find someone remarkably similar to anyone who lives in New York City, or Phoenix, or wherever it is you want to talk about.

We believe that if that inner person is released, he will automatically take up the kind of actions and have the kind of attitudes that are expected by us, because we think that the kind of people that we are is becoming the norm for humanity around the world. In other words, we think that the evidences of their cultures are superficial and transitory, perhaps evidence of backwardness, perhaps imposed on them by oppressors such as Saddam Hussein, and that if the shell of apparent local difference is shattered, these people will quickly emerge into the bright uplands of mankind’s progress toward the future and look remarkably like Americans. I think that we tend to believe deep in our hearts, as the crazy colonel did on the beach in *Apocalypse Now*, that inside every Vietnamese there is an American trying to get out.

I assure you, having known a lot of Vietnamese, that this is not true. It has not been true in any of the places that I have served in around the world. I spent a long time in the Army in Special Forces (we were kind of traveling, armed anthropologists), in military intelligence, and in international business. I have found that people are profoundly different in many places. It is true that they hunger, they lust, they want to go to sleep. They want to have

children, and they want shelter. Yes. But above that level of existence, there is a great variety of difference in human beings by group. It is not superficial at all. These differences are quite deeply seated and the expectation that you could easily change someone's culture, especially a group culture, is probably illusory.

It is easy to make the mistake of thinking that changing a culture will be easy to do, because there will always be somebody who apparently belongs to that culture willing to tell you that it is going to be easy, for a variety of reasons.

In many cases, people just do not understand their own situation very well. In particular, I am referring to those individuals who have been acculturated toward the West, usually toward the United States, in such a way that they are very willing to tell you how much they are like you. They are usually seeking some advantage; a visa, a contract, or something of the sort. In many cases, people actually know what it is they ought to be. They were taught in school. For example, if you ask almost any Iraqi, "Is Iraq a unitary state? Are the Iraqis one people through and through?" almost any Iraqi will say yes, because they were taught for long periods of time that that is what they should think. The fact that it is not true in its accomplishment is something they are just not going to tell you, period, and they do not see any reason why they should.

We accepted an awful lot of testimony from émigrés before our intervention in Iraq, and a lot of what they told us turned out to be absolute rubbish."

The terms "emic" and "etic" are very important in dealing with this issue. I was actually trained as an anthropologist. The emic data in this instance is that which people will tell you about themselves. The etic data is that which you come to believe is true about them after careful study, including study of the emic data. This is a very important distinction which I have always tried to teach to intelligence analysts, and now I try to teach to colonels and generals as well – that you cannot blindly accept what people say about themselves or else you'll end up in a bag somewhere.

A very capable American officer assured me when he came out of command a couple of years ago that it was not important whether Iraqis were Sunni Arabs, Shia Arabs, or Kurds; that they were all Iraqis together. I said, "How do you know that?"

"They tell me that, everyday."

"Has it occurred to you that it might not be true?"

"Why would I think that?" he asked. "They know their own country."

It is a big mistake to accept an opinion like that. Among the things you have to be very careful of is the testimony of émigrés. We accepted an awful lot of testimony from émigrés before our intervention in Iraq, and a lot of what they told us turned out to be absolute rubbish. Not only did they have their own view of what their country was like whenever it was that they had last seen it, but they were also quite willing to tell you whatever was necessary to bring them back to their homeland, and into power.

Whenever I had a chance to vote on whether or not an analyst was going to be hired or promoted, I always used to look for certain things in his background. I looked for knowledge of history, philosophy, language, the religious sciences of the area – all of the things that make up the totality of a human being's perception of his environment in a group pattern of thought. When you are dealing with a really foreign culture, you have to be very careful not to try to apply the models derived from Western social science in a blind and

oblivious way. If I am going to hire a political scientist for this sort of task, I want to see what is inside his degree.

I was at Fort Leavenworth a couple of months ago, the great schoolhouse of the U.S. Army out on the frozen plains of Kansas. I was participating in a program to train anthropological advisors for Army brigade commanders in the field in Afghanistan. Think about that. They are going to give somebody a quickie course in anthropology pertaining to Afghanistan and then send them to the wilds of eastern Afghanistan to advise some infantry colonel as to the tribal customs of Pashtuns.

That was an interesting thing, but what struck me the most was that, in addition to having Pashtuns, anthropologists, and others who had served with these tribes for their instructors, they also had some very classy political scientists from various universities. What I noticed was an effort to take the Pashtuns, who were the equivalent of square pegs, and hammer them and their customs into round holes that fit the frames of reference and the terms of whatever discipline the instructor speaking at the time came from.

And, of course, it does not work. People have tried this endlessly; over and over again. You can take, for example, the issue of Arabic grammar as taught in the English language. If you study Arabic in an English-speaking environment, you will find that the parts of speech and the structure of sentences are described in terms familiar to you. There are supposedly verbs, noun, objects, case endings, and adjectives. That is all rubbish. The things that are described in these terms in English are not really those things at all. They are something completely different.

You have to be careful that you do not hammer the total knowledge of all these people into little categories that you are comfortable with, but which do not mean anything at all in terms of trying to understand them.

My advice to anybody who wants to successfully deal with really foreign cultures is to start young – at about 20, go out there and live with them for five or six years and immerse yourself in the culture. I know that is not possible for everyone, so my real advice is to soak yourself in all of the components of their culture until you get to the point where you can walk in their shoes. If you cannot walk in their shoes, then you do not really understand what they think, and you never will. You will always be guessing about what they are thinking, and what their real motivations are.

Carl von Clausewitz would say that you need to saturate yourself in their ways of thinking, in the things they think about, and in their habits of thought to such an extent that knowledge becomes so thoroughly engrained that it becomes capability.

There are lots of examples of this in Arab culture – habits of speech; their habit of exaggeration, which is intended to give emphasis to anything; their demanding continual assurance of something before they believe it is really true; and their willingness to tell you “yes” when they mean “no.”

When I was defense attaché in Saudi Arabia, I dealt with an American Air Force major general who thought that the Saudis meant it every time they said “yes.” Most of the time, they meant “no.” They were just trying to get rid of him. He would tell me, “But they said ‘yes.’” I said to him, “If they come and tell you ‘yes’ two or three times, and insist on it, and they want to sign something about it, then they mean it.” The same is true about asking Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al Maliki for access to Sadr City. Those are things you have to guard against. You have to become a part-time member of their culture if you are to understand what it is that they are likely to do. It is possible to forecast what people are going to do in groups, but you have to achieve that state in which knowledge becomes capability.

PANEL ONE: THE PROXY WAR: IRAQ, SAUDI ARABIA, AND IRAN

Panelists: Patrick Clawson, Prof. Toby Craig Jones, Dafna Linzer, Lawrence Wright

Moderator: Steve Simon

Steve Simon:

In the summer of 2006, Israel and Hezbollah fought a war in Lebanon that was more conclusive for Washington than it was for the groups battling it out on the ground. In Washington, the war crystallized views among policymakers and others that there was actually something very much deeper going on in the Middle East. There was a fundamental realignment, and the summer war in Lebanon was the first battle fought between the emerging contenders in this new Middle East – the United States and its allies on the one hand, and Iran on the other.

This view found traction and was expressed in some rococo descriptions. Newt Gingrich, a former speaker of the House of Representatives, called it the beginning of World War III. Whether or not that is what one thinks it was, that is how people viewed it. The subsequent events in Iraq have tended to reinforce this view among people who held it to begin with. This is in part because there are two paradigms for understanding what is going on in Iraq (in Washington anyway; there are probably very different paradigms in New York).

The paradigms in Washington are essentially these; there is a moderate, civic-minded, nationalist political center in Baghdad that is yearning to breathe free. But outsiders in the form of al Qaeda and Iran are stoking extremist violence in order to prevent these moderates from self-actualization and the Iraqi state from achieving political maturity.

The other paradigm, of course, is that outsiders actually have very little to do with it; that the Iraqis have effectively been long-stripped of their ability to formulate a kind of normal politics. This is because Saddam Hussein had systematically destroyed civil society over the course of nearly 30 years. Twelve years of sanctions had decimated the

middle class, and the U.S. invasion had decapitated the government. So what was there to work with? That is the other paradigm.

I won't attempt to assess which paradigm is true. I just point them out because they illustrate the stakes, it seems to me, for those who are inclined to see an emerging realignment with the United States and its allies on the one side and Iran on the other. Allies of the United States within the region – principally the Sunni states – have jumped on this rather enthusiastically. But, of course, they are dealing with Islamist oppositions, so signing onto the great Sunni/Shia divide and demonizing Iran is like somebody running for City Council and going to Coney Island and eating kreplach and hot dogs – it is what you do to boost your prestige.

We have a great panel here that will help us get to the bottom of this interpretative morass. I hope that Patrick Clawson and Dafna Linzer will tell us about how the U.S. and Iran got to this point. It seems to me that everything was hunky dory in 2002 – the Iranians were cooperating with us in Afghanistan, and we had nothing but nice things to say about one another. And then a series of events beginning with a bombing in Saudi Arabia seemed to sour this. Now we find ourselves in this very perilous state.

Patrick Clawson:

You have spoken and written a great deal about what happened, Steve; namely that with the end of the Taliban regime and the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, Iran had achieved a great strategic breakthrough in the region, and they felt that they had great strategic strength. That, combined with the high price of oil, meant that Iran felt that it was impractical for the West to take action against them on the oil front, and that they had a great deal of income. They also felt that the breakdown

in the Arab-Israeli peace process empowered those who were closest to them.

So Iran felt emboldened, and a great many of the leaders of the Islamic Republic share the same objectives that Mahmoud Ahmadinejad states in stark terms, but they had long felt that those objectives are not realizable. Now they appeared to be realizable, and Iran pushed ahead, confident enough to brush off U.S. objections, and the United States therefore encountered great problems in dealing with them. That became extraordinarily apparent in the confrontation over the nuclear program, which Iran had long kept hidden, but which was revealed at about the same time.

"This campaign against Iranian influence in Iraq is essential to solving the Iraq problem. It is also essential to cementing our relationship with the Saudis."

That, then, is the overall background for the decisions taken by the United States over the last few months about how to engage with Iran, particularly the decision that the key theater of engagement will be Iraq. The administration's analysis of the problems facing our strategy in Iraq is that the Shia community lost patience, that Abu Musab al Zarqawi's efforts to provoke a war between Sunnis and Shia turned out to be a spectacularly successful strategy (unlike his earlier approaches), and that the fundamental problem that the United States faces in Iraq is Shia violence and not the Sunni insurgency. The administration feels that the Sunni insurgency is something that can be dealt with by the United States and its Iraqi allies, particularly if the Iraqi government gets more traction on the ground, which cannot happen until the Shia targeting of Sunnis for elimination stops.

Furthermore, the administration strongly senses that those who are primarily encouraging the Shia violence against random Sunnis are the most radical elements within the militias, and constitute only a small proportion of

those militias. (Twenty percent is often cited.) The administration senses that those radical militia members are doing this with the encouragement and support of the Iranians, who are interested in splitting those elements off and doing to the main militia movements what they did so successfully to the Amal movement in Lebanon in the early 1980s. Iran was able to provide political and material support for the most radical elements, which then organized within the larger Amal movement and later split off as a separate organization, Hezbollah. They were then able to carry out an internal civil war within the Shia community, to emerge victorious, and to dominate Shia politics in Lebanon to the point that Nabih Berri, the leader of Amal, is effectively reduced to being Hezbollah's spokesman. The U.S. strategy is to tell people like Moktada al Sadr that that is where their future lies, too, unless they join with us in cracking down on the Iran-supported Shia violence against Sunnis.

This campaign against Iranian influence in Iraq is essential to solving the Iraq problem. It is also essential to cementing our relationship with the Saudis, which has been rocky not just since 9/11 but for 15 years. The Saudis were not particularly eager to be close to the United States from the mid-1990s onward, certainly from the Khobar Towers bombing onward. It is really quite remarkable that, in many ways as a result of the Hezbollah/Israel war over the summer, the Saudis, in the view of the administration, have had an epiphany and have begun to view the region through an Iranian lens. At a time when the United States is unpopular and weak, the Saudis have decided to embrace the United States in the warmest way that they have in more than a decade. We see closer collaboration between the United States and Saudi Arabia on intelligence, military, and political matters.

This is also very much driven by a Saudi concern that the United States might not stand up to Iran. Seeing what is happening in Iraq, and that the United States is doing nothing about the Iranian influence there, the Saudis

are worried that perhaps the United States is going wobbly at the knees, and that it needs to be bucked up. Therefore we have such extraordinary scenes as Dick Cheney's trip to Saudi Arabia. Mr. Cheney is not somebody who particularly likes to travel, and he certainly does not like to take long plane trips just to go see a foreign head of state and then come right back. This was done quite expressly so that the Saudis could say to him, "Don't even think about talking to the Iranians and the Syrians." So the United States thinks that the strategy of going after the Iranian influence in Iraq will make a difference in reassuring Gulf allies, will reinforce the Saudi approach, and will help create greater regional pressure against Iran.

Finally, this approach of going after the Iranians' influence in Iraq offers some prospect of a positive effect on the Iranian nuclear program and on Iranian activities in general. It is hard to believe that it is coincidental that, after the passage of U.N. Security Council Resolution 1737 and two U.S. arrests of Iranian high officials within the space of three weeks, we see the Iranian press suddenly starting to criticize Mr. Ahmadinejad. This includes criticism from *Keyhan*, the main conservative newspaper that has always been among his biggest supporters, and had always been vicious about attacking anybody who criticized him. There have also been articles – whether in *Keyhan*, *Jomhouri Eslami*, *Hamshahri*, or on the radio – explicitly linking the criticism of Ahmadinejad to his overly aggressive approach toward the West on the nuclear issue.

This is very encouraging, because we have long been told that the nuclear issue was uncontroversial in Iran and that everyone supported it. Now it is a rare day when there are no articles in the Iranian press criticizing the president for endangering the country and encouraging the American bullies.

It was particularly telling that, after the American raid on what the Iranians described as a consulate in Irbil, the Iranian reaction was complete silence for four days. Ahmadinejad was in Venezuela at the time. The next day, he

and Hugo Chávez were together. Chávez stood up and delivered one of his diatribes against the United States. Ahmadinejad talked about the importance of economic cooperation and said nothing about the Irbil raid. So this more assertive approach against the Iranian presence in Iraq may also be helpful on the Iranian nuclear issue.

Dafna Linzer:

I will address a few things that Patrick said, and then go back to something that Steve mentioned in his introduction – a bombing in Saudi Arabia in May 2003 and how it has had an impact on our current situation.

In regard to what Patrick said about this U.S. strategy to get a little tougher with Iran, the hope is that it will cause the Iranians to back down on the nuclear program. That is, of course, one view. It does not take into account the possibility that Iran's reaction may be escalation. That is something that I know has concerned people inside the intelligence community and some areas of the Bush administration, and why it took quite a bit of time for people in the administration to come to the conclusion that this is the way they wanted to go.

"The United States went into Iraq and found itself in a world full of surprises. The Iranians went in with a very clear picture of what they wanted to accomplish."

There are many ways in which the Iranians could escalate inside Iraq. That could rapidly change the dynamic at a time when the U.S. military, and certainly the administration, are looking to calm things down. There is the Hezbollah issue, there is western Afghanistan. There are many ways in which the Iranians could hurt U.S. citizens and U.S. interests in the Gulf. Whether or not the strategy is definitely going to turn the Iranians in a different direction is up for discussion. So far I do not see a lot of evidence that that is a sure thing,

but that is certainly what this is built on.

The May 2003 bombing in Saudi Arabia was a big moment; it led to a break between the U.S. and the Iranians. There had been a great deal of quiet, but effective, cooperation after the September 11th attacks – cooperation in Afghanistan and cooperation on al Qaeda. The Iranians turned hundreds of al Qaeda fighters who had fled across their borders over to U.S. allies. They handed over photographs, fingerprints, and the names of every person that they had arrested coming across the border. This led to quite a bit of cooperation both privately on intelligence channels and diplomatically with Afghanistan.

Pat Lang's earlier comments about expectations, and the difference between how you see yourself and how others see you, are relevant here. There were a series of surprises for the Iranians throughout this process. They felt that they had been helpful on Afghanistan, and thus deserved to be rewarded, and yet were punished by speeches such as President Bush's State of the Union address in which he included them in "the axis of evil," an accusation which came in the middle of that cooperation. These sorts of things stopped and started the cooperation quite a bit, and certainly affected the Iranians' position on many issues.

They did feel, however, that in the run-up to the invasion of Iraq, they were on the same page as the United States, that the cooperation in regard to Afghanistan would continue in regard to Iraq, and that they could make some kind of deal. The Iranians agreed not to interfere with the invasion and kept that promise. They thought that they would get something out of it – possibly a deal with the Americans, better cooperation, or perhaps a swap of the al Qaeda high-value targets that they hold as bargaining chips (most believe) in exchange for some of the Iranian dissidents who are in a camp in Iraq. That deal did not go through, and a lot of this fell apart because of the May 2003 bombing in Saudi Arabia. There are some intelligence indications that one of the high-value targets who was in Iran at the time may have been connected somehow to the

bombing. As far as I know, the intelligence is not very firm but exists in some form or another. I think that is how things started to happen inside Iraq between the United States and Iran.

The United States went into Iraq and found itself in a world full of surprises. The Iranians went in with a very clear picture of what they wanted to accomplish. When you hear people in the administration talk about having U.S. troops embedded with Iraqi troops, you should know that the Iranians have been doing that for three years with Shiite militias. They have been fully embedded, providing logistics, weaponry, intelligence – anything they can to further the gains of the Shia in Iraq. So when you hear talk about being behind the curve on Iraq, this is certainly an area where the U.S. is vastly behind the curve and where the Iranians have moved ahead – frankly years ahead – of where the U.S. wants to be with the kind of influence they have.

In addition, the Iranians have made great gains in recruiting people in Iraq. They have their own intelligence station, which is about half the size of a C.I.A. station, and which gives them an enormous amount of influence and ability. They are focused on a single thing and are not as distracted as U.S. intelligence and U.S. troops.

That is where I think we are in Iraq. Patrick brought up the issue of Saudi Arabia, which is essential for all of the United States' Sunni Arab allies in the region. They are very nervous about the situation, and seem prepared to get into the mix as the Iranians have done, or at least want the United States to think that that's the case – that they could expand the conflict even wider if the United States does not get tougher with the Iranian influence inside Iraq.

The administration has been hesitant to do that. They have spent a lot of time trying not to do that, and trying to concentrate on the areas that were important to them when they first went into Iraq. The big focus was on the Sunnis, on the Baathists, the dead-enders, and so forth, and they did not see how significant

the Iranian influence with the Shiites was becoming or how the militias would end up becoming so violent and so aggressive in the insurgency.

I agree with Patrick that this is becoming the new front between the United States and Iran, and it is in the middle of the hottest battlefield in the world right now, which is significant. The U.S. strategy for dealing with the Iranians inside Iraq should not be confused with an Iraq policy or an Iraq strategy. It is an *Iran* strategy. As Patrick said, the idea is to encourage the Iranians to back down on their nuclear program. Even if people in the administration emphasize Iran's ties to terrorism, their relationship with Hezbollah, or any of their other interests in the region, it is their nuclear program that is at the top of the minds of the principals in the administration.

That is not because Iran is a year away from getting a bomb, but because they are on that track. U.S. intelligence still believes that Iran is about a decade away. Those estimates can change. You can put no stock in them or all of your stock in them. I am not sure that any intelligence estimates have rung true in a very long time, other than about the Soviet Union. But the estimates are there. I think that the Iranian nuclear program is struggling. The estimate never changes, no matter how many terrible centrifuges and poor quality arrangements they seem to put together. That is an important thing to note as well. But that is the number one issue for the administration – the nuclear program.

Steve Simon:

In his testimony to the Senate, Robert Gates, the new Secretary of Defense, raised the specter of regional war. He said that the cost of failure in Iraq would be "incalculable." He left it undefined, but the general idea is that if the U.S. were to pull out, everyone else would go in. Some of this thinking had been spurred, I suppose, by Nawaf Obaid, a Saudi royal family surrogate who wrote a piece in *The Washington Post* on November 29, 2006 about how the Saudis would have to move in.

Larry, I would like your perspective on

how the Saudis in particular see Iraq, their interests, and the region evolving following an American withdrawal. What could or would the Saudis do to protect their interests, given their own large Shia population, as well as their own domestic political interests in terms of their Sunni constituency?

Lawrence Wright:

This gets back to Pat Lang's comments about what people say about themselves and what we observe about their behavior. Nawaf Obaid is a mysterious figure. He is a security consultant who ostensibly worked for Prince Turki al-Faisal, who fired him after he wrote that Op-Ed piece in the *The Washington Post*.

Patrick Clawson:

Prince Turki ostensibly fired him.

Lawrence Wright:

Ostensibly fired him, yes. Perhaps we should use the word "ostensibly" in front of every active verb having to do with Saudi Arabia. In the Op-Ed piece, Obaid suggested that the Saudis would essentially invade Iraq – that there are irresistible tribal ties, that the pressure on the Kingdom would be too great. They would have to go in. Prince Turki then ostensibly let him go. Prince Turki resigned shortly thereafter, ostensibly because his cousin, Prince Bandar, was conducting private talks at the White House that he wasn't privy to, which may have had to do with creating an alliance between the Saudis and the U.S. against Iran. (All of this is a little mysterious, and I am not going to say that I understand it totally.)

What we can observe about the Saudis' past behavior may help us determine whether we should take them at face value now. The Khobar Towers bombing in 1996 comes to mind. There are still questions about what really happened, but the most likely link is that an Iranian-backed Saudi Hezbollah group bombed the American quarters there. The Saudis were essentially bombed by their neighbor. This was a bombing on Saudi soil. How did they react?

Well, they restricted the flow of information to the U.S. because they were afraid that we would retaliate. I asked Richard Clarke, formerly the director of counterterrorism at the National Security Council, whether we would have retaliated. He said, "Damn right. We would have gone in and bombed them." The Saudi response to being attacked on their own homeland was to not tell the U.S. They felt that they had to live there, that it was their neighborhood. They were terrified of the kind of response that the Iranians might be able to engender within the Kingdom, and towards the Kingdom's interests around the world. This probably pertains also to the 2003 bombing that Dafna talked about. So, there is a gap, I suppose, between what Nawaf Obaid said that the Kingdom would do and what they might actually do. The Saudis typically do not invade other countries. They hire mercenaries to protect themselves.

"The real reason we haven't been attacked is that al Qaeda was essentially a zombie for three years, until we invaded Iraq and reawakened this creature."

So if we were to withdraw from Iraq, the most likely result, in my opinion, would be a cataclysm within the region, beyond just the Sunni/Shia split. For one thing, there is already an overwhelming flood of refugees from neighboring countries, Jordan and Syria in particular. They are dealing with an enormous economic problem trying to accommodate the refugees that they are getting now. Imagine what it would be like if, instead of tens of thousands, there were millions fleeing to the borders.

How would the neighbors react? Very actively, I would think, with the Jordanians getting into it with the backing of Saudi money. I cannot quite envision Saudi troops going across the border, but I can certainly envision them actively protecting that border

and doing whatever they can to stop any further intrusions. I can imagine them activating mujahedeen to go across the border – simply opening a one-way door so that a lot of people would go into Iraq to protect Sunni interests as a way of guarding against stirring up Shiites within the Kingdom.

So, I see the U.S. withdrawal as being very consequential in the region – not to say that staying isn't consequential, but we would be fooling ourselves to think that even a carefully managed withdrawal wouldn't have dramatic consequences for the region.

Steve Simon:

There are already millions of refugees pouring over borders, as somebody in the audience noted. I wonder whether the Saudis are worried about a blowback problem, whether it is really possible to have a one-way door, despite all of the money that they are going to pay to build a wall along the border.

Toby, I was hoping you would talk about two related questions. Is there some kind of primordial, horrible Sunni/Shia "thing" unfolding in Iraq that is inexorable and terribly consequential? And is a broader sectarian division unfolding within the region, related to what is going on in Iraq?

Toby Craig Jones:

I'll comment on both of those questions. By way of providing context and background, sectarianism – and Sunni/Shia conflict, of course – has quite a history in the region. It has ebbed and flowed based on the political interests of ruling states that have risen and fallen over time. It is not necessarily primordial, but sectarianism becomes a convenient instrument of asserting and situating political power in the specific interests of those who rule.

This is one of those moments when sectarianism has become convenient in Iraq. In the 20th century, there was no absence of sectarian tension. The small Sunni majority retained and managed political control until very recently. The Shia have enthusiastically embraced their new-found political power based on various things – vengeance, libera-

tion, whatever we want to call it. So, sectarianism will continue to be an issue of central concern.

In addressing the regional dimensions of this, I will talk about what I know, which is the Shia community in Saudi Arabia, and how Saudi Arabia itself has managed the relationship between its Sunni constituency and the domestic Shia community. The Shia community in Saudi Arabia has been called a fifth column for Iran, an internal threat, divisive, and at moments certainly willing to use violence to achieve its own interests.

"Saudi Arabia has put itself on a war footing."

I am going to be alarmist. There are tendencies in Saudi Arabia that we can identify today that suggest that the presence of the Americans in Iraq is increasingly irrelevant, and that the issue of withdrawal may or may not be a concern moving forward. Saudi Arabia has put itself on a war footing, and the American presence, while it may change the dynamics of how this war footing materializes or develops, will probably not ultimately determine the extent to which Saudi Arabia's posturing and positioning for future conflict will produce violence.

In the past two years, Saudi Arabia – with its perception of an Iranian threat and the situation in Iraq – has determined that it is going to exacerbate and re-embrace the kind of politics that had hatched in the 1980s after the rise of Khomeini in Iran and the Iran/Iraq war. That is when it first principally identified the Shia threat as something that could potentially undermine its hegemony within the Gulf and the region more generally. Saudi Arabia has always embraced, since early in the 20th century, an anti-Shia streak. But that was not manifested publicly; it was not something that was talked about openly. After the Iranian-revolution-turned-Islamic-revolution, Saudi Arabia found that its interests were better served by embracing, supporting, and building an institutional and ideological framework that was specifically anti-Shia.

For example, as much as their support for the mujahedeen in Afghanistan was a response to the Soviet invasion, checking Khomeini's power and expansion into central Asia was no less a significant part of their thinking. Funding for Iraq in the Iran/Iraq war likewise demonstrated the Kingdom's interests in checking Khomeini's expansion westward. Certain kinds of institutions were established and materials published during the 1980s and 1990s that were vitriolic in their anti-Shiism.

This largely went away in the 1990s. Rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Iran was achieved on the surface, if not in practice. There were closer relations by the end of the decade – close enough that they had reestablished diplomatic ties and were willing to talk about security and regional issues.

The Iraq war has disrupted that balance and has led Saudi Arabia back into the land of institutionalized anti-Shiism and sectarianism. Constituencies within the country have been allowed to proceed with toxic and combustible domestic politics.

Two trends are identifiable. I will say by way of qualification that Saudi Arabia has always had a difficult relationship with its clergy. Yet one particular group has been especially troublesome since the 1990s. This group is the Islamic Awakening. They were radicalized after the Americans arrived to fight Iraq in the first Gulf War, and their radical tendencies took on an antigovernment tone. The government cracked down on them in the middle of the 1990s, imprisoning many. They were sufficiently chastened upon their release from prison in 2000 and 2001 to no longer espouse or articulate specifically anti-al Saud sentiments, in public at least. Several of them became quite prominent in the reform movement that emerged in 2003, and which has died a painful death in recent years.

Members of this Islamic Awakening community have always, or at least recently, clung to anti-Shia and sectarian tendencies beneath the surface. In recent months, though, there have been some disturbing trends. Prominent members of this group met alongside a group

of Iraqi clerics in Istanbul in early December and articulated a need for more open, sectarian warfare in Iraq. They outlined a position paper arguing for the need to wipe out the Persian menace to the east and to the north, which about 40 of them signed. This is quite disturbing.

On the surface, of course, it is disturbing because there is a group of Saudi clerics who are marching around the region promoting open warfare, but it is also disturbing because the Saudi government has done nothing to silence them. These are the same people who quite publicly maintain close relationships with jihadi networks and who are the most corrosive influences in the community.

The second trend that demonstrates a mobilization against the Shia both domestically and regionally is identifiable in a specific kind of political response to Saudi Arabia's own Shia community. In 2003, the Shia were openly embraced by then-Crown Prince Abdullah as part of a national reform movement. They were put center stage as an example of how Saudi Arabia was moving forward with religious tolerance and political pluralism. The Shia were able to speak openly, they published openly, and they were able to pursue their political, regional, and cultural interests with a bit more safety than they had in previous years. Much of that has gone away.

Saudi Arabia cracked down harshly after a group of Shia marched in support of Hezbollah during its confrontation with Israel over the summer. Scores of people were arrested for political reasons, especially those most closely identified with the old network of Saudi Hezbollah. In addition to political arrests, there have been a series of cultural crackdowns. Most recently, a group of pilgrims from the Eastern Province aboard a bus on their way to Mecca were detained and prevented from carrying out their religious rituals. This was a particularly provocative move, but it follows on the heels of similar moves in which the government has closed down hussainiyas, the community centers that the Shia use to speak about religious and

community matters. Perhaps also of interest is the government's sweeping initiative in the last three or four months to close down mixed Sunni/Shia salons, which have largely become identified as potential places for cross-community collaboration that reflect the kind of principles of pluralism that had become of interest in 2003.

Those two tendencies – permitting anti-Shia ideologues to become more prominent and cracking down on the Shia community domestically – suggest that a trend is underway in which Saudi Arabia has already decided that it is going to pursue a local and regional politics of sectarianism, and that it is quite committed to this.

One might say that Saudi Arabia is simply pursuing short-term interests, and that they could change this any time. I think that the broader problem, and this speaks to the potential for regional conflagration, is that if Saudi Arabia is doing this, they are painting themselves into an ideological corner from which it will be very difficult to escape.

There are various domestic pressures that are brought to bear on the Kingdom, particularly from the radical Sunni clerics who are very difficult to control and contain once they are operating under some momentum. If they do generate any kind of following inside the Kingdom and outside, it is conceivable that Saudi Arabia would not be able to reverse course and chart an alternative path. The disturbing note here is that this is the exact same kind of politics that Saudi Arabia pursued with hard-line Sunni radicals in the 1980s and early 1990s, and we all know what came out of Saudi Arabia as a result of that.

EXCERPTS FROM THE QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION:

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Stephen Holmes (*from the audience*):

Larry, you and Toby have both spoken about what Saudi Arabia might do in Iraq. What are they doing now? Is Saudi intelligence in Iraq? Are they opening the door now to deliberately send people over?

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Lawrence Wright:

I think that Saudi Arabia is afraid of blowback. They have already seen the consequences of young Saudis going into Iraq and the radicalizing effect that that has within the Kingdom. Saudis are the majority, by some estimates, of the suicide bombers in Iraq. The experience that the Saudis have had, though, is that they come back.

One of the Saudis' big mistakes early on during the Afghan war was imagining that it could be a good policy to let unemployed and unhappy young men with radical ideas go off and fight this jihad, thinking that that would dispose of them. It imported the problem back into the Kingdom in a much more profound way.

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Dafna Linzer:

My sense is that the Saudis are not opening the gates and letting people go directly in. They are making it a little bit more difficult, forcing them to go around. As far as I can tell, Iraq is one of the only areas of cooperation in counterterrorism intelligence right now between the Saudis and the United States, specifically because of the blowback issue — they do not want these people coming home, they are desperate to prevent that.

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Question (from the audience):

What would happen if the United States were to reduce its role in the region?

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Lawrence Wright:

If the United States were to pull back from Iraq, the psychological effect on al Qaeda and radical Islam would be profound. People have been talking about how we have not been attacked here since 9/11, and saying that we must be doing something right.

The real reason we haven't been attacked is that al Qaeda was essentially a zombie for three years, until we invaded Iraq and reawakened this creature. It is much more potent now. It is focused on Iraq, but we would be crazy to

think that there is not going to be an immense amount of blowback when all of the jihadis who are going into Iraq begin to leave. Many of them are going to be focusing their efforts on us and our allies, and they will be much more emboldened if they feel like they have been victorious in Iraq.

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Question (from the audience):

If the U.S. were to scale back, could al Qaeda cause a spark that would pull us back in?

Lawrence Wright:

There are many things al Qaeda can't do that they would like the U.S. to do for them. Taking on Iran is one of those things.

Al Qaeda probably couldn't shut down the Strait of Hormuz or destroy the Saudi oil fields. Iran could. By provoking a confrontation between the Sunni and the Shia that could then spill into a U.S./Iranian conflict, al Qaeda accomplishes its goals by using us.

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Patrick Clawson:

The best way to avoid that conflict is by pressing Iran hard with diplomacy and with unified international efforts, such as those at the United Nations recently. It is discouraging to hear people who recommend against steps to deter and dissuade Iran; who recommend against forceful diplomacy because they hold out the fear of war.

The best way to avoid that war is by pressing Iran, as Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has said — offering a better path, a path toward reintegration in the world community if they cooperate. We should be stepping up our efforts to make Iran's choices starker, precisely to avoid the scenario that you describe.

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PANEL TWO:

THE TALIBAN RESURGENCE AND THE FUTURE OF AL QAEDA

Panelists: Peter Bergen, Steve Coll, Prof. Barnett Rubin

Moderator: Karen J. Greenberg

Karen J. Greenberg:

In the fall of 2001, the United States launched a rather successful attack against Afghanistan with the hope of destroying the Taliban and al Qaeda. By many estimates, the Taliban are now re-emerging. Some would say that al Qaeda has also gained new strength. Today, we have assembled a panel that can authoritatively tell us about what is happening.

Barnett Rubin:

I'd like to emphasize from the start that the Taliban and al Qaeda are not the same thing. While they have had common interests at times, they have also had divergent interests, and this has led to splits or disagreements within the Taliban leadership at various times.

The day after President Bush's speech on January 10th announcing his ostensibly new strategy in Iraq, the heads of all of the U.S. intelligence agencies, led by then-National Director of Intelligence John Negroponte, testified before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. Here is what he said (I am paraphrasing, but I have read it over several times, trying to figure out if President Bush was actually briefed on it or not). I am not necessarily endorsing all of these points, but this is the official analysis of the intelligence agencies of the United States.

He said: The greatest threat to the United States is terrorism. The most dangerous terrorist organization in the world is al Qaeda. The leaders of al Qaeda now have a new safe haven in Pakistan along the border with Afghanistan. In this safe haven, where they are protected by some Pakistani tribes and a number of armed groups that we can loosely refer to as Taliban, they are planning to inflict mass casualties on the United States. Of course, this sanctuary could expand as the

Taliban expand their power inside Afghanistan (and, I should add, Pakistan) and expand the territory that they control and have access to in those two countries.

Negroponte then noted that the number of attacks by the Taliban and other forces allied with them had doubled in the past year, that the number of suicide attacks had quadrupled, and that the Taliban leadership enjoys a safe haven in Pakistan (which is, I should mention, the world's leading source of nuclear proliferation to regimes that are less unlikely than others to allow terrorists to get access to nuclear materials).

That is the intelligence agencies' analysis of what constitutes the major threat to the United States. The president's response was to send more troops to Iraq, to escalate his threats against Iran, and to once again qualify Pakistan as our leading ally in the war on terror.

I do not suggest that we should put Pakistan on the axis of evil and have a policy toward it like we have toward Iran. I think that the policy toward both countries is mistaken. Neither of them has a stake in supporting al Qaeda's global campaign for an Islamic caliphate and the destruction of the United States, but I think that neither of them take those objectives as seriously as our government appears to do. Pakistan certainly continues to believe that it can play games with these organizations precisely in order to play upon our fears to its own advantage. Its ability to do so – and what I continue to see (although I have limited access) as our own government's lack of understanding about what the local actors see as the stakes in these conflicts – have prevented us from elaborating a realistic policy toward Afghanistan and Pakistan.

We need a coherent policy toward both of those countries. This has to be nested within a

coherent policy toward the regions around them and globally, which is one of the fundamental reasons that we have seen the re-creation of this cross-border safe haven for the Taliban.

***"Not everybody in the world analyzes
their own political dilemma
in terms of whether they are with us
or with the terrorists."***

It is a mistake to believe that United States officials can obtain the type of knowledge that you would need to operate effectively on the ground in these areas. Of course, they can be more effective or less effective, but my main point is that you need genuine partners to ally with who do have that kind of practitioner's knowledge. The type of knowledge needed is not finite but fractal in the sense that the more you look at the situation, the more complex it becomes; the more you know about it, the more you realize how much you don't know.

Afghanistan is but one case in which the categories that our government, public, and press bring to bear on the understanding of situations – derived from our interests and our understanding of what has happened to us – deprive us of the ability to understand whom we are working with and what they are trying to do.

That is, September 11th was described as an attack on freedom. Our enemies were the enemies of freedom, and everybody had to be either with us or with the terrorists. The fact is, not everybody in the world analyzes their own political dilemma in terms of whether they are with us or with the terrorists. Nor do they agree with the terrorists. They have their own interests, but they see that by being with us in some way, however partially, they can get resources with which to accomplish their other goals.

Of course, this is actually the core element of Pakistan's national security policy; that is, forming a relationship with the United States based on opposition to the Soviet Union, or to

Iran, or to al Qaeda in order to obtain the military assistance that it wants in order to balance India, which it believes does not fully accept its right to exist as a state. Therefore, its behavior toward Afghanistan and toward other issues is a function of that national security problem, not of the United States' problem with terrorists.

On a more microscopic level, when the United States went into Afghanistan in 2001 (and here I am partly relying on Bob Woodward's books and others) the only high-level discussions that I have learned of were discussions about whom we could get to fight against our enemies, and what they would want in order to do that. But there was no analysis done of what the post-war consequences of empowering various groups would be.

That led to ethnic issues in Afghanistan, and also to the country basically being taken over by a bunch of armed gangs (I highly recommend Sarah Chayes's book, *The Punishment of Virtue: Inside Afghanistan After the Taliban*, about her experience in Kandahar). It also led to a pattern of involvement in local politics that we really did not understand; a pattern of involvement that enabled us to be very effectively manipulated by local warlords, by power-holders, and also by Pakistan.

Kandahar is the homeland of the Taliban and the Afghan monarchy, and it is an area of Pashtun tribes. Within Afghanistan, Kandahar sees itself as first among equals. That is to say, the leader of the state should be from Kandahar and should be a member of one of the leading tribes of Kandahar. That is the case now. Within Kandahar itself, there has to be a balance among the leading tribes.

Because of basically tactical considerations during the taking of Kandahar, the United States Army empowered Gul Agha Shirzai, a Barakzai commander with very little political support; marginalized the forces of Hamid Karzai and his allies; and created a situation where the local people perceived that we were supporting a drug-trading mafia leader at the expense of the other groups and

tribes in Kandahar. Then, because of competition over smuggling routes, drug trafficking, and some ethnic issues, he pursued a conflict with Ismail Khan, a Persian-speaking leader who took Herat (also with U.S. assistance), and began giving military assistance to Pashtun tribes on the outskirts of Herat. (By the way, Persian speakers and Pashtun tribes from Kandahar have been fighting over Herat for about 400 or 500 years.) He was encouraged in this – armed and paid to do this – by Pakistan, which saw the Northern Alliance to which Ismail Khan belonged as being an anti-Pakistani group, and which also did not want Afghanistan to develop a stable government.

Basically, this struggle over smuggling income and ethnic politics, and Pakistani attempts to produce a pro-Pakistani government in Afghanistan, was portrayed by the Americans as Pakistan, our ally in the war on terror, helping us with the aid of our local militia ally, Gul Agha Shirzai, against the terrorist axis-of-evil Iranians. The Iranian Revolutionary Guard had welcomed our Special Forces into Bagram Air Base and helped us arm them, of course for their own interest as well.

Similarly, Colin Powell had said there was no need for a Marshall Plan in Afghanistan, which is a very simple economy, and with a few hundred million dollars the country would be on its feet again. So, there was also no major economic assistance coming into the country for the first year or so, no reconstruction assistance, and we were seen to be allied with corrupt leaders and being manipulated by Afghanistan's long-term opponent (enemy perhaps) Pakistan, a successor to the British Empire and to the Mogul Empire.

Now, this pattern could be replicated in various parts of the country, but the result was that the people in Afghanistan had tremendous hopes, actually, for the U.S. intervention, and most of them welcomed it as a rescue mission rather than as an invasion or an occupation. They started very early on to lose faith. In a series of interviews that I held with elders from all over the country on two occa-

sions during the past year, I found them to be extremely embittered. They said things like, "We have finally concluded that the international community is not really here to assist Afghanistan but that they have some other goals."

I do not mean to say that it would have been easy to establish good governance in Afghanistan, but the general pattern of supporting very bad governance in Afghanistan and seemingly ignoring it is what created an opening for the Taliban. The Taliban do have this microknowledge of the patterns of tribal factions, of clan politics in southern Afghanistan. That said, they would not have been able to create such an insurgency if they did not have a safe haven in Pakistan, which they do have. They certainly receive support from the religious parties that are in power in the border provinces, and which have militias in the tribal territories. The relationship to the government is not clear, except that the government does not take any decisive action against them. There are reports that the intelligence agency continues to help them; not, of course, because they hate America, but because of their conflict with Afghanistan.

The conflict between Pakistan and Afghanistan, which senior officials of our administration did not even know about when I told them about it, is something that goes back as long as those two countries have existed (which is not that long, Pakistan having only existed for 60 years). They always talk about problems with the border. Afghanistan does not recognize that border as a border. It has never accepted the incorporation of Pashtun territories and Baluch territories into Pakistan. Of course, it does not have the power to take them back, but that has had all kinds of effects on the relationship between the two countries.

That is why Afghanistan turned to the Soviet Union to build its army. That is why Pakistan has always tried to disempower Pashtun nationalists and support Pashtun Islamists in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. As part of the British border settlement that Afghanistan does not recognize, Pakistan has

maintained, and has strengthened in certain ways, the autonomy of those tribal agencies along the border. That border has a state that does not recognize it on one side and, on the other side, agencies that are not controlled by the government.

So this is a perfect area for the creation of safe havens. What is actually required in both countries are measures that would be difficult, time-consuming, and expensive in order to gradually resolve or de-escalate that long-standing conflict and build up institutions of governance on both sides of the border. At the moment, the policy that we have instead been pursuing has unintentionally aggravated the relations between the two countries to the point where they find it very difficult to communicate about what we insist are their shared security interests, although they apparently do not always see it that way.

Peter Bergen:

I agree with everything that Professor Rubin said. There is one note of optimism – ABC and the BBC conducted a significant poll in December and found that the Afghans' view of the future has declined from a positive rating of 77 percent to 55 percent, but that still favorably compares to the perception of the future that people have in the United States. Something like 80 percent of Afghans have a positive view of the international and U.S. presence in Afghanistan. That is not to say that the situation is not much worse than it was even two years ago. But, unlike in Iraq, I think that in 2007 in Afghanistan, with some real political will, we could reverse some of the things that have gone wrong.

Let me address the al Qaeda question. I think that there has been a sort of conventional wisdom in the last two years that al Qaeda the organization has been replaced by al Qaeda the ideological movement. The evidence for that was that the attack in Madrid in 2004 seemed to be the work of a bunch of drug dealers and radicals with very little connection to al Qaeda, although they managed to kill 191 commuters. Other evidence for that included the Miami case last summer, where a

group of al Qaeda (wannabes) allegedly plotted to blow up a number of federal buildings.

Although the ideological movement certainly exists, we were not attacked by a group of ideas on 9/11, but by an organization. While it is bad if lots of people around the world do not like the United States, what is really bad is if they organize themselves in such a way that they can attack us. I am going to give you seven or eight pieces of evidence that I think indicate that al Qaeda is very much in a position where it might be able to attack us sometime in the next five to ten years.

The London attack on July 7, 2005 was reported both by the media and also strangely by the British government as being carried out by a bunch of homegrown guys who were radicalized in Leeds and who conducted the most successful terrorist attack in British history. In fact, that initial picture was completely wrong. Two of the main suicide attackers had gone to Pakistan, had trained in an al Qaeda training camp, and had made suicide tapes with al Qaeda's media division, as-Sahab (which means "the Clouds" in Arabic). It was an out-and-out al Qaeda operation.

That gets to the second piece of evidence, which is that al Qaeda's reach into the United Kingdom is really quite strong. In an unprecedented, or at least very rare, public speech, Dame Eliza Manningham-Buller, the head of the British domestic intelligence service, said publicly that there were 30 plots they were aware of, many of which linked back to al Qaeda in Pakistan in the post-9/11 era. She also said that the number of people in Britain who had trained with al Qaeda in Pakistan was growing.

Operation Crevice, a trial that is ongoing in Britain right now, is one of the cases that demonstrate that this is accurate. A group of people, none of whom had gardens, had 1,300 pounds of fertilizer that they were keeping in a storage facility in West London. The court documents show that they, too, had trained with al Qaeda. Also, General Michael Maples, head of the United States' Defense

Intelligence Agency, said something extremely interesting in December 2006. He said, point blank, that the attempt to bring down ten American planes with liquid explosives back in August was an al Qaeda operation directed from Pakistan. He did not mince his words.

*"I think that a radiological bomb attack
in a major European city,
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the next five years."*

The activity of as-Sahab, the al Qaeda propaganda arm that I have already mentioned, is a further piece of evidence for al Qaeda's reorganization. It would be one thing if it were all talking-head propaganda, but as-Sahab is now documenting suicide missions in Afghanistan conducted by both Afghans and Arabs. It is documenting quite skillful improvised-explosive-device attacks in eastern Afghanistan against American Humvees. And, of course, it is also producing a lot of talking-head propaganda which actually makes a difference. When bin Laden says something, or Ayman al Zawahri starts talking about Somalia, people respond. There are people who want to respond to these things. I can promise you that they will try and intervene in some way in Darfur. If there is a U.N. intervention in Darfur, the U.N. mission there will certainly be attacked, in my view, by al Qaeda affiliates in the region. In the past year, as-Sahab has produced 58 videotapes, which is triple the output from 2005, an unprecedented amount.

You might say, "Hey, this is all propaganda." But, to me, this shows that there is a degree of organization. I do not say there is a fixed studio location – as-Sahab Studios, Incorporated, Waziristan – but there are camera people, there are editors and there is a fairly major operation there. And, of course, bin Laden and Ayman al Zawahri have hardly been silent. In fact, Ayman al Zawahri is say-

ing so many things now that they are barely newsworthy. We have had about 20 videotapes from Ayman al Zawahri this year, and five audiotapes from bin Laden. They do not seem too hassled by the global war on terrorism, given their output.

There is a link between bin Laden's statements and the actions he has undertaken. In September of 2003, bin Laden, for the first time, mentioned Spain as a place that jihadists should attack. Of course, six months later there was the attack in Madrid. Bin Laden has repeatedly called for attacks on Saudi oil facilities. Just last year we had an attack on perhaps the most important oil facility in the world by al Qaeda's affiliate in Saudi Arabia. Luckily, it did not work out, but next time we may not be so fortunate. Bin Laden has offered truces to members of the coalition in Iraq who are willing to pull out. Of course, I think that has something to do with the London attack. Obviously the British government did not take up the offer of a truce with al Qaeda.

Another piece of evidence is that more groups are joining al Qaeda. G.S.P.C., which is the largest Algerian terrorist group, just announced that it is now part of al Qaeda. Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a sort of maverick Afghan warlord, said on al Jazeera some months ago that he was part of al Qaeda. Even though there are differences between the Taliban and al Qaeda, there are many fewer differences than there have been in the past. The Taliban are a very provincial bunch of people. Mullah Omar visited his own capital, Kabul, only twice in the five years that he actually ran the country. Now the Taliban are talking about Iraq, Palestine, and the global jihad. They have morphed ideologically and tactically with al Qaeda. They are saying the same things and they are using the same techniques.

Paul Cruickshank (a Fellow here at the Center on Law and Security) and I have collaborated in looking at jihadist terrorism since the invasion of Iraq because we were both somewhat skeptical that the invasion of Iraq was in some way beneficial to the war on ter-

rorism. It is very interesting; if you look at the Afghan suicide attacks, they did not really happen in 2003, and took off in 2004. The Taliban and al Qaeda in Afghanistan were looking at the experience of the Iraq war and learning from it. There were 21 suicide attacks in 2005 and 139 this past year. The graph is exponential. The graph is also exponential for improvised explosive devices and for attacks on international forces in Afghanistan.

Professor Rubin has already referred to the safe havens on the Afghan/Pakistan border. According to a U.S. intelligence official who was recently in the region, there are 2,000 foreign fighters there. There are seven federally administered tribal regions. There have already been peace agreements with two of those regions and the Pakistani government, and they have not resulted in any decline in violence in Afghanistan; quite the reverse. And, of course, they benefit al Qaeda.

Finally, there is Dafna Linzer's and Thomas Ricks's fine piece in *The Washington Post* on November 28, 2006 about what is really going on in Anbar Province. It was the U.S. Marines, not a bunch of flaming liberals, who said that al Qaeda is now actually in charge of Anbar Province. If you think about Zarqawi's plan in Iraq – to try to provoke a civil war between the Sunni and the Shia, so that the Sunnis finally get the message that al Qaeda is the only entity that can protect them – that is what has happened in Anbar Province, according to the U.S. Marines' own assessment.

That is where we are with al Qaeda today. Where are we going to be with al Qaeda five years from now? Making predictions about the future is always a very bad idea, I'm sure. In 1996, when the bin Laden unit was set up at the CIA, I do not think that anybody, including anybody who had a strong interest in the subject, could have predicted the 9/11 attacks five years later. But we do know a lot more about al Qaeda today than we did five years ago, and I think we know what their intentions are. We have somewhat less of an idea of their capabilities, but I'm going to try

to sketch out some things that I think will happen in the next few years.

First of all, I think their haven on the Afghan/Pakistan border is secure. There is a very important election that will happen in 2007 in Pakistan, arguably the most important election post-9/11 other than our own, which is the presidential election. No one is going to win that election by saying, "I am going to help the U.S. in the war on terrorism." That would not be a winning ticket in Pakistan. So, whoever the successful candidate is, there is going to be less effort to help the United States on this issue.

There are 400,000 visits by U.K. citizens to Pakistan every year. Not all of those people are going to Pakistan simply to visit family, and I think that the possibility of our being attacked by a British citizen is a reasonably high one if al Qaeda is able to attack us in the next five years. The haven in Iraq, I think, will continue to exist, and al Qaeda's ability to attract European militants to its cause will continue to exist. That is relevant to our safety because European citizens benefit from the visa-waiver program, a program that I am not suggesting we change in any great way. An interesting example of the kind of person we could expect attacking the United States in the future is Muriel Degauque, the female Belgian baker's assistant who conducted a suicide operation in Iraq in November of 2005. When the war is over, that kind of person may come and attack here.

I do not believe that al Qaeda central is going to be able to attack the United States directly in the next five years. The plan to attack American aircraft that was foiled in the U.K. in August was an attempt to attack us directly in a place other than the United States, but even al Qaeda may recognize that the American Muslim community has not adopted the al Qaeda ideology. In my view, there are no American sleeper cells. There is very scant evidence of them. Karen Greenberg and the Center on Law and Security's work on the terrorism trials in the United States demonstrates that very few of

these trials have been about terrorists or intended terrorist activities.

In terms of tactics that I think al Qaeda will use in the future, I think that they will continue to attack oil facilities in Saudi Arabia and Iraq. They will continue to attack Western brand names around the Muslim world, particularly hotels. They will continue to attack Israeli and Jewish targets outside of Israel. They have already done a lot of that since 9/11.

There are three things that I think they will use that they have not done to much effect so far. One is increasing the use of female jihadists, perhaps female jihadi suicide attackers. We have seen some evidence of this in Iraq, in Jordan, in Kashmir, and in Egypt in the last two years. The people who run al Qaeda, of course, are huge misogynists, but they do recognize that from a tactical point of view female jihadi suicide attackers have certain advantages.

There are two other things that would have very a damaging impact on American interests. One would be bringing down a commercial airliner with a rocket-propelled grenade or surface-to-air missile, which is well within al Qaeda's capabilities. This is not a Chicken Little scenario. They tried to do it in Mombasa in 2002 with an Israeli passenger jet; it almost succeeded. They tried to bring down a DHL jet in Baghdad in 2003. They have tried it before, and I think that they will try it again. Obviously, such an attack, if successful, would have a transformative impact on global aviation and tourism. Finally, I think that a radiological bomb attack in a major European city, although not an American city, is quite a plausible scenario within the next five years. Such an attack obviously would have a nasty effect on global investor confidence.

Steve Coll:

I am going to concentrate on the current structure of Pakistan's relationship with the Taliban, and talk a little more specifically about the themes that Professor Rubin outlined, which I endorse entirely.

Carlotta Gall wrote a terrific piece in *The New York Times* on January 21, 2007. She quoted unnamed Western diplomats who said that Western governments believe that Pakistan's government is supporting the Taliban. That was the extent of the assertion in the piece. It raises questions that have bedeviled India in the face of bombings in Delhi and Bombay, and bedevil not only the United States but also Canada, Britain and the Netherlands, whose soldiers, in addition to Afghans, are targets of attacks coming out of the tribal areas. The questions are: To what extent is Pakistan's relationship with the Taliban formalized today? What command and control, if any, exists? To what extent is that relationship an expression of the failure of the Pakistani state to control the Islamist political parties, movements, and militias which it has sponsored in the past, and continues to tolerate? Are there weekly meetings? What evidence is there?

I think this is important, because the Pakistani assertion that they have no formal relationship with the Taliban, and that they in fact seek to prevent the Talibanization of the North-West Frontier Province, Baluchistan, and the tribal areas, is an important reason why they continue to receive large amounts of aid from the United States and Europe.

I cannot give you a code-word level inventory of the evidence, but I do have a sense that that there is convincing evidence of active contacts with Taliban leaders in Pakistan that are monitored by Western governments, and that involve the same characters who have staffed the Afghan bureau of Pakistan's Directorate for Inter-Services Intelligence (or "ISI") for 20 years. Some of these officers in the Pakistan Army are serving officers, some are retired officers back on contract, and some are retired officers who may be acting as religious volunteers. Even when you identify a colonel, it is difficult to know whether he is receiving a pension or a salary, or has the benefit of *zakat* contributions.

Maybe it does not matter, but I think that in a government-to-government relationship where quite a lot of money is flowing through

the pipeline the evidence is important. Ultimately it will matter, and the Pakistani government understands this most of all, because as Professor Rubin said, one of their tricks has been to pull off this balancing act that allows them to maximize the resources that they draw down from the West while also maximizing their freedom of action, as they see it, in an existential struggle against India. If they are judged to be actively engaged with the Taliban, that could put that balancing act in jeopardy.

My information about staffing in the Afghan bureau of the ISI is a little out of date, but I certainly know that about a year ago a lot of the people who were in that bureau on the Pakistan side were people who had been involved with the Taliban pre-9/11, and who were presumed to be sympathetic and who enjoy rich relationships with people like the clan that surrounds Jalaluddin Haqqani. He is a former Taliban minister whose family and allies control the area around Miram Shah, one of the hot areas of Taliban border-crossing operations.

I think there is still a question about what the exact nature of this policy is, but the evidence is not inconsequential. Professor Rubin alluded to another way to think about it, which is to ask what a Pakistani government that was genuinely pursuing an aggressive anti-Taliban policy would reasonably do, even granting that their self-preservation should be one of the objectives of their anti-Taliban policy.

What would they do, and are they doing it? That is a much easier question to answer. They are not doing it. They are not making the arrests of *shura* members and others that they would be arresting if they were genuinely attempting to break up the Taliban leadership on Pakistani soil. To the contrary, in September 2006 they cut a deal with tribal leaders in North Waziristan, including people who openly identify themselves as Taliban leadership and who issue statements in the name of the Taliban. The nature of that deal was essentially to exchange agreements about targeting. The local militants agreed not to target Pakistani army or government forces, and

the Pakistani army agreed to accept voluntarily self-compliance with the objective of not running attacks into Afghanistan. I think it is well understood that the result of this has been a sharp increase in attacks from this very region by these very groups.

***"What would a Pakistani government
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What would they do, and
are they doing it? They are not."***

What does Pakistan say in its defense? Pervez Musharraf was here in the fall to meet with the president (and to sell his book on *The Daily Show*). The message that the Pakistani one-or two-star generals delivered to the president was apparently about the complexity of the tribal areas; these are very complicated areas and Pakistan must be trusted to engage in its neo-colonial political strategy.

In any event, their defense is not altogether divorced from the facts. They point out that these regions have been radicalized by 20 years of warfare and, not incidentally, by U.S. and Pakistani government policy. They point out that the old system of secular-minded, or at least loyal, political agents has been destroyed. And it *has* been destroyed. In its place has arisen a system of religious leadership that is, although it can be complicated from agency to agency, very much allied with the objectives of the Taliban and al Qaeda on the whole, as are the two major religious parties that hold power in the provincial governments just down the hill from the tribal areas, and which control their infrastructure, their ministries, their patronage systems, their auto-

mobiles with flashing red lights, and all the rest of the good things that come with provincial government.

The Pakistani army has struggled to come up with a convincing strategy. They have at times thought about the use of military force, and they sent a brigade or so up into Wana which was very badly beaten up and quickly stopped. They now claim to have two regular army divisions deployed in the tribal areas. Although I am not sure that anyone thinks that there are really two divisions' worth of Pakistani soldiers up there, there are clearly a headquarters and a few brigades there, and some Americans floating around in these bases. But the Punjabi-dominated army does not have much room to run around there, and certainly the Caucasians in their midst are equally constrained, if not more so.

The official Pakistani strategy in the tribal areas these days is to try to revive the system of secular political agents through political processes supported by development work. The difficulty is precisely what Professor Rubin referred to, which is that the secular political parties in this region that would be the natural allies of a locally grounded anti-Taliban strategy, recognizable to Pashtuns as legitimate, are regarded with deep suspicion by Musharraf and his colleagues in the officer corps because of their historical calls for an independent Pashtun nation. They are also considered suspicious because of their perceived alliance, in the view of the Pakistani officer class, with Indian, Soviet, and other interests over the years. So, just as Musharraf has failed to make what those in the West would regard as a natural bargain with the Pakistan Peoples Party – after all, a secular, robust party that could protect people like Musharraf from al Qaeda-sponsored assassination plots – he has also failed to figure out a way to build a political future with the Awami parties, the secular parties, out there.

I am afraid that is going to persist into the next year. The upcoming election cycle is going to be important, and it is not very encouraging so far.

Why does Musharraf do the things he does? I do not think that anybody can answer that question. If you have watched him speak with Jon Stewart, if you have read his book (which I have, and cannot say that I would recommend it absent a professional reason to read it), there is a flowering of ego in that manuscript that exceeds even the typical political memoir of its type. There is a list of every certificate that he has ever won in his life, including his high school bodybuilding competition. He bears grudges against people who interfered with his career advancement 25 years ago, and he lists them by name.

Interestingly, when he writes about the problem of Afghanistan, he describes the Northern Alliance in a transparently hostile way, as an instrument of Indian mischief-making and hegemony, and an India that will never accept the existence of Pakistan. You would think that someone working for him would have been brave enough to say, "Hey Boss, you're right about this, but we could get ourselves into trouble if we are this transparent about our perceptions." But no, it is sitting right there on the page.

Carlotta Gall's terrific piece in *The New York Times* referred to Pakistan's long ambition to control political and strategic space in Afghanistan. That is true as far as it goes, but I think that for someone like Musharraf it is much more pointed than that. It is all about India, and it is all about a very specific history with both openly declared and clandestine warfare with India. Musharraf was a commando in the clandestine warfare, after all. He lives a very secular life, he is secular in a personal sense, but as a general he has been a bit of a jihadi even within his own group. After he took power in 1999, he went up to Muzaffarabad, talked to Kashmir Islamist groups, and got them all riled up. He embraced the Taliban after thinking about it for a couple of months. He recognizes that these groups frighten the people that he wants off-balance, and he has been more aggressive in embracing them than some of his colleagues.

The most likely networks that al Qaeda's leadership takes advantage of as it builds the infrastructure that Peter Bergen described are those that it has the longest history with, in my judgment. It is just common sense; I do not have any special information about it. As one Afghan I was talking to said, "Hey, if I knew where bin Laden was, I'd get the \$25,000,000."

But Julaluddin Haqqani's networks have always been very close to bin Laden in particular, and al Qaeda was essentially formed in the territory that Haqqani meaningfully controlled. Haqqani was a direct client of the Central Intelligence Agency in those days. He was a unilateral; he received big bags of cash. We were one degree separated from bin Laden through Haqqani, and his sons still thrive in the Miram Shah area.

The other network is Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who I think announced a few weeks ago that he had helped bin Laden escape after Tora Bora and had ushered him into the networks that gave him, at least initially, sanctuary. That makes sense, too, because Hekmatyar has always been the Afghan leader who bin Laden has most explicitly singled out for praise. Hekmatyar has a long relationship with the Jamaat-e-Islami, the Muslim Brotherhood-influenced political party in Pakistan that is now very prominent in the North-West Frontier Province. It controls a lot of infrastructure. After Hekmatyar came back from Iran, he presumably floated back into these networks. Both Hekmatyar and Haqqani have long histories with ISI, so they have the goods to keep somebody quiet and safe.

Lastly, there is going to be a presidential election next year, but I think it is actually already over. I think that Musharraf is going to be reelected, and that the only question is which quarter of the year it will be in. The general betting is that he will be reelected in the fall. It is not a direct election; it is an indirect election by the assemblies that he already controls. He is going to be reelected by the existing assemblies, and then they will elect new assemblies. He will keep his uniform on,

I think, so not much is going to change.

The concern that the government of the United Kingdom has, for instance, about being on the receiving end of these attacks that Peter has described (and that you'd wish the government of the United States also had concerns about, but is distracted with other questions on the whole), is that the persistence of these religious parties in the North-West Frontier Province and Baluchistan would seem unacceptable given the amount of violence and conspiracies that seems to be rolling out of this territory. You would wish for a political process that could somehow promise to replace these religious governments with something less openly hostile. That will possibly be the result of the provincial elections that will now probably occur in the first quarter of next year. Musharraf's objective in all of this, unfortunately, seems to be self-preservation, and secondarily the prosecution of the war that he sees himself waging against India by clandestine means.

Karen J. Greenberg:

What is the relationship between what you have identified as the important realities and the understanding of our State Department, the Pentagon, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff? Do you think that they are listening to the nuances that you are talking about, or do you feel that there is a gap between what they see and the reality as you have described it?

Steve Coll:

There are people who are well informed, of course, in the middle and upper levels of the bureaucracy, but many of them are prisoners of a policy that does not allow much running room around these kinds of issues. There has also been, at least when I encounter it, so much rotation in these important jobs in the field, and there is so much force of gravity in Iraq that even when you run into someone who has started to develop a richer understanding of this the conversation is all about Iraq.

We saw this in the good piece that *The Washington Post* produced last September

about the failure to even look for bin Laden, never mind locate him.

Barnett Rubin:

I have, shall I say, selective access to such people. I probably get to speak to the people who tend to agree with me. Therefore, I cannot give you an objective analysis. My impression is that people who are sent to Afghanistan in order to be on the ground there develop a pretty good understanding of the situation by the time they leave.

As Steve Coll said, there are people in Washington who know. I did have a number of discussions in November with high-level Pakistani civilian officials in Islamabad and Peshawar, including one retired general who was governor of North-West Frontier Province. Certainly one of the least-credible things that they say is that they do not have information about Taliban activities because they cannot tell the Taliban apart from the locals, although members of al Qaeda are easier to identify because they are foreigners (Musharraf said this at the Council on Foreign Relations, too).

Of course, given the history that we all know about, that is an extraordinarily incredible statement, which is what I told a fairly high-ranking State Department officer. If they were to say, “We know exactly what they are doing, but it is very dangerous for us politically,” that would be a little bit more credible.

I had other discussions, too. One American official said to me, “We have no concrete evidence that Pakistan is supporting the Taliban,” which is almost word-for-word what an assistant secretary of state said to me in 1995. So it is very easy for Pakistan, because they just recycle the same things that they were doing ten years ago, and it seems to work. At the strategic level, you have people who apparently count more on their personal feel for a certain individual than on what some mid-level intelligence agent may give them. I guess certain people find General Musharraf very credible when they look into his heart.

Peter Bergen:

I visited Afghanistan four times in the past year and spent a fair amount of time with the U.S. military. Every single American officer that I met said, “The solution in Afghanistan is political, not military.” I thought that was an interesting observation that was universally held, so there are plenty of people in the bureaucracy who understand these issues rhetorically and perhaps even in fact. As to whether there is recognition within the U.S. government of al Qaeda’s resiliency, both FBI Director Robert Mueller and John Negroponte made nods in that direction in their recent congressional testimony.

EXCERPTS FROM THE QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

Steve Simon: *(from the audience):*

A couple of days ago, a senior administration official was asked whether the war in Iraq is hurting us in Afghanistan, especially since the surge is going to require more resources. This is a paraphrase, but the official answered by saying something like, “You’re exactly right, and we have to stay in Iraq because otherwise the insurgents in Iraq will flow to Afghanistan.” In effect, he described Iraq as being the forward security perimeter of Afghanistan.

I thought that this was an astonishing statement, but it was delivered with a great deal of conviction, so I was wondering if the panelists would comment on it, given their expertise on both Iraq and the Afghan/Pakistani fronts.

Barnett Rubin:

At the strategic level, it is very clear that the invasion of Iraq had a hugely negative impact on our operation in Afghanistan. As we know, starting on September 12, 2001, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld wanted to bomb Iraq because there were not enough targets in Afghanistan, and the lack-of-target problem continued. So, resources were drawn away, and then on the other side, Iraq became a recruitment and capacity-building center for

the jihadis. The phenomenon that they are concerned about is already happening; if not through the physical flow of people, which may be happening (although to a small extent), then through the learning process.

The idea that jihadis will go from Iraq to Afghanistan is very much worrying the Iranians. I had a discussion with a number of Iranian senior officials in Kabul in November who told me that it has already started, basically because the jihadis think they have done their job in Iraq and can now redeploy their forces. One of the Iranian officials said that they are coming in through Kunar Province, where there are some specific madrasas that are friendlier to Wahhabis and Salafis than those in southern Afghanistan.

His hair was on fire, to use an expression, because he wanted to share this information with the United States and did not have the authorization to do that. He thought that it was in the national interest of both countries, but our people do not have the authorization to talk with him, and he does not have the authorization to talk with us. So, again, while there is a possibility of that fallout, there is also a possibility of joint management of that fallout with Iran, which has common interests with us on both of those fronts, but that is something that we are not exploring.

Peter Bergen:

As you know, Steve, this is a retread of the “flypaper” theory. The flypaper theory holds that the war in Iraq will draw all of the bad guys to one place. The logical flaw in this is the assumption that there is a finite group of people that you can attract to one place and kill.

In fact, we have vastly expanded the number of people who want to do us damage. In the work that Paul Cruickshank and I are doing, we looked at jihadi terrorist attacks around the world since the invasion of Iraq and found that they have gone up sevenfold. Of course, much of that is in Iraq and some of it is in Afghanistan, but it is also true around the Arab world, and to some degree in Europe. The only place where there has been a

decrease is in Southeast Asia (and that has nothing to do with Iraq, it is just to do with the particular situation in Southeast Asia).

The argument is absurd on the face of it, but I think it is related to the larger flypaper argument.

Steve Coll:

If you were to map money, weapons innovations, volunteers, and the movements among them currently, you would see that the same networks that are sending people around to Syria and Iraq are also going in through Karachi and up to the frontier. It is an easier trip, because you do not have to deal with the uncertainties that you encounter in Syria and then on your way into Iraq.

But the more important traffic in terms of actual plots that have been unraveled is, as Peter described, between Pakistan and the U.K. What is interesting is that it is a completely different infrastructure that is non-Arab. Lashkar-e-Taiba and its offshoots have a presence in the U.K. for fundraising, and there is an enormous amount of infrastructure that is used to move in that direction. That is a South Asian/European highway.

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PANEL THREE: THE LAST BEST CHANCE: NEW PLANS OF ACTION

Panelists: Max Boot, Prof. Noah Feldman, Col. W. Patrick Lang, Salameh Nematt, Prof. Paul Pillar

Moderator: Daniel Benjamin

Daniel Benjamin:

Pat Lang understood this conflict very early on. He summed it up for me, saying, “When you drive the car over the cliff, your options narrow.” I haven’t heard anyone improve on that since.

We have 130,000 troops in Iraq. We have the chaos there that has been amply discussed. Although I would say the conventional wisdom is that we have no good options, and certainly very few that have many virtues to them, we are in this mess nonetheless. We need to come up with the best idea possible for going forward.

While it may be true that the options have narrowed, certainly there have been many different plans put forward. We are, of course, headed for the surge. That seems like a foregone conclusion right now. It is also being called by some “The McCain Doctrine,” for reasons I cannot imagine. Other options are “double down” and “go long.” There are the Gelb-Biden Partition Plan, the Galbraith Partition Plan, the Murtha Redeployment Plan, and the Levin Redeployment plan. Others, and I think this is more inchoate, have come up with humanitarian intervention to protect the innocents as they relocate in the ethnic cleansing. There are garrisons and cantonments, and I am sure that we are soon going to see the “Give War a Chance Plan” as one way of dealing with the Sunni insurgency.

This raises, I think, serious questions that we need to grapple with, which include: What plan will do the best to safeguard, so far as possible, American interests; to limit the killing which, as Noah Feldman has pointed out, is a moral obligation of ours, since we did get the Iraqis into this mess in a very real sense? What should we do to avoid a wider war, a regional war, a proxy war? There are many different interests at stake here in what is the most economically vital part of the world.

I’d like to ask the panelists to illuminate the particular virtues of these different plans, or to put forth ones of their own.

Col. W. Patrick Lang:

There is positive value in proposing actual options for the future, even if they have narrowed considerably over the last few years. I start by saying that I do not think there is any doubt whatsoever that the president’s intentions, as stated (which are, of course, national policy), are the ones he intends to adhere to. Given that, I think there is going to be a tremendous struggle in Baghdad and to a lesser extent in Anbar Province over the next year. I personally think that, however much we wish our expeditionary force all the best opportunities they could have, we will still have this situation unresolved a year from now, and we will still have a large force in Iraq. I think that is what the future is very likely to be.

Nevertheless, I have felt for some time a personal responsibility to state what I think would be an alternative policy, to counter the argument “Well, you don’t like our plan, what’s your plan?”

I do not represent anybody, but I thought that I would offer such a plan. My position is that ongoing combat operations, and any future combat operations that are likely to ensue with regard to Iran or Syria, or anything of that sort, are not likely to be decisive in resolving the foreign policy issues in the United States’ favor, much less in favor of the various other countries.

Although it is useful in a diplomatic sense to threaten people, either explicitly or implicitly as appropriate, and to keep a large military force around as a balancing weight in negotiations, I think that the best way to resolve this would be for the United States to emphatically, strongly, and persistently lead a round of negotiations with both the internal and exter-

nal parties to this conflict in the greater Middle East. The United States should seek to engage each of them under our leadership, that is, the leadership of the president and whatever other foreign partners we could engage, in an attempt to reduce the number of conflicts-of-interest that are perceived to exist between us and the various players.

"I am in favor of an aggressive waging of diplomacy, with the end in mind of preventing the outbreak of war. I have considerable personal experience with war, and I do not wish to see it break out in any more places."

This would not be with the belief that you could create a paradise-on-Earth in which there would be no hatreds, no conflicts, and no killings, but rather to reduce the level of heat in these various conflicts to a level at which it would again resemble something we are more familiar with.

I am very much in favor of continuing the war against international jihadism. I think that the international jihadi movement, which people in this country like to call "al Qaeda," is a dedicated and irreconcilable enemy of the United States, and that they should be pursued to the ends of the Earth and destroyed because there is no way to make peace with them.

But with regard to regional peace in the Middle East and all of the various problems and conflicts that threaten to break out into war at present there, I think we should do as I said. We should go around in a tough-minded, not accommodating, not "we're giving up to you" kind of spirit, and seek to negotiate all of the different issues that exist between us and them, or between them and them, whoever the "them" is.

We cannot do that just on the basis of trying, for example, to negotiate with the Iranians over what it is they are doing in Iraq that we do not like. That would be just foolish

in my opinion, because if we do that, the Iranians, who have the upper hand there, will have no particular reason to negotiate with us at all. But there are a lot of different issues that the Iranians have over which we could reach enough of an accommodation to reduce the level of heat and the possibility of war throughout the region.

Many will say that this is realpolitik with a vengeance. It certainly is. I am in favor of an aggressive waging of diplomacy, with the end in mind of preventing the outbreak of war. I have considerable personal experience with war, and I do not wish to see it break out in any more places. I think that avoiding war, if you can reach a reasonable accommodation with people, is a worthwhile goal in itself.

Daniel Benjamin:

Could we have the kind of diplomatic initiative that you suggest if it were not backed by force, since we seem to be a little out of luck in that regard? And second, could we actually contain the issue of the Iranian nuclear program within this round of diplomacy? That issue seems to be almost as big as what is going on in Iraq.

Pat Lang:

To the first point, I think that the United States, whatever our present difficulties are in Iraq, remains by far the strongest military power on Earth. By maintaining a force in being in the region while negotiations of this sort are conducted, backed up by the enormous, overwhelming power of American strategic and other forces, there is no difficulty in having the military weight to influence the outcome.

As for the Iranian nuclear program, I am unconvinced that the Iranians really wish above all else to possess nuclear weapons and the missiles to employ them. There are a number of Iranian issues having to do with their place in the international order in the Middle East, and involving their economy, all of which we play a role in with a good deal of enthusiasm. And so, I think that if we went to the Iranians on the basis of all of the different

issues that involve us and them, with the aim of, for example, getting them to put their nuclear program under the full safeguards of the International Atomic Energy Agency, there would be some chance of their doing that. It is certainly worth the attempt.

Salameh Nematt:

I would like to start by taking a snapshot of the situation in the region, a picture as it stands now. I think that what is most striking about the region today is that nobody has decisively won in the confrontation with the other. If we look at the big picture of the American/Iranian confrontation – whether it is a confrontation over domination of Iraq; over Lebanon, with Iran backing Hezbollah against the U.S.-backed government; or in Palestine, where the Iranians have succeeded in playing an influential role in Hamas policies versus the Fatah secular movement, and in the relationship with Israel – I think the only thing in common between all the crises in the region is Iran, as a senior administration official said to me a few weeks ago. Iran is the common denominator of all the problems America has in that part of the world, and primarily, of course, in Iraq.

The insurgents have not won in Iraq. When people argue that America has lost the war in Iraq, the question that comes to mind is, who won? I do not think that the insurgents have won. Back in 2004 the insurgents were able to claim that they held territory. They held Falluja, for example. Today the insurgents do not hold a single part of Iraq. True, Anbar is a problematic area from which most of the attacks are being launched. There are not enough resources to take care of Anbar; but again, the insurgents cannot claim that they hold the territory, and now 4,000 troops are supposed to be earmarked for that particular region.

Saddam Hussein is gone. If there were Baathists who thought that there was still a chance of a deal to save and perhaps reinstall him, they now realize that this is not going to happen. And in the Middle East, political symbolism is very important; sometimes

more important than facts. Perceptions are sometimes more important than facts.

In my view, the Iranians have had a very good last three years, in the sense that they have consolidated their influence in Iraq. But I would disagree with those who say that the Iraqi Shiites have sold themselves to the Iranians. I think that if I were an Iraqi Shiite, I would be insulted if somebody told me that I was Iranian. While they do have strategic interests with Iran, and an interest in not upsetting Iran because it is a neighbor with whom they have to live, that does not mean that they are agents of the Iranians.

"I think that the Iranians have absolutely no interest in destabilizing Iraq, a country where fellow Shiites have gained power."

There is a big clash between the ayatollahs of the Shiites in Iraq, such as Sistani, and the ayatollahs of Iran who basically believe in *velayat-e-faqih*. Sistani believes that the clerics should not be running politics. This is a fundamental and very important difference. I think that ultimately there will be a confrontation between the mullahs of Iran and the mullahs of Iraq in terms of their role in society. There will also be a confrontation over who dominates in terms of *marja* as a reference point for the Shiites in the world, with the Iraqis claiming that Najaf is more holy than Qom, an assertion with which most Shiite scholars would agree.

Again, the insurgents have not won in Iraq. The Americans are losing interest, losing their stomach for the war, and they are just fed up with this messy situation where they do not see a clear victory. On the other hand, the Iranians have also not won in the sense that just when they thought the Americans were going to "cut and run," the U.S. decided to send more troops and engage countries that are now clearly hostile to Iran, such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan, to try to play a role, at least in the Anbar Province. I have

information that some military advisors and intelligence agents have been moved from these countries into Anbar through Jordan to try to explore the possibilities, talking to some tribal leaders to see if they could actually bring troops to control the security situation in Anbar. If that happens, it would be very significant. It would be the first time that Islamic troops, maybe under the U.N. umbrella, maybe covertly, would be actually moving into Anbar to control the biggest trouble that the Americans and the Iraqis are facing.

If I were to predict, I would say that the situation will look much better in nine months, not only because of the 20,000 troops being sent in the surge, but because of the way that all of the troops, all 140,000, will be used. They will be used differently than before. That is what General David Petraeus has been talking about, and I think this is important. He might not want to spell out publicly his plan for fear of giving advance notice to the insurgents, but I believe that the insurgents are getting fed up.

There is insurgency fatigue in Iraq. We only see what happens on the American side. In a democracy you have to be transparent, because the government is held accountable to the people. This is not the case on the side of the insurgents. The majority of the Sunnis in Iraq now are fed up with al Qaeda. They feel that al Qaeda is driving them to hell. Last year, Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad predicted that "a year from now, the Shiites would ask us to leave, and the Sunnis would beg us to stay." The Sunnis realize now that if the Americans lose in Iraq, they will be slaughtered. There will be genocide, there will be ethnic cleansing. This is exactly the incentive that would drive countries like Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt to move in to see what they could do to stop this. This is probably the biggest new development in the so-called new strategy in Iraq. I think the tactics are being changed.

It is another story for Lebanon and Palestine, but I think the biggest breakthrough that the Iranians have achieved in the region has been their ability to split not the Shiites

and the Sunnis, but the Shiites themselves, and even the Christians in Lebanon, where half of the Christians went with Hezbollah. They also broke that barrier with the Sunnis when they established an alliance with Hamas, which is a Sunni Muslim organization. This is where Iran has been very successful.

I think, on the other fronts, it is far from settled that the Iranians have won. I think the Iranians received a slap in Somalia because of their work with al Qaeda, and the Islamic Courts of Somalia has been unrolled by American-backed Ethiopian troops over the course of a few weeks.

Daniel Benjamin:

Well, I must say it is bracing to hear optimism. It is true that it is hard to identify a clear winner, but would you disagree with the proposition that Iran has at least a near-term interest in chaos in Iraq, because its principal enemy is pinned down and being bled?

Salameh Nematt:

There is a strong argument that if America confronts Iran, the Iranians will create hell for the Americans in Iraq. I would argue against that. I think that the Iranians have absolutely no interest in destabilizing a country where fellow Shiites have gained power. The Shiites are the government in Iraq, and they are, at least for now, in an alliance with the Iranians. Why would Iran try to destabilize a government that is supposed to be their ally, and risk the possibility of America installing a Sunni dictator, backed by the Arab Sunni states, to crush the Shiites and purge the Iranian influence from Iraq? I do not think that the Iranians would do that, simply because they are not stupid.

The other factor is the Iranian nuclear issue, which is, in my view, probably the biggest hoax in political memory. First of all, I do not think the Iranians are serious about obtaining a nuclear weapon. They know they would never be allowed to, and that the Israelis would take care of it first. Even if they did get a weapon, what could they do with it? As a practical matter, they couldn't use it. Is it

a deterrent against the Israelis? Not really, because if the Israelis wanted to wipe Iran off the map they would have done it already. Why should they wait for the Iranians to get the bomb? I do not think that the talk about nuclear weapons serves any point except for one thing, which is to use it as a bargaining chip with the Americans and the others concerned in order to consolidate Iranian regional influence and power. I agree with Pat Lang that the Iranians are using this as a means to a better deal with the Americans and the Israelis in regard to their role in and their domination of the Gulf region at least.

*"The Iranian nuclear issue
is probably the biggest hoax in
political memory."*

If you dominated the Gulf region, if you dominated its oil policies, you would be in a strong position to negotiate with the West. You would be holding a very important weapon – oil prices – if you could coordinate oil production among producers. One could easily argue that the Iranians are trying to convince the Saudis. They could say, "Why are you producing oil at full capacity? You could get twice as much for half of the output if you go along with us. We would have the West begging us to increase our production, and then we could dictate our terms. Why are you selling the oil so cheap?" This is their argument.

The Saudis respond by saying, "We want American protection against your ambitions in the region. The Americans have no intention of occupying us, but you could stir up the Shiite minority and cause us serious trouble."

So, in my view, the Iranians just want to dominate the region. They do not want to do anything against America or Israel. They want to bargain with these powers. At the height of the Islamic Revolution under Khomeini, the Iranians were doing business with America and Israel, "The Great Satan" and "The Little Satan." This is known as the Iran-Contra

Affair. If I were in the shoes of the U.S. government, I would not even discuss the nuclear issue with Iran. I would not bargain over the nuclear issue, I would just talk business about their regional role and their intervention in Iraq, Palestine, and Lebanon.

Max Boot:

This panel is a microcosm of the Congress and American public opinion. Everybody is deeply unhappy with the current course of events in Iraq, but nobody knows what the alternative ought to be; or rather, many people have different ideas about what the alternative ought to be, and there is very little consensus.

I certainly agree with the consensus view that the path we are on now is not the right one, obviously. We are heading toward defeat in Iraq, and American soldiers and the Iraqis themselves are paying a very high price for the current course of events. Like most people, I do not have any great degree of certainty, given where we are today and considering Pat Lang's comment that there are no good options when you are going over a cliff. So I do not have any great option that I think would magically solve everything and make the situation better in the course of two weeks, two months, or even two years.

I think, however, that there are some options which are less realistic than others. I want to begin with some of the unrealistic options which I hear being talked about as alternatives to what the Bush administration is doing (which itself is unrealistic, but I'll come to that).

The big option, which was the product of months of labor by the Iraq Study Group, is basically that we should go hat-in-hand to the Iranians and to the Syrians and ask them to please help us out in Iraq. I think everybody is still scratching their heads trying to figure out why our enemies in Syria and Iran would be interested in bailing us out of this situation, where we are losing and they are gaining the upper hand. I do not mind negotiating. I agree with Colonel Lang that by all means we should negotiate. But I say that we have to

negotiate from a position of strength, where we have something to bring to the table, and are not just abject pleaders to our enemies. That is unfortunately the situation that we would be in today if we were to try somehow to negotiate our way out of Iraq based on the good will of the Syrians or the Iranians. I do not think they would help us.

I am not sure that the help they could give us would be very useful in any case, and the price they would exact would be incredibly high, including having to go along with the Iranian nuclear program, having to go along with the Syrian domination of Lebanon, and various other unpalatable options. I just do not think that a negotiated solution with the neighbors is a very realistic way out of this mess in Iraq, which is being driven largely by internal Iraqi dynamics. While the Syrians and Iranians could certainly pour fuel on the fire, I do not think that they could extinguish the flames.

Other options which have been thrown out there are also, I think, extremely high-risk with very low probabilities of success. I hear talk about options such as gradually drawing down U.S. troops while building up our advisory presence with the Iraqi forces, or perhaps moving the U.S. troops into bastions in the Kurdish areas or in western Iraq. It sounds realistic, but I do not think it really is. When you consider, for example, the option of positioning U.S. troops on the borders away from the population centers, and basically saying, "Let Iraq have its civil war, we will just try to contain it on the borders," I am not sure that it is realistic to expect tens of thousands of U.S. troops to sit a few miles away while massive ethnic cleansing, or even genocide, is being perpetrated. What good would the troops be doing there?

Would they be keeping Iraq's neighbors from intervening? I doubt it, because while they could keep Syrian or Iranian troop formations from crossing the frontier, that is unlikely in any case. Simply having regular troop formations on the border is not going to stop Iraq's neighbors from providing arms, or money, or advisors – the kind of support

they already provide – to various factions within Iraq.

I do not think there is much that U.S. troops could do simply by redeploying, or by following the notion that we could somehow police western Iraq from forces in Kurdistan or Kuwait. Iraq is a big country, a country the size of California. It would be like policing San Francisco from Los Angeles, or policing New York City from Albany. It is not a terribly realistic scenario if you think about the mechanics of how it would actually work.

There are other options out there, including various versions of a partition of Iraq, including one that is being pitched by my old boss, Les Gelb. I do not think this has gotten very far, because when you think about how you would implement it, you have to realize very quickly that it is a recipe not for decreasing bloodshed, but for increasing it, at least in the short term. When you think about how to partition multiethnic parts of Iraq, such as Baghdad or Mosul, what you are looking at is an India/Pakistan type of partition, which means that millions of people could potentially be killed.

I am not completely dismissive of options that call for decreasing the U.S. combat troop presence and increasing our advisory efforts with the Iraqi army. There is something to be said for that, and I know that there are a lot of folks in our Special Forces community who are in favor of that option. But we have to realize that it is a very high-risk option, because there is a very real risk that the Iraqi security forces, which are rickety in the best of times, would completely collapse if we were suddenly to start drawing down U.S. combat troops. You would have a complete disintegration. U.S. advisors would be hostage to fortune, and we would see terrible losses among them.

The Iraqi security forces are no great shakes right now, and to the extent that they are being held together at all, it is by a massive American military presence. I am not sure that we could sustain that presence at much lower troop levels.

I am afraid that if we do start pulling troops out, however we portray this in the

news media, whether we call it redeployment or whatever we call it, the reality that would come through to the Iraqis is that we would be withdrawing, we would be conceding defeat, giving up. We might see an acceleration of the collapse of the country which is already going on, and that would lead us to some of the dire consequences of precipitous withdrawal which the Iraqi Study Group itself warned about.

"There is a very real risk that the Iraqi security forces, which are rickety in the best of times, would completely collapse if we were suddenly to start drawing down U.S. combat troops."

As bad as the situation is now, it is not hard to imagine that it could get worse. About 100 Iraqis are dying a day now. We could see 1,000 Iraqis dying a day. We could see neighboring states being drawn in. We could see massive refugee outflows destabilizing neighboring states. We could see western Iraq becoming a Taliban-style haven of Sunni insurgents. We could see Shiite insurgents carrying their campaign across the border into Saudi Arabia. There are all sorts of dire scenarios that are very easy to envision. Maybe they wouldn't happen. Maybe everything would be okay if we were to pull out, but I do not think that is the way to bet. I think the way to bet is that things would get a whole heck of a lot worse.

I think there is a recognition of that, even though people are very upset about what is going on. We are not seeing a massive "pull out now" movement, even among the Democratic leaders in Congress. I think they are very wary of the consequences of immediate withdrawal as the Iraqi Study Group warned, and rightly so.

If we are not going to withdraw tomorrow, what do we do? The option that President Bush is pursuing is highly imperfect right

now, but I would argue that it is probably the least-bad option.

We have not been able to control Baghdad. I think a lot of that comes down to sheer lack of troop numbers, that you cannot control a city of 6,000,000 people with 120,000 troops.

If you look at the standard counterinsurgency formulas, which are contained in the counterinsurgency manual that General Petraeus and General James Mattis worked on, you need about one counterinsurgent per 50 people in the population, which suggests that you need a force level of about 120,000-130,000 to control Baghdad, and probably another 120,000-130,000 to control the rest of the Sunni triangle.

If we were carrying out this surge option in a perfect world, without any limitations imposed from the outside for various reasons, I would say that our best bet right now, short term, would be to send about another 130,000 troops to Iraq. Obviously that is not a terribly realistic proposal. We do not have 130,000 troops to send because of the major error that President Bush made early in his presidency by not enlarging the size of the active-duty Army and Marine Corps. We are badly overstretched and there are huge limits to what our military can provide, given where we are right now. Twenty thousand is far from an ideal number. I think it can, nevertheless, within those limitations, improve things, especially if those troops are used in a classic counterinsurgency campaign of the kind we pursued in Tal Afar and a few other places in Iraq.

That approach has not generally been pursued in Baghdad, at least not recently, where most of our troops have been based in large forward operating bases on the outskirts of the city, venturing into the city only for infrequent patrols or convoys. If we actually moved our troops into the city, positioned them in forward operating posts in the city itself, made them a constant presence on the street, and pursued this classic population security counterinsurgency strategy, it could pay off.

Even given the constraints, I think there would be certainly enough troops to mount an effective counterinsurgency campaign in the

central areas of Baghdad, to go after the mixed Sunni/Shiite neighborhoods, to go after some of the Sunni neighborhoods. It is not going to clean up the entire city right away. It is probably not going to do anything about Sadr City in the short term, but I do think that we have the resources to improve the situation in central Baghdad.

I think we can accomplish that, especially if we take other badly needed steps along with the increase in troop numbers. We also need to have more advisors within the Iraqi army. We need to expand the size of the Iraqi army, we need to commit more resources to it, and provide them with heavier arms and equipment. We need to expand the size of the Iraqi prison system and impose some kind of system of martial law. That would allow us to capture more violent offenders, get them off the street and keep them off the street, and end the kind of “catch-and-release” policy that our troops complain about now, where the troops capture bad guys who are then released by the Iraqi courts. We need to institute a system of biometric identity cards so that we have a better idea of who is living in Baghdad and other areas and so that we can tell insurgents apart from the civilian population.

There are a whole host of steps that we need to take along with the troop increase. If we do not, the impact of the troop increase is probably not going to be that great. But if we do take them, and if we carry out an effective counterinsurgency strategy, more troops can be very helpful. The challenge, of course, will be long term – sustaining the gains that you might get on the security front in the next few months, or in the next year, without keeping a massive U.S. military presence in Baghdad. That is going to be a huge challenge.

I cannot fool you and say that I think that the prospects of success are tremendous. I think that the odds of failure are still high, no matter what we do right now. But if we pull out right now and give up, the odds of failure will be 100 percent. I think that if we carry out the surge policy, and perhaps even increase the size of the surge (which I think

is possible), and take some of these other steps, there is still a possibility to salvage an acceptable outcome from what is currently an unacceptable situation. I am not making any kind of utopian promises here, or saying that this is somehow a magical formula for success. All I am saying is that it is the least-bad option.

Daniel Benjamin:

Thank you for a comprehensive overview. Let me push you on one issue. You said that the odds of failure would still be pretty high. According to some estimates, we would need, and have needed from the beginning, something like 500,000 troops in Iraq for an occupation and to be prepared for a counterinsurgency mission.

If you believe the odds are against you, isn't there a big opportunity cost to pursuing this kind of Baghdad-first strategy, as opposed to containing the civil war within Iraq's boundaries? The issue is not just about Syrian troop formations coming in – I agree with you that that's unlikely – but rather spillover effects in other countries, particularly some of the more fragile ones in the region, such as Jordan.

Max Boot:

I would be curious to hear about how the mechanics of this containment strategy would work. If Jordan were to be threatened – by massive refugee flows, for example, even higher than the refugee outflows that they have already had to date – does that mean that we would position U.S. troops on Iraq's western border and tell refugees at gunpoint that they can't go into Jordan? How would it work?

Daniel Benjamin:

They can usually tell the difference between refugees and combatants.

Max Boot:

But a massive outflow of refugees themselves would destabilize Jordan. This is one of these supposedly realistic policy scenarios that I do not want to dismiss altogether, but I am just

not convinced that U.S. troops could sit by while horrible atrocities, even worse than what has been happening today, are being perpetrated a few miles away. I recall that when terrible human rights abuses were occurring in places like Bosnia and Kosovo in the 1990s, I and a lot of other people said that we could not just sit by and watch. We were thousands of miles away then, not 20 miles away, so I do not think it is a terribly viable policy to say that U.S. troops would watch while the worst atrocities in the world go on a few miles away. I am not sure what good they would be doing simply by watching.

Paul Pillar:

The conventional wisdom about there being no good options has been referred to a number of times. While it may be conventional, it is still wisdom. It has to be the starting point for any discussion of options. It means that it is a whole lot easier to shoot down anyone else's proposal than to defend one's own plan. How a debate on this set of topics comes out largely depends on how the question is framed and structured.

I noticed that the president or his speechwriters skillfully framed the debate in a couple of respects in his speech on January 10, 2007. He challenged anyone with a better plan for stability in Iraq to come forward with it. In other words, he put the burden of proof on someone else. That provides protection if there is no good plan to bring about stability.

There is also the rhetoric about all the bad things that will flow from the plan not being supported, which we heard again in the president's State of the Union address. This sidesteps two questions. First, how much of the nightmare are we already seeing, everything from refugees to terrorist exploitation of the conflict? And second, even if things could get even worse, or would likely get worse, if the U.S. were to pull back rather than surge in, how much chance is there that something like that would happen eventually anyway, making it a question of delay rather than prevention?

The Iraq Study Group report, of course, had very high expectations placed on it before it was published, but its main contribution was never going to be coming up with bright new ideas or new ways to pull this particular rabbit out of a hat. The main value of the ISG exercise would have been to provide political cover for a way out of this mess that both the president and his opponents could have pointed to as a reference point despite all the bases for criticism – a reference point that could have been the basis for a consensus in which no side would have had to say that it had thrown in the towel to its political opponents. Well, the president chose a different route.

I think that the real issues, the most important and interesting issues on this question of Iraq right now, are more in Washington than in Iraq. In regard to the surge plan, let me point first to what I think is a valid principle embodied in it, which is that security affects the politics just as the politics affects security. In other words, it is a valid point that the totally unacceptable security situation in Baghdad is a direct and important impediment to any further progress in the political reconstruction process in Iraq. But the plan is not really new. We have tried to surge in other ways in Baghdad in the past. As Max Boot pointed out, the numbers are still short of what counterinsurgency doctrine would call for. Just to get close to those numbers, there is still the same old reliance on Iraqi troops, and even more so on Iraqi police, with the same questions about reliability and loyalties that have been a problem before.

"We have, today, two governments in Tehran and Washington that bring out the worst in each other."

Secondly, this is never going to be a classic counterinsurgency because it is not a classic insurgency on the other side. It is a civil war. Stephen Biddle has written about this and I totally agree with what he has said.

Any discussion that we can have about the prospects of this particular plan for apprecia-

bly improving things is really a discussion on the margins, which I do not say in order to belittle it. That is because we are talking about marginal differences in degree of hope for pulling this particular glob of fat out of this fire, and there are all kinds of uncertainties here. It is so marginal, and so beset with uncertainty, that I would even argue that this particular factor in the Iraq policy equation almost washes out compared to other major factors that we have not talked about here, and which go beyond Iraq.

One factor is all of the various ways in which this conflict continues to affect broader U.S. interests. This includes, but is by no means limited to, the effects on international terrorism as they were summarized by the intelligence estimate that was partly declassified on September 26, 2006; that it is a “cause célèbre” for the jihadists, that it is a recruitment tool for al Qaeda, that it is one of the major factors propelling the growth of and sustaining the jihadist movement and shaping a whole new generation of jihadi terrorists. There is also the issue of the United States’ larger standing among populations around the world, which the BBC released a poll about on January 23, 2007. That is one whole set of factors, beyond what happens inside Iraq.

The third is perhaps too obvious to need stating, but is the least uncertain – the direct expenditure of blood and treasure. As I tell members of Congress to whom I talk about this, “You, the representatives of the American people, are the best experts as to the tolerance of the American people for that.” It is not people like us on this panel. Someday someone is going to write a definitive biography, or psychobiography, of President Bush. It is going to explain a whole lot more about what this plan and associated things are all about than any of us who are presumed to be Middle East experts can. Frederick Kagan of the American Enterprise Institute was quoted in *The Washington Post* on January 21, 2007. He said, “The guy who is most committed to winning and finding a way to win is the president. He always has

been; he’s the only reason we are still in this fight.” I think I agree with Kagan on that.

With all the things you sometimes hear about similarities and differences between the Vietnam War and Iraq, let me just point out one big difference. Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger inherited the Vietnam War. George W. Bush did not inherit this war. It is totally his own, and we know him as a president who finds it very hard to admit a mistake. I do not see any real change in the current course, and I consider the plan announced on January 10, 2007 to basically be a variation on the current course over the next couple of years. That being the case, I think that a lot of us who have concerns about some of our policies in the Middle East need to think at least as much about Iran in the weeks ahead.

Some of my friends and government types are more worried than I am, although I do share some of the worry, of waking up one morning and reading about U.S. military strikes on Iran. There are certainly signs that are a basis for worry. Even if a strike is not planned, we are doing certain things, such as sending military deployments to the Persian Gulf and raiding Iranian consulates, which may increase the chances of clashes and confrontations. We have to remember that something like the accidental shooting down of an Iranian airliner during the Iran/Iraq War is the sort of thing that can happen in an atmosphere of confrontation in that part of the world – an incident, by the way, which many Iranians still believe was a deliberate act by the United States rather than a tragic case of mistaken identity.

We have, today, two governments in Tehran and Washington that bring out the worst in each other. I am not implying any equivalence here. I am just looking at the dynamics as a political scientist would. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad certainly makes things difficult, with his absolutely execrable, outrageous rhetoric about Israel, the Holocaust and all sorts of other things. I readily admit that that makes it hard for anyone in Washington – Republican or Democrat, whoever is in charge of our policy – to be seen

making anything that looks like an approach to Tehran. Ahmadinejad really is somebody that I think we all love to hate. But I think we see some encouraging signs in Tehran that the Iranians realize some of the liabilities of having this guy out front rhetorically, even though he does not really run national security policy. This is demonstrated by some of the results in the recent local elections and elections for the Council of Experts, in which forces allied with Ahmadinejad did not do well. More recently, some reports suggest that people associated with the supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and elsewhere in the government would like Ahmadinejad to strike a lower profile with things like the nuclear issue. That is one half of it.

But we have to recognize the other half – that the United States, through its policies, is a very big influence on Iranian perceptions and behavior. It simply does not make sense for us in the United States to say, “We do not like what you are doing in Iran, you Iranians,” and not realize that we are a major influence in the thinking in Tehran, which of course sees the United States as a major threat along with Israel. When they perceive a policy that is basically still centered around the hope for regime change, there is simply no incentive to cooperate.

The question of incentives for cooperation was raised earlier. I think that one of the biggest things that you have to applaud the Iraq Study Group for is putting the emphasis on regional diplomacy up front in the report, even though that opens them up to criticism, I think validly, about the Iranians and Syrians (no matter how much good will they exhibit) pulling our particular fat out of the Iraqi fire. I think that their ability to do so has been overstated. But why would they cooperate?

There are basically two reasons, if we were to give them the proper incentives. First, as Salameh Nematt mentioned earlier, they have a strong incentive not to have total, unending disorder on their western boundary. Second, because there are a lot of things that they want from the United States – not just to cave on the nuclear issue, there are all kinds of

other things, including the matters of frozen assets, of what to do with the Mujahadeen-e-Khalq, of economic and trade relations, and of something much vaguer that the Iranians describe as “respect.” But they have no hope of getting any of that.

Daniel Benjamin:

Your bottom line, then, is that it hardly matters what the policy is in the near-term in terms of controlling the consequences or changing the course of events. I think one of the lost messages of the ISG report is that we are, at this point, endangering our security in the rest of the world. And our forces are stretched dangerously thin.

I would like to ask your views on that. Secondly, to bring up something that Salameh mentioned, do you agree with the argument that the Iranians have a certain kind of relationship with our troops in Iraq, that our troops are hostage-like, that the Iranians could cause us a lot more trouble if they wanted to?

Paul Pillar:

As to the first point, I absolutely agree. To speak to Max Boot’s earlier point about being in a position of strength and so on, we are in a position of weakness because we are so tied down. Although the Iranians are concerned about being literally encircled by the U.S. military, the vibrations that I have gotten from journalists who have gone to Tehran is that they are not exactly shaking in their boots about this impending attack business because they know that we are tied down.

As to the second point, I do agree. I disagree, perhaps, with Salameh. One of our biggest vulnerabilities in terms of how the Iranians could respond, although not the only one, is in Iraq. The Iranians have been putting out all kinds of lines of influence with a wide variety of groups in Iraq, mainly to make sure that their influence will be there whenever the dust finally settles. They have not even begun to use those lines of influence in a way that they could to cause more deadly trouble for us.

Noah Feldman:

I would like to begin with the closing scenario in Iraq, and then move backwards to try to figure out what is going happen in the next few years. For this part of my remarks, I hope to wear a wholly realist hat. There should be no moral or ethical component to it at all. Then I will conclude my remarks with some observations about the moral or ethical implications that I will describe.

So this is an attempt at being purely predictive. Iraq is a denominationally and ethnically divided society with populations that, at certain flashpoints, are imbricated. Baghdad has large numbers of Shia and a large number of Sunni. There used to be a lot of Kurds living there; many of them are now gone. Kirkuk is obviously another multiethnic flashpoint. In a scenario like that, there are really only two versions of the final ending, and they are versions of the same thing.

In each scenario, those elites who are capable of generating the authority to get people to listen to them (which partly means political elites, and partly means quasi-military and militia elites) have decided that in light of the exertion of force upon them it would be better to stop fighting and reach some sort of a power-sharing arrangement than it would be to keep on fighting. I begin with the proposition that the fighting cannot end until that happens. It is important to add "in light of the exertion of force upon them," because I can really picture two different variants on this final conclusion.

One is a final conclusion in which these different leaderships, having bled, decide that they cannot gain anymore than they already have, and reach some sort of negotiated settlement where the populations remain imbricated, Baghdad does not become wholly ethnically cleansed, and the neighborhood divisions (which are becoming increasingly sharp) remain the *de facto* divisions.

The other scenario is where there has been a much more extensive kind of ethnic movement (and this is, by the way, a precondition of all of the partition plans. No matter what they tell you, this is a precondition of all of

the plans; that large numbers of population have been moved around, presumably mostly not by choice). That is the other possible scenario, and even here the fighting ends when leaders of these various moved-around factions just decide that there is nothing more to be gained by fighting forward.

Let me now project backwards. There is no question in my mind that Colonel Lang is correct that there will still be roughly the same number of U.S. troops in Iraq at the end of President Bush's term as there are now, partly for the reasons that Max Boot has described – that, in fact, it is not viable to stand there while people are being killed. It is also partly for the reasons that Paul Pillar described, that the president himself, personally, is deeply committed to this project and is not going to walk away and watch these massacres happen on his watch.

So now let me talk about a best-case scenario and a worst-case scenario for the next two years. The best-case scenario is that the civil war currently going on in Iraq, which is what I would describe as a contained and controlled civil war (a "controlled burn" if you want to use the forest fire metaphor), will bleed various parties enough that the various players think that they have more to gain by cutting some sort of a power-sharing deal than they do by continuing to fight and waiting to see what the next U.S. president is going to do. I do not think that this is a very high-probability outcome. But I do not think it is completely impossible. If adding to the number of troops in Iraq, which is really what we are talking about here, is actually somewhat able to increase stability in and around Baghdad, that will be a marginal reason for the various players to think that they have an interest in cutting some sort of a deal, because the efficacy of continuing to fight will be reduced for them.

And so I think that Paul is exactly right. At the margins, there is really no question that we could make some positive contribution to reaching this outcome where the negotiated solution comes at the end of the next two years. I would describe this whole thing as the

“controlled fire” model. The idea is that the fire burns itself out under some control. The control is exerted by our troops, and the fire is a civil war.

The alternate scenario is that at the end of the next two years when a new president takes office (it does not really matter for these purposes whether the new president is a Democrat or a Republican), the U.S. tries to take steps that would consequently put us in some of the positions that Max described. For example, the new president might say that we are going to just start withdrawing troops. As troops are withdrawn, if the civil war has not burnt itself out, the violence of the civil war will escalate, ethnic cleansing will escalate, and civilian deaths will escalate.

“I think that what we are ethically obligated to do is to try to save as many lives as we can on the way to a balanced outcome in which the different parties in Iraq enter into some kind of a peace agreement.”

At that stage in the scenario where a president, having gamed us out, nonetheless wants to withdraw, the only option left would be to use air power in an extremely imprecise way to try to stop some of the worst of the ethnic cleansing. The model for this is, and will be, the former Yugoslavia. When ethnic cleansing gets bad enough, it can be limited, but by no means eliminated, by air power. Some of that air power could ultimately be used to bring the local forces to realize that they have more to lose by continuing to fight. After the fighting has stopped, we would have to reintroduce some sort of peacekeeping troops, probably still Americans in that period, but Americans under a very different set of conditions. They would be under conditions of actual peacekeeping rather than counterinsurgency.

I think a lot more people would end up dying in this scenario, but many could die in the controlled burn also. I would describe it as the “not-really-controlled burn.” This is the idea that the fire needs to burn itself out, the civil war needs to play itself out. After that happens, the various players will get some sense of who has the capacity to win and who has the capacity to lose.

Parenthetically, I do not think anybody has a good sense of that. Salameh Nematt said, and I think it is very interesting, that there is a concern about who would win in such a civil war. I actually think there are plausible arguments on both sides. I do not think that the Sunni insurgents who believe that they will beat the Shia in the long run are crazy. Their numbers are much smaller, but they have the remnants of an officer corps. None of the Shia fighting forces has performed very impressively anywhere in Iraq yet, including militias and governmental forces. That is probably because of the absence of a trained officer corps.

It will certainly be a long and a bloody fight between the two sides, and obviously the Shia have a plausible argument to think that they will win because there are more of them in the long run. In a long-enough fight, they would have a tremendous advantage. I actually think that it is rational for both sides to think they can keep on fighting, and that is one of the reasons that the civil war scenario is deepening right now.

In sum, the fire is going to have to burn itself out. The question is, does the fire burn itself out in a controlled burn with us present, or does the fire burn itself out after we withdraw a couple years from now and put ourselves in some awkward positions? The cover that I think the new president would use in the latter circumstance would be, “I was elected by the American people saying ‘withdraw.’ I am withdrawing. We do not like to see massacres, but we cannot send ground troops into those massacres. We are just going to use air power, much in the way that the air power was used in former Yugoslavia eventually after a long process.”

Let me turn for just a minute to the moral or ethical consequences of this vision. There is an adage that philosophers like that says “ought implies can;” that it is not plausible to say that I have a moral obligation to do something if I cannot practically or realistically make it happen. If one believes this, which not everybody does, then any account of what our moral obligations are to Iraqis must be conditioned on what we can realistically do. I want to avoid an ethical mistake that I think has been made again and again in the debate over the Iraq War. The mistake is in saying that we cannot realistically add 120,000 more troops, for example, because the American public would never stand for it.

I hope you see the moral error there. It is in saying that “we” are different from the “American public.” They are one and the same. If there is a moral obligation to add 120,000 troops in order to get the situation under control, it is not an answer to say that it is unrealistic because we (the same people who are the moral agents) do not want to do it. I do not want to be understood as saying that because we are as a nation lacking in the will to do the right thing, we are excused ethically from it. That is getting “ought implies can” backwards.

However, the civil war has at this point reached such a serious state, and the government of Iraq has such a weak hold on a claim to be a government, that I think that what we are ethically obligated to do, as the country that initiated the scenario in the first place, is try to minimize the deaths along the way – to try to save as many lives as we can on the way to a balanced outcome between the different parties in Iraq in which some kind of a peace agreement is entered into.

That is why I think that it is probably a good thing that, as a realistic matter, we are stuck there for the next two years. That is also why things will be very tricky for the next president, assuming that the next president wants to enter into some sort of withdrawal model. There is an image of our being in the same place two years from now as we are today; that deaths continue at a controlled rate

in the meanwhile, but the parties refuse to reach a negotiated settlement because they think that we will eventually leave and want to see what will happen.

That could be where we are in two years, but I suspect not. I think that two years is a long time, and at the end of that time we will be closer to the parties having some sense of what they think should happen next. But I do not want to guarantee that; that may not be the case.

So, from an ethical or moral standpoint, I am opting for the controlled burn. Not because I like it (I am not happy about it at all), not because we couldn’t have done better at every stage, not because we weren’t under a moral duty to have many more troops there from the beginning – I believe all of those things to be the case – but because I think that it is the best scenario given the constraints that are on us right now.

Daniel Benjamin:

The premise built into your controlled burn is that our presence is controlling the burn, but the statistics actually indicate the opposite. We surged last summer in Baghdad. Killings have gone up dramatically. The conclusion I would draw from that is that we ought to get our people out of there. It is really an open question, especially considering Paul Pillar’s view, whether our presence is in any way contributing to restraining the violence, is it not?

Noah Feldman:

It is certainly an open question insofar as there is no place that you could look in a book and find out the answer to it, I’ll grant you that. These are just questions of the best arguments one can raise. Certainly our surge in Baghdad last time was an open invitation to the insurgents to either stand and fight or walk away and show that our strategy was working. For the most part, they chose to fight, and they have gotten the better of it.

I do not think it follows that our walking away from Baghdad, for example, would substantially reduce the degree of violence. The

reason is simply the bare fact of where the populations are. What we have seen is the increased breakdown of Baghdad into distinct neighborhoods with distinct centers of control; not just the government over here, Americans over here, insurgents over here, Jaish al Mahdi over here, and indeterminate gangs over in this other neighborhood. The breakdown has been into many, many subgroups. Those sorts of neighborhood arrangements are profoundly unstable.

If someone could convince me that our presence is what is causing the problem (and people have been saying this quite rationally

from the very beginning); that if we left, people would say, “Okay, the Americans are out, now we understand our strategic position and now we can negotiate a settlement,” I would absolutely think that was the right thing to do strategically, tactically, and morally. But thus far I haven’t heard arguments that convince me that that would be the scenario. Instead, it seems to me that the most likely scenario is that a greater degree of withdrawal would lead to just what we have seen happening – a loss of control in Baghdad, greater Balkanization, greater instability, and quasi-ethnic-cleansing of neighborhoods.

PANEL FOUR: THE NEIGHBORHOOD: DOMINOES READY TO FALL?

Panelists: Steven Cook, Prof. Fawaz Gerges, Prof. Farhad Kazemi, Craig Unger

Moderator: Prof. Stephen Holmes

Stephen Holmes:

This panel will focus on the regional consequences of the war in Iraq. Several people have already spoken about the likelihood of other countries being drawn in, and about refugees flooding out. The conversation so far has primarily been about Iran and Saudi Arabia. I’d like for this panel to focus on Turkey, and perhaps Israel. I’d also like the panel to address issues such as the nuclear arms race in the region and the wider effects of the Sunni/Shia battle in Iraq. Does that conflict affect the relationship between Hezbollah and Hamas, for example?

The title of this discussion refers to the domino metaphor, and whether those dominoes are ready to fall. That question does not address the idea of a democratic wave; that is, a *democratic* domino effect. People are not talking about that anymore. Condoleezza Rice did not mention it when she was in Cairo in October 2006. There is a lot to be said about that, but I will just give one example. In 1837, Alexis de Tocqueville wrote one of his letters on Algeria. This was after the French had invaded, and the purpose of the letter was to show that the power to conquer militarily is not the power to govern. He asked this

question: Let’s imagine that a Chinese army invaded France, and that this Chinese force that invaded and conquered France knew no French, knew nothing about French history, knew nothing about French institutions, and nothing about French law, but wished to reform the French political system. Would it be likely to succeed?

It would be very unlikely, he concludes. I think there is a lesson there.

Steven Cook:

We are here to talk about whether the dominoes will fall, and what effects U.S. policy has had on the region as the result of our invasion of Iraq. It is abundantly clear that the political effects throughout the region have been massive.

First and foremost is the rise of Iran and its regional ambitions. Second, there is the reemergence of Sunni/Shia politics, which is reverberating well beyond the Gulf. Fawaz Gerges has spent some time in Cairo; I was there in September. I know that people in Algeria are talking about the Sunni/Shia conflict. These are places where it is relatively hard to find a Shia. It is particularly amazing in a place like Egypt, where Zeinab and

Hussein are venerated – these are central figures in Shia theology, yet Egypt is overwhelmingly Sunni.

Third, our policy choices have done great damage to our relations with Turkey as the result of the possible emergence of an independent Kurdistan in northern Iraq. This has had a significant effect not only on Turkish foreign policy, but on their domestic policy as well. A more forceful Turkish military has reemerged. This is certainly not good for Turkey's efforts to consolidate the rather extraordinary political reforms that they have undertaken since mid-2003 or so. At the same time, our policy choices, the situation in northern Iraq, and the possibility of the rise of an independent Kurdistan have resulted in a massive dose of nationalism that made the assassination of Hrant Dink, a Turkish-Armenian newspaper editor, possible.

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The fourth effect that our misguided policies have had on the region is the diminution of the United States' strategic position in the Arab world. If any casual observer of Arab media were to see the juxtaposition of the U.S. occupation of Iraq and Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories, they would see that a clear message is being sent. This has most recently resulted in efforts on the part of our traditional allies – Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan – to carve out foreign policies that are more independent from our own. It is no coincidence that Hosni Mubarak's son, Gamal Mubarak, the presumptive successor to the Egyptian presidency, suddenly announced in September that Egypt would be pursuing its own nuclear program. It is no coincidence that the Saudis have been flirting with the Chinese, or that every Egyptian official whom I meet

with is either coming from or going to Beijing.

This has been somewhat ameliorated by the perceived Iranian threat in the region. Unlike the response to Vice President Dick Cheney's tour in 2002 to drum up support for an invasion of Iraq, my sense is that our traditional Arab allies would be tripping over themselves to take part in the destabilization of Iran. That being said, the strong undercurrent of looking for ways to carve out more independent foreign policies still remains. From my own perspective, that is not necessarily a bad thing. But from the point of view of the decision-makers in Washington, that may be disastrous.

Finally, just consider for a moment what the war in Iraq and its outcome to date have done to Arab leaders. Imagine for a second that you are an Arab potentate in Cairo, Amman, or Riyadh. What has happened in Iraq is a fundamental break from your world view. Contrary to myths about the Middle East being an Arab region, there is now a Kurdish president of Iraq. Contrary to your ideas about Sunni supremacy, the Shia are clearly going to control Iraq. Contrary to your efforts to maintain your authoritarian rule, there has been some genuine effort to establish an open and more democratic political system in Iraq. That effort has not worked out very well to be sure, but the January 30, 2005 elections in Iraq particularly reverberated amongst populations within the region. Leaders in the region are clearly shaken as a result.

Do I believe that the dominoes are ready to fall based on all of this? Absolutely not. It is not likely. One of our grave misperceptions about the Middle East is that the region is hopelessly unstable. I actually see the regimes in the region as being quite stable. Phenomena such as extremism and violence may be indicative of a variety of interconnected problems, but they do not necessarily suggest instability. I think the idea that regimes in the Middle East are unstable and vulnerable to political challenges is too narrow and underestimates their proven capacity to survive and muddle through seemingly catastrophic crises.

There have been a whole host of them, including Egypt's defeat in 1967, bread riots in Egypt in 1977, and riots in Jordan in 1989. Saddam Hussein's regime remained intact after the Iraqi defeat in the first Gulf War.

I do believe that a regional war as the result of a collapse in Iraq is entirely possible. Should Iraq fail, regional powers would most certainly get involved. After all, Nawaf Obaid, a former advisor to the recently departed Saudi ambassador to the United States, said as much in *The Washington Post* on November 29, 2006. Some believe that this will ultimately result in a regional war. It was interesting how President Bush used this as a political tool to garner support for the surge (which is a misnomer, it is more like an ooze) in his State of the Union address on January 23, 2007. The nightmare scenario being spit out by some has been picked up by the administration as a reason to say that we must support the surge, the escalation, the augmentation of U.S. troops in Iraq.

I think that those people have not spent enough time in the Middle East. We are unlikely to see Saudi, Egyptian, or Jordanian boots on the ground in Iraq. These countries will continue to do what they have been doing – arming and funding factions in a proxy war against Iran. That means that it will largely be contained within Iraq. After all, the Saudis are building a wall along their border with Iraq for precisely this eventuality. (Sadly, the construction of walls is a growth industry in the Middle East these days.)

The exception is Turkey. We could see a massive commitment of Turkish forces across the border into northern Iraq in order to prevent either a takeover of the city of Kirkuk or the emergence of an independent Kurdistan. The reason that I am so concerned about this has more to do with what is happening in Brussels than with what is happening in Kirkuk, northern Iraq, or Ankara. The more trouble that the Turks get into with the European Union, the less likely it is that the main political actors in this drama in Turkey will feel constrained from taking precipitous action to prevent the emergence of an inde-

pendent state in northern Iraq. As Turkey gets into trouble with the European Union, the Turkish general staff will feel less compelled to toe the line on Turkey's E.U. drive. They will feel that they have very little to lose and much to gain from snuffing out Kurdish nationalism in northern Iraq.

So, in the end, I do not think that there will be a falling dominoes effect in the region. I think that the regimes are largely stable and intact, but I believe that we are in for a very difficult and potentially violent time in the region.

Stephen Holmes:

How are Turkish/Iranian relations evolving in relation to the Kurdish threat?

Steven Cook:

That is a very interesting question. I was in Ankara in November, and I spent some time with people from the Turkish general staff. I did not want to come out and say, "Hey, what are you guys up to with the Iranian side?" I tried to do it in a sly way. I said, "You know, it's clear that the Iranians have themselves taken steps against the PKK, the Kurdistan Workers Party, this terrorist organization. What do you make of their capabilities?"

"The idea that regimes in the Middle East are unstable and vulnerable to political challenges is too narrow and underestimates their proven capacity to survive and muddle through seemingly catastrophic crises."

They essentially gave me the answer I was looking for, which is, "There is no coordination between the Iranians and the Turkish military, but maybe there actually is some coordination between the Iranians and the Turkish military." What they basically said to me was, "Look, as long as the Iranians are taking on the PKK, we do not really have a problem.

And as long as they are taking on the PKK, we do not have a problem actually engaging with them on that particular issue.”

That has all kinds of implications for Turkish/Israeli relations as well.

Stephen Holmes:

Turkey is a Sunni power and Iran a Shia power. That Turkey and Iran seem to be collaborating, at least on this one dimension, speaks to larger regional Sunni/Shia relations, doesn't it?

Steven Cook:

Certainly. The logic of Kurdistan and Kurdish nationalism is driving close relations between Turkey and two countries with which it has traditionally had very difficult relations – Syria and Iran.

After all, in December 1998, the Turks threatened war against Hafez al Assad, the president of Syria at the time, because he was harboring Abdullah Öcalan, the leader of the PKK. Turkey is now the one country (in addition to Iran) in the world that Syria actually has warm relations with. So I think that this issue, which is seen as an existential issue for all three countries, is really driving the relationship.

Fawaz Gerges:

I am spending six months in the Middle East interviewing activists, nationalists and mainstream and radical Islamists. My goal is to understand the relationship between the two leading forces in the region – the nationalists and the Islamists – and their relative weight and influence. At the risk of simplification, I want to put some tentative observations on the table based on lessons learned since the spring of 2006.

First, the region is boiling, not just in Iraq, but also in Lebanon, Sudan, Syria, Palestine, Egypt, and elsewhere. What official Washington views as “clarifying moments” are in fact deepening and widening fault lines that are shaking Middle Eastern societies to their very foundations. I will focus only on three of them, which are pivotal.

The first is the widening socioeconomic divide between a very tiny elite and critical segments of the Arab population. On average, between 30 and 40 percent of the Arab population lives at the poverty line or below. All it takes is a visit to the poverty belts surrounding Arab cities in Egypt and Sudan, or Sanaa, Beirut, or Algiers, to see millions of young Muslims who hardly subsist and who have no stake whatsoever in the existing order. Several developments make this widening socioeconomic gulf between the haves and have-nots unique and dangerous: obsessive consumerism, the new media or communications revolution that has reached every corner of the Arab and Muslim world, and the declining or collapsing social functions of the Arab state.

There are indications that militancy is migrating into these poverty belts. Since its inception in the mid-1970s, the jihadist or militant Islamist movement has basically been elitist. Some of the brightest and most educated young Arab and Muslim men led the jihadist movement from its inception until the mid-to-late-1990s. Their ideology is now spreading into refugee camps and the urban poverty belts of Arab and Muslim cities. This is something recent and alarming.

The dominant wisdom in the United States is that the Arab state system is durable; that it has withstood various shocks and social upheavals. But is it as durable as it used to be, and how long will that forced durability last? Are there systemic forces threatening it? Although social revolutions are unlikely at this historic juncture, urban riots, social chaos and politically driven violence are very likely. It could take only a tiny incident such as a riot over a soccer game, a protest against human rights violations by the security services, or a hunger protest to precipitate social chaos and urban rioting. I hope that I am wrong, but I would not be surprised to wake up one day and see entire posh neighborhoods in Arab and Muslim cities on fire. The burning of Arab cities is not farfetched but a real possibility, reflecting a reservoir of accumulated grievances and the social deprivation in the

region that has been taking place particularly in the last 15 years. So the widening socioeconomic gap, coupled with obsessive consumerism, the new media revolution, and the declining social functions of the state, may threaten the very foundation of the forced durability of the Arab state system.

A second, related fault line revolves around the increasing legitimacy gap between the Arab ruling elite and the population. The vacuum of legitimate political authority had never been as wide as it is today. It has been exacerbated by the dismal economic performance of the Arab state and a widespread perception by citizens that the Arab rulers are subservient to American foreign policy.

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A consensus exists, outside of the ruling circles, that the status quo is no longer viable. There are now moderate voices calling for civil disobedience. Radical and nationalist Islamists are calling for open revolt. This is nothing new, but what is interesting is the vocal anger expressed by the opposition throughout the Arab world. The paradox is that the opposition is also fragmented. One would have expected the opposition to construct a united front to resist the dominant ruling order, but I am puzzled at their inability to coalesce and force Arab regimes to open up the closed political system.

It is little wonder that mainstream Islamists represent the only viable alternative to the relatively secular authoritarian order. The fragmentation of social and political opposition groups has created a bipolarity – one in which mainstream Islamists, particularly the Muslim Brotherhood, are the major challenge to the status quo. In almost every

Arab society, mainstream Islamists (as opposed to radical and militant Islamists) have emerged as the leading social and political force.

In addition to the fragmentation of the opposition groups, public apathy is the hallmark of Arab politics. There is no political party or organization in the Arab Middle East that could mobilize more than a few thousand protesters on the street, other than the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, other mainstream Islamists in the region, and sectarian groups in Lebanon. Egypt is a case in point. In Egypt, with 75 million people, there is no political party other than the Muslim Brotherhood that could draw more than 2,000 or 3,000 people to the street. This apathy persists, despite the declining social functioning of the Arab state and its dismal economic performance. Why? In the last 50 years, authoritarianism and ideological immobilization in the Arab world have sapped the strength of Arab citizens and estranged them from the political process.

They are fed up with the elite, both the opposition and the ruling elite, who promised heaven and delivered dust.

Sadly, mainstream Islamists have provided neither the vision nor the initiative to build a broad alliance of social forces and transform themselves and the political space in the process. They arm themselves with general and vacuous slogans like "Islam is the solution."

A third fault line that has recently burst into the Arab and Muslim world is the Shia/Sunni divide, including in traditionally non-sectarian societies like Egypt, Yemen, and Jordan. Even there, the sectarian divide is resonating. In my interviews, some radical Islamists have told me that the Shia represent a more existential threat to the Sunnis than the Americans do. "America can never infiltrate the social fabric of Sunni societies, while the Shia can," they said.

The spillover from the Iraq war is threatening social harmony and peace from Lebanon to Syria to the Gulf. Unfortunately, American strategy in Iraq has widened the gulf between Shia Iran and the Sunni-domi-

nated states in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Jordan, and is indirectly sowing the seeds for a transnational sectarian battle. The transformation of Sunni and Shia public opinion is astonishing.

How is America seen in this volatile region? The dominant narrative pins the blame for deepening and widening internal fault lines on America. Time and again, I am told that Westernization and globalization, America's support for Israel and authoritarian Muslim regimes, coupled with America's war in Iraq and Afghanistan, are the sources of the ills besetting Arab and Muslim societies.

Now it would be futile to talk about what the Bush administration can do to prevent social disintegration and the escalation of hostilities in the region. We must await the coming of a new administration – one that begins the process of extracting American forces from Iraq's shifting sands and trying to resolve the region's simmering conflicts, particularly the Palestine/Israeli conflict. The coming administration, along with the United Nations and the international community, must also try to develop a new Marshall Plan to help Arabs rejuvenate their collapsed economies and institutions.

Stephen Holmes:

Could you please say just a word about how the democratization agenda of the United States, no matter how superficial it may have been, is perceived in the region? Is it perceived as part of an aggressive American act?

Fawaz Gerges:

Without pressure from the international community, Arab regimes will resist reforming and opening up the closed political system. The United States went about it the wrong way. Because of its invasion and occupation of Iraq and the subsequent devastation that has taken place, the Bush administration's rhetoric on democracy is not taken seriously by Arabs or Muslims. The rhetoric is widely perceived as a ploy to dominate and subjugate the Muslim world. Now liberals say to the Bush

administration, "Please leave us alone. You have done a great deal of damage to our democratic agenda."

Stephen Holmes:

Just to clarify, the way we carried out our democratization has been disastrous, has poisoned the reputation of democracy, and has weakened the allies of liberalization and democratization of the region. But in principle, do you think a slow, well-handled, intelligently organized opening up – by increasing political rights and so forth – would be a way to manage the incredible problems that you have described for us? Could it address the potential for deadly urban riots, the socioeconomic differences which are so volatile, the rage and the fragmented elite you described? Those problems seem so massive that it is hard to imagine how any form of democratization would be a solution to them.

Fawaz Gerges:

Based on public surveys, if you ask ordinary Arabs, generally speaking, about their priorities, democracy does not rank high among them. Bread-and-butter issues top their concerns and worries. Democracy is a luxury when their economic survival is at stake.

The question is, how do you construct a creative, functioning economic agenda with political liberalization? Millions of Arab and Muslim children are starving. The rhetoric of democracy means very little unless it is translated into concrete actions, such as helping to build a productive social base, the rule of law, and a universal commitment to human rights, and reducing tensions by resolving festering regional conflicts.

Steven Cook:

If it is the hope of Arab liberals that a new administration with a clean slate could do this more intelligently and in a coherent fashion, then they are likely to be waiting for a long time. As one senior Democratic foreign policy wallah said to me recently, "The democratization agenda in the Middle East is dead. It is dead."

Farhad Kazemi:

I have just returned from the Arab side of the Persian Gulf, and what my dear friend Fawaz Gerges said reverberates even there.

I will emphasize three points. I will talk first about Iran's perception of its own insecurity in the region, second about the process of Shia empowerment in the Middle East, and third about the nuclear issue and the consequences if it is not handled properly.

*"Whether it is in a few months
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We think of Iran as this aggressive country over there, but we should realize that there have been a host of internal and external issues that have increased the country's perception of insecurity in the region since 1979. I will just point to some of them.

First is the revolution. Then there is the process of Islamization of society and of the political system. There is the invention of the concept of Supreme Jurisprudent by Ayatollah Khomeini. On top of that, there are the collapse of the USSR, the arrival of six new Muslim republics in Iran's neighborhood, problems with neighbors in the Persian Gulf, stormy relations with the Taliban in Afghanistan, the war with Iraq of course, as well as problems in Europe, Argentina and elsewhere. Furthermore, since the revolution, Iran has played an active, and I would say highly divisive, role in the Arab/Israeli conflict – a role that used to be positive but has become very negative. Then there is the imposition of U.S. trade sanctions under President Clinton, and the embargo. There have also been all kinds of other issues.

So, to someone sitting in Iran and looking out at the world, this is a very insecure envi-

ronment (some of that by their own doing, by all means). This is especially true since Iran is now surrounded by American forces, not only in Iraq and Afghanistan, but also in many of the Gulf states, in the Caucasus, in Central Asia, and so forth.

Adding to this problem has been the development of a new issue in Iranian politics since 2005, concerning the demise of the reformers and the emergence of Ahmadinejad with his millennialistic, populist, hard-line view of Iran's role in the world. Although in the long run, the demise of the reformers may not turn out to be quite that way – there is a social movement for reform that has not had the room to become a political party. But Ahmadinejad's rise creates two issues that are very important to observe. First, this is the beginning, or maybe even the flowering, of the role of military and intelligence elements in the highest level of Iranian politics. After all, Ahmadinejad's base was in the Revolutionary Guard and in intelligence. This process is new. Iran may have been the first empire in the world, but they never had a regular standing army until the Pahlavis, and the military was subservient to the civilians. This process, which began before Ahmadinejad, is beginning to develop further. It is not, from my point of view, a good thing. It may have serious implications for the future and for the way in which Iranian politics will move along.

The second issue involves Shia mythology and the role of the Hidden Imam (the last of 12 imams, who is expected to return as the Messiah). This is a populist message that resonates within the psyche of the Iranian Shia, whether they like Ahmadinejad or not.

Added to all this is the Shia empowerment that has taken place within the Middle East. This began with the Iranian revolution, followed by the Lebanese Shia emergence through Amal and then later Hezbollah (which was created by the Iranians). Hezbollah has gradually transformed into a critical political organization within Lebanese politics.

And what did we do? We toppled Iran's two worst enemies – Saddam Hussein and the

Taliban. A cynic would say that the U.S. is Iran's secret weapon. But the situation is not quite as simple as that. As I have said, the Iranians are surrounded by U.S. forces in the region. I think that the American actions in Iraq will be viewed historically as a threshold event. The Shia were already emerging as a force in the region but this gave them a phenomenal base that will have reverberations for a long time to come. The Shia will play a critical role in Iraqi politics in the future, no matter what. They have been emboldened; they have had a taste of power and will always be a significant player in Iraqi politics.

But even though there is a close relationship between the Iranian and the Iraqi Shia, and connections between the Iranians, the Iraqis and the Lebanese Shia at the highest levels, the Iraqi Shia will not play second fiddle to the Iranians in the long run. This is true even though Ayatollah Sistani, the most important ayatollah in the region, is an Iranian and carries an Iranian passport. When things are eventually settled (and only heaven knows when that will be), I think that there will be some important divisions on theological, nationalistic, and other issues between the Iranians and the Iraqis.

I am very worried about Iran's potential nuclear weapons development. Most Iranians believe, along with their president, that they have a right to nuclear energy. But the difference between nuclear energy and nuclear weapons is very important. Until recently, the regime in Iran had made the discussion of nuclear weapons a national issue and not something for public discourse, except through blogs and Web sites and so forth. That has changed in the past few weeks, partly because of Ahmadinejad's failure to deliver on his economic policies, and partly because they are frightened that an action may take place against Iran by the U.S., Israel, or a combination of the two. The options for the U.S. are not very bright. I do not know what I would advise any president.

If we do attack the nuclear sites, Iran could do a lot of damage to our interests in

retaliation. This means that Iraq would be much worse than it is today. Iran has clients in Iraq, in Afghanistan, in Lebanon, in Hamas, in Islamic Jihad, and with others. There is a potentially limitless amount of damage that could be done, and a conflict situation of that sort could give the Iranians the incentive to do it.

The option of regime change through clandestine action and support of Iranian dissidents is sometimes discussed, although not as often anymore as it had been. That option is no more attractive than a military strike. We saw what happened in Iraq of course, but Iran is a bit more problematic. The Islamic Republic, for better or for worse, is in firm control. Furthermore, there is no credible, organized opposition group, inside the country or out. There is no equivalent of the Northern Alliance in Iran that could successfully take charge, even with external support. The Islamic Republic has institutionalized the revolution and has enormous means of violence at its disposal, which it is willing to use. This is not the Shah's regime. They will use those means of violence when the time comes.

Furthermore, there are a whole host of people in Iran, whether they like the regime or not, who are economically dependent upon it. In terms of the military, more than a million people, maybe two million, are dependent upon the system when you include the regular army, the Revolutionary Guards, and all of their dependants. Then there is the Iranian bureaucracy and all of those who work for it. Finally, and very importantly, there are the state-controlled foundations that were created after the revolution with the funds of the ancien regime. These foundations have billions of dollars of assets at their disposal. They own land and factories, and there are many people who work for them.

So, unless there is something better with some chance of success, the idea of regime change does not have a chance under the sun. I have been arguing for years – including with those who are antagonistic toward the Islamic Republic, with its dismal record on human

rights and tolerance – that maybe there is a diplomatic route. Pat Lang spoke earlier about an “aggressive waging of diplomacy.” I don’t know what that means exactly, but there is something about it that appeals to me. The policies of sanctions and the isolation of Iran have not worked. The foreign policy failures have been on both sides. Whether it is in a few months or a few years, we will need to engage Iran in some formal fashion that is acceptable by our standards and by the standards of international justice.

Stephen Holmes:

There has been some discussion today about a growing split, or a turn of Iranian political opinion against the president. Could you say just a word about how you read the situation?

Farhad Kazemi:

It has been going on for a while, and the press is now covering it. Regarding the nuclear issue, the president of Iran is not the key actor. Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Ali Larijani, and Hashemi Rafsanjani are. The president has taken too much of an aggressive position on the nuclear issue. They wanted to cut his wings off, and they have.

More importantly, the pro-democracy movement is often youth-led. This was the case when the students of Tehran University rose against oppression. Of course, the regime took them down forcefully. The students failed to make a connection between the wonderful ideals of democracy, and of liberty, and the bread-and-butter issues with which most Iranians are faced. We have recently seen students emerging once again. Students who were upset about the way things were happening prevented Mr. Ahmadinejad from giving a talk at Amir Kabir University in December, 2006. They actually tried to attack his car, and chanted “Down with the dictator.” So, there is obviously a great deal of sentiment in Iran that is not necessarily pro-president, and those who are in charge are taking notice of that. But more importantly, I think that Iranians are very scared that some action may take place on the nuclear issue by the U.S. and its allies.

Stephen Holmes:

How do Iranians understand America’s actions over the last few years? That is, they understand that they have been labeled as part of the axis of evil, that Americans want a regime change and want to hurt Iran. They also understand that what we have done has helped Iran, as you have said. It has made Iran stronger, and destroyed their enemies to the left and to the right. And I assume they believe that American policy is both intelligent and coherent. So how do they understand what we have done, given our hostile intent and its beneficial effect?

Farhad Kazemi:

I was at a meeting at Oxford after Saddam was toppled but before things got out of hand. A leading Iranian ayatollah was there, and he said, “Oh, we love the Americans, they are wonderful. The most important thing is that the Shia are getting what they are entitled to in Iraq.” And that sentiment was shared by many others.

I think that the U.S. has made some significant errors in dealing with the Iranians, and vice versa. The “axis of evil” speech completely destroyed the help that the Iranians gave the U.S. in Afghanistan and their willingness to go even further. That gave them leeway to think that the U.S. couldn’t be trusted no matter what they did. But really, the toppling of Saddam and the Taliban was a phenomenal gift to them, two crumbs thrown in their direction.

Craig Unger:

I’d like to broadly discuss some of the consequences of the war in Iraq, and then talk a little bit about the next step in Iran. If you look at the unintended consequences of the war, they have really been quite breathtaking. It seems that, in every case, we have empowered our enemies and hurt our friends. We have all heard about how Iran has been empowered, but, if you look at Israel, it is arguably in a more precarious position than it has been in since 1948. The Saudis are worried about the ascendancy of the Shia. Turkey is worried

about the growing Kurdish nationalism. Gary Sick articulated the most optimistic scenario, it seems to me, as to whether or not there is a new realignment. In that scenario, Hezbollah, Iran, Syria and Hamas are on one side (the anagram I hear a lot these days is "HISH") versus the United States, Israel and the Sunni allies – Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan – on the other.

I think that everything is so fluid at this stage, and there are so many contradictions, that it is hard to say if anything positive has emerged from that realignment. If anything has, it may well be the drop in oil prices, which has recently been reported as part of a Saudi drive to impoverish Iran.

"We have the capability to launch a very powerful naval and air attack on Iran.

***...If that were to happen,
I think that everything would
go out of control."***

I think that the larger questions, though, are what the U.S. policy toward Iran is, and whether the Bush administration, having made its bet, will double down. It was quite interesting to hear many people on the earlier panels talk about the Iranian nuclear threat as a phantom threat. Gary Sick has noted that their nuclear program has been in development for 22 years, while even Pakistan was able to develop a nuclear weapon in just a handful of years. He made the case that Iran is made more powerful by threatening to build a weapon than by actually having one.

At the same time, the Bush administration has essentially built the fire, and all of the elements will be in place by the end of February. The question is, will they light the match? First, they deployed minesweepers to the Persian Gulf, with the idea that if we were to bomb Iran in order to take out their nuclear operations, Iran would retaliate by blockading the Persian Gulf. That would cut off about 40 percent of all the oil in the world and send oil prices through the roof. The minesweepers are

there as an advance countermeasure. In addition, we have two carrier groups there. More recently, and this has been very quiet, the command responsibility for Iran was transferred from the United States Central Command, which really has its hands full with Iraq and Afghanistan, to the Strategic Command.

If you put that all together, we have the capability to launch a very powerful naval and air attack on Iran. In addition, Admiral William Fallon is replacing General John Abizaid. Although Fallon is said to be someone who is very good at knitting coalitions together, he is also a naval man capable of overseeing such an operation. If that were to happen, I think that everything would go out of control. There would be a major oil war. The supply lines to America's 130,000 troops in Iraq could easily be cut. The Shia in Iraq would obviously not look too kindly on American troops, and something as simple as rocket-propelled grenades could disrupt those supply lines. That would make American troops almost hostages and very vulnerable.

What could trigger such an event? It was interesting to hear Paul Pillar say that Iran does not take these threats very seriously. At the same time, I think that there are a number of trigger mechanisms by which things could get out of control. One of those would be a replay of the Israel/Hezbollah conflict that we saw last summer. President Bush, in his speech on January 10, 2007, said that we would pursue enemy supply lines across borders, into Iran if necessary. Many people interpreted that as potentially being a *casus belli* for the next war. I think this is potentially very dangerous.

On a different note, and this is something that is very much outside the Shia/Sunni paradigm, Kurdish troops went across the border into Turkey last summer, during the Israel/Hezbollah conflict, and killed 15 Turkish soldiers. At least 20,000 Turkish soldiers were then amassed on the Iraqi border. It fell to the American ambassador to say essentially, "It is okay for Israel to go into Lebanon, but you cannot go into Iraq."

Stephen Holmes:

One of the more conservative panelists said earlier that the administration believes that every problem we have in Iraq is due to Iran. What do you think about that perception, and what that could mean?

Craig Unger:

A report in *The Los Angeles Times* on January 23, 2007, flatly contradicted that. I do not have real specifics, but it is certainly not every single problem.

Stephen Holmes:

Well, your remarks provoke the question. Is the problem going to be an intentional American drive motivated by embarrassment that we have strengthened Iran? Do we have to do something to weaken Iran now that we have strengthened it? Or is it going to be the sort of thing that Barbara Tuchman wrote about, a bluffing game that slowly, inadvertently turns into something else?

Craig Unger:

If you go look at the neo-conservative plans going back to 1996, Iran was always the focus. In 1996, for example, the neo-con paper "A Clean Break" was written, and it established Iraq as the target. It was written for Benjamin Netanyahu, then the prime minister of Israel. Two days later, Netanyahu delivered a speech before a joint session of Congress, and he added one line saying that Iran was ultimately the target in terms of Israeli regional security. So, I think that that is part of the calculus.

Fawaz Gerges:

Empirically, it does not make sense to pin the blame for America's troubles in Iraq on Iran, for the simple reason that the insurgency or resistance is Sunni-led. It is as much opposed to Shia Iran as it is to the American military presence. The bulk of American soldiers have been killed by the Sunni-dominated resistance, not by the armed Shia militias, which have targeted and killed Sunni civilians.

The fundamental problem in Iraq lies in internal divisions among the various Iraqi

communities. Neither Iran nor Syria is mainly responsible for the escalating security situation in Iraq.

**EXCERPTS FROM THE QUESTION
AND ANSWER SESSION**

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Question (from the audience):

Professor Gerges outlined a very dire situation and suggested that the Islamists are the only viable alternative. At the same time, though, the Islamists have not much more than slogans if you push them a bit further. This suggests that they might not be viable in the long-run in terms of solving bread-and-butter kinds of issues. Could you please comment on this dichotomy, and how we might put some better alternatives in place?

• • •

Fawaz Gerges:

There is a dichotomy in the Middle East between the secular, authoritarian regimes on the one hand and mainstream Islamists on the other. Liberal voices hold the regimes responsible for creating this dichotomy as a result of their closure of the political system and their crackdown on progressive, secular elements.

While governments succeed in silencing progressive voices, they have failed to do so with the Islamists. The Islamists possess their own resources including mosques, Quranic schools and their social infrastructure. In a way, Muslim rulers enabled mainstream Islamists to become the only viable political alternative. I went to Imbaba, one of the poorest neighborhoods in Egypt. I interviewed a poor Egyptian and he said, "Listen, suppose my son gets ill at two in the morning. He is dying. Who do I call? Who is there? The Muslim Brotherhood." The Brotherhood would send a doctor to his house in the middle of the night. "Who do you want me to vote for," he asked, "the government or the Muslim Brotherhood?"

• • •

Steven Cook:

There is a certain amount of tension between my analysis and Fawaz's about stability and

instability in the region, but if you take a look at Fawaz's presentation, there are elements of an argument that I made. Think about Egypt in particular. Why do I think that this regime is so stable? It is for the very reasons that Fawaz has pointed out. There is a broad spectrum of opposition, but they are hopelessly fragmented. There is a relatively tightly-knit regime that has not had any cracks. Importantly, there are no signs of the military in Egypt separating itself from President Mubarak.

What you see, particularly in the relationship between the Muslim Brotherhood and the regime, is a recurring pattern of relations in which the state giveth with one hand and taketh away with the other. In the two weeks between regular security sweeps, agents of the regime are making deals with the Brotherhood and the Brotherhood is taking them. They want you to think that they are stupid. They are very, very smart. They are very shrewd. And these regimes are actually rather flexible and supple in their ability to repress, undermine, deflect or divide their oppositions.

. . .

Paul Cruickshank: *(from the audience):*

I was actually in Cairo in January 2007, and spoke to the leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood. What I found was not just empty slogans. They have now decided to formulate a manifesto, a new party. They are coming up with a very specific program which will be released this spring.

The new generation of leaders in the Muslim Brotherhood seems quite serious about taking their reform program in a different direction. Their democracy rhetoric seems genuine. So, the question is, should the U.S. administration be talking to the Muslim Brotherhood?

. . .

Fawaz Gerges:

I think Paul is absolutely correct that the Muslim Brotherhood has come a long way. The Muslim Brothers are trying to evolve under harsh conditions and frequent persecutions. In the final analysis, the challenge facing the Brotherhood is to construct a new

vision that resolves the tensions and contradictions in its rhetoric in respect to the relationship between religion and politics, and to institutionalize a comprehensive program laying out its position and stance on state, society, economics, and foreign policy.

There is a great deal of turmoil taking place within the Muslim Brotherhood. In the last few months I have interviewed scores of Brotherhood rank-and-file, as well as the Supreme Guide and top leadership.

The Bush administration is mistaken to lump together mainstream Islamists like the Muslim Brotherhood as well as al Qaeda, the Salafis, and other radical and enlightened Islamists.

Steven Cook:

There is all of this talk about the evolution of the Muslim Brotherhood. This manifesto, this evolution, strikes me as part of a pattern that we have seen. If you were to go back to 1987 and read the platform of the Islamic Alliance, you would think that the Muslim Brotherhood is a democratic-oriented organization. It is extraordinary.

I do believe that the organization can evolve, but here is my question. They have certainly appropriated the discourse of democratization and reform, and they picked this up because in Egyptian society, and beyond, this is clearly a new part of the conversation. But have they repudiated their historical interpretation of Shariah that seems to contradict some of the basic principles of democratic government? To my mind, that has not happened yet. That does not mean it will not happen – it is important to point out that prior to the most recent session of the People's Assembly, the 19 Muslim Brotherhood independents were the most responsible, best politicians in the chamber, and the same is true of the current crop.

I am just not there yet. When they do that, when this does happen, then I will say, well, okay.

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