GEORGE W. BUSH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

FINAL EDITED TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW WITH L. PAUL BREMER III

August 28–29, 2012
Charlottesville, Virginia

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Riley: This is the Ambassador Paul Bremer interview as a part of the George W. Bush Oral History Project. Thank you very much for coming to Charlottesville.

Bremer: Nice to be with you.

Riley: And for all of your labors in helping us with the briefing book and the timelines. We're delighted to have you here. A couple of administrative chores—we already talked about the confidential nature of the proceedings before we got on tape. As an aid to the transcriber, though, we need to go around the room and introduce ourselves. I'm Russell Riley, chair of the Presidential Oral History Program.

Nelson: I'm Michael Nelson. I teach at Rhodes College and I am a senior fellow here.

Leffler: I'm Mel Leffler. I am a professor in the history department.

Perry: I'm Barbara Perry. I am a senior fellow in the Presidential Oral History Program here at the Miller Center.

Bremer: I'm Paul Bremer.

Riley: One additional preliminary note. Anybody who comes to the transcript in the future ought to use your book, *My Year In Iraq,* as an essential starting point. This is an extremely valuable piece of work about your time. As I noted to the group yesterday, it actually liberates us in some respects because we don't feel compelled to try to dot every I and cross every T in the chronology. That allows us to bore down on some things as well.

You have a couple of interesting items on your résumé in advance of 2000. A lot of interesting things, but two that are particularly relevant to us. That is, the antiterrorism piece under the [Ronald] Reagan administration and then the Bipartisan National Commission on Terrorism, which I think must set the stage for some of what comes later. So I'd like to ask you a little bit about your experiences there, what you were learning in those experiences, and maybe how they bore on your experience in Iraq later.

Bremer: The Ambassador-at-Large for Counterterrorism position at the State Department

ironically was due to President George Herbert Walker Bush. There had been a bombing of first the Embassy and then the Marine barracks in Beirut in 1983. At the time I was already overseas as Ambassador to the Netherlands, but President Reagan asked then-Vice President Bush to chair an interagency organization to say we're facing some kind of a new threat here and how should we organize the American government.

Bush's recommendation was to create a senior executive level-two position at the State Department with interagency responsibility, Ambassador-at-Large for Counterterrorism. It required legislation. George Shultz, who at that time was Secretary of State for whom I had worked before I went to the Netherlands, tried to recruit me for the job of Ambassador-at-Large.

That's a long story, unrelated to this. In any case in the end I agreed and came back from the Netherlands to take that job. I didn't seek it; in fact I was rather reluctant because my research had persuaded me that every State Department person who had been working on counterterrorism—the first one was established after the hijackings in 1969-1970—every one of them had not only not gone on to a good job in the State Department but had never gotten any other job in the State Department. So it did not look like a career-enhancing move to me to take this job. In any case, the Secretary and the President asked me.

I did feel strongly then that we did face a threat for which the American government was not well organized, as Vice President Bush's study had shown, and that it required something unique, which was the integration of the various parts of the national security apparatus to deal with the threat. Indeed, at the State Department I had a unique setup, something that had not happened at State before, and rarely since, which was an interagency office based in the State Department. I had representatives from the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency], FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation], DEA [Drug Enforcement Agency], Joint Chiefs of Staff, Special Forces, and so forth, all of them working for me directly at the State Department.

So the interagency experience and dealing with terrorism was an important one. I stayed engaged in wrestling with the problem of terrorism during the 1990s when I was out of government. I had retired and was working in the private sector, but I stayed engaged with various studies and in the end was asked by then Speaker of the House [Newton] Gingrich to chair the National Commission on Terrorism. It came into being after the attacks on two American embassies in East Africa in 1998. Congress now felt that we were not organized to deal with the new threat.

So I headed up the National Commission. What we found and what we reported was that we faced a new threat. It was not like the terrorism that I had been fighting in the '80s, and I can go into more detail. In any case the new threat was Islamic fundamentalists and particularly al-Qaeda. We highlighted that threat in our study, which was delivered to President [William J.] Clinton and released to the public in June 2000.

It was borne in on us—we were ten, it was a bipartisan commission, five appointed by the Republicans, five by the Democrats—that this new threat was something serious and the American government was not organized to deal with it. Our findings were met with resounding silence in the political classes until 9/11. But it certainly was an important part of the background to me of the lead up to 9/11 and then the consequences of 9/11.

Riley: Were there acquaintances that you made in either of those two positions that continue into the period of 2003 and 2004?

Bremer: When I had been Ambassador-at-Large for Counterterrorism, Rich Armitage had been the Assistant Secretary of Defense for—I think it was called ISA [International Security Affairs] at that time. I don't remember exactly what it was. [Oliver] Buck Revell, who was subsequently more senior in the FBI, was there. Bill Webster was a friend and director of the FBI and then subsequently of the CIA. All of them eventually came back to play. Colin Powell became National Security Advisor while I was Ambassador-at-Large for Counterterrorism.

In the Commission on Terrorism we interviewed all kinds of people, including George Tenet, who at that time was already head of the CIA. In establishing and setting up the Commission on Terrorism I had conversations with Don Rumsfeld, whom I had known from the [Gerald] Ford administration when I was [Henry] Kissinger's chief of staff, because Rumsfeld had just chaired the commission on Missile Defense. I needed some guidance. He gave me some ideas about how to staff the operation and how to get the job done. One of my emphases as chairman of the national commission was I wanted us to have fully agreed findings if possible. I didn't want to have everybody footnoting this part and that part. I talked to Don a bit about how to try and get a unanimous report, which we did with one minor footnote.

I was involved a bit with Rumsfeld. I don't remember whether I had any interaction with [Richard B.] Cheney. Cheney had been a classmate of mine at Yale, though. Like [Edward] Stettinius [Jr.] he didn't make it the whole way through. The best thing that ever happened to him from a political point of view was getting expelled. He wasn't going to get elected in Wyoming being a Yalie.

Leffler: Let me ask you; when you say your report was met with resounding silence, did you make any efforts to communicate your findings directly to the new people in the Bush administration?

Bremer: Not immediately. They were obviously pretty busy the first few months. They had the U.S. P3 go down in China. They were pretty well tied up. I was frustrated, as were the other members of the commission. Ironically I had lunch on September 10, 2001, with Jane Harman, who was one of the leading Democrats on the commission and who was at that time out of Congress. We were both very frustrated, I even more than she because she was a Democrat. I didn't feel that the Bush administration had really seized on our report. We didn't expect an awful lot from the Clinton administration because we issued our report early June 2000 and they were in the middle of the election campaign. The administration at that point was winding down, although they did have the attack on the *Cole* on their watch.

Jane and I agreed on September 10th that we would seek a meeting with Cheney in the next couple of days to try to get some attention focused, and of course the next day was 9/11.

Leffler: In that period from January to September did you yourself make any efforts to communicate this report, to invite a meeting with [Stephen J.] Hadley, with [Condoleezza] Rice, with Powell, with Armitage, with any of those people?

Bremer: No, I think I may have had a conversation at some point in that period that I don't

remember with either [I. Lewis] Scooter Libby in the Vice President's office or with Paul Wolfowitz, who may or may not by that time have been confirmed. I don't remember the timeline. But no, I didn't know Condi very well. She was in the first Bush administration, but I retired from the State Department about six months into the first Bush administration. I think I had met her, but she had been on Soviet matters, which wasn't my area.

Leffler: None of the people approached you, invited you, or anything of that sort?

Bremer: No.

Leffler: So this says something about perceptions, threat perception. One might extrapolate from that that these folks were not putting terrorism high on their agenda during these first few months.

Bremer: I don't know. I don't have any firsthand knowledge. I know that Richard Clarke has alleged that he tried to get attention.

Riley: Of course.

Bremer: I have no firsthand knowledge of that.

Riley: Did you know Clarke?

Bremer: Yes, I knew Clarke. That's a good point. Clarke, back in the Reagan years—I don't remember if it was the first or the second administration—he was at State doing political-military matters. So I knew him from my Ambassador-at-Large Counterterrorism period as well.

Riley: Was he someone the commission had consulted?

Bremer: Yes, I think he testified before us. You'd have to look; I'm pretty sure he testified.

Riley: You wouldn't have had conversations with him about trying—

Bremer: I don't remember talking to him about it.

Riley: Were there, in the course of the commission, proceedings or reports? You said that the nature of the threat had changed. Was it your sense that the proximity of the threat or the magnitude of the threat had also grown and that—

Bremer: Yes.

Riley: And a secondary question is about—we get from the later commission reports this phrase "hair on fire," with people trying to figure out how can I from my own perception of the threat create a sense of alarm in others who are in responsible positions? Did you feel like you had your hair on fire at the time?

Bremer: I'm not usually a hair-on-fire type of guy. I think, from the period roughly 15 months from when we reported until 9/11 it was more a sense of deep frustration. All ten of us felt that we had put our finger on a real threat and that neither administration, neither the Clinton nor the

new Bush administration, had been seized with the matter. It wasn't something people talked about. Bush at that time was still, as I recall, portraying himself as the education President. In fact he was sitting in a classroom when the 9/11 attack happened.

I've been through a number of Presidential transitions in my time in the State Department and I knew there is always a cadence to a new administration. For the first six months a new administration is desperately busy trying to figure out what they're trying to do, trying to get people confirmed, which is now more and more difficult. The President is trying to figure out who he can trust. The first crisis always brings out the strengths and weaknesses in your team, in the case of the P3 in China.

So I was frustrated, but I guess somewhat realistic that you can't expect a new administration to tackle everything at once. There has to be a sense of priorities and it takes time to get there.

Leffler: One of the interesting things about your report is the lack of focus on Iraq. You identify in your counterterrorism report key threats coming from Iran, Syria. You note with prescience the problems of the Taliban in Afghanistan. But it is remarkably silent about Iraqi links to terrorists in light of what would become the huge preoccupation of Iraqi links with terrorists during 2002 and 2003. I just invite you to comment on that. Did you not see what others saw? Do you think what others saw greatly exaggerated the issue, or what?

Bremer: The focus of our attention was on Islamic extremism. That was not the problem with Saddam [Hussein] then or afterward.

Leffler: But the focus was on terrorism.

Bremer: Our focus was on a new threat. We identified the new threat as Islamic extremism effectively coming from Sunnis like al-Qaeda and the Taliban. So it's not surprising. I knew Iraq—I had been in charge of counterterrorism policy. Iraq had been designated a terrorist state by various American administrations for a long time. So it was no surprise that Iraq was a terrorist state. But it represented in many ways the old-style terrorism as we looked at it, not the new-style terrorism. So I don't find the lack of focus on Iraq surprising given that the intellectual context we were looking at was a new kind of terrorism, which was not what Saddam was doing; he was an old kind of terrorist. He was basically a secularist. He wasn't an Islamist.

Perry: I was just going to say you had hoped to meet with Vice President Cheney and then 9/11 happened before you could meet with him.

Bremer: Right.

Perry: What would you have said to him?

Bremer: I think Jane and I both felt that we needed to say, "You ought to go back and take another look at what we focused on—" which was if you looked at the pattern of what the new terrorists had said from really late 1988, 1989, but in the 1990s and what they had done, they were exemplifying a new kind of threat— "and you need to deal with it. You need to organize the government to deal with it. You need to put the intelligence assets on it" and so forth.

He might have said, “We’re doing all that.” I don’t know. Anyway, the meeting never happened, at least that meeting.

Nelson: It strikes me that you entered government and came in at a time when there had been a series of Presidents who entered office with a great deal of Washington experience.

Bremer: When I went back into government, you mean. When I entered government it was 1966. You’re talking about when I came back into government?

Nelson: Well, ’66, but also when you started working for Kissinger, Presidents were Washington figures. In [Richard M.] Nixon’s case, with a great deal of interest in foreign policy. Then the rest of your career with the exception of Bush 41, a series of people who became President coming out of state politics, domestic agendas first and foremost on their minds. I wonder, did you notice that it was more difficult over time to get Presidents to focus on foreign policy as a matter of choice?

Bremer: I think one should be a bit careful in making a general statement like that. Gerald Ford was not a foreign policy President, although his instincts were pretty good. Reagan actually turned out to be an excellent foreign policy President. Although it may not have been his formation, he effectively brought down the Soviet Union. So I think one should be careful not to make too sweeping—it is certainly true of [Jimmy] Carter and Clinton that their focus was primarily domestic.

Nelson: Let me clarify. All Presidents get interested in foreign policy because—

Bremer: Of course, it’s there.

Nelson: It’s there, but not—you described George W. Bush as starting out with perhaps less interest in that, which is unsurprising given the fact that like Clinton, like Reagan, he had been elected primarily with domestic policy agendas.

Bremer: Just to be precise, I didn’t say he had less interest. What I said was that my understanding from just reading the newspapers—I had not met him after all—was that he was styling himself as the education President in those first months. That was his focus.

Perry: Along with—

Bremer: It would be fair to say he didn’t have a lot of experience in foreign policy. That is certainly the case. He had been the Governor of Texas.

Leffler: I want to change the topic a little bit and ask you about your background. One of the things that attracted me was the fact that you got your MBA [master of business administration degree] at Harvard in the mid-’60s. I ask you the following questions because a few years later George W. Bush got his MBA from Harvard, and there are a number of people who think that what Bush learned at Harvard about management and leadership would shape his style of decision making. I’m just curious, did you take any lessons away from your years at Harvard Business School that would shape the way you would orient yourself in the future, especially when you were in an executive decision-making place?

Bremer: Yes.

Leffler: So what did you learn there that shaped your style?

Bremer: I have written and said that the Harvard business school uses the case method entirely. There are no lectures. To me the case method was the most exciting pedagogical experience I had in my educational career because it really forces you to think on your own. It forces you into an analytical taxonomy that requires you to identify a problem, identify alternative courses of action, evaluate the various courses of action, and make a decision or a recommendation depending on where you are. That is not a normal approach in foreign policy circles. The normal approach is more theoretical, more how do international relations work, what can we learn.

So to me it was, I think, in the end, actually quite helpful to my career in the Foreign Service because it gave me a way of—as it turned out, since I worked on the staff of Secretaries of State and Secretaries of State are not very interested in—neither are Presidents—in theoretical constructs; which are not very useful. In fact, I say to my friends who are teachers, in all the years having worked with eight Presidents and nine or ten Secretaries of State, I never once heard somebody walk into the Oval Office and say, "Mr. President, according to international theory," What you do hear somebody say is, "Mr. President, you've got a problem and here's a solution." That's what a President wants to hear, or a Secretary of State.

The approach, not so much a management approach as an intellectual approach to problem solving, is what I took away from business school. I think it helped because a lot of times when a Secretary of State calls a meeting he has a problem. He is not interested in somebody else coming in the room with another problem. What he needs is solutions. Or he needs a recommendation to give the President. If you can approach international relations or whatever that way, that can be helpful.

Leffler: Working for Kissinger and Associates, whatever the firm was called throughout most of the '90s, what issues did you focus on that you could extrapolate, and maybe the answer is none, to your subsequent issues that would challenge you in Iraq? Anything?

Bremer: That's an interesting question. What we did at Kissinger Associates was basically help our clients, who were CEOs [chief executive officers] of large Fortune 100 companies, try to understand the political and economic dynamics of a place, usually a developing country, Indonesia, China, Nigeria, Brazil, and what the implications of that were for their business decisions. That was the value-added that we brought.

On some occasions we would help them negotiate the investment they wanted to make. Those were more skills that drew on my foreign service. They were more backward-looking skills because those were the skills you have as a Foreign Service officer. "What is going on in this place and what does it mean for America and how do we get to success"—whatever that's defined as. I don't know whether it had any additional impact on my approach to subsequent matters.

Leffler: Did you do much in the '90s in that capacity in Middle Eastern countries?

Bremer: We had a few clients interested, mostly in the Maghreb. We had a couple of cases in

the Gulf states and India, but not in the Middle East itself, though I traveled a fair amount with Henry in the region on his travels to Egypt and Israel. Of course I'd been to all of those countries when I was his chief of staff on the shuttle diplomacy. Kissinger Associates didn't have real business in the area except for the Maghreb, but that's not the Middle East.

Leffler: Somewhere I read that you spent some time in Afghanistan, is that correct?

Bremer: It was my first Foreign Service assignment. I was there for two years.

Leffler: What years were those?

Bremer: Sixty-six to '68. The King was still there.

Riley: What was that like, briefly?

Bremer: It was a lot of fun, actually. We were young and recently married.

Riley: Your wife went with you?

Bremer: Oh, sure, yes. It was more or less a safe place in those days. We enjoyed it a lot. It was very primitive.

Leffler: So what did you know about Iraq? One of the standard criticisms of your approach or your year in Iraq was that you were appointed and you weren't a person who had much knowledge of the country or the region. You're aware of that.

Bremer: I've heard it.

Riley: It's probably in the briefing book.

Bremer: I wouldn't be surprised.

Leffler: So reflecting back, what did you know and what things did you not know that turned out to really be harmful to your experiences there?

Bremer: First of all you can make an argument that it is an advantage not to know that much about it. I was not an Iraq expert. I did have Iraq experts on my staff, including Ryan Crocker, Hume Horan, John Sawers from Britain. I don't take it as dispositive that it is important to have actual expertise in the country as long as you have people around you. I had lived in the region. I had traveled to virtually every country in the region except Iraq. I knew about Iraq and had studied Iraq as part of the counterterrorism battle in the 1980s and then to a lesser extent in the '90s. Of course it would have been better if I had had more time to prepare.

I did read as much Iraqi history as I could in the very brief time before I went, which was only a couple of weeks. Would it have mattered greatly if I had known more? Perhaps. You can almost always use more time to learn more about a place. I have never seen a convincing argument that my lack of deep Iraqi experience actually made a difference.

There are people who disagree with things we did, but there are always going to be people who

disagree with things we did.

Riley: Can I ask you to elaborate on the point that you started with? You said that you could make an argument that an absence of expertise is neither an advantage nor disadvantage. What do you mean by that?

Bremer: I'll tell you what I mean by that. It's interesting because it does come to George Bush a bit. I believed and have believed for a very long time that most people want to be free, that representative government is the best way to ensure people's freedom and that any culture is capable of freedom. I point out that when I lived in Afghanistan in the 1960s people said, "The Afghans are completely incapable of anything other than a monarchy; the writ of Kabul has never reached south of Ghazni. These people can never be democratic." They're living under a constitution today. Yes, it is a messy place, but today Afghanistan has a representative government.

When I was Henry's chief of staff in the '70s there was a lot of attention on Korea. "The Koreans are a patriarchal society, a hermit kingdom. They've been at it for 3,000 years. They're never going to be a democracy." Today Korea is a democracy. When I was working for Henry in the '90s, Indonesia was the big subject. All the experts got it wrong again, arguing, "There were 13,000 islands, a complete mess. You've got Hindus and Muslims and Animists and God only knows. This place can only be run by a dictator like Suharto." Well, today Indonesia is a large, thriving, Muslim democracy.

In every one of those cases the so-called experts, the people who knew about Afghanistan, who knew about Korea, who knew about Indonesia, were the ones who said they can never be democratic. So I think you can make an argument that sometimes being a so-called "expert" can get in the way of seeing the more fundamental truth; that people are capable of representative government, including the Iraqis.

Leffler: I'm impressed by those comments. But Henry Kissinger, especially in the 1970s and '80s, was not renowned for his belief in the potential of people to be democratic.

Bremer: [*mimics Kissinger's voice*] Well, I'm not Henry Kissinger. [*laughter*]

Leffler: Do you remember advocating this position? You tell us about cases that eventuated this way, but are there concrete examples you could illuminate in your own career in the 1970s and '80s where you, on the record, promoted in an active way, efforts to promote democracy?

Bremer: In the '70s I was strongly in favor—in the '70s the question really was what do you do about basket three in the CSCE (Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe), the promotion of human rights more generally speaking.

Leffler: Once again, I don't remember Kissinger thinking—

Bremer: No, you're right. I disagreed. I can't say I predicted it would have the effect it did have in Czechoslovakia, but it turned out to be quite a powerful thing. Certainly in Afghanistan, where I had lived, I felt particularly during the '80s that the Afghans deserved an opportunity to put together their own government and said so. I was not responsible for Afghan policy, so what I

said was essentially irrelevant, that was not my writ.

Nelson: I'd like to make an observation about a couple of things you said and then ask you to respond. Earlier you were talking about the valuelessness of international relations theory in terms of interacting with policymakers, sort of the case method, focus on the particular. But you just made an incredibly sweeping philosophical statement—

Bremer: Right.

Nelson: —which President Bush often made, that all people want to be free. It is a statement about human nature and the best way of achieving that freedom is representative government, which is a sweeping statement about human society. So isn't there a lot of theory underlying the sort of hard nuts and bolts decisions you're making?

Bremer: Every pragmatic approach is going to be embedded in some kind of a philosophical approach. So whether you call it a theory or a philosophical approach you have an intellectual construct, which is in this case human nature suggests people want to be free, and experience, not theory, shows that representative government is the best way to enforce that freedom. I don't think that's a theory. That's experience. I think that is demonstrable, starting with the American experience. So I don't find a contradiction.

The case method approach then says OK, how do we advance that goal? People try to trap you into saying one approach has to fit everything. That's not the way it works in foreign policy. We're taking a different approach in Syria from the one we took in Libya. Do we care as much about Chad being democratic? Is that as important to America as Iran? No. So you have different approaches. But you can have, call it a theory, philosophic, whatever you want to call it, I call it factual evidence, that people will be better off if they have freedom.

Riley: Did you or were you approached by anybody in the Bush administration about taking the position when they transitioned in in 2001?

Bremer: I think I referred earlier in response to something Mel asked. I did have conversations with Libby and Wolfowitz. I think with Libby before 9/11, sometime in that period, about whether I'd be interested to come back into government and I said, "Well, it depends on what there is." Then after 9/11 again I talked, I think again to Libby and I know again to Wolfowitz, about the possibility of doing something. This was all before the Iraq invasion.

Riley: Of course.

Bremer: This is perhaps 2002. They talked about maybe CIA or something like that. It never got very concrete and I presume neither of them was authorized to offer anything anyway.

Riley: At the top of CIA?

Bremer: Yes.

Riley: As the director? OK. I was just going to ask. I think you made a brief reference to how you'd known Libby, but I'm not sure we know how you had known Wolfowitz.

Bremer: Paul was policy director when Al [Alexander, Jr.] Haig was Secretary of State and I was Al's chief of staff. So I knew him from 1981, '82.

Leffler: You knew Libby from where?

Bremer: I don't know when I met Scooter. He was around in the foreign policy crowd at the Council on Foreign Relations, the Institute of Mideast Studies. I don't remember when I met Scooter. I do remember when I met Paul.

Riley: Where were you on 9/11?

Bremer: I was in an airplane trying to get to New York.

Riley: No kidding.

Bremer: From Washington.

Riley: Did you have any contacts with Washington officialdom in the immediate aftermath presumably in relation to the commission work?

Bremer: Yes. It is a bit of a cloud at this point, but I was running a business in New York for Marsh & McLennan and I had conversations with a lot of people in those days. I had a lot of press and a lot of conversations with people.

Nelson: More mundanely, how did you find out what happened, and how did you interpret what happened based on the work you had been doing on terrorism?

Bremer: I had been working in New York for 12 years but living in Washington, so I commuted regularly. I don't like New York. I was flying on the Delta shuttle that Tuesday morning, 7:30 or 8:30—I guess the 8:30 shuttle. Since I flew it regularly, I knew the pattern. I didn't have to look up from my newspaper, I could tell they were circling over Philadelphia. It was a clear day over Philadelphia. There was a woman sitting next to me. I said, "I guess we've got a delay in LaGuardia or something." The Captain came on and said, "A plane has hit the World Trade Center and we're in a holding pattern." I said to the lady, "That's strange, because LaGuardia is closed." *The plane*, I was thinking, *it's a Piper Cub, it goes in, why would you close LaGuardia, which is 12 miles away?*

In those days there were phones on the airplanes still, so I got on the phone and called my assistant in New York to tell her it looked like we were going to be late. She happened to be looking downtown (Marsh & McLennan's building was on 6th and 46th). She was looking downtown as we were talking and she said, "Oh, my God, another plane has hit the building," or words to that effect. She was in tears. So I hung up and I said to the woman, "We've got a big problem. We're not going anywhere near New York. This is a major terrorist attack."

The captain then came on and said, "We're running low on fuel so we're going back to land in Baltimore." Running low on fuel on the first flight of the day? [*laughter*] We got on the ground in Baltimore and the captain came on again and said, "The President has declared a national emergency. You can get your onward flights from the Delta people." I ran into a friend of mine

and told him there was no way we were going to get out on another plane. He and I literally commandeered a taxi at the airport to get us to Washington. I was doing press already on the way. As we were driving back to Washington he had CBS [Columbia Broadcasting System] News on and Dan Rather said, "Oh, my God, there goes the second tower." When we got near Washington, we could see the smoke rising off the Pentagon.

Nelson: When you say, "driving back to Washington," to where in Washington?

Bremer: To home, Chevy Chase. You couldn't get into the city at that point.

Riley: So between that interval and April of 2003 you have a commission appointment that comes in, right? I don't recall the sequence.

Bremer: Oh, the President's Homeland Security Advisory Commission—I don't remember when that was.

Perry: It says June 2002.

Riley: So that's not a major item on your résumé?

Leffler: I'm just curious. I think Mike was trying to get at this. As the person who wrote one of the key—and by the way, I do think your report is a really good report, prescient in many ways—but as the author of this report after 9/11, no one calls you in to talk to you? That's what you were trying to get at?

Nelson: Yes.

Leffler: I'm just curious about that.

Perry: The press was calling.

Leffler: This is a guy who has really studied this problem. I don't understand—

Bremer: It is possible somebody did, but I don't remember. It was a very busy time. I don't remember going into anybody's office to talk about it. It's possible somebody called me on the phone, but I just don't remember. I think you'd probably have to say no. At least it didn't make an impression on me.

Perry: So what was your thought about the team, about the President himself? We haven't talked about the election of 2000 and what your thoughts were now about President George W. Bush. Now, after 9/11 what is your thought about the President, the team he has assembled around him, particularly given the fact that people have not followed the recommendations of the commission or don't seem to be interested from your perspective.

Bremer: At that point I wasn't looking to point fingers at people. To me we had a major national crisis, and the question was how can the President lead us out. I just paid attention. I thought his speech to Congress was still one of the great Presidential speeches. I think it was September 20th or something like that. He had troops on the ground in Afghanistan right away. They took three

weeks. To me, they were doing the right things. So it wasn't a question of "well, we told you so." That wasn't the point. The point now was how do we go? I thought that he had shown decisive, bold leadership in that period.

Leffler: One of the criticisms of course of the administration during late 2001, 2002, is that policymakers took their eyes off Afghanistan and started focusing on Iraq and they hadn't really dealt effectively yet with al-Qaeda but were reconfiguring the focus toward Iraq. Did you at that time share that view, or do you remember yourself as yes, we really need to go after Saddam, that's the next object here?

Bremer: You may be right. I don't remember people saying that we weren't focusing on Afghanistan in 2001 because we *were* focusing on Afghanistan in 2001.

Leffler: No, I'm saying after December 2001—

Bremer: In other words, 2002?

Leffler: No, after December 2001, Taliban are dispersed.

Bremer: Right.

Leffler: Some are fleeing to Pakistan, a few going to Iran and elsewhere. There is a major criticism in the literature. Peter Berger and others have said one of the problems during this period of time, from late 2001 into 2002, was the refocusing and recalibration of attention toward Iraq rather than cleaning up the situation—

Bremer: It is easy in hindsight to make arguments like that. One of my favorite sayings in American history relates to a Virginian, Robert E. Lee, who after the Civil War was asked about the war and he said, "One of the things that amazed me was how all of the best Southern generals instead of leading troops during the war became professors."

I didn't have a view one way or the other about whether we finished the job in Afghanistan. I certainly was sympathetic to the problem and the focus on Iraq because Iraq, unlike Afghanistan, had a WMD [weapons of mass destruction] capability. The real problem, as we had pointed out in the national commission, was you had terrorists who were, unlike the old ones, prepared to kill by the tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands, which was not the case of the terrorists we had faced in the '80s. If they could get their hands on biological, chemical, nuclear, or radiological weapons they had the capacity to carry out that kind of thing.

As we looked at the list of states that had relationships with terrorists, Iraq was the one, the only one at that time—actually Libya had used chemical weapons in Chad in 1986—but basically Iraq was the only one that had had and had used WMD. So to me it was an appropriate focus. Now whether you should have also focused more on Afghanistan—

Leffler: What does that mean? This is what I'm really trying to get at. Were you a proponent of going to war to promote regime change, or were you more focused on trying to get inspectors into Iraq to assess whether there were WMDs?

Bremer: First the second, second the first. First continue the efforts through the UN [United Nations] to get inspectors in, but certainly at some point in 2002, midyear, I don't know exactly when, it was pretty clear that was not going to work. Saddam had consistently violated at that point 16 UN resolutions. He had lied about his WMD. We found out about his whole biological program only when defectors told us about it.

So as 2002 went along—and again, I'm not familiar with the timeline of the Bush thinking on it because I was not in government—I was sympathetic to the idea that time was certainly running out on the effort to get more inspectors in and try to deal with it in a peaceful way. At a certain point you come to the end of the line where that isn't going to work anymore. So by the end of 2002, as they started to move troops into the region, it seemed to me it was not likely that the negotiating tract was going to succeed. Moreover, it was clear that a similar policy of ritual condemnation, international "isolation" and tight sanctions had had virtually no success in stopping North Korea's drive for nuclear weapons.

Riley: In the course of 2002 are you being consulted by anybody in the administration on a formal or informal basis on this or on any other foreign policy issue?

Bremer: I just don't remember. Not intensely enough to make an impression.

Nelson: The sequence in Afghanistan after the Taliban was overthrown was not appointment of administrator but really quick transition to Afghan self-government, then the writing of the constitution. Did you think that was the right way to go at the time? When you eventually were an administrator in Iraq did you think the U.S. course of action in Afghanistan a valuable one in terms of lessons to be learned?

Bremer: I have to search my memory a bit here. It struck me that the goal of what we were trying to do in Afghanistan was appropriate. That is to say, try to give them some kind of a political structure, a constitution or something, to build a political framework. It became—I have to go forward to when I was in Iraq. It seemed to me there was some press speculation that we should follow the same pattern in Iraq. Basically, they're not comparable.

From a structural point of view you had the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan, which gave you a base that was intersectarian, although largely northern tribes. They were able to come together and agree as exiles to a new constitution relatively quickly. This option was forestalled in Iraq immediately by [Ali al-] Sistani and his fatwa that any sovereign Iraqi government had to be elected. So unless we were going to go directly against him—he represented the most important Shi'a voice—we weren't going to be able to follow the Afghan model. If you looked at the country's metrics, though, I didn't spend a lot of time on this analysis at the time—I have since reflected on it—the metrics are actually more favorable in Iraq than they are in Afghanistan on every single measure. Iraq is more highly educated, it is more urbanized, has a deeper history of central rule, albeit not recently friendly central but at least central rule, which is not the case in Afghanistan, even under King Amanullah Khan. He didn't really reach very far out. So I don't think there really is much for the argument that the model in Afghanistan was applicable to Iraq, though I can't say I spent a lot of time wrestling with that at the time.

Leffler: But at the time in late 2002, early 2003, before you were approached for a position, I'm

inferring, just from listening to you, correct me if I'm wrong, you weren't really paying substantial attention to these issues. You're an educated, well-informed guy reading the newspaper, talking to friends, but it's not like you were really deeply immersed in Afghan or Iraq issues in 2002, early 2003.

Bremer: Certainly not in 2002. By 2003 I was certainly paying attention to Iraq, just because it was of interest.

Leffler: So let's turn now to early 2003, before your appointment. Were you in contact with folks in the State Department on any regular or even irregular basis? Were you talking to Bill Burns? Armitage? Any of the key people there?

Bremer: I don't remember conversations with them. I know again I had a conversation with Wolfowitz, I think it is in my book, and I think I also had another one with Libby. That was in either January or February, somewhere in there, before the kinetic operation started. I don't remember talking to anybody at State.

Riley: The conversations with them in January, February were—

Bremer: It was again kind of vague early on: "There might be something for you in the administration." I'm not sure Iraq came up that early. It came up again in March when the U.S. government got more serious about thinking about it.

Riley: Do you remember much of the conversations then about the initial approach on this appointment? You indicate in the book that it is Wolfowitz and—

Bremer: Yes, it is.

Riley: Telephone call, or—?

Bremer: A couple of calls, and I had a meeting with Paul in his office at DoD [Department of Defense]. It must have been after March 19th that I met Wolfowitz. It could have been before they started the war. I just don't know.

Riley: Tell us about that.

Bremer: At that point it was more specific. It was talking about going over to Iraq and heading up whatever it was going to be. I don't know if it even had a name at that point. They were thinking—It was a separate conversation with Libby too. They were thinking in terms of *It's 90 days, go over there for 90 days, sort the thing out*.

I said, "Ninety days? How is that going to work? If it develops, be in touch." Then there was a subsequent conversation, which is referred to in the book, where Wolfowitz called me and said, "We're now getting ready, thinking about—" again, I don't know. I can't remember. I think that must have been after the war started. He probably—and I'm now guessing—was putting together a list for Rumsfeld, putting together some names, "Would you be interested?" That's when I had the conversation with my wife saying, "Look, it's getting kind of serious now. I'm either going to say yes or no and I've got to know if you'll go along with it."

Leffler: Did you speak to other people about is this a job I should take? Were there people—

Bremer: No, because it was confidential. The next I heard, some Wednesday afternoon in April my office got a call from Rumsfeld's office saying can you come see the Secretary tomorrow afternoon. That was the next thing I heard.

Riley: OK.

Bremer: Now, Rumsfeld says in his book that Shultz gave him my name, which I didn't know actually until I read Rumsfeld's book. Anyway, that's possible. Kissinger claims he gave Rumsfeld my name.

Nelson: Did you wonder whether a position like this was necessary? There hadn't been a comparable person since World War II.

Bremer: Since [Lucius D.] Clay, yes. When the question was raised it was not clear to me—in fact, it hadn't been decided by the UN—that we were going to be called the "occupying power." So it wasn't clear what the position was. It was sort of a Presidential Envoy. That told me something, because I'd been a Presidential Envoy. That's what Ambassadors do. The "occupying" part came in later, when the UN passed the resolution formally designating us as the occupying power.

So it wasn't in my mind, at least at the phase when I was deciding whether I would put my name into it, what exactly the title would be. I certainly didn't know anything about the occupying power.

Riley: Do you remember your discussion with Rumsfeld?

Bremer: Yes.

Riley: Tell us what you can about that.

Bremer: We met alone.

Riley: In his office?

Bremer: In his office at DoD. He had a list of names of people. I didn't see it, but there were 15 or 20 names on there. He must have already done some checking, because the main thing I remember him saying, and again I wrote in the book, was he wondered how I got along with the other members of the national security team. I went through it in the book. Then he I guess said something about that.

Nelson: What did you say? You mentioned earlier you didn't really know Condi Rice.

Bremer: She was the only one I didn't know, and the President. I had never met the President. I'd met the President on the Domestic Homeland Security Commission. That's a lot of people sitting around a table. But I knew Colin from the time he was V Corps commander when I was Ambassador to the Netherlands. I also knew him as National Security Advisor. I had known him

a long time.

Cheney had been a classmate at Yale. I didn't know him there, but I knew him when he was Chief of Staff to Ford. Rumsfeld I had known as Secretary of Defense and then he came back as a Special Envoy under Reagan to deal with Saddam Hussein. I had met Condi. I didn't really know her, and I had never met the President.

Riley: Steve Hadley.

Bremer: Tenet I knew. Hadley I knew as one of that crowd that moved around in foreign policy circles in Washington in the '90s. I knew him, but not well.

Leffler: So Secretary Rumsfeld, did he talk to you mostly about who you knew? Did he talk to you about what he wanted to accomplish, what he wanted you to accomplish? What he thought were the greatest challenges?

Bremer: I don't remember, frankly. There must have been some substantive conversation, but what I remembered distinctly was that he was going to run the traps with the other guys and then let me know. As I said, I got the impression he had made up his mind for whatever reason. I don't know.

Leffler: And at that meeting you said if you chose me I'll take the job?

Bremer: Yes.

Riley: By that time was it a well-defined position or was it still sort of nebulous as to exactly what—

Bremer: It was still nebulous, at least to me. As I wrote in the book, I was somewhat surprised to hear that Condi thought that Zal [Zalmay] Khalilzad would still be involved in some fashion, which as you know I took up with the President.

Riley: He was the Presidential Envoy.

Bremer: He was a Presidential Envoy. As I said, all of my experience in the Foreign Service taught me unity of command. You don't have two Ambassadors in a country at the same time. There is one Ambassador who represents the President and there are other people. So I'm trying to answer your question about was it nebulous. I thought that was a little bit nebulous and it needed sorting out.

The title—I have a vague memory that in meetings in Rumsfeld's office after the President made the announcement there was some back-and-forth about what the other position was going to be called. Was I going to be an "administrator," a "counselor"? The coalition, provisional authority—

Nelson: Not Viceroy.

Bremer: Yes, what was my title going to be? I frankly was agnostic. They came up with

"administrator."

Nelson: What was your relationship going to be with the operation Jay Garner was running over there?

Bremer: It was understood that Jay was going to leave. He was scheduled to leave, I think, June 15th. I don't know if he had a contract. I don't know what it was. I was told that he was planning to leave on June 15th; he told me he was planning to leave on June 15th. As I wrote in my book, my subsequent understanding was that they had always intended for there to be a shift, but I presume other members that you interview will tell you more about that. But there was always planned to be a shift.

Jay had been chosen because he had done such a good, tough job in the north during the period of the no-fly zone and he knew a lot of people up north. He was able to retire as a three-star. He was chosen I think largely because—and again, as you all know from your research—planning for the postconflict period, planners, like generals, plan for the last war. They had planned basically on the assumptions that they would face the same kinds of problems we faced in 1991. Humanitarian relief, large-scale—burning oil fields and all that. It was called ORHA [Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance]. That's what they thought they were going to be facing, and therefore Jay was a logical choice in the run-up in January, February.

In any case, it was understood that Jay was planning to phase out by June 15th and then, as I wrote in the book, he was not well handled, I think, by the administration.

Leffler: When did you have that initial meeting with Secretary Rumsfeld? Do you remember the date? I'm not clear on that date.

Bremer: It was a Thursday in late April. You can find the date very quickly. Look at the President's schedule on the Fridays because we went and saw the President the next day at ten o'clock or something. That's when he offered me the job.

Leffler: So it's the very next day that you met with the President.

Bremer: Right.

Leffler: And then had lunch with him.

Bremer: I had lunch a week or ten days later. The lunch was on May 6th. That I know for sure.

Riley: OK.

Bremer: So let's do the math here. April has 30 days. You can figure it out.

Leffler: We can figure it out. That first meeting with the President when he offers you the job is a short meeting, yes?

Bremer: Yes, it was short, 15, 20 minutes only.

Riley: So there is still not a great deal of definition about the job description.

Bremer: Well, I think there was description about part of it, which was Presidential Envoy. The title of CPA [Coalition Provisional Authority] at that point I don't think had been decided, with me designated as "administrator." There was still floating in the atmosphere this question about Zal Khalilzad. My position was clear; the question is what is the rest of it.

Riley: So what were the main components of your job description then as you understood it as a Presidential Envoy, for those of us who don't traffic in those terms all the time?

Bremer: The title itself doesn't quite describe it in this case because it's not a standard, bilateral diplomatic relationship. What I came to understand it to be—and I can't tell you at which meeting because there was a pretty intensive two-week period—was helping the Iraqis get control of the country again. There were three aspects of that. Helping them get on a path toward better government; helping them get the economy back on its feet; and, though it wasn't my responsibility, providing security. But that was certainly part of the overall strategy.

My focus in the discussions—the briefings before I went over there were largely on the political aspect, discussions about how long it was going to take. This 90-day thing that I had heard before had by then disappeared. I have my own view on how that happened, but anyway it happened. Most of the discussions were on the responsibility to get the Iraqi political process started, with the economy being the second.

Riley: OK.

Leffler: So essentially you're given the position in the last days of April. May 6th you have this lunch with the President. So you have about a week, at the most nine days, before you speak to the President. Flesh out what you were doing during those eight, nine days. Who did you go speak to? What were you learning? What were you reading? Tell us something beyond your book.

Bremer: I should have brought, but I didn't—I may have it on my computer. Somewhere there is a list of the meetings I had.

Leffler: Do you have any recollections of ones that stand out in your mind?

Bremer: It was just drinking from a fire hose.

Riley: If you can send us that we'd be happy to use it as an appendix to this document. It would be very helpful.

Leffler: That would be very useful.

Bremer: I may have it and may be able to give it to Katrina [Kuhn]. I'm not sure I have it on this computer. I can't remember which meetings stood out. I do know I met people from State, from CIA, from DIA [Defense Intelligence Agency], obviously from the Pentagon, the military side, the civilian side. It was just a 24-hour-a-day thrash.

Leffler: Do you remember extrapolating any generalizations from that week? When you meet with President Bush and you talk about it on the 6th, one of your major preoccupations seems to be making sure you establish unity of command and your control of the situation. There isn't a great deal of discussion, from what it seems, about substantive issues, so I'm wondering what you're defining. Are these the issues you're defining? One of the things that strikes the listener is that already at that point in time there is enormous preoccupation with security and with looting and with disorder, with instability. Yet you're telling us that this was not primary consideration number one on your mind.

Bremer: First of all, it wasn't my responsibility. I was not in the military chain of command. I was not responsible—

Leffler: Let me pursue that, because that is a really interesting issue. As you read the literature on this, one of the interesting aspects is that when you arrive in Iraq, at least all the military folks with whom you deal think that you want to establish your authority. They all report to you. You're the number one person. They all feel that you are asserting your responsibility and they also believe that you take actions that in some ways undercut their ability to establish security. So on the one hand you're saying that's not your preoccupation; on the other hand they say that you have established yourself as the head of command for all intents and purposes.

Bremer: That's just nonsense. First of all, that's the first I ever heard of it. They never bothered to tell me that when I was there.

Leffler: Have you read General [Ricardo] Sanchez's memoir?

Bremer: No.

Leffler: I urge you to read it because you might want to write a rebuttal.

Bremer: I don't have to write any rebuttals. My record stands. A lot of people afterward have a lot of ideas about what they think and said. I was very clear. I've been an ambassador. The law establishes very clearly what the role of an ambassador is—Section 22, CFR something, something. It very clearly states that an ambassador has authority over all American citizens in the country except those military officers who are under direct command of a theater commander. I didn't need any lesson from any generals to understand how it works.

The President asked me to write my instructions. I pulled out 22 CFR, which I had received as an ambassador when I went to the Netherlands, and basically that document, with a few modifications, described exactly what my responsibilities were and exactly limited where my authority ended, which was any military in the country under the command of a theater commander, which included every single military person who was under such a command. So there was never any question in my mind then or now that they did not work for me. If they thought they did that's their problem, not mine.

Riley: Can you tell us—again, this is a gloss on Mel's question. You're in this rush of meetings as you're getting ready to go overseas, the development of the relationship with the Pentagon and your expectations about your communications channels back into Washington. I think part of what Mel is getting at is the sense of some dissonance between the expectations on the part of the

White House and on the part of the Defense Department.

Leffler: There are two different issues here. This is a very important one. One of course is lines of communication with Washington.

Bremer: Right.

Leffler: The other is interactions in the theater. But I think your query is extremely important, and one which, again, the memoirs are very complicated because there is just incredible disagreement.

Bremer: Let me finish on the military side because I didn't quite finish, in fairness to Mel.

Riley: Of course.

Bremer: As I said in the book, I think everybody in Washington and I realized that there was going to need to be coordination in the field between the political and the military. Since I was not in the chain of command as Clay had been and [Douglas] McArthur had been the last time we had done occupations. The problem had been finessed because basically it was the military guy in charge in Germany and a military guy in charge in Japan.

Wolfowitz signed an order—he was acting, I don't know where Rumsfeld was— that established that the military in Iraq should pay attention to my desires as "commander's intent." In the military lexicon, commander's intent means "it's not an order but the commander would like this kind of thing to happen. See if you can make it happen." So there was an instruction to the military, which was dealing with a difficult situation. They were operating in a highly political environment, to try to at least factor into their actions the direction the political leadership was giving to them. But anybody in the military who thought I was in the chain of command was not reading the law. That's simply wrong, flat wrong. I understood that. I had been dealing with that issue for 30 years. It was no surprise to me.

Communications to Washington. The President—I can't remember whether he used the words "Report to me through Don," or exactly what the words were, but that was clear. The decision as you know had been made in January to put the responsibility for the post conflict, whatever it was going to be, in the Pentagon, not in the State Department. I actually think that was the right decision. Most of my State Department friends disagreed, but I think it was the right decision.

It was the right decision for two reasons. One of them goes right back to Mel's point, which is that you had a civilian and a military chain of command in Iraq. If you put the civilian part in the State Department, then effectively when there were disagreements the only place in the chain of command where those two things could be adjudicated was the President, because he was the only one who stood on top of both of those chains of command. On the other hand, if you put past conflict responsibility in the Pentagon, at least in theory those two chains go through the Secretary of Defense. So the President is able to devolve authority down a level, which from a policy point of view is probably the right thing to do, and in effect that is how we had done it in Germany and Japan.

Secondly, with the rather well-documented disagreements between Powell and Rumsfeld, if you

had put the post conflict into State, which was not wildly enthusiastic about the whole process, of going into Iraq because all the experts there knew the Iraqis could never be democratic, you were going to exacerbate the internal personal differences. So I thought it was a good idea to put it in the Pentagon.

The President said, again, I can't say if he used the words, "Report to me through Don, and of course you always have Condi as well." She and Rumsfeld and Powell were at the meeting with the President where he offered me the job, I think. It may be that Powell was not there and Armitage was. Anyway, you can find out from the record. It will show. I don't remember. But it was clear that I was to report through Rumsfeld.

Nelson: Had the Khalilzad complication been sorted out?

Bremer: At our lunch I said to the President, "You can't have two Presidential Envoys," and he said, "I understand." It got sorted out. Khalilzad was still in Iraq at that time. Eventually he left before I got there.

Leffler: Just to project ahead a little bit, but following up on this question, once you would get to Iraq, summarize for us over the first few months how often—you say your instructions were to report to the President through Rumsfeld. How often did you talk to Rumsfeld?

Bremer: In the first weeks, pretty much every day.

Leffler: Daily? For how long? I mean, on a typical day.

Bremer: It depends, 15 minutes, 45 minutes? Again, his records will show.

Leffler: During this time did you talk much to Rice?

Bremer: No. I think I might have a record of that, but I think I did not talk to her before we met with the President in Qatar, which was three weeks after I got to Iraq. She was with him; that was June 5th or 6th. I don't think I spoke to her in those three weeks. I didn't speak to her regularly until she set up her Iraq Support Group in October. She says, by the way, in her book that she had her first meetings, I just noticed that in this excerpt, in September. That's news to me because the first I heard about it was in October, as I wrote in my book, when it was on the front page of the *New York Times.* I didn't even know she had the group.

Riley: Stay with your line of questions, but I owe our guest a break.

Bremer: I'm OK. If someone else—

Riley: We're going to take 2-3 minutes here.

[BREAK]

Riley: OK, we're back.

Bremer: I wanted to come back to Mel's question about meetings. I do remember—I will get you a list, but it's in the book. Again, the meeting I had with Jim Dobbins, an old friend from the Foreign Service who had just completed the draft of this Rand study on the need for more troops, which also addresses the question of security. Both the President and I have accounts of it in our books.

Leffler: I'm following up on these questions with regard to communications between you and Baghdad and Washington policymakers. You said you had daily discussions with Rumsfeld. For the most part you did not speak to Rice at all for the first three months. Did you talk to people at the State Department on a regular basis, on an occasional basis?

Bremer: No, not at that point. I had people from the State Department who were on my staff, so I spoke to them all the time, Ryan Crocker especially, Hume Horan, Pat Kennedy. I did have email exchanges with Colin Powell before he came out to visit. To go back, I came back to Washington for consultations at the end of July and I met everybody then, including Powell and Rice and Tenet and the rest of them. Then Powell came out on a visit in September.

Basically, the State Department communications were through people who were working with me in Iraq.

Leffler: I see. Rumsfeld says that you were very skillful at playing off top bureaucrats, including himself, in Washington. He writes in his memoir that you were not in frequent contact with him, that he often did not know what you were doing, that he was often caught by surprise. Should one take these generalizations—I could bring in the memoir and read you specific sentences. Take my word for it, that's what he says.

Bremer: I take your word for it.

Leffler: And people who study this are a little perplexed by what seem to be diametrically opposed statements. Eventually we'll get a record. We'll be able to see every phone call, but it is going to take a long time.

Bremer: It's hard to know why he would say that. The record is pretty clear. I don't have, as he will have, because I didn't have the staff to do it, a record of every phone call I made, although I have pretty good notes. He was kept regularly informed by phone, by telegram, by letter. I don't know exactly what he was surprised about. I'd have to know what actually surprised him to know whether it was something I did without telling him.

Riley: There is one episode, Mel, again we'll sort of jump out of the chronology, but there was an article that you published either in the *Washington Post*—

Perry: The op-ed.

Riley: Six or seven steps forward.

Bremer: Right.

Nelson: He says he didn't know about it, and even though he had just been with you, you didn't tell him it was coming.

Leffler: That's just one example. That's in September if I recall, September 8th or something like that.

Bremer: Right.

Riley: So the floor is yours.

Bremer: I know that this is an argument that [Douglas] Feith made in his book. I prepared in my timeline a very extensive list of the number of times—I counted them, I didn't give you the full chronology—but there were at least 39 times between my arrival in Baghdad and the writing of this editorial that I informed the U.S. government explicitly of our process—in writing, on the phone, in letters to the President, in speeches both in Washington and Amman. I just found the other day, a *New York Times* op-ed which I published on July 13th, which repeated the process. In other words two months before. These communications explicitly laid out the entire process that we were following. So it's hard for me to understand how anybody in a position of authority in Washington could say that they were surprised, frankly. If they were surprised, I really don't understand how anybody could say that.

Leffler: Let me ask this question on communications. Did you speak to Doug Feith much on the phone?

Bremer: No. Rumsfeld wrote, I understand in his book—Feith asked—no, I guess it was in Feith's book. Feith asked to be the guy on the other end of the phone and Rumsfeld said no. End of story.

Leffler: So you didn't speak to Feith. You didn't speak to Wolfowitz much?

Bremer: No, I spoke to him when he was acting, and of course he visited.

Leffler: And you didn't speak on any frequent basis to Armitage or to Powell or to Bill Burns? The people who were with you like Crocker, et cetera, may have been doing that.

Bremer: I assumed they were; that's their job.

Leffler: But not you.

Bremer: My job was not to do interagency coordination, as I kept reminding people. We had our hands full doing what we were doing in Iraq. Since my channel of communication was to the Pentagon, to Rumsfeld, my assumption was that he, working with Rice or not, was going to take the responsibility of being sure the Treasury Department knew we were doing X and the Agriculture Department knew we were doing Y and Powell knew we were doing Z. That was not my job. Everybody—those offices, Treasury, State, Defense, CIA—they all had people in Baghdad. They were informed of what we were doing. I assumed they were communicating back to their head offices. That was not my job. I never saw interagency coordination as my job. Now, was it effective in Washington? That's another question.

Leffler: Actually, the larger point I think is not interagency coordination. No one expects you to be doing interagency coordination.

Bremer: Some people apparently have.

Leffler: That would be totally unreasonable.

Bremer: I agree.

Leffler: However, the rationale for this course of questioning is one that perhaps you would have thought that these folks back in Washington had something to offer you, Powell or Armitage or Rice. But secondly and more importantly, because there seems to have been an absolutely basic philosophical difference between what Feith and Rumsfeld say they wanted to accomplish, and that is devolving authority quickly to the Iraqis, and your preoccupation with moving slowly and systematically to create a framework. Of course you justify your approach by saying, well, I told President Bush it was going to take me a long time to do this. This is a long process. It is going to take a while, and President Bush said, "Don't worry. I'm going to stick with you."

Bremer: Right.

Leffler: On the other hand, you convey the sense that everybody agreed with this.

Bremer: Right.

Leffler: Yet Rumsfeld and Feith believe that you acted in great violation of the spirit of what they sought to accomplish.

Bremer: Well, the policy I was carrying out was the policy of the President of the United States. It wasn't my policy. It wasn't something I made up. The President speaking, right here, Rumsfeld on the 9th of May says in his memo, "The transition from despotism to a democracy will not happen fast or easily. It cannot be rushed." That's Don Rumsfeld speaking on May 9th. Does that sound like a man in a hurry?

The President of the United States at the NSC meeting the same day says, "It will take a long time to reach our desired outlook, and the U.S. will take the time necessary to produce a credible political process." That is quoted both in Feith's book and mine. That was the President's policy. Now I can go through the chronology.

My first letter to the President—all the letters I sent to the President were submitted through the Secretary of Defense. Is it likely that the Secretary of Defense would forward a letter from me to the President without reading it? My first letter on the 22nd of May said, "I have relaunched the political dialogue with the Iraqi leaders. My message is that full sovereignty under an Iraqi government can come after democratic elections which themselves must be based on a constitution agreed by all the people. This process will take time." The President wrote back the next day and said, "I agree."

I can go through it. There are 39 separate times just from my unclassified records in which anybody in Washington who was reading the mail or the phone calls would have understood that

the President's policy was to put in place a process that would allow the Iraqis to reach democratic government and that that required a constitution which would be ratified by the Iraqi people and then sovereignty would end.

On July 4, 2003, I sent Rumsfeld the first version of the CPA's strategic plan. It would not have been clearer about the planned political process. It said we would "encourage the Iraqis to write as quickly as possible a modern constitution…. The constitution will then be ratified, elections held for a sovereign Iraqi government at which point the coalition relinquishes sovereignty." I knew Rumsfeld read the plan because on his web page he has posted a note he sent, with the plan, to Feith, saying it looked good to him. By the way, this strategic plan was hand delivered by Don to all 535 Members of Congress two weeks later, on July 23.

I'm just going to read one more. On the 13th of July I wrote a memo to Rumsfeld conveying the names of the governing council and I outlined again, "The political process of getting a constitution followed by a referendum, then elections, will lead to the dissolution of the CPA." I repeated these points in a *New York Times* editorial the same day. Does the Secretary of Defense read the *New York Times?* It is simply not credible for somebody to say they didn't know what the process was, and in any case it wasn't *my* process, it was the President's process.

Riley: Let me try coming—

Bremer: There is a separate question. Why do they say they were surprised on September 8th? That's a good question.

Riley: I wanted to come at this from a slightly different angle, that there was a not very fully developed planning process that Feith was running before you came into office. My understanding is that it was predicated on the notion that Mel articulated, trying to find a quick transfer of power to the Iraqis.

Bremer: Right.

Riley: Let me put the question to you this way. Inevitably at some point you are required to confront the reality that there is a process that was going on when you came on board. How do you become cognizant of this process and momentum and what do you have to do, if anything, to alter the momentum that exists for that process once you come into your position?

Bremer: I have to answer this two ways; what I knew then and what I have learned subsequently.

Riley: OK.

Bremer: That dichotomy between what the President said his policy was and what was going on on the ground became clear to me in two ways before I left. I think, again, they're both in my book. One was just before I left, when Garner told the press he was going to put a government in place the next week, May 15th, which was to me a complete disconnect from everything I'd heard in Washington from Secretary Rumsfeld, from the President, from the Vice President, from the Secretary of State, who were all talking about taking the necessary time to get this thing right. Garner is telling the press he is going to appoint an interim government the next week.

Something was amiss.

Secondly, somewhere in that time frame, that same first week or so of May, I had my briefing, "in the tank," from the Chiefs who showed me their plan to draw down—I think we had 180,000 American troops on the ground at that time—to 30,000 by September 1st, which also struck me—having read Dobbins's paper—as disconnected from reality.

My interpretation of what happened—now I'm telling you what I've come to learn or think since then. Feith says in his book that the President in a meeting in March, the 14th, before the kinetic phase started, was presented with a "fast option" and a "slower option," the fast option being the one I guess Feith was suggesting, involved handing over to Iraqis quickly, which explains why at some point I had heard this 90-day notion, though I didn't know this at the time. There was an alternate process apparently, again, according to Feith, more supported by the State Department and CIA, that said, "No, it's going to take longer. We have to take our time."

The President, according to Feith, in that March meeting said he favored the short option. At some point, and you'll have to ask the President, at the end of March or early April, in that time frame the President switched to the slower option. How he switched or why I don't know. I never had a chance to ask him. At the time I didn't realize there had been this struggle. I just knew something was screwed up because Garner and the Chiefs seemed to be working on a timetable inconsistent with the President's.

Leffler: Why do you say at that time he switched? On what evidence?

Bremer: The plain facts of life. On May 6th—

Leffler: OK, on May 6th.

Bremer: I don't know when it happened.

Leffler: On May 6th when he is talking to you and you say to him—

Bremer: Certainly not later than that time.

Leffler: You say to him it is going to take time and he says yes.

Bremer: Yes, but—

Leffler: How well developed is this thinking by President Bush?

Bremer: You will have to ask him because other people have told me that the analysis is right and that the switch came sometime around the fall of Baghdad, which was April 9. At that time I was not in government so you will have to ask other people.

Riley: OK.

Bremer: In any case, by the time I was in government the President was clearly on the "go-slower" option. Now, was that memorialized in some fashion with an NSDD [National Security

Decision Directive]? Was it communicated to Garner and Khalilzad who were out still apparently pursuing the short option?

Riley: Was it communicated to Defense?

Bremer: These are good questions. As I say I only learned about this subsequently by reading Feith's book, so I can't say I knew it at the time. I knew something was amiss when I heard about Garner. I knew there was something wrong. I knew what the President's policy was, and it wasn't consistent with what Garner was saying. I couldn't have been more meticulous in reporting through Rumsfeld back to Washington my understanding of what was needed, which was this process called the Seven Step Plan. The seven steps were outlined as early as my letter to the President, which I submitted to him through Rumsfeld, May 22nd.

Leffler: And Rumsfeld never said to you on the phone or otherwise, "Jerry, this is going to take too long"?

Bremer: No, that's the other point that I've made in my subsequently written op-eds. In this time frame from when I left, May 10th to September 8th, nobody in the administration—not the President, not Rumsfeld, not Powell, not Rice—nobody said, "Hey, you're not following the right policy." Nobody. There was virtual silence except that the President said he approved. So the only thing that I could assume as I beavered away out there, I was carrying out the President's policy and there was agreement with it. Nobody ever said they objected until the op-ed came out. Now the question is why did they suddenly get their hair on fire? I don't know. It is inexplicable to me.

Leffler: I just want to follow up on this. What makes you think that the President had a really clear policy, that this was something he had really thought through? It seems to me that just reading the materials that exist that one can see that when Rumsfeld talks to President Bush and he says. "We really need to get out of here as quickly as possible. We don't want to get involved in nation building. Our military is stretched thin, Tommy doesn't really want to do this to begin with," and Bush seems to convey, "Sure, that's right."

Then you go in and say to the President, "This is going to take a long time, Mr. President. We really need to work on this systematically," and he says, "You're right, Jerry. You have as long as you want." Is there reason to think that President Bush really had a clear policy? That he had thought this through?

Bremer: The policy was absolutely clear to me, no question. I only subsequently have heard about the discussion that went before. So to me it was very clear. I didn't ask to see a decision paper. I wasn't looking for a 40-page memorandum on what it was going to take to do it in Iraq. I assumed that the National Security Council would have prepared the President and he would have made the decision.

Riley: Let me follow up, and forgive me, Mike, you had a question. The follow-up on this is, one might have expected you to get some incoming, if you will, from Feith's operation or from someplace else about why things aren't progressing more quickly.

Bremer: I told you, I never heard from anybody until after September 8th, it was the first I heard

that anybody in Washington had any concerns about what I had been reporting and saying publicly. I had said it to the Congress. I said it in my strategic plan to Rumsfeld in July. If people objected they never said anything. I can't explain it.

Nelson: The report you got from Jim Dobbins seems to suggest you needed a lot more troops instead of a lot fewer.

Bremer: Right.

Nelson: When you passed that information on to the President he said he was working on it.

Bremer: Right. He said Colin Powell was working to line up additional allied troops. In the excerpt you gave me he was slightly more detailed than I had in my book. I didn't know what he did. Apparently he did ask Rumsfeld about it.

Nelson: What did you think might come of that? Did anything come of that?

Bremer: Yes, something did come of it. At that time we had—again, the record will show, maybe eight or ten other countries with troops on the ground. We eventually had 30 countries with troops on the ground. So at that time it was, at least to me, a reasonable answer to say what I wrote in my book, that Colin Powell is working on it, he is trying to get some more people in. That sounded reasonable. It made sense to try and get some other countries to come in there.

Nelson: You had, in terms of resources, five or six people whom you chose, roughly 400 or so who were already there whom you inherited, and then 170,000 or so troops on the ground. Did you want any of those numbers to change? Did you think any of those numbers needed to change in order for you to do the job effectively? Did you need more personal staff? Did you need more and better career staff? Did you need more and better troops, and did you expect to be able to get these things?

Bremer: Let's deal with them one at a time. On troops, I felt we needed more troops and we needed a different strategy, which I also wrote about. We needed basically a counterinsurgency strategy. That was consistent throughout my entire stay there and is pretty well documented.

There really was another CPA staff in addition to the American staff. There was staff from 25 other countries among the 3,000 people who eventually worked for me. We never were staffed beyond 56 percent of our requested staffing. So we never had adequate staff, at least as we defined it. Would it have made a difference? Yes, it would have helped to have had more staff. But the more important question was to have the right security in place.

Nelson: Was there any chance at all given the political environment that the United States would be sending additional troops after winning the war?

Bremer: It depends on how you define winning the war.

Nelson: Well, you know, "Mission accomplished." To the American people there was a sense that we had won now and presumably the number of troops would start going down. Did you think politically you could undo that expectation?

Bremer: My view was that as a Presidential Envoy, I owed the President my unvarnished view of what was needed and he got it from me both in terms of the Iraqi political process and in terms of the number of troops. He was paid to make the decision of what the domestic political process could bear. He was facing reelection. It was up to him to make those judgments. I was obviously sensitive to the fact that he had to face those. My job was to give it to him straight. That's what a good Ambassador does.

Leffler: How often did you do that on the troop issue? You raised—

Bremer: Very often. I raised it with Rumsfeld, I raised it with the President, raised it with Dr. Rice and Hadley, raised it again with the President, mentioned it to [Andrew] Card.

Nelson: Let me frame the question this way. You were speaking to Rumsfeld every day.

Bremer: Yes, for at least the first couple of months.

Leffler: So how many of those days would you say that you said, "Mr. Secretary, we really need more troops"?

Bremer: I don't know.

Leffler: Give me a sense. Was it something you would say to him daily?

Bremer: No.

Leffler: It's easy to say, "There is this quote, I brought it up," just like Rumsfeld has selective quotes. I think what the historical record needs to show, since this has become such a big issue—

Bremer: You're talking about troop strength?

Leffler: Troops and the security situation, because we need to shift to Iraq and get your impressions of what you were seeing there during this very period of time. How often did you say to Rumsfeld on the phone, speaking daily? Did you say to him once a week we need more troops?

Bremer: I probably raised it more often with him in the September, October, November time frame than in the summer.

Leffler: That's what the record would indicate.

Bremer: In the summer, until the bombing started in early August, we didn't really have what you would call an insurgency, at least we certainly didn't see it. The shape was not there. I raised it frequently with him by the end of September. Again, it is in my book. When I was writing my book, the guy I was writing with, we were talking about this time frame, he said, "You already wrote that." I said, "I know I already wrote it, but I said it to him again. It was the same discussion over and over in September and October."

When the military was facing the planning for the 15-brigade rotation they had them do in the

spring of 2004, and they were talking about drawing down and trying to replace their troops with Iraqis, I have it I think only once in the book, but it literally came up—I wouldn't say daily, but at least weekly—I mentioned it to the President when I saw him in late October. The military was essentially saying you can count these untrained Iraqis the same as the guys from the 101st or the 82nd, which in my view was a dangerous way to think about it. That came up over and over and over in September and October. How many times I don't know.

Riley: Just for a point of clarification, it is clear for a first-time reader of your book that there is a great deal of attention to the troop rotation driving these decisions.

Bremer: Right.

Riley: My question, as a matter of clarification—you were pushing before then not to preserve strength but to increase the base numbers of troops that were there. Is that correct?

Bremer: No, I didn't call for more troops until much later after I made the point to the President and Rumsfeld based on the Dobbins report that we didn't have enough on the ground. I did then ask for MPs [military police] to secure—that's in the book. [John] Abizaid sent, I don't know, some MPs up there. Certainly by September I was trying to preserve the numbers. I also pushed for a more coherent counterinsurgency strategy. By the spring of '04 I thought we needed more troops.

Nelson: Did private companies, Blackwater and so on, make up much of the slack that you saw there? For a time there I think there were as many of them as—

Bremer: No. Well, I don't know how many they had on the ground. In September I did authorize the Iraqi Ministry of Oil and the Ministry of Electricity to hire guards to guard their facilities because we didn't have enough troops to guard pipelines and power lines. They weren't private contractors. They basically went out and hired tribes to guard facilities. I don't remember that the American contractor base was that big at this time. They were guarding me, Blackwater was, but I don't remember great numbers of them. Maybe they were around.

Nelson: A lot of them were handling logistics, the kitchen work—

Bremer: KBR [Kellogg, Brown & Root], sure.

Nelson: So the soldiers who were there were all presumably free for the kind of duty one would want them to do.

Bremer: Yes, I'm sorry. I misunderstood. I thought you were talking about security. No, that's true, KBR was there, no question about that. We tried to solve the infrastructure security problem by authorizing the ministries to go out and hire security forces, and they hired thousands of people.

Riley: Let me ask you to talk a little bit about your relationship with the military side of this, which is sort of woven in and out. You've got, as you already mentioned, a bit of a complication in the unity of command or the chain of command problem, because there are two of you.

Bremer: Right.

Riley: Tell us about your relationship then with the military side. When you get over in Iraq is it the way you expect it to look? How much of this is driven by your personal compatibility with the chief? Are their perceptions about military strength the same as yours?

Bremer: Was it as I expected? Yes, I think the structure of it was basically as I expected. I arranged that Sanchez would have an office in the palace just down the corridor so that we had at least some connection. The first meeting I had every day was with Sanchez and the station chief and the military intelligence guys. Then he also came to the bigger staff meeting right afterward, so I saw Sanchez regularly.

There were some hiccups early on, with I think the Marines down south who wanted to hold an election in Najaf and the only candidate was the former Ba'athist governor. There were some problems with that and we had to sort that out. In fact we found in a number of places that the military had effectively reinstalled Ba'athist leaders in towns. I understood. I sympathized with them. You're a captain, you come in with your unit. You're in some town, the place is stabilized, and you say, "OK, we've got to get the water turned back on. We've got to get the power. Who the hell can do it?" Somebody steps forward and says, "I can get it done." You say, "OK, you're it, you're the new mayor, get it done."

Well, the guy didn't get it done, turns out to have been the guy who was there before. He's the Ba'athist. So I can understand the problem, which led me to the view that you need to have what the State Department calls POLADS, political advisors, integrated into the military forces during the kinetic phase so you don't make those kinds of mistakes. But apart from that, no. I know people have written a great deal about Sanchez and me. I've never understood it. I got along fine with Sanchez.

I haven't read his book. He may have a different view now. At the time and after we both left, he told me directly, personally, that he was not the source of all this blah, blah. It must have been our staffs. So I don't know what he wrote later. I thought relations were more or less as I expected them to be and more or less satisfactory.

Riley: On this question of troop strength, this is a shared opinion? Or does this become—

Bremer: In fairness to the President I'm glad you asked that because I should have continued the last thought. While I was of the view that we needed more troops, it is true that I never heard an American general ask for more troops. Rumsfeld always asked, "Do you need more troops?" and they said no. I'd heard the President a number of times—

Leffler: You never heard General Sanchez ask for more troops?

Bremer: Never. He wouldn't have asked me, but I never heard him ask, in any meeting I was in where Rumsfeld asked him, "Do you have enough troops?" or where the President asked him, "Do you have enough troops?" All I ever heard generals say was, "We have enough troops to accomplish the mission." It is an important thing they said, what is "the mission"? Then you come back to the question of the definition—

Leffler: Just so you're informed, during this period of time, May, June, July, General Sanchez writes virtually every single day he was screeching for more troops. Every single day. Every single person he saw he was saying, "We need more troops." Plus the fact there are technical issues here that he was very preoccupied about. This was not your fault—

Bremer: No, I know, he lost his corps command. The corps headquarters went home.

Leffler: Not only did the corps headquarters go home, but all strategic intelligence went home.

Bremer: I know.

Leffler: All the key intelligence staff went back to the United States. You knew these things were going on, right?

Bremer: I did not know that he was asking for more troops. This is the first I heard.

Leffler: You knew that he was losing absolutely critical staff.

Bremer: I heard at some point, and I don't remember when it was, that he had lost the corps command. The corps command had been taken out. I only subsequently heard that he had asked to get that fixed. I never heard that he asked for more troops. He never said anything to me about wanting more troops. But why would he? Who he would say it to was to the military chain of command. So all I'm saying is, to come back to the point about the President—who is after all who we are talking about—the President often asked, "Do you have enough troops?" Rumsfeld asked quite often do you have enough troops.

Now, maybe they wouldn't say they wanted more troops when I was in the room. In any case, I never heard a general ask for more troops. If you put yourself in the position of a President and he is asking do we need more troops and he is consistently being told by the military we have enough troops and over in the corner there is this retread diplomat standing there in his blue suit saying, "I think we need more troops," who do you listen to?

I can understand in a way the dilemma the President faced, which he faced really all the way up to the end of 2006. He was consistently being told you have enough troops and in fact he didn't have enough troops. Nor did the military follow a proper counterinsurgency strategy.

Leffler: I think in some ways people studying this will be mystified. You come there, you're in charge of the occupation. You have a general, now Sanchez, who is taking over. Certainly an overriding problem from Day One is security, disorder, looting, inadequate safeguard of ministries.

Bremer: Right.

Leffler: You and the general, both of whom respectively believe there are inadequate numbers of troops, did not, on the most important issue, talk to one another and say, "We need to do something together to bring this to the attention of the President." How come you didn't know that General Sanchez felt this way? We'll ask him someday maybe how come he didn't know you felt this way. Why didn't you end up—

Bremer: He may have known I felt that way. I don't know.

Leffler: You and the military commander together address this issue in a way that would bring it to the President's and the Secretary of Defense's attention.

Bremer: Well, the Secretary of Defense certainly knew about my view, and I assume he knew about Sanchez's, but you'll have to ask. If Sanchez was saying this—

Leffler: Rumsfeld says he doesn't know. He also says nobody—

Bremer: In his book he says, as I recall, that he was surprised that Sanchez was a) appointed and b) lost his corps command. So you'll have to ask him. I assume Rumsfeld knew about both of us. It's a question of what he did with that information. It's a fair point. Certainly in retrospect it probably would have been better—I don't know if it would have changed anything—if we had made a joint statement.

We were apparently both of the view, as you pointed out, that we didn't have enough security on the ground, although at the time we're talking about in May, June, we were really talking about street security because of the looting. We were not talking about an insurgency yet; we were talking about the looting. It's a different point, and the ROE [rules of engagement]. I believe, as I said in my book, we had 40,000 troops on the ground in Baghdad—two full divisions. But they had no instructions to stop the looting. It wasn't troop strength; it was a ROE problem.

Leffler: That's true. A great many people who write about the U.S. involvement in Iraq identify now—in fact, I think this would be a consensus statement. It's not a uniform view, but it is a consensus view that essentially the initial occupation of Iraq was lost in April, May, June, and July of 2003 partly because of what you just say is looting, but a lot of people like Charles Duelfer, who was in Iraq at that time, writes very persuasively in his memoir that American authority was totally undercut during this period.

Bremer: I agree with that. As you know I thought we should impose martial law. I agree with Charles.

Leffler: One of the things that local commanders like Sanchez wanted to do, and you just referred to this, so I thought it was very interesting, was to use some of the local Ba'athite officials to restore order. They were doing that. You said to me give me precise examples. Sanchez says you specifically told him to get rid of these people; you cannot rely on them. That is one illumination of where—now, did you do that?

Bremer: I don't know. If he says I did I probably did. Sounds right.

Leffler: I don't know, people write—Rumsfeld also says you didn't talk to him every day.

Bremer: What you quote Sanchez as saying is at least plausible to me. Yes, we were obviously trying to avoid the reestablishment of the Ba'athist secularite, Saddamist organization. So if somebody came to me and said he wanted to put some Ba'athists in charge of something I probably would have said no, bad idea. I don't remember it, but it sounds plausible.

Nelson: On the rules of engagement question, when you found out that the military's rules of engagement were not to shoot civilians even if they were looting, did you tell Rumsfeld—

Bremer: Yes.

Nelson: —you need to get those orders changed?

Bremer: No, I think the conversation I had, which is in the book—I don't remember talking with Rumsfeld—was with Abizaid, who by that time I guess was still deputy. He was forward deployed, so he was in Qatar. He offered to send a couple of thousand MPs up to help with security. I don't remember if I discussed it with Rumsfeld.

Nelson: Did you think that was a response to the need you identified?

Bremer: It was at least an initial response, yes. The looting did in the end stop because all the buildings were burned down.

Riley: In the book you mention on a couple of occasions your sense that there had been a missed deployment of intelligence personnel once it became fairly evident that the weapons of mass destruction business wasn't going to play out the way I think most people had expected it to. Could you talk a little bit about that process? And were you under political duress from the White House or the Defense Department to keep pushing on this WMD issue?

Bremer: No, it's interesting. I had almost no conversations at all about WMD with Washington. In Baghdad I did meet once a week with David Kay, who was at that time still heading up whatever it was called. He had a big group, 1,400 people or something working for him. I got a weekly update from him on what they had found in leads. Every now and then there would be a lead they had and they wanted some Iraqi politician to help them. I would help with that. And a couple of times an Iraqi would come to me with a WMD lead, which I'd pass on to David.

By the time of the bombing of the Jordanian Embassy on August 8th, at the latest anyway, it became clear to me that our intelligence effort was heavily weighted toward WMD, and without reducing that we also needed to build up some kind of a counterinsurgency, counterterrorist capability. I called George Tenet and said we've got to redo the intelligence footprint. They then did start to build up that side of the house. I was really not involved in the search for WMD other than getting briefed by David Kay every week.

Riley: Was it unusual for you to talk to Tenet?

Bremer: No. He may have been our first visitor to Baghdad. He came out quite early in my time there. I remember taking a helicopter tour with him of Baghdad. No, it wasn't particularly unusual. It was a little unusual because he was on a beach somewhere in New Jersey so I had to get him off a beach to a secure phone for this early August call.

Riley: On his trip over was the focus at that time mostly on WMD?

Bremer: I think it probably was because I think the trip was quite early—maybe in early June or something. I don't remember exactly. We met at the station and talked to his guys. He may have

come another time too. But the focus early on in terms of what the station was doing was WMD.

Riley: Did you get a sense of frustration out of Washington about the inability to come up with WMDs?

Bremer: No, I don't remember anybody raising that.

Nelson: It was simply not your domain.

Bremer: People understood that it was over there with the Agency. Kay in theory reported to me because he was a civilian under the 22 CFR, but it was basically keeping me informed.

Riley: But at the point that you begin to sense that you need a reallocation do you get pushback on that, or is it sort of fatalistic?

Bremer: No, I think people recognized—by that time we'd had a number of incidents out in the west in Anbar province in Fallujah and in Haditha and we'd had the bombing of the Jordanian Embassy. It was beginning to be clear. There was no pushback, it was a question of just—and I never said I wanted to reduce the number looking for WMD. I just wanted to build up the other side, which they did.

Perry: Can I ask your impressions of President Bush? We haven't really talked about that through this period. So you go from not really knowing him to having an intense lunch meeting with him at which time he tells you that we're going to take the slow approach and he seemed very certain about that. Then you have other opportunities to see him up through, let's say, Christmas of 2003. What is your impression of him at this time and your talks with him about policy?

Bremer: My impression of him was of an energetic, confident executive who had a good sense of humor, who wanted to know what was going on the ground and had a particular interest in how the Iraqi people felt about what we were doing. He said at some point, I don't remember when it was, it might have been in Qatar, "Well, like everybody, don't they want their kids to be able to go to school in peace and lead happy lives or be able to work free of Saddam?" So in a way it goes back to the very beginning of the conversation. That reflected to me the view that I had that no people are incapable of self-government. It's simply not the case that people can't govern themselves. It is the question of whether they have the opportunity to govern themselves. Of course if he hadn't said it by then, his second inaugural pretty much laid it out: Freedom is God's gift.

He didn't say that to me at the time, but then in a way I was—what he was saying to me in those conversations was thoroughly consistent with the idea of what he wanted to do in terms of a strategy, which was to give the Iraqis a chance to recover their country, even if it took time. Even in the end—by the time we reached October, November of 2003, when it was getting pretty hairy—even in the end if it meant political risks to him for his reelection. Again it is in the book. My wife and I had dinner with them in the White House. She and Mrs. [Laura] Bush had their conversation in one place, the President and I spoke mostly about Iraq. They decided that the two of us are very much alike. We go to bed early. Mrs. Bush said to Francie [Bremer], "At 9:30 every night he tells me 'When are you going to turn off that damn light?'" Which is exactly what

I say to my wife. We are also both athletes.

Perry: Bikers? He mountain bikes.

Bremer: This is a very sensitive subject. We can get back to that. That is a very sensitive subject. We can come to that over lunch.

Nelson: I have another sensitive topic. This is not a hostile question because I am a religious person myself, but in your book you say—this is when you're with your family just before leaving for Iraq. You refer to the assurance in our faith that God who asked us to make this sacrifice would give us the strength to endure it. I know you don't mean by that that God spoke to you in some sort of tangible way—maybe, I don't know that. What is your understanding of what you were doing as kind of an agent of divine purpose, providence? How did that affect your conduct?

Bremer: I didn't feel I was an agent of God's. What I felt was that our prayers that would protect and carry us forward would help us succeed. It wasn't that I was an agent. I wasn't bringing God's message to the Iraqi people. On the contrary I very carefully stayed away from anything implying that. That was not my—this was more a personal thing that—obviously, from my family's point of view, my wife and my kids, my security was what they were mainly concerned about. So it was more a question that our faith would get us through this very difficult time, not that I was an agent.

Nelson: I guess the phrase that I was playing off of was the God who had asked us to make this sacrifice. That sounds like you felt a sense of a call.

Bremer: Yes. When my wife and I discussed the question of whether I would put my hat in the ring as it were, it was a question of basically praying and saying is this something I should do. The view of both of us was we felt that God said yes, this is something you should do.

Nelson: Did you ever talk with the President or did your wives talk about whatever serenity or sense of purpose came from your faith?

Bremer: Yes, I think Francie probably talked more to Mrs. Bush about it than I did to the President, although I did tell the President toward the end of the time that I certainly could not have done the job without the faith that I had. It was another connecting point with him as a man as you suggested. I knew of course his biography. In fact, his parents visited us when we were in the Netherlands. His father came as Vice President. We were trying to deploy the cruise missiles there and Bush was the point man on cruise missiles for Reagan, so he came to visit. The Dutch were the last holdouts. So they came and stayed with us. Francie and Mrs. [Barbara] Bush had breakfast every day while he and I went off to beat up on the Dutch.

Perry: That was Barbara Bush.

Bremer: Yes, that was Barbara Bush. We had young kids at that time and Francie was saying, "Boy, this is hard with young kids living over here" and all the rest. Barbara said, "You talk about kids, I ought to tell you about my son." This is about the time he went straight.

Nelson: What did she say?

Bremer: I don't know. All I know is that my wife tells the story. That was the first we had ever heard of him. The point was I had great respect for—I think anybody who can overcome that kind of an addiction, whatever it is, winds up in some way with a great inner strength, which is beyond my understanding.

Perry: Could I ask you about his style? You said you shared characteristics including management, leadership style. Many people have commented about his impatience with long-winded explanations. Did you find that to be the case, that he wanted you to cut to the chase or he would cut to the chase with questions?

Bremer: I'm pretty short-winded. I never heard anybody give him a long-winded statement. Maybe they had learned the lesson. I've heard that about him.

Perry: So you never felt that you had more to say and you were being cut short?

Bremer: No, but then I have the same management style.

Nelson: Well, long-winded, is that simply a synonym for thorough?

Bremer: It could be, I don't know. But again, I didn't experience it. He asked good questions. He always, in my view, asked good questions. Obviously you served him best by giving good answers. If it took a long time, it took a long time. But I never saw that. Doesn't mean it didn't happen.

Riley: He was good about helping keep your spirits up?

Bremer: Yes, he was good. He called from time to time. Sometimes I'd be talking to Condi and he'd walk in and she'd hand him the phone. Yes, he was good. I guess the press wrote at some point that he was happy when I was happy and if I was concerned he was concerned. He obviously felt it was important to hear from the guy on the ground. So that is effectively a delegation, I guess, if you think of it from the management point of view.

Leffler: How often did you talk to President Bush on the telephone during these first few months? I mean—?

Bremer: His record would show, I don't—

Leffler: In your recollection would it have been—

Bremer: Not often.

Leffler: Once a week?

Bremer: No, no, not that often. I was speaking much more to Rumsfeld.

Leffler: Much more to Rumsfeld.

Bremer: In fact throughout. I don't think I ever initiated a call to the President. I didn't think that was my—If the time had come that I needed to, I would have, but basically I did not initiate calls to him.

Leffler: You write in your book, but talk to us a little bit more about your impressions when you arrived in Iraq. How much worse was the situation than you anticipated? I know you write the economy was much worse than you anticipated.

Bremer: Yes.

Leffler: Can you say something more than that in terms of your impressions, what the situation seemed like?

Bremer: Let's take it one at a time. On security obviously there had been a lot of press stories about the looting and stuff, so I knew there would be looting, though to see it on the ground brought it home much more. The buildings were still smoking; some were still on fire. As I wrote in the book, looters were still running in the streets free. That was surprising to me.

I think the economy is a very important point. It came home to me; I remember on two visits I made. One the week after I got there to a cotton-weaving factory in Hilla. I went down to see the mass graves, and as part of that trip visited a factory. I had come into the Foreign Service as a commercial officer. I came from business school. Commercial officers are trained when they go into an installation to look around and try to make an assessment of what is going on here.

I distinctly remember this place. It was half shuttered. There were pigeons flying around, cobwebs everywhere. The nameplate on the carding machine was Sheffield 1963. That really struck me. I thought what in the world are they doing with a 40-year-old machine? I asked the manager what was his business. He said he had to buy cotton from a government cotton commune somewhere up in the Kurdish region at three times the world price and ship it down to his plant, manufacture it into products that nobody wanted, and he couldn't sell on machinery that is 40 years old.

The same week I visited Dora, the big Baghdad refinery. I went out there and again went around. It was striking the number of pipes—refineries are complicated things—that literally had duct tape around them. Then we went into the control room and it was a control room out of the *Buck Rogers* television series in 1950. Big dials and switches you threw and needles going like this. It was just striking to me. It was like going back a half century in time.

It gradually dawned on me that getting the economy started was going to be a lot harder than we thought. In fact I have said often since that while the WMD was a major intelligence failure, it was also the case that we really had no intelligence about how bad the economy was. Now again, in fairness to the intelligence community, that wasn't their job in the '90s. Their job in the '90s was to look for and hopefully find WMD or stop it.

We were almost blind about how bad the economy was. It was a major factor. It doesn't feature very much in what people write, but I probably spent at least 50 percent of my time on the economy during the 14 months I was there. It was a real mess.

Perry: Can I ask if this is part of the disconnect with Secretary Rumsfeld and the Pentagon and DoD and maybe the generals? You spelled out your superb background and Harvard Business School and the fact that you went into the Foreign Service as a commercial officer. Yet you made the case that State should not have been in charge of what you were doing.

Bremer: Right.

Perry: But would that have been a better fit? Would there have been better ends because of that? Better ramifications?

Bremer: I don't know. You mean on the economic side? I don't know what you—

Perry: The fact that you said you were really spending about 50 percent of your time doing that. Again, all the books are full of the disconnects that apparently were happening or were perceived by Secretary Rumsfeld or whatever. I'm just trying to bear down on what was the core problem there. Everything that you're describing, your background and what you did and what you saw there relates to the economy and the politics even more than the military.

Bremer: I see. Yes. Well, a more logical case would be for the political process to be in the State Department. It is perhaps less logical to say the economy should be there; it is not clear where the economy should be. In terms of economic rebuilding, State doesn't really do that. As I said as a theoretical matter you could make the argument the postconflict responsibility should be at State, although you then have to deal with the problem of the two chains of command only coming together at the President, which, in my view, is not the best—if I were the President's advisor, that would not be my choice.

Then you have to deal with the reality that you have Rumsfeld and Powell at each other's throats. So in the practical case of Iraq I don't think that it would have been better to put it in State. As you know there have been a lot of people in Washington since Iraq wrestling with the question of how do we organize for reconstruction. There is no really good answer, frankly.

Riley: Let me ask a corollary question, particularly because Mel is still here before lunch. That is, the administration has come under criticism both from the press and from some scholars about a national security–making process that didn't work very well.

Bremer: Yes.

Riley: From your perception did you see or experience some of that at a remove, and can you help us understand where the problems were and what the implications were for what you had to do?

Bremer: I saw it, though I didn't quite understand what I was seeing right away with Garner and Khalilzad going this direction, and JCS [Joint Chiefs of Staff] going in this direction, and the President's policy in that direction. Something was wrong. I didn't have a lot of time to think about what was leading to it being wrong, but something was clearly disconnected. When I went back for my first consultations at the end of July and went around and talked to Colin Powell and George Tenet and John Snow and other people, I was surprised to find that they didn't seem to be very well informed about the programs we were pursuing, and we were reporting through the

Pentagon, which was our channel.

Riley: Right.

Bremer: One thing was a minor thing, which is in the State Department telegrams that come in from posts, unless they are marked STADIS, which means "state distribution only," are automatically routed by the machine to the NSC [National Security Council], the CIA and so forth. I knew this because I had been executive secretary. My deputy in Iraq, Clay McManaway, had been my deputy as an executive secretary.

DoD cables at least at that time worked differently. In DoD a cable goes into the Pentagon and doesn't go anywhere else unless somebody specifically marks it to go somewhere. So when it comes into the NMCC [National Military Command Center], instead of going automatically to State and the Agency, it stays in DoD unless somebody says, "State ought to get this."

Clay and I talked on the phone while I was back from my first consultations and we finally broke the code. I couldn't figure out—I said, "Why does George Tenet not know X or Y?" So from that time on, the end of July, we started multiple addressing all of our cables so that when we sent them through DoD cables, they were also addressed to State, the NSC and CIA. Part of the problem, at least a mechanical part, seems to have been that.

It might explain why the third level down at the State Department doesn't know what is going on. It doesn't explain why the Secretary of State and the National Security Advisor don't know what is going on because they wouldn't in any case be reading all these cables. They would be briefed on the phone calls and the memos and so forth.

Riley: Right.

Bremer: I therefore was surprised but sympathetic when Condi set up her mechanism back there in October and told me on the phone that she was feeling kind of left out and wanted to talk every day, which we did from then on.

Riley: This is in the fall?

Bremer: Yes, the first week of October. So obviously something wasn't working and she was feeling blindsided. It wasn't just the mechanical thing that I mentioned; that was a detail.

Leffler: Are you saying that the cables that you sent to Rumsfeld and OSD [Office of the Secretary of Defense] were not being distributed elsewhere?

Bremer: I don't know it for a fact. All I know is Clay and I were trying to figure out what went wrong because we knew we were reporting—not only was I talking to Rumsfeld, but we were reporting through DoD cables. Clay finally figured out because he had been in charge of the operations center under me when I was executive secretary. He made the connection about how cables are distributed. Again, it is a detail. It doesn't explain the broader question of was the NSC system working. No, there was something wrong.

Riley: In this instance there could be two interpretations. One is that because of your reporting

through the chain of command there is something dysfunctional at the top of the Defense Department that they're not communicating. The other alternative explanation, maybe there are others, is that Defense is in fact winnowing this down and getting it out but that there is a problem, probably at the NSC level, in not having sufficient coordination in vetting through the other principals and deputies. Do you have an opinion about where the—

Bremer: I really don't know. Again, thinking about it after the fact, I have some understanding for the problem that Dr. Rice faced. She comes into office as NSC Advisor, having been in government but at a modest rank as deputy on the Soviet stuff. She looks around and she's got a Secretary of State who has been a four-star general, National Security Advisor, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and potentially a Presidential candidate. She has a Secretary of Defense who has been the youngest Secretary of Defense and the oldest Secretary of Defense, White House Chief of Staff, and a very successful businessman. Looking over her shoulder she has a Vice President who has been Chief of Staff, Secretary of Defense, and he is now Vice President. So you're the National Security counselor. You have a significant management problem.

Nelson: Or they look at her and see a President's pal.

Bremer: Right.

Nelson: And get jealous for that reason.

Bremer: It goes back in a way to this question: Feith says the President decided it was going to be a short occupation on March 14th. At some point, pick a day, I don't know when, sometime in April, he goes the other way. Are either of these things memorialized? Back when Henry was running the NSC, when the President made a decision, there was an NSDD, a National Security Decision Document I think it was. "The President today decided that we will follow the following—"

Leffler: How did you develop your idea in your six- or eight-point program that it should be an elaborate process, step by step, in which a constitution is written first? Where did you get these ideas?

Bremer: Well, they were part of the Future of Iraq study. I hadn't read the whole study before I went out. It's a couple thousand pages. I didn't have time to read it until October. I was briefed by the State Department on the key points, and one of the key points made by the Iraqis involved in the study was that Iraq needed a new constitution. So that's where the idea of a constitution came from. That was quite consistent with the general point that you needed some kind of a political structure. You can't just out of nowhere conjure a political process. It had to have some structure that led to an architecture of a political life, which is effectively a constitution.

Leffler: And it is on that point that Feith writes in his book that the structure that he had in mind was to create this Iraqi Interim Authority, the IIA as he called it, and to devolve authority to them and let them set up these processes. He seems to think that you disregarded those processes.

Bremer: Well, it's interesting that he should write such a thing several years later. He never said anything at the time. I assume he read some of the reports I made. Maybe Rumsfeld didn't brief him on every meeting, but I know he read, because as I mentioned Rumsfeld has it posted on his

website, the memo I sent him on July 4th, the draft strategic plan, which said explicitly the CPA would "encourage the Iraqis to write as quickly as possible a modern constitution embodying democratic and individual rights. The constitution will then be ratified, elections held for a sovereign Iraqi government, at which point the coalition relinquishes sovereignty." Rumsfeld sent it with a note to Feith saying, "I think this is good stuff," so they both read it; or perhaps Feith did not have the habit of reading notes from his boss.

If Feith thought that that process described there, which was in our strategic plan, it was not just some other document, was wrong, it took him three years to write about it.

Nelson: I wonder if this phrase, "as quickly as possible," wasn't in everybody's mind in all the time, and in some people's minds it meant this will happen in a few months and in other people's minds it meant it will take longer than that, but they are all thinking, *We're going to do this as quickly as possible.*

Bremer: They can think whatever they want to think. What I said repeatedly was it is going to take time. I told the President in early June whatever the date was when we met in Qatar, we'd be very lucky if we can pull off elections in a year. To me that is "as quickly as possible." Maybe to somebody else as quickly as possible is something else. But Feith, if he had an objection, never made it to me, never once before the September op-ed.

Riley: One of the things that is interesting, sort of weaving a couple of these things together, is you indicated a few minutes ago that in the Kissinger model, where it was formalized, it was committed to writing, everything was there.

Bremer: Right.

Riley: Evidently we're looking at administration—I'll look to Mel here, who knows the paperwork better than I do. This is an administration that, although it was superior to some, maybe its predecessor in terms of formalizing and keeping paperwork, didn't follow those formalities as others did. Is that a correct assumption?

Bremer: I don't know. I wouldn't have seen the papers probably anyway, but it is at least a working hypothesis. [*laughter*]

Riley: Well, we'll find out.

Perry: Can I ask just a follow-up that you had mentioned about these conversations by phone with Secretary Rumsfeld? You said of course he had the staff to keep voluminous notes, et cetera, but you said you had kept some notes on your telephone conversations. When you would hang up? Or were these notes you made ahead of time, things to speak with him on?

Bremer: Both. Sometimes there would be at least an agenda. Sometimes Rumsfeld's staff would say, "Here are the six things he wants to talk about." So I would know at least what the agenda was before the call and I would try to—it's very hard to take notes on your own conversation.

Perry: But you have those and you will someday deposit those in the library?

Bremer: Somewhere.

Perry: Somewhere.

Riley: Mel, do you have any questions before you have to take off? We're going to break for lunch here as you go, but I didn't know whether there was a question that you wanted to pose before you take off.

Bremer: Are you back this afternoon or just tomorrow?

Leffler: I'm going to come back probably between 3:00 and 3:30; I have to meet my class for the first time today.

Bremer: Of course.

Leffler: They'll be very impressed that I'm talking to you.

Riley: Although what you said they'll hear nothing of. [*laughter*]

Bremer: That's all right.

Leffler: In fact I won't even tell them who I spoke to.

Riley: You can tell them who.

Leffler: There's not time now, but I do think that we probably need to discuss the issues of de-Ba'athification, army disbandment, relationships with the Iraqi Governing Council. These were all issues of central importance in May and June.

Nelson: Do you think we can postpone until Mel gets back?

Bremer: Sure.

Riley: I think there are other things we can talk about, and we'll do our best—this is a good time to have a break.

[BREAK]

Riley: I want to go back. Let's have a full stop here. We really haven't heard very much about your biography. One of the striking things about the book is you start practically in Iraq. One of the routine things we would do had we not felt that there was a little bit of pinch in time this morning was to get you to tell us a little bit about who you are and your personal background so we have a sense of who this person is who is involved in these high-level things. So where do you come from? What was your education like?

Perry: Family, parents, the whole deal.

Riley: How did you get into this kind of work?

Bremer: I was born and brought up in New England. My father was, when I was born, teaching languages at a small prep school, Westminster, in Hartford, where I was born. He joined the Navy right after Pearl Harbor and after the war became a businessman. He didn't teach anymore. He was in international business, which is relevant with his languages, to my eventual choice of career. I am the oldest of five children. We sat around the kitchen table a lot, or the dining room table as it happened, because the kitchen table was too small for seven people.

My father always said over and over that we were lucky to have been born in America, the greatest country there ever was, and anybody who could should try to give back something to society. A sense of "noblesse oblige," you should do something in public service as he had done when he joined the Navy.

Riley: Was his family fresh to the United States?

Bremer: No, his family came originally, as far as I can trace it back, in the 1840s. He has a great, great, great something grandfather who was born in Hanover, Germany. He was born in 1820. I can't find when he came here, but long ago. My mother's family was from New York, and he grew up in New Jersey. My mother's family had been here longer than that. Scotch on the father's side and also German on the mother's side.

I was interested in foreign policy from a fairly young age simply because there was a lot of talk about it, my father being in international business. I started languages fairly early. I started Latin in fourth or fifth grade and French in eighth grade. I liked languages. As I said, my father was quite a linguist.

Riley: How many languages did he speak?

Bremer: I don't know. I know he spoke French, Italian, and to my eternal regret, Latin. When the time came, when I had done six or seven years of Latin, I finally said to him, "I've had enough of Latin. It is a dead language anyway." It is one of those conversations every son has at some point with his father. My father said, "No, no, you should continue Latin." I said, "Why? It's a dead language." He said, "Because it will help you with your English." I thought, *What is he talking about?* He was right of course. I should have continued Latin, but I didn't. Anyway, I continued French.

I became interested in international affairs in my early teens I would guess. I went to school in Connecticut, then went to a boarding school. As it happens I went to Andover, where the President went. Of course I didn't know him. I basically began reading quite a lot of history at that point, and international affairs, whatever you want to call it. That became kind of interesting.

I went on from there to Yale, and at Yale I really did focus on history. I got more and more into history and more interested—I traveled to Europe two or three times as a teenager.

Riley: With your family?

Bremer: No, I went the first time with a friend whose mother had just died and they thought it would be helpful if I went with Tim to change the subject. We went in some kind of a group; I think we were about 15; we went to France. But my parents went regularly to Europe. There was a lot of that. My father eventually became President of a French company in the United States so there was a real connection. I worked in France. One summer in college I traveled in Europe, another summer I continued my French language training.

In my senior year I applied for and was accepted at Harvard Business School. My father encouraged that. Although he was a self-made businessman, having been a teacher before the war. I think he had in mind, although he never said it, that I could come and work with him and maybe one day replace him, which was OK. He also thought it would be useful to take another year before I went to business school to get my French to a more fluent level. So I asked for and got deferred from Harvard and studied in Paris for a year at the Instituts d'études politiques, which is the political science faculty of the University of Paris.

I studied there. I was there about a year and a half and then came back and went to Harvard, which we talked a little bit about, the case method and so forth.

Perry: When your parents talked about international relations and you had these family discussions, were they political?

Bremer: Yes, my father was a conservative. He probably was, although I was too young to know, you would probably call him a [Robert] Taft Republican. I do remember the '52 and '56 elections. He certainly supported [Dwight] Eisenhower. He wasn't active. I don't mean he did anything, but that was the conversation around the table.

Perry: And your mother?

Bremer: She was less politically active. She sort of listened. She didn't disagree. It just wasn't her thing. She was bringing up five kids. She had started college before they got married and then the war came, so she stopped after two years. She had been at Sarah Lawrence. After the war she taught herself photography and became quite a well-known professional photographer, candids mostly of children where she made a pretty good living. To spin it forward she went back to Sarah Lawrence in the '60s after the last of the five children had grown up, and wound up graduating from Sarah Lawrence the same year as her daughter graduated from there. That was a nice touch. She then became a teacher of art history. So there was a lot of art around our house, too, which was my second concentration at Yale, art history.

Perry: So were you politically inclined in college and beyond?

Bremer: I became interested in politics probably around the ninth grade. I remember there was a couple teaching what was then called social studies or civics. It was basically modern politics. They were quite liberal so they were a good foil for me because I could test out the ideas I was hearing around the table and reading. I frankly didn't study very hard at Yale. Whatever time I devoted to studies was the history of art. But I also did become more active politically. I joined the radio station. The radio station in those days at Yale was like a fraternity. It was the place you went and drank beer with friends. We put out both an AM and FM station.

Riley: Sort of like talk radio today.

Bremer: A little before that time. I wound up being on the board and so I wrote editorials. I was quite critical of the [John F.] Kennedy administration. I thought he had mishandled the Vienna summit, which took place my sophomore year I guess, and he paid the price with the wall going up in Berlin shortly thereafter. I was critical of the way they had mishandled, in my view, the Bay of Pigs invasion, particularly the way the President mishandled it by calling off the air cover. I wrote my senior thesis on the Bay of Pigs.

Then Allen Dulles came to visit, and they invited a small group of people. I think it was part of their recruiting. So I, with the bumptiousness that only a Yale senior can feel, "Well, I wrote a paper on the Bay of Pigs." "Oh, yes, son, send it to me," which I did. I never heard back. [*laughter*] So anyway—

Nelson: Did the Cuban Missile Crisis—

Bremer: Yes, in '62, that was my—

Nelson: I'm a little younger than you, but I have vivid memories of it as something that made us think.

Bremer: The only thing I remember about it was there was an overflight in New Haven of, I think they were probably bombers. I just remember seeing this—I don't remember what size they were. They probably came out of Bradley Airport, which was both an Air Force and a civilian airport for New Haven. It was a pretty tense time.

Of course in the '50s when I grew up we still did duck-and-cover at school. So we'd been living with that.

Nelson: Were you attracted to [Barry] Goldwater, [Nelson] Rockefeller?

Bremer: Yes, I canvassed a rather unpromising neighborhood in Cambridge. [*laughter*]

Riley: For Goldwater?

Bremer: We were not met with great enthusiasm. I had met Goldwater before he was nominated. Goldwater came to Yale to give a speech; it must have been in '63. Nobody else at the radio station would agree to be his escort. He was going to do an interview. I conducted the interview at the radio station because I was the only Republican among the group. So I had met Goldwater. Not that that related that much to what I did. But by the autumn of '64 I was at business school, so I didn't have a whole lot of spare time, but I did canvass.

Nelson: If we're looking for the moment that turned you toward Foreign Service?

Bremer: What happened was I kind of knew from the time I got really interested in international relations and history at Yale that I was going to wind up doing something international. My thinking then, reflecting my father's thinking, was that it would be business. When the time came to pay my debt as my father put it to society, after I finished business school I thought, *OK, I'll*

go into the government for five years. I'll pay my debt and then I'm going to get out and make some money.

When I decided to go in the government, I interviewed at the CIA and the State Department, Army intelligence, Navy intelligence—and the Commerce Department, since I was attending business school. As I mentioned earlier, when I came into the Foreign Service I was slotted as a commercial officer, so the theory was they were going to use my commercial experience. Since my first assignment was Afghanistan, there was a rather thin market for Harvard Business School graduates.

Anyway, I remained a commercial officer for the first five years I was in the Foreign Service. Eventually I was reslotted as a political officer. When the five years was up, the problem for me was that I now suddenly found myself as Special Assistant to the Secretary of State, and that's not an easy place to leave from. Shortly thereafter [William] Rogers resigned and Kissinger came over to State. I told Kissinger, "I'll stay for a couple of months, but I'm really kind of tired, I'm burned out. I have a family, two young kids." Of course two weeks after Kissinger arrived the Yom Kippur war broke out. By the time I came up for air it was 1976. So by that time the five-year idea was long gone.

Nelson: You're in college in the early '60s; dramatically different from the late '60s in general. You weren't in Vietnam.

Bremer: No.

Nelson: Did that have an effect on the way you thought about your career?

Bremer: When I came into the Foreign Service there were 52 officers in the incoming class, and I was married. At that time if you were not married coming into the Foreign Service you were sent to Vietnam. A bunch of my colleagues, my classmates, class cohorts, whatever you want to call it, came in, and they did go to Vietnam. Vietnam was obviously a big issue. Now we went to Afghanistan,, where Vietnam was not a big issue, although [Averell] Harriman did come through there.

It was interesting to my later career because Harriman was a Special Envoy of [Lyndon] Johnson at that time. So the Embassy in Kabul, which was a pretty small, out of the way place in those days, we had to really gear up for this big guy coming from Washington with the big jet and all the rest of it. He had a bunch of people who in the future I learned were people from the Executive Secretariat staffing him, which is what they do. It led me some years later when I was trying to figure out what job to apply for in Washington after I had finished my next tour, which was in Africa, to request an assignment to the Secretariat because that looked kind of fun. These guys going around with Averell Harriman, it looked kind of exciting. So I applied for a job and I wound up getting assigned to the Executive Secretariat.

Nelson: Is that in any way a political process? Meaning were you assigned to the Secretary's office by the Foreign Service, or were you interviewed by a different staff?

Bremer: No, the Secretariat is technically part of the Secretary's office, but it is a fairly large operation that has four parts all staffed by career Foreign Service or career civil service

employees. It has an information section, which is the archival part where they make records of everything that goes not just to the Secretary but to the other principal officers in the State Department. There is an administration section which handles personnel and budget. The operations center, which is self-explanatory, cables, 24-hour watch operation; and finally the Secretariat staff. In those days there were about eight people on the Secretariat staff, who served as a common staff to the Secretary, the Deputy Secretary, and the various Under Secretaries—helping them manage the paper flow coming up to them and going back into the bureaucracy.

In those days, when you were assigned you were assigned by the State Department personnel people. If you got assigned to the Executive Secretariat, usually you first went to the operations center, and then if you were good enough there you eventually were assigned into the Secretariat staff. That was the pool from which the principals, the Secretary and the Deputy, drew their personal staff. That's the process I followed, except I started actually in the National Military Command Center. So the jobs are not political.

Nelson: I didn't mean political in a crass way, I meant political in the sense that they were Presidentially appointed.

Bremer: No, those jobs are way below that level. The Secretary doesn't care. The executive secretary, which eventually was a job I served in later, has a process of selection—because a lot more people apply for these jobs than can have them. The executive secretary sets up a process whereby he or she figures out who they want to bring into the process. The executive secretary at that time I guess assigned me.

Nelson: What happens to your partisanship along the way?

Bremer: It disappears.

Nelson: Disappears both within you—

Bremer: No, not within you, but as a professional. You serve whoever is the President. I feel very strongly about that. I felt that you are obliged to carry out the policy the President has laid down. If you violently disagree with it, you can make that known, and try, within the bureaucracy, to change it. If the policy doesn't change and you feel strongly it's wrong, you should resign. You don't go to the press, you don't leak, you don't talk to Congress about it. You get out.

Nelson: There were some who resigned right from Kissinger's staff during the Nixon years, Winston Lord, Roger Morris, and a couple of others. Did they do it—

Bremer: That was while he was still at the White House and they resigned for a different reason, because he was going along with the wiretapping.

Nelson: Did they go about that in a way you described as the right way to do it?

Bremer: Yes, they left. There were people who resigned over Vietnam; there were people who resigned over the support we gave to Bangladesh and not Pakistan when Bangladesh broke away in whatever it was, '70 or '71. That's the right thing to do if you're a professional. You do your

best to influence policy in the direction you think it should go, and if it becomes a point where you cannot in good conscience support a major policy, you resign.

Nelson: Quietly or publicly?

Bremer: Quietly.

Nelson: The views you expressed this morning about the universal desire for freedom, when does that become something you believe to be true?

Bremer: Believed?

Nelson: When did you embrace that idea?

Bremer: I think it kind of grew on me over the years as I mentioned just watching what had happened in places like Afghanistan, Korea. I didn't mention Central America in the '80s where we had the same argument—for example about Central Americans, Nicaraguans. Certainly by the '90s it was apparent I was never entirely comfortable with the uber-realist approach that Henry took, as I mentioned earlier. I think you have to find a balance. Henry would agree you have to find a balance. It's just that his balance would be weighted one way and mine would be weighted maybe the other way.

Nelson: Who was the first President you interacted with?

Bremer: Nixon.

Nelson: Can you describe that, the circumstances, and the—

Bremer: I saw him a couple of times at the White House because Henry, for the first year he was Secretary, was still NSC advisor, and I would go back and forth with him between State and the White House. I saw him at least once at San Clemente. We went out for some meeting there. I saw him briefly at Moscow at the first summit. At which time I was still working for Rogers in '72. I didn't have any intense interaction. I was just a staff guy.

Nelson: Did it form an impression in your mind about how a President ought to comport himself or not comport himself?

Bremer: Not that I recall.

Perry: What did you think of him either from firsthand observation or what you knew about him and his policies?

Bremer: I thought his policies were quite striking. For a more-or-less conservative Republican to basically say he was going to wind down the war in Vietnam, maybe it was inevitable, but to do it was not easy, and of course the opening of China was a major thing. Maybe Teddy Roosevelt was as well prepared in foreign policy, but there are not a lot of Presidents who were as well prepared as he was. Kissinger certainly gets and should get a lot of credit for the implementation of the policies, but President Nixon really laid them out. The decision to open to

China is really a stunning thing when you think about it. Absolutely amazing, and very courageous.

What I think about any President is he gets paid to make tough decisions. I used to say to my colleagues when I worked in the government and afterward no easy decision belongs on the President's desk. If it gets there, somebody is not doing their job. So it gets back to what we were talking about at lunch. Every decision that comes to a President is a 51-49 decision. In every case people he trusts are on both sides of the issue. The Secretary of Defense who he appointed says he supports the 51 percent side, the Secretary of State or Treasury whom he also appointed says no, it is the 49 percent side. So how does a President choose? He really has to rely on something called judgment, which you don't learn at school; you learn it through life.

When you look at [Abraham] Lincoln, his picture is downstairs, how did he manage? He had great judgment.

Nelson: I don't think we got you from Rogers to Kissinger. What step did I skip?

Bremer: What's the question?

Nelson: You were working in the Secretariat.

Bremer: It had three steps. I came back from Malawi, from Africa. I was assigned the Ops Center but I was assigned first to the NMCC. We had an exchange in those days. The Defense rep came to State ops, State rep went to the National Military Command Center in the Pentagon. I worked over there for five or six months. Then I came back to the Ops Center very briefly. Then they moved me on to the Secretariat staff where I was a "line officer," as it was called. I was doing the common staffing.

Then Rogers hired me from that job in late '71. I could be wrong. It could have been early '72. Anyway, I went on Rogers's personal staff. This is all inside baseball. I wound up on Rogers's personal staff I think in early '72. That's right, early '72.

Nelson: It must have given you some sense of tension within an administration among people who have overlapping responsibilities. I'm thinking of the Rogers-Kissinger relationship. You think of them all from the outside as part of the team, but—

Bremer: I'm somewhat philosophical about that. I saw Rogers-Kissinger. I saw Kissinger-Rumsfeld. I saw [Harold] Brown-[Zbigniew] Brzezinski because I worked for [Cyrus R.] Vance and then [Edmund] Muskie in the Carter administration. I saw Haig and everyone else. I saw Shultz and [Caspar] Weinberger, which was actually almost as intense as the Rumsfeld-Powell. To some degree it is institutional and it is healthy. The State Department and the Pentagon have different missions and different perspectives on foreign affairs. That's perfectly normal and it is normal therefore that the two heads of those organizations are going to have a different approach to what they recommend and whatever President it is.

One of the things that I did see happen was—and this comes back a bit to the comment no one asked about Sanchez. What I did see happen in many of those instances was that the staff people often exacerbated unnecessarily the relations between the principals. Staff guys would go at each

other and the principals wouldn't even know what was going on. Again, my impression is that that explains some of the different perspectives—well, some of the assertions that Sanchez and I didn't get along. I don't know what he wrote. I got along fine with Sanchez. I had no question about where his authority started and mine ended.

Nelson: You said it can be healthy. Can it be unhealthy?

Bremer: Sure. When you're dealing with Cabinet-level people, they tend not to be shrinking violets. People are different. Some people handle conflict better than others. I think the Shultz-Weinberger relationship was not very healthy. I think the Powell-Rumsfeld thing was not healthy. It made it worse than it needed to be.

Riley: Where out of your experience was, in retrospect, the healthiest relationship? Where, if we were going to find the model of behavior between these two, would you point?

Bremer: In some ways, ironically, it was when Rogers was Secretary of State because you knew he wasn't the key guy. He didn't have a big ego. He was a nice man and in a way I think he was misplaced. He should have been Attorney General. His job in many ways in foreign policy was to try to keep [J. William] Fulbright under control, or at least to moderate Fulbright, which he did very well. He played golf with him almost every week at Burning Tree. He had no particular illusions that Kissinger was really the power behind the throne. Rogers was a proud man, so I think it hurt him, but he didn't let it get acrimonious.

Now that's not a model in the sense of "does that serve the President well." He has a Secretary who is just sort of there and a National Security Advisor, who is acting as Secretary. From a political science point of view it is probably not the best. The best solution was when Henry was both, probably. [*laughter*] Does the National Security Advisor agree? Yes, he agrees. [*mimics Kissinger*]

Riley: Although we have been told that there were times when they disagreed.

Bremer: Well, eventually the NSC Advisor was [Brent] Scowcroft. Probably Kissinger-Scowcroft was a good model, but again it is a little bit unusual because Scowcroft had been Kissinger's deputy.

Riley: Sure.

Perry: So what is the President to do? What is the model from the President's side? He knows he has these two departments that have different agendas and missions and he has two probably egotistical, strong-willed people. What is the President's leadership role? What is the model for that? Either a person you can name or a type of leadership style.

Bremer: Actually, it isn't so much a question of style off the top of my head, and it comes back to what we talked about. It's a question of how do you organize it so it works. I have to digress a minute. My experience in the State Department, having seen a lot of it from the perspective of being executive secretary, is that orderly decision making is more likely to lead to good decisions than the contrary, just as a proposition. So how do you—one of the problems for a President or Secretary of State or a business executive is how do I get an orderly process here?

What do I mean by orderly? Back to case method. What is the problem, what are the alternatives? How do I assess them, what do you recommend? That's orderly. Everybody is included in the group making the analysis. If it's White House or NSC, then the State Department, all of the various bureaus. If it's the State Department, the Pentagon, the Treasury, everybody who has some useful input ought to have an opportunity to make their case before the decision goes to the principal, the President, in this case.

If a President were asking me, I'd say you are best served if you have an orderly decision-making process, which ensures that everybody with valuable input has a chance to make the input, and then you can make the decision. As we talked about over lunch, sometimes there are extraneous factors no matter how well you organize things. Somebody is having a bad day, so all of the orderly decision making goes out the window. But within what is possible for us mortals, an executive, including a President, is best served by an orderly process of decision making. It's why I set up an Executive Secretariat when I went to Baghdad, because I wanted to be sure that there was somebody out there, the executive secretary, to ensure when papers came to me that the right people in the CPA had been asked to make input, so that when I made a decision I had all of the relevant information. Long answer.

Nelson: In part you answered a question I was about to ask, and that is are there things you're learning along the way that turn out to be directly or indirectly useful to you when you become administrator? One is as you just described, orderly process.

Bremer: Yes.

Nelson: Other things that you pick up here, pick up there, that later on become of particular value either as things to do or things to avoid, cautionary tales? That's a simple question, but not an easy one.

Bremer: I'm sure the answer is yes. In a way it goes back to business school. One of the things you learn at business school with the case method is you never have enough information. Your first reaction, the first semester, the first term you are there, is to say, "God, I don't know if he should sell the plant or buy the plant. I don't have enough information." The professor would say, "That's the only information you've got. What's your decision, Mr. Bremer? What are you going to do?" In many ways that is also true in government. There is never enough information. In a way, in Iraq, this was compounded by the fact that we had no time. There was urgency right from the start, every day, 18-20 hours a day scores of decisions were needed every day.

While I would insist on getting information where I could, I guess my life experience, especially in government, had taught me that you never have all the information you'd like to have, so you just have to get on with it. You've got to decide.

Nelson: And be comfortable with that?

Bremer: Yes. And then move on.

Perry: That first question from the Harvard Business School case method of what's the problem—was the answer to that perhaps not correct or that problems that were being cited weren't necessarily the ones to address?

Bremer: I'm sorry. I don't understand the question.

Perry: You said the first question in the Harvard Business School model—

Bremer: The taxonomy.

Perry: Exactly.

Bremer: What's the problem?

Perry: So if we take that and we apply it to Iraq, particularly given what you said this morning that the generals are always fighting the last war and people are organizing units in Iraq along humanitarian lines, was the answer incorrect initially to what was the problem in Iraq when you went?

Bremer: I was thinking of it more as "We're only generating 30 megawatts of electricity and we need 6,000." That's the problem. What are the alternatives? Well, we can bring in some diesel, but it's going to cost us this much. We could build a refinery; it's going to cost and will take time. In the broadest sense the answer to your question is that every plan depends on assumptions. The assumptions that went into the prewar planning for the postwar conflict in Baghdad were based on assumptions that turned out to be incorrect, or at least inadequate.

So in a way the problem was mis-defined. But I don't hold that against the planners because you have to start somewhere. Sometimes when I give speeches I quote Lucius Clay, who was the *gauleiter* in Germany, from his book, *Decision in Germany*. You have to remember that the Joint Chiefs set up planning for the occupation of Germany in 1942. They had three years of planning, and hundreds and hundreds of colonels and majors and captains did this planning and came out with a document called 1067 or something.

Clay, who was a three-star general, wrote in his book that when he got on the ground in Germany, "I don't know who put together this 1067; it has no relationship to the situation on the ground." That's the way planning is, so I don't hold it against them. But the fact is that the planning was for a different set of circumstances than we faced. If you take that as defining the problem, it was ill-defined. It wasn't that their courses of action were wrong; based on their assumptions, they were right. I guess I wasn't thinking of it in the broadest sense, as you are.

Nelson: Eisenhower frequently said, "Plans are useless, but planning is essential."

Bremer: Exactly.

Riley: I don't want to lose track of this, but I do want to go back to the discussion we had over lunch to go ahead and get this on the record because I thought it was striking and interesting and useful and particularly relevant, and that was your claim as a historian as well as somebody who has been a practitioner at how difficult it is for us to know from the outside what is actually going on. I wonder if I could get you to reflect on that a little bit. Don't worry about repeating what was said at lunch. The reader won't know.

Bremer: Even though I am a historian and interested in history, I think it is very hard in the end

to get the full record of what happened, why a President decided this or that. Because you can find a paper trail that leads up to the meeting he has with the Secretary of State. You know that the Secretary of State has made a big pitch to take a favorable view of some issue, like the law of the sea; all of the arguments are well mustered by the State Department and they are all written down there.

You find out as a historian that the President didn't agree with the Secretary of State. He decided to take a harsher, whatever, different view on the law of the sea. Now you will go searching around and you might find a paper from the Secretary of Defense that takes the contrary—aha, the President decided to support the Secretary of Defense on this issue. But is that why he decided, because he thought the argument was better? Or was it because two days before these two Cabinet members had also come to the President with a major decision on what to do about India? The Secretary of State on one side, the Secretary of Defense on the other. The President had decided in favor of the Secretary of State.

Now the President thinks to himself, *Boy, if I overrule the Secretary of Defense twice in 48 hours I'm going to have a real problem on my hands because he is already angry anyway. I know he is leaking to the press that he doesn't like our policy in Vietnam.* So the President thinks, *Maybe I'd better throw him one here on law of the sea.* You're not going to have that written down anywhere. The President won't reveal it unless he writes it in his memoirs, and he is not likely to do that, and he's not going to be talking into a mike. A White House tape recorder won't pick it up, but it's perfectly human for the President to be thinking in terms of how he manages the people in addition to how he manages the problem.

Riley: Right.

Bremer: That's the thing that is very hard to get visibility on. Now you're thinking, *How do I know why Napoleon [Bonaparte] decided to go to Moscow after all? Why did [Adolph] Hitler decide to open the front against the Russians?* You can look at all the documents, but in the end—probably on those two you can find it—but on the little things—so I think the beginning of wisdom as a historian is to start by saying there are a lot of known unknowns. [*laughter*]

Riley: To quote one of your favorite authors.

Nelson: Thinking about things that might have been formative in some way in your later public role, did you formulate views of the press during this time and how to relate to the press, how to work around them? That became an important part of the Iraq story, how it was being reported back home.

Bremer: Well, I don't know what lessons I'd learned. I'd had a fair amount of exposure to the press in the Netherlands because of the importance of the cruise missile debate, which was my main job. Of course as Ambassador-at-Large for Counterterrorism because we had the Iran-Contra scandal open up three weeks after I took the job. Then we had Pan Am 103 at the end of my time there and a whole bunch of other terrorist incidents in between. I did a lot of press during the '90s when I was in the private sector. What did I learn?

My general approach to the press was to be as straightforward as possible. If I didn't want to answer a question, the best thing to say was, "I'm not going to answer the question." I never was

comfortable trying to find some weaving way around it. Obviously in Iraq the press became a major part of the job and I was fortunately well advised by my senior assistants, particularly Dan Senor, who took also a very "let's lean forward" approach to the press, began daily briefings, had me do at least a once-a-week press conference, sometimes twice a week, and a weekly TV talk show for the Iraqi public.

I guess my view was I knew press was important and I'd done a lot so I just kept doing it. I didn't have any particular magic approach to it.

Nelson: Your radio days at Yale didn't turn you into a—

Bremer: No, I don't have a good radio voice.

Nelson: We got a little bit off track in terms of the timeline.

Riley: That's quite all right because we were going back and filling in some of the picture that we had wanted to cover. I'm happy for us to go back to where we left off.

Perry: Before we do that, we of course had raced ahead to your getting to Iraq, and I had just a couple of questions of about that time, what you might have been thinking. We left Afghanistan, again to fast-forward to your going to Iraq. We had just about gotten to the point where the Taliban were on the run, and pretty much we thought had been disbanded. We didn't circle back to ask you about al-Qaeda. Because that had been your concern going back to the commission, what were your thoughts about the administration's approach to al-Qaeda and particularly [Osama] bin Laden?

Bremer: The timing here, we're talking 2000 or 2001? They're slightly different.

Perry: Why don't we do both.

Bremer: Our report was in June of 2000. The attack on the *Cole* was in October of 2000. I happened to be giving a speech at the Philadelphia World Affairs Council that evening. I said at the time that this has the looks of an al-Qaeda-type attack. I went back and reprised what our report had said. I said I hoped the administration's reaction would be vigorous, which it wasn't. Now, again, it was two weeks before an election, which could explain their reluctance.

In terms of the Bush administration, I don't think I have any more to say than what I said. I became increasingly concerned as 2001 went on that the Bush administration was also not paying enough attention to what we thought we had identified as a significant threat from al-Qaeda. I don't remember that there were any al-Qaeda attacks in 2001 before 9/11; maybe there was one small one in the summer. You'd have to ask Richard Clarke, but I don't remember. There was the *Cole* attack, which was—

Nelson: There were the embassies.

Bremer: That was '98.

Riley: I think they were quite on purpose. I think bin Laden's idea was to—

Bremer: There was no question about the ’98. That was part of our study.

Riley: But I’m talking about leading up to 2001. I think they were—

Bremer: Right. I think they were planning.

Perry: It was their strategy.

Bremer: To me the more precise question of whether the Bush administration was paying attention to al-Qaeda was are they paying attention to this threat of al-Qaeda. It is bin Laden; there’s something out there.

Perry: So now we fast-forward up to Afghanistan. The Taliban is on the run. Al-Qaeda is presumably on the run. We think bin Laden is at Tora Bora. Obviously you were sorry that we didn’t get him there, but were you sorry that we seemed to move away from that?

Bremer: I didn’t second-guess that. I just didn’t know enough about it—and I wouldn’t have. If somebody in the press had asked me—nobody did—I would have said, “Look, I don’t know what the deployment is out there. They have other intelligence. I don’t think you can second-guess from outside.” It is much easier to do two or three years later.

Riley: Or ten.

Bremer: There is one part of my biography that impinges a little bit because—

Riley: Please.

Bremer: Your study is not about me, but in addition to the bipartisan national commission I served from 2000—until I went to Iraq in 2003—on Jim Gilmore’s commission. Governor Gilmore was serving as Virginia’s Governor then. It effectively was the organization that came up with the idea for a Department of Homeland Security, which is I think how I wound up getting appointed to the President’s Homeland Security Advisory Commission, or whatever it was called.

Perry: In 2002.

Bremer: Yes. The Gilmore Commission struggled a lot with the problem of the interagency. How do you protect the homeland and how do you pull all this stuff, and we came up with the idea of a Department of Homeland Security, which may or may not be a great idea, but that’s what we came up with.

Nelson: This may sound a little rude, but it’s a question others may have. Given your background in Afghanistan, given the work you’ve recently done on terrorism, why didn’t you call your friends in government on September 12th and say, “Sign me up. I’ve got skills, I’ve got background, and can be of use to the government right now.”

Bremer: It’s not my style. I figured if they needed help they’d find me. First of all, on the 12th, 13th, 14th they were busy with a lot of other things. And so was I. the firm I worked for then had

over 1,500 employees in the World Trade Center. In the ensuing chaos we didn't know how many had survived. Soon we realized we had lost 295 colleagues. So we were dealing with our own major corporate crisis in the weeks after 9/11. So I wasn't looking for a different job.

Nelson: Right.

Bremer: It is just not the way I—

Nelson: A matter of temperament?

Bremer: Plus it was a matter of temperament.

Riley: I want to go back and ask you—when we were asking you about the administration's focus on foreign policy, you mentioned the plane being shot down by the Chinese. As a close outsider and somebody who had a lot of experience in negotiations, did you have any reactions or response to how well that situation was handled by the administration?

Bremer: To the outside it looked as if it was well handled to me. Nothing I've learned since has changed that feeling.

Perry: I have a Middle East question, and again this is leading up to the war in Iraq. You told us of course about the WMD concern and that Iraq had been viewed as a terrorist state. Did you have thoughts before the war was launched in Iraq about what that would do vis-à-vis Iran?

Bremer: Before the war was launched?

Perry: Presumably to remove Saddam.

Bremer: I thought it would be salutary, if I thought about it. I can't say that I wrote anything down about it or talked about it. I thought it would be a very helpful signal.

Perry: Then once you—

Bremer: In fact, I think that is what happened. At least the NIE [National Intelligence Estimate] says they stopped their weaponization program in the fall of 2003 and [Muammar] Gaddafi gave up his nuclear program after we overthrew Saddam. So if I spent a lot of time thinking about it that would have been my reaction. Now your next question is once I got there?

Perry: Yes, once you got there, the insurgency—we haven't really gotten into the insurgency. Maybe you want to hold that off for when Mel is here.

Riley: Yes, let's hold that off. My question just skipped my mind.

Nelson: I've got one too. You were with Kissinger Associates—

Riley: That's my question.

Bremer: That's a premise.

Riley: I'm projecting your question.

Nelson: —when you get the call about being what would turn out to be the CPA administrator. In general, we haven't answered that, so maybe your particular case would shed some light. What is it like for somebody who is in a mature career position and you get a call? What are the logistical difficulties of leaving one place and then going through whatever kinds of background and confirmation and whatever other processes may be involved? What does it cost you to leave and what does it cost you to join?

Bremer: One, for the record, I was working for Marsh & McLennan. I had left Kissinger two years before. It was extremely chaotic. I decided once the President offered me the job that I needed to divest all of my holdings, which were not deep, but extensive, all of my stock, my options, etcetera. I had been in the private sector for 12 years. I had been on a number of boards. Most of my pay had been in deferred stock and so forth.

I wanted there to be no question that I could not possibly gain financially from any decision I made in Iraq because I knew I would be making a lot of decisions that affected pretty much everything in Iraq. So I called up an old friend who was a retired KPMG senior partner. He had been my accountant, the guy who did my taxes back in the '80s when I didn't have any money. I said, "I need help. I can't tell you what the job is, but I'm going back in and I've got to get rid of everything and I've got to do it in the next ten days." It was a substantial undertaking and cost me a lot of money. You don't go back in the government for money anyway.

Nelson: What other price did you have to pay for leaving where you were and then going in?

Bremer: That was the main thing. Another concerned an organization I had been building, a company called Marsh Crisis Consulting, for a couple of years and I had hired people. We bought a small company based in Virginia. I brought those people on board, had been building it up. I had to leave them basically on their own. I had a guy who had helped me, sort of a deputy. I had not had a chance to put a successor in place, so I had to leave them to the tender mercies of this conglomerate, Marsh & McLennan, and which as I feared gradually phased them out after I left. So I was giving that up. Of course there was the family.

Nelson: On the government side of it, were there hoops you had to jump through to get through that process of appointment?

Bremer: No, because I wasn't subject to Senate confirmation. The hoop was trying to get briefed as much as I could. That was the main thing.

Nelson: I just wondered what the costs are of going from private career—

Bremer: They're very big. If I had been subject to Senate confirmation it would have taken another three or four months. I think everybody knew we didn't have three months to play with. It is a legitimate concern when you consider the price people pay these days to go into a Cabinet position now. I'm all for transparency, but it has gotten to a point where there must be competent businessmen and women and lawyers out there who just say it's not worth it. I don't want to put myself and my family and my entire life through that.

Riley: Sure.

Bremer: It wasn't the case in my case. My case was just a question of "let's get out there."

Nelson: Why didn't it require Senate confirmation?

Bremer: You can have a Presidential Envoy without him being subject to Congressional—I don't know what the red line is you have to cross. Certainly being CPA administrator you didn't have to be confirmed.

Riley: My guess is Congress didn't want to have anything to do with it.

Bremer: Probably not. I don't even know what Congressional consultations if any did they do. I have no idea.

Riley: My question when you raised the emerging from the Kissinger network was more a political question because there is a sense that among some Republicans that the Kissinger connection would be the kiss of death. Did you have some problems or did you experience any difficulties with folks in the administration?

Bremer: Not that anybody ever expressed to me. Rumsfeld and Kissinger had a quite contentious relationship back in the Nixon years, but it didn't seem to have stopped Rumsfeld from asking me, although he says in his book it was Shultz. I don't know. It never came up.

Riley: I'm sure it speaks to your professionalism in it not being an issue.

Bremer: It never came up.

Riley: What about the question of the so-called neoconservatives within the administration? We get differing responses from people that we talk with about whether the network existed, how powerful they were, and so forth. I'm curious about your perspective on this question about the extent of neoconservative influence within the administration and how you fit into that, if a sort of identifiable network of neocons existed.

Perry: As the son of a Taft conservative.

Nelson: Goldwater.

Bremer: I'm a Goldwater—

Riley: A Goldwater conservative.

Nelson: Very different.

Bremer: Right generation. What does it mean, neoconservative? It means a new conservative. It came into being when a group of people, Democratic intellectuals, starting with Jeane Kirkpatrick, decided that the Democratic Party was not sufficiently robust in foreign policy. So she became Reagan's Ambassador to the UN. That is when this came about. Then you had some prominent neoconservatives, as the press calls them. I don't know if they call themselves

neoconservatives, by the way.

Riley: Some do.

Bremer: Wolfowitz and Feith are identified as neoconservatives. I knew them both. I knew Scooter, who I guess is also sometimes called a neoconservative. I don't think either Rumsfeld or Cheney would call themselves neocons. So I don't know what it means. Neoconservative? Someone who late in life saw the light and became a conservative? I'm a paleoconservative; I welcome them. [*laughter*] I don't know, when you say what influence—it's really a question the President has to answer. He's the man who made foreign policy. There certainly is, if you look at it as I do, as an observer, a confluence between President Bush's view that people deserve to have representative government as an element of natural desire for freedom and the neocon view that one of the objectives in American foreign policy—I'm phrasing it in my terms, I'm not a neocon—one of the objectives should be to promote democracy.

It's not only the right thing to do, but it's in America's interests. I happen to agree with that second view. It's both the realistic and right thing to do pragmatically, and it's the right thing to do as a moral matter. But how much of that influenced President Bush only he can answer. I don't know.

Riley: One of the focus areas among those who both embrace neoconservatism and the critics is the position of Israel geopolitically as well as its relationship to the United States.

Bremer: Right.

Riley: Let me throw that out as a general question for you to reflect back on your experience and the extent to which either the security of Israel was a factor in decision making as you perceived it or the direct extent to which diplomatic efforts with Israel played a role in what it is you were doing in Iraq.

Bremer: Well, if you mean decision making, was it a factor in decision making in the CPA?

Riley: Yes.

Bremer: Not at all, never once came up. No Iraqi ever raised with me either Israel or Palestine. No, that's wrong. The Foreign Minister at one point asked me what I thought about allowing people to present passports at the border that had Israeli stamps in them. I said of course you should accept them and so the Iraqi government did accept them at least while we were there. That was the one discussion. Nobody in the State Department said, "Say this or that." I just said, "Do it."

Israel as an issue, the Palestinians were both simply nonexistent. During the 14 months I was there, it never came up.

Nelson: We're waiting on Mel to flesh out the time you were—

Riley: We need to go ahead and proceed.

Nelson: Let me ask this. You're right, we do. Directly or indirectly when you were over in Iraq were you ever made aware of the fact that an election was occurring in the United States? Did that ever work its way into what you were told or what you assumed must be behind things you were being told at all?

Bremer: It came up. I think both times are in the book; I can only remember twice. Once when Powell told me in Madrid in late October when I was saying we need more troops and I was having this problem with Abizaid. He said, "Well, you've got to understand to do the next 15-brigade rotation the President is going to have to call up some National Guard and Reserve units and that's hard to do in an election year." I said to Powell, "That's what he's paid for. All I can do is tell him what I think has to happen and he'll have to make that judgment."

Then it came up again in the meetings at the end of that month in Washington where I raised it with Andy Card. It's in the book. He said, "You're being gamed," and people are trying to set you up. I said I thought we would make it impossible to carry out the President's vision for Iraq if we just cut and run. I said, "I know that the President is facing an election and this could cost him the election, but that's my view."

Nelson: Apart from those specific exchanges, were there ever times you thought, wondering why something was being decided in Washington the way it was, *This must have something to do with the election*?

Bremer: No. I had a calendar; I knew what was going on. I knew when we were looking at the summer of 2004, we were looking at the summer before an election. Nobody had to draw me a picture.

Riley: What about the flip side of the question? You're in country and how much attention are the political figures in Iraq giving to the fact that there was about to be a Presidential election and whether that is going to have an influence one way or the other about America's resolve in the country?

Bremer: If they had those concerns, and I could understand that they might, they didn't share them with me or to my knowledge with any of my colleagues. I never heard any discussion about it. To us on the ground, particularly in May and June of 2004, the question wasn't so much the American elections, it was how are we going to organize the Iraqi elections in January 2005. We knew there would be an American election in between but no Iraqi said to us, "Yes, but what if the Democrats win?" They may have been thinking it; it would be normal.

Nelson: What were the insurgents thinking?

Bremer: I don't know.

Nelson: I mean, to the extent that they thought they could drive American public opinion into the rejection of this President, did you have any evidence that that was animating their calendar?

Bremer: Our intelligence on the insurgency was so poor that we had no insight into what they were thinking.

Riley: There was a follow-up I wanted to ask, and I'm sure it will come to mind in a moment. Mike talked about the press. One of the other things we always like to talk about is relationship with Congress. Invariably you had a lot of interaction with Members of Congress both in Washington as well as in Iraq. This is not the kind of thing that the foreign policy professionals normally would focus on.

Bremer: Right.

Riley: So tell us about your relations with Congress. Who were the most important figures that you dealt with? Who were the real pains in the ass for you? Were there times when you despaired of your ability to get the attention that you wanted?

Bremer: Well, there are two chunks of answer. My most intense and concentrated interaction was when I came back to testify in favor of the supplemental $18 billion request when I did nine committees in four days or something.

Riley: This would have been in the fall?

Bremer: The end of September, the 23rd, 24th, somewhere in there. There is a fair amount in the book about that visit. It was clear by then that some of the Democrats were basically saying not that the war was lost, they just didn't want to do anything. They wanted to get out. [Jay] Rockefeller, Robert Byrd, were both very negative.

We started to get Congressional visits. We must have had some before that, but by the time I left in 2004 we had had something like 298 Congressional visitors, so we had a fair chunk of them, some of them more than once, obviously. [John] McCain, [Hillary Rodham] Clinton. She came a couple of times. What we found was that most of them, when they left, left with a better appreciation of what we were trying to do and a more positive impression of what we were trying to do. So I welcomed getting the visits. I felt that our story was not getting through to them through the press. There was only so much I could do by phone. Politicians react to people, so it was better to see them in person.

We'd get them over and sit them around a table and Sanchez would brief on his stuff. If they were cleared we'd have the station brief and then I would brief. We'd take them around. We'd meet some Iraqi politicians. On the whole the visits were helpful to us and certainly helped get the support we needed. Ted Stevens was enormously important to us in getting the supplemental aid budget. You asked who was important. He was at that time still Chairman of the Appropriations Committee in the Senate. He was enormously helpful. So was Jim Kolbe in the House. By and large it was very intense and it was very useful.

Riley: What, beyond an around-the-table brief, would you routinely do with them?

Bremer: If security allowed we tried to take them to see a project. We always had projects. The question was what kind of a project? An orphanage or hospital or something. We would try to get them some social interaction with members of the Iraqi government who were senior governmental officials. Sit down with sandwiches or something. They usually wanted to visit troops from their state, so we tried to do that with either a Guard or a Reserve unit or a fort that was based in their constituency. So they got around. Security made it hard for them to do

everything they'd normally do on a visit.

Riley: Did you have any close calls with security? [*Bremer indicated he had none.*]

Nelson: The supplemental you mentioned, was that the 18—

Bremer: The $18.4 billion.

Nelson: For Iraqi reconstruction?

Bremer: Right.

Nelson: In one of your interviews you pointed out that by the time you left only 1 percent of that money was actually in Iraq being spent.

Bremer: About $100.8 million.

Nelson: What went wrong?

Bremer: What went wrong—and I kick myself, it was a mistake that I should have foreseen—was when we put this bill through Congress, it was the biggest aid bill that had ever been put to Congress, we agreed with Congress that the contracting would be under the FAR, the Federal Acquisition Regulation, which is the standard contracting requirement. You put each project out to open bid; you make an award. The guy who loses has, I don't know, 180 days to appeal. If he appeals you start over. This was a serious mistake. We never should have agreed to that. Almost everybody who has written anything about this, including the Special Inspector General for Iraqi Reconstruction, has written this was a mistake.

I didn't appreciate how long it would take to spin everything up. It just took a very long time. You had to get the contractors through. They had to be individually qualified before you put out the bid. Then you put out the bid, then there had to be so many days until the bid was ordered. Then assuming there was no protest to the award, the winner had to order the materials, equipment, and get the people. It just took a lot longer.

Nelson: Why do you blame yourself? I would think there were plenty of people in the State Department whose job it was to be on top of that.

Bremer: All I'm saying is if you ask me where did we make mistakes, it is one where, again, in retrospect, I should have been more insistent. I thought at the time it was a useful assurance to Congress that we were going to do things right. I also asked Ted Stevens, who agreed, to put in the law the establishment of the Special Inspector General so that we had somebody overseeing the whole process. It's a lot of money. So I guess I was more attentive to—you have to remember that in September when I was testifying there was a huge flap going on about Halliburton and Cheney's previous role there. So there was a lot of attention on this. KBR, which was a Halliburton stepchild or something, I don't remember exactly what it was, they were doing the LOGCAP [Logistics Civil Augmentation Program], it was called, logistics. There was a lot of controversy about that. We were pretty sensitive to the need to show that we were going to do it right and we went too far by insisting on the FAR. It was a mistake.

Nelson: What effect do you think the delay had on the situation in Iraq?

Bremer: Well, I don't know. It's a little hard to assess because [John] Negroponte says, and I have no reason to believe he is wrong, that when he got there he decided it was all wrong anyway, we were putting too much money into big infrastructure projects. We should chuck—and Condi says it—cut it up into smaller things. It's an interesting theory. If Negroponte had been in my position I'm not sure he would have come to that conclusion. But what we faced was this huge degeneration of the whole economic infrastructure. No electricity, no oil, no refineries. I don't know what else—it's nice to say you should do little things. We did 28,000 reconstruction projects while I was there. I don't know what effect the delay on the big projects had.

If we had been able to spend the money more quickly and get stuff on the ground more quickly, could it have helped? Maybe. But I kept saying to the Iraqis, you don't have fuel oils and electricity. To build a refinery or a power plant is at best an 18-month project. It's not something you just snap your fingers. So it really comes back to the security problem. The security problem wasn't solved until the end of 2006.

Nelson: You didn't have, say, members of the Governing Council saying, "Where is this money we heard about? We've been telling our people that help is on the way."

Bremer: No, what they were saying was, "Where's the electricity? You guys threw Saddam out in three weeks; we've been trying to do it for three decades. Where's the electricity?" I remember hearing this when I was in Africa, when we landed Apollo 8 on the moon. The Africans are all saying, "You guys can land on the moon. Why are we sitting here starving in Africa? Fix it." [*laughter*]

Riley: It's like my daughter who can't figure out any time she sees a commercial on television I can't just produce it.

Bremer: You may be able to soon. Be careful. Wait long enough— [*laughter*]

Riley: I want to shift gears a little bit and ask you to go back to the question of pre-war intelligence. You said that you believed it was true that every person was capable of self-governance. Yet much of what we read in your account and other accounts is how surprised we were, we being the United States, at the breakdown in civil society and the ability to interact on a meaningful social level among the Iraqis because of the fear and debilitating influence of Saddam's dictatorship.

I want to get you to comment on that a little bit. We treat that in most of what I read as a given when we come in. Was that predictable? Couldn't we have foreseen that this, if we believed what you called, I believe, the "buttresses for bridges"—

Bremer: Shock absorbers.

Riley: Shock absorbers. You had a sense about this.

Bremer: To me it was not a surprise; you said it was a surprise. I put surprise in quotes. I didn't

find it surprising. That's why I knew it was going to take a long time. I don't know who was surprised. Maybe the people who were saying they thought we could do this in 90 days. I was in no way surprised.

I had lived in three countries that had been occupied by the Germans—Norway, the Netherlands, and France. I had read a lot, talked to a lot of people about what it was like after the war, what the resistance was like, how the exiles were seen by the people who stayed behind. Every country is different, but there were certain similarities. The exiles were never going to be welcomed as saviors in Iraq, just as the people who went to London from France and Norway and the Netherlands were not welcome. "Where were you guys when we were here fighting the Germans?"

The reconstruction, even in those countries, which were, after all, essentially democratic, the reconstruction of the political fabric took time. To me, that was not an intelligence issue; it was intelligence in the narrow sense of the word. If somebody didn't understand it, they weren't intelligent. To me that was the obvious reason. That's why I talked about the social structure. In fact, I mentioned it to Bush I think in my first meeting. I didn't have to be an Iraq expert to know that. To me that was a question of learning enough about how transitions had gone. I didn't hold myself out as an expert on that. I certainly was not surprised at how long it was going to take or how difficult it was for them. Maybe it turned out more difficult than I expected; the whole job turned out more difficult. That part of it did not surprise me.

Riley: I think you're correct in saying that the people who thought a quick transition was possible did underestimate that. You and the President were—

Bremer: Anybody who thought it was going to be short certainly underestimated that, or at least thought there was some quick fix.

Nelson: A different subject. That is, the number and the caliber of the people working for you in Iraq. You mentioned earlier that it never got above—

Bremer: You have a piece of paper?

Nelson: Fifty-six percent of what you were staffed for.

Bremer: Right.

Nelson: Also I think you mentioned somewhere along the way that it's not as if talented people were lining up in the government and saying "send me to Iraq" in great numbers. Can you talk about that?

Bremer: Yes. It is one of the prevailing myths among many that there were only a bunch of young ideologues working for me.

Nelson: Or young Bush campaign people, whatever.

Bremer: So I wrote a paper, I'm going to leave it with you. It was published in the *Wall Street Journal.* It's a list of the top one hundred officials working for the CPA. Just thumb through it.

Katrina can put it in the record.

Riley: We'll put it in as an appendix.

Bremer: The pagination is a little screwed up there. There were a couple of points on personnel. Number one, we didn't have enough. I covered that this morning. What difference would it have made? Well, it certainly would have helped some people get a little more sleep, at a minimum. Number two, the ranks of the 3,000 people who worked for me were from 25 countries, they were all volunteers, and they were extremely capable and basically trained for the jobs they had, most of them. There were a few, as you would expect in any organization that size, who didn't measure up. In the end I had very little choice over anybody anyway, because I left in such a hurry except I got to choose five or six people and that was it.

The quality of the staff to me is not a legitimate point of contention. You can argue with what we did or whatever, but it wasn't that these people weren't qualified and weren't trying.

Nelson: But the number. Why was the number smaller?

Bremer: There you had the problem of some of the departments not sending people. Not the State Department. We had a lot of State Department people. In fact, when we started the transition to planning for the Embassy, which was in February of 2004, Colin sent me, I think, five serving Ambassadors to come to Iraq. They're all listed on that paper. They were serving already as Ambassadors to different places. I got very senior, very good State Department people, all Arabists, who came and helped.

Garner ran into this before the war and it never really quite resolved itself. Before the war the other departments were sort of saying, "Yeah, yeah, yeah. Call us when the war starts and we'll let you know." Then of course they never came, say, Agriculture or Transportation—I'm making these up just as possible examples of departments not sending people after the fall of Baghdad. Treasury was good, State was good, DoD was good. It was more or less the second-level departments where we had trouble. Those things were important. If you looked at the Ministry of Communication, I think there is one guy listed. It's a pretty big ministry, particularly when we were setting up the first cell phone system in Iraq's history. There was no Internet under Saddam. We had a lot of problems. We had one guy. He is advising the Iraqi ministry, but he is the only guy.

Riley: Let me piggyback—

Nelson: I just have one follow-up, and that is, of the 3,000, about 2,500 were from other countries. Is that right?

Bremer: Probably.

Nelson: Did you have any challenges coordinating the work of a coalition of these people?

Bremer: Not any that I can remember. I had a couple of American advisors I had trouble with.

Riley: Care to put a name on any?

Bremer: No, I sent them home. The Italians were terrific. They sent guys to do the Ministry of Culture and they were just wonderful. The Minister was actually an Iraqi communist, so the Italians fit in fine. Dealing with a communist was no problem for them, and I said no problem for me either, just get on with it. The civilians in CPA were courageous people. Two Japanese and I think one Rumanian got killed on my staff, and some Americans.

Riley: I think that's an important point. It was a question I was going to ask. There was a tendency I think among the critics to sniff at the so-called coalition as not being a very important fixture of the military apparatus anyway.

Bremer: That is also not true. You can look at the numbers there. It's clear. There we did have problems. As I mentioned in here with the Spanish, Italians, once we got into the crisis.

Perry: So Secretary Rumsfeld's paragraph or so when he says, and then the State Department said they were going to send people but there weren't enough people signing on to come.

Bremer: Well, that's true. They did have some problem. I think that was mostly, however, later. I think that was in the second administration because as I recall—I only know it from reading the press reports—there was a report at one point that at that time Secretary Rice said they would have to go to mandatory assignments. When I came in the Foreign Service if you were not married it was mandatory that you went to Vietnam. That was the last time the Foreign Service had used some provision of the regulations where they could require assignments. But I suspect Rumsfeld is talking about later.

One of the problems we had, and it went on all of 2003, was that anybody coming out was required to go through I think it was a five-day chemical weapons equipment training down somewhere in Virginia. You had to go down, learn how to put on protective clothing. There were no chemical weapons, right? By that time Kay had already reported there are no chemical weapons. So you had this kind of typical—the way bureaucracies work. They get started on a path and until you can put a figuratively-speaking explosive in the road to get them to go a different direction, they don't go a different direction.

So there were these huge delays going on. People were taking three weeks. You had to have the anthrax shots, and the anthrax shots took a week and a half.

Riley: Did you have to get shots before going over?

Bremer: Yes, I did.

Riley: So you weren't up to date.

Bremer: I had to get anthrax. I'd never had that. I think I had the tetanus. I don't remember. I got a bunch of shots.

Riley: Was your health generally pretty good while you were there?

Bremer: Terrific. I had one day when I had a bad cold and that was it. I still remember the day because I had a meeting with the Minister of Irrigation or something. I'm sitting there—you

know how you feel. It was a head cold.

Riley: Worked out every day or ran every day?

Bremer: Pretty much.

Riley: Ever any close calls when you were out running?

Bremer: No. I eventually had to stop running outside because one of the things we did was try to get Iraqi families back into the apartment buildings that were inside what was later called the "green zone." My security guys were nervous. These were apartment buildings that went to 12 stories or something and I was out running in the streets and there was very little traffic. When you see some guy running with six guys behind him it's pretty obvious what the target is, so they were concerned that there would be snipers. Eventually they wouldn't let me run outside anymore and I had to get a bike and a treadmill.

Perry: You mentioned the green zone. Is there a typical day for you in those 14 months, or are things just changing so quickly that there is never a typical day?

Bremer: Never a typical day. Pretty much it started at 4:30 because that's when the rockets and mortars came in. For whatever reason that's the time these guys liked to set them off. So you'd hear an oomph and I'd say, "Well, time to get up."

Riley: That's my call. I want to ask about going back to the beginning about the exiles.

Bremer: Yes.

Riley: To get you to give us a picture of how you first become exposed to the exiles and what your perception of their role is likely to be. I recognize that this is fairly closely connected with the prospects for an interim authority.

Bremer: Right.

Riley: Then beyond that if you could give us your thumbnail impressions of the most important of these individuals, who they were, what their strengths and weaknesses were, how history ought to recall them.

Bremer: We had a problem that again was not untypical of other countries in the past, which was that with a dictatorship like Saddam's, most of the politically active people had left or been killed. That meant that almost all the people who were left behind were not politically active. So the exiles wind up being pretty much the only people with political experience, at least for the last 20 years or so. Therefore the exiles faced—and I knew this would be the case before I went because I'd been in places where exiles had come home—they faced the problem of trying to establish some credibility among the people who had stayed behind.

The second problem with the group of exiles that we had been talking to, that Garner and Khalilzad had been talking to, was that they were not representative. There were no women. The Sunnis were underrepresented. There were no Christians, no Turkmens, the Kurds were

overrepresented, if you wanted to use a mathematical model.

Riley: You called them the externals rather than the exiles because the Kurds were included in the group.

Bremer: Right. In a way the Kurds were exiles. They were still in Iraq. So there was a structural problem right from the start. One of the points that gets lost in the shuffle with the Feith theory is that I said in my first meeting with that group, there were seven of them, "We're prepared to move as quickly as the Iraqi people can make it move, but you guys are not representative. Look around you." I went through it, "Where are the women? I don't know what the population in Iraq is, but women have got to be a majority, right? You had a whole decade where you're killing men. So women are the majority. Where are the women? Where are the Turkmen? Where are the Christians? You have a big Christian population. Why aren't there more Sunnis here?"

I said to them in that first meeting, "You're going to have to broaden yourselves if you want to put yourselves forward as representative of Iraq. You're going to have to get people who have been here the whole time." There was only one of them who had lived in Iraq, so he wasn't an exile. "I'll give you a couple of weeks; go out and broaden yourselves. You know who the people are. Go out and make yourself broader." They came back in two weeks with the same people. I said, "What happened?" Nothing. It gets kind of lost in the shuffle that we gave them a chance to broaden themselves and they couldn't do it.

Nelson: Why did they think they could get away with that?

Bremer: I don't know. Probably based on the impressions they took away from their conversations. Garner had said the week before he was going to appoint an interim, an IIA, on May 15th. Who was it going to be? He hadn't spent months looking for other people. Maybe he had left them the impression that it was going to be them. I don't know.

Riley: Had there been a sense of maybe a privileged status in prior communications with the State Department that left them feeling—

Bremer: Probably not with State. It would have been with the Pentagon.

Riley: With Defense, I'm sorry.

Bremer: Possibly.

Riley: So they figure, where else are they going to go?

Bremer: In any case, they were given the chance to come forward and they didn't. It's an important contrast from the situation in Afghanistan where you have the Northern Alliance, which was more or less representative, which had, you couldn't really call them exiles because they were all in Afghanistan, but that group had an agreement on how to go forward. So they were able to adopt a constitution within whatever it was, a month or something. None of these preconditions existed in Iraq. There was no agreed course going forward, there was no representative group.

Nelson: I interrupted you earlier. So they come back for the second meeting, same group. Then what happened?

Bremer: I said, "OK, if you can't do it, broaden your group. We're going to have to do it," and we started the process where we sent CPA people, Americans, Brits, Rumanians, whoever we had—it was mostly Americans and Brits at that point—into the provinces to start meeting tribal chiefs and local professors and lawyers and whoever they could meet. The process took the next six, seven weeks. We identified in the end something like 87 potential members of what eventually became the Governing Council.

Riley: Are there advocates for the existing exile groups within the U.S. government that are pushing you back on this?

Bremer: No. It's an interesting point because part of the mythology that grows up, and for which there is no evidence that I know of, that Feith and Wolfowitz and neocons are pushing [Ahmed] Chalabi. I have to say nobody ever said to me, "Hey, Chalabi's our guy." I never heard it. I kept the Pentagon informed at this stage essentially daily in my conversations with Rumsfeld, plus cables, plus letters, about the people we were talking to and what we were trying to do. Nobody ever picked up the phone or sent a third-party message, "Hey, Chalabi is the one." Never happened. To their credit those guys never mentioned Chalabi to me.

Nelson: You said you identified 87, I think was the number.

Bremer: Something like that.

Nelson: What gets that down to 25?

Bremer: It was a wild process. I had set out a general goal that the Governing Council should be big enough to be inclusive, that is, truly representative, but small enough to be effective. We talked about how many people can be effective on a committee. Is it 33? Certainly not 80. It's not 15. We came up with 25. We were doing fine until the Shi'a made it clear that they had to be a majority. Whatever the number was they had to be a majority.

The people have since criticized us for establishing the Governing Council through a kind of mathematical formula. It wasn't us. It was the Shi'a. I kept saying to the Shi'a, "You guys realize that when you say you have to be the others will reach." Immediately the Kurds said, "If you're going to be 50 percent, we are 13 percent or 15 percent of the population." They had some number. The Sunnis said, "We're actually a majority" and the Christians said, "We've got 5 percent." "OK," I said, "it adds up to 140 percent." [*laughter*]

Riley: Even in Iraq.

Bremer: Over and over, I said, "I'll tell you one thing." There had not been a census since 1957. "I don't know who has what percent or what, but I do know women are a majority. This I do know, for sure." Then they would all get very quiet. I said in a democracy they're going to vote. So it was an iterative process of getting down to a number, which we had penciled in at 25. It was not without its amusing moments, as you have read, getting the Communist who still thought [Leonid Ilyich] Brezhnev was alive. And [Seyyid Muhammed] Bahr ul-Uloom, with

whom John Sawers and I spent three very long hours the day before we announced, who had all kinds of reasons he couldn't join because it would violate Sistani and we had to persuade him it wouldn't violate Sistani. Anyway, we got to 25 finally.

Riley: I had asked you if you would be willing to go through and tell us a little bit about some of these major figures. Chalabi of course is somebody who is well known on the outside. What was your take? Was he legitimate, or was this a guy who had made friends in high places by charm?

Bremer: Those are not mutually exclusive. You can make friends in high places and still be legitimate.

Riley: Sure.

Bremer: A very smart guy. Somebody who gets his Ph.D. in math from MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology] at the age of 17 or whatever it was, this is not a fool. A very smart guy. From a wealthy family. Very successful and wealthy family in the '50s, left when the King was overthrown in 1958. Slick, extremely articulate, very political, with quite a bit of media savvy, who spent a lot of time in the '90s—I didn't know him—making friends in high places, in Congress and in what became the executive branch. He was on one important thing very helpful and in one important thing very unhelpful.

The helpful thing was he was the only one in the Iraqi government who had any business experience. So he understood that the economy really needed a fundamental change. He became the chairman of the economic committee of the Governing Council. Peter McPherson, who was my senior economic advisor at that time, worked with Chalabi on the regulations to repeal Saddam's prohibition of foreign direct investment, except in oil. We left the prohibition in place on oil. In a variety of issues—bankruptcy laws, a whole bunch of commerce laws that we got the Governing Council to agree to that Chalabi really understood—he was able to say credibly to the others, "We should do this."

Where he was unhelpful was, as I said in the book, I made the mistake of turning the implementation of the Ba'athification decree over to the Governing Council, who in turn turned it over to Chalabi. Maybe I should have foreseen that. In any case it was a mistake to give the implementation to politicians. He was extremely unhelpful there because he immediately started a campaign to broaden the reach of the decree far beyond what was in the decree. Then we had a big battle to walk it back, which we did finally in the spring of 2004. But the damage was done.

Nelson: Did you not have people working with the authority who knew the Ba'ath Party well enough to know that it shouldn't be allowed to go down through the rungs all the way to the bottom?

Bremer: It didn't go down through the rungs. It was the top three. You mean when Chalabi took it over? I don't know whether you're talking about the decree or Chalabi's implementation of the decree.

Nelson: Let me rephrase it. Did you not have people who could say Chalabi is over interpreting his charge?

Bremer: Yes. When he was initially appointed, which was November 4th, the same day the appropriation passed, we were concerned about it. We decided to test where Chalabi was on the implementation by having him come in and brief the provincial and military commanders. Every month I got the military commanders from all the MSCs [Major Subordinate Commands] come in, and all of our provincial CPA people come in for a meeting, just a general update on what is going on. So Chalabi came to the early December meeting. He had been appointed, as I said, in early November.

We asked him to do a presentation on the de-Ba'athification council. He gave a good presentation. It sounded very reasonable. So our concerns were at least initially alleviated. But by January, February, it was clear that the de-Ba'athification Council was broadening the scope implementing the decree beyond what was in it. I had a meeting with Chalabi to express our concerns. Eventually, at the request of the CPA political guys, I sent him a letter and signed it as administrator, which I didn't do very often. I didn't write a lot of letters. I reminded him, "This is the intent, this is how the decree is supposed to work, you've got to get it right." Chalabi danced around, and in the end I had to basically undo what he had done.

So yes, we were concerned when it was turned over to him. He led us to believe in the presentation at the Commanders Conference that he was going to be moderate, and then he wasn't.

Riley: There is a perception that he was also adept at fostering friendships stateside that could occasionally be problematic for you. Is that an accurate impression?

Bremer: He went back to Washington rather soon after I got there, probably sometime after the first meeting with the small group of exiles, maybe after the second meeting, when I talked about how I met with these guys. I knew he was back talking to people in Washington, though I didn't get any reflection of it. Why was he back there? His excuse was his daughter was at Harvard or graduating from Harvard or something but he was making the rounds in Washington. When he got back he came in to see me and started going on about how we had to move more quickly and so forth and he didn't like the process we were following.

Now maybe that's what he was saying back in Washington. Maybe somebody in Washington was saying that to him. I don't know, but I landed on him pretty hard. I said, "Listen, we've been working hard on this, we're going to do it this way."

Then in September he openly opposed the President's request for the big appropriation, which did not make the President very happy, to put it mildly.

Riley: On what grounds did he oppose—

Bremer: It was going to be a waste of American money.

Riley: Chalabi was selling that?

Bremer: He was peddling it around on the Hill. The President will tell you when you interview him, again it's in my book. This was the week that the President traditionally goes to New York for the UN GA [General Assembly] every year, around the 15th of September. We had dinner

the following week, our dinner, my wife and I had with the Bushes. I said something to the President about Chalabi and he said, "Yes, I know. He has been up on the Hill lobbying against my request and I'm pretty—" and he used the word "pissed," which the President didn't do very often. He was not happy. He said, "I was going to say something to him in the receiving line" at the UN GA reception. "I was really going to land on him when he came through the line but I noticed his daughter was with him." Being a gentleman, Bush did not raise it with Chalabi.

So Chalabi was active. I raised it another time with Scooter. I don't remember what the context was, but Scooter said to me, either on the phone or I was back in Washington. Scooter said, "He has about outworn his welcome here too," which I thought was pretty significant coming from that part of the administration. So Chalabi was on the one hand helpful, on the other hand not helpful.

Riley: OK. I owe you a break anyway.

[BREAK—Leffler returns]

Riley: We basically have been filling in missing points from the morning's discussion. We talked a little bit about the Iraq experience with respect to press relations and congressional relations. I may be missing something, but we had just begun talking about the exiles and trying to get some sort of character portraits of who the exiles were. The only extent that we talked about de-Ba'athification has been in relation to Chalabi's overinterpretation of his remit, if that is the term.

Bremer: Overimplementation.

Riley: Overimplementation of the decree, but we haven't really talked about the history or the origins or the emergence of the two orders, which would be fine. What we might want to do with your permission is go ahead and continue, since we were on the exiles. I'll see if they have anything else on Chalabi. If there are three or four others that you'd like to highlight or not—

Nelson: It's up to you.

Riley: We can come back and start at the beginning with the orders.

Bremer: Here's Libby, that same trip. That's the reference.

[BREAK]

Bremer: Before we move on to whatever you want to I want to make a couple of other points

about the early transfer idea because you started on the exiles. We talked a little about the exiles.

Riley: Great.

Bremer: This argument that we should have turned over quickly—put aside the question of whether that was the President's policy. It wasn't the President's policy. But was it a realistic hope that we could have turned over quickly? I don't think so in retrospect. The contrast with Afghanistan is important. Part of it is that you do not have the structure of a representative group that you could deal with as you did with the Northern Alliance, at least as the kernel, where you could get an agreement on a plan going forward, you could get a constitution. That was not the case, in Iraq.

We talked a bit about the Iraqi exiles. They were not representative, nor could they, as it turned out, broaden themselves to be representative as we challenged them to do. Secondly, let's assume that that wasn't the case and you could find a group and we had turned over quickly. If we had turned over quickly, the Shi'a would have dominated. They were clearly there. The Shi'a made it very clear what their policy was to me. Their policy was unleash their militia. "We need the militia to get going and go after all these bad people, Ba'athists and everybody else around here. We're going to use them." My view was no, in a good place only the central government has the monopoly of legal violence. You don't have militia running that.

The second thing is the Shi'a had made it clear they would be much harsher than we would be. We were criticized in Iraq for not being harsh enough on the Ba'athists, not for being too harsh. A government to which we handed over quickly would have been harsher and would have used the militia. So it was my judgment then, and I would say subsequent judgment too—I've often thought afterward what would have happened if we had pursued that policy. We would have had a civil war almost right away. The violence that eventually came in 2006 would have been provoked in 2003. Then it is an interesting question whether the U.S. government would have been better prepared in 2003 to deal with the civil war than we were in 2006, a question for historians.

Finally, a government like that where we simply turned authority over right away would have been operating in a complete legal and political vacuum for all the reasons that are laid out in various places in my book. There was no political architecture in place; there was no representative government. The place had been run by a revolutionary council since 1970. There was no way to get one in place quickly because there had been no census, there were no constituent boundaries, no political laws, no political party laws. There was no media law. You can go right down the list; there was nothing.

So the idea that in 90 days or some short time like that if we could have identified and could have turned over quickly—in my view, nobody has ever made a convincing case that this would have worked. In fact, I think it would have been worse. Now I made that point retrospectively because it really wasn't a question at that time since the President's policy was clear and I was carrying out his policy. I want to get on the record the fact that those people who now argue in favor of a quick turnover have not ever satisfactorily explained how they would make that happen in a final and satisfactory fashion. And I repeat, nobody in the administration, from the President down, raised objections to our implementation of his policy at the time.

Nelson: Let me ask you this. Was there anything in what you just described that could not have been anticipated before the war? I'm asking this as an observer. In other words, should people in government have known if you go to war to depose Iraq then there will be a long occupation to follow?

Bremer: I think they should have known it, and I think in the end that is the policy we followed. Again, you'll have to ask the President about this allegation that he approved one policy and then switched to another. But there was no doubt what the policy was when I came in. Yes, they should have anticipated it was going to take a long time for all the reasons we talked about earlier this afternoon. And that is exactly what I told President Bush at our May 6 luncheon. I thought you were asking, "Could you have mitigated those things beforehand?" That would have been pretty hard. I suppose you could say the State Department tried by their Future of Iraq Project. They got together scores of Iraqis who wrote 2,000 pages, by the way, which are internally contradictory. It is not a plan. As Ryan Crocker who ran the project for State told me, it was never intended to be a plan because it said on the one hand do this, and on the other hand do the opposite.

Riley: Is it your perception that the initial ground war succeeded more quickly than the planners had anticipated and that that created problems? Then you're thrown into phase two, phase three—I don't know which phase.

Bremer: Phase four. All I know from what I read in the press is that the military was telling the President and Rumsfeld before the war that it was going to take months and tens of thousands of casualties. It took three weeks and there were fewer than 1,000 casualties. So in a way, I'm sympathetic to Rumsfeld. He comes into office in 2001 and he looks around and he sees a military that by doctrine, equipment, training, and deployment is ready to meet a 10-division Soviet assault across the Fulda gap. He looks around and says, "Wait a minute. Didn't those guys file for bankruptcy a decade ago? They're 800 miles further east. What are we doing?" so he pushes for a lighter, faster, more flexible, more technological force structure.

He had a big pushback from the military and to some degree from Congress. Then 9/11 happens, and in three weeks our forces go in and essentially depose—although the job wasn't finished, obviously—the Taliban. Then 18 months later the military is saying we need more troops to win this war in Iraq and it's going to take two to three months. They go and in three weeks Saddam is ousted. Rumsfeld would be justified in feeling a little bit of "I told you so," that the new way to fight wars is not the old way.

Riley: Let me round off the discussion that we were having about the exiles and then we can go back to the two big orders at the front and start dealing with them at least. Chalabi we pretty much all know. Are there any others among the exiles that you considered to be particularly important that history ought to pay attention to as especially—

Bremer: You're talking about the initial—

Riley: I'm talking about the initial group of exiles or externals that were in some way historically important.

Bremer: Certainly [Ayad] Allawi, because he eventually became the first Prime Minister. Both

of the Kurds, because they continued to be active, [Jalal] Talabani as President and [Masoud] Barzani now as head of the regional government. I would argue [Sayyid Abdul Aziz al-] Hakim, though not so much him but what he stood for, which was the Shi'a Islamist thread in Iraqi life. Hakim himself was not very active as Governing Council member. His deputy, Adil Abdul-Mahdi, on the other hand, was very active and very constructive. Off the top of my head, I would say those four in addition to Chalabi.

Riley: Were there any of these people in particular, and let's expand this not just to the exiles but to the folks who remained in country, that the President himself expressed to you particular admiration for, or did he have any special rapport with any of these folks? Maybe they were at too great a remove for that to have occurred.

Bremer: There was too great a remove. He met groups of Iraqis when they went to Washington. I didn't participate in that.

Riley: OK, so let's go back to the beginning then. There are two major orders that you sign.

Bremer: Right.

Riley: That I think we would agree in the literature you take some heat for.

Bremer: [*chuckling*] I hadn't noticed. Why don't we finish with de-Ba'athification, since we talked about that earlier?

Riley: All right.

Bremer: I don't know that there is a lot more to say than is in my book. The order was drafted by, I guess, somebody in Feith's office. Anyway, Feith showed it to me in draft on the day before I left, that is on the 9th of May. He said they were going to issue it that day. Somebody was going to issue it, Garner, I guess, and I said, "Why don't we wait until I get out there?" It was modeled on de-Nazification, though much milder, directed really at only the top 1 percent of the party.

One of the concerns that we had, obviously, was how is this going to work. I wanted to talk to my political colleagues in Baghdad, which I did. They said, "Well, there are going to be some unhappy people." Yes. It affected 20,000 people out of about 2.5 million in the party. So it was much more narrowly drawn than de-Nazification and allowed a much broader level of activity for people who were affected. They could become farmers, they could open newspapers, they could run an appliance store, they could do whatever they wanted to do, only they couldn't be in the government. Very different. De-Nazification affected 800,000 Nazis and it said you guys can't even work in the private sector. So it was narrower in scope and in breadth.

One of the prevailing myths is that this decree emasculated the government, that the ministries collapsed. It's nonsense, complete nonsense. The ministries carried on. In most of the ministries the people affected by the decree had already fled before I even arrived. The minister and the deputy minister in every ministry had gone. They were they were either in hiding or had left the country. It had very little impact on most ministries. Most ministries were then run by, in European terms, what would be called a Secretary-General, sort of a top career civil servant

serving as number three in the ministry. Some ministers had a director general as number three. Most of them were men in their 50s, 55 to 60. They had been in the Ministry of Transportation, say, for 30 years. They were technocrats, not politicians. They were perfectly competent to run the ministries. In any case by September 1st, 2003, there were Iraqi ministers in every single ministry, appointed by the Iraqis.

Leffler: By when?

Bremer: September 1st. The ministries continued to function. They produced plans, they produced budgets, they produced policies, they paid people. Basically, the government continued to run. The idea that government collapsed—there is simply no basis in fact.

Riley: Are these Sunni?

Bremer: Some were Sunni, some were Shi'a, some were Kurds. I didn't ask. To us that wasn't the question. To us the question was, "Can they do the job?" Plus it is important to note that the last paragraph of the de-Ba'athification decree explicitly says that the administrator can make exceptions, and I made scores of exceptions on the basis of recommendations from my advisors. Somebody in a ministry would say, "Look, we've really got to keep Abdul Hajim here because he runs the administration section of the Ministry of X and he really is the only guy who knows how we can make sense out of the personnel files. We really need him here and he was a member of the Ba'ath Party." Fine. I never turned down a request from my advisors to exempt somebody from a de-Ba'athification. I gave scores of exemptions.

The idea that this collapsed the government has simply no basis in fact. De-Ba'athification was, according to our polls, the single most popular thing the CPA did in the entire time we were in Iraq. Never polled below 94 percent. The fact that three successive elected Iraqi governments have had difficulty figuring out how to implement it shows how sensitive the subject is.

Anyway, the order was the right thing to do. It was welcomed. It did not collapse the government. The mistake I made, which takes us back to what I said earlier, is that I turned implementation over to a group of Iraqi politicals. I should have established some kind of a group of lawyers or judges who tended to be respected. Particularly judges tended to be respected, ironically, for the reason Saddam never used them. Whenever he had somebody he wanted to try, he set up a special commission, a military tribunal, or something else. So a lot of the judges were quite clean. Anyway, I should have set up some kind of a tribunal of Iraqi judges to do the implementation, which we knew we were not competent to do. Our intelligence wasn't good enough.

Riley: Did you make mistakes in excessively granting—

Bremer: Not that I ever heard of. Probably, but I never heard of any specifically. You make scores of decisions; you're not likely to get them all right. But I always made them on the basis of the recommendation of the senior coalition advisor in the Ministry of Communications or Ministry of Health, or wherever.

Riley: Did you take heat from your own side? Were there people in the U.S. government who felt that you were either being too aggressive or too passive in this?

Bremer: Well, the initial reaction of the senior advisors the morning I told them about it was to despair. "This is going to hurt us very badly. There are people in my ministry who are going to be very unhappy" and so forth. I said, "Well, go out and talk to them. Tell them what the rationale is." They came back and I have a memo somewhere in my files from the leader of our senior advisors who said, "To my surprise, people were really pretty happy about this." Again as I say, it never polled below 94 percent among the people at large. Yes, some people were unhappy, but by and large it was the right thing to do.

Riley: From Washington did you hear? Any heat or any—

Bremer: No, not until Rice told me in November, I think it's in the book, that she was not aware that we were going to devolve authority to an Iraqi de-Ba'athification council. Well, if she wasn't aware, she hadn't been reading the traffic or her staff hadn't brought it to her. I said to her, "Condi, that has been the plan from the day I issued the decree." That day I announced that we're going to set up an Iraqi de-Ba'athification council because non-Iraqis do not have the capacity to make the judgment as to whether Umm Abdul became a Ba'ath Party member because she believes the ideology or because it was the only way she could get a job at the university. We don't know why Umm Abdul did that. An Iraqi has to make that judgment. So it had been an announced part of the plan literally since the day I signed the order the 16th of May.

Leffler: When did you start hearing about the fact? It was actually Chalabi's nephew who was the head of the council, right?

Bremer: Yes.

Leffler: Not Chalabi himself.

Bremer: No, but it got to Chalabi because the governing council gave it to Chalabi, who then set up the council.

Leffler: Which was under his nephew.

Bremer: Yes.

Leffler: How long did it take for you to begin hearing that cases were being decided in ways that were perhaps prejudicial or not objective?

Bremer: I think I covered it before you came in, Mel. It was I think in late January, maybe February. I don't remember exactly.

Leffler: So it was six, seven, eight months into—?

Bremer: No, Chalabi was given the authority by the Governing Council the first week of November, I think around November 4th. Some of my staff was concerned about how he would handle it and so was I. So we invited him to come address the Commanders Conference in December. I had all the MSC commanders in once a month and the provincial CPA guys to talk about matters. Chalabi did a very good presentation, very moderate assessment of how he intended to carry out de-Ba'athification, perfectly consistent with our intent and the decree. So

we were a little relaxed for about a month, a month and a half.

Somewhere toward January, February, we started to hear stories about it being applied. The Minister of Education came to me, that was maybe in March, and said there was a problem with the teachers; teachers were being laid off who shouldn't be laid off. At that point I had a meeting with Chalabi to caution him to follow the intention and scope of the decree. I eventually had to write him a letter, which was in early April sometime, saying, "You're going off course, and if you don't fix it I am going to have to revert the authority," which in the end is what I had to do.

Riley: Before the November date you were taking care of all this yourself based on—

Bremer: Yes, I wasn't doing it personally, the staff was. The senior advisors.

Riley: But it was still a coalition, a CPA chore to do until that time.

Bremer: Right.

Nelson: If the order had been implemented correctly in your view, how much difference would that have made in terms of the numbers of people who were de-Ba'athified and the kinds of people?

Bremer: I think it would have helped a lot to have it more narrowly implemented because I'm sure that, although we did our best to undo everything we thought exceeded it, that Chalabi had done in that period between say January and April, I'm sure we didn't get everything, plus it had set the mood, which was probably more lasting than the actual effect. It set the mood that you could go after the Ba'athists. Of course that was Chalabi's intention. It exacerbated the tension with Allawi. That's what Chalabi was trying to do. So it would have helped to have not had the problem.

Riley: When was the meeting or the complaint that you fielded from Condi Rice about turning this over?

Bremer: It was very soon after it was announced by the Governing Council. It must have been the first week in November. Anyway, that's de-Ba'athification.

Riley: Anything else on that, Mel, on de-Ba'athification?

Leffler: I'm a little confused here because the de-Ba'athification order was initially made when?

Bremer: May 16th, sometime the week after I got there.

Leffler: Much of the criticism in the literature relates not to what happens in November, December, January, February, but to its immediate impact.

Bremer: I don't know what that criticism is, what is it?

Leffler: The criticism is that it meant that it undermined and thwarted the capacity to get many government agencies functioning.

Bremer: I covered this a little while ago. The allegation is nonsense. Who were the responsible people who made that argument? It's one thing if it's somebody sitting in a chair somewhere back here three years later. I was there. My assistants were there. I never once heard—

Leffler: One person who made the comment while he was there at that very time, for example, was Charles Duelfer, who in his memoir—and he is there in May and June. I don't know if he ever met with you during that period.

Bremer: Not that I remember. I think I met him only after he took over for Kay.

Leffler: But he is there.

Bremer: How many ministries did he say were affected? Which ones specifically? In general doesn't do me much good, Mel. Which ones?

Leffler: The ones that I can tell you—one of our colleagues here at the University of Virginia named Jim Savage has written a remarkable manuscript that I've read looking at the Finance Ministry and the Planning Ministry and he has interviewed a huge—did he ever interview you? I don't remember.

Bremer: I don't think so.

Leffler: A huge number of people. First of all, he makes the case that it was extraordinarily difficult to get the Finance Ministry and Planning Ministry up to date.

Bremer: It's true.

Leffler: Payroll information had been either destroyed or taken home and it had to be reconstituted, that virtually nobody was at work.

Bremer: Right.

Leffler: It was very hard to get people back. The very fact of the de-Ba'athification order meant that people at the higher levels weren't there. There was interaction with some people at the middle levels. People came back incrementally very slowly. That actually in his account the CPA did a remarkable job, but it took a very long time to get things functioning. The notion that things were working by September—August, September in his manuscript is—

Bremer: That's not what I said. What I said was Iraqi ministers were in place on September 1st. The Ministry of Finance, for example, was badly looted. A year later when Abdul-Mahdi became Minister of Finance in the interim government in June, he still had only half the people working there. They had to work in shifts because the building hadn't been rebuilt. That had nothing to do with de-Ba'athification.

I don't say that the government was functioning well. It was a mess. You have to remember that under Saddam the ministries rarely even had computers. Internet access was restricted to the politically favored. There were no modern MIS [management information system] systems anywhere. The banking system operated only on a cash basis. There was no capacity for

electronic transfer of funds, so ministries had to pay expenses in cash—as did the CPA. So to an American eye, this could hardly have been called an efficient government even before the war. To which must be added that all the ministry headquarters buildings, and many provincial ministry buildings had to be damaged or destroyed in the rampant postconflict looting. But I do say that the idea that de-Ba'athification somehow collapsed the bureaucracy is arrant nonsense. Nobody had proved the case contrary. By the way, at the time nobody told me that that was the case. If it was their case, they are making it *post facto*. In fact the advisors came to exactly the opposite conclusions and they were the people working in every ministry every day.

You could say they had a preconception or a prejudice to say, "Everything is fine over here. Leave us alone." Possibly. There can be lots of criticisms of de-Ba'athification. You can say the whole idea was wrong. It was the wrong model to use Germany and all the rest of it. Some de-Ba'athification, as the *Future of Iraq* study pointed out, was going to happen one way or the other. It was certainly called for by the Iraqis and very popular. It was certainly a mistake to turn it over to the politicians, particularly when they turned it over to Chalabi. Fair enough. But the idea it collapsed the government is simply nonsense. The government was collapsed, but not by de-Ba'athification.

It was collapsed by 30 years of underinvestment. I repeat: there was no Internet. Most of the ministries didn't have computers. Half of the Ministry of Finance was burned to the ground. All of those things were true. They have nothing to do with de-Ba'athification. I'm sure Mr. Savage is right that those places were not operating well. When did he visit, by the way?

Leffler: When did he visit?

Bremer: Yes, when did he come to Iraq?

Leffler: I don't know when he came to Iraq. He has written this book in the last two, three years and he has interviewed virtually every American on the operating level. It is really quite a remarkable manuscript, one of the best things that will have been written on the actual functioning of the CPA. The point that he makes, it's not a point that he dwells on, but it is a point that Charles Duelfer dwells on and it is a point that General Sanchez dwells on, that in May and June and July of 2003 de-Ba'athification discouraged and undermined the viability of any quick effort to get the government functioning effectively. You're saying that is not the case.

Bremer: I am saying it was hard to get the government functioning, but it was not because of de-Ba'athification. If it affected it, it must have been out at the far margin. It's just not the case. I visited all the ministries at the time, by the way. I don't know whether Mr. Savage got there at that time. A lot of people who have found all the things we did wrong it turns out have never been to Iraq. I was there.

Duelfer, I would respect his view. Sanchez was a military guy. I tried as hard as I could not to tell him how to drive tanks. I said to him, "My job is the politics. You drive the tanks."

Nelson: The order that Feith presented you with as a draft order for de-Ba'athification, did you modify that at all?

Bremer: No.

Riley: Did you have any idea about the process that had produced the document?

Bremer: No. Feith may have said—I assumed since he said, "We're going to issue it today" that whatever interagency process that had to happen had happened.

Nelson: Were you aware of what a big decision you were signing on to when you signed that?

Bremer: Yes.

Nelson: There was another order. I guess this was order number one (about the army).

Bremer: I don't know what I can add to what is in the book. [Walter] Slocombe has written some stuff, maybe your research guys have pulled together Slocombe's articles because he has written more extensively than I have. My impression is—again this part is retrospective—that before the war there had been some plan to try to use elements of the Iraqi military in some form of reconstruction, putting railroad ties down or restringing electrical wires or whatever.

By the time Baghdad fell, this idea essentially was made irrelevant because there was no army. Slocombe came back into government before I did, sometime around the 15th of April. I don't know. He was already at work on the question of the Iraqi Army when I got called back. He has written more about that. I can't summarize all of it, but he had a lot of meetings, including with Wolfowitz and the others. They basically came up with the idea that since the Iraqi Army was no longer intact, the question was how do we reconstitute something. They will need an army. At the time it was considered mostly that they would need an army for border protection and external use.

I guess I first heard about the plan sometime around two or three days before I left because there is—I don't know if it's in this timeline, but I sent a memo to Jim Haynes on the 9th of May briefing, saying here is the result of Slocombe's conversation with Wolfowitz and the chiefs and so forth. "Here is the plan, please send it around." It was copied to a variety of people, including [David] McKiernan, who was at that time CFLCC [Coalition Forces Land Component Command] commander. Slocombe conducted extensive discussions with the political and military sides of the Pentagon and came up with the plan. He also briefed the British MoD [Minister of Defence] and FCO [Foreign & Commonwealth Office] in London May 13 to 14 on his way to Baghdad. The British government agreed with both de-Ba'athification and the plan to constitute a new army.

Then there were discussions—I think it's in the timeline—with Rumsfeld; there was a discussion with the President. There was a letter to the President. There was an NSC meeting. We issued the order. It had certainly been cleared appropriately, although subsequently, some years later, Powell told me the first he had heard of it was at the NSC meeting on the 22nd of May.

I said, "Colin, I didn't do interagency coordination from Baghdad. If you hadn't heard about it, there was obviously some problem somewhere." The President in his book says it could have used more deliberation. OK, you can always use more deliberation on anything, although he also says they might have issued the order anyway.

I believe it was the right thing to do. I think it was a mistake to call it "disbanding the army"

because there was nothing to disband at that point. They were all gone. The practical and political objections to recalling the army were at the time and still are to me persuasive; practically because we would have had to have forced Shi'a enlisted men back into an army under largely Sunni officers who had hazed them and brutalized them. That would have meant sending American soldiers into the villages to force these guys back at gunpoint. It didn't seem like a very good use of our soldiers, of whom we had too few anyway.

More importantly, the political matter. The Shi'a were cooperating with us under Sistani's guidance, and as we all knew after the '91 war Saddam had used the army, particularly the revolutionary guards, to massacre tens of thousands of Iraqi Shi'a. The Kurds, where he had been even more brutal, and practiced what the UN called genocide, were adamant that if we tried to recall Saddam's army they would secede from Iraq. It seemed to me at the time and it has seemed to me ever since that if the Kurds were to secede from Iraq, it would have triggered an immediate civil war in Iraq between the Kurds and the Arabs and probably would have drawn in the Iranians and the Turks, neither of whom could really tolerate the idea of an independent Kurdistan. By the way, I don't think they can today tolerate the idea of an independent Kurdistan because of the impact on their own minorities.

So I think it was absolutely the right thing to do. I know that some colonels here and there have said they had a platoon or a brigade or a battalion or somebody ready to come back. Perhaps they did. I don't know. It could be. But it doesn't overcome, unfortunately, the political downside of recalling the army.

Indeed, when one brigade of Saddam's army was recalled by the Marines in the crisis in Fallujah in April it caused an immediate uproar. The Iraqi Governing Council almost broke up. The UN special representative, Lakhdar Brahimi, threatened to abandon the UN mission to Iraq. The Fallujah brigade, as it was called, wound up instead of doing what they told the Marines they were going to do, which was go in and control the insurgents in Fallujah, went over to the other side. The guy who was appointed as the head, who was I think a retired major general, had to be fired. The whole Fallujah brigade was a complete fiasco. And by the way, this decision to recall this unit of Saddam's army was taken by the U.S. military without any consultation with me or my staff.

So the one time when the army actually tried to recall a small part of the army was an absolute mess. I am very comfortable with the decision. Whether it was properly vetted around the interagency in Washington is a fair question. If Powell hadn't heard about it, and he after all was a military guy, then something got missed in the coordination.

Riley: Was this a case where you felt that your basic intelligence was sound? You've been critical of the in-country intelligence on some other dimensions. I'm just wondering in retrospect; you're hearing that everybody has disbanded everywhere. Was it possible that your intelligence was faulty on some of this? I don't have any evidence for that. I'm just wondering.

Bremer: I don't know. It wasn't my intelligence. It was General Abizaid who said there isn't a single unit left standing in the country. I had no way of second-guessing Abizaid.

Riley: Sure.

Bremer: Certainly in visiting, as I did, some of the military sites, there was no evidence that there was anybody there because the buildings were literally stripped to the bottom brick in most cases. There was nothing there. Why would the Shi'a conscripts stand to arms anyway? They wouldn't. It was a conscript army. That's 300,000 people right there.

Riley: The logic was that the conscripts wouldn't return in your telling here because at least one factor was their superiors were Sunni.

Bremer: In most cases.

Riley: That logic would not have changed if these were effectively coalition or new Iraq troops.

Bremer: No. In fact, when we stood up our first battalion, which was in July, what we said at the time was any member of the former army up to the rank of colonel will be welcome to apply for a position in the new army. I think by the time we left something like 80 percent of them were from the old army, including some former conscripts who came back. But they were not coming back under the old army, they were coming back under a new volunteer army. So that's a different equation. It proves nothing except they were willing to come back under some circumstances.

Riley: The question is—and again, I don't know the particulars well enough to know whether this is conceivable. I'm positing it as a question of logic. If the conditions of the new army had obtained at an earlier interval, would they have been available?

Bremer: Probably, but setting up an army is not something you do from one day to the next.

Riley: I understand.

Bremer: We were rather pleased if we got the first battalion stood up on July 7th. That was pretty fast; it was less than two months.

Riley: This is 2003.

Bremer: In terms of what did the intelligence tell us, we had had—let me go back. Wouldn't it have been better if when we made the announcement about the new Iraqi army we had also been able to specify the way in which we were going to pay the former army members? Because we did establish a one-time pay for all the conscripts and effectively a pension for all the officers except the very top generals.

So couldn't we have announced all of that at the same time? Yes, except that we had two problems. Actually, we had three problems. The first problem was there was some political sensitivity to the idea of paying an army that has just been killing Americans. The next day you say, "OK, we're going to pay you." Secondly, we didn't know—

Leffler: Whose political sensitivity? Your political sensitivity?

Bremer: Mine and people in the Pentagon, Rumsfeld and others, yes. Secondly, we didn't know the order of battle of the Iraqi Army. We didn't know how many of them there were. We knew in

general there were 715,000 of these guys, of whom some 315,000 were conscripts. We didn't know what grades they were. Until we knew that, we couldn't figure out what it was going to cost to pay them or pension them off. The third problem was how much money did we have. We were going to use Iraqi money, obviously, it wasn't going to be American money. But we didn't have any visibility on Iraqi funds because we weren't pumping oil yet. So all we had were seized Iraqi assets of which we at that time had no inventory, and some escrow Iraqi funds.

The key driving problem was not having the order of battle, which we didn't get until the middle of June. So it wasn't until the middle of June that I could sit down with the finance guys and the military guys and go through the order of battle and say OK, you've got 18,000—actually there were 12,000 generals. You've got 20,000 majors and 32,000 lieutenants and whatever it was. Then you knew what their base salary was. Then we did a multiple to come up with a number, which established a one-time severance payment for all the conscripts. We also then established a monthly "stipend" for all the NCOs [noncommissioned officers] and officers, except the top generals. We established the level of the "stipend" at each class to make it more than they would have received as a pension had they retired under Saddam. Then you did the sum and got the number. The number was a couple hundred million dollars, something like that. That's when we announced the pay scale and that's when the demonstrations stopped.

We had had some demonstrations from former officers outside, I think some were at the green zone, some were outside Camp Victory. There had been some demonstrations. Until then, until we made the announcement, the demonstrations continued and the intelligence people, to come to your point, in the morning briefing that they did for Sanchez and me had a category called "former officers" that they listed as a threat. The categories were "terrorists" and "criminals" and the "people released from jail" and "former officers." The category of "former officers" was remade by the intel guys as soon as we announced the payments because the demonstrations stopped. As soon as we said we're going to start paying you.

Nelson: Whose job was it to train the new army? And did that change?

Bremer: Sanchez proposed and briefed me that the U.S. Army should do it, which sounded right to me. I agreed. He sent—again, through his channels, I never saw the message. But he sent a proposal up for the U.S. Army to do it, which was never acted on or was effectively rejected because it was never acted on. So we wound up having to use a contract.

Nelson: You used contractors?

Bremer: Yes.

Nelson: You sound like you passively reacted to this decision. Did you pursue it? This was a major policy decision.

Bremer: As far as I was concerned if we were going to get more Army people on the ground, they ought to be doing security, not training. So it wasn't my top priority. My top priority if we were going to get more troops was security. If the Army said we don't want to send troops to do the training, I wasn't about to break my pick on that because what I wanted was more troops to do security. So in the end we did the training through contractors.

Nelson: How did this operate? How were the contractors hired? Who supervised them?

Bremer: All the contracting was assigned by Rumsfeld to the Department of the Army. The Department of the Army was our "contracting agent," or whatever it's called. There is a term in the Pentagon. They did all the contracting. That and in the end the contracting for the supplemental, the reconstruction, they did it all. That was done back in Washington. I think it was DynCorp. I'm not entirely sure which one of the contractors it was. I think it was DynCorp.

Nelson: Were you able to monitor how effectively that training was being done?

Bremer: I went out to the training base a couple of times. I went also for the graduation of the first battalion, which was October 1st or 2nd, 2003. I'm not a military guy. I wouldn't have the technical capability to monitor. I monitored the pace for sure.

Nelson: The mission—you said initially it was conceived of by the Iraqis—

Bremer: And us.

Nelson: And us, as border defense. Did that change, and if so, how?

Bremer: It did. I'm not sure if it formally changed with the army. There was this Iraqi Civil Defense Corps, ICDC, that was set up alongside the army, which was sort of seen as a civil defense. That's what it was called. It was less well trained, less well equipped. It was going to help with internal security. I think the general view, which I agreed with, was that a country like Iraq when it has an army: a) should be under civilian control, and b) the army should be outward-facing. You don't want armies in situations like this to have internal security roles. That's really something for the police or a gendarmerie or something. We had a lot of back-and-forth about gendarmerie and constabularies.

Leffler: Wasn't the key initially to use parts of the army precisely for security? That's what Sanchez wanted to do.

Bremer: There was no army.

Leffler: I know there was no army, but Sanchez writes, for example specifically, I'll bring in the quote tomorrow. He writes at the time you arrived, he and other military officials were already involved in establishing linkages with key members of the Iraqi military forces and they were in the process of trying to reconstitute elements for the preservation of security. He says explicitly that you told him not to do this.

Bremer: You really ought to read Slocombe's pieces because he was involved in these detailed discussions with them about—everybody knew we needed a new army. There was no disagreement on that. The question was to what degree do you build it from the bottom up? To what degree do you use officers from the old one and build it top down? He writes, I think in his *Atlantic Monthly* article, anyway one of them, about the discussions he had with the military, Abizaid, with Wolfowitz, and with others on precisely that subject before I came back into government. As I say, it was not in my time. His view, and when he conveyed it to me I agreed with him, was we needed to try to build the Iraqi army pretty much from the bottom up using

officers up to the level of colonel but not above that. That pretty much describes—in more detail he describes that discussion, which must be what Sanchez is talking about.

Leffler: Slocombe writes about how to conceptualize the construction of a new army. Sanchez is describing how do I preserve security in this incredibly difficult environment where I have totally inadequate troops. That's the way he presents it.

Bremer: It's interesting. It's not a conversation he ever had with me, so I have no insight. My answer to him would have been let's get more American troops here and more coalition troops here. If he'd been asking for them at that time, as I said this morning I didn't know. *I* certainly would have seconded that. I would not have agreed to reconstitute the other army for all the reasons I gave.

Riley: But you do address in your own book your objections to using Armed Forces, as you just said. The military has to be outward-based rather than inward-facing.

Bremer: Right.

Riley: So let me follow up Mel's question by asking—I'm assuming the police force, to the extent that there were police, they were completely disbanded—were the police also completely discredited because of their experience under Saddam? And was there a corollary effort to develop or to reconstitute in some fashion a police corps apart from this question about military affairs?

Bremer: That's an interesting point, because what happened was the police essentially deserted when Baghdad fell. We did recall them. We did what everybody wanted us to do with the army and it was a disaster. They were human rights abusers, rapists, criminals. We knew the standard was going to be pretty low.

Riley: How did you know this?

Bremer: How did we know this?

Riley: On what testimony?

Bremer: On the intelligence we had and then how they acted when we recalled them. I personally had to fire a police colonel the second week or something I was there because I went to visit his station at the request of the American advisor who was helping with our police training. All of the other Iraqi under officers came to my assistant and a few came to me who spoke enough English to say, "This guy is really bad. He is a criminal, he is a murderer," and after we investigated, we had to fire him.

The police were recalled effectively, we had no choice. We recalled and then we started police training in Jordan. Certainly as of the time that I left, and I would say at least until the last year or so, the single most respected institution in Iraq was the army, which was rebuilt from the bottom up. The police were completely disrespected because they were basically never rebuilt. So I think the police are a very good foil. We did what people have said we should have done with the army with the police and it was a complete failure. We did not do it with the army and

the army became in time the most respected institution in the country. The one time a unit of Saddam's army was recalled, in Fallujah, as I mentioned, it was a complete failure. The commander had to be relieved and the unit disbanded.

Leffler: The argument usually goes that the trade-off in May and June—you were trying in part to be responsive to perception of Shi'a discontent with you and their demands in terms of getting rid of the army and the upper level of Ba'athites. That was one political calculus, and you certainly emphasized that tremendously in terms of your preoccupation with the Kurds and the possibility that that would secede. The other calculus that is dwelled on in all the criticisms of these early months is that the de-Ba'athification order and the disbanding of the army and the delay in actual pay for a month or six weeks helped to create the insurgency.

Bremer: There is no evidence for that. Have you ever seen any actual evidence of that? People have asserted it. My answer to that is I don't doubt that some of these people became insurgents. They did not become insurgents because they didn't get paid; they got paid. They got paid at a level—we intentionally set it higher than they would have gotten if they retired from Saddam's army—

Leffler: But they—

Bremer: Just a minute. There was a delay for the reasons I said. If somebody could fix that for me in retrospect I would be very happy. If somebody could have gotten me the order of battle a month earlier I would have paid them a month earlier. There was no way I could get it. I didn't have the order of battle until the middle of June. Well, you can say that's a mistake, fine, but it happened. That was the reality on the ground at the time. Looking back now and saying wouldn't it have been better to be able to move more quickly is not a particularly useful observation. But if people became part of the insurgency at this point in May and June, it's not because they were not getting paid, it was because they wanted to reimpose the Ba'athist rule in Iraq. They did not agree with the vision of a democratic Iraq. Many of them were Sunnis who found it understandably hard to realize that after a thousand years they were no longer going to be in charge here.

People who make these arguments are not looking at the big picture and they are not looking at the facts on the ground at the time that we faced. I used to say to my colleagues, "We don't have the leisure of the theory class here. We have to deal with what we find on the ground." It would have been nice to pay them sooner, I agree. It probably would have been important, and I think that was my mistake, to have said more clearly in the initial decree that we intended to come up with a precise plan to pay them. We did say nice things about honoring the army and the importance it had played in Iraq's history. But anybody who wants to suggest how we could have paid them earlier—I'd be very interested to see how you do that without an order of battle.

Leffler: I'm just trying to re-create the parameters of the debate about this, which as you know is intense. You say these are theoretical retrospective views. The people who make these arguments say the facts on the ground, literally on the ground then, were incredible chaos, disorder, disintegration, and that the de-Ba'athification orders and the disbanding—not that any army existed, but there were efforts allegedly to begin to re-create army units—

Bremer: Right.

Leffler: That the facts on the ground demanded more than anything else the establishment of order and security.

Bremer: I agree.

Leffler: This is Charles Duelfer's big argument. He leaves Iraq in late June, early July, and he is absolutely infuriated with the entire situation. Now I think his account is biased by most of his connections are with Sunnis.

Bremer: Right.

Leffler: They're with Sunnis because he had established those connections in the 1990s when he was there. So one needs to read his account with a degree of care and understanding. But his critique and many of the critiques that exist, in fact 80 percent of the things that have been written are critical of these decisions. The criticism is that the greatest preoccupation was order, stability.

Bremer: Right.

Leffler: And that your decisions, they weren't totally yours—

Bremer: They weren't even my idea.

Leffler: —contributed to the spiral downward of order and stability. That is the nature of the arguments.

Bremer: Right.

Leffler: What I hear you saying, your retort to that, is that that spiral downward was inevitable, had nothing to do really with these decisions that we're talking about here. Is that correct?

Bremer: No. It's partially correct. My concern also was order, or I wouldn't have been asking for more troops. I wouldn't have asked for MPs, I wouldn't have done the things I did, so there is no argument about order. In May, I was the one who proposed we declare martial law to stop the looting. In fact, by early June it was not chaotic any longer. By then, the looting had largely stopped. The demonstrations by the officers had stopped. People who are writing that it was chaotic as late as July obviously weren't there or I don't know what they were talking about.

The real insurgency didn't start until Ramadan, until October. We had the bombings in August. We didn't know what they were, but in retrospect, it was a different problem. It was [Abu Musab al-] Zarqawi's al-Qaeda operation. So it was chaotic certainly in April and May and a bit into June, but by July that was not the characterization of the country. It doesn't mean I wasn't concerned about law and order. I argued right from the start before I got there that the primary role of any government is to provide security for the citizens, and we didn't do it.

You could make the argument, which sounds like what they're arguing, although I don't want to

put words in their mouths, that by not establishing, showing that we were prepared to establish security early on, we effectively encouraged the opponents, however you define them, Zarqawi, al-Qaeda, the insurgents, to believe that they could chase us out and that that incentivized them to attack us more viciously starting in October of '03. That is a possible argument.

I go back to the point if military people joined the insurgency, and I don't doubt that some of them did, they didn't do it because they weren't paid and they didn't do it because they didn't have a future. If they were a colonel or below they were welcome in the new army, and 80 percent of the officers by the time I left had come from the old army. They didn't do it for any other reason it seems to me than they wanted to reimpose the Ba'athist rule.

Riley: Let me press you about that, because one of the things that you write about in your book is a strong contemporaneous concern about the quality of intelligence that you're getting about the opposition or insurgency.

Bremer: Right.

Riley: In the absence of that intelligence, how are you reaching conclusions about what the motives are for the opposition at this period. Is it based on—

Bremer: Which period are we talking about?

Riley: I would say—

Bremer: It's a different situation by the end of the year.

Riley: I think much of what Mel is talking about is the early phase, the chaos of the immediate pre-war period is still in effect, and then there is that period of calm before Ramadan.

Bremer: Right.

Riley: Let's deal with the first two periods, which I think is where your arguments are about your concerns about intelligence. You keep pushing the intel people to say we don't know where this is coming from.

Bremer: Right.

Riley: So what I'm trying to do now, is it a retrospect that you're looking back at this and reaching your conclusion about what is motivating the opposition?

Bremer: No, it's my analysis. I'm simply saying the argument seems to be that by disbanding a nonexistent army we somehow encouraged a group of people to take up arms against us because they had no future. They weren't getting paid and they had no future. I'm saying I don't doubt that some of them took up arms against us, but it wasn't because they weren't getting paid. They were getting paid. That's not intelligence analysis, it is just simply a fact.

My concerns about intelligence, as I think we talked about this morning, really were more or less excited by the bombings in August. We really didn't know what was going on. We had these

three major bombings. As it turned out—we didn't know until January when we got Zarqawi's letter that it was Zarqawi, it wasn't the insurgency. By the time the insurgency rolled around in October the Agency had begun to increase its terrorist counterinsurgency assets on the ground in response to my request to Tenet in August.

I have to say throughout the entire time I was there I never felt that our intelligence, military or otherwise, was very good on the structure and strategy of the insurgency. When I went out and visited a battalion somewhere, a battalion commander could do a terrific briefing on what he faced. He would tell you, "Here's my AOR [area of responsibility], here are the guys," he even had a social diagram. These guys relate to those, this is a tribe, that clan is over here, and tomorrow night these guys are going to do—he knows. That level of tactical intelligence was really quite good at the operational level.

What we didn't know was command and control. We never had much insight into that, at least I never saw it either on the military side or on the intel side.

Nelson: It sounds like in the period June, July—well, July, August, September, you might well have thought things are going very well here. Obviously when you took over there was a good bit of disorder but the looting had stopped, the demonstrations had stopped. When the bombings did occur it wasn't clear that they foretold of an insurgency. Was that your sense that by July that we're—?

Bremer: Yes, I think that's right.

Nelson: We're on a trajectory.

Bremer: In August it got interrupted. We had the bombings, but that's right. I think certainly by early July, maybe late June, it looked like things were going pretty well.

Nelson: Did that cause you, for example, to stop requesting with the same fervor additional troops or additional resources?

Leffler: You did ask for hugely additional resources.

Bremer: I had, by that time, I don't know, July, I had sort of moved on. I wasn't going to get troops. How many times can you take no for an answer or silence for an answer? I just moved on. Sort of the same thing, Sanchez asked for the army to train and they said no or gave him no answer. That was an answer. OK, let's get going.

Nelson: The August bombings. Did you think of that as a start of reversal of progress or—

Bremer: Yes, it was certainly very concerning, particularly after the UN bombing. There was some minor bombing before the Jordanian Embassy. I don't remember exactly what it was. The Jordanian bombing I think was the 8th of August and then the UN one was the 18th. Yes, it looked like a shift. We didn't know what it was, and then the big one in Najaf at the end of the month.

Nelson: I guess what is underlying this is when you think things are going well and you're

optimistic about the future and then things turn back in exactly the opposite course of not only what you hoped for but expected, that has effects on morale, that has effects on self-confidence. Did it have any of those effects that you noticed in yourself or others?

Bremer: The third bombing, the August one in Najaf, was a pretty big blow because they killed a major Ayatollah and 200 people and they were all Shi'a. We had no good intelligence about where it had come from or who had done it. It caused a huge uproar in the Shi'a community, raising again the question of why wouldn't we let them unleash their militia, back to all of the arguments about, "If you can't protect us, we're going to have to do it ourselves."

I can't say what effect it had in Washington. Rumsfeld visited shortly thereafter around the 5th of September and was highly critical of us of not having a sense of urgency, which I may have interpreted the wrong way. I don't know exactly what he meant by that.

Nelson: You took it to mean you guys aren't working hard enough.

Bremer: Right, which may not be what he meant. Maybe he meant we weren't being urgent enough in handing over to the Iraqis. Maybe he was already thinking that; I don't know. I took it as we weren't working hard enough, which didn't sit very well with me and my colleagues. Maybe against that backdrop, when my article came out, which by the way was in an unclassified cable, I have it in my files, to the State Department, the NSC, and DoD, the full text. It was cabled three days ahead of time. I reminded Condi of that. She said she hadn't been informed, so I looked in my record and I called her back. This is when her book came out. I said, "I've got it right here in front of me. It went to the NSC." Now obviously the National Security Advisor doesn't read every cable, but if somebody on your staff thought what I was about to write wasn't consistent with the President's policy, they should have brought it in to her and said, "Look at this jerk in Baghdad."

Riley: Maybe that was Labor Day weekend.

Nelson: Seriously.

Bremer: It could have been.

Riley: It is certainly true that what we've heard is that it came as a surprise.

Bremer: I know, but the record just cannot sustain it.

Riley: It's fascinating to hear you say this.

Bremer: I don't know. I did not pick up, that I remember, a view from Washington that the series of events in August set a lot of people back. I didn't hear that.

Riley: When does Bob Blackwill get sent over?

Bremer: He came I think in the middle of September.

Leffler: I think it's October.

Bremer: The group wasn't formally, anyway, leaked until I think the second or third of October. I don't know. Maybe he only came in October.

Leffler: I'm not positive.

Bremer: I think he may have made a trip in September.

Riley: You do write about your conversation with Rumsfeld where he says that the White House is about to take control or responsibility or whatever for this. Mel, do you remember the date?

Leffler: That's December 6th.

Bremer: That's December, that's afterward. He gave me no pre-warning. He says he didn't know.

Riley: So his arrival is not a harbinger of—

Bremer: Who's he?

Riley: Blackwill. His arrival is not a harbinger of the relocation of responsibility?

Bremer: I don't know, because Mel thinks maybe that visit was in October. I have it in the back of my head he may have visited in September, but I don't know. But in any case if it was after the announcement or leak, then it was October. I just don't remember. The conversation with Rumsfeld was December. That is much later.

Riley: But the announcement, or leak, of the fact of Blackwill's arrival?

Bremer: No, what came out, it's not here but you can find it. What came out in the *Times* was that she had established an Iraq Support Group. I don't know what it's called. Blackwill's name I don't think was in it. It might have been.

Riley: So how did you interpret his—

Bremer: I first got on the phone to Reuben Jeffery (III), who was covering my back at the Pentagon, and I said, "What the hell is this about? I just read it." So he spoke to Rice, who called me the same day. She said, "Sorry I didn't tell you," and so forth. I thought I was left out. I don't remember, but I think she mentioned Blackwill in the conversation. I'm not precise on that one, either that one or a subsequent one. I welcomed it. I've known him for 35 years. He was in the group around Kissinger. He was working for [Helmut] Sonnenfeldt in those days. I'd known Bob a long time and I welcomed it.

Riley: His portfolio is what when he comes over?

Bremer: I don't think there was ever anything written down. The way I looked at him he was Condi's eyes and ears on what I was doing. That was fine with me. She wanted to talk with me once a day and I knew Blackwill would talk to her at least once a day. Since I was going to tell her exactly what I was going to tell Blackwill, that didn't bother me either. She was getting it

from both sides. That's OK.

Riley: At what point do you start talking with Condi then, once a day?

Bremer: Almost right away after she called me, which must have been the first week of October.

Nelson: Did Rumsfeld know about this? Did he have a problem with it?

Bremer: About?

Nelson: It sounds from his memoirs that he did. About you talking with her.

Bremer: He apparently did. He didn't mention it to me until that conversation two months later on December 6th when he was visiting Baghdad. At the airport I saw him off that night and he took me aside and said—it's in the book. Something like, "It seems to me Condi is taking over responsibility and I'm out of the political scene." I don't remember exactly what his words were, but that was the impression. He didn't mention it before that, although I had seen him in Washington and talked to him a number of times. That was the first time he mentioned it to me.

Nelson: Did you wonder after he said that, *So I continue to report to the President through Don?*

Bremer: No, I just continued to use both channels. My instructions were to report through Rumsfeld, and I assumed Condi was operating on some instructions from the President to talk to me regularly, so OK.

Nelson: Did it damage your relationship with Rumsfeld?

Bremer: Yes, I think it probably did, which I told her in our early October conversation. I said, "This is going to cause me some trouble at the Pentagon."

Riley: So you said Blackwill was there as basically Condi's eyes and ears. Is he being directed by you there, or has he got an open portfolio?

Bremer: First of all, there are two different time frames. In the October through almost January time frame, he just came a couple of times and was there for a couple of days and maybe went up to the Kurdish region. I think maybe we went together once to Kurdistan. He was just sort of looking around.

Riley: He was going to take a look and turn around.

Bremer: It was a little more complicated after Brahimi was appointed by Kofi Annan and came to Iraq in February. Bob's remit then was more shadowing Brahimi and trying to help him understand the situation and be sure he didn't go off the rails to take the thing in a direction that was not going to be in our interest. Bob and I met two or three times a day during this period, sometimes with Brahimi, sometimes just the two of us, to try and figure out how we were going to deal with Brahimi and the Iraqis and so forth. I wouldn't say he was working for me; he was working with me. That worked OK.

Riley: To your mind did the interagency process, as it presented itself to you, improve after Blackwill arrived?

Bremer: I could see no difference. My guess is that it probably improved because Blackwill had at least a staff behind him back at the NSC that could work problems. I don't honestly know. When Rumsfeld told me on the 6th that he was sort of out of the political process I don't know what instructions he may have given to Feith, who would have been the person mostly interacting with Blackwill in Washington. I don't know whether that got better. I didn't have any visibility.

Leffler: Did interagency conflict in Washington—it sounds like the interagency controversies really weren't affecting you all that much. Is that a true statement? This is what I'm hearing you say.

Bremer: That's right.

Leffler: In terms of both big decisions and little day-to-day decisions, it may have been confusing things in Washington, but it wasn't really bearing very much on your—

Bremer: I think that's a fair point. It helped to have Blackwill because he I knew was giving a good channel back to Rice. The only problem I did have, and again it's not that high level, was that it began to be the case that we had people in various parts of the interagency framework back in Washington calling in directly to people at the CPA and giving them instructions. "I want a report on this. I need a three-page thing. I want a PowerPoint on that." I finally had to say to Condi, "Look, this can't happen. We have people working 18 hours a day as it is. I don't mind them being responsive. If you or Steve call me and say we need X, I'll make it happen, but I can't have third-level people at the NSC tasking these guys out here who are working for me and trying to get their priorities straight." I had a little bit of that problem with Blackwill a couple of times and I straightened it out.

Leffler: So pretty much what is going on in Iraq is your responsibility during this period of time. It's not like decisions are being made and you're being forced—I mean basically the folks in Washington for all intents and purposes have relinquished authority and are depending on you during this period of time.

Bremer: That goes maybe a bit far. Again, we go back to the President's view, which seemed to be to rely on the guy on the ground. At least we had the initiative. Perhaps that would be more appropriate than having the authority.

Leffler: OK, initiative. And pretty much you're getting what you want from Washington, isn't that correct? You make these requests for huge increment in aid and really they were very responsive. I mean, for gigantic requests, right?

Bremer: I was getting what I wanted in *that* field. I was not getting the staff I wanted. That went on and on. I was not hearing the kind of approach to the security problem, particularly by the end of September, that I thought we needed to have. The problem of the spring troop rotation kept coming up. On the economic side certainly the response was very favorable, and on the redoing of the Iraqi debt I suggested Jim Baker and they eventually got Baker there and that helped too.

Leffler: Why were you not getting the staff that you wanted? How do you analyze that situation? Who is responsible for the understaffing? In a lot of the literature it says you were getting very young people who really didn't know very much and didn't know the language and you had a few top people who were really good.

Riley: We did deal with that, Mel, so I'll let you look at that.

Bremer: The short answer is effectively the Pentagon was in charge of staffing us because people had to be brought in on a—I can't remember the number, 3110 or something, a civil service code, or they had to be seconded. The Pentagon had to do that and they had to get them through the chemical warfare briefing. On the whole, the State Department was responsive, Treasury was responsive, the Pentagon was responsive. It was in the other departments where we didn't get enough. Again, I don't make that much of it. Mike asked the question this morning, and it's a fair question. What difference would it have made if we had had 100 percent of staffing instead of 56 percent? People would have gotten more sleep.

Leffler: So week-to-week how were you analyzing August, September, October, November? Week-to-week, how were you analyzing and understanding the growth in the emergence of an insurgency?

Bremer: Well, let me put it slightly differently. What was emerging was a security problem. Whether it was an insurgency or something else was not all that clear. Again, as I say, in January 2004 it became clear that the August attacks had been Zarqawi. In August the concern was the bombing, still in September. At the end of September there was concern about the drawdown, the military plan to not only not increase troop strength but to draw down and then to play this game of counting the Iraqis as equal to Americans. This is still before the insurgency really took off in late October.

Leffler: Yes.

Bremer: In October we had the start of what was an insurgency, and that lasted basically until the capture of Saddam. That lasted eight weeks. After the capture of Saddam incidents dropped off by 25 to 30 percent. In all, the MSCs attacks dropped rather substantially. In January and February again it began to look like we could get through this thing. It had quieted down. We had a process going to get a constitution. We had a bunch of economic decisions because of the June 30th date. I don't know if that answers you.

Riley: I want to ask a follow-up question to Mel's line of questioning before this one, and that is that you write once or twice in your book sort of derisively of the 8,000-mile screwdriver. Who most often was on the other end of the screwdriver?

Bremer: Some unnamed bureaucrat. [*laughter*] It was the kind of thing I was talking about earlier, where you get tasked by somebody—I don't know—we would try to implement some policy and six people would say, "Why don't you turn the screw another quarter in this direction?" I had a ready answer for these people. I would say, and I'd say it to the press, "Anybody who wants to come out here, I have a bunk, hard hat, and a flak jacket and we need people. Come on out. You got a solution? We've got a lot of problems."

Riley: But it wasn't persistently Defense or the White House or—

Bremer: No, you would have for example people in the Department of Agriculture saying, "Do you really want to do x or somebody somewhere else." It was the general problem of in a world where everybody now has email and cell phones you no longer have control over communications. It's an interesting problem on how you run a government. It was my introduction because I'd been out of government for that decade of the '90s when all this stuff came into being. For me it was a management problem, a challenge to manage the priorities of the people who were working in Baghdad. They legitimately would get a list of priorities from me and then somebody else says, "No, no, no, I want these three things." That's a problem.

Nelson: So the problem is partly the people in Washington telling you here's what you ought to be doing, but it sounds like maybe an even greater part of the problem is people in the Agriculture Department in Washington—

Bremer: To use an example.

Nelson: —telling their people in Iraq, "Here's what you need to be doing."

Bremer: I didn't mind. People could tell me what to do. I work for the President. That's not a problem. If somebody calls up and says, "This is what the President wants you to do," or "This is what we want to do," and Rumsfeld says, "This is our policy," fine. It was going at the staff people that really became—that's mostly where the 8,000-mile screwdriver would come in. Somebody would come in and say, "They're at it again. They had the screwdriver—a quarter turn to the right, clockwise."

Riley: Did you ever get the sense during your time there that the President was losing confidence in you?

Bremer: There was a story in the press in late October, maybe early November, that he was. I didn't see it. Somebody told me about it. Dan Senor, who was my press guy, came in. He was always on the phone with folks at the White House because he'd come out of the White House. He said the President was furious about the article and instructed whoever it was, Ari Fleischer, I don't know, somebody else, to deny the story and that was the end of it.

Perry: What about his—

Bremer: As I wrote in my book, the President, facing an election a year away, would have every reason to have been questioning whether—at that time when there was this big push to get out early by the Pentagon, especially in the October meetings that I had there. I said in my letter to my wife, "They'd better bring a long reliever. He'd better have a lot of innings in him if he's coming in now."

Nelson: Mel suggested earlier, and I think you agreed, you were the one who was in charge there. You weren't being directed.

Bremer: Right.

Nelson: How true was that in comparison to the military chain of command in Iraq? To what extent were you running things in Iraq and to what extent were they running things in Iraq?

Bremer: Do you mean did Sanchez have as much latitude as I did? Is that your question?

Nelson: Yes. I don't mean to set policy there, but in terms of how the troops were deployed, how their missions were defined. Was what he was doing important independently of what you were doing?

Bremer: I'm confused by the question because that's a different question. I thought you were saying I had a lot of latitude to do my job, did Sanchez have the same amount of latitude to do his job. Or are you saying—

Nelson: Answer that one first then.

Bremer: I think I probably had more latitude than he did, but that's the nature of the military. The military is a more structured operation and it doesn't surprise me.

Nelson: That's a different question than what I intended. In terms of what America was doing on the ground in Iraq, how much of it was determined by your decisions and how much was determined by decisions that Sanchez made in terms of how the American military was deployed and its mission? In later years when things get better in Iraq because of the surge and a new mission, that American troops were—

Bremer: I go back to the point that every general who was asked in my presence, "Do you have enough troops?" said "Yes, sir, we have enough to accomplish the mission." So what is the mission? That's the question.

Leffler: So when you asked them that, what did they say?

Bremer: No, these are meetings that I was in the audience. Rumsfeld would meet with people and ask and the President would ask them.

Leffler: But you're in the audience. Didn't you interject and say at those times, "My gosh, we don't have enough troops"?

Bremer: I did do that, but the question wasn't that. The question was the mission. As I said in the book, my concern about the military was twofold, the number of troops and strategy. We did not have a counterinsurgency doctrine. We were basically playing whack-a-mole, especially in places like Fallujah. I raised that concern, I raised it directly with the Vice President in a conversation I had with him.

I think, to go back to your point, Sanchez did the best he could with the resources he'd been given and the mission he'd been assigned. I don't know that he could have done more. I certainly wasn't going to second-guess how he deployed his troops. That was his lane. My lane was the political side. He certainly had less latitude, in a sense, because it's the military organization.

Nelson: So there was never a time you thought, *I can't do my job here as long as the military is*

doing what it is doing the way it is doing it?

Bremer: No, although it comes back again to the question of what the strategy, what the mission was and the doctrine to carry it out. If the goal was to provide security for the Iraqis, my view was you needed more troops and a different strategy, a counterinsurgency strategy. But that was not something Sanchez could fix. Remember that despite the uptick in violence in late October 2003, by January-February 2004 things had quieted down. We were making steady progress in the two areas of CPA responsibility. We had Iraqis drafting a modern constitution. Iraqi ministries were functioning. Oil and electrical power generation were back at pre-war levels. If I had felt that the lack of troops was going to make it impossible to do my job, I could have taken the matter again directly to the President. In fact, when the crisis of April and May did threaten the entire project, I did recommend the addition of two more American divisions.

Nelson: [David] Petraeus is the one we associate with the development of counterinsurgency strategy. Was he doing things in country while you were there that you were taking notice of and thinking, *This is exactly what ought to be happening countrywide*?

Bremer: He was doing things, but I don't remember—he was Commander of the 101st when I arrived. A year later, he came back to start the training mission the last six weeks I was there. I don't remember being particularly struck by what he was doing. He was conducting a very aggressive public affairs program.

Nelson: Do you want to elaborate on that? [*laughter*]

Perry: You're smiling.

Riley: We're all giving it a chuckle here.

Bremer: I'm not sure I do.

Nelson: Public affairs is a term that requires definition.

Bremer: I don't remember being struck that he was doing anything particularly—

Nelson: You talk about counterinsurgency as if it were something you already figured out. Is that right?

Bremer: I was guided in a large way by my deputy, Clay McManaway, who had spent four years in Vietnam. He started saying to me, as the insurgency began to pick up in October, "The military is trying to do the same things they tried to do in Vietnam. Some village rises up, they go in, they whack everybody down, then they leave. Of course they don't stay and the situation then reverts to bad." By that time, early November, the 82nd had been in and out of Fallujah I think four times, starting with the big fru-fra they had there during the kinetic phase in spring of 2003. What sort of brought it all home was there were two Chinooks. I guess in fact they were Marines. I don't know what they were doing out in Anbar. But anyway they got shot down around the 2nd of November. We did nothing. There was no reaction. We didn't go find the bad guys and kill them. Clay and I started to talk about it. He wrote a very good analysis to me, which is what provoked my call to the Vice President on November 6th saying, "We don't have

the right strategy." I wouldn't use these words at the time, but "clear, hold, and rebuild." We're not doing that.

Nelson: Why did you call the Vice President?

Bremer: I don't remember what exactly provoked my call to him. That period I think I'd been back on consultations the last week of October. I'd have to look at my calendar. I must have had a meeting with him in the margins of the various meetings and we must have talked and I must have picked up some sense that he had a problem. I actually wasn't trying to reach him. I placed the call to Scooter Libby, with whom I had had a conversation, and the Vice President called back. I don't know why.

Perry: He didn't pick up the phone.

Nelson: Scooter was too busy. [*laughter*]

Bremer: Can you handle that—

Riley: Mr. Ambassador, you have been very accommodating.

Bremer: Are we out of time?

Riley: It is very instructive and a fascinating day for us and I'm sure an exhausting day for you reliving this, and you have been a good sport to take multiple questions, some of them with some difficult premises involved and we're grateful for that. We've covered a lot of territory, but we have a lot more to cover tomorrow.

Bremer: I was going to say I don't know where we got to.

Perry: We got to November.

Bremer: That's almost halfway there.

Riley: Exactly. We've got a few hours tomorrow morning, and we'll make good use of it, but we're grateful for your good nature and cooperation.

August 29, 2012

Riley: This is day two of the Paul Bremer interview. Usually what I do at the beginning of the second day is ask you this question: Anything occur to you last night or this morning while you were eating breakfast you thought, *Oh, gosh, I forgot to talk about this* or *I wish I had said that*?

Bremer: Something did occur to me, but I forgot what it was. [*laughter*] It will come to me.

Literally I said to myself this morning while I was shaving—*Oh, I should have*—it will come back.

Riley: It happens all the time and it is not unusual for people to come in with the Boar's Head notepad with notes.

Bremer: What I say is I don't have a problem with data retrieval anymore, I just don't get same-day service. [*laughter*]

Perry: You're on dial-up now instead of broadband.

Bremer: Exactly.

Riley: Barbara has a question, but I thought I would start with a sort of global question for you. You have a photograph in your book and you make a reference to this, before you go you have a plaque made for your desk, "Success has a thousand fathers."

Bremer: Right.

Riley: It is problematic for historians because we sometimes like to find the one or two fathers that are really responsible for success and to try to develop our understandings accordingly. I wonder if on reflection there are some significant successes that you experienced over there that you really do feel that you had ownership and authorship of, and conversely, are there, on reflection, some decisions or outcomes that have your fingerprints on them that didn't come out the way you wanted?

Bremer: Let me start with the second first?

Riley: Sure.

Bremer: While I think the de-Ba'athification decree was the right thing to do and was certainly welcomed by the vast majority of Iraqis, it was certainly a mistake to turn the implementation over to the Governing Council, which in turn turned it over to Chalabi.

Riley: Right. And that was your call?

Bremer: Yes.

Leffler: When did that exactly happen? I was confused yesterday. I know when the decree was, but when did you turn it over to the Governing Council and when did they turn it over to Chalabi?

Bremer: I turned it over to the Governing Council probably the first week or ten days after they were formed, so probably in late July. We had a whole agenda of things on which we wanted their advice and assistance. They didn't act on it until—I think it was the first week of November, November 4th sticks in my mind, right in that area. So that was the timing.

When I announced the decree I said explicitly that we intended to establish an Iraqi de-

Ba'athification council. So I announced the fact that we were going to do it when I issued the decree in May. That's the sequence. We announced it. I turned it over to the Governing Council sometime in July, and they acted on it in November. That was a mistake.

I think it's fair to say on the army disbandment it was a mistake not to make explicit the day we announced that decree that we intended to pay most of the army people, though we could not explicitly say what we would pay because as I explained yesterday we didn't have the money. Just to put the money thing in perspective, we had a monthly budget of $250 million a month for just the civil service payroll of the Iraqi government. We had a monthly cost of the food basket, which we didn't discuss, but it is in the book, of about $300 million a month, and we had energy subsidies of about $400 million a month. So if you add it up it's a little bit more than a billion dollars a month.

When I arrived in Iraq, first of all we had no idea what kind of Iraqi funds we had anywhere because the central bank had been flooded and we didn't know how many dinars there were. We did know that we had seized Iraqi assets that were estimated to be in the order of $800-900 million. In other words, I was broke. I couldn't make the monthly payments the next month until we figured out how to get the oil going. We couldn't get the oil going until the UN passed its resolution, and then you had to crank up the oil.

So I'm still making the excuse that there would have been no way—first of all, we could not put a dollar sign next to what it would cost to pay the Army because we didn't know the order of battle until the middle of June. Having said all that, it was probably a mistake not to have made it explicit because it did lead to the uncertainty that led to some of the demonstrations by former officers, who then went away quietly as soon as we announced what we were paying. Those were mistakes.

I think the two big successes of the CPA were the interim constitution, which I'm sure we'll talk about, and the revival of the economy. I take no credit for either of these personally. It was basically my staff. That's why I say there were a thousand fathers, other than I was determined to make them happen. I had no particular great intellectual insight into either of these matters except I just wanted to make them happen.

Riley: But the failures that you mentioned arguably are again failures of planning.

Bremer: Failures of what?

Riley: Failures of planning. You came in and some of these things were occurring. The key decisions were made within weeks of when you had taken the job.

Bremer: Yes and no. You're historians, so am I. We talked about planning yesterday. The plan is nothing; planning is everything. I'm sympathetic to the pre-war planners. They had to start with some assumptions, and that's how you build a plan. The assumptions turned out to be wrong. Should they have made different assumptions? It's easy to say in hindsight. It's always easier in hindsight to figure out what should have been done. But in any case you asked for my balance sheet; that's my balance sheet.

Riley: On personnel matters? Let's exclude the Iraqis.

Bremer: The people working for me?

Riley: Everybody work out?

Bremer: The ones I chose or in some cases inherited, like Ryan Crocker, were terrific. As I mentioned yesterday, a lot of the so-called senior advisors were not chosen by me. I didn't have time. They were chosen in Washington through a process—I don't know what that process was. Most of them worked out. A couple of them I had some troubles with and had to send home, but that's not surprising if you have a staff of 3,000. They're not all going to work out.

On personnel, first of all I didn't have much latitude myself. The ones I chose worked out well and for the most part the rest worked out well.

Perry: I wanted to ask about the President's November visit at Thanksgiving. What insight did you obtain about him and his character, his personality, from that visit and also the press aspect of it and the PR [public relations] aspect of it? I can remember sitting in the living room with my family gathered for Thanksgiving and suddenly seeing that on television. It was quite stunning.

Bremer: It was quite a dramatic event. I don't know that it gave me a different insight into the President from what I already had. It was quite a powerful moment. It was sort of, I guess, typical of him that after he made his short speech from the stage and worked his way down through the crowd to the chow line, he went behind the chow line and served the soldiers.

I thought, *He'll pick up a tray and he'll get some turkey and he'll go sit with some guys.* Not at all. He went behind the chow line and dished for however long, I don't know, half an hour or something. Then we had a meeting with the members of the Governing Council who had come out to the event thinking—I don't know why they came. In fact I had a hard time figuring out why the soldiers were there because they were told we were going to have a USO [United Service Organizations] event and I was going to make a speech. Why would you come listen to some guy make a speech? Anyway, the place was full. It was a very dramatic moment, very powerful.

The room, as he said in his book, and I can't remember how I wrote about it, it just exploded when he came out on stage. It was really dramatic. My staff assistant, who had worked in the White House before, Brian McCormack, had come up with this gimmick where it is traditional that the most senior American reads the President's Thanksgiving address. So Sanchez was in on this thing. Sanchez introduced—for the guys sitting out there it must have—Sanchez and I had kind of wandered up and down the rows beforehand. They're all taking pictures. As I think I said in my book, I said to myself, *I hope these guys don't run out of film because there's a much bigger moment coming.*

Anyway, Brian came up with this idea that Sanchez would introduce me to read the President's Thanksgiving message to the nation and then I would do this thing about, "Gee, I'm reading this, but I wonder if there is a more senior person here." Bush was in on it of course. It was a great moment. I guess he just worked the crowd; he was a politician. He did it very well. He obviously had great rapport with the men and women there. A good event.

Leffler: I'd like to ask you a global question if you're starting off that way. You were not

prepared to focus on Iraq in early 2003. That wasn't what you were expecting to do. Then in about ten days you're approached, you take the job, and you clearly develop some pretty strong ideas about a long occupation, about a process toward democracy, about disbandment and army reconfiguration. My question is this: What shaped your ideas? Who shaped your ideas?

You had about ten days. I know you said yesterday, "I read a lot of papers" blah, blah, blah. Of course you read a lot of papers, but I don't believe that's what shaped your ideas. As Henry Kissinger once said, you come in with pretty clear conceptualization of how to do things. You're faced with problems, but you have some basic thoughts. So on these critical issues, long occupation, people seem to have been expecting a short occupation. A little bit more extensive de-Ba'athification, slow but steady process with incremental steps toward democratization. Where did you get these ideas?

Bremer: Let's take those one at a time. On de-Ba'athification I didn't have any preconception one way or the other. I was presented with a decree, and in the end after talking about it, implemented it. I didn't have any personal view there. The other two, they are to me more interesting questions, and I'm not sure I know the answer. I guess my experience and reading for the previous 40 years suggested to me, and my understanding of American history, suggested that moving from a tyranny to representative government was never easy. It wasn't easy in America. I used to remind people that it took us seven years to win our War for Independence, 12 years before we wrote a constitution, and 20 years before we had political parties. And we had it easy.

We had 500 years of the impact of Magna Carta behind us. We had colonial parliaments that had been active, including one here, well, not here but in Williamsburg, for almost a hundred years before the revolution. So my approach as a student of history, if not a historian, was that the transition from a tyranny to a democracy under the best of circumstances was going to be hard.

Not that I was a great student of Bosnia and Kosovo and all the more recent experiences, and then again, having read a lot and lived in Europe, I was aware of how hard it had been in countries that were just occupied, not under tyranny but occupied for five or six years in Europe and the transition in Germany, postwar Germany. I knew the occupations in both Germany and Japan had lasted a very long time. So I guess what shaped my view, Mel, in answer to your first two questions about the length of the occupation and the need to get to a coherent political process, was shaped by my personal experience and my personal understanding of historic precedents, not necessarily models, but precedents.

Riley: Is it fair to say—you made a point yesterday and you make a point in the book of having heard Garner's remarks.

Bremer: Right.

Riley: Is it fair to say that the thrust of what you were hearing in the week to ten days you were getting briefed up did not run counter to these predispositions that you had?

Bremer: That's right. The Garner comment—it was essentially out of sync with what you might call my preconceptions or my own view, and it was out of sync with what the President, the Vice President, and Secretary of State had said in meetings both with me and at the NSC. So it was his

comment that seemed to me to be—

Leffler: Let me take issue with that. I went back last night having listened to you and to Rumsfeld's memoir. I'm just curious, did you read it?

Bremer: I read the part of it about Iraq. I didn't read the whole thing.

Leffler: Pages 510 to 523 or so are basically a sustained attack on your approach and on the fact that you reversed what he clearly wanted to do. I ask this particularly in relationship to what you just said because you're saying everybody in Washington believed that what Garner said was off the mark. Yet—

Bremer: I didn't say that. You said that. I said it struck me that it was inconsistent with what I was hearing. I didn't say that everybody said that. I just want to be precise.

Leffler: But you were talking a lot to Defense people. You couldn't possibly have heard that from Defense people.

Bremer: Here's Rumsfeld. Take a look at his memo, he's got it in his book. Here he is, memo to the National Security Council on May 9th. "The transition from despotism to a democracy will not happen fast or easily. It cannot be rushed." That's Don Rumsfeld. That's what I was hearing from him.

Leffler: That's what you were hearing from him?

Bremer: It's on the record, right there.

Leffler: But we all know, those of us who are historians know how easy it is to select out a quote. You have a lot of stuff.

Bremer: It's on his website. You can read the whole thing. You don't have to read the book.

Leffler: I know. One of the problems we historians have with both Feith's website and Rumsfeld's website is we who have done research know that when you go into the archives you're going to find 500 boxes of materials, literally, 500 boxes of materials that deal with OSD and Iraq. They put on the website 50 documents or 100 documents that they've selected.

Bremer: Right.

Leffler: For those of us we have to ask the question, how representative are they. They're helpful. I use them all the time, and my students use that.

Bremer: So what's the question? That's what I'm trying to figure out.

Leffler: My question is, for 25 sustained pages in his memoir he says the opposite. That's really my question. You're saying that there are one or two memos that we should focus on because they're the primary source, which I believe. I'm not saying he's right here. I'd just like, for the record, to know. Your claim is that the thrust of what he is saying in his memoir is not really

representative of the views he communicated at that time to you.

Bremer: Correct. I'm also saying, as I said yesterday, that not once in the time from May 12th, when I arrived, until September 8th, when my editorial or my op-ed appeared, did Rumsfeld, Feith, Wolfowitz, Rice, the President, the Vice President, anybody say that the policy I was pursuing, which was laid out very clearly and repeatedly both in my private and public statements, was not the President's policy. So if Rumsfeld had a problem with what I was doing, he never said it to me until September 13th. Not once, either in writing, orally, face-to-face when he came to Iraq or when I was in Washington. Not once. And I've provided you with a comprehensive list of memos, letters, cables, phone calls, speeches, and op-eds that I submitted to Washington or made in Washington between May 12, when I arrived, and September 8th, when my op-ed allegedly surprised Mr. Rumsfeld. And these were just the records I can find in my unclassified files.

Riley: In fairness, it's hard to characterize 20 or 30 pages and to ask for a point-by-point response. Yet the thrust is certainly accurate and he can respond to the thrust but not to the specific content without us picking it apart.

Nelson: Did you have conversations with Garner when you got there about his understanding of a short transition versus what you came there intending to do?

Bremer: I don't remember. Garner was very upset, rightly upset, by the way they announced his departure. He was really unhappy. I spent most of my time with Jay trying to buck him up and keep him from leaving the next day, which he was threatening to do, because I knew I needed some transition time with him, just helping me get the various ministries stood up and figuring out who was doing what. We may have had a conversation about the political transition. I don't know. My view was I wasn't going to waste a lot of time saying to Jay, "What did you have on your mind" because I knew what the policy was. The President made it clear in his meetings and so forth in Washington. I didn't want to pick on Jay; I wanted to keep him there. I had great respect for him and I thought he was shabbily treated by the government.

Nelson: He stayed until the 15th of June.

Bremer: Yes, about then.

Nelson: What use did you make of his presence?

Bremer: He continued to conduct the morning staff meetings for the first week or so while I tried to figure out what I was doing. We met frequently, every day. He helped. His focus was on getting the various ministries stood up, the Ministry of Electricity, the Ministry of Transportation. He had a group of advisors—somebody said yesterday 400—I think he had something like 600 people who went to Kuwait with him. Maybe not that many came to Baghdad. I don't know how many there were. So he knew all the players.

He basically in effect was Chief Operating Officer. He was trying to keep the thing going while I was trying to figure out how we were going to get our feet on the ground. He was very helpful. He stayed in the end until about June 15th. I don't remember exactly when he left. Around there. He threatened, I think I said in the book, a number of times just to pack up and go home. He was

mad; his wife was not happy about the way he was treated.

Nelson: Were you glad to see him go, given that he stayed about a month after you got there? Were you ready to see him go?

Bremer: I was ready to see him go; I wasn't glad to see him go. I had a lot of respect for Jay and I thought he had been badly handled. I knew he had to go. It was a difficult thing for both of us.

Leffler: Both Iraqis and military officials who were in Iraq saw that transition between you and Garner as marking a significant reversal of substantive policy. Did you have a perception of that at the time?

Bremer: Which policies?

Leffler: One with regard to de-Ba'athification, one with regard to the army, and thirdly trying to expedite a quick occupation, like that quote, and giving, devolving authority quickly to a so-called provisional government.

Bremer: Let's take those one at a time. First, on de-Ba'athification, there was no policy other than [Tommy] Franks's Freedom Message, which had already outlawed the Ba'ath Party. There was no other plan. There wasn't anything. Garner was the one who was going to sign the document on May 9th, the day before I left, when I asked Feith to hold it off. So I can't imagine there was any difference with Garner on de-Ba'athification.

Secondly, the discussion about the Army had been ongoing, as I mentioned yesterday, with Slocombe for several weeks before I joined. There were certainly people on the ground in Iraq, U.S. Army people or military people, who still thought there was a possibility of effectively reconstituting the Iraqi Army. We discussed that yesterday. I don't have anything new to add on that.

In terms of the third thing, which was the pace of the transition, of course there was a change. There was no question. Garner, I assume, did have a plan to announce some kind of an IIA, Interim Iraqi Administration, by May 15th, or he wouldn't have said it to the press. As I mentioned in my book, the meeting I had with the group—what did we decide to call them? Not exiles—

Riley: Externals.

Bremer: Externals. On Friday night, the 16th, I was very clear we were going to take our time. At least several of them—Chalabi I think talked about—I don't have a full record of the meeting, but several of them were unhappy to hear that we were going to take more time. So I accept the point on the last one; that was the policy. The policy was to do that. If people on the ground perceived it that way, they got it right. That was right.

Nelson: Can you talk—go ahead, Mel.

Leffler: Just a quick follow-up. Do you think that is when Iraqis—

Bremer: I did not hear it from Iraqis except on the last one.

Leffler: On the last one.

Bremer: Yes, on de-Ba'athification they felt we didn't go far enough, fast enough, and hard enough. On the army they were—as I wrote in the book, it was very clear that recalling the army would have started a civil war and no longer have had cooperation from the Shi'a. So on the first two points to the extent I heard anything from the Iraqis it was that we didn't go far enough.

On the third point, it is true. The small group of Iraqis to whom we had been talking correctly perceived that the U.S. government had decided to go a different way or more slowly than what they had been led to believe. That is correct.

Leffler: Would you agree or disagree with the sense that that was a moment in time when Iraqis begin to see that the so-called liberation is transitioning into an occupation?

Bremer: I don't think they needed that. All they had to do was read the UN resolution. They didn't need me to say anything or Garner to say anything. The UN resolution clearly said we were an occupying power. There wasn't any secret to it. That was it.

Perry: How did you feel about that?

Bremer: I hated it.

Perry: Rumsfeld says it is an unfortunate semantic.

Bremer: Absolutely. And I never figured out, by the way, and still haven't, how it got there. We obviously didn't have very creative lawyers. Creative lawyers would have figured out some way to give us whatever authority they thought we needed without labeling us as "the occupying power." I said to the Iraqis, "It isn't comfortable to be occupied and let me tell you, it's not very comfortable for an American to be called an occupier." It was a terrible word.

Riley: Did it translate in Arabic?

Bremer: I guess so. It certainly was a poor choice of words in any language.

Nelson: I want to ask you to talk about the writing of the interim constitution, how that came about. As somebody who has an interest not only in history but also in representative government as a basic desirable trait of human society, the extent to which you conceived of the task as well as how it was executed.

Bremer: Well, part of the background is that virtually every Iraqi to whom I or my staff spoke in the first month to six weeks while we were working on getting the Governing Council put together said we needed a new constitution. They had had a fairly reasonable constitution in 1925 with the British and the British occupation. That had been supplanted when the Ba'athists came to power. The most recent constitution was in 1970 and it was just laughable. Aside from the Revolutionary Council, there was no structure. Saddam paid no attention to what was written anyway. He just did whatever he wanted to do. So the Iraqis we consulted all said we need a new

constitution. They wanted it to be progressive, modern, whatever word you want to use.

So I don't remember any Iraqi saying we don't need a new constitution; everybody wanted that. It was certainly my view that if we were going to get them on the path to representative government you needed a constitution to provide some kind of political architecture. You could argue the British could say, "We never had a constitution." Yes, OK, but since Magna Carta you've had a lot of experience, particularly with the concept of divided power. The American experience, anyway, is that a constitution helps frame the political structure. It defines how the government is organized. Is it a republic? Is it a monarchy? Is the Parliament bicameral? How does the whole thing work? What kind of rights are inherent in the people?

I certainly was, in this respect, and so were my colleagues, and so I think was our government, influenced by our own historic experience with a Constitution and a Bill of Rights. The plan was that we agreed with all the Iraqis that they should write the constitution, not us. One of the problems we had was—

Nelson: When you say the Iraqis do you mean the Governing Council?

Bremer: The Governing Council and others outside the Governing Council, anybody we could talk to, tribal leaders. It was pretty broad. They wanted a constitution. I think many of them saw a constitution as providing protections of the rights that had been abused for 30 years under Saddam.

One of the problems we had was Sistani. As nearly as I can tell what happened was when Sistani agreed to see Sergio de Mello. He was the only person in the entire time, 14 months, that Sistani agreed to meet, other than one meeting with de Mello's successor, Brahimi, in February 2004. De Mello seems to have put into Sistani's mind the idea that we were going to do what MacArthur did. I was going to write, or my team was going to write, a constitution, which provoked Sistani's fatwa that any group of Iraqis that was going to write the constitution was going to have to be elected.

I was at some pains in my early communications with Sistani to say we agree; Iraqis should write the constitution. We're not going to write the constitution. It is not Japan. We're going to turn it over to Iraqis. So the mechanism we came up with was the Governing Council would have as its first task appointing an assembly or a committee that would make recommendations on how to convoke some kind of a constituent assembly or constitutional convention. The title didn't really matter. It would be a group of Iraqis who would write the constitution. We suggested, and the governing Council agreed, that they would put together that committee within 30 days of their being appointed. They were appointed on July 13th, so the deadline at least in theory was August 15th.

That committee would itself have then a month to put together their recommendations back to the Governing Council. Well, as is the case everywhere in Iraq, deadlines slip. It wound up that the deadline for them to put together their committee was September 30th, so it slipped from the 15th to the 30th. By the 30th of September it became apparent that that committee was basically stuck. They were stuck on the Sistani fatwa. They couldn't figure out how to square the circle.

If the group that was going to write the constitution had to be elected, how were they going to get

elected? There was no way to get them elected.

Leffler: That was what Sistani actually insisted, right? That's the key point.

Bremer: That was the key initial—his position later changed. It became worse afterward, but that was his position from the outset. Exactly. So we thought there must be some way around this. We've got to find some way to slide past it. The Shi'a Islamists on the Governing Council were unwilling to slide past it because they were afraid they were going to go against Sistani's fatwa and they quite understandably didn't want to do that.

So in early October when I got back from Washington, I think on September 29th or 30th, I asked the governance guys where do we stand on this matter. They said the Governing Council is stuck; they can't get out of the bind. So I suggested to my political advisors that we start thinking of a plan B. How do we get around this? We're obviously caught. They spent October coming up with various ideas.

Nelson: Who did?

Bremer: The governance team, what in an embassy would be the political section but we called it "governance" for reasons I never understood. Anyway that's what it was called. We went through several iterations of how to get around this thing. In the end they came up with and test marketed with some of the Iraqi politicians the idea of an interim constitution. By early November the President of the Council was Talabani. You remember the Council had a different President every month.

Somebody on the governance team, it might have been Meghan O'Sullivan or Scott Carpenter, met with [Adnan al-] Pachachi in October. Pachachi had been GC [Governing Council] President, I think, in October. Pachachi was most senior member of the Governing Council. He had been Foreign Minister back in the late '50s, a respected Sunni, trained as a lawyer, if I remember. So he was very senior and very respected.

Pachachi loved this idea of the interim constitution, so we said we're going to make this Pachachi's idea, let Pachachi take it to Talabani as his idea, which he did. Talabani thought it was great. I said to Talabani—he was going to be President in November, and Hakim, the Shi'a Islamist, was due to be President in December—"It would be a great thing for you to do this while you're President, a good thing to do this in November. Let's get this idea of an interim constitution launched."

We had a rather busy weekend the weekend of the 8th and 9th of November sort of politicking this idea around with various Iraqis and trying to see if this would work. My team put together a cable that I sent the morning of Monday the 10th Baghdad time to the Vice President, Rumsfeld, Powell, and Rice saying, "We have this new idea, an interim constitution. We think from our soundings that we have taken—" By that time two Iraqi politicians had traveled to Najaf to talk to Sistani about it, Talabani and Adel Mahdi. I told Washington it looks like it can work. It gets us out of this problem. It allows us still to get a constitution.

I should say the background of this was, you will recall from the book, in late October, the week before that, I'd been in Washington and we had a discussion between a Pentagon proposal in

effect to get out with or without a constitution by April 9th, the one-year anniversary of the liberation of Baghdad. My view was that it would be impossible to realize the President's vision for Iraq without a constitution. We needed that, which Condi was a very strong proponent of also. We need a constitution.

So against that background we were trying to come up with a proposal that would both be consistent with Sistani's fatwa and get the Iraqis a constitution. We had the meetings in Washington. It's all written down there. We got the agreement of November 15th and then Sistani moved the goalposts.

Riley: Were you getting pushback from any sectors in Washington as the process was moving along, or was this a case where there was general agreement that you were headed in the right direction?

Bremer: I think the discussions in October showed that the Pentagon—when I say the Pentagon in this case I mean OSD. I don't think the military took a position. But OSD was less committed to the idea of a constitution. They were focused on finding ways to leave more quickly. I don't remember any pushback about the TAL [Transitional Administrative Law] from Rumsfeld. In fact I think it is in the book. I think I called him on November 10 and he said, "I don't have any opinion. Why don't you talk to the Vice President?" Or something. He sort of dusted me off.

Powell at the NSC meeting with the President did say, "This is very ambitious," because the deadlines were all in the proposal. We were now pretty much committed to leaving by the end of June and to getting the constitution by March 1st, which was ambitious because most legal experts, American and Iraqi, said it is going to take three or four months to write a constitution. We were putting ourselves under significant pressure, but there was not pushback. Nobody was saying, "No, no, we shouldn't do this." They were saying it was risky. I said I agree.

Riley: That was the basis of the question. Because of the timelines involved, the people in Rumsfeld's operation might not have viewed this as this is too ambitious, we have to find some way to short circuit it or discover an alternative that won't get us tied up in endless negotiations over constitutional questions.

Bremer: If I remember correctly, in one of the October meetings, Rumsfeld, when we initially had a timeline, I think we had a full three months for the constitution. It would have taken us to the end of March and Rumsfeld said, "Can't we push it back to the first of March?" and I said, "Yes, we can."

Riley: It was a timing issue rather than one of content or substance?

Bremer: In the November meetings nobody that I remember said we didn't need a constitution, let's just get out.

Riley: Going back to the metaphor, was there much of the 8,000-mile screwdriver on the contents of the constitution? In other words, did you have people in the State Department who are itching to get their fingers on—

Bremer: Well, once we got the negotiations over the text going, there were a variety of people in

Baghdad. There may have been some who just arrived. There were a whole lot of lawyers around, advising lawyers, advising other lawyers, advising me. There were a lot of people.

Perry: These were American lawyers?

Bremer: Yes.

Perry: Mostly from the State Department?

Bremer: I don't know. They were from all over, some from State, some from universities. There were a lot of people who wanted to have their hand in. I don't remember any problems in that respect. I'm not an attorney, so I wasn't going to get down in the weeds and pretend that I knew better about it. Our objective was to get a structure in place, to get a federalist approach to the overall government, and to have checks and balances.

I was very explicit to the Iraqis, and I said it to the pretender to the throne. "I don't take a position on whether it should be a republic or a monarchy. That's up to you." I said to him, "If you can get the support for a monarchy, do it." "We've had , problem with monarchs, but I don't have a problem with you guys. It's up to you." I didn't get deep into it. He never polled above 2 percent, never got anybody elected to the Parliament. I wanted there to be a bill of rights, a federalist structure, and checks and balances. Whether checks and balances would involve a bicameral or a unicameral parliament, or how that would all work out, that was something for the Iraqis to negotiate. There were a lot of Americans helping both in Washington and in Baghdad.

Riley: Europeans as well?

Bremer: Oh, yes, there were Brits and there were Australians. There were quite a few Australians in the Office of General Counsel in the CPA. There were Iraqi Americans, Iraqi Brits. There were a lot. It was a big group of people.

Nelson: You say you wanted a federalist system. What would be the equivalent in Iraq of the states?

Bremer: The provinces federal structure was a red line for the Kurds. If we didn't have a federalist system, the Kurds were not going to buy in. In my very first meetings with the Kurds, even before we got started, way back in the summer when I went up to visit the Kurds in May or June, I said we were in favor of a federalist structure, which calmed them down.

Perry: Did you talk to them about religious freedom and the role of religion?

Bremer: Oh, yes. In the drawn-out negotiations a major question became whether Islam is "*the"* source of law for Iraq, or is it "*a"* source. I think in the Afghan constitution we had approved it says "the." I said "the" goes too far. Freedom of religion is affirmed twice, in two different places, as is a full range of what we would consider a bill of rights in terms of individual freedom and respect for individuals not based on gender, ethnicity, and so on. I think it was quite an accomplishment. It was not easy.

Leffler: I'm just curious about a detail. Sistani's son often acted as the interlocutor.

Bremer: Mohammed Reda [Sistani]?

Leffler: Yes. Did you deal with him?

Bremer: Did I?

Leffler: Did you talk to him?

Bremer: No.

Leffler: Did he talk to people on your staff?

Bremer: Oh, yes.

Leffler: What was the impression of him?

Bremer: I never met him. I can't give you an impression.

Riley: Sistani?

Bremer: I never met either of them.

Leffler: The son was the interlocutor.

Bremer: Let me say, when I look back on it, although we had difficulties with Sistani because of his fatwa and then his subsequent moving of the goalposts, which cost us probably a month or two, on the whole Sistani was helpful. I said to him in my messages, my letters, "Your vision for Iraq is very similar to the President's vision for Iraq. It's an Iraq where the people are free, where they are respected as human beings, and where they have a right to choose their government, and that is basically what President Bush wants. So let's work together." In the end he was helpful. But he did move the goalposts almost immediately after the Governing Council announced the November 15 agreement. Now Sistani insisted that any Iraqi government to which the CPA turned over sovereignty, authority, had to be elected. So we were pushed back into the very corner the interim constitution was designed to get us out of.

Sistani was only finally persuaded that if we had to wait for an elected Iraqi government to end to occupation, the turnover of sovereignty would be delayed by up to two years. The "solution" to this bind was Brahimi's agreement with Sistani in March 2004 that—despite the difficulties—the first parliamentary elections had to be held not later than January 2005. UN election experts and the GC election official all said this would be too soon for the first postconflict elections. But Sistani was immovable on this point.

Perry: You've spoken several times about Iraqi public opinion and some polling. How does one do polling in a situation such as that?

Bremer: First of all, I always took the polls with a bit of a grain of salt. It was very difficult. We didn't get any polling until September 2003. We just couldn't get people out into the provinces. Secondly, I'm skeptical of polling after 30 years of dictatorship. Someone knocks on the door

and says, “I want to ask you a few questions.” If you’re an Iraqi you say, “What’s your question?” The answer is, “Yes, I agree with whatever you say.” So one has to be cautious. But you could see trends in the polls. In the end there were quite a few—I think we used two or three different groups during polling. I don’t remember exactly. There was a group contracted by the State Department, there were two others who were doing polls. Most of it was I think funded out of the State Department.

You could see trends. People were delighted with the de-Ba’athification. That came through loud and clear. They wanted a new kind of government. They were mostly concerned about—if you said, “What’s your concern?” it was security. If you asked were you optimistic or pessimistic about the future, they were always optimistic, which was stunning, particularly when the violence really picked up after the CPA folded up. Nonetheless, the polls continued to show they were optimistic about the future; they are a very resilient people. So you could get general trends. You had to be a little bit cautious about them unless you could see the same thing three or four months in a row. We were polling probably every three weeks or so.

Nelson: The ideas that were critical to you in terms of the Iraqi constitution, checks and balances, federalism, bill of rights, these are all Western and to a large degree American notions of constitutional government.

Bremer: Yes.

Nelson: Did you get, to use Russell’s term, pushback from Iraqis who were saying this is not—

Bremer: No, but on the other hand people we were talking to were obviously self-selected from an educated elite.

Nelson: Right.

Bremer: The 1925 constitution that the British did was pretty good. It was a western-style constitution with some of these concepts in it, particularly the concept of individual freedom and rights and so forth. The British had established law schools in the ’20s when they were there, which is why lawyers are a highly respected cadre in Iraq, as we found. Apart from Egypt, this is really the place where law in Islamic countries was developed. So the people who would present themselves with ideas about the constitution were automatically not going to be the farmers and date growers and so forth. These were people who understood.

There was a considerable back-and-forth over the question of the role of religion, as you would expect. It took quite a while to get that sorted out.

Riley: Did the President ever weigh in on this with Iraqis and give his own personal—

Bremer: Not that I know of. He wouldn’t have seen very many Iraqis in that time frame. There was another group that came back to Washington in December 2003. I didn’t come because I was over there with Rumsfeld. Yes, there was a group that came in January. I brought a group back in January that included Pachachi and a couple of others. We had a meeting with the President in the Oval Office, but at that time we just were getting started with the Constitution. It was January 15th or 16th. I think his comments were mostly of a general nature. His comments

were along the lines of, “We think it’s good that we get this process going.”

Nelson: Just back to these principles of constitutional government. What about the concern of Shi’as that their majority status be represented in whatever government is created? What about the concern of Kurds and Sunnis that they not be overrun by a Shi’a majority? Did those get manifested in the constitution in explicit ways? Or was it just the sense that the checks and balances and federalism—you don’t have to worry about majority tyranny?

Bremer: It was mostly handled by the discussions we had with them. It was essentially important to say, and I said it many times to the Shi’a, majority rule is not majoritarian rule. Majority rule means respect for the rights of the minority and the ability for peaceful transfer of power. That is a concept that is not easy to get if you’ve never had any democracy or any historic experience. So it was really to me the key problem.

If you could accept the fact that the minority had rights and that the majority couldn’t just run a steamroller, then it followed from there that you could have federalism. So my approach was to try to get them to understand the philosophic point and then have the legal consequences follow in the document.

Did we succeed? Well, we got the document, and as I said to the Iraqis after we got it, it was an historic achievement. But it is still just a piece of paper. The constitution is just a piece of paper. You have to give it life. And there have been some problems with parts of it with subsequent governments. For the Kurds, in a way the agreement to federalism gave them the comfort they needed. That was really their key demand.

For the Sunnis the problem was much more difficult. I think we talked about it yesterday. The Sunnis effectively had been running this place for more than a millennium one way or another—themselves, the Turks, the Hashemites, then the British, then the Ba’athists. So for them it was very difficult because they had to accept a fundamental shift in the power relationship. That was a fact of life, and that, by the way, was going to be a fact of life once we threw out Saddam whatever else happened, whether you put in a new government now or you did it in a year, whether you had a constitution or didn’t—that was a fundamental fact of life and it was difficult for the Sunnis. The only comfort that we could offer them was precisely the same one, that minority rights were going to be defended, were going to be recognized and defended in whatever structure we put together.

Nelson: Yesterday you said that the judiciary in Iraq had a certain integrity to it even under Saddam.

Bremer: Yes.

Nelson: You haven’t talked about an independent judiciary, rule of law. When you talk about the constitution can you say something about that?

Bremer: I called on the Minister of Justice, shortly after he was appointed on September 1st, 2003. His first request was to establish an independent judiciary, which I did that same day. I went back, got my General Counsel in, said to prepare a decree that establishes an independent judiciary, and I signed it the same day. So we had already established an independent judiciary. I

don't remember any Iraqi even raising the question. It was just taken as a given that then would also be reflected as one of the checks and balances in the constitution. When I say checks and balances, that was one of them.

There was a check and balance between the executive, the legislature, and the judiciary. Then there is a question of how you do checks and balances within the legislature, bicameral, not bicameral, whatever.

Nelson: Something about that statement, "I signed the document and created an independent judiciary," that sounds a little too facile. In other words, what was it that was going to make the judiciary independent as an enduring phenomenon?

Bremer: We removed the authority of the Minister of Justice to oversee the courts. I had already established in July the independence of the Central Bank for the first time. The head of the Central Bank no longer worked for the Minister of Finance or the Revolutionary Council or anybody else. He was independent. So we had already established the fact that we were going to make certain institutions independent. Later on we did the same things with Inspectors-General.

Nelson: So how were judges to be chosen?

Bremer: I was going to choose them until we left.

Nelson: I mean, under the constitution. Under the constitution how would they be chosen so they would be independent?

Bremer: They were going to be chosen—I don't remember exactly how it was going to work. I think maybe the President was going to choose them with some advice. I don't remember the details. But this was not a contentious issue. The question that it was going to be independent was not an issue people worried about. They understood it. Maybe most of the people working on the thing were Iraqi lawyers, so they thought it was a good idea.

Perry: This is a follow-on to Mike's line of questioning about constitutional culture. Were there efforts on the part of the U.S. to try to create this constitutional culture among the people or to bolster civic education? Sort of a Federalist Papers? An attempt through media to get the word out?

Bremer: Yes. We talked briefly yesterday about what I called the "shock absorbers," what is also called sometimes "civil society." We had started a program of building out what we called democracy centers, women's rights centers, and human rights centers throughout the provinces already in the summer of '03. By September, October of '03 we had them in most of the provinces. Among other things, in the democracy effort we had an NGO [nongovernmental organization] called IFES [International Foundation for Election Systems]. It's a Washington-based group. It was already on contract when I got there to help us conduct effectively—they weren't quite Federalist Papers operations, but they were a series of meetings in these various democracy centers around the country.

I did one down in Nasiriyah and another in Maysan. They got a group of people in, tribal leaders, community leaders and so forth. They came and talked about the principles of representative

government. So we did a fair amount of that. Obviously it was going to have to in the end be the Iraqis who led the effort, not us.

Perry: Did they start that while you were there? For example, did members of the Governing Council—

Bremer: They didn't do much about it, frankly. The Governing Council in the end was more concerned—I guess not surprisingly, they're politicians—with what their role was going to be in the next government. So they didn't spend a lot of time doing that kind of outreach. When we set up the Governing Council, in one of the first meetings with them, I said, "By the way, we have a television station." We were the only ones broadcasting at that time. "Any of you guys want to use the television, come on over and use it whenever you want or once a week go for an hour." Only one of them ever took any advantage of that, which was [Ibrahim al-] Jaafari. His poll numbers started to go up.

It's not quite on your point, but it's related. We encouraged the Governing Council right from the start to try to communicate with the Iraqi people about the new Iraq and what it meant and so forth. They weren't as forward-leaning as we would have hoped, before or after the TAL.

Riley: I've got a different line of questioning, but I don't want to cut off anything on the constitution. This follows on one of the lines of questions Mel had had earlier. One of the places where it's clear from your book that there was disagreement among people within the coalition and between you and Washington was on Muqtada [al-Sadr].

Bremer: Yes.

Riley: Why don't you start from the beginning and hit the high points and tell us a little bit about what was going on there. From your perspective, what were the major problems that you were experiencing in your position and trying to get the rest of the United States government to do what you thought they should do in dealing with this person?

Bremer: OK, just to review the sequence. One of the major members of the [Marja'iyyah], Ayatollah [Abdul Majid al-] Khoei, who had been in exile in London, came back to Iraq on April 10th and went back to Najaf where he was killed by a group of Iraqis. In early July, Muqtada al-Sadr had a newspaper, whose name I can't remember, that started writing articles essentially attacking the occupying forces and so forth and so on, which became more and more violent in its words over the next week or two. His paper then published a list of 124 Iraqis who were "accomplices of the occupier"—they happened to be people who were interpreters for the military mostly. They were identified by name, and the paper called on readers to "take appropriate action." Two of these people were killed within a week of the list appearing.

Meanwhile at about that same time—we're talking now the middle of July—something like that, the guy who was our senior advisor to the Ministry of Justice, Major General Don Campbell, who was a sitting judge in New Jersey and a Reserve Major General in the Army, came to me and said an Iraqi magistrate—just to review, Iraq has have the Napoleonic system, the French system rather than the American system. A magistrate is actually a prosecutor.

An Iraqi magistrate had issued an arrest warrant for Muqtada al-Sadr and 22 accomplices for

killing Ayatollah al-Khoei, the Iraqi magistrate who had talked to the Iraqi police who were willing to execute this arrest warrant, but the police told him that they believed Muqtada al-Sadr has something like 160 people guarding him in Kufa where he lived, a neighboring town to Najaf. The Iraqi magistrate and police would like coalition forces to provide perimeter security while they go in and execute the arrest warrant. I said, "That sounds OK to me. What else do we know?"

Judge Campbell said he understood the Marines—at that time the Marines' AOR was in the south—the Marines had done some investigating and there seemed to be some doubt among the—I think there were two JAG [judge advocate general] Marines down there—about what they thought about the evidence and whether there was sufficient evidence. I asked for those two Marine lawyers—I say Marine, they might have been Army, but they were attached to the Marines. Anyway, I said why don't we get these American military lawyers up here to Baghdad to talk to them if they looked at the evidence.

The Marines said no, they wouldn't send the JAGs up to Baghdad. No reason given. So I deputized Don Campbell and an Australian who was a lawyer in the CPA General Counsel's office to go down, to meet the military lawyers, review the evidence and come back with a recommendation as to what they thought about this arrest warrant. Apparently the dossier was in Najaf. So they went down and after two days came back and brought me a translation of the indictment. It described in some detail what had happened that April day and what the witnesses said had happened, what they had seen Muqtada and his cronies do.

Again, I'm not an attorney. It looked pretty persuasive to me. Campbell and the Australian lawyer said it was their professional view that there was sufficient grounds to execute the arrest warrant. In any case, the Iraqi magistrate had asked for our help, and what was on my mind was two things. First of all, the fact that Muqtada's newspaper had in effect incited violence against two people, two Iraqis who were interpreters for us and who were subsequently murdered. More important was the question of the rule of law. One of the fundamental attributes of a representative government, a decent government, is that there is a rule of law. Equal justice for all it says, right there, equal justice for all. Here was an Iraqi magistrate duly trained, with evidence that our lawyers said was persuasive. They argued that at least a case could be made asking for our help to enforce Iraqi law against an Iraqi. So my view was we should help him.

Riley: Was the decision vetted?

Bremer: There was a lot of back-and-forth now with Washington because the need from our point of view was the request that the Coalition forces provide perimeter security. We were going to have to deploy troops to put—I don't know, a company or some level of American or coalition forces in the perimeter to keep other Muqtada supporters from coming in and interfering with the Iraqi police who were going to execute the warrant. There was a lot of back-and-forth on how this was going to work, when it was going to work. It got complicated because at some point the Iraqi magistrate said he wanted to exhume al-Khoei's body to do some forensic work to make his case stronger. I can't remember what that problem was. It might have had to do with the knife wounds or whatever.

Anyway, he had to exhume it, but to exhume it, because al-Khoei had been an ayatollah, the

magistrate had to get Sistani's approval to have him exhumed, so he had to go back to Sistani. This went back and forth. This took us into the first ten days or so of August. At this point—I can't remember the sequence exactly—the Pentagon, by which I mean OSD, mostly Feith, I think, was sending questions all the time about this and about details of the planned operation. We kept answering the questions. There were more questions about how it was going to work, what role would the Americans play. We kept saying the Americans are going to provide perimeter security; the Iraqi police will enforce a duly-issued Iraqi arrest warrant. It has to do with the rule of law.

Then I learned that the Marines were, through military channels, opposing this operation. Just to top it off, then the British decided they didn't like this all that much. David Richmond, who was at that time Acting Deputy for the British, told me—

Riley: Did you find this out through channels in country, or are you hearing this through Washington?

Bremer: We found out about the British in country. I don't remember how we learned of the Marine opposition. I think it came through Washington somehow. One of the CPA guys in Washington must have picked it up.

Riley: But you're still down the hall from—

Bremer: Sanchez was involved in our discussions. He never said anything to me about opposing giving the Iraqi police support. Rick was quite good. He said, "I need 48 hours to do it." I understand. I didn't have any pushback from him, to me anyway. I don't know what he was hearing from the Marines. In fairness to the Marines they were due to out deploy on Labor Day, so they had about two or three weeks to go in their deployment. They'd fought the war. They were the guys who fought in the south. So you can understand you don't particularly want to fight again, if it was going to be a fight. There was very little violence in the south at this point. We were not taking casualties down there. It was quiet.

On the other hand, I felt pretty strongly that this was a rule of law question and nobody was above the law. In any case we were ready to move on the 18th of August, finally. Everything seemed to be in place. It's in the book—at midnight Baghdad time the night of August 17–18 we get a long list again from Feith. I don't know, 10 or 12 questions, all of which we had answered one way or the other before. My deputy, Clay McManaway, who was on the receiving end of this, shook his head and said, "I don't know what's going on."

We knew there was stalling because we'd heard about stalling, and this just looked like another stall to us. We answered the questions. It took us until two or three in the morning. Then of course the next day the UN bomb came and the whole subject changed. So the question went on the back burner at that point for a while until it came up again in October and then again in March or something.

I think it's a great regret that we were unable to help the Iraqis carry out the arrest. At that time the estimate was that Muqtada had fewer than 60 followers. The CIA, I subsequently learned, was telling people, "Don't worry about this guy. He'll fade out. He's not going to be a problem." They got that about as right as they got WMD. So anyway it was regrettable that we didn't move

on Muqtada then. Then he subsequently started killing Americans in October. So that's Muqtada.

Riley: The counterargument, had this gone sour, had it gone bad, if we—

Bremer: Yes, there would have been risks.

Riley: What was the major downside other than obviously some casualties?

Bremer: By the way, again I think it's in the book, the Iraqis were encouraging us to get rid of Muqtada. He's from a family that is highly respected. The Sadrs were, particularly his father. But he himself was viewed by the Iraqis—I never met him so I don't have a personal view—as a rather uncouth, uneducated young man. Nobody knew quite how old he was, 29 or 30. Apparently he used a lot of foul language, which is not the Iraqi style. Iraqis don't do that. A lot of his followers were basically alcoholics and drug addicts as it turned out.

So the Iraqi view of him was—move on him. Of course later, I can't remember which of the various crises, Sistani was sent a message saying it would be nice if he disappeared. It's kind of an interesting way to say it. We knew there would be consequences, although to me one risk would be that you'd have violence in Najaf, although he was actually in Kufa. We knew where he lived.

Riley: Is this case illustrative of your broader relationships with Washington? Again, going back, we're trying to understand how you were dealing with your home government.

Bremer: Well, I guess it was in a way. I did feel it was legitimate for Washington to ask questions. It was going to be a risky operation. I felt we had answered them a number of times, that we had assessed the risks, and that we were getting second-guessed yet again.

Nelson: You know, this general relationship between you in the field and people back in Washington. I'm thinking summer of '03 with 115-degree temperatures.

Bremer: When we were lucky.

Nelson: Four or five hours of sleep a night, all the pressures of being in a hot seat not just literally but figuratively, and then getting at the last minute a dozen questions or whatever it was from people who are in their well-heated—

Bremer: Well-cooled.

Nelson: Well-cooled offices going home to sleep in their comfortable beds. Does that over time just become like a pebble in your shoe? We're here; we're in the midst of this. We have people sitting in the back seat telling us how to drive.

Bremer: Yes and no. Again, on this one this was a pretty big decision. It was not one I was going to take myself. I understood it had implications. Among other things, as we said earlier I didn't command troops. I couldn't make this operation happen myself. If our troops were going to provide perimeter security, they had to have orders down through the military command. So it was perfectly legitimate for Washington to ask questions about this.

I did feel in this case that after we'd answered the same questions several times, enough is enough. Then if you don't want us to do it, give us an order not to do it and tell me how to fix this problem. How do I then go back to the Iraqi magistrate and say, "Oh, yes, well, rule of law doesn't really mean equal justice for everybody"?

Leffler: But they never really told you that.

Bremer: No.

Leffler: They just belabored it.

Bremer: They belabored it and belabored it.

Leffler: Then after the UN bombing it was just unimaginable to pursue—

Bremer: At that time we just had a lot of other more important matters and it sort of slid off the back burner.

Leffler: Then it reemerges in October.

Nelson: I wanted to get him to talk about in general, over time, what is it like? Does your attitude get callused toward Washington just because of the situation you're in and the situation they're in? The different levels of information you feel you have to prepare for them.

Bremer: I think it was probably more frustrating to the guys on my staff than it was to me because they were getting these little pinpricks that we talked about yesterday from the lower-level people saying do this, do that, or the other. Particularly once Condi established the daily phone calls I was pretty comfortable that I was on track with at least what the President wanted, assuming that that is what Condi was reflecting, which I think she was.

Then there were disagreements about how quickly to turn over sovereignty with the Pentagon. Those were to me legitimate disagreements that needed to be aired. I tried to take the view that I shouldn't let the pinpricks drive my view. I wanted to focus on the places where there really were problems—problems is the wrong word—where there were issues that needed to be discussed seriously, where in the end the President had to make decisions.

I did feel that there were people out of government back in Washington the whole time who were sitting in their comfortable armchairs at think tanks or up in Congress who had a lot of ideas that they liked to express in the press about how we should do X or Y. As I said yesterday, my attitude was fine, great, come on over. Got a bunk, here's your helmet, here's your flak jacket, let's get to work. I don't remember anybody picking up the offer.

Nelson: I know you didn't mean to suggest that people in Congress are out of the government.

Bremer: No.

Leffler: There are two lines of argument. I'm just curious. You're establishing the daily contact with Condi Rice—

Bremer: She established it. It wasn't my idea.

Leffler: Once you have the daily contact. Do you think that reinforced Secretary Rumsfeld's inclination to wash his hands of the issue?

Bremer: Yes.

Leffler: Because one of the striking things that goes well beyond your tenure there as a reader of the literature is the Secretary's ostensible indifference to a remarkably deteriorating situation in 2005, 2006. As simply a reader, an outsider, I find it truly hard to comprehend that a Secretary of Defense is as aloof as he seems to become from such an ominous and worsening situation.

Bremer: I can't comment on that from personal knowledge, because I wasn't in government. If you go back to the December 6th meeting we had at the Baghdad airport, Rumsfeld basically said to me, "I guess you're reporting to Condi now." I can't remember what the quote is. It's in the book. "I'm sort of leaving it to you." By December it certainly was clear to me that he was, I wouldn't say washing his hands of it, because that would be going too far, but he had sort of withdrawn. I had anticipated this was going to be a problem in my conversation with Condi when she called me to tell me about her support group in early October. I told her this was going to give me some problems at the Pentagon.

Leffler: At this point did you stop your daily phone calls—

Bremer: I still talked to him. The daily phone calls lasted maybe two months when we were in the phasing in, and then it would be once a week or something. I still talked to Rumsfeld, but it was pretty clear after the decisions that the President took in November about the process, rounded up with the November 15th agreement, Rumsfeld's focus was going to move and he made that clear to me in the meeting in December. I can't comment after I left. I don't know what he did.

Leffler: Let's just go back to your dealing with Muqtada al-Sadr in October. Were you inclined at that point to go after him and arrest him in a serious way? And what were the dynamics at that point in time? Ultimately once again it's called off.

Bremer: Yes, my memory of the details is a little vaguer though. At that time as I recall he had killed a couple of Americans in Karbala, and the arrest warrant was still outstanding. It wasn't ours; it was an Iraqi magistrate's. It did seem to me that we should take up the question again. I don't remember quite how it petered into the sand, but it did. It sort of dried into the sand again. I don't remember—

Leffler: So it never became—

Bremer: It wasn't as close as it was in August.

Leffler: I see.

Bremer: In August we had a plan of operation. We actually had the maps. We were ready to go.

Leffler: Did it ever become close again?

Bremer: Not as close as August. No, there was another talk about it in February.

Leffler: I'm struck by your assessment that he had very little support in August.

Bremer: That was the CIA's assessment.

Leffler: But you yourself thought—

Bremer: Certainly the Iraqis that I spoke to gave me the impression they didn't support him. The important point I was trying to make was the Agency's approach was he has very few supporters. Leave him alone and he'll go away.

Leffler: But at the same time one was reading in the press—and this is what I'm inviting you to comment on, that he had a lot of support in Baghdad city—

Bremer: Sadr City.

Leffler: Is that true as you observed it? Did your polling show that? Was that something that you were worried about?

Bremer: I don't remember the polling showing it. There was an incident in the summer in Sadr City where a helicopter knocked down a flag of his by mistake. I don't remember the details. The flag was flying on a building. The helicopter came too close and the prop wash knocked down the flag. There was a demonstration. I would say I don't think as early as this period we're talking about still, which is 2003, I don't think his support in Sadr City was really manifested at that point. I think it came later. I am struggling with my memory here.

Certainly once it became clear that he had support and his militia was operating there and so forth—that was in the spring—then it was clear that he had picked up support contrary to the Agency's estimate and it was going to be a bigger problem.

Leffler: How would you explain the growing support for him?

Bremer: I think the lack of services and security in Baghdad in general and in particular in Sadr City was a problem, open sewers—

Leffler: How is he explaining it? By blaming it on the Americans, essentially?

Bremer: Sure.

Leffler: These terrible conditions.

Bremer: "There's no electricity, and you guys freed us in three weeks. Where's the electricity? Let's go." So yes, he played on that, and he played no doubt on what is there, which all the experts say isn't there, which is a sense of national pride. The Iraqis are a proud people. Even though the country is by most terms rather young, now almost 100 years old, you scratch an Iraqi and he starts talking about Hammurabi and Nebuchadnezzar. They have a sense of their history.

Perry: Is this where the concept of occupation is so damaging?

Bremer: Absolutely.

Riley: I'm going to call a break and we'll come back, and we have about an hour and 20 minutes before we'll be done.

[BREAK]

Bremer: Just a quick point on Muqtada al-Sadr. One of the problems that developed with him in February is we found that he had set up "People's Courts" in Najaf and Kufa, which were not duly constituted by anybody and were not overseen by judges, where they had found people guilty of various alleged crimes. He had also set up his own prisons. We had a policeman who escaped who had been tortured there, and two women who had been raped in these prisons. So Muqtada al-Sadr effectively was reinstituting Saddam Hussein's system—extraordinary courts overseen by people who were not judges, prisons that he operated on his own where torture and rape were being practiced. Anyway, that's enough on Muqtada al-Sadr. I just wanted to get on the record what an evil person he is.

Riley: We don't have time to deal with each of the return visits that you made and I don't know if they were on the order of a dozen.

Bremer: You mean back to Washington?

Riley: Yes. I wonder if you could reflect back and maybe pick out one or two or three that stand out in your memory as being particularly important on whatever dimension, either for your own personal health and wellbeing or in terms of critical turning points or in terms of making important contacts.

Perry: Interactions with the President.

Riley: Exactly. How important were the trips home for you?

Bremer: From my own point of view and my family's they were very important. I didn't get back until I'd been there three months. The first visit was very important in reconnecting with my family. That was in July. It was also important in learning about the problems we had with communication. We talked about the fact that our communications didn't seem to be getting out to the interagency.

The trip I made in September was important because it was the time I made the appearances in Congress for the supplemental, which was obviously important to our long-term economic—it turned out it didn't have much impact on the time I was there, and for the dinner my wife and I had with the President and Mrs. Bush, which was really a time to establish a more social and personal relationship with the President.

I guess the most important visit back was in November—the decisions in early November we talked about earlier, the 11th and 12th of November, when we had the shift in strategy toward a transitional constitution, which established the timeline for departure of June 30th. That was probably the most important single one, and it was the one where effectively the President put to rest the idea that we were going to try to leave without a constitution and established a deadline for me.

I had one other visit in January and then I didn't come at all for the last six months. I think the November visit was the most important.

Riley: In these instances did the communications improve by the time you had come back? You indicated yesterday that part of what you were finding when you came was that the level of knowledge in the relevant community in Washington wasn't what you expected it to be.

Bremer: I don't think the fact that we tried to fix that by multiple-addressing cables made much difference.

Riley: Sure.

Bremer: What made a difference was the daily phone calls with Dr. Rice starting at her request in early October. I was still also communicating with the Pentagon, but at least at that point I felt we were better plugged in than apparently we had been in say May, June, and July. I don't think the fact that we fixed the cables had much influence over it.

Riley: You had also said at one point yesterday that—and I can't remember what context—we talked about resignations. Did you ever consider resigning during that time?

Bremer: I considered that I might get fired.

Leffler: When was that?

Bremer: In October. It was pretty clear by the end of October that pretty much everybody was bailing out on the initial idea about how we were going to conduct the occupation. The Pentagon had started pushing back in September. Colin, whom I met in Madrid on my way back to Washington in October, kept pressing me about, "What's your backup? This isn't going to work." He was right, but anyway he was pushing. And then of course there were these very contentious meetings at the end of October with my view and the Pentagon's view being presented first to the principals and then to the President. Andy Card's comment that I was being gamed, people were trying to blame me and so forth and so on. It certainly felt that way.

My view on resignation from government service is that other than for health or family reasons, it's appropriate to resign when you feel you're being asked to carry out a policy you can't agree with. That was not my problem. I could well understand if the President—and there was this leak in that same time frame that he was fed up with me and so forth, which he then had patently denied. I could well understand that he wanted to change pilots out there, in which case fine, that was his prerogative. I never thought of resigning. I would only have thought of that if I felt I was being asked to do something I couldn't in good conscience do, that I thought was wrong.

Riley: What are the big pieces that we're missing in 2004? We spent a lot of time focused on the beginning and the changes in the fall.

Perry: Abu Ghraib.

Bremer: Well, Abu Ghraib can be summarized in a couple of words, really. I found out about it in January when I was back in Washington on my last visit. A cable from Baghdad came in. Dan Senor came in to me, said there has been a story there has been some abuse. I said make it public right away, announce it, don't mess around. Announce it. We announced it the same day in Baghdad. Then the story sort of went subterranean. We didn't hear anything more really about it—it was being investigated, we knew that—until the pictures appeared on CBS or something—

Perry: *60 Minutes.*

Bremer: In late April or May?

Perry: Yes.

Bremer: Until then, other than the brief statement we issued in January, I heard nothing about the subject.

Perry: You heard nothing about the fact that the broadcast was coming up?

Bremer: No. The thing went sub rosa because they said it is being investigated.

Perry: Then you heard no more about it.

Bremer: It seemed reasonable. I didn't get asked questions about it either. It just sort of disappeared. I don't think I took a single question from the press about it. They were not asking us. It was OK because it was being investigated by the Pentagon. What would we know?

Then it came back with the pictures. Immediately after the CBS show, I arranged for a special meeting of the Governing Council for Sanchez and me to apologize to the Governing Council on behalf of America for what had happened, which we did. It was quite a powerful experience—after our statements, we went around the table and each Iraqi spoke. Effectively their message was: It's unfortunate but it is nowhere near as bad as what we suffered under Saddam Hussein. One of the members, Pachachi's deputy, his name I can't remember, had spent 11 years in solitary confinement in one of Saddam's prisons. He asked the others for permission to say something. He came to the table instead of Pachachi. Pachachi went to the back. This guy spoke for 15 minutes about what he had experienced, the torture and mistreatment, the pain and indignity.

Perry: When you first heard about it did your heart just sink, though, in terms of this concept of rule of law?

Bremer: Oh, yes.

Perry: We're trying to show the right approach to law?

Bremer: Of course. The interesting thing was that at least as long as I was there, the impact was much less in Iraq than it was in the United States, I think largely because our perspective is the system of law we've had for a couple of hundred years. Their perspective is the system of "ill-law," illegal, whatever you want to call it, "unlaw," that they had for 30 years. So they were measuring the story against this base and we were measuring it against our base.

Perry: So I guess we should say, what did the response in the U.S. tell you about what was happening to public opinion here?

Bremer: It was clear it was going to be a big problem, no question. But frankly that did not play out strongly locally. It was there for a couple of days. We had the meeting with the Governing Council and then frankly we got back to work trying to put together the interim government. But in the long run it obviously had an important impact in both places though not in Iraq while I was there.

Leffler: Don't you think it had an important impact underscoring what was widely perceived on the Arab street as the hypocrisy between American proclaimed principles and American actions?

Bremer: I don't know. I'm not an expert on the Arab street, whatever it might be. It did not have that effect in Iraq, at least not while I was there. Now obviously it became a much bigger issue elsewhere and it certainly had an effect on how people viewed us. My only point is, in terms of my job, it did not have time to become a really big issue. It just didn't.

Riley: Let me ask one question, and Mike wants to get back to the economy, which is one of the two big things you mentioned.

Bremer: Yes.

Riley: This is sort of the flip side of Mel's question. What kind of impressions were you developing about the American popular reaction and understanding about Iraq on these trips back and even on the occasion of your return in April or May of 2004? Were you in any way surprised—you had spent a lot of time overseas and you understand that the average man in the street doesn't pay a lot of attention to foreign affairs, but was there anything distinctive or striking to you about how the American public was dealing with Iraq?

Bremer: First of all, I never got back between January and when I left because of the—

Riley: But you had been back in intervals before.

Bremer: But the situation changed. You're talking about 2004; 2003 is different than 2004.

Riley: OK.

Bremer: We still had codels [congressional delegation trips] coming in 2004, and on the whole the codels went away better informed and more favorable, or less unfavorable, than they arrived. It was clear—I could read the press—that there was an undercurrent of opposition building in the public. I obviously couldn't judge how important that was sitting wherever it was, 6,000 miles away. By the time I left, my view was we had done, on the whole, a pretty good job, about as

well as we could have done under the circumstances.

I think a lot of the discontent really developed later. The security situation really deteriorated in 2005, 2006. The President did get reelected. So whatever the public view of Iraq was, it wasn't enough to cost him the election.

Riley: One other follow-up on this, Mike. That is, can you comment on the quality of reporting out of Iraq?

Bremer: You mean the press?

Riley: Press reporting of Iraq, both in the United States and the press that you were following in the languages that you read.

Bremer: It was on the whole poor. It was largely misinformed, largely looking only for the bad news. The example I often give is on these reconstruction projects. We did almost 30,000 reconstruction projects, while the CPA was there, which if you do the math is something like 65 projects a day, every day, seven days a week for 14 months. There were always good news stories to be told, whether it was a new hospital, a roof for a school, setting up an orphanage. We couldn't get the press to cover any of these good news stories and there were a lot of them. Of course there were also problems, but the press seemed to want to seek out the bad news. We never really got on top of that. Maybe it couldn't be done; I don't know.

We had a huge press corps there. We had more resident American journalists than any capital in the world except Washington. It was a huge press corps and they took a lot of care and feeding, which we tried to do.

Riley: In retrospect were there any reporters that you felt got it right more often than others that would be good sources for people in the future to come back to from your perspective?

Bremer: I don't remember which ones were there. I know Michael Gordon is working on a book and I have a lot of respect—Michael Hirsh, who at that time was with *Newsweek,* I think. I don't remember exactly where he was. He was quite good. Fred Hiatt from the *Washington Post* came and visited, and I think came away with a better understanding. Generally speaking, if they made an effort and we made an effort, they at least became more balanced. I don't ask that they write hagiography. We were not looking for that. We just wanted balanced reporting.

Riley: Sure. What about *Al Jazeera*? A problem for you?

Bremer: Big problem, more for the Iraqis than for me, although they became a problem in some cases for the military. *Al Jazeera* had in some cases appeared to have been tipped off about attacks beforehand and were there when Americans were attacked. That was not good. The Iraqis basically several times told us to kick them out of the country, pull their credentials.

Riley: This is Governing Council Iraqis?

Bremer: Yes. I resisted.

Perry: Freedom of the press?

Bremer: Yes, freedom of the press.

Nelson: I want to open up the subject of what was accomplished in Iraq during your time there under the domain of economic reconstruction or whatever the right term is.

Bremer: Yes. It's probably the biggest unreported side of the CPA. As I think I said yesterday, it's something I spent almost half my time on, although it's not the part that is in the book. That is mostly political. The size of the challenge was enormous. The country had been basically run into the ground by Saddam from a very successful medium-income country to effectively a per capita income smaller than Angola. They really had been devastated.

That had distorted pretty much everything. There was effectively no private economy. There were 192 SOEs, state-owned enterprises, that dominated what you could call the private economy. They all worked for the government. Everything was distorted. The electricity subsidies, the food subsidies we talked about, the lack of spending on infrastructure so that the electricity was not available. There were only three refineries that were producing less than a third of Iraq's daily needs of fuel oils. There was no banking system other than state banks, and the banks gave credit on the basis of bureaucratic decisions rather than the market. If you had political connections you could get a loan at an interest rate fixed by some bureaucrat in the Ministry of Finance, not by the market.

There was no system for electronic transfer of funds. Everything had to be done in cash, on site, and no checking accounts. You couldn't write a check in Baghdad to be drawn in Arbil or even in Kirkuk. The place was absolutely shattered. As I said, to me it was the biggest surprise how run down the economy was. It therefore became a much bigger challenge than just trying to turn the electricity on. It was a huge structural challenge, which obviously we made a start at. We didn't by any means solve it.

On the other hand, if you take a few metrics, when we got there Saddam's government had estimated that the prewar unemployment rate was 60 percent. When we left it was 10 percent. Inflation had been running at over 100,000 percent on an annual basis before the war according to the Ministry of Planning. When we left it was at 4 percent. Bank deposits—all the banks were reopened. We got a start on electronic transfers. We got oil production back above pre-war levels for eight months. We got electricity production back to 50 percent more than pre-war, though still far below demand, particularly since demand was going up very rapidly.

We cut all tariffs so there were no longer any tariffs in place. We worked with the Governing Council to pass modern bankruptcy laws, banking laws, contract laws, which are still in place. We studied and made a big effort at trying to get at the major distortions in the subsidies. We established the principle of a balanced budget, so fiscal responsibility. We produced a balanced budget for 2003 and 2004 with the Iraqis. We established the principle of the independence of the central bank and we freed interest rates to be determined by the market, not by bureaucrats. So we established monetary responsibility in addition to fiscal responsibility. Those things have remained in place.

We replaced the entire currency of the country in three months in the middle of a war without a

glitch, something that it took the EU [European Union] three years to do, although theirs was admittedly more complicated. That Iraqi dinar still trades freely on the world markets. We did away with all the exchange rate controls that Saddam had put in place. There were about 15 different exchange rates. One of my rules of thumb when I was in business, if you go into a country and there is more than one exchange rate, leave. So from my business experience I knew if you have 15 exchange rates, something is wrong here. You get this rate and you get that rate. If you're a crony you get that rate.

Basically, we were unable to replace the food basket, the monthly dole of food products to every Iraqi, which was a very complicated process. There were 44,000 different distribution points around the country where you would show up as an Iraqi if you were on the register and get a food basket. The economists told us the best thing to do is to monetize the food basket. In other words, you phase it out. First you say you're not going to get a basket this month but you're going to get, say, 1,000 dinars, which is what it would have cost you to buy, and then you can go out and buy whatever you want. That would have, I think, worked, except that it's sort of an unsettling thing. For ten years you're used to getting a food basket and then suddenly you're going to get money.

So the economists said we can do it experimentally in one province. I said if you do it in one province you've got to be ready immediately to do it everywhere. You're not going to get away with saying, "We're just doing it over here in Nasiriyah." It's not going to work. So we were unable to do anything about that.

We were unable to do anything about the state-owned enterprises, which were hugely overvalued. They were basically value-destroying entities. We had a good study made of them by Tom Foley, who was a very bright financier from Connecticut. He looked at them all. By November he had concluded that maybe 30 of the 192 might be able to survive in a market economy. The question was could any of these things be somehow refinanced and brought to market? In the end, we did nothing about the SOEs because they employed half a million people. While you could say, "Here's where we are and we want to get here with the 30 that do and we want to get rid of the other ones, and when we get to that point, when we get from A to B, things will be better." The trouble is between A and B you've got another half a million Iraqi families without income. It didn't sound like a great idea once we knew we were leaving in June, so we had to put that on the shelf. We continued to pay all the salaries of all SOEs, even those which had been looted to the ground, until the CPA left.

We were unable to do anything about the lack of fuel oils, which was costing Iraq $3 or 4 billion a year to import diesel and gasoline and kerosene and LPG [liquefied petroleum gas] because we couldn't build refineries. You can't build refineries that fast. One of the reasons we focused on large infrastructure projects in our aid request was to try to address some of these major structural problems.

But we put the economy on a path that has been very successful. In 2004 according to the IMF [International Monetary Fund] the economy grew by over 46 percent. Iraq's per capita income today is about six to eight times higher than it was before we were there. The economy is working. We were unable to address the question of who owns the oil. We knew that we weren't going to do anything about the oil. In fact, when we proposed a law to the Governing Council to

repeal the prohibition on foreign direct investment, we explicitly excluded the oil industry because we didn't want anybody to say we had gone there for the oil. This was obviously not the point. But we made a comprehensive study of the oil question.

In the transition period in June I met with then Prime Minister Allawi each day. We prepared and gave him white papers on alternate ways to think about oil. The concept was to look at the Norwegian model, at the Alaska model, and several others to say what you need to do in the long run is have the oil owned by the people. In Alaska you get a dividend every year for the shares you own. Then the government taxes you on the dividend or on your consumption, whatever. It is a complicated process because it would take ten years for the Iraqi government to redo the entire financial basis of the government.

At present the Iraqi government takes the money right off the top as the owner of the oil. To me there are real political risks in that process. In any monoculture country, if the government controls the major resource there is a tendency to use control of the funds to control the politics. So it's not just an economic question, it's also a political question. We knew we couldn't touch it, so we left it to them. I think the successes on the economy are largely underreported.

Nelson: When you talked through this review, the we, who were the key people in the CPA, elsewhere in Iraq, back in Washington, who were part of this "we"?

Bremer: You mean on the economy?

Nelson: Yes.

Bremer: The key people in Iraq were the successive economic advisors, Peter McPherson and followed by—I gave the list the other day. We had terrific support in Washington, particularly from the Treasury Department, in terms of the concept of the economic reforms but also particularly the currency exchange.

Leffler: [John] Taylor?

Bremer: Yes, John Taylor and John Snow, he was very supportive. We had on the ground there I mentioned Tom Foley, who helped with the SOEs, and who also on the side worked to get the stock market going. There were a lot of people involved. We had good support on the economic side both there and here.

Nelson: My impression is that there was less division, less controversy, attending your economic reform than your work on these other matters.

Bremer: Yes, true.

Nelson: Hand-in-hand with that I guess is also less publicity because everything is operating smoothly so there isn't a story there.

Bremer: Bad news is the only news. That could be one interpretation.

Riley: Were you in fact getting higher and more consistent levels of cooperation from the

international community in the economic realm than you were in the political realm?

Bremer: No, I don't think that was the case while I was there. We were just beginning to try to get the international support on the economic side. We had this donors' conference in Madrid in October.

Riley: Of '03?

Bremer: Yes, of '03, where we got pledges, I think, of something like $13 billion. I don't remember exactly. But we knew that was going to be a long time coming if it ever came and it was going to be tied, as our aid is. If you're going to get Japanese money, you have to spend it on Japanese firms. We got support, but I wouldn't say—I think we probably had more countries supporting us on the military side and there were citizens of 25 countries on the CPA civilian side.

Riley: I wonder if you would geographically look and tell us—I would assume that a part of your time must have been spent on neighborhood relations while you're there in a very broad sense, including Iran. I'm just wondering if you could comment a bit on what you were confronting. I don't know if the refugee issues were a huge problem when you were there. That may come later.

Bremer: Yes.

Riley: Sort of go around the neighborhood and see if there is anything worth talking about.

Bremer: Well, I didn't do what you normally would do if it had been a normal embassy. What you would do is probably go on a plane and visit the Ambassadors and try and see the foreign minister. I didn't do that. I didn't have time for that. So physically I didn't spend much time with it. The relations with neighbors were quite variable.

We had a lot of business with the Turks and Kuwaitis on logistics. Almost all of the logistical support for the military, and therefore for us, because we were basically piggybacked on them, came through Kuwait, KBR, brought in by regular convoys from Kuwait. The main Kuwaiti interest that I heard about was their interest in continuing to be paid the reparations that they were due from the 1991 war. But it was not a big factor.

The Turks were more sensitive because of the Kurds. In the late summer of '03 they had been asked by our government to provide troops to the coalition forces and they were prepared to send, I think, a division, a fairly substantial commitment. The question was where were their troops going to be deployed. They obviously would not be welcome in the Kurdish region. The Turks wanted to be somewhere in the west, down in Anbar province. But they wanted their lines of communication to go back up through Kirkuk and out. The Kurds went ballistic. So that fell through.

On the other hand, we were buying an enormous amount of fuel oils from the Turks, and huge amounts were then smuggled back into Turkey at a very high markup. At one point, I can't remember, it's somewhere in here, the guys in finance did a study that said you could buy a gallon or a liter of gasoline on the subsidized prices in Iraq for $1 and sell it for $99 in Turkey.

So there was a fairly substantial incentive to smuggle. There was a lot of smuggling going on across all the borders.

The Turks came with a delegation to offer to work on building up the private sector, which we encouraged; that was pretty much the interaction with the Turks.

Riley: Was there lingering ill will between the United States and Turkey over the lack of invasion?

Bremer: There was—I felt it was a serious mistake for the Turks not to let the 4th ID [Infantry Division] through; it wasn't something I spent a lot of time talking about. I don't know how they felt in Washington. It wasn't something we discussed.

Riley: But there weren't any implications?

Bremer: There were implications.

Riley: Lingering—

Bremer: There were clear implications. Then you have Jordan, where I did meet the King, and the King sent his intelligence guy a couple of times. The Jordanians were on the whole supportive of what we were trying to do, although obviously concerned because they got a lot of refugees, although not as many while I was there; it was later. And the Jordanians agreed to help provide training for the Iraqi police.

The Syrians were a real problem because it was very clear that they were running these ratlines to get the al-Qaeda terrorists into the country coming through Syria. My view was we should attack the camps on the other side of the border, in Syria. The last part of the terrorists' preparation was a camp or two over there. I thought we should attack the camps, but anyway, I didn't get much farther with that.

Riley: You reported that to Washington or—

Bremer: In the field. Now the Iranians, I left them to last. While I was there the Iranians were not yet very active. I think only in retrospect, after reading the NIE that was produced at the end of 2003, my interpretation is they were still a little afraid of what was going to happen. They had a big American army on both their east and west frontiers. They had heard that they were part of this Axis of Evil and this looked pretty ominous to them.

Every now and then a Qods Force squad would cross the border or do something and we would chase them away. At one point a unit of the regular Iranian army took over a border post down in Maysan province where the border has never been entirely agreed. We asked the British Army—it was in the Bosra AOR—to chase them off and they chased them off. So there were some indications that they were doing things. They had very close ties, some of them with the Kurds, particularly with Talabani's group, PUK [Patriotic Union of Kurdistan]. But the Iranians were not a big factor when I was there.

Riley: With the Iraqis that you were dealing with on the Governing Council was there marked

anxiety about Iran at the time?

Bremer: No.

Riley: Was that so far off?

Bremer: A number of them had lived in Iran in exile, which I think was more of concern to some people in Washington than it was to the Iraqis themselves. I never saw these particular Iraqis as being the cat's paw of the Iranians. To me they were Arabs, not Persians. That's a more important distinction than whether they're Shi'a or Sunnis.

Leffler: During 2003, early 2004, did you fail to see the rise of a Sunni insurgency?

Bremer: No, we saw it, as I said yesterday. It was somewhat confusing. We knew something was amiss in August and we thought that was an insurgency. It turned out later that these attacks were al-Qaeda operations. The insurgency itself really didn't pick up until Ramadan, late October. We saw it. It wasn't missed. We could see the number of attacks going up, we could see the number of casualties going up, so we didn't fail to see it. Then—I can't remember if we talked about it—an interesting thing happened because after we captured Saddam violence, attacks dropped off 20 to 30 percent over the next six weeks or so until early February. Then it started to pick up again. We intercepted Zarqawi's letter in mid-January. In it he clearly revealed al-Qaeda's strategy. It was very explicit: kill as many Shi'a as possible to provoke a sectarian war between Shi'a and Sunnis. This was the purpose of his bomb attack in Najaf August 30, 2003. And it was that strategy which culminated in the major bombing of another Shi'a shrine in Samarra in February 2006.

I would argue that if we look back from this perspective the real insurgency started in 2006 after the bombing in Samarra. That was where it really picked up. We obviously had problems in April in Fallujah, but that was more constrained to a particular province, actually almost to a particular city.

Leffler: I've been reading the book by Ali Allawi, and he has long, long sections on 2003, 2004 about the rise of the insurgency.

Bremer: Yes.

Leffler: The way he portrays it is not how many incidents month by month, but the cumulative factors that are influencing the dynamics of the situation. So what happens in 2006 is sort of a culmination.

Bremer: Yes, sure.

Leffler: You leave in 2004, so no one is blaming you. Plenty of people *do* blame you, but I'm not blaming you. [*laughter*] Should steps have been taken during late 2003, 2004, et cetera to begin to grapple with what you said you saw emerging?

Bremer: Yes, of course they should.

Leffler: What were those?

Bremer: A different strategy.

Leffler: A different strategy meaning what?

Bremer: A strategy meaning clear, hold, rebuild instead of whack-a-mole, was still our strategy at the end of 2003. If necessary, more troops. I always felt it was necessary to have more troops. I kept asking for more troops. Even though there was a decline in violence after Saddam was arrested, it didn't persuade me that we were on a slide down. Some of the military I think concluded, "Well, it's OK now. We can carry out the rotation coming up, 15 brigades. It'll be OK."

In this time frame, in February 2004, to my surprise Karl Eikenberry came out. He was then a Major General on a study tour from Rumsfeld about how to deal with the security situation and recommended effectively that we use the ICDC, Iraqi Civilian Defense Corps, instead of the Iraqi Army, that we should put more money into the ICDC than into the army. I think it's in the book. I can't remember. I pushed back. I didn't think that was a great idea.

Riley: Why was that?

Bremer: Units of the ICDC were getting only two or three weeks of training at the most. In some cases, maybe by February that was no longer the case, but back in September and October, they were. I think Abizaid gave an order to Sanchez—come up with 30,000 in 30 days. They were basically taking 18-year-old kids off the street, giving them a patch that said you're either military or—here is an AK-47, three days of training, and you're police. You're either going to have a professional army or you're not. I wouldn't say that I was comfortable at all with the fact that there was a decline in incidents. Then of course it picked up again in April and May, which is when I then made a more formal request in writing for more troops. That was also turned down.

I don't know what more I could have done; it's not clear to me. As I said yesterday, I have in some sense some sympathy for the President, who kept asking the question, "Do you have enough troops?" As far as I know he was always told they had enough troops.

Riley: At what point did the troop rotation—

Bremer: They do what they call "left seat/right seat." The relieving force begins to come in 45 days before the actual turnover of command. They started I think—the Marines came the first two weeks of March, something like that. Basically, the rotation started in March, April.

Riley: You make a lot in your book about how the logic of that rotation was driving many of the decisions related to strategy.

Bremer: Well, yes, but that was more in the September time frame, when the military, the services, began to look at the 15-brigade rotation coming in the spring of 2004 and say, "Gosh, this is going to be really hard because we're going to have to call up Reserves. We're going to have to use the Guard. Can't we reduce the number?" That's what they were after. "We're going

to substitute Iraqis for the Americans to reduce the number." That didn't happen. We did the full rotation in the end.

That was driving, in my view, some of the idea of "let's get out of here in April" that was coming from the civilian side of the Pentagon in October 2003. I may be over interpreting it, but that's the way it looked to me.

Riley: And it certainly is communicated in your book. My question was whether once the rotation is essentially effected or understood is there then a longer horizon for decision making that you face because you know that you're set—I don't know enough about the military to know how long the next rotation lasts.

Bremer: They were a year on the ground.

Riley: So you figure you have another nine- or ten-month interval before you have to worry about this. Did that alleviate some of the pressures on these decisions?

Bremer: No, not that I knew.

Nelson: I wondered, because at various times you've said over the last couple of days the President asked do you have enough troops and the answer was yes. I know before the war there was a good bit of back-and-forth between Rumsfeld, Tommy Franks, and so on. Then eventually a number is established and the military signs off on that number. From that point on is the military like a starting pitcher in baseball, where if the manager comes out and says, "Can you keep going?" you have to say yes? It would be unmanly to say no. Is that going on here when what they really want to say is yes, I want more troops, but they're not going to admit that?

Bremer: I have to speak in terms of what I think happened, not what I know happened. What I know happened was [Richard] Shinseki got defenestrated [*laughter*] for suggesting before the war that in the postconflict phase they were going to need 400,000 troops instead of the planned 200,000.

Nelson: Right.

Bremer: The last we saw of him he was outside. I ran into—I will leave him unnamed—but a three-star Air Force General. I was riding with him on a plane somewhere a couple of years after I got back and I said to him, "I don't understand this thing. You guys are paid to tell the President—" The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs is required, by law, irrespective of what he thinks the political consequences are. So I said, "In the Foreign Service if the President asks you a question, you owe him a direct answer. You guys are professionals. What happened? If you needed more troops, why didn't you say it?"

He said, "Well, Shinseki. By the way, I also got fired." He didn't actually get fired. He got retired. He was a Lieutenant General and they made him retire at Major General level. Rumsfeld did, he says. OK, that's hearsay, but I'm just telling you what somebody told me. Therefore a working hypothesis as one might put it is that some of the military officers had seen Mr. Shinseki go out the window and decided that probably the right answer was yes. Now, I don't know that.

Riley: Yes, we have enough.

Bremer: Yes. It disturbs me if it's true. It disturbs me because I would have less confidence in military officers who are not prepared to tell straight out whether they had enough for the mission we were assigned. Now, the question is what was "the mission." Don't forget, Franks never really defined the mission of Phase Four and we were in Phase Four from April 9th forward, according to military. Well, April 10 maybe. We were in Phase Four. So what was the mission?

Nelson: When the surge is accompanied by a redefinition of the mission, that's what it would take.

Bremer: That's right.

Nelson: You talk about clear, hold, and build as something that you were thinking before it became part of the common discussion in '06. Is that true?

Bremer: Again, I go back to my—it was not my idea, it was Clay McManaway, my deputy, who had been in Vietnam for four years. That was his point. His point was you can't just go in and whack them and then go away and think everything is going to be fine because that night the Vietcong is going to come back into town and take it over again. You've got to go in there, you've got to clear them out, you've got to hold it, and then you can start to rebuild.

Leffler: But you need troops to do that.

Nelson: You do need troops.

Bremer: That's true, Mel, but what you need first is the doctrine. What was interesting to me, when Petraeus was brought back after he did a year of training stuff the Iraqi army the press announced he was going to "write" a counterinsurgency document for the Army. He wasn't going to "edit" one because it didn't exist; he was going to write it. Interesting choice of verbs.

Nelson: So the generals who were there when you were there were not willing to say, "We're not willing to buy into that suggestion for a different definition of the mission along with—"

Leffler: Here is General Sanchez writing, "In the meantime, I continued my requests for manning. I asked the Joint Staff for expertise in intelligence, in operations, in strategy, in policy, planning, detention, and legal affairs. We need lawyers to help us in all of the divisions to address the challenges of detention, interrogation. I told them. We didn't get lawyers; we didn't get people." That's what he writes.

Bremer: I haven't read that book, as I told you. Those aren't the kind of forces I was talking about. I'm talking about shooters. I'm not talking about staff guys, lawyers.

Leffler: He's talking about them too.

Bremer: My point is that excerpt you read is not the solution to the problem. Again, now speaking as an observer of history, I think what happened—and I've talked to Army and Marine

officers since. After Vietnam the U.S. military said, "We're never going to do this again. This was a bad deal. We got way out on the limb, and the politicians sawed the limb off after us." These were captains and majors. Now they're phasing out, but many became the three and four stars in the services at the time of the Iraq and Afghan wars. So there was no doctrine for counterinsurgency. They had learned 30 years earlier, "We're not going to do that again," which is why Petraeus had to write one, not edit one.

Nelson: He and others came out of that social sciences department at West Point, which was sort of a think tank of junior officers in exile during the '90s.

Bremer: Anyway—

Riley: Would you be willing to talk for a few minutes about—you invested a year of your life in this enterprise and then you leave in mid-2004. What are your perceptions about how things have gone since you left? The early phases, the surge, and so forth? Are there surprising things? Did trends follow the way you thought that they would?

Bremer: I was obviously discouraged to see the uptick in violence, particularly in 2006. I was disappointed that it took us as long as it did, took the President as long as it did, to change the strategy and put the extra troops in, which I thought needed to be done much sooner, obviously, if not right at the beginning.

I thought his decision at the end of 2006 to do the surge was one of the most courageous Presidential decisions I've seen in my time in Washington because it went against all of the conventional wisdom in Washington, all the recommendations, including Jim Baker, who was, after all, fairly important to the Bush family. It was a very courageous decision. It was the right decision and it worked.

How do I feel now? The two things that we put in place are still there at least. The constitution is effectively the one that we helped them write. The economy is certainly doing extremely well. But there are tendencies in Nouri al-Maliki in particular to trend back, regression to the mean. The Iraqi mean is you get a guy in charge who has all this oil revenue—again—the problem of who owns the oil—which he uses to build up security forces loyal to him and his cronies. We've seen this movie before; it is not a good sign.

I think the Bush administration can be faulted for taking too much of a hands-off approach to the formation of the government in 2005, the first government, the al-Jaafari government, and then the subsequent formation of the government under al-Maliki. Everybody else, all the other countries were involved very deeply. We went without an ambassador for three months after Negroponte left. That to me was a serious mistake and really not necessary. There was no reason why Khalilzad couldn't have been there for a hot handoff from Negroponte or why Negroponte couldn't stay a couple more months before setting up the DNI [Director of National Intelligence].

Riley: What was the explanation?

Bremer: I don't know. I'm not informed, but anyway, I think it was a mistake. We were also rather hands-off about the al-Maliki government. The election was after all won by Ayad

Allawi's party, and we don't seem to have played as much of a role there as we might have to be sure that if Allawi wasn't Prime Minister he at least got whatever they called it, National Defense Council or whatever, which still hasn't been created.

I think the [Barack] Obama administration can be strongly faulted for not trying hard to keep some American troops on the ground there; it would have made a significant difference as Max Boot argues today in the *Wall Street Journal*. So both the Bush administration and the Obama administration I think have left parts of the job undone. I can't say that that entirely explains the problems. There were always going to be problems.

I think on balance, as I said, when I look back on our time there, we did the best we could do with the situation we had on the ground, with planning or lack of it that had been done before, with the resources we got, both the security and nonsecurity resources and the time we had, which wasn't very much time.

[Nelson leaves]

Riley: A corollary question about the neighborhood again. There have been a lot of changes in the neighborhood. Is it fair to extrapolate? Did the President's vision of a transformed Middle East legitimately begin with this intervention, or is that overreading the tea leaves?

Bremer: I think it's too early to know. It certainly is possible, I think even likely, that by effectively breaking the hold of a tyrant over his people, which is what happened in Iraq, it incentivized people elsewhere. Iraq is not a second-tier country in this region. If you again look at the history, you have 3,000 years, 5,000 years of competition between the Niletic culture and the Mesopotamian culture. This is an important center of the region—I don't even say of Islam because it predates Islam.

So toppling Saddam Hussein was a really big deal in the region. It certainly unsettled some neighbors like the Iranians, and maybe in the end they actually profited from it, at least to some degree. I was on the board briefly of IRI, the International Republican Institute, that does democracy building like NDI, National Democratic Institute. Interestingly, before the overthrow of [Hosni] Mubarak, IRI was bringing Iraqis from Iraq to Egypt to conduct seminars in democracy building. I thought that was a nice touch because the Egyptians basically look down at the Iraqis, the Iraqis look down at the Egyptians, and have for several thousand years.

I think it's possible that what happened was people in the region saw that it could be done and then it carried on, but it's a little early to know.

Riley: The cause and effect in your mind isn't—

Bremer: I don't think you can make a direct cause and effect, although there were people—again, it's not very analytical, but you had people in Tahrir Square talking about the situation in Iraq. OK, it's a long jump from there to say that one led to the other.

Riley: Of course this is something that the historians and scholars are going to be struggling with for years.

Bremer: I think it's too early to know, but it's at least a question that should be asked.

Riley: You have a unique perspective having been in the region, so your opinions on these things I think will be consulted.

Bremer: Maybe. It is an interesting question. One of the things I think about, again as a student of foreign policy, is you can make the argument, and I've seen it made by some people in the press, we never should have done it because everything was much better before and everything was stable. It's the old argument that Dr. Rice has spoken about, that Bush has spoken about.

For a long time after [Franklin] Roosevelt met King [bin Abdul Aziz al-Saud] Fahd in 1944, it was the American policy to promote stability in this region. That was it. If you were a king or dictator, OK. Bush, probably for a number of reasons took a different approach. First, his own, the post 9/11 world, possible connection of the new terrorists getting their hands on WMD, the 12-year-long avoidance of UN resolutions by Saddam Hussein, and under it all his view about the importance of freedom serving American interests. For all of those reasons, anyway, he made the decision.

WMD seems to have gone away. He certainly has spoken, as has Rice afterward, about the importance of recognizing that simply promoting stability in the long run is not the only American interest. The change elsewhere in the region will be painful for us as it has been in Iraq. I don't think we're at the end of the picture in Egypt yet. Libya is maybe going a little better. Syria we have yet to know.

Riley: In your period of public service for this time, are there pieces of the picture that get underrepresented by those of us on the outside that we ought to pay more careful attention to?

Bremer: I'm not sure that there are any that we haven't covered. I think the economy is one that I believe has been largely underreported. There has been overreporting on the view that I was, particularly from one side, the Rumsfeld-Feith side, that they had this other plan and I overruled it, which is demonstrably untrue. It simply doesn't bear close examination.

Riley: Mel? Barbara?

Perry: I have two questions. One is, given your business background, did you ever worry about the monetary cost to the U.S. for the reconstruction of Iraq?

Bremer: Sure. I made a proposal for the largest aid bill we'd ever had. I'm a taxpayer. I'm a Republican.

Riley: You're a Goldwater Republican.

Bremer: I'm really a Reagan Republican. I started as Goldwater. Of course I worried about it. That doesn't count the military cost, which was even higher.

Perry: Right.

Bremer: I could give a sort of pragmatic answer and a more philosophic answer. From a

pragmatic point of view, I was paid to do a job. I wasn't going to spend a lot of time with green eyeshades saying the military is costing us X a month. That's somebody back in Washington, OMB [Office of Management and Budget] or the President has to worry about that. Philosophically my view was sort of like Colin Powell's. You broke it, so you have to fix it.

We went in there. You can argue we should have gone or we shouldn't have gone. It doesn't matter. The situation as of April 9th was what it was and there was no going back at that point. The question then was how can we make an omelet out of all these broken eggs? What is the best approach? I think the President came on the best approach. The best approach was to say let's try to help these people find a way for their first time in history really to govern themselves. That had consequences in terms of the constitution and the time it took to produce and all the rest. Everything flowed from that one—

Leffler: The other side of that right is that it also led to four million refugees, 100-200,000 Iraqis dead.

Bremer: That's an argument for letting Hitler take the Rhineland. Then he takes Austria and then he takes Czechoslovakia and then he goes into Poland.

Leffler: Is it?

Bremer: Yes, it is. That's an argument against doing anything. Of course a war is going to have refugees. Of course there are going to be casualties. Anybody who thinks otherwise has never studied history. That's not an argument for not doing it. Certainly not on March 19th, 2003, when the military and Rumsfeld—Rumsfeld is telling you it's going to be quick; the military is going to say it is going to take a couple of months. You can argue they got it wrong and so forth and so on. It's always easy in hindsight. Wars change. Wars and the objectives in wars change.

I used to point out, because people say—we didn't go in there to make a democracy. You can look back and they talked about WMD. It's true, they did. There were some important speeches about democracy. I like to cite Lincoln's first inaugural where Lincoln said, "I support the Fugitive Slave Act. I'm going to enforce the Dred Scott case. This war, if it comes, is not about slavery." Yet we see that war as entirely about slavery now, or the abolition of slavery, because of the Emancipation Proclamation, which took another two years for him to issue. The objectives in wars change.

It is not only that no war plan survives first contact with the enemy as [Carl von] Clausewitz says. No civilian plan survives first contact with reality. That is a fact of life. I don't accept the proposition that because there were refugees and casualties it wasn't worth doing because that would be true of every war and you would never have a war until you got overrun by somebody else who was willing to ignore those facts. So to me that is not itself dispositive. Of course there were more than we wanted, of course it was harder than we wanted it to be. Yes, we made mistakes. Who doesn't? I think in the long run it is going to turn out to have been the right thing to do. I'm very confident of that.

Perry: My last question is, presuming we have an opportunity to talk to Secretary Rumsfeld, what should we ask him?

Bremer: I don't want to play lawyer.

Riley: You can play oral historian.

Perry: You can play interviewer.

Bremer: He's got the book.

Leffler: I'll ask him all the same questions except when he is here I'll cite you.

Bremer: I'm sure you will. I don't want to get into that. I still consider him a friend. I don't think he was fair to me in the book, but that's—

Perry: Is that just his personality? I mean, everybody knows he's prickly.

Bremer: Yes.

Perry: We've all seen him on television. It just seems so personal and ad hominem, to repeat myself.

Bremer: Yes.

Perry: Is it just his persona?

Bremer: I can't really explain how he and Feith and some of the others in that group wrote the conclusions they arrived at. I can't explain it because it simply cannot stand up to anybody looking at the record.

Leffler: It's easy to understand why they did it.

Bremer: I'm sorry, yes, you're right. That's a more correct way—I don't want to comment on—

Leffler: It's very easy to understand why they did it.

Bremer: Your correction is correct.

Riley: On that note, I think you have done us all a service by agreeing to sit down and talk with us through this. Partly what we talked about does appear from a careful reading of your book, but having the opportunity to question you with some pointed questions, to give you an opportunity to respond as you have done somewhat in print, but respond more directly to some of these criticisms and give future scholars and students direction on what we ought to look at and pay attention to is just invaluable.

The fog of war doesn't lift for historians. It's still there. We have a terribly difficult time as we talked about over lunch yesterday trying to sort all this out. You have done us an enormous service by being patient with our questions and responsive, and our definition of public service includes not just what you did in Iraq but your willingness to indulge in our explorations to try to figure out what happened for whatever reason. We're probably the same kind of historian you are. We just think there is value in knowing what happened.

Bremer: I appreciate that and I think it is a great project you're doing and I'm glad to have been able to help. I'm happy to answer additional questions if they occur to you.

Riley: We'll do that and by the same token if in reading the document there are places where you feel like it needs elaboration just get on your laptop and hammer out a few things. Tell Meghan she has nothing to be afraid of.

Bremer: I will talk to Meghan this weekend.

Riley: And anyone else that comes your way. We'd be delighted to have their input. You've done us all a service, and there are a lot of folks who will profit from our labors. I always say at this point that we never exhaust all the possible topics but we do a pretty good job of exhausting the person sitting in your chair. So we'll stop now.

[BREAK, but talking continues]

Bremer: I don't know if you've been in touch with Roman Martinez. If not, you may want to talk to Roman. He was very important. He worked with Meghan.

Leffler: He wrote a wonderful critique of Rumsfeld's book in the *Washington Post.* It adumbrates in many ways what you have said here today.

Bremer: He had more insight because he was working at the Pentagon before the war.

Leffler: He wrote that with Dan Senor.

Bremer: This was after the thing came out. I do remember this. He quotes a lot of the same people. But Roman would be someone to talk to because he was involved at the Pentagon. I think he was also involved in the prewar planning and that he also deployed with Meghan and Garner. He's with a law firm in Washington.

Riley: There's a parallel project that's just getting underway. You probably know Jeff Ingle is going to be directing it down at SMU [Southern Methodist University]. We're dealing with the upper tier of 60 to 100 officials. And they're doing a deep dive into the lower-tier folks.

Bremer: Is the idea to put all this together?

Riley: It will all be in the Bush Library.

Leffler: We have our own collection here because it continues on through many administrations.

Bremer: I saw the library yesterday. As a historian I appreciate the work.

Leffler: I'm curious; are there any books that you would recommend on Iraq?

Bremer: I think the most balanced treatment, which is not totally laudatory, obviously, is the one that Dobbins did on occupying Iraq for the RAND corporation because he had access to all the CPA documents. He was the first person to go through them, and that helped.