GEORGE W. BUSH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

FINAL EDITED TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW WITH RYAN CROCKER

September 9–10, 2010
Charlottesville, Virginia

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Riley: This is the Ryan Crocker interview as a part of the George W. Bush Oral History Project. Thank you for coming to Charlottesville. We talked beforehand about the ground rules, and I'll repeat the most fundamental one is that this is being conducted under a veil of confidentiality. We're not allowed to repeat anything that occurs during the course of the interview. Ambassador Crocker will have the right to review the transcript and to place any stipulations or redactions that he wishes to make, and that will become the authoritative record of the interview.

The other thing we normally do at the beginning is go around the table and identify ourselves, so the transcriber will know which voice belongs to whom. I'm Russell Riley. I head the Presidential Oral History Program here.

Crocker: Ryan Crocker. Former Ambassador to Iraq.

Perry: I'm Barbara Perry. I'm a senior fellow here at the Miller Center.

Bakich: I'm Spencer Bakich, an assistant professor at Sweet Briar College.

Riley: One of the real challenges in figuring out how to start the interview is that we could easily spend a day and a half talking about your experience before the second President Bush comes into office. Obviously, we can't do that. What I'd like to get you to do is to talk a little bit about the relevant experiences or the kinds of lessons you were picking up when you were serving in ambassadorial posts from 1990 on. And tell us a bit about your relationship with Presidents. The first President Bush, 41, and President [William] Clinton, to the extent that you had any direct interaction with them or their White Houses.

Crocker: Bush 41 was the last American President to receive his ambassadors before they went out to post.

Riley: Right.

Crocker: President Clinton discontinued that practice and successive Presidents have not picked it up. I did meet President [George H. W.] Bush, actually not before I went to Lebanon. I went out in a hurry because there was a brief window to reopen the post in late 1990. It had been closed for a year and a half for security reasons. So we grabbed it. It was subsequently evacuated in January 1991 when Desert Storm commenced. And it was during that interval, before I returned to Beirut, that I met with President Bush. In my view, it's a very good investment of 15 minutes of Presidential time. It connects the Ambassador directly with the Commander in Chief. It gives the Commander in Chief the opportunity to say, "Here are the two or three things that are

important to me and my administration," and it just shapes and sets the new Ambassador going out.

I did not have further direct interaction with President Bush. I did with Secretary [James] Baker, who came to visit, the first secretarial visit to Beirut in a decade. I was also there for the previous secretarial visit with George Shultz.

I was President Clinton's Ambassador twice, to Kuwait and to Syria. I did have direct interaction with him on both occasions. He visited Kuwait, the first visit ever to Kuwait by a sitting President. This was late October 1994, following an effort by Saddam Hussein to reinvade the country. I had the chance to brief the President. I subsequently briefed him in the Oval Office in Washington prior to a visit by the Emir of Kuwait.

I was struck by his detailed grasp of issues. He seemed to me a person of extraordinary intellect. The ability, as he was running the rest of the world, to actually know what happened in Kuwait and to have questions that seemed to be prompted by his own mind, not something a staffer had put in front of him.

I moved on to Syria, and as we began to develop some momentum on a Syrian-Israeli negotiation, I spent ten days in January of 2000 in Shepherdstown, West Virginia, and saw a lot of the President at that time. Again, I was impressed by his grasp of detail at the tactical level but also a broad strategic picture of where we were trying to get.

The last time I saw President Clinton was in Geneva at the end of March 2000. A summit between the President and Hafez al-Assad. That basically put an end to our hope for a Syrian-Israeli peace. Extremely disappointing to all of us. The President impressed me in that instance by recognizing this wasn't going to work. There was no point in flogging an all-too-dead horse. You move on. No point in recriminations or "we should have done this, that, the other." We gave it our best shot. Didn't work. We move on.

Riley: And this was in early 2000?

Crocker: Yes. The Shepherdstown negotiations between Israeli Prime Minister [Ehud] Barak and Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk al-Sharaa were January 2000. The Assad-Clinton summit was late March of 2000.

Riley: If the President did continue to hold some hopes later that year that they might be able to develop a—

Crocker: That was on the Palestinians, I think. Because if you recall, Hafez al-Assad died in June of 2000. His son succeeded, and it was certainly my recommendation right after the transition that there was no point in revisiting negotiations with Israel with this brand-new, very insecure President. The track was effectively cold after that for the duration of the Clinton Presidency.

In July of 2000 there was Camp David II, the effort with [Yasser] Arafat, but that was on the Palestinian side.

Riley: Can you say anything about the chemistry between President Clinton and the regional leaders you were dealing with? Assad in particular, but to the extent that you were witnessing this with others in Shepherdstown.

Crocker: In the case of the Kuwaitis, it was a very positive chemistry because in Kuwaiti eyes he had made good on Bush 41's commitment to the defense and security of Kuwait. As Saddam moved south, President Clinton immediately moved to deploy U.S. troops into Kuwait, and that caused Saddam to say it was all an exercise, which it wasn't. But the Kuwaitis were hugely grateful, so it was quite a celebration, both in Kuwait and then subsequently when the Emir visited Washington.

Very different with Hafez al-Assad. Assad had, by the time of the Geneva summit, decided that he knew his own health was failing and although we didn't know it at the time, he had made the decision that his succession was best managed by focusing on an internal agenda and not risking a bold step on peace with Israel.

He arrived in Geneva with his mind made up. I remember there was some initial, fairly cordial banter between the two, they seemed to enjoy each other, but very quickly the discussion shifted into substance and very quickly it became clear that there was not going to be an agreement.

Riley: And that wasn't knowable beforehand? If you're staffing Presidential time, you don't want a President to spend his time on something that looks to be a dead end, right?

Crocker: We had, by that time, invested a great deal in this process and come very close at Shepherdstown.

Riley: I see.

Crocker: I had a concern going into Geneva because it had proven difficult to schedule the meeting. The Syrians did not come right back and say, "Yes, we can be there." They said, "Well, this date isn't good, maybe later." And I was doing the discussions with the Foreign Minister at the time and sensed that this was not a good thing.

Riley: The President was already abroad at that time? I'm trying to recall my Clinton history here, and I have some vague recollection that he was already in the area for something else and this was an add-on.

Crocker: He was. He was coming back from South Asia at the time, and it was something of a stretch for him to be able to do this. I remember he came in very late to Geneva the night before the talks.

Riley: Was it conventional in the Clinton administration to have career diplomats in these sensitive posts in the Middle East and South Asia, or were there political appointees in some of these positions?

Crocker: It was pretty much the established pattern. Both Republican and Democratic administrations in recent times have tended to have career officers in Arab posts with a couple of exceptions. Morocco. Saudi Arabia. And perhaps one other smaller Gulf state, normally Qatar.

And that doesn't change much from administration to administration. Democrats and Republicans tend to approach it the same.

Bakich: You made a comment that you quickly realized with the transition on the Syrian side any possible negotiations would be fruitless. I'm curious to hear what was the State Department's task in front of it, knowing that the transition is going to be coming, knowing that the new President is Western educated and such. Was there any sense that there might be some opening or was it simply the fact that watching Assad go through the motions, turning inward, that that was the direction it was going?

Crocker: Knowledge is an iterative process and hindsight is great, that's how you piece things together. We did not know that Assad was near death in March. We knew he'd had a heart condition for years. He died suddenly about two and a half months after the Geneva summit. It was a heart attack and it killed him instantly.

Prior to that, I had the opportunity to meet with Bashar [al-Assad] on several occasions. The ten months or so prior to his assumption of the Presidency. These were long meetings, just the two of us. And although he had done his postdoctoral ophthalmologic studies in London, we spoke in Arabic. He was not comfortable discussing complicated political issues in English. What I learned from that was that the West was making too much of his Western connections. He had spent about a year in London, and all he did was study the human eye. He did not have other interactions. He was not broadly engaged in British society. He could speak of eye diseases in English, I'm sure, at a level where I couldn't follow him. But he was not comfortable in English. He is now.

I also learned, talking to him, that he was actually more doctrinaire, rigid, and narrow than his father. His father, after all, had grown up in the days of the Syrian Republic, was educated at what was then the best secondary school in northern Syria, run by the French. He had a liberal education.

Bashar grew up in the Ba'ath system. Did not travel abroad at all until he already had his medical degree. So our assessment from the Embassy at the time of the transition first—and this again with the advantage of hindsight—was that Hafez al-Assad had in late '99, early 2000 been prepared to bet on a Syrian-Israeli peace that he concluded as the way of solidifying his son's assumption of power. When Shepherdstown didn't go the way he wanted, he switched to focus on a domestic agenda as preparation for Bashar, a Ba'ath Party Congress in the spring and so forth.

By June that was how we assessed it. So there were two points in what we sent back to Washington. First, that Hafez himself had decided against a peace with Israel on his watch, so Bashar certainly wasn't going to go there. And second, Bashar was more doctrinaire and more rigid than his father, not less.

So we told Washington, "Don't even bother."

Riley: The negotiations at Shepherdstown didn't actually constitute a summit, but you had Presidential engagement. Did you reach any conclusions about the desirability of having that kind of Presidential engagement in an issue as a result of Shepherdstown?

Crocker: I think it was key. In retrospect, with Ehud Barak, not an experienced politician or statesman, a career military officer, and he had perspectives that surprised us that we found not hugely helpful to the overall process. I think the President was effective in shaping, persuading, and managing him. Since he was Prime Minister, I don't think a Secretary of State or National Security Advisor could necessarily have done that. My analysis is that it was all a question of timing. Had Barak made the offer in Shepherdstown that he was prepared to have Clinton offer on Israel's behalf in Geneva, we might have had a deal.

But Farouk al-Sharaa reported back to Assad that the Israelis were playing games, stringing us out here, and Assad, in my judgment, concluded it was too dangerous, not enough time.

Riley: Were there any other missed opportunities you can recall from the era when, perhaps for domestic political reasons, Clinton was weakened on a couple of occasions, like in '94 after the midterms and then again with the impeachment? Or were there other places where domestic politics intruded in ways that complicated your business?

Crocker: I don't think so. It was interesting on the impeachment. We had and have, of course, a very complex and difficult relationship with Syria, but Syrians to a marked degree rallied to Clinton on the impeachment thing. They said, "How can you treat your President this way?"

I would hear this from ordinary citizens. I would hear it from government officials. "This is an outrage. You can't run a country this way." He may have had the sympathy vote in Damascus.

I think there were missed opportunities with Syria, but they preceded that by a good bit. I think Bush 41 and Baker, after Desert Storm, after the Madrid Conference, were establishing relations with the Syrians that had there been a second Bush term might have further progressed. But with the change of administration, a new team, something of a shift in emphasis, that wasn't built on until fairly late in the second term.

Riley: Of your three assignments during this interval in the '90s, did you have a preference? Is there an order of ranking where you think, *I enjoyed this assignment more. I felt like I accomplished more in this assignment, relative to the others*?

Crocker: Each one was hugely challenging and unique in its challenges.

In Lebanon, it was the challenge of opening and maintaining an Embassy that had been closed for a year and a half because of the security threat. I was involved in the mediation that effectively ended the Lebanese civil war and, of course, it was the time when we got the hostages back.

In Kuwait, early in my tenure when we had the threat from Saddam, the architecture we had in place with pre-positioned equipment allowed us to simply charter commercial aircraft and have a brigade of troops on the ground within 48 hours. It was great to be part of that. It was in Kuwait in late 1994 that I was part of the process that restructured the United States Air Force, that created the Air Expeditionary Forces of combat units that would be assigned on 60- to 90-day rotations in very Spartan conditions. That, in turn, shaped our ability to respond to 9/11 and Afghanistan. Being part of that evolving national security architecture was an extraordinary experience.

And in Syria, too, to get that close to a Syrian-Israeli peace was to be a part of history and also to learn how to deal with massive disappointment. [*laughter*]

Bakich: Speaking of massive disappointment, in the immediate aftermath of the Persian Gulf War, there were numerous potential opportunities that it seems from our perspective the President and the Secretary of State were intent on capitalizing. International public opinion seemed to be with the United States for a great number of months. And the new world order, for lack of a better term, came to naught. You've referenced timing on a number of occasions. Was the point at which the United States wasn't going to get everything it desired in the aftermath of the Persian Gulf War in terms of post–Cold War international era, was this a matter of timing? Or was it a matter of incomplete strategy?

Crocker: That's kind of a cosmic question.

Bakich: My apologies.

Crocker: I think it was only over time that we came to see that the end of the Cold War and the bipolar system did not in fact raise the curtain on a new world order with the United States as a very dominant but benevolent power. It instead was a multipolar or nonpolar world that we had and still have to deal with.

The first shots literally of the post–Cold War era were August 1990 when Saddam invaded Kuwait. I don't think he would have done that if the Soviet Union was still at full power. So the world we inherited after we won the Cold War was a world in which regional powers could drive international-security agendas in a way they couldn't before. And that also, as we saw with al-Qaeda in particular, but also Hezbollah and Hamas, opened up opportunities for nonstate actors.

I don't think I see a strategic failure on the part of the 41 [George H. W. Bush] administration. Even with 20 years' worth of hindsight, I'm not sure I can see how they could have better ordered their approach. There was a failure of analysis, if you will—What was the nature of this world we were dealing with?—but even that would be a reach, because the world still had to show us what the range of disorder was going to be.

Perry: You've talked about the impact of transitioning from one leader to another in Syria. Could you talk about the impact on your work of transitions from one President to another in this country and particularly the 2000 election? The aftermath of the 2000 election and how that had an influence and impact on what you were doing.

Crocker: For all the spirit and tradition of change that our Presidential elections represent, there is far more continuity than change in foreign policy, as we all know, and I think particularly in the Middle East. The Syrians were pleased with the outcome of the 2000 election. Fascinated by the process. Absolutely fascinated as an authoritarian state where elections were not even a bad joke, to have the Florida recount. The Syrian view was, "Just send in the troops." [*laughter*] "What are you messing around with?"

Riley: That may have been contemplated. [*laughter*]

Crocker: I think Syrian officials were relieved that it was not [Albert, Jr.] Gore-[Joseph] Lieberman for the totally unworthy reason that Lieberman was Jewish, and they thought that they would then get a better shake from the Bush administration. I remember telling the Deputy Foreign Minister, "Don't be too sure." And, indeed, as things played out that was very much the case.

Secretary of State [Colin] Powell came out to Damascus the first month of the administration, late February, to see what the prospects were with two new administrations, one in Damascus and one in Washington. Very much continuity in terms of how the new team approached Syria initially. As we saw, that quickly moved away from any effort at cooperation into a fairly confrontational relationship that reached its current depths after the assassination of Rafic Hariri in Lebanon in 2005.

Riley: During the decade of the '90s, how much of your attention was occupied by the question of terrorism? You mentioned nonstate actors in answer to Spencer's question. We are trying to get a portrait of how things are before 9/11, and I don't think we've got a very good picture yet about the extent to which this was an occupying issue for people who were in the foreign-policy community before 9/11. I hope you can help us understand that a little better.

Crocker: I have said previously the War on Terror for me did not start on 9/11. It started on April 18, 1983, when the Embassy in Beirut was blown up and I was in it. Of course, six months later was the attack on the Marine barracks. So I was very conscious, very focused, on this new dimension in international terror. Terror in the Middle East was not new then. A wave of secular Palestinian terror had begun in the beginning of the '70s, but what we saw in Lebanon in the early '80s was a qualitative and quantitative difference. I was focused on this new phenomenon of state-organized, religion-motivated terror.

We hadn't seen that before. And coming at *us*. And had time to reflect on unintended consequences. How you need to be careful what you get into. The Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, which we supported tacitly, set in motion a chain of unforeseen and I would say unforeseeable events that included the rise of Hezbollah. So from Lebanon forward I had that very much in mind.

I went back to Lebanon to reopen the Embassy in a pretty eye-watering environment. We had been shut down because of the threat of terror, of a Tehran-style takeover of the compound. I spent a lot of my time figuring out how we wouldn't be taken over. Where you put the 50 calibers, how you lay your wire, how you arm and order your guards. All that sort of thing. How you drive around Beirut without getting blown up. I think as much as anybody in the business, terror has been a part of my life from the early '80s going forward.

It was during my time in Kuwait that we had the Khobar Towers bombing, just down the street. We had worked very hard to ensure the Embassy and our military installations were not vulnerable to that kind of attack, but it took a considerable amount of effort, planning, thinking, and resources to keep us safe.

Syria is a net exporter of terror, not an importer. Relatively few terror attacks, but while I was in Damascus, the Embassy was attacked twice by government-organized Syrian mobs. My house

was overrun. On the grand scale of things a fairly benign manifestation of terror unless you happen to be the person terrorized at the moment. [*laughter*]

Riley: Your living room.

Perry: And your wife.

Crocker: And my wife was the one who had to ride it out inside. So that's been part of my career and very much on my mind as I move through my assignments, really starting in '83 and, of course, Pakistan and Iraq also terrorism central in so many ways.

Riley: Getting down to the specific case of [Osama] bin Laden and al-Qaeda, can you recall when that first started showing up on your radar screen?

Crocker: That was in the '90s. Of course, the east Africa bombings in the summer of '98 were what really brought it home, but I recall seeing the reports of bin Laden and the name of al-Qaeda beginning some years before that when he was active in the Sudan.

Riley: And you've already suggested that because of your personal proximity, this was a live issue for you. Did you find that the people you are reporting to in Washington are interested in these issues? And to what extent are you picking up signals in the '90s that the United States homeland is vulnerable to the same kinds of things you're experiencing?

Crocker: I was focused on the peculiarities and particularities of my own situation. What's happening in the country to which I'm accredited? How does it play in the region? What's likely to come across its borders? I spent a fair amount of time on that.

I have to say, in all honesty, I never *imagined* a 9/11-type attack. One of the great questions of crisis management is, what would it take to change your assumptions? I think many American officials, including myself, were trapped in the assumption that terrorism is a threat to America, but it's a threat to America overseas.

And it is interesting because if you recall, the Oklahoma City bombing happened the day before the anniversary of the Beirut Embassy bombing. And there was an initial assumption that this had come at us from the Middle East. When it was proven that it didn't, I think we all just dropped the notion, rather than saying, "But could it have? And who would do it and why?" Or "Who might look at Oklahoma City and say, 'Not a bad idea'?"

Even when we had the first World Trade Center attempt. I'd say again a collective failure of imagination that, yes, it was fairly amateurish but still pretty scary and what if you got something larger and smarter out there that says, "This is the way we're going to go, we're just going to do it right next time"?

Riley: In your ambassadorial assignments, are you effectively the orchestrator of all American efforts within your country? Is there a CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] station chief you have responsibility for or are coordinating your activities with? Are there military presences in the countries you coordinate with or are responsible for? How organizationally does the multifaceted presence of American interest within your countries get managed by an ambassador?

Crocker: Management is the operative word. an ambassador is not the representative of the Department of State. He or she is the President's personal representative, charged with managing all aspects of policy and all executive branch personnel except those under the authority of a combatant commander. And particularly in the post-Cold War world, with a multiplicity of agencies now involved in the foreign arena, that management capacity is absolutely critical. an ambassador has to not so much assert authority, because the authority is there, but assert an active interest in particularly the non–State Department agencies. What are their goals? What are their resources? What are their personnel? How do given agencies' goals fit into the broader set of U.S. strategic interests in that country? It requires a particularly active engagement with U.S. military. I had the good fortune of coming out of a military background, my father was a career Air Force officer, so I grew up in that, was very familiar with and appreciative of military culture. I understood it.

And in Kuwait that in particular was important. My most important senior relationship during my three and a half years in Kuwait wasn't with the Assistant Secretary or the Secretary of State, it was with Commander, Central Command. First [J. H. Binford] Binny Peay and later Tony Zinni. And I had started on that before I ever got out there. Went out to Central Command in Florida before I deployed, had gotten to know General Peay, and when Saddam started south, we were instantly on the phone together. What were *we* going to do?

He sent out his deputy commander, a two-star Reserve general, and he told me when he'd arrived, and this is when it looked like it could be a war, he said, "What you've got to do for me is don't let him get decisively engaged until we have the backup there. If he wants to move forward with two platoons of tanks against all of Saddam's armor, don't let him do it. You've got to make him pull back."

And I thought, *That's kind of an interesting goal for an ambassador.* [*laughter*] Again, I had no authority over—these were combatant forces, but I had a relationship with the combatant commander. If I were to call him up and say, "I'm standing here with General So-and-So. He wants to engage the enemy and I really think that's a bad idea," I think he'd just hang up the phone. [*laughter*] But I think that also served well in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq.

Riley: Of course. You have those relevant experiences before you come in. And, broadly, the relationship with the intelligence community within the country if you're an ambassador?

Crocker: It's the same thing. The Chief of Station [COS] is not an independent actor. He is under Chief of Mission Authority. He is part of the Embassy. And this really isn't very hard, given some of the major intelligence flaps we've had over the years, particularly in Latin America some decades ago, the culture in the CIA is—The last thing you want to do is be a COS out there and something happens that comes into the public domain and your Ambassador doesn't know about it. That is *the worst* possible thing that can happen to a station chief. So they're inclined to be sure that the Ambassador knows everything they're doing because then if it goes really bad, they can just say—

Riley: For the tape record they can point their finger—

Crocker: They point their finger at the Ambassador, and that's the way it should be. I don't find this at all difficult because in my own sense of it, the heart of the American Foreign Service is, of course, the Foreign Service of the Department of State and it's the CIA's Directorate of Operations. Because we have been together everywhere in the world since the end of World War II. We live the same kinds of lives. Our kids grow up together. We run the same kinds of risks. We understand each other. In terms of cultural affinities, I think we're very close.

Bakich: Are those cultural affinities shared with the combatant commanders?

Crocker: It's a newer process, but there is a tremendous openness on the part of combatant commanders in a theater of operations like Central Command. And each combatant command has its own culture. European Command is very different from Central Command is very different from Pacific Command. They have different histories, different relationships, different ways of looking at the world, but Central Command as a new command, relatively speaking, in a tremendously complex, volatile part of the world, has since its inception put a very high premium on the command's relationship with individual ambassadors.

Every commander at Central Command I've known, upon assuming command, and General [James N.] Mattis has just done the same thing, gets on a plane and jets around and visits all the countries in his AOR [area of responsibility] and gets to know the ambassadors because that's where he turns for policy advice. "What on earth are those Kazakhs up to and why?" He's not going to know that from Tampa, but he's got an ambassador out there who he expects will have the answers. So of all the combatant commands, the best, deepest, and most intense civil-military relations are in Central Command.

Riley: Is that at all a function of having professional Foreign Service officers in those positions in those countries? At least theoretically, I can make an argument that if you got political on it, people who were political appointees and other ambassadorial posts, then maybe that relationship would be complicated by the fact that you don't have the high level of professionalism, the inbred culture of the Foreign Service represented in those communities.

Crocker: That, I think, *has been* true. Still is sporadically but largely in my experience not. Over time I have seen the process of selecting noncareer ambassadors, certainly in the broader Middle East, to be a very carefully managed process. No President wants to have somebody out there who is from the party make a mess out of it. And this is where Congressional oversight is important. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee, particularly the minority members, are just hoping that some President will give them the gift of a clearly unqualified nominee they can just rip apart in committee hearings.

This is all a good thing because over time it has dramatically improved the caliber of noncareer ambassadors. Certainly the ones I have known in the Middle East have been top-notch individuals. And Saudi Arabia, because the Saudis insist on it, is always a noncareer Ambassador. That's not our demand. The Saudis want someone whom they believe can pick up the phone and talk directly to the President.

Successive Central Command commanders have had very productive relationships with successive noncareer ambassadors in Saudi Arabia.

Bakich: Can I ask the question from the reverse angle? Has it been your experience that leaders in foreign countries attempt to play ambassadors and combatant commanders off each other?

Crocker: Only if you're dumb enough to give them the opportunity and I think, by and large, we're not that dumb.

Riley: Very good. Barbara had asked the question about the transition abroad, and you told us about the Syrian reaction to what was going on in Florida. Was it part of your job as the Ambassador during an election year to help figure out what's going on in the country as a way of preparing the leadership of your country for what's going to happen after an election takes place?

Crocker: It's part of the transition process. Ambassadors will prepare a paper. "Here are the key issues in this country. Here's why they're key. Here's how I would suggest the new administration approach them." And then that goes back to State and it's incorporated into the State transition process.

Riley: Candidate briefing material.

Crocker: Yes. That starts immediately after an election.

Riley: My question was more about what's going on in the United States and whether you are in any way trying to serve as an interpreter for the realities of domestic politics to the Syrians or to the Lebanese or the Kuwaitis if you happen to be there.

Crocker: Ambassadors have a lot of responsibilities. Two of the most fundamental are explaining the country of one's accreditation to Washington and explaining America to the country of one's accreditation. That if you Syrians proceed with this really dumb plan you've got, here is the kind of reaction you're going to get out of the U.S. and here's why. That's part of the job.

Riley: All right. How do you end up in a central State Department position under President [George W.] Bush 43?

Crocker: I was finishing up my time in Damascus in 2001. I'd had three successive ambassadorial assignments in three fairly challenging places. I wanted to go off and spend a year as a diplomat-in-residence in some nice cushy place like the University of Virginia. [*laughter*]

I was approached with the idea that I really should be Deputy Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs and reminded that I had not paid my dues in Washington at all. At all.

Riley: You were approached by?

Crocker: Bill Burns, the Assistant Secretary designate. He was coordinating, of course, with Deputy Secretary [Richard] Armitage and Secretary Powell. With not inconsiderable reluctance I agreed to do it and arrived back in main State about two and a half weeks before 9/11.

Riley: What did you find when you came back? Did you have conversations with Burns or others about the nature of the portfolio, or was it just an assumption that this was an ongoing

bureaucratic post that had its own momentum and there weren't any real initiatives you would have to undertake as a piece of the action?

Crocker: I think by late summer 2001, there was a certain sense around Washington that this still-new administration was going to have a pretty intense focus on Iraq and that was part of my portfolio.

Riley: Okay. But this was only a kind of generic, it's in the air, rather than any specific conversations you had.

Crocker: There were conversations. The administration arrived in office with the view that we weren't winning with Iraq. That international consensus was fraying, sanctions were crumbling, and we had a significant problem on our hands. I got there six months into the administration. So that was all percolating around.

No one at that time was talking about war plans or anything else. It was clear I was going to be pretty busy with Iraq because the administration was bringing a new focus on it. And indeed, on 9/11 I was on a plane up to New York, going to La Guardia, for consultations at the UN [United Nations] with our team with Security Council members on "What are we going to do about this?"

Riley: I want to come back to that in just a second and pick up the story, but were there other pieces of the portfolio that you thought would be important for your labors there? This would also be a two-year commitment basically?

Crocker: Right.

Riley: Or were you anticipating that Iraq was going to dominate your agenda?

Crocker: I basically had three components: Iraq, Iran, and the Arabian Peninsula states. And I saw the priorities to be in that order.

Riley: Did you have any personnel responsibilities beyond that? Beyond just staffing your particular operation? Were there other key positions that you would fill yourself as a piece of this?

Crocker: I had the offices in those areas as part of my responsibility and an indirect responsibility for recruiting and staffing the embassies under my supervision.

Riley: Below the ambassadorial level?

Crocker: Yes.

Riley: Or including the ambassadorial level?

Crocker: We would talk informally about possible candidates for ambassadorial postings, but we have a fairly structured process for that in State. Something called a Deputies Committee will meet, consider various candidates, then recommend a short list to the Secretary and so forth.

Bakich: To what extent was there any particular State Department policy preference with respect to Iraq prior to 9/11? Much talk of smart sanctions replacing a comprehensive sanction regime? Was it that level of detail?

Crocker: There was a broad sense in government, White House, NSC [National Security Council], DoD [Department of Defense], State, that we were not on a good trajectory. Our initial focus was on what we could do to shore up international support for sanctions. That's why, in the period just before 9/11, the focus was on, how do you engage the Russians? How do you engage the Chinese? How do you stop the Europeans from being squishy? How do we get the international community to say, "This is dangerous"?

The other element of it was WMD [weapons of mass destruction] and what could we do to enable UNSCOM [United Nations Special Commission on Iraq] to more effectively carry out its mission. And this is a question of difference in degree, not in essence. It's not as though the Clinton administration had just ignored Iraq. The new Bush administration clearly wanted to know how we could reverse the momentum on this.

Riley: To what extent was Iraq a sore point regionally in the '90s? I'm thinking about before 9/11, but was it something the countries in the region were focused on? Or is it secondary to everything that's going on internal to them and secondary to maybe Israeli-Palestinian issues?

Crocker: It depended on the country. The Kuwaitis were obsessed with Iraq for good and obvious reasons. The other Gulf states tended to say that it's the other four-letter country that begins with an I that's the real problem. Iran. The Saudis, I think, felt that what we had done in Desert Storm and the clear readiness that the Clinton administration had shown to respond to a new Saddam threat meant that Iraq was going to be a pain, but it wasn't any longer a strategic threat. The United States had severely weakened its military, shown a readiness to step forward again, and Saudi Arabia didn't really need to be deeply concerned.

Jordan had economic interests with Iraq through the oil trade. Syria also felt that Desert Storm had weakened a strategic enemy, and in fact, now allowed Syria to derive some economic benefit from dealing with that enemy.

So with the exception of Kuwait, the region was not overly concerned about Iraq, and that was part of our problem. They were dismissive of the WMD issue. "Maybe he's got them, but he's not going to use them on us. He knows if he does that, you'll be all over him. He's not going to do it." We obviously took a different view.

Riley: But with Iran there was a different sense on this? Was there a greater sense of vulnerability in Iran at the time?

Crocker: Oh, yes. The Iranians had laid claim to Bahrain. There were riots in Bahrain in '94, '95 that the Bahrainis believed were instigated by the Iranians. Bahrain is a Shi'a majority state ruled by the Sunnis. The United Arab Emirates had three of its islands seized by Iran under the Shah, but Iran is Iran no matter who rules in Tehran.

They felt an existential threat emanating from Iran. Oman wouldn't allow Iranians into the country. Didn't have an Iranian problem, didn't want one. And the Saudis, with their Shi'a-

dominated eastern province, which is where, of course, the oil fields are, constantly worried about Iranian subversion. And then there was the Sunni-Shi'a split in Islam. So sectarianism was part of this.

I think with the exception of the Kuwaitis, all of the Arabian Peninsula states would have said Iran after Desert Storm was a greater threat than Iraq.

Riley: In your return to central State, did Iran—I'm assuming based on what you said before that Iran was not as high a level of priority within the American government as is Iraq. That the focus was principally on Iraq.

Crocker: I think that's correct. We had learned to live with the Islamic republic, obviously not happily, but in mid-2001 we had not seen the Iranians engaged in new or enhanced activities that seemed to dramatically threaten our interests.

Perry: You've talked of the reasons the Bush administration made Iraq a priority in terms of strategic views. Any talk about what was left undone from the Gulf War?

Crocker: There were some voices at that time, political appointees in the new administration who were saying we should have just gotten it all done in 1991. Those of us on the career side, I think, virtually to a man and a woman, believed that the Bush 41 administration had handled it just right.

Riley: In the two-and-a-half-week interval between, did you have a sense about the working relationship and structure within the foreign-policy apparatus of the Bush administration? You're coming into a State Department but you've got CIA, you've got the National Security Council, Defense Department, are you getting a reading in the pre-9/11 interval about how well those organs are functioning with one another? Are there any unusual rivalries coming up? Assess that the center of gravity is maybe in a place where State was uncomfortable?

Crocker: I had just arrived there. I was a stranger to Washington and to the State Department and could barely find my way to the office. There were rivalries, not unusual ones. The classic pattern in Washington is that the State Department and CIA's Directorate of Operations line up pretty closely. And the Joint Staff is normally also pretty much in that alignment as well. The Office of the Secretary of Defense [OSD] normally is not. This isn't particular to any given administration. That's just normally how it works. State, CIA, Joint Staff have a field perspective. OSD has a Washington policy perspective. NSC is, of course by statute, supposed to be the neutral coordinator. Sometimes they are, sometimes they aren't.

I can't ascertain a pattern that varies from administration to administration. But that's the normal bureaucratic political lineup, and it was certainly there during the Bush administration.

Riley: So nothing unusual there?

Crocker: No.

Riley: Okay. You said you were on an airplane headed to La Guardia on 9/11. What happens from there?

Crocker: This was the 8 A.M. USAir shuttle out of Reagan. And as we were beginning our descent into La Guardia, we could see smoke coming out of the first tower. People got on cell phones, and we were still in the air when the word was passing around the plane that an aircraft had hit the tower.

Just as we landed, the second tower was hit. We were one of the last flights to get into La Guardia. My mission was to get to the United Nations and that's what I was going to do, so my colleague and I got a cab and were stuck in traffic on the Queensboro Bridge and watched both towers go down and never could get into Manhattan.

Rented a car back on Long Island. Found a hotel in central Long Island and basically stole the car. They said we couldn't take it off the island, and we headed for Orient Point and the Connecticut ferry and the next day made the long drive back to D.C. Like other Americans we figured it out in the car that it was no coincidence the Northern Alliance commander, Ahmad Shah Massoud, had been assassinated just a few days before.

So on 9/12 we were saying to each other, "This was al-Qaeda."

Riley: So you head back to Washington. What's happening in the days after that? What are you occupied with and what are you seeing within the department?

Crocker: Of course, 9/11 changed and still changes the country and the world, so whatever we were doing on the 10th of September, we weren't doing that anymore.

It's all pretty much a blur, but the judgment that this came to us from al-Qaeda out of Afghanistan was an assumption very early on. My responsibility was working with all of the Gulf states, sharing assessments, reviewing our mil-to-mil agreements and, starting in September, ensuring that we had overflight, refueling, staging arrangements in all the key Gulf states. And working with the ambassadors in Washington, our ambassadors out there, where we needed new architecture to be sure we got it.

The other thing I became involved in right after 9/11 was something called the Geneva Initiative with Iran. This was a preexisting mechanism involving Iran, the United States, Germany, and Italy, under the United Nations as a convener, to discuss Afghanistan. It was basically a way of putting the U.S. and Iran in the same room on an issue of common concern. The Germans and Italians were there for not particularly good reasons except to give us cover. The Italians because they had a significant section of the Afghan, not government in exile but government in waiting, the King and so forth, and the Germans because of the significant refugee population.

We had paid it little attention until 9/11. Our South Asia Bureau handled it. But when 9/11 happened, we got very interested. I was on one of the first flights out of Dulles to Geneva when the airport reopened, to sit down with the Iranians and start a serious discussion on the what-ifs in Afghanistan.

Riley: Are you participating in any leadership meetings within the State Department about the overall American response to this, or are your operational responsibilities so severe at that point that you're out and about more than dealing with crafting of national policy?

Crocker: Deputy Assistant Secretaries, really—it's either the top of the working level or the very bottom of the policy process. Deputy Assistant Secretaries normally aren't policy shapers, and I certainly wasn't in this. My sense was that the policy was shaped very early on. We were going to go into Afghanistan. I think the leadership worked that out when I was still in the car coming back from New York. Because the whole thrust of everything I was working on was to get us ready for that.

Perry: Can you talk about the meetings in Geneva?

Crocker: It was a fairly productive process. The Iranians had three very experienced diplomats who established in our first meeting that they viewed the United States as a strategic partner for Iran, not an adversary. We needed to work our way through our multiplicity of differences, and let's start with Afghanistan. It was always very cordial.

It was a process chaired by the UN. The Secretary General's representative in Kabul, Francesc Vendrell, the Spanish diplomat, had it at the time. But very quickly, I think in our first meeting, I and the Iranians decided to go off and have coffee. Just us. And these were not clandestine or covert meetings at all. We never denied them. Neither did we call attention to them. We didn't hold press conferences. Some of the media knew about it, never paid much attention, which was great.

But we developed a pattern as soon as I got on the scene that we would have our little plenary talks, but the main reason for them to be there and for me to be there was for informal bilateral talks that increasingly came to dominate the agenda as we moved through September and into October. Particularly once the military campaign started in early October. We spent very little time with the Germans and the Italians and a whole lot of time together. Lakhdar Brahimi then came in and took this over, and by the last couple of months of 2001 I think we had pretty much forgotten to invite the Italians and the Germans.

Riley: Who were the Iranian representatives? What was their background or experience? And are you speaking with them in English?

Crocker: In English, yes. Their Director of International Organizations Affairs, the UN connection. Their Ambassador to Tajikistan, who was really their Ambassador to the Northern Alliance. He was the main figure. He had been their Ambassador to Bosnia in the '90s. He had very close Revolutionary Guard connections. He was the one who engineered the breaking of the arms embargo and got Iranian arms in the hands of the Bosnian Muslims in the '90s. We, of course, were "outraged and shocked," but that's exactly what we wanted to happen.

Riley: Air quotes around your—

Crocker: Yes. "I'm shocked, Senator. Shocked." [*laughter*] So a very effective operator. And then the third was the head of their international economics department. Not there because of his portfolio but simply because he was a senior and respected figure in Tehran.

Riley: Were these Western-educated people?

Crocker: To greater or lesser degrees, yes. One of them had actually, as he later told me over a cup of coffee, had—we met in Geneva. We met in Paris at Brahimi's house. We were arranging to meet in New York at the UN headquarters, and the International Organizations Director said, "I can't be there." I said, "Why not?" He said, "You won't give me a visa." I said, "We give Iranian diplomats visas all the time to go to New York for UN business." He said, "You're not going to give me one because I was part of the Embassy takeover in 1979."

Perry: So the discussion then was centering on Afghanistan? And how about Iraq?

Crocker: It depends on the time. The initial meetings were all Afghanistan, all the time. About five days before we launched the war, they brought in maps and said, "Okay, here's our info on Taliban strong points. They've got this much of that here and this much of that there. Here's what our agents believe they think you're going to do. So here are the maps." And with a great deal of impatience, "Would you please get on with the war."

Once we were decisively engaged, one of the things I tried to do was hook up our CIA guys in northern Afghanistan with the Iranian Revolutionary Guards in northern Afghanistan. Because I said, "Look, Northern Alliance is going to play us off against each other." And they took that back to Tehran where it just went into a black hole. That was a bridge too far. But we were up for it, it was just having direct CIA-Rev Guard liaison in the north to coordinate the fight.

Bakich: To what extent was that actually thrown down the black hole? Was there any communication between the CIA and Revolutionary Guard?

Crocker: According to the CIA, no. They were ready but it— I don't know if it would have worked or not. It would have been very hard to do without doing it through the Northern Alliance. But it was fun to play around with.

Riley: What did you do with the maps?

Crocker: We got those back to Washington.

Bakich: To what extent was the Iranians' perception of Northern Alliance after Massoud's assassination? It's dramatically weakened?

Crocker: No. I think the Iranians played a significant role in helping the Northern Alliance to rally through Massoud's assassination. We never broke contact with the Northern Alliance, but we were very much a lesser player with them than the Iranians were. I think the Iranians probably should be credited with doing a lot to keep the Northern Alliance steady in those first— They were worried—and that's why they wanted us to move quickly—about a Taliban push into the north after the Massoud assassination.

Perry: So your discussions with the Iranians lasted throughout your time at State?

Crocker: Yes, off and on. We moved from Geneva to Paris, back to Geneva, to New York, all in the fall of '01. I had to go to northern Iraq in December. I came back from that and I was asked to go to Afghanistan.

Perry: And that was to reopen the Embassy.

Crocker: Reopen the Embassy. We called a Geneva meeting. Us, the Iranians, and [Jonathan] Mendel, on my way in to Kabul, and that's where we agreed that we would continue our talks in Kabul because one of the Iranian representatives then moved from Tajikistan to be the Iranian Ambassador in Kabul. So then we shifted it to Kabul under Brahimi.

Riley: I'm presuming you're reporting this back up through channels. Are you discovering things about the Iranians that are surprising you?

Crocker: You historians are going to hate this. Something I'm sure you're aware of but us good diplomats figured it out a long time ago. You will find nothing in writing on this.

Riley: Yes, of course. That's why we do this. [*laughter*]

Crocker: All my reporting was by secure phone from Geneva or wherever I happened to be. I'd just go into the Embassy and get on a secure phone and do an oral brief back.

Riley: This is a constant refrain with the White House people we talked to, that they long ago learned anything you put in writing either will show up on the front page of the *New York Times* or will be subject to subpoena. So one of the principal purposes of this project is to try to reconstruct as much as we can.

Crocker: And even worse from your point of view, very few senior diplomats keep personal journals anymore. When I first became Ambassador back in 1990, I had advice from a senior colleague, "Don't do it because it can be subpoenaed."

Riley: I had no idea it was that widespread. Because most of our projects have been focused on the White House and expanding a bit beyond that. We're very aware of it there.

Crocker: It's pervasive.

Riley: Wow. Well, let me return to the question. What are the kinds of things you're finding out about Iran that are important? As something more than a casual observer from the outside, I had no idea these contacts were taking place. And you get the impression that there are these walls drawn between the U.S. and Iran.

Crocker: No, it's one of these anomalies. Media normally all over, "secret talks." They knew it and you'll find little references, every now and then, little snippets that this is—but nobody ever really drilled down on it. It was kind of fascinating.

Iran is a hugely complex society. Iranians are a hugely complex people. And we know very little about them, having been disengaged in Iran since '79. So I was pretty modest in the sweep of my conclusions and observations from talking to three guys in a series of hotel rooms on different continents.

They were projecting their sense of long-term strategic interests between Iran and the United States, of which this period since '79 was an anomaly. We would overcome and we needed to

start talking about these issues face-to-face, and we should take advantage of this dialogue to range into some of these other issues. The constant refrain was that they were all strong revolutionaries who don't regret that a bit. The Shah's was a hateful and destructive regime. The United States had erred in giving it so much support, although they understood why, because of our Vietnam experience, we wanted proxies rather than direct involvement. They displayed a fairly impressive understanding of our own political history. Disappointed in the evolution of the revolution in Iran, that what they had fought for had largely been betrayed by these rigid and narrow clerics. Thought that Iran would evolve. Would not go through another revolution but would evolve into a less religiously focused society and polity that would then begin to reknit its ties with the U.S.

So we talked about Hezbollah. We talked about al-Qaeda operatives in Iran. We talked about spare parts for U.S.-manufactured aircraft. None of us had any authority, we made clear to each other, to talk about any of these things, but why not?

Over time, though, the nature of the discourse and the parties to the discourse changed. The "axis-of-evil" speech, the State of the Union January 2002, had a chilling effect on the discussion. I was in Kabul. My Iranian interlocutor was in Kabul, and he was not a happy camper in the wake of the State of the Union address. He and I kept contact there, I think he was doing it without the authority or even the knowledge of his government. Formal discussions were suspended for several months.

Perry: That was following the axis-of-evil reference?

Crocker: Right. We had been in discussions with the Iranians on rendition of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar to the [Hamid] Karzai government. I put out there that he was under house arrest in Tehran, would they give him to Karzai?

And they were discussing that. Then came axis of evil, and they sent Hekmatyar back into Afghanistan, where he still is, of course, to our bedevilment.

Bakich: An interesting move on the Iranians' part. They had him under house arrest for X number of years, ostensibly to keep tabs on him, and then he is reinserted into Afghanistan. It's a puzzling move on their part, isn't it?

Crocker: It was a reaction to axis of evil. I had no idea of the validity of anything they would say, but my interlocutors said that what this did was tip the whole debate in Tehran in favor of the anti-U.S. hardliners. So there were three options. Give Hekmatyar to Karzai, who would give him to us, keep him where he was, or insert him into the fight against us. And after axis of evil, the third course was the one that dominated.

Riley: You said you talked about Hezbollah? What are the kinds of things you're picking up from them?

Crocker: It was all happy talk. From individuals both American and Iranian who had not even authority to discuss these issues, let alone make anything happen about them.

Riley: Sure.

Crocker: But their approach was that support for Hezbollah was not a vital Iranian national security imperative. That it was a negotiable. That Iran had deep historic ties to the Shi'a community of Lebanon, which is true, it goes back to the sixteenth century, and would want to maintain those ties but need not necessarily do so through an armed militia.

That's when we talked a bit about if we could structure a package deal where the arms from Iran to Hezbollah cease but another shipment goes another way, which is badly needed spare parts for their old 727s and 737s. Could we put something like that together?

But this never got anywhere because you had axis of evil. You had several suspended talks. And then you had a change of players. [Mohammad] Javad Zarif, their United Nations Ambassador, moved in, the individuals with whom I was speaking moved out, and that was effectively a severe downgrading on the part of the Iranians of the dialogue because at least one of my interlocutors was directly connected to the Revolutionary Guard and may have been a Revolutionary Guardsman and could deliver. They did deliver several al-Qaeda facilitators to Karzai, even after axis of evil. And he arranged it.

Riley: Was that through your own personal engagement?

Crocker: Right. Zarif, a very polished diplomat, was in New York because he was connected to nothing. Reaction to axis of evil, you'll have the poster boy for Iranian diplomacy vis-à-vis the West in place, but the substance of the dialogue is cut off.

Perry: And did you report that in turn back to Washington? What you saw in the aftermath?

Crocker: Oh, yes.

Perry: So you reported that back.

Crocker: Yes, I did.

Perry: In very specific terms about where the talks were going and what things might have come out of them?

Crocker: They knew the things. I reported by telephone. There weren't going to be my fingerprints on anything.

Riley: Who are you reporting to?

Crocker: Colleagues in the Bureau.

Riley: Okay.

Crocker: And I gave it as my assessment that the departure of the team I started with was not a good sign in terms of Iranian attitudes on the efficacy of the dialogue any longer.

Riley: What you just painted for us is a picture of bureaucratic infighting in Iran that has an effect. Any of that on our side? Are you getting pushback from people in Defense or whatever?

Crocker: With the picture of extreme polarization that is painted, not without validity, of the bureaucratic politics of Washington, it was interesting to me that while there were certainly those in the White House and in OSD who did not think this dialogue was a good idea at all, no one tried to block it, shut it off, constrain it, constrain me in any way.

Riley: Okay.

Crocker: But neither did anybody tell me that "axis of evil" was going to be in the speech.

Riley: Do you know if anybody at State was circulated on this?

Crocker: I was sitting in Kabul, I have no idea.

Riley: All right, why don't we take a five-minute break?

[BREAK]

Bakich: You mentioned some of the negative consequences from the axis-of-evil speech. We're familiar with a number of the criticisms, but were there, from your operational and detail-work perspective, any opportunities, positives that emerged from the framing of the American threat complex construct in that way?

Crocker: Not that I could see, but I was narrowly focused and I was in theater. We knew and know so little about Iranian internal-power dynamics. Very hard for any of us to gauge. And I have no idea if my interlocutor was ever telling me the truth. His assertion was that, at a time of vigorous debate in Iran over whether to cooperate with or confront the United States, beginning with Afghanistan, this tipped it into confrontation. I suppose one aspect of this is to say that's where it would have gone anyway and better to get it there sooner rather than later. I just don't know.

Riley: Was anybody else going with you to these meetings?

Crocker: Yes. I was accompanied in early meetings by a representative from the South Asia Bureau. As these talks became more substantive and as we moved into operations in Afghanistan my secondment was somebody at the NSC.

Riley: But nobody from Defense or from the intelligence community was involved in these discussions?

Crocker: No.

Riley: Was Iraq on the agenda for these discussions?

Crocker: It was. As I noted, there was an increasing concern and focus on Iraq in view of the fact that we had had some effective cooperation on a common enemy in the form of the Taliban

and al-Qaeda to Iran's east, and there might be scope to talk about cooperation on an Iranian and American enemy to Iran's west.

But the dialogue really went through the transition into Zarif's leadership before that, went beyond, "Here's something we could talk about."

Riley: And if you go back and read the secondary accounts now, the question of Iraq is already blossoming within the halls of American government. Were they hearing this? Were they or were they not concerned that this was the next step?

Crocker: Oh, they were very much aware of it. But the free-flowing nature of the exchange had really evaporated with the change of personalities. The dialogue ceased in May 2003. Zal Khalilzad had moved in for the last few sessions, and these were pretty stiff affairs. Right before the commencement of hostilities in Iraq, we kind of laid down markers with the Iranians on their nonintervention. But by this point, these had become very formalized and pretty stilted affairs.

And there was an interesting subtext to all of this, which is that we were working very closely in the run up to and the immediate aftermath of Operation Iraqi Freedom with an Iraqi exile group with *extremely* close ties to the Iranians. So it was a multiple-layered dialogue, and I was involved in different aspects of it.

Riley: I'm sure we'll want to dig into that later. You mentioned that you were in northern Iraq in December of 2001, which did show up in the briefing book. Could you tell us a bit about the purpose of that visit and what transpired?

Crocker: As you know we have a long and *checkered* relationship with Iraq's Kurds. The Kurdish rising of 1991 was a chapter very much on our minds. But it goes back well before that. The Algiers Accords in 1976 basically was seen as an Iraq-Iran accord backed by the U.S. that gave both Iraq and Iran a free hand against their Kurds. Seen by Kurds as a U.S. betrayal, '91 was another U.S. betrayal, and so forth.

Riley: Seventy-six, you said?

Crocker: Yes. A long, tangled history that needn't concern us here in depth except to say we knew it and they knew it. So my mission in 2001 was to establish contact with the two primary Kurdish groups and their leaders and say, "Hey, you know what? Let's not do dumb stuff. We take the Iraqi threat seriously. We are cognizant of your tragic history with this regime. We have not yet made decisions, but we will consult with you closely as friends and partners. In return we ask that you do nothing to surprise us or to try to force our hands or events." Meaning don't start a war we're not ready for. So I spent a week or so up there moving around between Erbil and Sulaymaniyah, [Masoud] Barzani, [Jalal] Talabani.

Perry: And how did they respond to the concepts you were presenting to them?

Crocker: This is motherhood and apple pie, and given our history we all agreed that made eminent good sense. They so committed themselves. It was a mutual nonsurprise pact. Important to do because they were aware of everything that was swirling around by late 2001.

Riley: Is there a lot of U.S. traffic into this Kurdish area at this interval?

Crocker: No, I was it.

Riley: You were it.

Crocker: It was a very interesting mini mission because State's diplomatic securities said, "We can't possibly support this. It's an insane idea. We don't have the assets, and you just shouldn't go."

We had an important policy reason for me to go, so diplomatic security took me to the Turkish-Iraqi border and handed me off to the Peshmerga. Who took very good care of me as you can see.

Bakich: Understanding the checkered past between the United States and the Kurds, the northern no-fly zone certainly was a benefit to them over the period—

Crocker: Oh, yes. The Kurds felt they had been actively encouraged to take up arms against the regime in the spring of '91 and did so and then caught it in the neck. But they felt we had responded significantly, Operation Provide Comfort, the relief operation in the northern no-fly zone. You may recall, because everything was complicated in the Middle East, a Kurdish civil war broke out in the mid-1990s, '95-'96, between Talabani and Barzani, in which we played a very active mediation role in bringing an end to hostilities.

By the time I showed up on the scene, we were in a much better place with both groups than we had been in '91. But still both of us cautious because of the past.

Perry: And how about the Turks at this point?

Crocker: This is all highly intricate. One member of my delegation was a Turkish diplomat. That was a requirement. The only way we could get in was through Turkey, and the price of passage was to include a Turkish diplomat as part of the team. And I was very careful to brief the senior levels of the Turkish Foreign Ministry going in and coming out and to brief the Chief of Operations of the Turkish General Staff as well because of the acute Turkish sensitivities.

Riley: You didn't have a Defense Department companion on this trip?

Crocker: No. OSD actively wanted to be involved, and we thought it was better to make this a State initiative.

Riley: Was that litigated out or—

Crocker: We prevailed.

Riley: Was it litigated out?

Crocker: No lawyers were involved.

Riley: Okay. There are people like Paul Wolfowitz, for example, who have had a long-standing interest in this area. Are you having conversations with Wolfowitz at all about what you're doing?

Crocker: I'm having conversations with his staff.

Riley: Okay.

Crocker: But given the attitudes and orientations and personalities, it was our sense at State that you want to be very careful. You want to avoid signals that could be misinterpreted. The Kurds have a history of—it was like General Peay's two-star: don't get decisively engaged with two platoons. The Kurds have a tendency in that direction, and we were frankly concerned that OSD representatives might be getting too far out in front of the headlights for where we wanted to be.

Riley: On something like this then are you at liberty to make a final decision yourself? You said you prevailed and my question is, who ultimately makes the decision about who the U.S. representative is going to be?

Crocker: It would have been at the level probably of the Deputy Secretary and the Secretary of State.

Riley: Okay. So Armitage and Powell. The next stage of things seems to have you more in Kabul than in Iraq, but I don't want to surmise that without asking the question. Did you have any other engagements before the Kabul engagements on Iraq or with the Kurds?

Crocker: No. I came back from Kurdistan in mid-December '01 and ten days later was asked to go to Kabul.

Riley: And what was your portfolio to be in Kabul?

Crocker: Establish the Embassy and initiate a relationship with the Karzai administration. He arrived in Kabul as Interim Chairman just ten days before I got there myself.

Riley: And was that an open-ended deployment?

Crocker: Until they could get an ambassador confirmed.

Riley: So tell us about going to Afghanistan.

Crocker: From the time I was told to the time I arrived about 96 hours elapsed. And 24 of them were in Geneva with the Iranians. It was all moving very fast. A huge logistics effort to simply get the wherewithal out there for a minimally functioning Embassy. The State folks did a heroic job of basically going out to the world saying, "We need a couple of Antonovs," the superlarge Russian cargo planes. "We need them now." And they hired one from Uzbekistan and another, I think, from Tajikistan, aircraft that had never seen an air-worthiness certificate. [*laughter*] And got these things to Germany, cross-loaded supplies, and then literally went in in the back of these Antonovs, riding on the pallets into Bagram Air Base. And this was end of December 2001, it was pretty wild out there. So that's what I landed on.

A huge effort in a shattered Embassy building. It had been rocketed there at the end by the Taliban, so we had walls broken in, no glass in the windows. A Kabul January is significantly cold. Just trying to stay alive and then function and establish a relationship with Karzai. We met every morning. We were both in town for breakfast.

Riley: What's an Afghan breakfast?

Crocker: It's actually very good. It's freshly baked bread, cheese, honey, olives. It was my one hot meal of the day because we were living on meals ready to eat [MREs] otherwise. Then coordinating with CIA and particularly with the military. And the military had a totally fragmented command at the time. This was liberation on the cheap. Total economy-of-force operation. There was no overall military commander when I got there. So just trying to make a coherent, whole-of-government approach to Afghanistan. My primary military interlocutor, the officer with whom I worked far and away most closely, wasn't an American. He was a British two-star who was the first commander of the International Security Assistance Force.

Riley: And his name was?

Crocker: John McColl. He's now a four-star Deputy Supreme Allied Commander in Europe.

Riley: How was your feel for Afghanistan before you went in? This is a bit tangential to your core professional training and preparation, right?

Crocker: Yes, absolutely it was. I was chosen, presumably, for my inherent expendability. [*laughter*] Not, obviously, for an area of knowledge I didn't have. But also because I had had experience in coordinating whole-of-government approaches in crisis areas. And my job was to get the stage set for a permanent Ambassador to come in and run the show.

Riley: And do you know who made the choice to send you?

Crocker: Armitage was the one who communicated it. And in those circumstances, you don't ask whose dumb idea it was. You just salute and start packing.

Bakich: The American military side, is it still at this point CIA paramilitaries that are taking the lead or is this after Special Operations Forces have entered the field in sizable numbers?

Crocker: Everybody is in, and that's why it was so challenging. CIA had a major role. Special Forces were actively engaged, and you had a Marine amphibious unit down in Kandahar. So you had regular U.S. forces, irregular U.S. forces, and irregular U.S. nonmilitary. And there was no overarching command or even coordination structure at that point. I was on the phone very early on with the three-star commander of Coalition Land Forces based in Kuwait. He had been my Chief of Military Cooperation when I was Ambassador to Kuwait as a one-star. So here's somebody I know and I said, "We have some issues." He flew out immediately, and we put together a command and coordination structure that made sense to both of us.

Perry: And who was that?

Crocker: That was General [Paul T.] Mikolashek.

Riley: Are you in a pacified situation at that point or is this still hot?

Crocker: Oh, it was pretty exciting around Kabul, yes. We had a rocket attack on the Embassy when I was there. Yes, it was still pretty lively.

Bakich: At the point in which this coordination effort reached minimal satisfaction to you, did chain of command stop in Kabul or did it extend to Washington?

Crocker: Oh, it always extends to Washington. But what I got was a flag officer, a one-star general attached to my staff, assigned by General Mikolashek, who had the authority and the responsibility to have coordinating authority with all military echelons in Afghanistan. So he could call up the Marines, he could call up the Special Forces, he could call up other regular Army and say, "What's going on? The Ambassador needs to know."

He could not communicate orders to them but at General Mikolashek's order they had to say, "Here is what we're doing and here's what we're going to do." And then I could handle through him with the COS, the necessary military agency liaison.

Riley: Ryan, you may have already answered this question, but I want to go back and ask it specifically. You said you stopped over in Geneva and had another meeting with the Iranians on your way to Kabul. Were there any specific consequences to that meeting? Was that a planned meeting with the Iranians that you were supposed to do anyway?

Crocker: No, that was one laid on—

Riley: That was laid on because you were going to be going over. And what was the purpose of consulting with them at that point?

Crocker: The main purpose was to work out our structure for future meetings and to agree as we did that the dialogue would now move to Kabul, with my counterpart, the Iranian Ambassador, under the UN flag.

Riley: And that's where that picked up until the axis-of-evil speech.

Crocker: And it carried on after that.

Riley: But without much informal—

Crocker: No, because as long as I was in Afghanistan up until March, I regularly saw my Iranian counterpart. We had developed a relationship, and his government was severely unhappy with us but he saw value in continuing our dialogue.

Riley: And did you also find value in it? At one point you said you had maps. Are you getting intelligence from them that's proving useful?

Crocker: [redacted]

[redacted]

Riley: So you've got ample justification to believe you're getting solid communications from these folks.

Crocker: Now, to build up his credibility with me, he may have told me that, *knowing* that by the time we could get there Hekmatyar would be gone. You have no way of knowing.

Bakich: Do you know where Hekmatyar went?

Crocker: No. We never got a solid lead on him after that.

Riley: Could you talk about your breakfast meetings with Karzai? I presume this was the first time you had met him. What were your impressions of him and what were you reporting back to Washington about him?

Crocker: A man with a mission impossible. The devastation in Afghanistan at the end of '01, beginning of '02, was almost absolute. Just driving in from Bagram to Kabul, not a building standing, bridges out, we had to ford a river, whole city blocks of Kabul were gone. It looked like pictures of Berlin in 1945.

This was not because of us. It wasn't because of the Taliban. It was a result of the Afghan civil war in the 1990s. But it meant that Karzai had nothing. No infrastructure, no bureaucracy, no security forces. Just a cold, drafty palace to try and preside over.

And it was working with him trying to identify people who could help him. Afghan-Europeans, Afghan-Americans, the experience there is what gave rise to the Future of Iraq project. How much nicer it would have been if we had a cadre of Afghan expatriates already identified, who could have been brought in after the fall of the Taliban.

There were a few people like Ashraf Ghani, who is still on the scene, there at the time.

Bakich: Abdullah Abdullah?

Crocker: Oh, Abdullah Abdullah was, of course, Foreign Minister. And also a facilitator of our dialogue with the Iranians because he had relations with both of us.

At one breakfast meeting Karzai said, "What do you think the new Afghan flag should look like?" And we started to sketch that out on a little piece of paper.

Bakich: Everything needed to be done.

Crocker: Yes. Everything had to be done.

Bakich: Karzai's authority is derived from something hastily arranged previously?

Crocker: No. This was the Bonn Conference. Where we and the Iranians coordinated very closely.

Riley: What else are you finding out about Karzai? You're having to develop a quick sense of his own skills and weaknesses and strengths.

Crocker: A person of great personal courage and commitment. An Afghan nationalist—and they were, and are, in very short supply. He thought of Afghanistan as a nation, a Pashtun, but very open to the non-Pashtun communities.

But I also found that his political instincts and knowledge within Afghanistan were, not surprisingly, somewhat limited. For example, among the thousands of other things he had to do, he needed to make choices on provincial Governors. And he would ask me, "Who should be Governor of Ghazni?" Like I had a clue. And he made some *really* bad choices.

In one key eastern province his choice was barred physically from entering the provincial capital by outraged city elders. Karzai hadn't gone through the process of consultation, didn't know enough about the political landscape to realize this guy was absolutely toxic. I don't fault Karzai for this. He was an elder in a pretty small southern tribe, who had been in exile for a number of years. He just didn't have the threads and equipages to—

Riley: Sure.

Crocker: And we tried to help there. I worked with former Afghan President [Burhānuddīn] Rabbānī. I worked with other Afghan leaders, [Abdul Rasul] Sayyaf. The diplomatic security guys said, "You're going to go see Sayyaf?" You may have heard of the other Sayyaf group in the Philippines, who have some associations with him, but he was on the scene and an influential figure. We would talk to anybody who would talk to us to try to say, "Afghans' future now lies with the success of this new interim administration. You've got to put your past differences aside. They can be sorted out later, but we all have to rally together."

And then I got out around the country as much as I could.

Riley: Who on the American side did you take? Did anybody go with you? Are there people who are knowledgeable about the country who are members of an inner circle that you're working with on the U.S. side?

Crocker: Afghan experts ten years ago weren't in short supply, they were nonexistent. What I was able to do was pull in a couple of Farsi-speaking Foreign Service officers who had the direct language skill—we didn't have to rely on Afghan interpreters—and had some knowledge of that broad area. More Iran than Afghanistan, but still it was a help.

Riley: You're coming into an experience that, in the most literal sense, must be unique and you're having to build something from nothing. And there will be some threads of your previous experience that help inform this. Are there historical analogies that help you in this sense? Are there things you've read or immersed yourself in before this time? Are you just relying on personal instincts and your diplomatic training to get you through this?

Crocker: I've always been a big fan of history. My graduate work was in Near Eastern history, and I certainly was aware of both British and Soviet experiences in Afghanistan. So a clear imperative was asserting right from the beginning, "We are not an occupying power." That was the importance of the Bonn Conferences, the UN-brokered formation of the Afghan Interim Authority, a fully sovereign authority at least in name.

Avoiding the appearance and the reality of unilateralism. Not the Americans calling the shots. It all goes through Karzai. And to ensure we were all sending that signal, hence the importance of the relationship with General McColl. He and I, it's kind of interesting because it's what [David] Petraeus and I did later in Iraq. We would normally go see—my breakfasts were separate but McColl and I, a couple of times a week, would go together to see Karzai. Military-civilian, American and international, in support of an Afghan authority. Trying to avoid the narrative of another Western occupation of Afghanistan from taking hold.

And, in an ironic way, the very small force footprint we had at that time actually assisted in that, because you didn't have American soldiers on every street corner. It was this careful balance. We could not be styled as occupiers, yet we had to have enough leverage to prevent really bad things from happening. And we saw that contradiction play out fairly early on.

What was the operation at the beginning of March? It was our first big effort to eradicate—

Perry: That would be Anaconda?

Crocker: Anaconda. Right. That was an economy-of-force operation, and it did not go particularly well. A bigger, stronger enemy than we had anticipated. And that was when we had everybody in it. The 10th Mountain Division commander had overall command, but he had Special Forces, CIA paramilitaries and then, as we got bogged down, we had no armor. None. The mostly Tajik Norther Alliance did have T-54s and T-55s, and, if we were not going to have this be a stalemate, we had to get that armor to Anaconda. But that was into a Pashtun area, and the Pashtuns said, "Over our dead bodies. If they try to come through here, we're going to kill them."

My job was to negotiate with the Pashtuns the transit of that armor into the fight. And that's what we were reduced to. We weren't going to win in Anaconda if we didn't get some ragtag T-54s, crewed by Tajiks and Uzbeks, in there through hostile Pashtun territory to do it. Those were the kinds of things we worked on.

Bakich: What is the price for that? What do you, the Americans, have to give up? What did the Northern Alliance have to—

Crocker: The Northern Alliance had to give us an ironclad commitment that they would execute the mission and then withdraw. They will make no effort to extend their area of influence into this Pashtun area. They did make that pledge and they did deliver on it. With the Pashtuns it was very interesting. The Pashtun leader was a wild man named Pacha Khan Zadran, who was later killed.

I negotiated with his brother, who was the Minister for Tribal Affairs in Karzai's interim administration, and we went through this ballet on a freezing night with kerosene lanterns over

why we needed to do it and, from his side, why it was impossible for us to do it. With the authority of the military, when this was clearly at an impasse, I said, "This is vital to our success. It is vital to Afghanistan's future. That armor will move through, and if necessary, we will kill your brother."

He's a *giant* bearded Pashtun and he said, "Ooooh." [*laughter*] "Why didn't you say so?" So they went through without incident. We did not prevail in Anaconda. At best it was kind of a messy draw, but it wouldn't have been that if we hadn't gotten the armor in there. The DoD was adamant. We were not going to plus-up our forces. Absolutely were not. And the rest, as they say, is history.

But then again, had we plussed-up our forces we might have been on the wrong side of the imperial occupation argument. With even worse consequences.

Riley: But you're arguing this is not a two-sided conflict. How many sides are there in this conflict?

Crocker: Oh, if we had had only a half a dozen sides it would have been a piece of cake. I'm not an expert on this stuff. I'm not even knowledgeable. So trying to figure that out on the fly when you've got a hot conflict going on is—

Riley: Who are you reporting to back in Washington?

Crocker: The Assistant Secretary for South Asia Affairs was Christina Rocca, but I really didn't have much interaction with her. It was as close as you can get to an almost autonomous command. I had occasional contact with Armitage. But by and large the guidance I had was, "Go out there and do what you have to do."

Riley: That's surprising to me. I would have thought that given the centrality of this to the American effort there would have been a very high-level minder, whether it was Condi [Rice] or—you're shaking your head no.

Crocker: There wasn't. Again, you'd need to talk to others more senior in Washington, because I didn't do Afghanistan until I was in Afghanistan.

Riley: Yes.

Crocker: So I wasn't part of the discussions or anything else. My strong sense, based on my experience there, was that there wasn't a great deal of high-level interest anywhere in Washington as to what happened next in Afghanistan. We had gotten rid of the Taliban. We had answered 9/11. DoD in particular absolutely *did not* want to see us get involved in nation building, hence the total economy-of-force effort. We had knocked off the bad guys. We had paid back for 9/11. Our work there basically was done.

That is why I think we were, at least on the civilian side, pretty well left to our own initiatives, which was fine. The resources I did need I could get. Zal Khalilzad was involved as Envoy, although he came out only once during my three months. The military really was not well organized on this. General [Franklin] Hagenbeck, the 10th Mountain commander who had

overall authority for Anaconda, had more advice than you could imagine was possible, with a rear area echelon's commander senior to him telling him what they thought—from Kuwait or Tampa or Stuttgart—he really ought to be doing, without giving him the means to do it.

I didn't have much guidance at all, which was okay. He had too much. The CIA had it right. They carried an awful lot of the effort there, including support for Karzai. And had the right kind of Washington support without too much interference.

Riley: And who's leading that in country? Is it possible for you to say?

Crocker: I'd rather not mention names. He's still in active service.

Riley: Understood. But there was a direct line of communication from Washington to Kabul then on that line?

Crocker: Yes.

Riley: Would it have been helpful to you? I think you suggested earlier that you actually felt comfortable not having any sort of direct oversight, but there are also costs to not having that kind of support on certain occasions.

Crocker: I wanted more from USAID [United States Agency for International Development] than USAID was willing or able to give me. I argued from the beginning that we had to get back in the infrastructure business because there wasn't any. AID wanted to spend its resources on agricultural development—seeds, fertilizers, pesticides—because Afghanistan is an agrarian economy. And having been out there on the ground, I said, "It's not going to help if you can't get the seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides to the farmers and even if you could, the farmers can't get their crops to market because there *aren't any roads*."

And this ran against USAID's philosophy. So that was a bit frustrating. The AID administrator did come out, and that helped. But it took way too long, and the lack of someone saying, "Afghanistan is really important" did leave it to me and I had limited clout.

Bakich: And the USAID administrator at this time was?

Crocker: Andrew Natsios.

Bakich: Did you sense any direct influence by Pakistan while you were in Kabul?

Crocker: I went through Islamabad and met with the Deputy Foreign Minister. [Pervez] Musharraf had already done his famous strategic switch, so Pakistan was now our ally. I took the opportunity of going into Afghanistan saying, "This is a new chapter. Pakistan should be engaged and should signal to the Afghans it is engaged in a totally different way than you were engaged before." The Deputy Foreign Minister said, "You know, you're right. We should send our Ambassador back." And I said, "I think what you need is a new Ambassador. I think sending your Ambassador to the Taliban back to Kabul is not the signal we're really looking for here."

The Pakistanis at that initial time were off balance and very unsure of what they wanted to do diplomatically for obvious reasons.

Riley: Was there anybody in country who was valuable to you?

Crocker: Oh, yes. We had a couple of journalists. Kathy Gannon, longtime South Asia AP [Associated Press] correspondent, who was just great. We had a tiny handful of journalists—she was probably the best—who really did understand these things. She was great in just giving me Afghanistan 101.

Perry: She was in Kabul?

Crocker: In and out, yes. Between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Riley: Were there any natives?

Crocker: Oh, certainly, yes. Abdullah Abdullah was my key Northern Alliance interlocutor. Karim Khalili, the senior Hazara leader—again, they're educating you, and they are also spinning you.

Riley: Of course.

Crocker: And that's why you had to talk to everybody. Amalgamate all the stories. See what cancels out what and you may get something not too far off from ground truth. He was helpful. Ashraf Ghani, although many, many years outside of Afghanistan, was great because he had the international connections, understood how economies work, and knew people he could try and pull into this.

Those were the key figures.

Riley: And did your experience in an Arab culture prove to be particularly helpful to you in this instance, or did it in some ways miscue you?

Crocker: My experience in fractured societies, particularly Lebanon, was helpful. Countries that are emerging from years-long conflict, weak central governments, different armed factions, so Lebanon was somewhat instructive.

Riley: There was back-and-forth with the al-Qaeda connection between Afghanistan and Arab countries. Did you stumble across things that—you were hearing Arabic spoken or you would see something in Arabic that you were detecting, "My gosh, here is a piece of a connection that goes to Saudi Arabia or someplace else"?

Crocker: Not really. The hunt for al-Qaeda was, of course, a huge focus and primarily carried out by the CIA. But that was an intelligence and operational matter. There weren't any billboards up or files lying on the street.

Riley: I thought I would ask. You never know. And is bin Laden on your radar or your list of things to deal with there?

Crocker: He really wasn't. He was on the CIA's list, but at that time the belief was that he had gone to ground, probably on the Pakistani side of the border.

Riley: Was there ever any thought so far as you know to having Ryan Crocker confirmed as the ongoing Ambassador?

Crocker: Oh, no. Absolutely not. It was clear this was for a limited period of time, and my bureau was getting increasingly antsy because Iraq was looming.

Riley: Organizationally how did that work on the home front?

Crocker: My position was vacant.

Riley: And presumably the people who were reporting to you then are without supervision.

Crocker: Someone else in the front office stepped in, but it's just not a sustainable process given everything that's going on.

Riley: So the chronology is that you head back to Washington in—?

Crocker: I went back to Washington at the end of March and almost immediately headed for Kurdistan again because all of that had been in abeyance while I was in Afghanistan.

Riley: And what do you find when you get back?

Crocker: There was Kurdish concern that I had made that first trip, immediately went to Afghanistan and the Kurds were going to be left high and dry again. They were reassured I was back on the scene. This was about relationship building, trust and confidence, more than it was anything operational. We did not want anything operational out of them. Quite the opposite.

Riley: And do you know whether there were other Americans going into the Kurdish areas in the interval between when you were there?

Crocker: No.

Riley: Nobody had.

Crocker: There was a small CIA presence, but they were being very careful, for historical reasons and for the Agency's past experience. They wanted absolutely no political role at all, and did not engage the Kurds at all on anything remotely policy related. And that was exactly as it needed to be.

Riley: And people out of the Office of the Secretary of Defense are also staying out at this point?

Crocker: Yes. They agreed with obvious reluctance that they would not be engaged there. But, again, the Kurds are very savvy in Washington, have representatives there. Lots of private Americans were cruising around speaking in the name of official Americans. With what authority, who knows? It's the way we do business.

Bakich: There's clearly a Bureau of South Asian Affairs, Bureau of Near East Affairs. At this point was it odd for someone to essentially go in and represent an area that isn't officially on the letterhead, or does that happen far more frequently than we would expect?

Crocker: It was a unique situation. I did have experience, primarily in Lebanon, but also in Kuwait, of civil-military stuff. And I wasn't the policy guy or the area guy, I was the operations guy.

Riley: Did you get debriefed by Congress when you came back from Kabul?

Crocker: No, I didn't. I had some contacts, particularly on the House Appropriations side, conveying my impression that this was going to need to be a major U.S. investment and that I wasn't sure the administration was making the requests, so the appropriators might want to be asking some hard questions of where we go from here.

Riley: I'm assuming you had no codels [Congressional delegations] in Afghanistan?

Crocker: Oh, no. We did.

Riley: You did. Okay, we need to hear about that then. Do you have any recollections of those?

Crocker: We had numerous codels. The first codel on my watch was then-Senator [Joseph] Biden, who spent a couple of days sleeping with us in the Embassy, eating our MREs. There was an effort in Washington to limit codels because of our ability to support them. I said, "Let them come." The more Congressional interest we have, the better our chances of sustaining the resources for engagement. Codels were us, and it was a gamble because you lose a codel out there, it really isn't good for your policy.

What they did was bunch them. Biden came out alone, but the rest generally came in groups. We tried to get them in in the morning and out in the evening so we didn't have to deal with the logistics of an overnight.

Riley: But in Biden's case you did.

Crocker: In Biden's case we did. Given his seniority on the Foreign Relations Committee.

Riley: Okay, but beyond that they were—

Crocker: They came out in groups.

Riley: And where would they go from there if they weren't overnighting? Where would they go to sleep?

Crocker: Normally they came in and out from Pakistan. Sometimes from Uzbekistan.

Riley: All right. Did you have as a part of your portfolio once you went back to Washington the Iraqi government in exile? The groups that are beginning to form looking at—

Crocker: Oh, sure. That had started before I went out. We had the Iraq Liberation Act from the Clinton years, so we were in touch with all of the exile groups, some of which we were supporting financially.

Riley: What is your role in that? Do you have any specific recollections of meeting with them at various places?

Crocker: Absolutely. We were in touch with most of the groups. I initiated senior-level dialogue with the Dawa Party. We had been very unsure of them since the early ’80s. Believed they were involved in the bombing of our Embassy in Kuwait in December of ’83. In 1990, with the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, when the jail was liberated so to speak, they fled to Iran. That’s when we thought, *Ah, these were Iranian agents, not Dawa mainstream*, but still there were question marks. I made the recommendation, which was approved at senior levels, that if we were going to seriously engage with Iraq, we had to deal with its oldest, established, non-Ba’ath political party, which was Dawa. And had a meeting in Washington with Ibrahim al-Jaafari who, several years later, went on to become Prime Minister.

Riley: Has the equation shifted at all by the time you come back to Washington, in terms of the certitude?

Crocker: The momentum was clearly developing.

Riley: Was that a surprise to you?

Crocker: No.

Riley: You figured it was going to happen at some point?

Crocker: Yes.

Riley: So what is occupying most of your time then? You go back to State and you’ve got—

Perry: Is it the Future of Iraq?

Crocker: That’s when we cranked up Future of Iraq.

Perry: So this is what you’re working on at this point.

Crocker: That was in part driven by the Afghan experience, where, for obvious reasons, we had not thought through postliberation issues in Afghanistan, and we had not identified a cadre of the willing and the able who could deploy to help address those issues.

Bakich: Would you mind clarifying the date of the conception of the Future of Iraq project? There is a range.

Crocker: My bureau had done some preliminary work while I was in Afghanistan. We had our first formal meetings on it in April ’02 after I came back.

Riley: And can you tell us a bit about the nature of the project and how you're going about organizing the effort and who within the government and outside you're relying on to develop it?

Crocker: We picked a number of areas of governance. Education, infrastructure, services, economy, security, and so forth and worked to establish working groups that would include at least one, normally more, U.S. government officials. American experts in the field. And then Iraqi-origin individuals with some particular background. We got funding for this to convene working groups in each area that would develop an agenda.

It was all totally theoretical and hypothetical. If the Saddam regime were to end, and one day it will, what would be a sensible approach in these various areas? It started with an assessment. What do we think conditions are? How would this be addressed both as a technical matter and in a political context?

So presentations were made. Papers were generated. But for me the key issue wasn't the planning work, it was identifying the individuals and getting to know them so that if a decision was made to remove the regime you would have people who are in the blocks and ready to go out and address these things, which we totally didn't have in Afghanistan.

Riley: And is the predicate for this a forceful removal of Saddam or not?

Crocker: No. We were very careful simply to say, "Saddam is not going to last forever. Iraq has a history of regime change, often violent. It would be prudent for the U.S. and the West to begin thinking about the problems, challenges, and opportunities that will be faced in that context."

The subtext obviously was, "And maybe we'll do it ourselves," but that was never spoken.

Riley: Okay. The conditions on the ground would be very different if it were a relatively peaceful transition to a post-Saddam era and a forceful removal?

Crocker: As I said, the unspoken assumption was that it was going to be a forceful removal and that we were going to be the agent of it.

Perry: And sooner rather than later at that point?

Crocker: Well, as we frantically scheduled all sorts of working-group meetings it would not be an unnatural impression to draw.

Riley: As 2002 progresses. Did you have a time frame when you began this as to how long you would allow the exercise to continue?

Crocker: As long as it seemed to be of value, and that sense was that it would be a fairly long time because work generated insight, generated more work, and also people identified people, more people were invited and so forth.

Riley: And is that the main thing on your agenda when you come back?

Crocker: It's one of many things on the agenda. There is that effort. There is the political effort with Iraqi opposition groups. There is intensive dialogue with Congress. I spent a lot of time up on the Hill.

There were ongoing maintenance relations particularly with the Gulf states. This was a time, in the wake of 9/11, in which a lot of Arab nationals in the U.S. were having problems. Anti-Muslim sentiment and then running into our new regulations, so that took a fair—maintaining those relations, not having our Arab allies popularly and even government was turning anti-Arab. That took a fair amount of effort. Then because it's Washington and the American system right in the middle of all of this, the House Government Reform Committee seized itself of the plight of Saudi child abductions. Saudi fathers, American mothers. Marriage hits rocks. Saudi father abducts child, takes the child to Saudi Arabia, which has no legal structure to honor an extradition request or a court order giving the mother custody. And I'm responsible for Saudi Arabia, so I am the star witness in a series of *really* hostile hearings in front of C-SPAN, explaining why child abductions are actually a good thing and support U.S. interests. [*laughter*]

Riley: Is that what the crawl said?

Crocker: And I'm doing all of this while I've got everything else going on, including the no longer so productive Iranian dialogue, but it's still in place and I'm still flying out to Geneva on Friday night and coming back Sunday afternoon and pretending I've been sitting on my deck all weekend.

Riley: How was your wife dealing with all of this?

Crocker: My wife is career Foreign Service, or was career Foreign Service. We met in Baghdad on her first tour and served together in every rathole from then on. Two tours in Lebanon. She was in the residence in Damascus when it got overrun. She went with me to Afghanistan.

Riley: Did she?

Crocker: Yes.

Riley: I didn't know that.

Crocker: Yes, they needed somebody to do the basic logistics work.

Riley: So she was there as a Foreign Service officer?

Crocker: Yes. So she's used to it.

Riley: My question was partly predicated on how you stay in touch with her.

Crocker: It's real easy. She's right there.

Riley: But that must be a highly unusual set of circumstances.

Crocker: It is. You don't have many tandem couples who are ready to go anywhere as long as they can be together.

Riley: Does she have language skills also?

Crocker: She has French and Arabic.

Riley: Very good. So we have you in the interval with that set of responsibilities.

Crocker: Before you leave Future of Iraq, it was also clear from the outset that the Future of Iraq project did not have full buy-in in the U.S. government, nor within the Iraqi émigré political movement.

Riley: Okay. Explain.

Crocker: OSD in particular saw it as a distraction and an effort of minimal value. And those groups closest to OSD, particularly Ahmed Chalabi's Iraq National Congress, took a similar view. If not obstructionist, they certainly were not helpful in the process. And not too far into this I began to develop the concern that if and when the decision was made to go into Iraq this project would not have operational traction.

So it was of value, we continued it. But it was not embraced by the whole government.

Bakich: Could it have received operational traction by State alone, or did it need to be incorporated in the interagency structure?

Crocker: This becomes a broader issue that I'm not terribly well qualified to address. State was not in the mainstream of Iraqi decision making, was my sense from my level. So, no. My view would be that State alone couldn't have made it operational, and that's the way it played out. Because DoD, even before OFI [Office of Foreign Intelligence] was launched, was given the responsibility for postconflict operations, not State. Because ORHA [Office of Reconstruction and Human Assistance] was a DoD unit, not a State unit. So if DoD was going to have the lead, if DoD did not embrace the Future of Iraq project, it was not going to have operational significance.

Riley: Could you comment a bit more on your perceptions of why it was that DoD felt this was a distraction?

Crocker: This is surmise. Informed surmise, but surmise nonetheless. I think at that stage DoD was not looking at a paradigm for Iraq that would have a significant U.S.-led and resourced effort aimed at reconstruction and postconflict management. OSD was looking at a very swift assertion of Iraqi sovereignty by émigré groups that would then take it forward on their own. And that we would not need to be involved.

Bakich: [Douglas] Feith has written that he was amenable to the Future of Iraq largely because it contained a substantial number of Iraqi exiles. Did you have any contact with him as this project started?

Crocker: I did. Of course, he was several levels up from me. We did coordinate with him and his office on a number of events, including an August 2002 gathering of senior anti-Saddam political figures that he and Marc Grossman, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, cohosted. So we did work together with them. His staff was part of most of our working groups, but they certainly did not embrace the working groups.

Riley: Was a piece of this also a kind of thumb on the scales in favor of Chalabi and his organization who felt that they had things under their control and therefore didn't wish to participate in what they viewed as a sideshow?

Crocker: I think, yes, Chalabi clearly thought he had the wherewithal to take the reins in Iraq post liberation, and he had his supporters in DoD and elsewhere in the administration.

Riley: Did you have a reading from your own wisdom and the received wisdom of the people you were consulting with about Chalabi's ability to do what he was professing to do?

Crocker: I was of the view that it was highly unlikely a single exile group or a coalition of exile groups would have the ability or insight to establish a sovereign government in the aftermath of liberation and effectively rule the country. This process would have to heavily involve Iraqis in Iraq with whom we had no contact and little knowledge. You simply couldn't parachute in a government in exile and have it work.

Riley: Did you have any audience elsewhere within the American government that was interested in the relevance of your experience in Kabul?

Crocker: To a certain extent, but if you've ever been in Washington in crisis mode there isn't a lot of time, even if there is an inclination, for reflection on past experience or sober planning. It's "Do this, do this, do it now."

A lot of lip service was paid to the validity of the Future of Iraq project as a concept, and a lot of lip service was paid to how the Afghan experience guided us in that direction. These were outside of State, and State was not an operational actor to a large extent. It was lip service.

Riley: And are you sensing aggravation or frustration on the part of your superiors within State at the reaction you're getting from Defense?

Crocker: I think there was a certain attitude within State. You're going to have to talk to the principals.

Riley: We'll do that. You're an informed observer.

Crocker: Basically said, "We're doing the right things. Engaging the Kurds. They talk the talk. We're going to have people out there on the ground taking the lead in this. Future of Iraq is well conceived. It makes a lot of sense. So we're doing the right things and that's really enough. We'll be positioned when this all goes to hell to say, 'Wasn't our fault. We knew what we were doing.'"

Whether that is a defensible senior policy position, others are going to have to decide.

Riley: And at this stage you still are not, presumably, having a lot of contact with the White House, is that true?

Crocker: I certainly did with the NSC staff.

Riley: And who would be your principal points of contact on the NSC staff at this stage?

Crocker: Zal Khalilzad certainly. Frank Miller, who was very solid and ran a great interagency effort.

Bakich: The ESG [Executive Steering Group].

Crocker: Yes. And he was a superb chair of that in a very difficult bureaucratic environment. And then there was Phil Mudd, a seconded CIA officer.

Riley: Your engagement then is at the staff level, and the broader question is whether there is any attempt to engage the NSC apparatus to broker a more favorable outcome for the use of your work.

Crocker: Again, the NSC staff was supportive.

Riley: Right.

Crocker: On paper.

Riley: Right.

Crocker: And were involved in many of the working groups. What was missing was an NSC position that said, "If we do this, this will be our operational framework for doing it." And I don't think that was ever strongly pushed within State either. That it was okay just to have it. If others choose not to use it, that's their problem.

Riley: Okay. But you don't know whether there was an effort made either at the deputies' level or the principals' level to try to pressure the National Security Advisor or other people in the White House to make sure that there is more inclusive thinking about reconstruction efforts in Iraq.

Crocker: I have no idea what went on at those echelons. I certainly didn't see any reflection of it.

Bakich: I was wondering if you could describe your relationship with that cluster of working groups. The Executive Steering Group. The IPMC [Iraq Political-Military Cell], IR&R [Iraq Relief and Reconstruction], throughout at the Embassy.

Crocker: I think Frank Miller chaired a very well organized and focused ESG, the bureaucratic politics of which fell out along the fairly traditional lines we were talking about. State, Joint Staff, CIA worked pretty closely together under Frank's supervision. OSD did not. Often did not

attend meetings and certainly was not sharing with the ESG the relevant efforts they were engaged in.

Bakich: You mentioned that, as you saw it, the Future of Iraq project had two primary values. One was, for lack of a better term, the analytic exercise. "What could go wrong? What should we be thinking about?" Of course the other aspect of this was the personnel side. To what extent did you get a sense that the exiles or the externals, however you refer to them, on those working groups had presence in Iraq? Knew people in Iraq? Knew whom to go to? Whom to deal with should the war happen?

Crocker: It was a huge problem. Saddam ran a very effective police state. Many of these individuals had been out for quite a while. Some maintained that they sustained contact with individuals in Iraq. I was always dubious because Saddam was fairly effective at monitoring that kind of communication, which would get you killed. There were a few cases involving some of the western tribes where, in fact, they did move in and out, but their knowledge of what was happening in the center of the country was severely limited.

It's a great question because it's an important point. The Future of Iraq project has been portrayed as kind of an "if only." "If only" that had been embraced as our operational strategy, good instead of bad things would have happened, et cetera.

I'm not at all sure that's the case. We were planning in the abstract based on fairly limited knowledge, and we were working with people who had limited, if any at all, insight or contact with what was actually going on in Iraq. It was the best we could do, that I could see, but it had many limitations.

Bakich: Were these limitations that could have been overcome in the short run by virtue of financial resources? Greater buy-in? Or was it inherent to the project?

Crocker: It's inherent to the project. More financial resources would have got us more of what we already had. It's a fundamental question. We tend to focus on, as we look at Iraq '02-'03, how we could have planned it better. Certainly a valid question, but the real question is how much risk are you prepared to take? How much unknown and unknowable are you prepared to absorb to deal with the threats and opportunities you can foresee?

And that's what haunted me in this whole process. Not that I had a great plan that I couldn't sell to the rest of the government, but there was no earthly way we could develop a plan that was going to prepare us for what happens after the statue falls.

Bakich: And Tom Warrick's role in this is?

Crocker: Oh, he was the kingpin. He was the guy who more than anyone organized and implemented the project.

Bakich: And you were in daily, weekly contact with him?

Crocker: Daily.

Riley: I want to ask the flip side of the question: what good came out of the exercise?

Crocker: Since DoD did not embrace it and DoD had the responsibility for postconflict management, they would not put out the call or even accept the deployment of the totality of the people we had identified. They wouldn't let Tom Warrick into Iraq. But a number of individuals who had been identified and engaged by the Future of Iraq project did wind up in Iraq, and a number of those made very effective contributions.

Bakich: So to a certain extent it served one of the ideas, the hopes that you had?

Crocker: Yes. Not in the systematic, broad-gauged way. We had a sort of a—I can't remember what DoD called it. There was a parallel effort to identify and deploy individuals of Iraqi origin, some of whom also made a difference, but that was sort of done on the fly, after the invasion had already taken place.

Riley: All right. Why don't we break for lunch?

[BREAK]

Perry: I have a follow-up. The portrait you're painting of Afghanistan and Iraq after the American invasion is obviously so similar in the sense that there was not the will on the part of Washington to nation build. Does that just go straight back to the 2000 campaign and President George W. Bush saying in that campaign that we were not here to do nation building? Now granted that that was before 9/11 but does it start with that, with the campaign, with the President and work its way down through the appropriate agencies?

Crocker: It's a great question, but I don't have the perspective to be able to address that. I would see some fundamental distinctions between Afghanistan and Iraq though. The administration did not have a predisposition toward regime change in Afghanistan. Having been compelled to do so there was a neorealism, I think, personified by [Donald] Rumsfeld, who said, "We will use a minimum of force to achieve this objective, and we will not be concerned with its aftermath in any major or sustained way." There was no neoidealist/neoconservative counterpoint to that in Afghanistan.

Iraq was, I think, fundamentally different. Rumsfeld still the neorealist. "We will use an absolute economy of force to prevail." But you had a very significant element that was not present in Afghanistan, and those were the neocons and the neoidealists who said, "We do not have to nation plan or nation build because once liberated from oppression, right-thinking Iraqis will do the right thing. The outcome will be hugely beneficial for them, for us, and for the region." That wasn't a factor in Afghanistan.

Riley: One of the things that turns up in the briefing materials with some frequency is the "perfect storm" memo from 2002. Were you motivated to write that memo in part because you were picking up signals that made you uncomfortable about postwar planning?

Crocker: It was clear by late 2002 that we were moving toward war even though no formal decision had been communicated. It was clearly where we were going. The concern that some of us had is that we had not only not prepared for the aftermath, we hadn't really seriously considered what the variables would be in that aftermath and that's our earlier discussion on how much known and unknown risk are you prepared to absorb in an endeavor that complex that you cannot *possibly* foresee its consequences.

The "perfect storm" memo grew out of conversations among Bill Burns, Assistant Secretary of State for Near East Affairs; David Pearce, head of the Iran/Iraq office; and myself. David was the principal author. We sent it outside the system. It wasn't attempting to be predictive, it was attempting to be illustrative. "Here are all the things that might go wrong. Has anybody really thought through this?"

It went forward. It went up to the Secretary. I never heard another word about it. It wasn't an effort to predict the future, it was simply to say, "Maybe it isn't going to be the future you think it is."

Riley: You said you sent it up outside the system. What do you mean by that?

Crocker: There are system memos and there are outside-the-system memos. An outside-the-system memo doesn't go through the normal clearance process, and it is not widely disseminated. It doesn't go through the Executive Secretary. An Assistant Secretary can basically carry an out-of-system memo to the Secretary, which the Assistant Secretary did in this case. But it has no standing within the system.

Riley: Any follow-up on that?

Bakich: The "perfect storm" memo comes out at a time when that type of analysis isn't— it's not the only one. I'm curious to hear to what extent you were hearing from others outside the State Department but within the government about the concerns you were having. Were there back-channel discussions as to say, this momentum is potentially dangerous or—?

Crocker: Certainly there were those, for example, in the NSC and the CIA who, with extensive field experience in this region, were saying an awful lot of things could happen in the wake of a military intervention, only a few of which might be good. So, yes, there was lots of angst and anxiety around town, but I'm not aware of any principal in any building, including my own, who was able or prepared to walk into an NSC meeting and say, "Hold it."

Riley: As a routine matter, are you getting reports from your superiors about what is happening at the senior-level meetings where decisions were being taken about preparations for an invasion or postwar planning, or is your knowledge base principally built out of reading the *Washington Post* and whatever else the ordinary citizen is picking up?

Crocker: Certainly we got regular debriefs. They came to me primarily through Marc Grossman, who would provide readouts on deputies committees and principals committees meetings. These were very operational in their import. "Here's what we need for the next meeting. Here's the decision on this issue. Here's the follow-up." So it wasn't a highly elevated

discussion on the consequences of war and peace. It was, "Here's what has to be done for the next meeting."

Riley: But you were building surmises based on the character of the specifics that are coming back to you. In other words, you have a pretty good sense of where all the momentum is.

Crocker: It was clear in February that DoD would have the responsibility for postconflict engagement. That's when ORHA was created under DoD auspices. So, yes, we clearly saw the decision making as it unfolded.

Riley: Do you recall any other specific instances where there were jurisdictional disputes with DoD over particular aspects of planning? Were there cases where State felt like it was being cut out in this?

Crocker: It was quite clear in the ESG process that OSD was running a number of its own initiatives that it was not discussing with not just us but other elements of the interagency.

Bakich: Was it your sense that DC [Deputies Committee] meetings were running in the same pattern, following the same pattern as the ESG, OSD is not participating fully at the level above?

Crocker: I attended only a certain number of DCs and even fewer PCs [Principals Committee]. The OSD did engage actively and certainly in the DCs that I attended it was primarily Doug Feith. But I at least had the sense that there was also a lot going on outside the room that wasn't being brought into the room.

I don't want to give you the sense of a totally stovepiped or noncollaborative atmosphere. We worked closely with OSD on a number of initiatives. They came up in the fall with the notion of the Free Iraqi Forces and we, and others, did everything we could to support that effort. I think it wound up that DoD identified some locations where these people could be housed and trained in large numbers. I believe it was in Poland. State went to the Polish government and said, "Here's what we want to do." Worked out terms of use.

DoD thought that a lot of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq cadre out of Iran would be interested in this, so we worked with the UAE [United Arab Emirates] to ensure they could get into the UAE and then be transported on to Poland. You've got all that in place. As it turned out very few signed up for it, but that would be one of many examples where OSD and State worked very closely together.

Bakich: In that instance, it was CENTCOM [U.S. Central Command] that was less than excited about the Free Iraqi Forces.

Crocker: CENTCOM was worried that they would go into combat operations with large numbers of barely trained individuals who could create havoc on the battlefield. It was a legitimate concern, and I think one that OSD was prepared to take into account. As it turned out, the numbers were so small, there really were no units deployed, or very few to my knowledge. As individuals, some of these people did great and even heroic work as scouts and advance elements. They did have their utility but not on the scale envisioned. That may have been a good thing. CENTCOM was certainly relieved.

Riley: Who succeeded you in Afghanistan?

> **Crocker:** Now a professor at Princeton, a specialist in central Asian affairs, Robert Finn.

Riley: Did you have debriefing conversations? He came in at the point where you transitioned out or was there an interval between?

Crocker: No, we wanted to hold the gap to a minimum, but I had to immediately retool and get into Kurdistan, so we never overlapped. I left at midday and he arrived the evening of that same day.

Riley: That's pretty tight. Were there any transitional memos or things of that sort?

Crocker: No. His permanent Deputy Chief of Mission, David Sedney, deployed about two weeks before I left. I took him to every meeting I had, everything I was in on, so that was the transition.

Riley: And at the point when you come back to the United States, is Afghanistan completely off your plate?

Crocker: Absolutely, totally. I was immediately swept up in the Iraq stuff.

Riley: Was there a loss of professional expertise or knowledge? I'm trying to determine whether any significant opportunity costs—

Crocker: Not for me because I didn't have any.

Riley: You're being too modest.

Crocker: No, I debriefed the Deputy Secretary and the Secretary at some length of my impressions going forward and so forth. I again spent two weeks with the incoming Deputy Chief of Mission, so I think it was reasonable.

Riley: I hear what you're saying, but within the literature there is a criticism of American foreign policy at this time that what happens is Iraq comes on the stage and crowds out attention to Afghanistan. The real war was left behind for a war of choice. I'm not endorsing the view. I'm just saying that it is a part of the criticism.

Crocker: Yes.

Riley: So I'm wondering whether there weren't diplomatic opportunity costs associated with somebody in your position and having developed relationships over—you said you were there three months or something like that?

Crocker: Yes.

Riley: Having developed those relationships and that knowledge base and then, by your own words now, when you left the country it no longer has any of your attention.

Crocker: Robert Finn coming in actually knew something about Afghanistan. It was a trade-up.

Riley: Again, I think maybe you're being too modest but I accept the claim. Your contacts with Iran had stopped by the time you came back to the U.S.?

Crocker: No. I have no idea how often or when, but I was involved in discussions with the Iranians that carried on through our last meeting in Geneva in the beginning of May 2003. The details recede in my mind because after about mid-2002 they just weren't very productive.

Riley: You had earlier suggested that they lost a lot of utility by that point.

Bakich: They lost utility. What happened at these meetings? Was it simply a chance to look to the other side and say, "You're here, I'm here, and we're now going to talk," get in the same room?

Crocker: We had these detailed talking points. We would make a series of points, demands, requests. They would make a series of points, demands, requests that basically went right past each other.

Riley: What about the Kurdish area? Do you go back in there at any point after you come to Washington?

Crocker: Yes, I was there in April 2002 for several weeks. It's an interesting period because Barham Salih and I almost got assassinated then. They were aiming at him, but he was on his way to pick me up.

Riley: What happened?

Crocker: An element of Ansar al-Islam, a fundamentalist Kurdish group that interestingly had its safe haven in Iran and links to al-Qaeda, attempted to assassinate him one afternoon. Killed seven of his bodyguards but missed him.

Riley: In a convoy?

Crocker: No, in front of his residence. They were setting up for his move to pick me up and they opened fire too soon, before he had left the house. So they killed the bodyguards but missed him.

Riley: And you were under their security at that time?

Crocker: Absolutely.

Riley: You still didn't have U.S. diplomatic security?

Crocker: No.

Riley: What was the purpose of your trip to the Kurdish region?

Crocker: The next iteration of the planning, consultative, and confidence-building process.

Riley: At this stage had there been any further U.S. presence there?

Crocker: No, just the agency bases.

Riley: So still no DoD—Wolfowitz is not in this area at all during this time?

Crocker: Not to my knowledge.

Riley: And that's true of anybody else associated with the Defense Department. Track us through then. You've already said you had four or five major things on your agenda, but we'll stay focused on Iraq. Any other major developments or big things happening during 2002 on Iraq?

Crocker: Just ongoing discussions with the Iraqi opposition. As I mentioned, we had a major gathering of senior opposition figures cohosted by Grossman and Feith. This was at the State Department in August 2002. That intensified our interaction with the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, one of whose top leaders, Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, came to the U.S. for that. This is significant because at a time when our direct dialogue with Iran was clearly going downhill there was an indirect dialogue, SCIRI [Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq], being headquartered in Tehran. The fact that Abdul Aziz al-Hakim was allowed to travel to the U.S. for high-level meetings was a signal from the Iranians that they were happy to have their guys work with us. As we got into the actual invasion and its aftermath, there were some indirect but very critical U.S.-Iranian understandings through the Supreme Council that we managed even at that time.

Riley: You're in your meeting with the Iraqi nationals. You feel at that stage State and Defense were pretty much on the same page with respect to this group or not?

Crocker: With respect to SCIRI, yes, pretty much. State didn't really have a favorite among the opposition. Chalabi was very close to OSD and the Vice President's Office. Ayad Allawi had strong links to the CIA. We did not see a particular favorite and indeed, in my view, it was disadvantageous to us to have a preference.

Riley: I wonder if you could comment a little bit more about Chalabi and his ability to win favor within the Defense Department. This seems to me to be a very important historical development and I don't understand it very well. I'd be interested to hear your observations about how this came about and maybe the consequences of it.

Crocker: I'm really not in a position to comment. You'd have to talk to those in OSD, the Vice President's office, NSC who had those relationships. They were there clearly. Chalabi was an extremely intelligent individual who spoke in language that I think Americans like to hear. A democratic Iraq under the rule of law allied with the U.S. He had his arguments as to why he could bring that into being. I don't think many of us in State found him terribly persuasive. He had, at best, a checkered past. He was wanted in Jordan for mega-million-dollar embezzlements from a bank. You were not dealing with the Boy Scouts of America and we knew that with any of these guys. But even by the extraordinarily low standards of the Iraqi opposition, he distinguished himself.

Riley: Were you independently picking up information about Chalabi and others through your networks in the Arab world?

Crocker: He was *non grata* in much of the Arab world. But his defenders would say, "And that proves the point. He is utterly unlike these authoritarian, totalitarian, undemocratic, traditionalist monarchies. He is the new face of the Arab world."

Riley: But you weren't persuaded.

Crocker: No, I wasn't. But this is anachronistic. Chalabi went from being America's darling to being the most despised Iraqi we could think of, and that isn't right either. Chalabi is an Iraqi nationalist and a Chalabist. [*laughter*] He sees himself as part of the tradition in Iraq, part of a family dynasty. His family under the monarchy had a prominent position. He sees himself as having the destiny to carry that forward. He is a person of great personal courage, unlike so many of the exiled leaders. When he went back to Baghdad he largely stayed there, and he stayed outside the Green Zone.

So 2002, 2003, 2004, he was seen as our man. Now he is seen as an Iranian agent. The reality is he played us, and now he is playing the Iranians. But it is for his agenda, and part of his agenda is very much a nationalist agenda.

Riley: One of the things we have not talked about in the earlier discussions is the WMD threat and the development of that as the rationale for proceeding in Iraq. Were you at all engaged in these discussions in 2002, or were you privy to information from your sources in the region, or were you deployed in any way in information gathering to help support the—?

Crocker: No, I was not part of the WMD effort. I did have a connection to UNSCOM. I deployed to Iraq in spring of 1998 as the U.S. Diplomatic Representative on an UNSCOM mission to inspect Saddam's Presidential palaces.

Riley: Is that right? In '98?

Crocker: In '98.

Riley: Could you tell us a little bit about that experience?

Crocker: You may recall in the long tortuous process of UNSCOM's engagement in Iraq, we reached an impasse over the question of Presidential palaces, which the UN insisted must be inspected because of recurring reports that they were being used to store weapons of mass destruction. Saddam refused as an unacceptable infringement on the sovereignty of the state. A painful compromise was worked out in which a special commission would be developed that would include UNSCOM but that would not be UNSCOM. It was a Presidential palace inspection mission, and it involved diplomats from around the world including an American diplomat and that was me.

We spent two weeks going through the basements of Saddam's palaces from Mosul in the north to Basra in the south, and to our intense astonishment we found nothing. So I did have that onetime involvement with UNSCOM, but I was not involved in the WMD effort.

Riley: Were there trained professionals who went with you?

Crocker: Oh, yes, the UNSCOM inspectors were part of each team.

Riley: But you said they wanted international diplomats rather than—

Crocker: To make this a diplomatic mission rather than a mission of weapons inspectors.

Riley: Do you have any special recollections of going through Saddam's palaces?

Crocker: Oh, goodness, yes. In particular in Baghdad, the republican palace complex. As an Arabic speaker I had the opportunity to interact with the Iraqis a little more than some of my colleagues. In Ramadi in the west I met Saddam's private secretary, I have to dredge up his name now. Not a household word, but after Saddam possibly the most feared man in the regime. It was interesting to see hardened Iraqi officers, our counterparts in the inspection, just shrink into the shadows when this guy showed up.

He engaged me, said he would like to meet Secretary [Madeleine] Albright and could I set that up. Abid Hamid Mahmoud was his name. A few days later in Baghdad he showed up again and said, "Jump in the car. I want to show you something." So we drove over to another palace—

Riley: You got in the car with him?

Crocker: Yes, I thought that would be prudent. He said, "This is the palace of Saddam Kamel." This was the son-in-law of Saddam Hussein who defected to Jordan in 1996 along with his brother. After about nine months they returned and were murdered. Mahmoud took great delight in saying, "This was his palace. He left in a hurry." Indeed, shoes were strewn around. Then he said, "A very bad thing happened to him later" and laughed. I was quite aware I was in the presence of the man who had caused that bad thing to happen. So, yes, I had a chance to meet the Saddam regime as well as the newer.

Riley: Did you meet Saddam himself?

Crocker: No. Tariq Aziz and Abid Hamid Mahmoud.

Riley: Did you learn anything else from the trip about Iraq or about Saddam himself by virtue of having this exposure to his residences?

Crocker: The megalomania of the man who built these unbelievably lavish palaces, with imported Italian marble, that were never occupied. They were built and then left vacant. Clearly we were dealing with a total megalomaniac. Then, of course, the republic of fear. The *terror* that senior officials could inspire in those around them.

Riley: Were you systematically debriefed by our intelligence community after you'd come out?

Crocker: Yes, I did sit down and I did a written report and a couple of oral debriefs.

Riley: Did you reach any conclusions about the WMD threat based on that experience?

Crocker: I am no arms control expert at all, but it seemed to me going through that particular episode that UNSCOM was never going to find weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. I did not think for a minute that that was because there were no weapons of mass destruction. It's just needles in haystacks in which the regime was going to be more than able to move the needle if it looked like you were getting anywhere near it.

Riley: So it was basically a question of oversight capacity and the inability of anybody to have any kind of reliable oversight capacity.

Crocker: Yes, a tightly controlled police state that was also staffed by ruthless and intelligent people. A tiny example from our own experience was the anthrax killer. It took us years before we could trace it to the presumed suspect, and then he either died or killed himself before it could be proven. But in this one instance with operating in a benign and supportive environment that was the United States of America, our best law enforcement minds on the case, it took us forever to trace that back. So how are you going to find the anthrax in a country that has determined to see that you don't?

Riley: You're doing the tours with the UNSCOM professionals. Did they have confidence in their own ability to do this? I can imagine in a situation like that where the professionals would come back out of the country with you and in a casual moment throw up their hands and admit exactly what you just said: "This is an impossible job."

Crocker: They were wholly committed professionals. Here were the leads they were following, here's the next step. They had some capacity, they thought, to identify a site and stake it out and prevent anyone from entering or leaving. I didn't know any of them well enough to have the kind of, "Let's have a few beers and talk about the existential futility of this whole thing." Their capacity to carry on against overwhelming odds of actually coming across something was extraordinary.

Riley: Let's go back to where we started. Based on this experience and anything else that may be relevant, had you developed a position on this WMD question in advance of the invasion?

Crocker: I certainly believed what the intelligence community was reporting. I think everyone I worked with—these are serious professionals and their assessment was there were definitely WMDs.

Bakich: INR [Bureau of Intelligence and Research] is said to have a fantastic reputation in the intelligence community, routinely punches above its weight. Were you a consumer of much of its products?

Crocker: Sure, I read INR's analyses. They're a good organization, they're a boutique organization. They're very small. I tended to put more weight in the DI [Directorate of Intelligence] stuff simply because they had more resources.

Perry: Could I follow up then on your trip, not so much about how it shaped your worldview about WMDs but how it shaped your view of Saddam Hussein.

Crocker: It's a great question because I think we as Americans lose sight of how awful that regime was and why we were up against such terrifically hard choices by 2002, 2003 as sanctions were crumbling, international consensus was dissipating, and Saddam was by no means getting any kindler or gentler. That's what I saw in '98. That built on my experience early in my career, the two years I spent there, '78 to '80, when Saddam assumed power formally. I was present in Iraq when he, for example, carried out the summary execution of his Minister of Planning, who was a protégé but who in a Cabinet meeting criticized Saddam's economic policies. He was removed from that meeting and executed the next morning, and the regime made sure that word got out.

I was there when he murdered the founder of the Dawa Party, Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr. We saw uniquely what life was like even in the regime. The Deputy Minister of Agriculture at that time had an American wife. The Deputy Minister was taken from his home in the middle of the night and his bullet-ridden body was dumped on the steps of that same home the following morning. His wife and children were then told that they were not being charged with his corruption, but that they were forbidden to leave the country. She came to us utterly hysterical saying, "They're going to assassinate me next, they're going to assassinate my children. What can you do?" We could do nothing except get some insight into that world of terror in which even officials live.

Riley: You were posted in Iraq at the time?

Crocker: Yes, '78 to '80. So I've lived under a lot of unsavory regimes, but this was in a class by itself. It was a regime of terror, it ruled by terror. I saw that again in '98. So while I appreciated all the risks of military intervention, I sure didn't have a good answer to, "Okay, what's the alternative?" Because you could see sanctions eroding. UNSCOM by then was UNMOVIC [United Nations Monitoring, Verification, and Inspection Commission], and they were never going to find anything. Saddam was going to win this particular confrontation. As we look back at 2003, I think we lose that part of the issue. This was an evil and dangerous regime that was actually gaining ground. What we really don't grasp is just how evil that regime was.

Riley: And in violation of agreements from '91.

Crocker: Yes, in violation of a dozen Chapter Seven Security Council resolutions. It was an interesting anomaly in American political life. The conservatives favored regime change and the liberals opposed it, without either side, I think, looking at the consequences of their policies.

Perry: I'm trying to work on the diplomats' view then of, I don't know whether I should call it a balance or a line of the actual removal of Saddam Hussein. Was it a necessity because he was a murderous dictator or because of the strategic importance of Iraq as, we hope, a democracy in the center of the Middle East? Is it both? How do you deal with those two?

Crocker: We career types don't have the luxury of making policy based on those grand ideas. Certainly they both, and others, were in play in the decision-making process. My personal view at the time was that on balance it is too dangerous to try. But it was kind of a Hobson's choice because leaving him in place meant he was only going to get stronger, and then what? Given his track record it wasn't a happy point of speculation.

Bakich: You witnessed and experienced the republic of fear. To what extent did that give you confidence that you had some handle on the way in which the leader in the country where you're stationed makes decisions? How does he operate? If someone were to ask you as a man on the spot, "Who are we dealing with? What motivates him?" What would have been your answer or what was your answer?

Crocker: To be pretty modest on our capacity to understand a personality and system that is so far beyond our experience, mercifully, as to be almost unimaginable. But I did see it, particularly in the '78 to '80 period. The masterful use of terror as a weapon of control. One of the stratagems was, for example, to have a young man in a family arrested and then later executed. Then the thanks of a grateful nation would be communicated to his family for their courage and patriotism in revealing the traitor in their own midst. What that did was make family members afraid to talk to other family members. So he could take terror and state control all the way down to the family level and every level above that, where everyone was constantly afraid of being informed on by everyone else and with the knowledge that they didn't even need to say anything indiscreet for that to happen.

It was a masterful system of total evil. Now the Iraqis have a grim joke that Iraq is a hard place to govern, always has been. It has only been governed successfully twice, once by Al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf in the dawn of Islam, who was sent from Mecca to put down an insurrection in the eighth century, and he did so by basically murdering every Iraqi he could find over a 72-hour period. The only other one to do it successfully was Saddam Hussein. It was that knowledge of how he operated, fear and terror as an instrument of policy at every level, from using poison gas against Kurdish civilians in the north to disassembling families.

Bakich: I believe you mentioned you had a working relationship at some time with Tariq Aziz?

Crocker: Not a working relationship, I met him.

Bakich: What were your impressions of him?

Crocker: You gain nothing from a very brief conversation like that. He was the intelligent, articulate, urbane face of Iraq for the outside world and, of course, a brilliant choice by Saddam because of his abilities and his capabilities. But Saddam knew he could never, remotely, be a risk to him because Tariq Aziz was a Christian. He had no family, clan, tribal connections that even with all his brilliance he could manipulate to Saddam's disadvantage. He was completely safe and chosen for that reason.

Riley: Is there anything we should cover between what we've been talking about and the invasion? Are there any big developments where you're involved or any changes in your portfolio?

Crocker: No. It became increasingly a sleep-deprived blur as we moved through the last months of 2002 and into early 2003 in any case, but there were no dramatic developments.

Bakich: To what extent were you involved in the establishment of ORHA? Did your life intersect with [Jay] Garner's at all?

Crocker: I was struck that after the creation of ORHA I was in more DCs and PCs than Garner was. I think he made one token appearance. He was not at all part of the policy process. We were involved with ORHA. I put a lot of personal time into trying to recruit staff from State for ORHA.

Riley: This is in advance of the invasion?

Crocker: Yes. We had a lot of Foreign Service types, both active duty and recently retired, who signed up for ORHA, so was certainly engaged in that sense. But it was a DoD operation.

Bakich: Were you at the National Defense University rock drill?

Crocker: I was not, no. My staff were but I wasn't.

Riley: Did you get a report back from them on what happened?

Crocker: Yes, it wasn't pretty.

Riley: They were unhappy?

Crocker: They thought it lacked organization, focus, direction, purpose.

Riley: And they were right?

Crocker: And resources.

Bakich: Did you have any relationship or see firsthand the Warrick-[Meghan] O'Sullivan controversy?

Crocker: No, no, I didn't.

Riley: Meaning their inability to get over or controversy before that?

Bakich: From the way it has been described in the historical record, it was OSD saying no to two very talented individuals.

Riley: Right, to them going over.

Bakich: Right, participation at all.

Crocker: Meghan O'Sullivan went out; Tom Warrick did not.

Bakich: Yes.

Crocker: And stayed out.

Bakich: Yes.

Crocker: But they didn't like her because she was smart and objective and hadn't signed on to a particular agenda.

Riley: When did you find out you were going to get drafted to go over?

Crocker: Which time?

Riley: The first time.

Crocker: That was probably early April. Wolfowitz invited me to a meeting in his offices. This was when the invasion was still underway. I think it was actually late March. That was when things had bogged down on the road to Baghdad.

Riley: Was it unusual for you to be invited to Wolfowitz's office?

Crocker: Yes, it was. Hume Horan was there as well. They were reaching out to area experts. The idea was, is there anything we could do politically to create some kind of popular momentum in favor of liberation that could shift the balances in Iraq and ease the pressure on our invading forces. We came up with this notion of having a popular conference in southern Iraq. But by the time we actually could get it organized they'd broken through and Baghdad had fallen. We went ahead with it anyway because we saw this as in the "what do you do now" category. How do you start an Iraqi political process? Zal had the lead by this time. He went to Nasiriyah in the middle of April or thereabouts and did this conference. By arrangement, senior figures of the Iraqi exile community were not present, so we could try to highlight and identify Iraqis who had never left the country. We produced a Nasiriyah Declaration.

Riley: How did you identify the participants?

Crocker: It was by gosh and by golly. We relied on military personnel who had been there maybe a whole week and a half, who had come to their attention as a notable. We did talk to our Iraqi exile contacts for individuals they might have uncovered. We based some of this on our rudimentary knowledge of tribal structures to reach out to tribal figures who had been identified as of significance or representative, and we saw it as an iteration. We would have *this* one, see what that told us. See who else might step forward, and then we'll have another one. That was basically left to Zal and me. Garner would do the reconstruction relief process and we'd try to figure out some kind of political process. We then organized a second meeting in Baghdad for the end of April. We had the thought, Okay, if we want an early transfer of sovereignty maybe we just keep organizing these meetings around the country and at a certain point these meetings then nominate individuals for a grand conference in Baghdad, and that grand conference chooses an interim Parliament and that Parliament chooses an Interim Prime Minister and there you are. We kind of figured that out on the back of an envelope.

But as we were doing the Baghdad conference the decision came down that Garner would be superseded by [L. Paul] Jerry Bremer, and we went back to Washington. Zal and I briefed the principals on how things had gone so far, laid out this notion of, just as I described, a process of town meetings that could lead to an interim authority. As I recall, Condi chaired the principals and said, "I don't think that's the way we're going to go."

Then in that first week in May, Jerry Bremer was getting himself organized. He called me up and said he'd like me to join him in Baghdad to do the political piece. I said, "What political piece are you thinking of? Because if it is the kind of orchestration of town hall meetings, the person you want is Zal because he's really good at that. He just has the flair for it."

Jerry said, "I don't think that's where we're going. I'd just like you to come out and work with me on it and figure out what to do." There's only one right answer when you're asked to serve in a time of war, which is off you go. So I joined him out there the second week of May.

Riley: I seem to recall in one of the reports I read, at some point in the interval before Bremer is named to replace Garner, you had been quoted as being critical of Garner's leadership, which was one of the things that might have precipitated the change. Is that a correct report?

Crocker: I'd love to think I had that much influence. No, I was never critical of Garner's leadership. He did the best he could in a totally impossible situation. He did not have the backing, the staffing, or the resources to cope with the enormity of the situation. I think the administration was right not to let it rock along the way it was. But, no, I've *never* been critical of Jay Garner. I think he's very courageous stepping up to a situation in which you're pretty damn sure you're going to fail but you do it anyway because that's where duty takes you, and that's what he did. But I certainly didn't report back. I got out there in April—

Riley: This was for the conference?

Crocker: The Baghdad conference. Baghdad was a *mess*. The fires were still burning from the looting, just chaos, destruction, disorganization. But that wasn't Garner's fault. Rumsfeld had reduced the military force, almost cut it in half. The original plans to give the troops responsibility for infrastructure protection got removed. So they had no mission to protect infrastructure and that wave of looting swept over it. But that wasn't the troops' fault. That wasn't Garner's fault. But I certainly did report back to the State Department that we had a mess.

Perry: You spoke earlier this morning about the impact of the President's proclamation of the "axis of evil." It was just about this time that you're in Baghdad and he proclaims, or at least the banner behind him proclaims, "Mission Accomplished." Your thoughts about that? The timing of it?

Crocker: I'd just come back from Baghdad and was just getting set to go back. I remember thinking sarcastically, *Oh, that's good, I guess I don't have to go*. It's interesting how we look at these things in retrospect because I watched it. My reaction at the time was "nothing inappropriate about that" in terms of his clear context: the liberation of Iraq and the demise of Saddam Hussein. They did accomplish that mission. I still find the subsequent castigation of Bush over this misses that point. I think it was meant far more narrowly than it was interpreted.

Riley: Had you met the President by then?

Crocker: No, I didn't meet him until September or October of '03.

Riley: So you're back. You've been asked by Bremer to join him for a period of time?

Crocker: Right.

Riley: How long does he want you for, six months?

Crocker: I told him I had been given a faculty appointment at the National War College at the beginning of August, and I really wanted to take that. He said, "Okay, you can do it." So he was basically up front that I'd be there for about three months.

Riley: So you come back. Did your wife go with you on this one?

Crocker: No, not on this one.

Riley: What is your portfolio when you go back? What occupies your time when you're back in Baghdad?

Crocker: I was in charge of governance, in other words figuring out what one should be. That's again where Bremer early on convened the exiled leaders and said, "You're not the government. Let's work together on coming up with a generally representative structure that can take on those responsibilities." It was also clear by that time, and indeed with the fact of Bremer's appointment, that we were going to be the occupying power. Although I was not involved in it, the effort was underway to construct the Security Council resolution passed in June that so designated the CPA [Coalition Provisional Authority] as the legal occupying authority in Iraq.

What I took charge of for Bremer was kind of a miniaturized version of the process that Zal and I had started, where we conducted a series of meetings in Baghdad inviting different mixes of Iraqis to talk about what the future of governance in Iraq might look like. We used those meetings like casting calls to identify individuals who looked like they could actually walk the walk. I also worked very closely with the United Nations, Sérgio de Mello, whom I had known since we were together in Beirut in the early '80s. He was a political advisor to the United Nations' Interim Force in Lebanon, and we grew very close through those hellacious times.

In the course of May, June, and early July, we came up—mainly us, some input from the Brits, close coordination with the UN—with a group of 25 Iraqis whom we and they decided would be the Governing Council. That was rolled out in the middle of July. It was interesting the way we orchestrated it. There was only one non-Iraqi on stage, and it wasn't Jerry Bremer, it was Sérgio de Mello. So we wrapped this initial governing endeavor in the flag of the United Nations. The calculus of putting this group together was exceedingly interesting.

Saddam's deconstruction of Iraqi society meant that when he was removed there were no political or social organizations left standing. All you had were family, clan, tribe, sect, or ethnic group. Those were the bases on which we had to put this together. Sunnis, Shi'a, Kurds, tribals, urbans, exiles, indigenous, geographic representation and trying to get all of this in place. It was a hugely intricate, complex, exhausting negotiation, one of the critical elements of which was the indirect negotiation with Iranians through the Supreme Council.

I was informed by history. The Brits after World War I ran into a Shi'a revolt in 1920 that took them a decade to suppress. I couldn't foresee very much, but I knew what I wanted to avoid and what was critical to avoid was another Shi'a revolt. The Iranians could have instigated one. So I

worked with Adil Abdul-Mahdi, currently the Vice President of Iraq and the senior Supreme Council figure in country at the time. With him, and he was very open, through him to the Iranians as to what the Shi'a representation would look like. At 3 o'clock in the morning we reached a conclusion that all three of us could support.

History is also made up of things that didn't happen. We almost had that Shi'a revolt in 2004 with Muqtada al-Sadr, but it was only Sadr and it was bad enough. The other main Shi'a groups wouldn't go with him. I think that's in part because the Iranians didn't want to see them go there and they themselves felt they had enough stake in the new system, unlike 1920 Iraq, that it would not be to their advantage.

We were aware in mid-July that we were pretty solid with the Shi'a, that we had the Kurds on side, that the Sunnis were a huge question mark. We had a lot of trouble figuring out who post-Saddam Sunni potential leaders were and who they would look like. So the insurgency had not yet risen, but by getting the Shi'a piece right, keeping the Kurds from doing insane Kurdish things, we had two legs. But by mid-July the Sunni thing, that would then be the problem.

Bakich: SCIRI's on board?

Crocker: SCIRI's on board.

Bakich: SCIRI's on board, Kurds on board.

Crocker: SCIRI is on board, Dawa was on board, the Kurds on board.

Riley: Are you getting pushback from the exile groups?

Crocker: Yes, they were unhappy that we just didn't hand the whole show over to them, but they were all accommodated on the Governing Council as well.

Riley: Who other than Chalabi is crucial among the exile groups?

Crocker: Chalabi probably wasn't that critical. He never, and still hasn't, mustered a lot of weight within Iraq.

Riley: But he has the ear of the Defense Department, which seems to me to be important.

Crocker: Yes, we could have had a Defense Department revolt had we not accommodated Chalabi. So Supreme Council was critical, Dawa was critical. The Iraqi Islamic Party, Sunni was critical, the two Kurds obviously, and then what we thought was critical didn't play out. We were looking to Sunni tribal leaders and found the son of the paramount sheikh of the Shamar, which was the largest Sunni confederation, who agreed to serve and indeed became the first President of Iraq but just didn't have the stuff. That hurt us. If we had been able to get credible western tribal representation it might have blunted that element of the insurgency, but we didn't get it.

Bakich: I've got my timeline right here. How far after CPA Orders 1 and 2 are we, or are we right there?

Crocker: One and 2 were about the time I arrived so that was the first half of May.

Riley: What was your reaction?

Crocker: I wasn't much involved in the process because this was basically decided when Bremer took over. On the dissolution of the army, that to me was and still is a no-brainer. The army had already dissolved itself. If we wanted Saddam's army to be a factor, we would have had to take active steps to reconstitute it. Had we done that we would have had that Shi'a revolt. This was Saddam's army and if the signal we were sending is that those who have murdered and oppressed you are once again going to bear arms and be the dominant force in this country, we would have gotten it from both Shi'a and the Kurds. No question.

Riley: Was 1 consistent with the main thrust of the Future of Iraq planning?

Crocker: On the dissolution of the army?

Riley: Yes.

Crocker: I'd have to look at the papers again. The Security Working Group, as I recall, said that we would have to move very quickly to stand up a new Iraqi security architecture, and that's what we failed to do. We failed to do two things. Meghan O'Sullivan really worked hard at this to convince the American leadership that we had to move immediately and generously on pensions, and we didn't. That was one mistake. The second mistake was that we were way too slow in organizing to establish that new force because again there was nothing in the order dissolving the Iraqi army. In fact, there was some explicit language saying they would be eligible to return to a new Iraqi security force. We were way too slow in making that happen.

Riley: How would that most logically have been constituted? If you decided that the old army is not—that that is a no-brainer as you say, is the only alternative to build it one person at a time?

Crocker: No, I think in a sense you use a few mirrors and a little bit of smoke. You immediately staff up for a mega military-training mission, open recruiting offices throughout the country. Say "you all come" with the expectation that a whole lot of former members of the Iraqi military would indeed come. You have a vetting process and then a command structure that ensures you haven't just handed over the new corps to the former corps commander.

Riley: How realistic is it to assume that an enterprise that large could be stood up under those circumstances in a short period of time?

Crocker: It is to create the impression of momentum, that something positive is happening that could have really taken the heat out of the proto-insurgency. Because to actually organize this into a trained force is going to take years.

Riley: But I'm thinking not so much in terms of training it, but the virtue of keeping the same force in effect is that you have the manpower you need by reconstituting something. You've identified the deficiency in that avenue, which I take it is persuasive. But I'm wondering how realistic it is to assume that—how large was the military force at the time? Was it several hundred thousand people?

Crocker: Oh, goodness, no, it was close to a million with reserves factored in.

Riley: So knowing what we know about the administration, how was it possible to identify a million people and vet them in any kind of—

Crocker: There were two deficiencies: failure to pay pensions swiftly and failure to move to recruit a new force quickly. By establishing recruiting offices and pension offices you address both. For 90 percent of that million-man army there were no issues. These are the rank and file and junior enlisted who didn't have a political orientation.

Bakich: And Shi'a.

Crocker: Yes, the bulk of Saddam's army was Shi'a. That's what we didn't do.

Riley: But would it have been possible to have used the framework—the second order was the one about the Ba'athist—

Crocker: Right.

Riley: Could you not have taken that framework and applied it to the military?

Crocker: Of course, that would have been part of the vetting process. As far as Order Number 2, I looked at it at the time, and there were all sorts of exceptions and exemptions and processes for appeal. The problem was not in the order, the problem was in the implementation of the order, and the problem with the implementation is that it was an early transfer of sovereignty, if you will, that was largely given to the Iraqis to implement. And I'm not sure there's any recourse to that for us. The profound impact of Ba'athism on the national psyche was so extraordinarily intense that if we were to have said, "We will decide whether your mother's killer deserves redemption or not," that could have opened up a huge host of problems. As it played out, this was not about accountability, it was about vengeance and political gain. How much risk are you ready to absorb in order to achieve the goals you can foresee? I'm not sure there was any way of handling the legacy of Ba'athism that would have led to different or better outcomes. Several may have led to worse outcomes.

Bakich: Was Chalabi at all involved in the implementation of the orders?

Crocker: Yes.

Bakich: To what extent?

Crocker: He chaired the commission.

Riley: And the commission was responsible for setting up the guidelines or for actually—?

Crocker: The order was ours, for implementing the order.

Bakich: Chalabi went beyond his writ.

Crocker: Let's say he was well outside the spirit of the order.

Bakich: Including 40,000 some-odd schoolteachers—horror stories down here.

Crocker: Then again to be a schoolteacher you had to be in the party, and I think we envisioned the process where cases in which membership was a professional necessity absent any clear proof that there was active involvement in the party, that would be assumed to be a check and he went the opposite way.

Riley: You mentioned on a couple of occasions your reliance on history. Was there anything out of post-1945 Germany that was helpful as you were contemplating how to go about doing this?

Crocker: Those analogies were largely false. Much was made of "if the Germans could go through Nazism and emerge with a federal republic in just a few years, so can the Iraqis," which I think profoundly ignored the difference of traditions and political development in those two countries. Those who favored the intervention and favored letting the Iraqis get on with it would often cite Germany.

Another camp would then cite Japan. That in a state emerging from a murderous, totalitarian regime and with no history of indigenous democracy the only way forward is an intense and prolonged U.S. occupation. But what both camps ignored is that in Germany and Japan we were dealing with *totally defeated* nations and populations. That was never the case in Iraq. John Abizaid and I had that discussion as early as April. There was no northern front because of the Turks. Very little of Saddam's army actually met us in combat. Most of his forces were in Baghdad and to the north. They saw what was coming and they got out of the way. It was not a defeated population. It wasn't even a defeated army. The psychology of Germans and Japanese in 1945 and Iraqis in 2003 was *profoundly* different. They hadn't been in the fight yet, they were just getting ready for it.

Riley: Did you say everything you wanted to say about the two mistakes that were made?

Crocker: Yes.

Riley: The pensions would have been paid to all public employees or also to the pensions and payroll?

Crocker: Anyone who was on the public payroll who chose to no longer be on the public payroll or could not be returned to the public payroll for whatever reason would be eligible for an immediate pension.

Perry: And that ran into an obstacle where?

Crocker: You need to talk to Meghan about it because she was the real spearhead on that. I don't know whether it simply ran into bureaucratic inertia and overload or whether there were ideological reasons behind it. One thing that seldom emerges from these histories is what it's like if you're in the smoke and dust of the actual events. When you're going seven days a week, multi hours a day. We talked about being cold and miserable in Afghanistan. If you have a choice between cold and miserable and hot and miserable, take cold and miserable. Because in Iraq as we went into that summer of 2003 with no air conditioning, overnight lows in the palace were like 95. We had to have signs up saying, "Please do not sweat over your laptop, you'll short

circuit it." You're going through a fog of total exhaustion and total overload, and trying to thread your way intellectually through all of that is unbelievably difficult.

Riley: Where were you living at the time?

Crocker: I was in the general officers' quarters, second floor, Republican Palace, 20 to a room.

Bakich: Contrast with life in the Green Zone as it eventually became?

Crocker: Life in the Green Zone—eventually people got to having half of a trailer, one small room in a trailer with a door you could close behind you, and that was heaven.

Bakich: Can you describe the relationship between CPA and CJTF-7 [Coalition Joint Task Force 7] at that point?

Crocker: It was just getting underway. Rick [Ricardo] Sanchez assumed command sometime in June, I think. By the time I left at the beginning of August, it really hadn't got its feet under it. The tensions that later emerged were not too visible to me in the early going.

Riley: Anything else from your period there that we should talk about?

Crocker: It didn't happen exactly when I was there, it was the week after I left that Sérgio de Mello was killed. Terrorism works. We had worked to have de Mello and the UN literally front and center on stage, and he was prepared to play that role. He was prepared to go on playing that role. When he was murdered, it took the UN out of the picture. And it took the international community out of the picture with, I think, profound consequences for problems going forward.

Riley: And this was a purposeful—?

Crocker: Absolutely.

Riley: There are frequent references in the briefing materials to the opposition effort to isolate the United States from other elements of the international community. Were there other aspects of this that you saw where it played out?

Crocker: They went after the UN, got them out. They went after the International Committee of the Red Cross, got them out. Then they went after Arab embassies, Jordanian and Egyptian, and got them out.

Riley: How did they do that?

Crocker: Blew them up.

Riley: Blew the embassies up.

Bakich: I imagine the experience with the UN the decision to pull out totally must have been frustrating for you and for everyone else the CPA was working with.

Crocker: Yes. Again, terrorism works. So it is best not to abet them in making it work. But I think Kofi Annan felt a huge personal responsibility because he had gone to de Mello, who didn't want to do it. De Mello wanted to continue to head up UNHCR [United Nations High Commission for Refugees]. He did it because of his long-term friendship with Kofi Annan, and I think for Kofi Annan it was deeply personal after that.

Riley: So you come back to the states in the summer—

Crocker: August.

Perry: Of '03.

Riley: And as you're coming back do you have a sense that you're leaving a project with some promise, or do you feel like it is so screwed up that it can't—?

Crocker: I was mildly encouraged by both the process and the outcome of the formation of the Governing Council. I thought that did have the potential of starting to take charge in Iraq. I envisioned a devolution of authorities to the council by us starting pretty early on, consistent with the responsibilities given to us in the Security Council resolution.

I thought that as much as we can hand off to them, the better Iraq and our interests would be. It didn't play out that way. This is after I left. I remember talking to Bremer about it, whether he chose not to or whether they were incapable of absorbing those responsibilities. But at the time I left I thought this had some potential.

Riley: One of the things we haven't talked about with respect to the CPA is decisions made in the realm of economics. There was a lot of secondary discussion afterward about the effort to introduce free enterprise economics. Were you a party to the discussions about this at the early stages?

Crocker: I knew they were out there. I had no time or bandwidth to focus on them. I do remember thinking, *This is great theory, but how on earth are you going to make it work on the ground?* There's no tradition of this, no structures, there are no people who know how to make this work. And what about all those folks who are going to be out of a job?

Riley: Were there any other major decisions that Bremer took during your period there—and then we can talk about the immediate aftermath—that you thought were questionable?

Crocker: As I tried to make clear, I think Orders 1 and 2 were the right orders, or the best that could be fashioned at the time. I certainly hope history will be kinder to Bremer than the contemporary judgments have been. Mission impossible. He did a personally heroic job of keeping composure and trying to put in place structures and mechanisms to make something work that was already probably unworkable.

Riley: That's part of the reason we're sitting at a table with you, to get the thoughts and reflections of people who were close enough on the ground to know these things that we can't know.

There were a lot of accounts also in the aftermath about the brevity of the postings there, the rush of a lot of very young, green people into this environment. Did you have any personal exposure to this?

Crocker: Yes, staffing was a problem from the beginning. There were a lot of young, idealistic and willing, ideologically driven in some cases, not in all. Again, I went out to do piecework. I did my piece in getting the Governing Council set. But there was not a call to service, certainly not in the Foreign Service. We did not have the Secretary of State saying, "This is America's biggest challenge and we will be full players and I want to see 200 volunteers by Friday for one-year tours." Didn't happen.

Perry: Why do you think that was?

Crocker: You're going to have to talk to people more senior to me. In part I think it is because it was seen in State as a DoD show. They wanted it, let them staff it. If that's the thinking, it makes no sense because DoD doesn't have the people to do that. That's what the Foreign Service does. So there wasn't a whole-of-government approach, shall we say, to the aftermath of the invasion.

Bakich: Before you return to the States, you are in a perhaps unique position of actually having worked for Colin Powell, Donald Rumsfeld at CPA. Where you were in the various positions in these two departments? Are there any patterns, any points of contradiction or distinction that are worth commenting on, or is your work so focused that it is—?

Crocker: Yes, I worked for DoD, but only in the sense that I was working for Jerry Bremer. I didn't have direct reports back to the Pentagon. I reported to Bremer and he carried it forward. It was suggested to me before I went out in May that I establish a back channel to State, because we did have some State communications capabilities, just so they could stay informed. My response to that was, "If you want to be informed on what is going on in Iraq, why don't you call over to DoD, because that's who I'm working for right now."

Riley: So you come home and go to the War College for a year or so?

Crocker: Nine months.

Riley: Teaching there or writing?

Crocker: Teaching.

Riley: What kind of classes were you teaching?

Crocker: I did the core curriculum and national security strategy, and I taught electives on the Middle East and North Africa.

Riley: Are people calling you every other day to get your advice about this, that, and the other in Iraq?

Crocker: I made it pretty clear I preferred to be treated as unlisted. State didn't see it as their responsibility until the transfer of sovereignty at the end of June 2004, and it was DoD. I don't

recall hearing much from DoD. I did hear from the President. That was end of September, early October.

Riley: Of ’03?

Crocker: I guess it must have been October because it was when things were starting to trend down. Insurgency was picking up. The President invited a half dozen of us who had been with CPA in the early days to come to the White House and share with him and [Stephen] Hadley and Rice and a few others—I think it was all White House and NSC, I don’t think there were any other agencies—our observations and any suggestions we had going forward as they wrestled with this rising host of problems. I can’t remember what inanities I might have muttered, but I do remember saying in conclusion something along the lines of, “This is obviously going to get a lot harder now, but, Mr. President, please stay with this. We’re in. It’s going to get bad, it will only get far worse if we try to get out now.”

And he said, “I’m with this one all the way.” His conviction really impressed me.

Riley: This was the first time you’d had an extended meeting with the President?

Crocker: Yes.

Riley: Who were some of the other people in the room? You mentioned the NSC people but I’m thinking about the invited extras.

Crocker: Yael Lempert, the Foreign Service officer who was with me and did heroic work out there. Bernie Kerik. Need I say more? I don’t remember the others, a couple, three others.

Riley: The timing of this again was?

Crocker: I think it was October of ’03. It got some media attention.

Riley: Are you being consulted on an occasional basis by the White House after this?

Crocker: No, that was the one time. I stayed in touch with CPA colleagues, Meghan O’Sullivan in particular. Whenever she was in town we’d get together. Another young lawyer who also stayed with it for quite a while. I’d have conversations with people who were still engaged.

Perry: You said you were impressed by the President’s commitment to stay the course in Iraq.

Crocker: Yes.

Perry: Any other thoughts about how he was receiving the information being given to him in that meeting and his level of knowledge and understanding?

Crocker: He’s been accused or criticized for being disengaged and uninterested in details, but, boy, not on Iraq. He’d make notes himself. He’d ask a question, I can’t remember the examples, but I certainly saw these notes. He had a detailed grasp of what was going on with the issues and that impressed me too.

Riley: Did you get a sense that he had himself a realistic assessment at that point of the difficulties or the hazards?

Crocker: The fact that he called us over suggested he knew all was not well in our newest Camelot. I gave him credit for that.

Riley: Do you think this is where the origins of your ambassadorial appointment to Pakistan came from?

Crocker: I have no idea. I was approached on this in the fall of ’03, initially said no and then was re-asked with greater intensity in the spring of ’04.

Riley: You said no because you didn’t want to go to that area?

Crocker: I was kind of on total burnout at that point. I didn’t know much about South Asia and frankly wasn’t interested in getting back in the fight.

Peters: Had you arranged to have that nine months in the academic world to recharge and get back in the country?

Crocker: Yes. It had been pretty much a decade of nonstop crisis stuff.

Riley: On reflection during that period, did you make any reassessments of what you’d done before? Did you have any epiphanies about your experience?

Crocker: I don’t do epiphanies.

Riley: All right. So you say you’re asked about Pakistan and then you’re re-asked with greater vigor. Who is the ask coming from?

Crocker: I think Marc Grossman raised it the first time, and the second time it was Christina Rocca, the Assistant Secretary, on behalf of the Deputy Secretary.

Riley: And the Deputy is?

Crocker: Armitage.

Riley: Okay, Armitage at this point. Were they more persuasive or were you just at a better place?

Crocker: Probably a combination.

Riley: How did your wife feel about going to Pakistan?

Crocker: “What’s one more crisis?”

Perry: “Just give me a safe room.”

Riley: So when do you go to Pakistan?

Crocker: I arrived the beginning of November of ’04.

Riley: And there presumably is air conditioning and heat in this—?

Crocker: There is, it is just unbelievable luxury.

Riley: I can imagine. And at least then nobody is shooting at the Embassy.

Crocker: No, but it was a critical threat post so the potential is always there.

Riley: Let’s take a break. Then we have the next phase of your career to explore.

[BREAK]

Riley: You’re an Arab-trained specialist, why are they sending you to Pakistan?

Crocker: You’d have to ask them.

Riley: I will.

Crocker: I didn’t volunteer. They asked me. This was Powell, Armitage, the ones who asked me about Afghanistan. You have to understand that we don’t have a very deep or strong bench on South Asia. We don’t have a lot of people.

Riley: Why is that?

Crocker: It has historically been a very small bureau with a very small cadre of people who stay in the bureau. They tend to move in and out. We’re doing better now, but we had very few language specialists then.

Riley: Do you have to go through a political orientation for what you’re about to confront?

Crocker: In addition to normal consultations on the Hill and in the executive branch, I spent a day with scholars of Pakistan to get their perspectives, did a lot of reading on it.

Riley: Did you have much engagement with Pakistani issues in your earlier postings?

Crocker: No.

Riley: Maybe were not in Kabul long enough for it to matter?

Crocker: As I mentioned, I dealt with the Pakistanis on my way into Afghanistan. I tried to maintain a relationship with a Pakistani colleague when one showed up, to make a special effort to host a social event that included the Pakistani Ambassador and Afghan leaders, to encourage him to do the same, to attend that, to try to get Afghan-Pakistan relations off on a new foot.

Riley: How long is it before you hit your first crisis when you get to Pakistan?

Crocker: I'm not sure, but it must have been fairly soon. There was no end to the crises as we wrestled with the problem of al-Qaeda and the tribal areas and all the threats that Pakistan faced to its own security instability.

Riley: You've already told us about the conventional working relationship with the other branches of the government. When you come into Pakistan are you inheriting a good situation in that regard, particularly with respect to the intelligence community?

Crocker: Yes. Pakistan was one of the key relationships for the intelligence community, so they sent first-rate people there and a lot of them. I had a very good relationship there, also a very strong office of military cooperation called Office of the Defense Representative-Pakistan. It was given the prominence of the military and Pakistani affairs, having a very solid mil-to-mil relationship was important and we had good people for that.

Riley: How soon do you meet General Musharraf?

Crocker: I think my first week there.

Riley: And what were your impressions?

Crocker: Focused, intelligent, articulate. He struck me as pretty frank. As I got to know him better, he would say, "Once a Special Forces officer, always a Special Forces officer." We're not real good at large flowery phrases that obscure the truth.

Riley: And that was true of him?

Crocker: You would see his staff sometimes roll their eyes when the President was perhaps more frank than they would have liked him to be. That was one of his better qualities.

Riley: But your dealings with him were always conducted through an interpreter?

Crocker: No, he speaks perfect English. The Pakistani elite, civilian and military, are as good in English as we are. At the Pakistani Military Academy of which Musharraf, like most career officers, is a graduate, the medium of instruction is English. The language of command in the Pakistani Army is English.

Bakich: Clearly he is head of the army. To what extent are you getting any sense that the Pakistan Army is a corporate entity in the country, exists independently of Musharraf at all? Or did Musharraf actually have complete control of civil-military relations in that country?

Crocker: Musharraf was Chief of State and Chief of Army Staff. It's a complex question. There is a corporate identity to the Pakistani military in the sense that they have a variety of commercial ventures. They are heavily invested in the Pakistani economy, manufacturing, producing, and retailing all sorts of things that have nothing to do with the military. So there quite literally is a corporate identity to the Pakistani military. At the same time it is an institution very proud of its traditions, its customs, and its rules.

While Musharraf was without doubt the commander of the army, he had to take those traditions and institutions very seriously. These include, for example, semiannual conferences of corps commanders in which the three-star generals of the Pakistani Army who command corps come together and give their frank assessments of their wants and needs and the circumstances in their areas of responsibility to the Chief of Army Staff. No Chief of Army Staff, including one who is also President of the country, takes those meetings lightly or thinks he can simply dictate by fiat how things are going to be.

So in an institutionally challenged country, the army is a very serious institution in Pakistan. The recent and highly unusual extension of Ashfaq Kayani's term as Chief of Army Staff was by no means anything he decided or even proposed. This was a consensus of the corps commanders that the military and the state would be best served by a two-year extension of his term.

Bakich: How about the relationship between Musharraf and ISI [Inter-Services Intelligence]?

Crocker: General Kayani, who was a trusted colleague and indeed a protégé of Musharraf, was ISI chief during my time there. They had a very close relationship that was personal as well as professional. Several times I would go over for a very small family dinner and Kayani was normally there.

Riley: I have seen references in some of the background material to the metaphor of the Politburo. Does that sound like a reasonable metaphor for Pakistan in the sense that the corps commanders have a role if not as equals but something close to equals to Musharraf?

Crocker: No, the Pakistani Army is a very hierarchical structure. The Chief of Army Staff is a four-star, and corps commanders are three-stars, only one of whom will put on that fourth star. Maybe akin to British barons after the Magna Carta. They have significant influence, but the King is still the King.

Riley: Then the question about ISI is about the extent of centralized control over ISI, particularly as it relates to Afghanistan. Did you have a window onto that?

Crocker: ISI is an enormously complex structure. In my experience it's uniquely structured among intelligence agencies in that it is directed and officered at its senior levels by regular military officers who come into ISI from conventional commands. Kayani, for example, is an infantryman, not an intelligence officer. Then after their two to three years in ISI they will move back into regular military positions.

There is also a permanent civilian cadre in ISI that, in many but not by any means all cases, is composed of retired military officers at lower grades. They're the institutional backbone of ISI. Very hard for an outsider to understand precisely how this mechanism works. There are some who believe that the permanent ISI staff operates with considerable autonomy because their military superiors do not have the knowledge or the longevity to really figure out what they're doing and make them do it differently or not at all. I think there is probably some of that. But also, knowing the hierarchical nature of the Pakistani military, I don't think ISI is a rogue operation in whole or in part.

History as perceived by the Pakistanis is important, and with respect to Afghanistan they see us as having been their most allied of allies through the Soviet occupation of the ’80s. And once that occupation was ended through our jointly successful endeavor, we walked out on them. Not only did we walk out, we imposed broad-ranging sanctions over their nuclear weapons program, which we had known all about for the previous 16 years but ignored because of the immediacy of the Soviet threat.

In consequence, there was an ingrained sense of bitterness and mistrust in the Pakistani establishment, both military and civilian. With respect to ISI and Afghanistan as the Pakistanis scrambled to keep the accelerating civil war in Afghanistan from spilling over to their country, looking for a horse to back that might actually run, when the Taliban began to emerge in Kandahar in 1994, 1995, they said, “This may work.” Because a deeply chaotic Afghanistan is, in Pakistani eyes, a threat to Pakistani national security. So they solidly backed the Taliban, and in their narrative that was a matter of survival because we had left them holding a very nasty bag.

Fast-forward to 9/11: Musharraf’s dramatic strategic shift, faced with an American ultimatum. Not everything shifts. You have much of ISI saying, “The Americans are back and expect us to fight another nasty little war for them. When is their return ticket? When are the Americans going to walk out again? Leaving us with a Taliban that is now our sworn enemy.” So much bet hedging, double dealing goes on of which Musharraf is certainly broadly aware but not in detail.

But it is more complicated than that because the Taliban is not monolithic. You have organizations like the [Sirajuddin] Haqqani network deeply involved in Afghanistan, deeply rooted in Pakistan’s tribal areas. Taking on the Haqqani network could bring down the state, and they know it. Then don’t forget about India because that is the strategic obsession of Pakistan, first, last, and always. Al-Qaeda may be a threat, Taliban even a bigger threat, but India is the one force that can annihilate the state. Groups like the Taliban and Haqqani can keep an Afghan government from forging a strategic relationship with New Delhi, which is Pakistan’s ultimate nightmare. Complicated enough?

Riley: Yes.

Bakich: I’m curious to hear to what extent were you as the Ambassador involved in any confidence-building measures between the Pakistanis and the Indians. Is this a preoccupation with the United States? Should it be?

Crocker: It is, but it has to be very carefully approached. The Indians in particular are totally allergic to an overt American role in trying to resolve Kashmir, which they consider resolved, or doing an Arab-Israeli-style mediation. We had some very promising back-channel initiatives between the National Security Advisors of the two countries that I was more involved in than my colleague in New Delhi, again because the Pakistanis want us in and the Indians want us out. But we had the opportunity to make some suggestions and to try to shape developments there.

Musharraf was very eager to get a final resolution of Kashmir. He saw it as corrosive to the Pakistani state, a breeding ground for militancy. Never mind that they had stoked that militancy, it was now turning back on them. Musharraf was ready for a deal that basically would consecrate the status quo, and as commander of the Pakistani Army, he was the guy to sell it. Arguably, no

civilian President could have done it. He would talk to me about that. The Indians would not talk to us about it. So we had half a window into this and certainly did what we could to support and encourage. I think a deal would have been possible had Musharraf not made some horrific domestic miscalculations starting in early '07 when he tried to dismiss the Supreme Court Chief Justice and failed to do so. That was the beginning of his internal slide. It was right at the time I left, and after that he no longer had the time or the focus to try to bring the set of Indian initiatives to a conclusion.

Riley: How good a partner in the fight against terrorism was Pakistan during your tenure as Ambassador?

Crocker: As good as we could have reasonably hoped at the time, quite an effective partner in the fight against al-Qaeda. We did some very effective joint operations together. We did some unilaterally but with their support and cover. We had some joint fusion cells that worked these intelligence problems together in the same room. We never saw anything during my time there that suggested they ever covered up a lead on al-Qaeda. Of course, we were watching them as we hunted for al-Qaeda, reasonably sure we would have some sense of that.

Taliban was another matter. The Haqqanis posed a unique challenge to them for reasons probably more complex than this history warrants, but in Balochistan there's nothing like being on the ground. We accused them of aiding and abetting the existence of the so-called Quetta Shura in Balochistan's capital. There are three Quettas. There is Cantonment Quetta where the Pakistani military and civilian elites dwell in the old British cantonment. There is Pakistani Quetta, which is roughly reminiscent of Laredo in 1880, where the Texas Rangers didn't routinely go and Pakistani officialdom does not either dwell or visit. Then there is Afghan Quetta, which is a totally foreign and almost totally hostile entity for Pakistani officialdom as well.

We prodded the Pakistanis into an operation in Afghan Quetta. ISI led with some Special Forces against a location in which we were confident senior Taliban leadership were present. It did not turn out well. They lost eight officers and basically lost the engagement. They ran into a firefight in which they were hopelessly outgunned. They did not have the firepower, and they did not have the intelligence to operate in that environment.

We don't, I think, see how at risk the Pakistani state is. They do not control much of Balochistan, most of Quetta, much of Karachi, a city of 13 million people. They do not control the tribal areas at all, and areas adjacent to the tribal areas are in question. So it is not simply Machiavellian deviousness. As Musharraf would say, "How many enemies do you want me to take on before those enemies outweigh me?"

So Pakistan is a challenge over the long term. That's why I'm pleased to see the current administration work with both parties in Congress to fashion a $7.5 billion five-year aid package. That's the kind of commitment they need to build up both their capabilities and their confidence in the U.S. as a partner.

Bakich: This issue of the federally administered tribal areas and North-West Frontier Province has always fascinated me. What is it in particular? Is it institutional capacity, is it financial

resources? Is it a network of hostile tribal relationships that the Pakistanis haven't been able to master? What is it that prevents that from—?

Crocker: History is highly instructive. The Pakistani government didn't create the federally administered tribal areas, they inherited it from the British empire. The British Raj could never exercise control in the tribal areas. [Winston] Churchill's first published work, which he wrote as a young subaltern in the Indian army in the northwest frontier, is called *The Story of the Malakand Field Force* and describes the 1894 punitive expedition into the tribal areas. It reads exactly like a contemporary account of such an expedition would today. No central authority in recorded history has ever been able to impose order in those areas. The hardest part of Alexander the Great's campaign to India was through the tribal areas. He got through and then they jumped on his supply lines, and he was in danger of not being able to get back and contracted a series of agreements including marrying a tribal princess that let him get his butt back out of there.

So *no one* has ever controlled those areas.

Riley: You didn't have to volunteer to marry somebody to help you?

Crocker: Maybe that was my mistake.

Riley: Your wife went with you—

Crocker: She was there. So the challenge is utterly immense and it is complicated, of course, by, if you will, the urbanization of the tribal areas. It ain't your daddy's tribal area. The infusion of urbanization into the tribal areas allows for an urbanized al-Qaeda to take hold in a more anonymous setting, compounding the problem. The tribal areas are still governed by something called the Frontier Crimes Regulations, which stipulate that the writ of the government runs along maintained roads and within a hundred meters to either side of those roads and that's it. The tribes control the rest of it.

That's why any roadbuilding enterprise requires strenuous negotiation with the tribe in question. We do roadbuilding there. The Corps of Engineers of the Pakistani Army implements it, kilometer by painful kilometer. This is unique in world history as far as I know. There is no other part of the world that has a juridically and statutorily independent status from the government of a country of which it is ostensibly a part. All complicated by the British to whom we owe so much thanks for leaving us Kashmir, Palestine, Cyprus, and the Afghan-Pakistan border area, because the Durand Line that they drew was deliberately intended to divide tribes, which it doesn't do. It just makes tribes ignore the border.

Is there a way forward? Yes, there is, through sustained economic and social development of these areas in a manner congenial to the people who live there. We started this early on in the 43 [George W. Bush] administration, a school-building program in all of the seven tribal agencies. The murder, mayhem, pillage, and plunder since those schools started has been nearly endless. To my knowledge there has yet to be a single attack on a single school. Those schools are off limits. Half of them are girls' schools. Tribal elements want to see their kids educated. You educate kids, they have a different outlook than their parents did.

Bakich: Intertribal schools?

Crocker: It depends on the location, they all have to be negotiated. You have Waziries in south Waziristan, not totally but mainly Waziries, Masoods in north Waziristan. Generally speaking wherever you situate a school it is going to be a single tribe. Incidentally, the different tribes are constantly declaring jihad against each other as well as the state and us and anyone else they can think of. But I think a decades-long sustained economic and social-development program that was done in full consultation with the people who live there can over time make a fundamental change, but it would be decades.

Riley: You indicated that you thought the Pakistanis were reliable partners on al-Qaeda but not necessarily in the fight against the Taliban. On the al-Qaeda piece of this, weren't doubts occasionally raised about their reliability on things like where bin Laden might have been at certain points in time?

Crocker: In the early chaotic time, at the time of Tora Bora—I don't know enough about it there in 2001 to know—I have heard the assertion that the Pakistanis knew where he was going and facilitated his getting there. But you've got to look at what those regions are like. A man's home is literally his castle. I'm told you still have substantial swaths of the tribal areas where a woman leaves her father's house once in her life and that's when she moves to her husband's house, and she leaves that house at her death.

The traditions of these areas is the family is sacrosanct and what many of us believe has happened is that bin Laden has gone to ground in one of these compounds. He communicates absolutely not at all, not electronically, not by courier, by no means whatsoever. His chances of staying hidden are extraordinarily good.

The downside for him, of course, is that he hasn't been in operational command of al-Qaeda for years now. But you just don't do a house-to-house search out there. You don't do it. If there is no unusual traffic—if there were signals, we'd pick them up electronically. If there were couriers, we'd eventually catch one because we've caught them in the past. I don't need to presume the Pakistanis are concealing him, I think he's concealing himself. I also think if the Pakistanis were concealing him, we watch them closely enough that we would have had a signal to that by now because somebody would be chattering in the Pakistani establishment.

Riley: Was the A. Q. [Abdul Qadeer] Khan situation something you had to deal with while you were there?

Crocker: Yes.

Riley: Was he arrested?

Crocker: He was under house arrest.

Riley: Did the initial house arrest occur on your watch?

Crocker: No, that occurred before I got there. My periodic challenge was just being sure he stayed that way.

Riley: That's what I would like to hear about, your negotiations with them or your attempts to try to make sure that he stays where he is and the kinds of responses you're getting back from the Pakistanis on this.

Crocker: He certainly stayed where he was during my time there. The Pakistanis were always nervous about him. We were never given unescorted access to him. They always said he would refuse to talk directly to us and they could not compel that, and that's entirely plausible. If I were him, I wouldn't talk directly to us either. We have put questions to him through them, unraveled a bit more, bits and pieces. We gradually built up the puzzle. But Musharraf would get pretty feisty on this point. It's an interesting narrative.

He said, "Look, you were after our nuclear program and we were determined to pursue it. To keep you from getting at it, we had to devolve enormous authority to one person, A. Q. Khan, and have very limited command and control mechanisms over him because if we did, you'd pick them up. So we had to run totally silent. You forced us into a situation where we gave up what later turned out to be essential checks on A. Q. Khan, and he did what he did." It's an ingenious exercise in blaming somebody else, but there may be a logic to it as well.

Then it gets back to this legacy of mistrust. "You say we're an ally. The Indians were developing nuclear capability. We were determined to match. You went after us in a way you didn't go after the Indians and we paid the price."

Riley: Did he come out of house arrest on your watch?

Crocker: No.

Riley: He's not still under house arrest, is he?

Crocker: He was out briefly and then I think they put him back under.

Riley: Were you under pressure from people in Washington to do more on this?

Crocker: There would be episodic bouts of frustration, mainly when something came to light in North Korea, but given all of the other complexities and equities we faced that was not normally a front-burner issue. There was a generally accepted sense, certainly accepted by me, that whatever damage A. Q. Khan had done was in the past. He was certainly no longer in a position to proliferate anything, and we were watching pretty closely. We don't think anybody else was either.

Bakich: On a different point, to what extent was American policy solidly behind Musharraf? In other words, were you at all involved in attempting to persuade Musharraf to let [Benazir] Bhutto back in the country?

Crocker: Yes, very much. In the summer of 2006 in response to a suggestion from Musharraf's National Security Advisor, the British High Commissioner and I met with Musharraf to talk about Benazir Bhutto and Pakistan's political future. He asked us jointly to engage with Bhutto to see if we could help facilitate an understanding between Musharraf and Bhutto that would

allow her to return to Pakistan. So we worked very quietly but with a fair amount of energy to see what a deal might look like. By the time I left in early ’07 the shape of it was in place.

The Pakistani government would agree to drop all charges against her, and that took some hard swallowing because of massive corruption allegations of which she was certainly guilty. She would return and contest the elections, but in return she would guarantee, if she were elected Prime Minister, that Musharraf could carry on as the civilian President of Pakistan. And it almost worked. Again, terror works and her assassination left us with a different outcome.

Perry: Were you fearful for her?

Crocker: Assassination is a constant threat to any senior political figure in Pakistan. Musharraf survived two very serious attempts on my watch. Anytime you’re out there in those parts of the world, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, it is with the knowledge that all of your careful calculations and political strategies can be derailed in an instant by a successful assassination attempt on any major figure, including you.

Riley: My internal calendar is not recalling when Bhutto’s assassination took place.

Crocker: It was December.

Perry: Late ’07.

Riley: After you left. But you said there had been two attempts on Musharraf’s life while you were there.

Crocker: Yes.

Riley: Was there any immediate implication for his relations with the U.S. in this regard?

Crocker: No. The personal courage of figures in these parts of the world is extraordinary. In both attacks he lost members of his security detail, they were that close, and just emerged unruffled to carry on.

Riley: Were there any implications with Pakistani policy as a result? Any crackdowns on human rights?

Crocker: It comes back to the question of al-Qaeda. He and we were absolutely certain these attempts were coming from al-Qaeda. It certainly hardens their resolve to go after them. But it also means they don’t use this as a pretext to go after domestic political enemies or human rights crackdowns. To Musharraf’s credit, in none of these cases, or in attempts on other senior officials like the Prime Minister, did they try to leverage that into an excuse to go after some domestic enemy that had nothing to do with it.

Riley: Your initiatives with respect to Bhutto are under the broad rubric of a human-rights agenda. Were there other aspects of a human-rights agenda that you felt comfortable pursuing in Pakistan as Ambassador, or is the common fight against terrorism and the domestic problems

that that is creating for Musharraf a limiting agent on your ability to pursue any type of human-rights agenda?

Crocker: No, because they're related. One of the reasons the terrorism issue is so salient in Pakistan is because of very weak institutions, including in civil society. You succeed over the long run in the War on Terror by reducing economic inequities, by improving levels of health care and education, by providing equal opportunities for all aspects of society, especially for women. I always saw all of this as part of the war on terrorists. We were talking about the tribal areas. You win the War on Terror in the tribal areas by fundamentally changing society in the tribal areas, and there's no other way to do it.

I think our most successful human-rights effort was the 2005 earthquake relief operation.

Riley: I want you to talk about that.

Crocker: The magnitude of the earthquake was historic. By the third or fourth day it was clear we were looking at something pretty close to what emerged as the eventual total of almost 80,000 Pakistanis killed in three minutes. We responded right away, and this is again that civil-military coordination, preexisting relationships. I had known John Abizaid, Central Command Commander, very well for a very long time. We worked together in Iraq. We'd coordinated closely after I got to Pakistan and as soon as I saw what we had, I called him up and said, "I need your assets."

Within 48 hours of the earthquake we had our first Chinooks over from Afghanistan running relief missions. We eventually built that up to 26 helicopters, shuttling day and night in and out of the earthquake zone, half a billion dollars in reconstruction assistance. This became the largest and longest U.S.-managed airborne humanitarian relief operation since the Berlin airlift. It went on for six months, October '05 to April '06. It saved countless lives and rebuilt critical infrastructure in the earthquake zone.

We opened the first school in the earthquake area six months after the earthquake, and it was built to California earthquake-resistance standards. That did several things. It effected a to-this-day lasting change in the attitudes of the populations in those areas toward the U.S., and it did more than any amount of security assistance we had provided to reknit our relations with the Pakistani military because they were our main partner in this. We orchestrated this in a way where we did literally much of the heavy lifting, but the image was of the Pakistanis in charge. So their reputation in civil society and their image of themselves and us as partners was hugely assisted by a robust U.S. response.

We tested new concepts. I opened temporary Embassy offices all up through the North-West Frontier Province. Anywhere we had military, we had two field hospitals deployed, four refueling bases. Anywhere I had troops on the ground I wanted to have an Embassy office on the ground to help the military understand the environment they were dealing with, facilitating communication with local officials, the stuff that the Foreign Service is supposed to do. I had little Embassy teams living in shipping containers through the winter of '05 as the snow drifted over the peak. So we had some new concepts in expeditionary diplomacy, if you will, that helped us also in Iraq during my time there.

I would say that was a humanitarian effort with long-term strategic consequences that we are now reemploying as we deal with the current flood situation.

Bakich: In Lebanon or anywhere else you've seen Hezbollah out there very quickly doing exactly this type of work and I'm curious. Throughout this process did you see Lashkar-e-Taiba or similar types attempt to insert themselves and make themselves a presence in the Kashmir region?

Crocker: Very much so, as they're doing now in the flood zone. But they were completely dwarfed by the magnitude of our effort, and Pakistanis are at least as smart as anybody else around. They could see who was doing what.

One interesting little sidenote. Early on, my military commander came to me and said, "What about if we put big American flag decals on the sides of these helicopters?" I said, "That's a great idea." These crews had just come out of combat in Afghanistan and they looked at us like we were either drunk or crazy, probably both, and said, "We could do that, but why don't we just save some steps and shoot down our own helicopters?"

We said, "No, trust us." Because we had talked to the Pakistanis. We got these three-foot American flag decals. In six months we did not have a single hostile incident. The most popular toy in Pakistani toy stores by the end of the year was little plastic helicopters with big American flags on them made in China. [*laughter*]

Riley: That is reminiscent, we talked about post World War II, the Marshall plan.

Crocker: It really was in response to a natural disaster rather than a man-made one.

Perry: Could you talk about moving from grassroots to the top of the pyramid, the relations directly between President Bush and President Musharraf and what you observed either here in briefing the President or there when he would visit.

Crocker: They seemed to connect pretty well. These are heads of state. They're not going to be close personal friends. But I think President Bush believed Musharraf had made a choice out of serious conviction after 9/11 and was going to be the consistent partner that we hadn't always been. So at difficult times, and there were plenty of those, when it got up to the National Security Advisor or to the President, it was going to be "steady as she goes." We're going to work through it, we're not going to have a crisis.

He was always, as we've been discussing, aware that the Pakistanis were hedging bets but again prepared to take a longer-term view. The '06 visit was something of a challenge to manage because of the India-U.S. nuclear deal. But it was manageable. The President, with some of his personal gestures to Musharraf, helped do that. Some of our biggest battles as ambassadors are with our own government. The President made the decision himself that he was going to spend two nights in Islamabad. His staff didn't want him to spend any nights in Islamabad.

I said, "Look, they're going to compare this to India. We've already got the nuclear deal. If you spend three nights in India and spend one or none in Pakistan, it would be better not to come."

The President got it. The Secret Service was not a happy Secret Service. But he saw the strategic equities that required the risk.

Riley: He spent the nights in the Ambassador's residence?

Crocker: Yes.

Riley: The consequences of the meeting were all fine. The press reports were a little critical because there was some inference that Bush had—I think he used language that makes sense in Texas but maybe didn't translate very well about checking in and checking up on an ally or something like that. Did that make a problem for you?

Crocker: It did a bit, but it was manageable. Those two nights were so important. Then they had a big social evening the second night. So it was a net plus, not without its downsides.

Riley: And he was in the capital at all times, he didn't go outside?

Crocker: No, he didn't go outside. The Vice President did a couple of months before. We took him up to the earthquake zone. But that was a bridge too far with the President.

Riley: What else was on the agenda when the President was there? What were the other kinds of activities he was involved in?

Crocker: The main import of the visit was to establish a strategic dialogue with Pakistan, which has been embraced by the [Barack] Obama administration, and to establish a series of working groups that would look at energy, including nuclear, economic, and trade issues. Textiles is a big thing for them. To set in place an enduring structural framework to develop the bilateral relationship, and all of that has continued to today.

Riley: How about the Vice President's visit? What was the purpose of his visit? Was it also to take the temperature of Musharraf?

Crocker: No, his visit was mainly intended to show solidarity with Pakistan on the earthquake relief effort. That came at the height of the relief effort. That's why he did make the trip up into the earthquake zone. So in our discussions with the Pakistani leadership it was certainly about cooperation and the War on Terror. But the public theme was American concern for alleviation of Pakistani suffering.

Riley: Had you had many dealings with the Vice President before?

Crocker: Directly, no. It wasn't my first meeting with him but it was kind of the first—

Riley: Was he what you expected when you met him?

Crocker: One thing I'm not sure you always get in the public portrayals of the Vice President is his wonderfully wicked sense of humor. He has a dry wit that makes you not even feel that laceration he just inflicted.

Riley: Was it aimed at you? Can you recall any specifics or was it just being in the presence of somebody with a wicked sense of humor?

Crocker: Just that kind of fun thing of being with someone who says something and you've got that two-beat pause before—

Riley: Exactly, and maybe some gallows humor given the kinds of issues you're dealing with?

Crocker: Yes. I got to know him a lot better in Iraq, of course, but I enjoyed that first encounter.

Bakich: To what extent did you have any dealings either in your time in Washington or in any of your ambassadorial posts in the Bush administration with the Vice President's Chief of Staff, [I. Lewis] Scooter Libby and those folks?

Crocker: I didn't really. I met Scooter but that was several levels above me. My main contact was with John Hannah.

Riley: Were there any elevated concerns about Kashmir when you were there? There are the occasional flare-ups, and I just can't recall from the chronology whether there were any of those significant flare-ups on your watch.

Crocker: There were. There was a series of attacks in New Delhi, not as spectacular as the later Mumbai attacks, but bad enough that they caused concern over pressures for Indian military retaliation. Getting Pakistanis to understand that, it was not instinctive with them, to recognize how Indians react to this kind of thing. I would need to call up and say, "Okay, this happened. How about you make a statement like right now, you have the following points, and why don't you call in the Indian High Commissioner to personally express sympathy? Why doesn't the President call the Prime Minister to do likewise." They did these things, but it wasn't immediate.

Riley: It didn't come naturally to them.

Crocker: Yes.

Riley: Is that a conventional role that the U.S. Ambassador has played in these instances?

Crocker: In these kinds of issues it's not infrequent.

Riley: Were you getting routine military and intelligence reports on the situation in Kashmir also, or is that an area that is so highly charged it is not a good idea for us to have an independent presence?

Crocker: In Pakistani Kashmir we regularly had people in and out. Indian Kashmir was a little more challenging for New Delhi to cover on the ground, both for security reasons and because of Indian government sensitivities. But during my time there mercifully we did not have serious incidents within Kashmir or between India and Pakistan along the line of control.

Riley: Let me phrase a much broader question. I was at an international meeting in Europe several years ago with a very senior Indian official, who in that environment was saying the

Bush administration gets criticized for a lot of things globally, but from his perspective he said one of the things that was a true legacy of the Bush administration was a dramatic improvement in U.S.-Indian relations during this period. It was something he said has historic implications and is little understood outside of the country. How complicated was it for you to maintain good relations with Pakistan at a time when, if not the balance of emphasis is tilting, at least there are such significant overtures historically to their enemy?

Crocker: It was a challenge. We talked about it as "dehyphenating the relationships," that it wasn't going to be an India-Pakistan relationship, it was going to be separate relationships between us with each country. In the nuclear agreement, it did present a challenge. I went through how this required the Indians to be more transparent on their nuclear capabilities, not less, and hence was of value to everyone. I also was very frank, there ain't nobody named A. Q. Khan who has been associated with the Indian nuclear program. It is just politically impossible for us to contemplate a similar agreement with Pakistan given that history, but in the spirit of dehyphenation, we were doing things in Pakistan that we certainly weren't doing in India, witness the major ramp-up of economic and security assistance that was started under Bush and carried on under Obama.

As I signed the line on the F-16 deal, I pointed out that we had not in fact sold F-16s to India. At a certain level, the Pakistanis would accept that. I was there at a time when some of the bitterness of the 1990s was starting to dissipate, and for people like Musharraf, Kayani, Shaukat Aziz, the Prime Minister, there was a growing conviction that we had such a range of shared strategic interests, maybe we could count on the long term. And then the earthquake relief really made a difference.

Overall, while I found continuing paranoia on the part of Pakistan toward India, it was also a time when the Pakistani Eleventh Corps, which is based in Peshawar and had always had as its primary mission support of the Tenth Corps in Punjab in the event of a war with India, was formally re-missioned to have its primary responsibility the securing of the western border. It may not sound like much to us, but in Pakistani military doctrine that was a huge deal. Our agreements with India didn't shift or alter that at all.

So I found a certain maturation in Pakistani thinking about India and about the U.S. and India that it wasn't totally zero sum. They were prepared to see and not like an expanding U.S. relationship with India but not necessarily translate that as a threat to Pakistan. But little things, like Bush's willingness to spend those two nights in Pakistan and do some nonpolitical things, those symbols were hugely helpful.

Riley: You found a receptive White House to those kinds of overtures?

Crocker: Yes, at the very senior levels. The Secretary of State was hugely helpful on that too, Condi Rice.

Riley: What do you notice that's different either about the operation of the State Department or U.S. foreign policy when the Secretary of State changes, if anything?

Crocker: It depends on the change.

Riley: I'm thinking about Powell to Rice, but if you want to take it as a more global question, please do.

Crocker: I was in Washington, not in the field, for most of Powell's term. I went out to Pakistan just before Rice took over, just a couple of months before. What I certainly noticed, being Ambassador to a major country, having a Secretary of State who is in close harmony with the White House helps. Arguably no one in the administration knew the President's thinking more than Condi Rice. If I could persuade her, then the rest was pretty easy. For me as Ambassador to Pakistan, it was a pretty good alignment of the constellations at that time with Rice as Secretary.

Riley: Did you notice any changes in the National Security Council apparatus on her departure to Stephen Hadley's arrival?

Crocker: Pretty seamless because Hadley had been her Deputy.

Riley: And you were able to get the White House's attention when you needed it?

Crocker: Yes, I was, but mainly I occasionally would have direct contact with the NSC but really didn't need to because again—

Riley: Condi?

Crocker: Condi, yes. So on the earthquake relief stuff when I said, "This is a huge challenge, it is also a huge opportunity. We need to commit major resources right up front," she just got that right away and went over to the White House. They sat on OMB [Office of Management and Budget] until they capitulated. We were able to announce basically half a billion dollars for relief aid.

Riley: Let's stop here for today.

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Riley: Let's begin. I think we all listened this morning, remotely or in person, so there may be questions about that. When we have somebody here overnight, the first thing I ask is if anything occurred to you last night that you wish we had covered.

Crocker: I did my level best with extraordinary success not to think about it at all. [*laughter*]

Riley: I've done nothing but think about it since we left, so let me ask my colleagues. I think we got to the point where we were pretty much done with Pakistan. Anything from your end that we need to get to before we put you back in Baghdad? No? All right, let's proceed.

How early are you beginning to get feelers about moving to Iraq? At what point are people approaching you, and who is approaching you?

Crocker: I'd been in the game a long time, and you learn to read signals. When President Bush came to Pakistan in March of 2006, he and his team were exceptionally engaged and inclusive of me. I've been through Presidential visits before, and I know where ambassadors stand in the grand hierarchy of these things and it is not very high.

But the President, the Secretary, the National Security Advisor, all of them were extremely congenial, cordial, included me in the brief periods of downtime, just sitting back and having a cup of coffee, talking about the issue of the hour as though I were one of the inner group. Ambassadors simply aren't that.

I told my wife when they left, "Watch out." The Secretary came back in June for a visit of her own and said at the conclusion of that, "I really want to see you the next time you are in Washington." I said to my wife, "It's coming."

I did see her later that summer and she put the proposition to me. I said of course I would be honored to serve. Then in October the President asked me directly, but it was by that time a formality.

Riley: Were there any other slots this conceivably could have been leading up to or were you sure from the beginning?

Crocker: There could be only one.

Riley: How was the transition out of Pakistan? I can't remember who succeeded you.

Crocker: That was our current Ambassador, Anne Patterson. I left in late March and I think she got there a couple of months later, which is not atypical.

Riley: So this was late March of '07.

Crocker: Yes.

Riley: And you went directly in country from there?

Crocker: Yes. I was flown directly by the Air Force from Islamabad to Baghdad. I relinquished responsibility midafternoon one day and assumed responsibility in Iraq that night.

Riley: Was there preparation you had to do in advance of this or was your plate so full in Pakistan that the thinking is—?

Crocker: Pakistan was a full-time job up until literally the moment I got into the car to go to the airport. Following events in Iraq I did some VTCs [video teleconferences] with Embassy staff, but this was a particularly fraught period in Pakistan so I was fully engaged there.

Riley: Were there specific events in Pakistan?

Crocker: Yes. This was the moment, two weeks before my departure, at a farewell dinner hosted for me by the Speaker of the Pakistani Parliament, the news came that the President had dismissed the Chief Justice of the Pakistani Supreme Court. So my last weeks in Pakistan were in the middle of this enormous domestic crisis.

Riley: And you had conversations with Musharraf about this?

Crocker: I did.

Riley: What was the American position?

Crocker: I had broad latitude in Pakistan as I did in Iraq. There wasn't an American position per se. I'll probably edit all this out, but I can tell you I saw the President alone and said, "Mr. President, what on earth were you thinking?" His response was, "It was my decision. I never dreamed he wouldn't quietly step down, so I guess I didn't have a plan B."

I talked about the necessity of developing one, that nothing good would come of this prolonged confrontation. I talked to his National Security Advisor. "You have got to wicker something out whereby, with whatever face-saving means are available to you, the Chief Justice resumes his position." They all said, "Yes, yes," but I left before that could go anywhere. But that utterly consumed my final weeks in Pakistan. Talking to the opposition I said, "Don't overplay this. Do not get this into a position where the President has no options."

Again, this was just one of these flurries.

Riley: This is a lot of Ryan Crocker as hands-on diplomat in the area without a lot of instruction from Washington about what to do.

Crocker: One great thing about the administration during my time in both Pakistan and Iraq is they really did not micromanage at all. If they had confidence in their in-country leadership, they let us take the lead. It didn't mean they were indifferent, it just meant they understood that it would probably be better if they didn't try to guide the train from 8,000 miles away. We're out there to figure these things out and chart a course forward. The last four years of the

administration, the two in Pakistan and the two in Iraq, were a great environment for an experienced field guy to work in.

Bakich: Do you attribute that hands-off style to the Secretary, or do you think that's the way the President wanted his administration run?

Crocker: You're the experts on Presidential politics, but ultimately it always goes to the President. In this case you had an uncommonly close relationship between a Secretary and a President. I think they thought very much alike, but clearly it was the President's own predisposition. President Bush is often accused of being distant, indifferent, or hands off. This is not that. He knew what was going on in Pakistan. He *certainly* knew at a *very* detailed level what was going on in Iraq. He simply didn't try to use that knowledge to say, "Do this, don't do that, do the other, do it in this sequence." If he trusted your judgment, he let you shape the implementation strategy.

He would have a lot of good, hard questions, but it was anything but indifference and it is sometimes hard to convey that. He used his advisors, including senior ambassadors, I think quite well.

Perry: From your perspective are there any drawbacks to a President and Secretary of State being that closely united in their thinking?

Crocker: That moves into a theoretical realm that is beyond my particular expertise. You can certainly argue and the case has been made that when she was National Security Advisor the fact that she did not fill the role of challenging the President kind of led to the group-think mentality. If you're the guy in the field and you're getting the latitude and the resources and support to move policy in the way you want to move it, you don't spend any time at all thinking that maybe it would be better for our long-term interests if there was a little more tension at the top. It's just fine.

Riley: Was Musharraf's behavior with respect to the Supreme Court situation in any way emblematic of his political style or his sensitivity or lack of sensitivity to certain types of politics?

Crocker: It was very emblematic. It was the Special Forces officer at work. This is a Supreme Court and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court who is moving wildly beyond—we talk about our concern over activist judges. In Musharraf's view he was behaving in a totally unconstitutional fashion, legislating from the bench in a highly disruptive and partisan fashion. He had to go, and he, Musharraf, would simply do it. He did not consult with the leadership of his own party. He did not consult with his inner circle with the exception of his National Security Advisor. So it was again Musharraf, man of action. That's at one level. At the other level he was not an experienced political figure. So he didn't realize that this is *exactly* what his political opposition had been waiting for. Bhutto's PPP [Pakistan Peoples Party] was all over it. I said to the President, "You asked us to broker a deal with Benazir. How hard do you think you just made it? What interest is she going to have in a deal now that you've handed her the stick to beat you with?"

Musharraf had many good qualities, but his good qualities were also his bad qualities.

Riley: Okay, so we've got you on a plane to Baghdad. Did your wife go with you?

Crocker: No, she had to handle the packing of all our effects, so she joined me several months later. I took the family dog.

Riley: We haven't heard about the family dog. The family dog is? Was?

Crocker: Is. Born in Afghanistan, raised in Pakistan and Iraq.

Riley: Multilingual.

Crocker: And totally unsocialized. You would not want to meet the family dog.

Riley: The family dog's name is?

Crocker: The family dog's name is March, the month in which he was born.

Riley: Excellent. So you and March get on the plane and go to Baghdad.

Crocker: Right.

Riley: What are your first impressions when you get back in country? You were there a few years before.

Crocker: Many years before. I left in 1980, so it was 27 years. I'd been there in '98.

Riley: But under a different set of circumstances. So what are you discovering?

Crocker: It was a very difficult time. The night before my arrival the Embassy had been rocketed, and two of our American staff had been killed. We were an Embassy literally under siege. My initial sense was, *As bad as I thought it was, it's actually worse*. I saw, as I described this morning, the parallels to Lebanon a quarter of a century earlier with a beleaguered central government, hostile external actors, and a range of malevolent internal forces working in various levels of coordination.

Riley: Your predecessor in this position was?

Crocker: Zalmay Khalilzad.

Riley: Whom you'd known for a long time.

Crocker: Right.

Riley: Did he stay on for an interval or is that considered bad form?

Crocker: You should understand different cultures have different traditions. For the military, change of command is always face-to-face, the colors literally pass from the former commander to the new commander. In diplomacy, it is *never* face-to-face. There can only be one

Ambassador at a time. You *never* have the incoming and outgoing ambassadors in country at the same time. So Khalilzad left 48 hours before my arrival.

Riley: Then how do you go about getting briefed up for the job you're about to do?

Crocker: A lot had already been done. I mentioned the VTCs [video teleconferences], and General Petraeus and I had been in secure telephone contact since the end of December.

Riley: I don't want you to lose your train of thought, but I'd like to hear about those calls too.

Crocker: We had our first phone call before I was ever formally nominated. It was very clear to both of us that given the circumstances there was no assurance of success under any circumstances, but failure was most assured if we did not have the tightest possible coordination. So we had agreed on the establishment of what we called a Joint Security Assessment Team [JSAT]. It would be co-chaired by a general officer he would name and a senior Foreign Service officer I would name, would have joint civil and military staffing. They would go out, assess the situation, and deliver that assessment to us with their recommendations. We had formed that team and deployed it before I ever got there.

General H. R. [Herbert Raymond] McMaster was his head, and David Pearce, a longtime colleague, now our Ambassador to Algeria, was my cochair. So we had this already in process before I ever stepped off that plane.

Riley: Your conversations were frequent?

Crocker: I can no longer remember. I know we had a number of them.

Riley: Petraeus is somebody you'd known for a long time?

Crocker: No, we'd never met.

Bakich: Had you known McMaster?

Crocker: I met him when he came to the National War College, just one time in 2004.

Riley: At the same time are you getting marching orders from the White House during the interval about what their expectations are?

Crocker: The policy had been set, the New Way Forward rolled out in December of '06. Petraeus and I were not in the policy recommendation or formulation business, we were in the implementation business. We had the direction.

Riley: This was the surge?

Crocker: The formal name is A New Way Forward in Iraq, popularly known as the surge. This meant we were doubling down, going all in, both military and civilian. So our job was to figure out how to make that policy work. What did we need, where did we need it, how would we

employ it against what adversaries and risks with what expected gains over what timeline?
Riley: At this stage are there skeptics communicating to you about the feasibility of—?

Crocker: Sure. "This will never work, it can't work," which I had no interest in hearing. I had orders and my orders were to make it work. There was no point in wasting time wringing one's hands saying it isn't going to work. Had I come to that conclusion I would have said so. But going into it the Commander in Chief had said, "Here it is, make it work."

Riley: So you had not been a party to any of the previous discussions.

Crocker: No, not that there was a serious effort to involve me but I said, "Look, I've got Pakistan. You figure out what you want to do. I don't know enough to be a relevant or valuable part of this. You figure out what it is you want me to do and then I'll go out and try and do it."

Bakich: How long did it take for you and General Petraeus to work out a system of joint decision making?

Crocker: Before we got there. That's kind of what this JSAT was about. This was a joint team, coequal chairs, that would deliver combined assessments and recommendations and brief them jointly to us. Symbols count. Atypically because of the exigencies of the moment, I was sworn in as Ambassador in Baghdad. Swearings-in are always done in Washington, but I didn't want to lose the two days that going back to Washington would have entailed. So I was sworn in in front of the combined Embassy and multinational force command by a junior officer who served with me in Iraq, with Petraeus on stage.

The signal to our combined staffs is, "Get used to seeing us together because your life is now joint from here on in."

Bakich: Did you have an example in mind as to how this type of relationship had worked in the past?

Crocker: A long background in civil-military cooperation, that's what we were talking about yesterday. The Kuwait crisis of 1994 and subsequent iterations, standing up the Air Expeditionary Forces, which I did in close consultation with General Peay, the Pakistan earthquake relief effort, we totally fused civil-military operation that I commanded. I had had, by Foreign Service standards, a lot of background in not unity of command but unity of effort. Dave had not done as much of it but had thought deeply about it in preparing the counterinsurgency manual. So it was pretty easy for both of us.

Riley: You'd worked with a lot of military people. What can you tell us about Petraeus? What were you finding out about him and his turn of mind and his operating style?

Crocker: He'll go down in history as one of the finest military commanders of the post–World War II era, the quintessential soldier scholar, deeply knowledgeable and intellectually deeply interested in the universe. He didn't want to just be a good soldier, he wanted to know how the world worked. He surrounded himself with good people and didn't try to pretend he had all the answers. We didn't have to have many detailed discussions of who was going to do what. We just figured it out. We never had lanes, we had one vast undemarcated superhighway on which

the traffic was moving at hundreds of miles an hour. You just stepped in and did what you needed to do.

We used each other's staffs. I had no hesitation in reaching out directly to one of his staff members who had a particular area of expertise or could get me in touch with somebody if that man or woman could do it better or faster than my own people, and he'd do the same.

We were co-located, one waiting room separated our two offices. Our two staffs were basically locked together. There was no guidebook for it, we just intuitively sorted it out. Then we did everything together. Once a week we would go together to see the Prime Minister. I might have separate meetings, but that weekly meeting it was going to be both of us. That meant that each of us had to be thoroughly familiar with the other's issues, had to know how to react on the spot, reinforce each other as the conversation twisted and turned and, equally important, signaling to the Prime Minister, "Don't think you can game us. There just isn't going to be any daylight."

We made sure that whenever there was an issue—and there were almost none in two pretty tumultuous years—if we had a difference of views, *we* sorted it out. That was never visible to Washington, to the Iraqis, or even within our own structure.

Perry: So your video conference meetings with the President were weekly, is that correct?

Crocker: Yes.

Perry: And you would meet together as well to present a united front to the President?

Crocker: Yes, although as time went on, we almost didn't have to do it, to coordinate what we were going to say because I knew what he was going to say and he knew what I was going to say. We'd been together all week, every week, all day, every day. He had a lot of views on the politics and the possibilities and he knew all the actors. I had a lot of views on operations. For that we stayed very carefully in our own lanes. I never, in those VTCs, laid out a view on a military matter, and he returned the courtesy. So there we were kind of careful.

Riley: To what extent was personal chemistry an important factor in this? We were talking yesterday, I think after you had left, about the ongoing debate among scholars about the—

Crocker: Personalities versus institutions?

Riley: Yes.

Crocker: It's all important, it's all relevant. But you cannot conduct policy without personal relationships. If we had just taken an inherent, instinctive dislike to each other it would have been a lot harder. So, yes, it counts. We both ran. Once a week I'd helo out to Victory Base because it had lots and lots of real estate, and we'd go for an hour's run. We spent that hour talking about what lay in front of us in the next week from hell.

We prepared for our testimony in September that way. But we both liked to run and we enjoyed the run with each other, we looked forward to it. That was the week's entertainment.

Perry: How about the President's role in those conferences?

Crocker: It was great because it meant that neither of us had to put up with all the bureaucratic crap. You didn't have to persuade the Assistant Secretary so he could persuade the Under Secretary who could get five minutes with the Secretary who may or may not ever mention it to the President.

If I had an issue and I needed an answer, everybody involved in that knew it was either resolved before Tuesday morning Washington time or it was going to get resolved when I put it on the table in front of the President. That's bureaucratic heaven if you're an ambassador. It just doesn't get better than that. Dave was a little more constrained. He had command of Central Command and SecDef [Secretary of Defense], Chairman of the Joint Chiefs on the side, so he had a little more complex management issue than I faced.

Riley: There were some aggravations there.

Crocker: There were, yes.

Riley: I was asking you about getting yourself briefed up, and you mentioned that you had had these conversations with Petraeus, but can I take you back to the rest of the answer to that question about how you're trying to figure out the magnitude of the task in front of you when you first arrive in Baghdad?

Crocker: It is both overwhelming and pretty simple. The complexities of the situation were almost incalculable, but the ultimate objective was pretty basic, which was to drive down the violence, creating a context in which political movement became possible. Both communicate that to staffs and then get their feedback on, "Okay, what needs to happen? What's a good indicator, what's a bad indicator?" But you just keep that single objective out in front.

I didn't spend a lot of time getting detailed briefings, there wasn't time. I had to get out there and mix it up with all the political leadership. I had to get out in the city and the country to make on-the-ground assessments. In these contingencies you have to have the total opposite of an academic perspective.

Riley: No offense taken.

Crocker: No offense to academics, but you don't have the time for those kinds of thoughtful analyses and so forth, and that's where experience, education, background becomes so important. You'd better have absorbed a whole lot of stuff that you can call on to apply to the situation because you just don't have time to call on the analysts and say, "Brief me in depth on the interaction between Dawa and the Supreme Council historically." It just doesn't work that way.

Riley: So you're not spending very much time in your office when you get to Baghdad.

Crocker: Oh, goodness, no. I was in constant movement. Fortunately, I knew most of the players. They'd been around in the '02, '03 period. There had been sadly a certain number of assassinations, so deputies had stepped up to replace principals I had known. But the deputies, if

I didn't know them, knew me or knew of me. So I had the huge advantage of not being a newcomer to the scene either in terms of personal relationships or in terms of the substance.

Riley: Had the dynamics there in any way substantially changed the relative standing of the key actors among the Iraqis? We talked about Chalabi earlier.

Crocker: Chalabi's star had descended dramatically. [Nouri al-] Maliki, who was in back of the backbenchers in 2003, is now Prime Minister. But others were much as they had been. Adil Abdul-Mahdi, the two Kurdish leaders, Talabani and Barzani. Talabani had become President but base support remained in Kurdish areas. So there were both dramatic differences and underlying continuities. That's where prior experience helps, to recognize those differences, recognize their relevance and move on.

Bakich: Was there a particular actor or set of actors that you found to be surprising or particularly challenging?

Crocker: This is Iraq and these are Iraqis, so it's hard and it's hard all the time. They are a hard people in a hard place. They were all challenging. There are no pliable personalities in the upper levels of Iraqi politics. The pliable ones are dead. So was any one harder than any other? No. There were some who, because of prior relationships, because of their intellectual interests, I could have more relaxed conversations with. Adil Abdul-Mahdi was an example. But they were all really tough guys in political knife fights, which is what Iraq broadly was.

Riley: What can you tell us about Maliki? Paint us a picture of this person and his role at the time you come back.

Crocker: He became Prime Minister because the primary contenders simply deadlocked. He was a compromise candidate, a minor figure in a smaller party that was perceived to be acceptable broadly because he'd be no threat to anyone. He was, by the time I got there, very much a case of a man growing into one of the toughest positions in the world. He is not a politician by nature or temperament. He came of age in the Dawa Party, which is one of Iraq's oldest.

I found it informative to use initial meetings with him, I'd ask for parts of it to be one on one and I'd ask him, "Prime Minister, tell me about what you were doing when I was here from '78 to '80." What he was doing was running for his life literally, one step ahead of the assassination squads who caught and killed many of his colleagues in the party and many members of his own family. So he described that period.

He described getting out to Iran. I noted that I had seen a picture of him—I'd seen him on TV with the Iranian National Security Advisor and there was an interpreter. I said, "Prime Minister, I'm interested that you used an interpreter with Mr. [Ali] Larijani." He looked at me like I was dumber than he had previously thought and said, "Yes, he doesn't speak Arabic."

[redacted]

[redacted]

So I got clued in right from the beginning that all this stuff about Maliki being an Iranian pawn—*not quite*. [redacted] It was these kinds of conversations, learning from him how his decades in exile politics had shaped him. Saddam hit teams everywhere. You trusted no one. You talked to no one. That helped me understand why he was suspicious, secretive, uncommunicative. I also began to see that in addition to all that he was by nature an introvert. His great love is Arabic literature. He regretted that life had not allowed him to be a scholar and professor of Arabic literature. That's what he really would have liked to do.

I saw a person who neither by basic personality nor by political experience was at all suited to be in the position he was, but, by God, that's where he was and he was going to get it done. I developed huge respect for him. At the same time I found him hugely frustrating. But, again, personalities count. My ability, partly because of Arabic language, to early on be able to spend the time with him, get the note takers and the interpreters out and say, "Prime Minister, tell me about life." That helped down the line as we got into really tricky issues.

Riley: You mentioned this morning in your forum remarks the importance of understanding poetry and literature.

Crocker: Yes.

Riley: Were you able to have these conversations with him?

Crocker: Yes, I could. Because this has always intrigued me. I said, "Prime Minister, you are out of the Dawa Party, a deeply religious political movement. You're also a scholar of Arabic literature, so explain to me the salience of pre-Islamic Arabic poetry to a deeply religious scholar of literature."

He'd call for manuscripts, he'd talk about the poetry of Imru' al-Qais, who is the great pre-Islamic poet of Arab letters. That was his passion. He absolutely loved it. I was an English major in college, always been interested in literature. So it was a connection at another level.

Bakich: Clearly there are synergies intellectually in what fascinates both of you, but you're also a diplomat. Is your goal to get him to trust you or to respect you?

Crocker: All those things.

Bakich: I know this may sound naïve, but what is the type of relationship that you're trying to build with this man?

Crocker: Diplomacy is built on personalities, that's how diplomacy is done. Priority one: understand who you're dealing with—background, personality, motivations, hopes, fears, likes, dislikes. All of those conversations were meant to help me understand Nouri al-Maliki. Second is develop some confidence and trust. Get a sense of whether you can trust him or not and impart a

sense that he can trust you. Now none of that means he stops being the Prime Minister or I stop being Ambassador. We know who each other is. But you lay the foundations for the hard stuff that is going to come on down the line. It's the personal equivalent of what I was talking about earlier.

When you land in the middle of the Iraqi civil war, you don't have any time to get smart about Iraq, you'd better *be* smart about Iraq. Similarly, when the bilateral shit hits the fan with some major crisis involving us and the Prime Minister, that is not when you start building your knowledge of who he is, what makes him tick, and it's not when you try to lay down the foundations of trust. You had better have that in place.

Riley: Can you recall any specific instances where this personal rapport that you built up with him bore fruit later, when he had to make hard decisions, for instance?

Crocker: Numerous incidents, the earliest major one was June of '07 when al-Qaeda blew up the Golden Mosque in Samarra for the second time. The first time they did it they had sparked the Iraqi civil war as Shi'a retaliated against Sunnis and off it spiraled. This was the height of the surge, both Shi'a and Sunni militias were fighting for all they were worth. That was the month we lost 120 soldiers, could not have come at a worse time.

I got the call that this had happened. I hang up the phone and tell my secretary, "Get hold of Dave Petraeus," and she said, "He's here."

Riley: That was quick.

Crocker: He walked in and one of us said, "We've got to get to the Prime Minister." My Arabic-speaking assistant called the Prime Minister's office and the response was, "Get in the car."

Petraeus and I didn't really talk on the way over. We knew. So we got with Maliki and went through the facts as we knew them and then went through the necessary steps. It was all three of us coming up with ideas. Could Maliki get Ayatollah [Ali al-] Sistani to deliver a message of calm and restraint to the Shi'a. Could Maliki get Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi over immediately and could the two of them step out and, Sunni and Shi'a together, issue a joint appeal for calm. Could we get Maliki up to Samarra that afternoon so he could demonstrate a Prime Minister in charge, moving to the scene of the crime, and deliver an appeal with the mosque in the background, saying, "We will not resort again to arms." And yes, all of these things could happen.

He got on the phone. Hashimi and Maliki hated each other. Personalities that didn't work. But Maliki agreed right away. He called Hashimi while we were sitting there. Said, "Can you be here in 30 minutes?" They came and did that. Maliki said, "I want to do that first. Once I've done it, I'll call the Ayatollah and say, 'Here's what I just did, here's what you, Eminence, could usefully do.'" They did that later in the afternoon. It all spooled out.

It certainly helped that Maliki had confidence that we were trying to do the right thing and that we had a sense of what the right thing was. He could rely on our judgment and our good faith, and he could rely on us. So not a bad result. We had almost no retaliatory violence. Maybe we wouldn't have anyway, you don't know. But that was one early example.

The later examples were the negotiations as we reached crunch points, near breakdowns, and whatnot. My ability to throw out the negotiating teams, and he and I would just go sit in his private office and work through issues, was key in closing both those agreements.

Bakich: You mentioned Sistani. In that instance, correct me if I'm wrong, it was Maliki who was the liaison or the interlocutor between you and Sistani. Did you ever have an opportunity to sit down with the Ayatollah himself?

Crocker: Absolutely not. He never would receive any U.S. government official. I tried right from the beginning. Late May, early June of 2003 I went down to Najaf, made contact with some clerics who would talk to us to see if they could get me in. They couldn't. Even made the effort, he had an open public meeting after Friday prayers, when anybody could come in. I showed up dressed as Iraqi as I could get. Got in the middle of the crowd walking through the doors and was almost in when there was this hand on my shoulder pulling me back, saying, "Nice try."

Bakich: I can imagine that the Security Service was upset with you.

Crocker: This was the early days. Diplomatic security wasn't on the ground, military security hadn't really organized itself. We were traveling around by taxis. Then Hume Horan, one of the greatest Arabists the Foreign Service ever produced, tried it again in July, went down there and camped out for a week and had no better success.

We could send the Ayatollah letters. He would sometimes give an oral response, never a written one, but he wanted that removal from the Americans. This shows you how closely run this was on avoiding a Shi'a revolt, that the Shi'a spiritual leader would not ever talk to an American official.

Bakich: A source of power for him?

Crocker: A source of great vulnerability if his adversaries were able to say, "The Ayatollah has sold to the Americans. He has capitulated to the occupation."

Bakich: Now at this point in the early days, what is the status of the Sadrist Movement?

Crocker: It is starting to organize itself as an anti-coalition, anti-occupation force. The first clear signs were seen, I think, in late July '03 when they held a significant rally denouncing the occupation and all who collaborated with it. It was interesting because the reaction from other Shi'a leaders at the time was, "There is no end to the stupid mistakes you Americans make and made, but a colossal one was failing to kill Muqtada al-Sadr in March 2003." That was very strongly felt in the Shi'a establishment.

Riley: Who else are you developing, or do you have any other close relationships in the sense you've just described with Maliki and among the Iraqis?

Crocker: You go through the same process with all significant leaders. I did it with Barzani, Talabani, Abdul-Mahdi, Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, Tariq al-Hashimi, and the Speaker of the Parliament, Mahmoud al-Mashhadani. Personalities count. Some relationships were better and more developed than others, but in every case, I went through this kind of process. I was very

well positioned with the Kurds because I was the guy who first came to them all those years before, and we did what we said we would do. That was very helpful.

I had particularly good relations with the Supreme Council, Abdul Aziz al-Hakim. I was his escort when he made his landmark trip to Washington in 2002 and with Abdul-Mahdi as we put together the Governing Council. He and I had worked very closely together. I had good groundwork with those four and was able to build on that. I had known Hashimi from '03, Mashhadani I did not. But there again the Arabic was hugely helpful because none of them had had the experience of dealing with a senior American without going through an interpreter. That's why I make such a *big* thing about language. Your ability to communicate directly is absolutely huge among people who are not accustomed to it.

Perry: Working with the media, trying to get the kinds of messages that you're talking about in country to explain to the American populace what's going on and this is 2007, the United States is gearing up for a Presidential race and you have all sorts of discussions on campaign trails about the policy in Iraq.

Crocker: Yes, and that's a great question because part of the whole complex dance is the role and impact of the media. It is not dissimilar to dealing with foreign political leaders. I have always put a very high premium on relationships with key international correspondents. My oldest friends are journalists. These go back to people with whom I served in Lebanon in the early '80s, and we had a huge U.S. media corps covering a very complex situation. We spent a lot of time together pooling our knowledge because they're like us. They are supposed to understand and interpret complex situations. I styled my relations with journalists as, "Look, I'm not here to spin you a story." This is back in the early '80s. "I'm here to understand the story just like you are. So here's what I know. Make sense? What do you know?" A lot of these people were still on the scene as I moved into Iraq. Not part of the Iraqi press corps but back in Washington. Trudy Rubin of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Robin Wright at the *Washington Post*, Jonathan Randal. Tom Friedman and I were together in Beirut.

So a lot of really important preexisting relations with the media and that helps as they get word out to their folks in Baghdad, "Hey, you can talk to this guy. He actually has a thought or two." Trying to convey the story, I can't tell you how hard this is because there's no time anymore or editorial patience for long, complex, in-depth reporting, and it's hugely frustrating to the few reporters who are still out there. They may finally understand it, they finally get it right, and the thousand words they send back wind up as 250, and the meaning is lost. That's a huge challenge.

Petraeus and I both did a lot of media work. We were both as careful as we could be not to get into the trap of overselling a situation or an assessment. We tried to be pretty understated. Codels were a huge priority for both of us. We wanted as many as we could get, and we spent at least an hour and a half of our personal time with everyone who came out, and we always did it together. Yes, we knew it was an election year coming and we knew Congress controlled the appropriations. We knew Congress occasionally would read a paper, sometimes, maybe some of them. But at least they watched TV. So it was all part of the overall effort.

Given our history in Iraq, given the overall tension between executive and legislative, going back to Vietnam and before, we were as careful as we could be to say, "Here are the stakes, here's

what we're trying to do. I can't tell you it's going to work, but here's what the consequences of us deciding not to try it anymore might be." That kind of thing.

Bakich: You described clearly the relationships you were building with a number of Kurds and the Shi'a community. What's the relationship with the Sunni leaders at this time?

Crocker: That was Hashimi and Mashhadani from the Sunni establishment, and they were feeling bruised, underappreciated, and threatened, and attempting to keep them in the game was a huge priority. The complexity is impossible to overstate and it's hard to re-create. At the same time, the Sunnis were the most resentful of the U.S. for having enabled a Shi'a ascendancy for the first time in Iraq's history. The most negative toward us yet, at the same time those who had stepped into the political game were the most dependent on us. That we were what stood between them and death at the hand of the Shi'a militias. They were conflicted, to say the very least, and they were hugely disunified and trying, as you built relations, to be sure in building a relationship with Hashimi you then didn't make all of his enemies your enemies.

Figuring out how they were connected, who they were allied with, who they were antagonistic to was all part of this incredibly multidimensional process. The Sunnis were in a sense the hardest to deal with because they were the most fragmented, the most disunified, the most threatened, and without the organizational coherence that we found in Kurdish and Shi'a politics. I spent a lot of time with them and it was hard going.

Riley: There was at least one occasion where the Kurds were close to calling a vote of no confidence?

Crocker: Oh, goodness, yes. It was multiple rolling crises. That was one of them. It was sort of the "anybody but Maliki" current, which Kurds, Sunnis, and other Shi'a were all part of. This is where Presidential leadership makes a difference. Petraeus and I out there going through this day after day, week after week. We had made an effort with Maliki, but, boy, was he frustrating and hard to deal with and secretive and incapable of building alliances and coalitions. We had our days when, "Yes, let's throw him under the bus." It was President Bush who said, "Guys, really bad idea. Maliki is the one we brought to the dance. He is our partner and he is going to continue to be our partner. Figure out how to make that work."

Perry: So even when you and General Petraeus would be frustrated, the President would bring you—

Crocker: This is Presidential detachment in a good way, as well as Presidential leadership. He's sitting back there in Washington. He doesn't have to go through this every damn day, but he can also look above the smoke and dust of our political conflicts and say, "Strategically, this has to work. There is no alternative."

If you get a vote of no confidence in the Iraqi system, that is doable. Getting a vote of confidence in somebody else may not be doable. So the Prime Ministership is vacant in a crisis atmosphere for God knows how long. Again, not a good idea, guys, get rid of it.

Riley: I'm going to ask a question that probably takes you out of the day-to-day aspect of this and probably by the time you come in it is completely moot, but historically it has some

importance. That is the option of partitioning. Were there ever serious discussions that you were party to about whether partition was a realistic option? You're shaking your head no.

Crocker: It is an idea so stupid as to be laughable if the stakes would not have been so catastrophic. With all genuine respect, it's the kind of thing that academics in shaded campuses such as this one can come up with, with no sense of what that means on the ground. What it would have meant on the ground in Iraq would have been the proclamation of an independent Kurdish republic, which would have brought in the armies of Turkey, Iran, and Syria. An absolute red line for all three states. You would have had regional war just over the Kurdish issue.

A Sunni-Shi'a partition—will somebody please show me on a map where Sunnistan is and where Shi'astan is, because Iraq has a traditionally secular society, has a huge intermingling. What we saw by the time I arrived, as sectarian conflict raged through the country for the preceding 12 months, it burned so hot because the populations were so intermingled. Did we really want to try and engineer an India-Pakistan split in 1948 with how many died in that, two and a half million? Yet with much more divided communities than you had in Iraq. This is the human toll and the consequences for regional security of such mindless mutterings.

I've often thought that maybe we would tidy up our academic communities if we criminalized bad ideas. That would be one of my candidates.

Riley: Are you speaking as a dean now or as a former Ambassador?

Crocker: As a dean, I'd like to institute a wide range of corporal punishment to faculty.

Riley: So I take it there were no serious voices within the administration who were musing about this?

Crocker: Absolutely not. The current Vice President maintains strongly that he was utterly misinterpreted—

Riley: Is that right?

Crocker: Yes. He never called for partition. He talked about the need for significant decentralization within a federal construct.

Perry: That was how the media reported it here though, that he supported that approach.

Crocker: Yes.

Perry: But wasn't it much more nuanced than that, as I understand from the briefing book. The debate is over centralization versus some form of federalism?

Crocker: That's it exactly. Iraq's constitution establishes a federal republic, but it doesn't answer a lot of questions as to how that federal republic is going to work. That's what I alluded to earlier today.

The current issues that face Iraq, Kurdish-Arab relations, hydrocarbons and so forth, lie within a set of states' rights arguments. We had some difficulty ourselves on that issue, and they're facing the same thing. So it lies really within that context. How centralized or decentralized should a federal republic properly be? I had one memorable day in Iraq when I had back-to-back meetings with first Hashimi and then Maliki in which for once they agreed separately on a fundamental issue. They both were holding forth on the absolute need for fundamental amendments to the Iraqi Constitution.

Hashimi said it had to be amended to severely restrict the powers of the Prime Minister, and Maliki said it had to be amended to significantly expand the powers of the Prime Minister.

Perry: On this issue of centralization and federalism, you've spoken very eloquently about the United States' need and Americans' need to understand the history of the Middle East. Did you ever find yourself, as you'd done in testimony before Congress, talking to these parties in the Middle East about the United States' history on this very issue?

Crocker: Yes.

Perry: Were they open to listening to those lessons?

Crocker: I would bring it up and I would have multiple purposes. One would be to say, "I understand how hard this is because here's our own history." But another point would be, "Don't do what we did. If you cannot grapple with these fundamental issues in political terms, it may tear your country apart as it almost did ours. So don't try to paper over it for the next seven decades. These things have to be resolved if our history teaches you anything. But wouldn't you rather do that peacefully and politically than do it our way?"

Some of them absorbed different lessons from all of that. I think all of them, though, appreciated that because there's a certain current, you see it now, among Iraqi leaders of self-blame. "Why can't we make this work?" It's really hard to make it work. It's hard to make it work in a short time. Just commit yourselves *to* making it work. Do not get overly frustrated with yourself and particularly with your colleagues. Hunker down and commit yourself to political solutions. We'll see how they do.

Bakich: At what point are you getting the sense that there is a movement among the Sunni community to start forming what eventually turned into the Sons of Iraq?

Crocker: That was in embryo before I ever got there. They'd tried, going back to '05. But it really was with the advent of the surge that those tribal leaders with whom we had contact started telling us, "Gee, if I just had the wherewithal, the climate is now right where I can bring people out of the insurgency and into alliance with you." Fortunately, we had a flexible enough structure on the military side that we could use commanders' emergency response program funds to do just that. A hundred and fifty dollars, $200 a month paid by us, and you have Sons of Iraq. That began shortly after my arrival.

Bakich: At what point are you and General Petraeus informing Washington that certain folks are on the payroll?

Crocker: I can't remember exactly, but I'm sure it emerged in our briefings as it was happening. Because the military would have to notify and account for the expenditure of funds right away.

Perry: How about conversations with the Iranians? When do they begin after you arrive?

Crocker: Right before I got there, Zal Khalilzad, at a neighbors' sub-Ministerial conference in Baghdad, had some direct discussion with his Iranian counterpart, not one on one but they engaged directly in a plenary session with authority from Washington to do so. At another conference in May of '07 Secretary Rice was prepared to attend a small dinner with the Iranian Foreign Minister in which the expectation was that the two of them would directly interact. He chickened out at the last minute. But also at that conference at Sharm El-Sheikh in early May '07, I had a brief direct discussion with the Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister about direct talks in Baghdad. It took us several more painful evolutions to get that set up. I don't remember when the first round took place, July or August of '07. But it was DOA [dead on arrival]. It was clear the Iranian Ambassador had no latitude—in sharp contrast to my discussions on Afghanistan—he had no latitude whatsoever.

We noticed he kept calling for breaks. At first I thought he had a weak bladder. We found out later that when I would say something for which he did not have precleared talking points in response, he would call for a break, go out, use a cell phone to call Tehran to say, "He said this. What should I say back?" With that kind of totally scripted interlocutor, you're not going to get anywhere.

Riley: Is the White House aware of these contacts?

Crocker: Oh, sure, these were authorized. There's lots on the public record on this. I held a press conference.

Riley: Because I looked at one of the accounts this morning that indicated the Iraq Study Group—I'm assuming you didn't have any interaction with the Iraq Study Group.

Crocker: Careful not to.

Riley: One of the recommendations from the Iraq Study Group had been new diplomatic initiatives with Iran and Syria. Stephen Hadley had just knocked it down and said, "That's not possible." Is this inconsistent with what I was reading or—?

Crocker: That would be something you'd have to talk to Washington-based officials about. The authority was there for direct U.S.-Iranian contacts on Iraq. The Secretary herself was prepared to do it at Sharm El-Sheikh. The Iranians backed out.

Riley: And what about Syria? Did you have any—?

Crocker: I had a brief conversation with the Syrian Foreign Minister in Sharm El-Sheikh, Walid Muallem, whom I had known quite well when I was Ambassador to Syria and he was Deputy Foreign Minister. We explored informally how we might talk about Iraq. I didn't really have authorization to do that, but at these big conferences conversations take place.

It was interesting. Washington was not interested at all in any substantive interaction with the Syrians on Iraq or anything else. They were prepared to talk directly to the Iranians but not the Syrians.

Riley: The rationale being?

Crocker: That there was simply no point whatsoever in engaging the Syrians. Remember, we had pulled our Ambassador out of Damascus after the Hariri assassination in 2005. It was the view of the administration that this was a totally evil regime, that we had mistakenly and repeatedly tried to engage too many times before to no result, and we would not do it again.

Riley: Did you, other than this one episode, comply? Did you think this was a wise policy?

Crocker: Having one less person to talk to did not trouble me in any way.

Riley: Enough said.

Crocker: My experience in Syria did not incline me toward the view that good, productive things were likely to come out of it.

Bakich: One country in the region that our discussion of the last day and a half hasn't mentioned a great deal is Saudi Arabia. To what extent are the Saudis engaged?

Crocker: The Saudis were not engaged, providing some funding for some Iraqi factions but in no way prepared to deal on a state-to-state basis with a new Iraq. After our April '08 testimony, General Petraeus and I made a regional swing. We went to Saudi Arabia, we met together with King Abdullah [bin Abdulaziz] to try and encourage Saudi diplomatic and political engagement in Iraq, and the King could not have been clearer that he was not going to do that. He did not trust Nouri al-Maliki, Iraq was an Iranian province, and it was all our fault. Fundamentally, the Saudi leadership, particularly King Abdullah himself, considered and still considers the Iraqi leadership of being guilty of an unforgivable crime. It's what I call GWS, governing while Shi'a.

It is sectarian in its nature but it is very deeply felt. So the Saudis have just stayed out of any kind of economic or political relationship with post-2003 Iraq. At the same time we do not think they are involved in what the Iraqi government asserts they are, which is actively funding antigovernment insurgents. We think they're just pretty much hands off.

Riley: Are there other countries in the region that we haven't touched on that we ought to in examining what is going on in Iraq?

Crocker: Turkey has a very key role both with Iraq generally and with Kurdistan in particular. Of course, Turkish refusal to allow us a northern invasion route dramatically and negatively, as we discussed briefly yesterday, affected the environment we had to deal with post 2003. I'm not sure we have ever impressed on the Turks the very serious consequences of their refusal for the challenges we subsequently faced and the subsequent threat to their interests as well as ours. That Turkish decision was a game changer in a very negative way.

Riley: Let me ask a naïve question. Is Turkey, is there a boundary line there in terms of State Department areas?

Crocker: Sure, Turkey is part of the European Bureau.

Riley: Did that complicate matters in any way?

Crocker: Not particularly.

Riley: Fair enough.

Crocker: When the war started, whatever day that was, March 18, 2003, I was actually in Ankara making a last-ditch effort with the Turks to let the Fourth ID [Infantry Division] land in advance. So the bureaucratic divisions didn't really affect it. I had the lead for State even as an NEA [Near Eastern Affairs] guy in working with the Turks.

Riley: Did you make any headway?

Crocker: Obviously not.

Bakich: Was this a fundamental miscalculation on everyone's part pertaining to parliamentary politics, or was this his preference from the get-go?

Cocker: All politics are complicated everywhere and Turkey, as you may recall, at that particular time had an Islamist government that the Turkish General Staff deeply resented. It was this government that agreed to the request for transit authorization, but when it went to Parliament the Turkish General Staff refused to use its influence with the many parliamentarians over whom they had influence. Not because they were utterly opposed to the invasion, although most would rather not see it, but because they wanted to see the Islamist civilian government suffer a major defeat in Parliament.

I was in the Situation Room, Saturday Deputies Committee meeting, when word came in that the proposal had passed in Parliament. But there were so many deputies absent that it turned out not to be a legal vote. So it was that close. Should we have known or done better? I suppose theoretically. But this had become so extraordinarily complex as an issue in Turkish internal politics, all of our efforts were trying to get the deal done, which we did. TGS [Turkish General Staff] said they'd support it, then they didn't and may actively have worked against it by telling deputies to take a day off.

Bakich: What was the reaction among your colleagues in the sit [situation] room at that time?

Crocker: During the meeting we thought we had it. It was only later that somebody did the math and we didn't.

Riley: Another perhaps naïve question. Israel. We're talking about a region of the world where normally the Israelis would have a prominent role. Is this so radioactive that Israel has to be cordoned off from any engagement on this? Are you engaging the Israelis?

Crocker: I did engage the Israelis at one point, what point that was I've long since forgotten. I did go out to meet with the Israeli government to explain that no decision had yet been taken, but what we would really like you to do, should this become necessary, is nothing. Do nothing. Say nothing. We'd been through a very stressful period in '90, '91 with the Scud attacks, and the Israeli reaction was, "Good riddance to Saddam Hussein, and you can pretty much count on us to stay out of this."

What we did convey was if there is action it will be decisive action. It will be the end of the Iraqi regime. There will be nothing for you to shoot at even if they get off a volley at you. The Israeli response, politely phrased, "Yes, we understand that, in fact, without you telling us, shooting at a regime about to go down a rathole with American forces perhaps in the way of our missiles would not be a prudent thing to do. So go worry about something else." The Israelis, in short, were not a factor. We did touch the base.

Riley: Are you getting wind of any Monday-morning quarterbacking from Israel when things are not going well in Iraq?

Crocker: Not that I was ever aware of.

Riley: There were some issues on your agenda when you came in that first year. One was budgetary matters within country. Are you spending a lot of your time working on money issues?

Crocker: No, that was so great. The President ordered, as part of the New Way Forward, a civilian surge, a dramatic expansion in the number of provincial reconstruction teams throughout the country, a significant expansion of civilian staffing elsewhere. Early on I brought out Pat Kennedy, Under Secretary for Management and an Iraq veteran. He'd been out there in '03 with me, the ultimate executive branch management guru. I asked him to survey all Embassy staffing and structures. He produced something called the Kennedy Report that did just that, recommending fairly significant increases in staffing.

All of this took money, and it was truly wonderful for an ambassador. The administration attitude was, "You figure out what you need, we'll get it and we'll pay for it." I just was not under financial constraints.

Riley: Staffing you had to do in relation to this.

Crocker: Yes, the Embassy needed a substantial reorganization, which we had concluded in those recommendations in May. Then I had to get the people. It wasn't easy just to get the Foreign Service people and to get the necessary expertise from other civilian agencies that did not have a foreign affairs mandate and who would have to give us those people out of hide. It was a huge challenge. We still don't have a process or mechanisms to organize a civilian response to a complex contingency across agency lines.

I had to basically go to each Cabinet Secretary, from Baghdad. To the attorney general, saying, "I need 20 assistant U.S. attorneys and I need them now." This was Alberto Gonzales, who had a few problems of his own. Yet he did it, and he had to pull these men and women out of district offices and leave their positions vacant because he had no way to backfill. They don't have a cadre for that.

Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control. I needed public health specialists. I needed a lot of them. They also stepped up to it, but it was the same thing. They just had to ask for volunteers and then take the hit until an officer could come back. It was an ongoing struggle. The resources were there, but the bodies weren't.

Riley: Who is brokering the contacts with these folks? Is it the White House that is doing this? You don't go to Alberto Gonzales.

Crocker: Oh, yes, I did.

Riley: Did you?

Crocker: Yes. I went to all of them.

Riley: Directly to each of them with, presumably, the warrant of the President behind you?

Crocker: When Doug Lute came in as Deputy National Security Advisor for Iraq and Afghanistan that was a huge help. But ultimately, I was the guy at the top and I was in a position to say, or imply, "If I don't get those 20 assistant U.S. attorneys, the next call is going to be from the President of the United States."

Riley: That helps.

Crocker: That does help. The President would have. He never had to do it, but he would have done it.

Riley: Oil. That's a big issue for you or not?

Crocker: It was in the sense of multidimensional levels. Increasing Iraqi production and exports, a huge priority to give them the resources to fund their own development. It was a huge issue politically. One of the so-called benchmarks was a comprehensive hydrocarbons law, and within two months after my arrival I said, "This is not going to happen because a comprehensive hydrocarbons law will be the consequence of a comprehensive agreement on all these states' rights issues. It can follow it, it cannot precede it."

There is an existing mechanism. The constitution stipulates that oil is a national resource. That's established. There is an existing mechanism for the distribution of oil revenues on a reasonably equitable basis, so that works. So let's forget about a comprehensive hydrocarbons law. Guess what? Three and a half years after my arrival, there is no comprehensive hydrocarbons law and there isn't going to be anytime soon, but it's okay, it works. Both as a resource issue and as a political issue, oil figured prominently as a security issue. Finding a way to protect the export pipelines, particularly the northern pipeline, was a huge priority and that was woven intimately into the process.

How could we use tribes to secure the pipelines instead of blowing them up? An awful lot of work was done on that, ultimately successfully.

Riley: Did the absence of political agreements impair technically the ability to generate the oil and get it to market so that funds could be—?

Crocker: No.

Riley: So the pipelines are going as best they could go, as the technology would permit. It was merely a question of how you were going to allocate the—?

Crocker: There was a mechanism for the allocation of budget resources to provinces based on population that all saw as reasonably equitable. Also a political understanding that 17 percent of the revenues would go to the Kurdish region. Parliament had to vote it every year. Every year it was a crisis and a cliffhanger, every year they voted the damn thing. In this rush for benchmarks that was not necessary and not achievable.

I spent a lot of my time in those first six months trying to get the word "benchmark" out of the U.S.-Iraqi political lexicon.

Bakich: Not useful? The benchmarking process from Congress was not useful?

Crocker: No, and again, it's the difference between Washington and Baghdad clocks.

Riley: Why don't we call a break now.

[BREAK]

Perry: This is a follow-up to the question about budget and dealing with Washington. How about your preparation for, three years ago today, September 10, 2007, your testimony before Congress, the Congressional committees, your preparation with General Petraeus on that, with President Bush. Did you meet with the President before? And your reactions to the members' questions?

Crocker: The President came out to Iraq, to Anbar, about a week before Labor Day. I did brief him and his National Security Cabinet, the Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense, Chairman NSA [National Security Agency] were all there. But it was not a preview per se of my testimony. It was our regular national security update. Because we had more time, we were face-to-face, a little more detailed than was customarily the case. But the President was careful not to ask me for an advance copy of my testimony or to know exactly what it was going to say, and I was careful not to give it to him.

Perry: Or to make suggestions about what should be said?

Crocker: No. With both General Petraeus and me he was extremely careful to leave this as our prerogative. I think he was listening to hear whether I was going to give him any indication I was about to pull the plug on the whole endeavor. But the only person with whom I shared my

testimony in advance was General Petraeus, and I was the only person he shared his with. It was a very carefully preserved process.

Perry: And your response as to how you thought the Members of Congress received you and their questions to you?

Crocker: It was a fairly unusual event in American political life. Normally there's a division of labor, your field people pursue the matter in the field and your Washington people deal with Congress. We literally had to fight a two-front war, having to do both. I would hope that is not a precedent for all future commanding generals and ambassadors. Others are better equipped to comment on the impact of the testimony or attitudes of Congress. We went, we testified, and we went back to the war.

It did seem that the whole event, which was hugely hyped, had Americans kind of saying, "Okay, the republic still stands, so what?" It did seem to take the air out of the balloon a bit on the whole question of pulling funding and forcing withdrawals and all that kind of stuff.

I can't remember being totally surprised by anything that was asked. They were all fairly foreseeable. Some of them were not questions at all but mini-speeches, but that's the way our system works.

Bakich: You said the only person with whom you shared your testimony was Petraeus and vice versa. Did you draft them independently of one another or did you discuss—?

Crocker: Yes. We were very careful. We do everything jointly, but these were to be our independent assessments, and we felt that meant we needed to formulate them independently and then share.

Bakich: Was there anything that surprised you in his?

Crocker: I could have written his testimony and he could have written mine by that point. That was one interesting thing if anybody noticed. Some questions were directed specifically at one or the other of us. Some were just kind of tossed out. I don't think there was a single incident in two days in which there was any confusion between the two of us as to whose question it was. There was never a moment when both of us started to speak. We just knew. Sometimes we would finish each other's sentences, not ever in these kinds of situations but sitting around with our advisors. I'd start a sentence and he'd finish it, he'd start one and I'd finish it. We could do that—I knew exactly what he was going to say.

Riley: Were there instances when you were in conflict with him? Do you recall specific cases where you found yourselves knocking heads?

Crocker: A couple of months ago he was at [Texas] A&M [University] and we did an interview with a local paper and were asked that question. We could not, between us, recall—there had to have been episodes when we did not see a situation the same way, but clearly it never got to the point of conflict or one of us would remember it. Again, I respected his military judgments and if it was on his general side of the ledger and more me saying, "This ain't looking good, what do you think?" Similarly he'd say, "The politics of this really are not trending the right way. What

do we do?" I think, in those circumstances I would say to him, "I think your best military judgment is badly flawed and here's how you ought to run this particular operation" or he would say, "You're mishandling the politics of this, here's what you ought to do." That just never happened.

Riley: The issue of corruption was raised this morning in relation to Afghanistan, but let me raise it in relation to Iraq. How big a problem was it for you in country, and how big a problem was it for you representing the conflict back to Washington?

Crocker: Corruption in Iraq was a huge problem. We referred to it as the potential second insurgency. It was pervasive at every level and deeply corrosive. Corruption is a multitentacled creature. It's not just financial corruption, it's corruption in the judiciary where judges throw trials. It's at every echelon, and it can absolutely destroy a state. It was present in Iraq in a big way, and it is something about which we had some extremely contentious discussions with Maliki and with others in the government and the judiciary. Over time we started to see some progress where officials were dismissed, convictions were obtained, charges were brought, and so forth. But it is still a huge problem.

The enormous advantage we had in Iraq as compared to Afghanistan, as I said this morning, is this wasn't all a front-page story all the time. If you look at the transcripts of the testimony, corruption came up occasionally, but it was not a constant theme. If you had those kinds of hearings today in Afghanistan, that would probably be the dominant theme. We were lucky not to have had that because I think you now have a fevered atmosphere in which Karzai is almost compelled to stand up against us and say, "You are not telling me how to deal with these issues. I'm taking this over." Just as you're seeing now in statements out of Kabul.

Maliki was able to start taking some actions precisely because he wasn't being challenged on this publicly. We're a free country with a free media. I talked earlier about the value and the role of the media, but it is a hard truth that too much exposure on certain issues makes progress on those issues more rather than less difficult. I don't think it was quite as bad in Iraq as in Afghanistan. It was plenty bad enough. I think that is continuing to trend in the right direction. That started partway through my tour, and our and their ability to move it in that direction has a connection to the relative lack of intense media and Congressional focus it received.

Riley: How about the vast sums of money that were going in through the American presence there and the occasional reports that were coming out about an inability to account for those large sums of money. Was that still an issue when you were Ambassador or had those problems been largely resolved?

Crocker: On the civilian side, the accountability issues were in pretty good shape. The special inspector general for Iraqi reconstruction, which had a substantial presence in the Embassy, had really gotten pretty proficient by the time I was there. They had a good handle on these accountability issues. As a result of their investigations and inquiries, by and large by the time I got there you had actions and controls in place.

What continued to be a problem, of course, was some of these mega-projects that had been started early in the occupation, driven by the perceived need to do something, do it big, and do it

quick but not necessarily do it right. We continue to suffer from those projects with hard decisions on, do you try to see it through to completion? Do you abandon it? These had huge resource implications.

So overall accountability was in reasonably good shape on the civilian side but the issues of waste and mismanagement—what do they say? IGs [Inspectors General] tackle waste, fraud, and mismanagement? I think the fraud part of it was under pretty good control. The waste and mismanagement issues were still very salient.

We could actually use the SIGIR [special inspector general for Iraq reconstruction] process and the public attention to misuse or poor use of U.S. resources with the Iraqis. That was part of our discussion on corruption and accountability of public funds, saying, "This is the scrutiny we're under, this is what we've had to do about it and why, and this is what we have done about it. So we're not perfect either, God knows, but our process has impelled us in these directions. Why don't you take a page or two from these books?" So it actually did help in that sense.

Riley: Did you ever have conversations with General Petraeus about the process of getting to the policy that was in place by the time you came on board? There's been a fair amount written about the surge and that seems to have been very much a White House–driven decision, a case where in fact the people in the field were reporting something very different than the President ultimately decided on. I'm trying to square that with the depiction you rendered earlier about a President who does rely on his field people for these kinds of things.

Crocker: A President who relies on his field people when he has full confidence in his field people. I think that in Iraq, I'm not the one to speak to it, but by mid-'06 reports weren't matching the reality. But it's a great question. I'm sure you're addressing this with others qualified to speak to it. It was a White House–driven process in two important ways.

The field by and large said, "Just keep going the way we are," but it was also White House driven in the sense that the other agencies, State, DoD, were not the primary players, the White House itself was. I don't know if you've talked to Meghan O'Sullivan or Brett McGurk yet but I'm sure they're on your list, as well as Steve Hadley. They're the ones who did this.

Perry: I read in the briefing book about the President taking control of Iraq strategy then, in '06 and '07, according to the briefing book, relying less on the Joint Chiefs. Is that a parallel to President [John F.] Kennedy after the Bay of Pigs, drawing decision making closer to the White House and further away from the Joint Chiefs, or getting someone in the field in this case, as you say, on whom he could rely?

Crocker: I'm not in a position to make broad historical comparisons. I think there were some unique dynamics at work. First, as I indicated yesterday, the President felt uniquely and personally involved in Iraq. He was the decider, as he would put it, he was responsible. Iraq was his. So in that sense I think it is completely different from Bay of Pigs. He felt a real responsibility, and he exercised that responsibility. There was, of course, a decision made not to renew General [Peter] Pace's term as Chairman. I think with the arrival of Admiral [Michael] Mullen, certainly you had a Chairman in whom the President developed considerable confidence.

This was a unique situation and again no parallel with the Bay of Pigs. The President turned not to the Chairman and not to Commander, Central Command as his primary source for military advice, it was the commander in the field. There is no instance in our modern political organization comparable to that because Vietnam was under a different type of structure.

Riley: The commander in the field being Petraeus.

Crocker: Statutorily the Commander, Joint Chiefs of Staff, is the military advisor to the President and the National Security Council. On Iraq, the military advisor to the President and the National Security Council was General Petraeus.

Riley: Right. And extending what you've already told us, the execution of the policy you become a part of is also very much a White House–driven enterprise, different from what had gone before where the chain of command had been more present and relevant?

Crocker: I had the good fortune to come on the scene after the policy was set and after the Washington decision structures were set. It was clearly White House driven. The weekly VTCs embody that, but it wasn't achieved, I think, in any kind of adversarial way. Secretaries Rice and [Robert] Gates were perfectly comfortable with that. It is a unique interlude in American national security bureaucratic history.

Bakich: I would agree with you on that, and I'm curious as you and General Petraeus are after or before engaging with the President via video teleconference, did you ever look at each other with mutual recognition of exactly where you are in the chain of command? I say that in quotes knowing that there are people clearly above you who really should be between the President and the field commander and Ambassador are several steps removed. But you've noted that this is different. Did you ever recognize this?

Crocker: Oh, yes. Right from the get-go we saw, "This is a really good deal. Let's not screw it up." [*laughter*]

Riley: Did you get any heat from people who would normally be in your reporting chain of command back to the White House?

Crocker: Actually not. Every now and then there would be bleeps and bloopers, but not much because they know what the response would be, which was, "Gee, have a problem with that? Let me give you the President's number. Why don't you discuss it with him?" The President had it set the way he wanted it. In my case, the Secretary of State therefore was totally comfortable with it. So if some Assistant Secretary is going to have a problem with that, talk to the Secretary, talk to the President, don't talk to me.

Bakich: Can you describe the interaction between the President, Secretary of State, and Secretary of Defense while you and General Petraeus are engaged in these video teleconferences? I'm assuming that they're in on these meetings.

Crocker: Yes, they're always there. As you know, historically the full National Security Council seldom meets. This was an exception. It met every week on Iraq. This was normally a process in which there was little intervention by anyone except the President. He knew the issues. We did

most of the talking. I would brief, General Petraeus would brief. The President would ask questions throughout. He would then turn to other members of the Council and say, "Anybody have anything else?" Often there was precious little.

You don't surprise your boss, so Secretary Gates had a pretty good idea of what General Petraeus was going to say, and Secretary Rice had a pretty good idea of what I was going to say. They would have had opportunities if they needed them in advance of the meeting to talk to the President. It wasn't pre-scripted, but there was a certain process to this.

Bakich: Can you describe the relationship between Secretary Rice and yourself as you go through this? How frequently are you reporting?

Crocker: I would talk to her at least once a week. It was all by phone. History is a dying art because there are no records left.

Riley: Is this also true of the video conferences? Do you know if those were taped?

Crocker: Certainly not at our end. General Petraeus and I forbade the taking of notes, except we'd make little jottings but we wanted to make damn sure that your life was as difficult as possible.

Riley: Thank you.

Bakich: How involved was Rice in day-to-day influence of your work or supportive?

Crocker: She was totally supportive. We did have our differences on occasion. I think a couple of times I sent back unclassified cables that somehow found their way into the public domain. Once on civilian reorganization, saying, "I've got to get more and better people. We don't have our best people in the fight and you, Madam Secretary, need to lay down the hammer on this." That got public. I don't think she was very happy about that.

In September '07, right about the time of the testimony, I sent one back on refugees just saying, "I think our treatment of Iraqi refugees and those who have served us is unconscionable. People are dying out here because they served us and we're not letting them into the States before it's too late." That got leaked and caused a fairly major uproar, and she was not happy about that. But it also changed U.S. refugee policy.

Riley: You've told us how close you and General Petraeus became, and we also spent a fair amount of time questioning you about the conventional accounts of substantial divisions between the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense in the early stages of the Bush Presidency. Had those tensions largely been resolved by the time you came back, or do you get the sense that there was still tension between the departments, not on a day-to-day basis with you but at the upper echelons?

Crocker: With the departure of Rumsfeld and senior OSD staff that had largely gone away—Doug Feith's replacement was Eric Edelman, career Foreign Service officer, Foreign Policy Advisor to the Vice President. Bill Burns was his counterpart in State, it had all smoothed out. I

think a little further down the line there were people with old resentments, but frankly they didn't count.

Riley: What about the Vice President's role in this, presumably he was in on these video conferences.

Crocker: Yes, he was at virtually every one.

Riley: Was he an active interlocutor?

Crocker: It's not the Vice President's style to say a great deal. But he was definitely engaged in Iraq, came out at least twice during my tenure. I was in touch with his staff, John Hannah in particular. It was all pretty harmonious. I never had a significant difference with the Vice President or the Vice President's staff and would have been astonished if I did.

Riley: Sure.

Crocker: You have, by the time I came on the scene, a pretty harmonious team. All quite ready to say, "Let the guys in the field steer this," with the unspoken corollary that if we screw it up, we get blamed, but that's fair too.

Riley: What about the President's own involvement? Do you recall any specific instances where he was leaning against your advice in any way or asking you to push in a direction that you hadn't been inclined to go? I'm trying to get a picture of whether the President is actively steering the vehicle that he set in motion when the policy was changed earlier.

Crocker: One major example is one we've already talked about, which was, is it time to replace Prime Minister Maliki, and Dave Petraeus and I were thinking, *I can't stand another day with this guy. Anybody but Maliki*. The President said, "Not going there," and was dead right as it turned out. That was the single largest instance that stands out for me.

There were times in negotiations of the two agreements, particularly the security agreement, when the President clearly wanted to avoid hard deadlines and withdrawal dates and to work in conditionality. That was reflected again by Rice and Hadley. I had to explain why that was not politically possible in Iraq and why pushing it too hard could be dangerous to our ability to achieve an agreement at all. He came to accept that over time. It was simply that I could not get that done.

He wanted a different outcome—so did I for that matter—and pushed me hard on it but at the end of the day accepted that it was a bridge too far. What I was alluding to today, that they'll come to us and ask for renegotiation. That was said at the time. That was one of these crucial one-on-ones with Maliki in which he said, "There has to be a hard deadline. It's the only way to demolish the argument that you're an army of occupation." He said, "You're going to need to be here for 20 years, and we're going to come back to this at a quieter time but we have to take the issue out of Iraqi politics." That's what I explained to the President and he eventually accepted.

Riley: Which is consistent with his own thinking, it's just the fear of having it in a formal agreement?

Crocker: Yes.

Bakich: You made reference to status forces not being exactly what you wanted. What was your primary objective?

Crocker: We would have liked to have aspirational dates. U.S. forces will withdraw from Iraqi cities and towns by June 30, 2009, *as conditions permit*. All U.S. forces will withdraw from Iraq by the end of 2011 as agreed to by the governments of Iraq and the United States, depending on conditions on the ground. That's what we were aiming for. What Maliki said is, "Got to strike the conditionality."

Something else, maybe we're coming to this, in terms of the President's direct role. He had periodic VTCs with Maliki, the two of them together.

Riley: Were you always a party to it?

Crocker: Always there.

Riley: How did those go?

Crocker: I think they were critical, not so much for substance, but that trust and confidence factor, that Maliki knew he had direct access to the President of the United States and every now and then for the President to remind the Prime Minister that it was the President of the United States personally who caused Maliki to be in that chair as Prime Minister or anyone to be in that chair as Prime Minister.

I can't point to a particular issue or decision that came out of those VTCs, but the process of that interaction reinforced a critical sense of partnership and strategic interest.

Perry: Was the President alone on his end when he would have these teleconferences?

Crocker: No, the President almost always had the Vice President, the Secretary of State, and the National Security Advisor. At our end it was always Petraeus and me with the Prime Minister.

Riley: Something I read, and this may have been in Bob Woodward's book, there was some occasional grousing by Woodward's sources that Maliki occasionally used this direct channel to the President, that having a direct channel to the President that was used on a routine basis made it difficult for anybody else to serve in a highly useful role as an interlocutor with Maliki because he could always say, "I don't have to deal with you on this. I don't have to listen to this argument because I can take it directly to the President." Does that sound—?

Crocker: No. Petraeus and I would be the ones to have the biggest reason for complaint if there were a reason. These VTCs were always followed—by a day or by some hours, sometimes it would be the same day, but it was always after we'd had our national security VTC—we'd talk about, "What is Maliki likely to say, what's on his mind? If he raises this what should the President say back?" These were carefully scripted. For Petraeus and later [Raymond] Odierno and me, they reinforced our position, they didn't undercut it. Rice was very effective with Maliki, but it was the same dynamic.

The President used these VTCs to establish the trust and confidence of Maliki, but also to reinforce the position of Petraeus, Rice, me, and others. So that doesn't have any validity as I see it.

Bakich: Was there ever a point at which you're meeting with Washington where you think that any of the principals don't get what you're dealing with, don't get the issues, don't get the complexity, don't understand the players? Or are you dealing with a group of people who fundamentally understand?

Crocker: Yes to all of the above. Nobody who wasn't there on a sustained basis was going to get it, but they don't have to either. Every now and then Petraeus or I would inject a little local color to try and convey how unbelievably hard all of this was. They didn't understand it, but then they didn't really need to. They got it at the level appropriate to their positions. They did have a grasp of it. It was never really an issue.

There were times, particularly during the negotiation, when it did get a little frustrating. Why I can't get the things in the agreement that the administration wants. "Have you guys ever heard of the British occupation? Have you ever heard of the 1948 Treaty of Portsmouth between Iraq and the UK [United Kingdom] that brought down the first Shi'a Prime Minister? No, you've never heard of it, but believe me Nouri al-Maliki has heard of it and he ain't going there again, so just shut up and listen." I didn't actually say it that way.

Riley: There was more of a raised eyebrow to communicate all of that?

Crocker: There were times during these negotiations when they would say their piece, express their concerns and frustrations, and I would say, "Thank you, I got that." We all knew that they felt slightly better by saying it, and I was going to proceed as I saw fit.

Bakich: How did American relations, yours, Petraeus's, the President's, impressions of Maliki change after the Basra offensive in March of '08?

Crocker: It was a watershed event for Iraq. I had been particularly concerned about Basra, more so than I think Petraeus was for some time, and we had raised this with Maliki because you know there was another dynamic here that may not be relevant, probably isn't, to your inquiries. In addition to our weekly meetings with the National Security Council via VTC, General Petraeus and I were members of the Iraqi National Security Council, and we met once a week in Baghdad for Iraqi NSC meetings chaired by the Prime Minister. That was a fairly important forum for national strategy discussions, and it was in that forum that we talked about Iraq, the Jaysh al-Mahdi threat, the implications for Iranian interference and Iraq's extension of its sovereignty and so forth. We're pressing Maliki to take action, and Petraeus and I had talked about how that action might shape.

Then at a military committee meeting at which I was not present Maliki showed up—usually this was sub-Prime Ministerial; it was a Saturday night—and basically told the Americans led by Petraeus, "Okay, we urged definitive action in Basra, and at 0600 tomorrow that definitive action will commence." Petraeus calls me from the car saying, "Oh, God." And it did commence, Charge of the Knights. We thought we were looking at something incremental beginning weeks down the line carrying on for months, and Maliki said, "I'm going."

Bakich: What got him off the dime?

Crocker: His assessment that the climate broadly in the country, because of the virtuous circle I talked about this morning, now supported that. That his Shi'a constituency in particular was ready to see a definitive confrontation with Jaysh al-Mahdi and that his forces were now large enough, strong enough, and well organized enough to carry this out successfully. Part of our discussions too, he would talk about Iraqi history and he would talk about Abd al-Karim Qasim, the first postmonarchy leader, the one who led the '58 coup, and how he made the deals, used force, used persuasion, used rewards, and eventually it all got away from him and he got overthrown. Maliki said, "I think about this a lot."

So the other dominant factor in Maliki's thinking was the need to act like a strong and forceful leader. You cannot be weak in Iraq and expect to survive. That was part of it too. Of course it did not go well initially. We were getting hammered up in the Green Zone. They ran into a buzz saw down in Basra. Maliki flew down to take command under unbelievable conditions. The palace there was under constant bombardment. His head of security was killed, much of his staff. We established phone linkages down to him, and Petraeus and I were kind of huddled in my office as the rockets were banging on our heads, hearing the explosions down in Basra as Maliki got pummeled.

We were saying, "Prime Minister, great initiative, great endeavor. You may want to consolidate your positions, declare victory, and let us figure out what happens next because you're getting your ass kicked." Maliki said, "I'm going ahead. There's only going to be one victor and it's going to be me. This is a decisive moment."

Petraeus did unbelievable work in getting air platforms down there, close air support, Special Forces operators, air ground teams, under total combat conditions with no infrastructure and helping Maliki. But it was Maliki's—he did that. We said, "Don't do it," and he said, "I'm doing it anyway," and he did it. That was a determinative moment in our perception of Maliki as a forceful and ultimately successful leader.

Bakich: What were your interactions with him from that moment, when he returns to Baghdad from Basra?

Crocker: He is very gracious. We saw him the day he came back and there was none of this "I told you I could do it and you doubted me and I did it." There was immense gratitude for the critical support he received and that it was harder than he thought, but we needed to understand this is Iraq and there are times you've just got to go and this was one of them. It really solidified a sense of partnership and the fact that he had rolled the dice and it had worked. That's what brought the Sunnis back into government. It's what gave the military confidence.

Because it wasn't just Basra and Sadr City, they were engaging Jaysh al-Mahdi throughout the south, and in most of those engagements they were completely on their own. We didn't have people there. So they had some complete Iraq-led, Iraq-only successes at the same time, a huge boost for the confidence of the military. They had some units that crumbled under pressure, but others that performed heroically. They moved on their own two full divisions down

into the fight from central Iraq, which we didn't think they could do—they did it. Pretty ugly but they all got there, so it was a defining moment.

Bakich: What was President Bush's reaction next time they had a video teleconference? Did it come up?

Cutler: Oh, yes, the President called him up and said, "Congratulations, Mr. Prime Minister, great leadership, great achievement. With you all the way on this." Yes, the President made a big deal out of it, as he rightly should. Of course, before that the President was saying to Petraeus and me, "You've got to keep him from losing his ass." Petraeus and I looked at each other and said, "How exactly are we going to do that?"

Bakich: How difficult was it for Petraeus to position forces?

Crocker: It was *hugely* difficult because this was a British sector, and the British had basically disengaged. We had almost nothing on the ground in Basra.

Bakich: Did the British have any armor or anything?

Crocker: The British did not have authority to engage in combat operations, and I'm not sure they would have been able to even if they had the authority. They did embed some advisors with Iraqi units, but it was basically our guys who went into combat with the Iraqis, and we did all of the ISR [Intelligence, Surveillance & Reconnaissance] support, the air/ground combat, direct close air support, helicopter gunships—that was all us. No plan; put together on the fly. A couple of one-stars, special operations commanders who just did unbelievable things.

Riley: At what point did you begin to sense that the momentum was shifting?

Crocker: September '07.

Riley: By the time you make your testimony?

Crocker: Yes. Still close run, still a lot of uncertainty, but we were starting to see, as we testified, U.S. casualty levels were starting down after the high point in June, and overall violence was starting to trend down. And Iraqi leadership had come together at the end of August to put together a declaration of principles where they could all agree on some broad outlines of how they would approach political development and reform. The hearings were useful in that sense because I told them all, "I have to have this. I have to have an Iraqi consensus paper that you all agree to." We spent a day and a night in Talibani's palace. That's the nature of Iraq.

I had to be at the table to get that done. They did get it done, but we were able to show that as an example that under difficult circumstances the Iraqi leadership could agree on basic principles of the development of Iraqi democracy and the relationship with the U.S. That eventually became the strategic framework agreement. So late August, early September, that was not a turning point but the beginning of a strategic shift.

Bakich: As Ambassador you'd been charged to make progress. How do you put the wealth of potential indicators—good, bad, or indifferent—as to where Iraqi society, politics, economics,

security are going? Was this a fingertip feel for you or did you have a set of metrics that you had devised?

Crocker: Oh, God, metrics. Metrics and benchmarks. [*laughter*]

Bakich: A set of standards by which you could say, "Yes, this month is better."

Crocker: The metrics were those critical numbers. How many Americans were dying, how many Iraqis were dying. There were some clear and precise quantifiables that were finally starting to move in a favorable direction. And there were other measures as well, and I tried to lay that out in my testimony, which I haven't reread recently. I think I've got a phrase in there somewhere on the awful benchmarks. You could achieve all the benchmarks and still have failure in Iraq, or you could achieve very few of them and have success.

I talked about why that was. Can Iraqi political structures hold up in conflict? Yes, they can. Parliament continued to meet. Can they do any significant legislation? Yes, they can. It may not have been what *we* thought they should do, but it was what *they* thought they should do. Do Iraqi leaders maintain contacts across political divides? Yes, they do. Here are examples. That late August agreement was a clear example of that.

You have to tell the American people and the Congress more than "I feel it in my fingertips," but also to explain enough of a complex political environment so that they will understand why you can't have metrics for political development. That's what I tried to do in the testimony and at least it kept the plug from being pulled.

Riley: Were there anxieties in 2008 about the election and the transition into the new administration?

Crocker: On the part of the Iraqis? Yes. They were all over the place. A real concern that the departure of Bush deprived them of their one solid, consistent rock of support. But they were actually fairly sophisticated about it. Obama came out in July of '08, and they appreciated that. The antiwar Democratic candidate came out and listened. Obama, I thought, conducted himself very well. He asked a lot of questions, he did not deliver any campaign speeches to the Iraqis. While they were nervous about the election, I think the last month or so before it the prevailing sentiment among the political leadership is, "We're going to be okay whichever way this goes."

We did go through one period in which the Iraqis were saying, "Let's not conclude these agreements since the administration is going to change. Let's negotiate them with the new administration." I had to explain that you're going to get an agreement in approximately 2000-and-never because a new administration is not going to be equipped, organized, oriented, or prepared to do this. In our system an executive agreement passes from administration to administration. Just get it done. Don't worry about a new administration not wanting it. And indeed the signal from the Obama campaign, of course, was just get it done.

Riley: Were there pieces of the agreement that you were uncomfortable with? Were there aspects you had pushed for that didn't get in?

Crocker: Conditionality on the timelines would have been great but absolutely not achievable. Everything else, there was huge angst over jurisdictional questions, whether an American soldier could be tried in Iraqi courts. We worked and worked on that. Going into signing those agreements I knew we had it right. General Odierno was absolutely critical in that, and he trusted our judgment that his soldiers weren't going to wind up in Iraqi jails or in front of Iraqi courts. Those were pretty solid agreements by the time I got them done. It took ten months to do it, but they came out okay.

Riley: I think you said earlier that you thought the transition between the two administrations went well.

Crocker: Yes, at all levels it was exceptionally smooth. I've seen rougher transitions within the same party. But this was really smooth. Bush set the tone right away, as you recall, inviting Obama over to the White House. Certainly on Iraq it was totally seamless. We had signed the agreements in October, but they were not ratified by the Iraqi Parliament until after our election, Thanksgiving Day, and the incoming administration had sent a letter after that saying, "Great agreements, they're now ours." So it was just totally smooth and seamless.

Obama had a VTC with Odierno and me his first full day in office to signal that Iraq was important. It was very well handled by both the incoming and outgoing teams.

Riley: You stayed on for how long?

Crocker: About three weeks.

Riley: And your sense of momentum was favorable as a result of the smoothness of the transition? You felt you were leaving in reasonably good shape given where you'd hoped to be?

Crocker: Yes. You can't over glorify it, but we had the framework through the agreements for the continuity of the bilateral relationship, political trends continued to be favorable. They had very successful provincial elections at the end of January '09. It was as good as one could have hoped.

Riley: Did you have a final communication with President Bush before he left?

Crocker: I went back just a few days before he left office. They had a big event at the State Department, Medal of Freedom presentation, all of that.

Riley: Of course.

Crocker: That was kind of the farewell thing.

Riley: How did you find out about the honor?

Crocker: Nobody told me, these things are not supposed to be announced, but they sent a plane for me, so it was going to be a pretty big deal. What I was told was there was going to be a big event at the State Department to thank everybody, the President is presiding. You will be a

featured guest. I said, "Okay, do I need remarks?" Somebody in the NSC said, "Yes, you do, probably want a note card: thank you, Mr. President."

Riley: How do we know that the surge has worked and that this isn't another case, as you said, of the clocks being on two different tracks, that the Iraqis decided, "We can wait them out until the troops are withdrawn or the surge fades away"?

Crocker: I'm very much of the view that Secretary Gates expressed last week. We don't know yet. We *do not know* whether Iraq will be a success or not. I would say the surge worked. It was one time, for a finite time. Could not be sustained, could not be repeated. It did succeed in kicking off that virtuous spiral. Absolutely necessary. What we do not yet know is if it is sufficient. That's why we need to be extremely careful about what we do from here on in. Fifty thousand troops is a lot of troops. As I understand it, we are going to maintain that level for some significant period of time. I have talked to all the incoming commanders, the new Ambassador. There is no rush to the exits. We will be at 50,000 troops through the end of this year, I think probably until next summer. In that interval I expect that request from the Iraqis to prolong our presence. I hope we'll respond positively if that happens. So the surge enabled all of this, didn't cause it but enabled it. So far, so good. But it is still, after seven and a half years, early days.

Bakich: If you could speak about the nature of your relationship with General Odierno as opposed to working with General Petraeus.

Crocker: A different person, different personality, an equally close relationship. General Odierno had already commanded at the division and corps level, and I worked very closely with him when he was corps commander, as did all my people.

He has not gotten the credit he deserves for making the surge work. General Petraeus had the strategic vision and broad guidance, but Odierno as corps commander was the guy who put this brigade here and that division there and actually ran the surge. When he came in in September '08 he was the guy—there was nobody better for that succession. We connected immediately, went through another policy-review process together. He is just terrific to work with and had brought a great staff with him that worked just as well with my staff as Petraeus had.

Perry: Can I ask about the lessons of the Iraq surge for Afghanistan currently?

Crocker: In these kinds of conflicts, a surge is an absolutely vital but not necessarily sufficient component. Without a surge you don't have a viable Afghan strategy. That's why I think the President, it was painful for him because of the politics in his own party, but he did the right thing in December.

There is absolutely no one in the world better than Petraeus to translate the strategy into a workable implementation. That's obviously what he is trying to do. I worry a little bit that by talking as much as we have about July 2011 as the beginning of a withdrawal, we've deprived ourselves of some of the psychological impact of a surge, which in Iraq was to reassure your allies and put the fear of God and death into your adversaries. We'll just have to see. I'm a bit concerned that as we really start to move in, the Taliban are simply going to make themselves scarce and ride it out, thinking they can move back in later rather than saying, "This is not a

winning proposition. Let's go talk to the Americans and the Afghan government about another line of work." We'll have to see.

Perry: I have one last question on your lessons from today's forum here at the Miller Center. "Be careful what you get into and be careful about when you get out and how you get out." I'm just interested in the evolution and the distillation of those ideas for you. When would you have given this talk in the arc of your career?

Crocker: The first lesson early on because of my experience in Lebanon. But it would have been reinforced by the experience of Iraq in '02 and '03 and subsequently.

The second lesson took me a long time to figure out in the Lebanese context, of how Syria and Iran saw our engagement and disengagement from Lebanon and the consequences for our own interests. What Lebanon did was solidify a profound strategic alliance between those two countries, which we continue to suffer from and we will not separate. You're not going to drive them apart.

So understanding the consequences of the second lesson in a Lebanese dimension took me some time to absorb, including my time in Iraq.

Perry: Your time during the surge? In implementing the surge?

Crocker: Arriving and, as I said, discovering Iraq 2007 looked like Lebanon 1983. Then my time in Pakistan and indeed in Afghanistan, as short as it was, helped me understand clearly the consequences of premature disengagement.

Riley: I always say at this juncture that we never exhaust all the possible topics we could talk about, but we do a pretty good job at exhausting the person in the hot seat.

Crocker: You've exhausted me. Excellent.

Riley: We also have a very broad definition at the Miller Center of public service. The President properly honored your career, but allow us to say thanks for spending a couple of days recording your reflections. It has been fascinating for us, but more important, you're leaving something that people will find enormously valuable in trying to decipher what was going on during maybe the most consequential Presidency of my lifetime, so thank you.

Crocker: I know how thorough you are just looking at preparations for this, but you look for significant individuals without respect necessarily to where they stood in the hierarchy.

Riley: We do, although in this instance it is mildly complicated because we have an agreement with the Foundation to conduct a hundred interviews. So there are opportunity costs for anybody that work their way into the networks. However, SMU [Southern Methodist University] is engaging in a corollary project that is intended to get people who are not on our radar screen. I think between the two of us, and we'll be working very closely with them, we'll make sure everybody comes in. Do you have suggestions for me in this realm?

Crocker: To cover eight years of a hugely complex Presidency in both its international and domestic aspects, I don't envy you.

Riley: A two-term Presidency is a very difficult job. With Clinton we've done 135 interviews and we're still doing interviews, but there was a different arrangement with them. I think the fact that SMU is taking on a piece of the action I hope remedies the problem.

Crocker: Then will you combine this?

Riley: Yes, virtually everything will be available online once the project is completed. So they won't be formally combined but everything will be posted on the library website. Researchers would treat them both as equally valuable projects. I've met a couple of times with people at SMU and will keep them in the loop.

Crocker: And they have the benefit of your methodologies and approaches?

Riley: They're a startup. But I've met with them twice and intend to have them up to help us with a couple of interviews so they see our methodology. They're familiar with the way we produce the briefing materials. Not all of them are as fine as this particular book. But we're missionaries for this kind of work. I was delighted when Mark Langdale said they were thinking of taking on bigger aspects of it. I wasn't quite sure I understood it until I realized that Mark himself had been an ambassador, and he knew his recollections wouldn't be collected in a project the way we had styled it. So what he was looking for was something much more expansive that would allow them to make sure they accumulated all of the recollections of people who want to participate.

So something is better than nothing and more is better than something.

Crocker: I hope someone talks to Meghan O'Sullivan.

Riley: She's definitely on our list. The way that I'm moving through this now is our natural communities would be people at the Assistant to the President level and Cabinet officers. That's the starting point. Then you start filtering to that some foreign leaders if you can get to them, some sub-Cabinet officials where there are important portfolios, and then the people like Ms. O'Sullivan who anybody in the know recognizes was a crucial figure. I learned this lesson in the Clinton project. I'm embarrassed to go back and look at who I was recommending to my advisory board then in the first pool of interviewees.

The other thing that I'm trying to do is hold off writing up a list of one hundred at the outset. I want to talk to people and gather the names as we go through, so I'm hoping to hold this in abeyance for a little while until I know the lay of the land a little better.

Thank you very much.