



**GEORGE W. BUSH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

**FINAL EDITED TRANSCRIPT**

**INTERVIEW WITH ERIC EDELMAN**

June 2, 2017  
Charlottesville, Virginia

**Participants**

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### INTERVIEW WITH ERIC EDELMAN

June 2, 2017

**Riley:** This is the Eric Edelman interview as a part of the George W. Bush Oral History Project. We appreciate your giving us the time. You're sort of family at the Miller Center and that makes it good for all of us. I hope we don't have to prove our bona fides because of there being friends around the table, but we appreciate your—

**Edelman:** Just be gentle with me.

**Riley:** That's why we brought Mel here.

**Edelman:** Mel has interviewed me before; he's not gentle.

**Riley:** But we're grateful for the time. One of the things we did talk about, we have a very full agenda for the day and he has very graciously agreed that if we don't get through everything, we could come back at a later date and pick it up, but we'll try to stay focused on the matters at hand to take advantage of our colleagues here who are specialists in your field. Mel and Spencer are volunteering their time, and we are grateful for your willingness to come and be with us today. Thanks.

**Edelman:** I realized, actually, reading Spencer's biography, I need to read his book. *[laughter]*

**Riley:** Two ways of getting us started, two preliminary questions. We're going to try to get to 2000 as quickly as we can, but I wondered, if you had to reflect back on your experience before 2000, what about your past experience would be particularly relevant for us to understand? And secondly, and related to this I guess, is we're always curious about political development, personal and political development, party affiliations and things like that.

Your past is kind of—

**Edelman:** Checkered.

**Riley:** Checkered, your word. I'm wondering if you could tell us a little bit about how your own political sensibilities developed as you move along as well.

**Edelman:** Why don't I start with that and then I'll come back to the question about pre-2001 really, because I joined the Bush administration on I believe February 1st (someone can check a calendar), which I believe was a Friday about a week or ten days after the inauguration. I had returned from being United States Ambassador to Finland under the [William J.] Clinton administration to fill that job, but let me come back to that.

**Riley:** OK.

**Edelman:** I grew up in a kind of typical, Jewish, Democratic household in New York and suburban New Jersey. My parents were actually involved in the New York Reform Democratic movement that put an end to the reign of Tammany Hall and Carmine DeSapio. Actually, my mother was a member of the New York County Democratic Committee that unseated DeSapio, and my father had been an unsuccessful candidate for district leader on the Upper West Side.

I grew up in a family that believed if you voted for Republicans your hand would wither [laughter]. I matriculated at Cornell in 1968, so I was a freshman when the Willard Straight Hall takeover at Cornell took place. I had a very interesting education at Cornell, actually. Mel was a bit my senior, but he can testify to the fact that it was a very unusual place. Like Mel we shared an undergraduate mentor in Walter LaFeber, who was on the one hand one of the leading members of the Wisconsin School of revisionist diplomatic history—I'm not sure if Mel agrees with this—but Walt was also culturally actually sort of a conservative person.

**Leffler:** Absolutely.

**Edelman:** And so it was a very interesting mix. But we also had—It ended my freshman year—but we had this very large group of Straussian [Leo Strauss] political philosophers who dominated the government department at Cornell, including Allan Bloom, who believed that what happened my freshman year was like this world historical event that ultimately gave birth to his bestselling book, *The Closing of the American Mind*. We also had Allan Sindler and Walter Berns and it was a very kind of conservative approach to the study of political philosophy, a very interesting approach.

My own politics at the time were very much on the left. I was part of the antiwar movement. I was very supportive of a lot of the student SDS [Students for a Democratic Society] activities on campus. I had a kind of left, liberal orientation, although I was always very conservative about academic issues. I actually thought there should be requirements. I thought we shouldn't have things just pass/fail. I had this sort of slightly conservative side as well.

I left Cornell in 1972 and went to graduate school at Yale, where I was nominally a student of Gaddis Smith's. I studied with C. Vann Woodward as well because I actually did a certain amount of work on—and actually thought I was going to do my dissertation on—the history of the American South. When I left Cornell, my view was there were two great issues facing the country: one was race and the other was America's role in the world. So I actually started working with Professor Woodward, but ultimately kind of gravitated back to diplomatic history during the course of my first couple of years at Yale.

The real major intellectual influence on me at Yale was Donald Kagan, because I ended up doing my minor field in ancient Greece. Don had a huge impact on me, as did another kind of Cornellian who was teaching at Yale while I was there, the late Al [Alvin] Bernstein, who was a Roman historian. So over the time that I was at Yale my views sort of “evolved,” as we like to say in Washington. I became, particularly on national security issues, much more conservative.

Of course what I'm describing to you is like the classic kind of neoconservative progression. Some of it was driven by reaction to the [Richard] Nixon administration and particularly to

détente and the sense that actually détente wasn't working all that well and that it changed a bit my fundamental understanding of the Soviet Union and what the Soviet Union was about.

By the time I took the Foreign Service exam in 1977 I had voted in 1976 for Jimmy Carter, but I was already kind of well on my way to voting for Ronald Reagan in 1980 because of what I saw as the abject failures of the Carter administration. I passed the Foreign Service exam, but then because I'd done a certain amount of travel overseas, it took a while for me to get my security clearance done and entered in January 1980. So I was the first class of Foreign Service officers who were taken after the hostages were seized in Tehran.

My first tour in the Foreign Service ended up being very serendipitously—I mean, I can explain if people really care, but I ended up being assigned not to the normal kind of visa tour that most Foreign Service officers have, but I was assigned as a staff assistant to the West Bank Gaza Autonomy Talks delegation for the post-Camp David negotiations that were being led by the late Ambassador Sol Linowitz. Our offices were in Tel Aviv and Cairo, and I spent an equal amount of time—I'd say roughly in the first year of my Foreign Service career—in each capital in our office in each of the two countries.

Then because the administration changed, because Reagan was elected, I ended up being reassigned. The delegation was dissolved and I was reassigned back to Washington and I ended up going to the State Department Operations Center. By that point I regarded myself as a Reagan Democrat I would guess.

My past really is checkered and my politics really were pretty checkered. I found myself very disenchanted with the [George H. W.] Bush 41 administration in part because like a lot of Americans I thought I had voted for a third term of Ronald Reagan but I was getting something quite different in the Bush administration. Although I had a lot of admiration for a lot of people in the Bush 41 administration, notably Secretary [Richard] Cheney, for whom I was working at the end [REDACTED].

**Leffler:** Why were you disenchanted?

**Edelman:** I was basically disenchanted by the—I guess what I would say, by the narrow realism of the Bush 41 administration—

**Riley:** You put air quotes around that.

**Edelman:** In retrospect—I think I was probably wrong about some of this by the way—but I thought that President Bush was—His concern for prudence and his concern about triumphalism—which I thought were reasonable—manifested itself in slightly too conservative a view of the developments in the Soviet Union. It manifested itself in the fact that when I was in OSD [Office of the Secretary of Defense]—and we can talk about how I ended up there—with a job as the Assistant Deputy Under Secretary for Soviet and East European Affairs at the time that the Soviet Union was coming unraveled, there was actually a division inside the Bush administration about whether we should put our bets on [Boris] Yeltsin or on [Mikhail] Gorbachev. I was very much on the side of the folks who thought it ought to be Yeltsin and that Gorbachev had basically lost his political base and was not going to be able to survive and that Yeltsin actually—from the point of view of U.S. [United States] national interests was likely to

support policies that would be more advantageous to the U.S. I don't think we played that particularly well.

In particular, I was very distressed about Bosnia. That was a separate question, but I was very distressed at the failure to intervene in Bosnia in a significant way. The idea that we didn't have a dog in the fight in the most significant military upheaval in Europe since the end of the Second World War that was killing a quarter of a million people and making a couple of million people refugees just seemed to me to be wrong.

**Leffler:** Where did Secretary Cheney stand on that point?

**Edelman:** On Bosnia?

**Leffler:** Yes.

**Edelman:** I didn't have any responsibilities for Bosnia—thank God. We kind of reshuffled, and I was very grateful for this. There was a reshuffle of portfolios when the Warsaw Pact collapsed and the question was where would Yugoslavia go. My then boss Scooter [I. Lewis] Libby, who was the principal Deputy Under Secretary, was making a bid for us to get Yugoslavia and thank God we lost [*laughter*] in that bureaucratic tussle, because otherwise I would have been responsible for some of this. I was very grateful actually that I wasn't responsible. But Cheney was quite content not to have us involved in Bosnia and certainly Chairman [Colin] Powell famously said, "We do deserts, we don't do mountains and jungles." So he was very much opposed to any kind of U.S. involvement in Bosnia.

Paul Wolfowitz on the other hand, for whom I was working at the time, who was the Under Secretary, I think had much more—I guess you'd have to ask Paul—but I think he had much more of an inclination that the U.S. should be intervening in some way. I was struck by the fact that both Richard Nixon and Margaret Thatcher thought that the U.S. ought to have intervened.

I guess when you think about it from a strategic point of view, the United States had just put 500,000 troops into the Middle East. We had an enormous amount of naval power in the eastern Mediterranean, so we certainly had the wherewithal to intercede more effectively had we decided to do it. We just decided not to.

**Leffler:** After Bush lost the election in 1992 he gave two incredibly thoughtful speeches, I think, on this very topic about when to intervene. Did you ever read them? I think he gave one at Texas A&M and I think he gave the other at West Point, although I'm not sure. It was after he lost. And they were—

**Edelman:** I'm not sure I have read them, Mel.

**Leffler:** They are, I think, a very nuanced and textured description of the divergent pressures that one feels about military intervention and how difficult it really was. I think he was actually talking against [Caspar] Weinberger and Powell, the idea that you could have a clear set of criteria about when to intervene. Ultimately, it's an issue of judgment.

**Edelman:** Well, look, there were lots of arguments not to be involved. The Europeans had said this is the “hour of Europe” and all of that. Fair enough. There are arguments on both sides. By the way, I was also distressed at the end of the Gulf War, because my view was that it was a mistake to leave Saddam [Hussein] in power and that that was going to come back and haunt us.

I didn’t have any direct responsibility for that except to the extent that there was a U.S.-Soviet component to this because the Russians, the Soviets, had not blocked the U.S. effort and in some ways were trying to be—at least [Eduard] Shevardnadze was trying to be helpful. There were others like [Yevgeny] Primakov who I think were being less helpful.

**Perry:** Eric, before—obviously we’ll get there for 2003, but you said that you thought at the end of the Gulf War we should have gone in and taken out Saddam Hussein. What were you thinking at that time about the balance of power in the Middle East vis-à-vis Iran?

**Edelman:** Some of my concerns were linked actually to my views of what was going on in the Soviet Union. When you think about that period, I think it’s an extremely interesting moment, because you had three different multinational countries essentially, or multiethnic countries, that were all in the throes of dissolution of one kind or another. I believe that the President and other senior policy makers were allowing their views of both Iraq and Yugoslavia to be affected by their views of the Soviet Union, and particularly the desirability of the breakup of the Soviet Union.

This is really ironic—I had hired in the Pentagon my former Moscow colleague Tom Graham, who is now one of the vice presidents of Kissinger Associates, works for Henry on Russia issues. Tom was a very good Foreign Service officer. He and I now have very different views about [Vladimir] Putin, but at the time we had very similar views about Gorbachev, Yeltsin, and the Soviet Union.

Tom wrote a series of memos—unfortunately we could never get them through my front office up to Cheney, but basically they were written starting in the summer of 19—I think this would have been in the summer of 1991, before the coup in Moscow, or the attempted coup—basically suggesting that the Soviet Union was breaking up and that it was going to dissolve. It was not going to survive as a multinational power. That had huge implications we thought for U.S. national security and defense, because we knew that if central Asia and Ukraine went out, that was going to have enormous manpower consequences for the Soviet Red Army and it was going to change, obviously, the whole complexion of European politics and whatnot. So from our point of view, the breakup of the Soviet Union was a good thing. Anything that we could do to advance it we thought was important.

For instance—this is Secretary [James A., III] Baker actually—he talks about this in his memoir—one of the rare really internecine fights inside the Bush administration, which was largely very collegial in its national security apparatus, was the debate over the referendum on independence in Ukraine and Ukraine’s potential exit from the Soviet Union. Cheney encouraged us to push forward on the idea that the Ukraine ought to go—we ought to—the United States ought to not try and stand in the way of the breakup of the Soviet Union. In fact, to the extent we could facilitate it—we understood we weren’t going to be the driving forces here,

but to the extent we could facilitate it, we ought to. That led to some very tough interagency fights about this.

Chairman Powell did not agree with that. Secretary Baker did not agree with that. Baker actually recounts—I think he calls us the Ukrainiacs. There were these rabid Ukrainian nationalists in the Department of Defense who were arguing for Ukrainian independence. I like to say we lost the bureaucratic fight, but we won the war, because the reality was Ukraine did go out and that led to the meeting in Belarus in December of '91 that led to the dissolution of the Soviet Union. That's a kind of long digression.

The concern about the breakup of the Soviet Union had a big impact on how people thought about Yugoslavia and Iraq, because there was this general disposition that we ought to be holding these nation states together; that them breaking up would be a bad thing, it would lead to more uncertainty and more problems. My view was, as I said, dissolution of the Soviet Union was probably a good thing from the U.S. national interest point of view and the breakup of Yugoslavia probably couldn't be avoided either. From my point of view the real thing was to try and make sure in all of these cases that if there was a breakup that it would lead to—it would be done in a way that minimized the chances of violence, that preserved control over military structures so that you didn't get a lot of—in the case of the Soviet Union, loose nukes or chemical weapons or biological. In the case of Yugoslavia, that there was some breakup of the military that didn't lead to the kind of violence that we got in the former Yugoslavia.

In the case of Iraq, my view was that actually the fears about breakup were overstated, that the Shi'a population actually had been pretty loyal to Saddam, that they weren't likely to become—to your point, Barbara—they weren't likely to become a cat's paw for Iran, and that there was no way that we would be able to indefinitely live with a wounded Saddam in Iraq. That was just my view again. I didn't have any responsibility for any of this in 1991 or '92, so it was easy for me to have a view.

Anyway, there was this moment where all of these things were kind of in play at one time, in 1990, '91, '92.

**Riley:** Mel mentioned judgment in the first President Bush's sense about what could be done. I'm moved to ask you—he had some people around him who had a lot of experience in Yugoslavia, right?

**Edelman:** Larry Eagleburger and Brent Scowcroft.

**Riley:** Exactly. Were they—?

**Edelman:** It's living proof that expertise is overrated. *[laughter]* I mean that. It's partly obviously tongue in cheek, but it's also true. It is true that Larry had been Ambassador to Yugoslavia and Brent had been the military attaché there. So yes, they did know a lot about Yugoslavia, but actually their experience was pretty dated. There's actually a danger, I think, a lot of times that you think you know something because you've had experience in it before, but time moves on and things change and you sometimes are not as up to date or knowledgeable as you would like to believe. Therefore, you can become frozen in judgments that may not be relevant.

I think Larry and Brent exemplified that in this particular instance. I think if you look at for instance Warren Zimmerman's book *Origins of a Catastrophe*, you get someone who is more recently there who understood the dynamic a little bit better.

**Riley:** OK.

**Edelman:** Better than Larry and Brent did.

**Riley:** [REDACTED]

**Edelman:** [REDACTED]

**Leffler:** [REDACTED]

**Edelman:** [REDACTED]

**Riley:** What about during the transition? Somalia? Did you have a piece of that at all?

**Edelman:** I wasn't really involved in that. During the transition I was on detail as Foreign Service officer to the Department of Defense as the Assistant Deputy Under Secretary and when the [Les] Aspin people came in, because I was perceived to be pretty close to Wolfowitz and Libby and to Cheney, I was treated as a political appointee. It was actually kind of funny.

So January 21st I came into the office and I was told, "Clean out your desk, you can go back to the State Department by 5 o'clock," so I was packing my stuff up. About 11 o'clock someone came in and said, "No, stop, you're staying here because Frank Wisner wants you to stay here." Frank was appointed to be Under Secretary. At that point Strobe Talbott approached me and asked me if I would come to work for him at State, so there was a kind of tug-of-war for a couple of weeks between State and Defense about whether I could come or go. Wisner wanted me to stay to help Aspin in the first few months of the transition. I found the whole Aspin transition incredibly chaotic and very unpleasant personally. It was actually three of the worst months of my government service.

Finally, Peter Burleigh, who was the Acting Director General of the Foreign Service, just sort of by diktat, told Defense, "He is going back to State on Monday"—whatever the date was in April. He said, "A detail is an agreement between the receiving agency, the sending agency, and the detailee, and two of the three have decided he is going back to State." So I went back to State.



**Perry:** What were you seeing in Defense about this chaotic transition, since that's so much in the news today—a chaotic Presidential transition?

**Edelman:** Mel and I were talking about this at breakfast. So Secretary Aspin had collected, as Chairman of the Armed Services Committee over the years, a coterie of people whom he wanted to make Assistant Secretaries: Mort [Morton] Halperin, Graham Allison, Ash [Ashton] Carter—there was a whole group of them. The problem was there were not enough legislative-created Assistant Secretary—Senate confirmable Assistant Secretary—positions to accommodate all of those people.

So they set about kind of reorganizing the policy apparatus in order to accommodate these individuals, many of whom are my friends, actually. Philip [Zelikow] was involved in some of this, by the way, during that transition, Philip Zelikow. It led to an incredibly chaotic and not very pleasant experience, in part because it was being driven by personality issues rather than substantive issues.

**Riley:** Aspin had his own personal traits and quirks too that contributed to this, right?

**Edelman:** Yes. My observation was—Secretary Aspin was always very nice to me personally, but he ran a very—He was a really chaotic—It was a very chaotic ship. In some sense, I'm not sure Secretary Aspin ever made the transition from running a Congressional office to being a Cabinet Secretary. His schedule was chaos; he would change it at the last minute, which goes on a lot on the Hill I know, but an executive agency—particularly one like the Department of Defense, which is—It's like running a giant aircraft carrier. You can't just make these kinds of rapid course changes without having ripple effects throughout the whole organization.

I don't think Secretary Aspin really had an executive temperament. When he had meetings—I sat in several of his meetings with Russian officials or other central East European officials in the first six months or four months of his term. Actually, I sat in some of his meetings even after I went to State with Strobe. He tended to run them—They were very discursive. He tended to run them sort of like a Congressional hearing.

Basically, he thought his view was to be the interrogator-in-chief for the Defense Department, so he would be asking a lot of questions of his interlocutors but not actually trying to get to the points that were usually in his briefing memos. For instance—This is the plaint of the former action officer who gets disturbed when he sees the principals not reading his talking points. But still it led to him not being perceived in the administration as being very effective. That is one of the reasons I think that less than a year in he was replaced.

But I didn't have any involvement in the Somalia stuff. I observed it a little bit, but that's all.

**Riley:** So give us a sort of thumbnail of what you were doing during the Clinton years.

████████████████████ Were you generally pleased with the performance in foreign policy or what?

**Edelman:** I was actually incredibly disturbed by the first two years. I mean, the first year was a very shaky—I spent about four or five months working for Strobe. Strobe attempted to recruit me to be his Deputy full time. I had already been assigned to be the Deputy Chief of Mission in

the Czech Republic and was meant to be starting Czech language training. I told him—I said, “Look, I’ve got this assignment. I need to go be a DCM [Deputy Chief of Mission]; it’s an important career development thing for me. But I will do this job for you until the summer and I will help you recruit a permanent replacement,” who turned out to be a former colleague from the Moscow embassy, Steve Pifer. So I was there from roughly April to July helping him get started as the Ambassador-at-Large for the new independent states. Then ultimately he became Deputy Secretary.

**Leffler:** How did you feel about the expansion of NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization]?

**Edelman:** I was in favor of it. In fact, while I was in Czech language training, Strobe asked Steve and me to both write him memos on the pros and cons. Steve wrote the con memo; I wrote the pro memo. So I was in favor of that. Of course I went to Prague, which was one of the initial new members.

**Leffler:** That’s why I’m asking.

**Edelman:** Then I went from Prague—actually I was in Prague for two years as Deputy Chief of Mission. Then Strobe, who had become Deputy Secretary and had the lead in the Clinton administration on NATO enlargement—Victoria Nuland, his executive assistant, chief of staff, got pregnant. So he asked me to come back and replace her as his chief of staff, which I did from ’96 to ’98. I worked with him on the whole run-up to the Madrid summit and NATO enlargement. From there I went off to be Ambassador to Finland.

**Leffler:** Who were the strongest opponents of NATO enlargement within the administration and what were their most salient arguments?

**Edelman:** Mostly the opponents were people who in one way or another were concerned about the potential to antagonize Russia. But there was less—There wasn’t really that much opposition inside the—

**Leffler:** It was mostly outside?

**Edelman:** It was mostly outside. Secretary [Warren] Christopher I think was very reserved about NATO enlargement. I don’t know that he was an opponent per se, but he was not an enthusiast. Strobe at one point said to me in 1996, as we were transitioning out of Secretary Christopher’s time and into the [Madeleine] Albright regime, he said, “You know, if you think about it, we had three big initiatives in the first term of Clinton: one was Bosnia Dayton, one was NATO enlargement, and the third was the invasion of Haiti. Warren Christopher was against all three.” That was a kind of interesting observation.

**Bakich:** Let me if I could hit the opposite side of the question. How well articulated was the pro side of NATO enlargement? Was it a matter of inertia or was there positive policy—

**Edelman:** My impression is that President Clinton early on was very favorably disposed. Now remember, again, I think the strategic context is important here. In the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, which the Clinton folks just inherited, there was this search for what’s—We don’t have a superpower opponent; what’s the animating principle of U.S. foreign policy? So

there was this effort, a whole series of speeches by different senior figures in the Clinton administration—Tony Lake gave a speech that was probably the best articulation of what was going on in the Clinton administration, which was democratic enlargement, that we need to enlarge the sphere of democratic nations.

This was also a time, in terms of intellectual climate, in which all this literature about the democratic peace is emerging. So there was that. That was kind of, I would say, the zeitgeist that informed some of this. There was also just the practical matter, that you had countries like Poland, the Czechs, Hungarians, basically saying we want to be part of NATO. We've become democracies and we want to become part of the Western club of nations. It was kind of hard really to find a practical objection to that. What are the grounds for saying, "No, you can't be part of our club"?

**Leffler:** The foes, right, including George Kennan himself, argued that it would have a very adverse impact on long-term Russian-American relations. How did you respond to that? And Walt Slocombe has very adeptly talked about well, Clinton really wanted good Russian-American relations, he really cared about that.

**Edelman:** That's right.

**Leffler:** But he also cared about NATO enlargement.

**Edelman:** Right.

**Leffler:** And it was just one of these tough situations where you had to choose priorities, and the priority was NATO enlargement.

**Edelman:** On the Kennan point, because Strobe had Kennan come in and talk to us, and actually I talked to Ambassador Kennan myself a couple of times, the record should show that Ambassador Kennan was opposed to every enlargement of NATO starting in the early 1950s.

**Leffler:** He was opposed to NATO [*laughter*]. He was opposed—

**Edelman:** I know from writing my doctoral dissertation on U.S.-Italian relations, he was opposed to including Italy in NATO. He thought it should only be the western European union concept.

**Leffler:** He was opposed to the whole concept of NATO.

**Edelman:** So there's that. My view was that in a post-Soviet world there was absolutely no reason why an independent Russia ought to actually fear an enlarged NATO. My view always was—and Strobe I think shared this and Ron Asmus, who was very involved in this, both when he was at RAND and then when he came in as a Deputy Assistant Secretary of State and I worked closely with Ron on this. Our view was—and this was somewhat controversial with some of the other allies—but our view was look, NATO ought to be open to any democratic European state, and that includes Russia.

If Russia can meet the criteria, there is no reason why Russia couldn't be part—and this was sort of the notion that what we really were building was in a post-Soviet world a kind of concert of democratic powers that could keep the peace and provide greater security, not just in Europe but outside of Europe potentially.

By the way, the British and French objection to this when we were involved in the negotiations over NATO enlargement was if you take the Russians in, then the alliance has a border with China and what does that mean? That was not an unreasonable concern.

The way we squared it, Mel, to your point, was to try and bring Russia in by not just imposing this on them willy-nilly but by carefully negotiating what became the NATO-Russia Founding Act. The idea was to make this more palatable to Russia by including them inside NATO structures in the hope that eventually they would get themselves to the point where they too could be a member. That led to the negotiations that Strobe undertook with Yevgeny Primakov before the Madrid summit that created the NATO-Russia Council and drafted the NATO-Russia Founding Act. There were a lot of people who have authorship in that, but it was largely a then young Foreign Service officer named John Bass whom I brought up from the NATO desk to help us write it and who is now my successor several times removed as Ambassador in Turkey, where, by the way, he is doing a great job under unbelievably adverse circumstances.

Sandy [Alexander] Vershbow, who was I guess the DCM in NATO at that point; Steve Pifer, who was over at the NSC [National Security Council] at that point; and a variety of other people were involved in this.

Now it's an interesting question about what was the long-term consequence of this and did it in fact lead to some of what we have now in U.S.-Russia relations. My SAIS [Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies] colleague, Michael Mandelbaum, for instance, has argued vociferously for a long time, for 20 years, that this was a catastrophic strategic mistake because it guaranteed that Russia would turn out the way it was. I actually think the best thing that has been done on this is by my Cornell classmate, Steve [Stephen] Sestanovich, who was opposed to NATO enlargement but then as Ambassador-at-Large had to deal with the consequences. Steve has a very good essay in the *American Interest* in which he says, look, this had nothing to do really—What has happened in U.S. Russia relations has much more to do with internal Russian developments than it does with anything that resulted from NATO enlargement. Had Boris Yeltsin chosen to make someone else his successor other than Vladimir Putin, we might have had a very different outcome here.

I still think in retrospect it was the right thing to do. I think we did it about as well as could be done. Like a lot of things people say in retrospect, it wasn't that hard because the Russians were weak; they really couldn't stop it. The central Europeans wanted it. The west Europeans in NATO ultimately would do what the U.S. told them. But I can tell you from having been engaged in all the diplomacy that went on, it seemed a whole lot harder at the time. It wasn't at all clear that we were ever going to be able to get to where we got in Madrid.

**Leffler:** To what extent were people like yourself, who supported NATO expansion, explicitly envisioning that Russia would reemerge in the long run as an adversary? Clearly some of the east Europeans whom you were responding to, the Poles, the Hungarians—

**Edelman:** They always thought that.

**Leffler:** All thought that.

**Edelman:** Right.

**Leffler:** That's why they were seeking protection. But did folks like yourself think that way?

**Edelman:** I can't speak for others; I can only speak for myself. I always thought there was a chance that we could get an unhappy ending in Russia. There was always the chance that—particularly because Yeltsin himself was such a mercurial figure and his health was bad and his drinking was a problem. So there was always a chance that you could get a communist-elected government in Russia. [Gennady] Zyuganov could have won the election in 1996.

Certainly after what happened in 1993, I think everyone understood this could—

**Leffler:** It was precarious.

**Edelman:** It was precarious. It could go a lot of different ways. I think most of us understood that we could help at the margins, but ultimately this was going to be determined by Russians and what they thought and what they wanted. I think I underestimated what I think was in the back of the minds of a lot of eastern Europeans, which was that national character does exist and it plays a role in some of these outcomes. There were some things deep in the Russian soul that were going to make it very difficult for Russia to traverse this transition and come out as a kind of liberal democracy at the other end. That had to do with fear of disorder, the difficulty of making the transition from a command economy to a free economy.

I'm trying to remember now which Pole said this, but one of the Polish Solidarity guys—Adam Michnik—said that the problem is we know how to make fish soup out of an aquarium but nobody knows how to make an aquarium out of fish soup. *[laughter]*

**Riley:** I have to think about that.

**Edelman:** So I think the east-central Europeans understood this. They also understood that they had a more recent memory of capitalism than the Soviets did. That was one reason, for instance, that if you go back and look at what Secretary [William] Perry said about our nuclear posture, it was always one that we arranged with—We were ready to draw down, do this or do that, but we have to have a hedge against Russia. That's why we have the nondeployed stockpile, because there could be a problem and we don't want to get caught short. So I think we always knew that this was potentially a problem.

**Bakich:** Along these lines, were there any particular states whose candidacy was more contentious than others? I'm thinking in particular the Baltics would likely—?

**Edelman:** To the degree that I have any regrets about NATO enlargement, it's not about the first tranche in 1997.

**Bakich:** Right.

**Edelman:** I think in the subsequent tranches we were a bit careless, and that goes to the Bush administration in 2002. I was very reserved—

When we get to it; I don't know when we're going to get there. I told you we would not have enough time to do all this. But when we get to 2008 and we talk about Georgia, Bob Gates and I were really very concerned in 2008 about the membership action plan for Georgia and Ukraine. We can come to that.

My view was NATO enlargement needed to proceed carefully. So Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary were easy, very easy I thought, in '97. Slovakia was excluded in part because the Slovaks had a lot of political problems, which are the antecedents of many of the populist problems we see in east-central Europe today under [Vladimír] Mečiar and that's why they were excluded in the first round. My view was informed by the fact that in the 1992 defense planning guidance exercise that I had been involved in with Bush 41 we had—one of the things we had to do was a classified excursion into how would—if the Baltic states became members of NATO, how would we defend the Baltic states? The answer was—this is like incredibly hard.

I don't think it has improved since 1991 or '92. My view was—There were two parts to it. One was we shouldn't rush the agenda. In other words, there was a big push to include Romania in the first tranche. The Romanians really wanted to be in. We didn't take them in in the first round. The second prize for the Romanians was that Bill Clinton went to Bucharest after the Madrid summit to assuage the wounded *amour propre* of the Romanians.

Right after that, the Romanians started a campaign; they really wanted to get in in the next tranche. My view was that Bulgaria, Romania, I wasn't sure how ready they were to be members. I always believed—and now it's coming back to haunt us—that we needed Finland and Sweden in if we were going to take the Baltics in. I think that's ultimately the solution to the defense of the Baltics and the problems that they have. You've got to have the Finns and the Swedes in because they create a strategic hinterland from which you can more easily reinforce the Baltic states. Plus, they give you the opportunity to close the Baltic and bottle up the Russian Baltic fleet in St. Petersburg. So from a military defense planning point of view it would have made much more sense if we did this in a much more orderly way.

But there were a lot of advocates, like Ron Asmus, of what they call the big bang—the idea that you take them all in in the next round, and that prevailed in 2002 even though I was frankly a little bit worried about where that would leave us. I think that has created some of the problem that we have today in terms of the difficulty of defending the Baltics.

I don't have a regret about NATO enlargement or what we did in '96, '97. Afterward I think we were less cautious about it than we should have been.

**Riley:** You had likened three problems, or I guess in your early discussion of the breakup of the Soviet Union—

**Edelman:** Yugoslavia and the possible breakup of Iraq.

**Riley:** Can you give us a sort of brief sketch of Clinton on those other two matters—on your sense about him and the Balkans—

**Edelman:** In the Balkans my distress at our inaction in the Balkans in the Bush administration continued into the Clinton administration. I was actually quite glad once again that I didn't have any personal responsibility for policy in the Balkans. I actually admired a number of my colleagues in the State Department who ultimately resigned over Bosnia because of their distress at our inaction.

I mean, after all this talk, the Clinton administration came in—Part of my disillusionment with the Clinton folks was that there was all this hand-wringing in the Clinton administration about how hard it was to do this. When they finally got in there and started doing it—I remember, when I was in language training and getting ready to go to Prague, Leon Fuerth came to speak to us. Leon, who was National Security Advisor to Vice President [Albert, Jr.] Gore—And Leon gave what I thought was a totally morally squalid speech in which he outlined what Clinton said during the campaign and then started—There was all this hand-wringing about oh, it's so hard, it's so difficult, we didn't realize, and blah, blah, blah.

I'm thinking, *People are being killed and we're sitting here*. I found it really disturbing. So I actually tried very hard not to have anything to do with it. In fact, when I was in—Shortly after I arrived in Prague—I'm trying to get the timing completely right on this—Shortly after I arrived there was a terrible accident on Mt. Igman Road, where [Samuel] Nelson Drew and Bob Frasure and Joe Kruzel were all killed. Strobe called me and said, "You know, we need to replace Bob Frasure. Would you come back and be Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Yugoslavia?"

I begged off on family grounds, which were legitimate. I literally had just moved my family to Prague and I didn't want to turn around and move everybody back after six months. Frankly, I also did it because I did not want to have any involvement—I mean, I admired [Richard] Holbrooke and what he was trying to do; I didn't have a lot of confidence that the Clinton administration would follow through and actually do it. So I begged off and stayed in Prague.

Ultimately, I was gratified at what Holbrooke did and I admired Holbrooke for it, but I didn't want to have any involvement in it myself because I didn't have a whole lot of confidence that it would be carried through.

**Riley:** What about Iraq?

**Edelman:** To finish on the Balkans first, I think ultimately it took a long time—and the Europeans bear some of the burden here—The Clinton administration took a very long time to get to the right place on Bosnia. It took Holbrooke, who I think really understood the big picture here and why this was so dangerous for Europe, to do the right thing.

**Leffler:** Do you think they handled the situation in Kosovo more effectively?

**Edelman:** That's where I was going to get to. Yes and no. On the one hand I think the problem—and Holbrooke knew this—was that Dayton left [Slobodan] Milošević in place, which was the source of the problem. Part of the difficulty in Bosnia, in my view—and my view here is very heavily informed by an absolutely terrific book by Brendan Simms called *Unfinest Hour*, which is not so much about the U.S. policy, it's really more about Britain and France's policy toward Bosnia and the conscious effort they made to kind of keep the U.S. out.

But both the Brits, the French, and we made the same mistake in Kosovo, which was what Simms calls the humanitarianization of the problem, to define it as a humanitarian problem as opposed to—This was a politico-military problem that was created by Milošević and by Serbia. Until you were willing to face up to the political challenge, there was no way you could actually solve this problem.

**Leffler:** You couldn't deal with that legally, right? That's an impediment.

**Edelman:** You mean because you didn't have UN [United Nations] sanction?

**Leffler:** Yes.

**Edelman:** You had a whole series of UN Security Council resolutions. What you didn't have was Russian acquiescence. In Kosovo at the end of the day, of course, we acted with NATO authorization, which by the way is one of the reasons why allies are very convenient, because they can provide some legitimacy for you if you lack the UN imprimatur. I think the diplomacy in Kosovo was extremely awkward. The way we got into it—I'm not sure—It was easy for me, I was up in Helsinki, so I feel a little bad about appearing to criticize Chris Hill and Madeleine Albright and Jamie Rubin for the way they handled all that. I have some sympathy for Kissinger's criticism of Rambouillet, which was that it was sort of do what we want or we will bomb you. It was a kind of backassward way to get into it. But what we did in the end in Kosovo I believe was the right thing to stop what was going on and lay the predicate for ultimately removing Milošević from power, which is what—

**Bakich:** Do you have any thoughts on the—?

**Edelman:** And I had some direct involvement in that because as Ambassador to Finland, because the Finns had the EU [European Union] Presidency and President [Martti] Ahtisaari was so involved in the diplomacy, I got very involved in that. In fact, Ahtisaari—nobody knows this; now you will, because no one reads Finnish—but in his memoirs President Ahtisaari basically says I was effectively a part of his team, which was true.

**Bakich:** That was actually my question. What are your thoughts on the Talbott-[Viktor] Chernomyrdin-Ahtisaari trilateral pressure on Milošević?

**Edelman:** I think it was extremely effective and I think it was Strobe at his best as a diplomat. He was very sensitive about it, because journalists were trying to write the story—Albright's war and Talbott's peace. But there was a lot of truth to that. He used his relationship with Ahtisaari very effectively. The Finns—Ahtisaari himself, who was, I think, a really great man and a terrific diplomat, understood that he could use the Russian perception of Finnish neutrality to accomplish a sort of Western end because Ahtisaari himself sees Finland as part of the West. They effectively used Chernomyrdin, of course, as well to ultimately convince Milošević that he had to get out, that there was no alternative to him getting out. I think that that set the basis ultimately for Milošević to leave Kosovo, but also ultimately set in motion the process that led to his overthrow and his being remanded to The Hague to stand trial. I think that was actually—of the things that I was involved in in my career, it's one of the things I'm proudest of.

**Riley:** Anything else that you want to say about—



**Edelman:** So that's the Balkans. We didn't get to the Iraq part.

**Riley:** Exactly; that's where I was headed.

**Edelman:** Again, my involvement in this was peripheral because from '93 until 2000 I was variously working for Strobe on NATO enlargement. Since Strobe's remit was global, I had a lot of Iraq stuff when we went in in September '96 and when Saddam had his encroachment into the Kurdistan regional area and we had a couple of days of bombing. Then I was in Finland when we did Desert Fox.

When we did the effort in '94—I think it was when Saddam started menacing Kuwait again—we effectively mobilized a lot of pressure on him to pull back. So my involvement was in the diplomatic aspects in other countries. The Czechs were on the Security Council at that point, so they got involved in this. I had to go explain what we were doing in Desert Fox to the Finns, et cetera.

So the Clinton administration in my view understood all the problems that they had inherited as a result of not getting rid of Saddam at the end of the Gulf War. They recognized that he was a huge problem and his programs were a huge problem. If you think back to the efforts that were made by Madeleine Albright and Bill Cohen and others to mobilize public opinion in 1998 about Saddam's WMD [weapons of mass destruction] programs, I don't think any of them had any doubt that this was a huge problem.

I think in '98, leading up to Desert Fox and the various crises over UNSCOM [United Nations Special Commission] that led to '98 and then the creation of UNMOVIC [United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission] and the aftermath of that, I think they all recognized—and Clinton said as much—that this is a problem that we've got to deal with at some point. Having kind of looked into the abyss of how hard this would be and how difficult it would be, given all of Clinton's domestic political problems as it was, I think they just said OK, this is in a too-hard-to-do pile.

As the late Sandy [Samuel] Berger said, "The big deal is we've got to keep Saddam in his box." I think they convinced themselves that a combination of inspections and sanctions regime would keep the problem in manageable boundaries until they could turn it over to the next administration.

**Riley:** Was it your perception that that was a viable option? One of the things that I'm never clear on—

**Edelman:** No, it was never my view that that was a viable option.

**Riley:** You mean to keep him in his box?

**Edelman:** It was inevitable, in my view, that sanctions were going to deteriorate. We already saw the pressure that we were under to come up with the Oil-for-Food Programme in Iraq that we had to accede to because—

**Leffler:** Were there more viable options?

**Edelman:** We didn't have good options. One of the problems with most of these things—as Don Rumsfeld used to say, “If it was an easy problem, it wouldn't be on your desk. Someone at a lower level would have solved this.” *[laughter]*

**Leffler:** Would you reframe what you just said? I'm asking this as a question, would you reframe that the policies they pursued were not a viable option, nonetheless more viable than any other options that were presented at the time?

**Edelman:** You mean the Clinton administration?

**Leffler:** Yes.

**Edelman:** If you recall, I think it was in '98, the Iraq Liberation Act [ILA] passes. I think it's 98 to zero in the Senate.

**Leffler:** Yes, 98.

**Edelman:** What it says is that it is the policy of the United States that regime change in Iraq has to be accomplished. I think everyone in the Clinton administration had come to that conclusion. Until Saddam was gone, there wasn't going to be any solution to these problems. That precipitates the question of OK, well, what do you do to secure regime change? The ILA basically said, we're going to support the INC [Iraqi National Congress]. They appointed Frank [Francis, Jr.] Ricciardone I think to be the coordinator for assistance to the Iraqi opposition. Pretty quickly both CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] and State were feuding with [Ahmed] Chalabi and with the INC guys, and for all sorts of reasons as I understand it.

I think the Clinton administration's view was OK, we passed the ILA; we're just going to manage this because it's too hard to do. So the question really is, Mel, could they have done anything else? Well, I think they could have done more to support the INC. We have a long history of dealing with difficult clients who are not—who have all sorts of deficiencies. In human nature that's just kind of the nature of the beast; that's what you end up getting in these situations a lot of the time. You don't get the clients you would like to have; you get the clients that you do have.

**Riley:** Is that Rumsfeld again?

**Edelman:** Pretty much. You don't get the allies you would like to have; you get the allies you have. So I think a more aggressive support of the INC—Part of the problem was really I think a question of bandwidth and allocation of resources diplomatically. So post-Gulf War both Bush and Clinton administrations ultimately decided that they were going to put a lot of their eggs in the Palestinian-Israeli peace basket rather than focusing on Gulf security. So Gulf security was second priority; Arab-Israeli was number one.

Now you can argue kind of round or flat the proposition of whether that was right or wrong. My view at that time was that it was a mistake. This comes on the basis of having been involved in that issue in the early part of my career. My view was it wasn't right; it was going to take a long time. We needed to focus on trying to build institutions inside the territories that would enable peace to ultimately take place, and that we really should—Our real national security threats

really had to do with the Gulf and maintaining Gulf security. We needed to have the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense out there much more trying to build a regional security order. This was in the days of so-called dual containment. We were trying to contain both Iraq and Iran and we needed to be spending more time and effort on that and less on the other.

If you look, however, at what Dennis Ross was spending his time on, what Martin Indyk was spending his time on, it was all on peace process. It was true of both administrations; it was completely bipartisan.

**Riley:** But isn't there a logic there to press on this? If you can resolve the problem that Dennis Ross was working on at the time, that that has collateral effects beyond the Middle East?

**Edelman:** That was the theory. I think—I've always thought it was a mistaken theory. My view is that all the Arab states played a lot of lip service to the Palestinian-Israeli dispute, but they didn't really mean very much of it. They had other national interests that were clearly more important to them. You see this over and over again in their willingness to sell out the Palestinian cause, but that—and particularly after the Gulf War, after Yasser Arafat threw in his lot with Saddam, that the other Arab states really looked much more askance at the Palestinians.

Now I'm not saying that you should neglect the problem; I think it had to be managed for sure. It's just—This is really a judgment about relative allocation of time and attention of the President and senior officials.

**Leffler:** Is it really that sort of a judgment, or was the principal motivation among these priorities driven by domestic politics?

**Edelman:** In what sense, Mel?

**Leffler:** That there was a huge preoccupation with trying to find Middle East peace.

**Edelman:** Yes, but I don't think that was driven by public opinion saying we really think national security makers, policy makers, should be spending all their time on Middle East peace. I think that is more a function of overhang from the Kissinger-Carter era, where people have seen—senior policy makers have seen—themselves as being judged on the basis of their ability to get a deal or some deal in this arena, because that's how Kissinger became Super K and that's how Carter won the Nobel Peace Prize. That's why President [Donald] Trump says, "Everyone says this is the biggest deal of all."

**Leffler:** Don't you think that was a key motivating factor of President Clinton himself from—?

**Edelman:** Yes.

**Leffler:** Engulfed in the domestic controversies he was in, that the—

**Edelman:** I don't want to be totally cynical about it. I don't think—It was not purely driven by vainglory.

**Leffler:** No, I wouldn't say vainglory, but it was a desirable domestic, political outcome or vehicle to transcend the controversies that engulfed him.

**Edelman:** No doubt that played a part. Also I think people, once they get into this they feel that they can maybe make something happen. I mean, Dennis has spent essentially his whole adult life doing it. I don't mean that as a criticism, Dennis is a friend. People get very caught up in it, and I can understand it, having been involved in it myself and then having made again a conscious decision that I don't want to be involved in this anymore because it becomes all consuming.

**Riley:** Let me pose one more question in trying to track this on ahead, and I promise we're going to get there, although we probably owe you a break.

**Edelman:** I'm good, but I would just like to point out for the record that we're at 11 o'clock and we haven't gotten to 2000 yet.

**Riley:** You've been a good sport in indulging our questions because these are all fascinating things.

To what extent was terrorism on your radar as an issue before 2001?

**Edelman:** It was on my mind because we had the embassy bombings in East Africa in 1998. We had Khobar Towers I think in '96. We had had any number of terrorist incidents. We had the USS *Cole* in the fall of 2000.

**Perry:** And the first World Trade Center bombing.

**Edelman:** Yes, the first World Trade Center bombing in 1993. So we'd had no shortage of incidents. In particular—because I was Ambassador in Finland at the time the East Africa bombings took place, it was a concern of mine. As DCM in Prague—When you're a DCM or Ambassador—if you're Ambassador in particular—your letter of instruction from the President says he is or she has remanded into your responsibility the safety and security of both the Americans and the Foreign Service nationals in your charge. I personally took that very seriously as part of my remit. I followed the intelligence pretty closely, as best I could, on al-Qaeda before 2001 because of that.

**Perry:** Could I ask at this point, before we get into the 2000-plus area, you mentioned that Clinton himself, Bill Clinton, thought in terms of regime change. How did you view regime change at that time, given the odyssey that you've talked about from your parents, probably New Deal Democrat up to when you go into the Bush 43 administration? What did regime change mean to you and are you a neocon about regime change at that point?

**Edelman:** I hate the whole neocon rubric because I think it now has just become an epithet rather than—At one point in time it actually meant something. I don't think it really means anything anymore.

There are a couple of layers to that, Barbara. One is that I think there is a question at the kind of metastrategic level, what regime type is most conducive to peace and security? It goes back to

the whole question of the democratic peace. There is that element of it. In specific, in Iraq, my view then, back in the '90s, was that Iraq was this very segmented society because you had Shi'a, Sunni, and Kurds. There were probably only two ways to govern it. One was to govern it more or less the way Saddam did, which is to say you pick one of these groups and make it superordinate and make everybody else subordinate to it.

The other was to find some kind of pluralistic system that could accommodate the interests of all elements of Iraqi society. The British had essentially in the '20s decided to put the Sunni Arab population in that superordinate position as a function of imperial management. We had more or less inherited that.

In my view regime change was not just a question of does Saddam go, is he replaced by Uday [Hussein] or Qusay [Hussein] or is he replaced by some other Ba'athist general as had happened in Iraq periodically in the '60s and '70s. But I was careful to say a pluralistic regime of some sort, not a democratic regime, because it wasn't at all clear to me that you could get what we could conceive of as a liberal democratic regime. This is one of the ways in which I think the debate has become very misshapen. In part that's because those who were involved in the decision making, like Secretary Powell and others, for convenience's sake chose to caricature the views of people who advocated regime change as wanting to impose a [Thomas] Jeffersonian democracy in Mesopotamia, which was the way that Powell used to put it.

Again, I can't speak for others, I can only speak for myself. I never had any view that that was possible. But I did think it was possible to tighten the pressures on Saddam to the point where he was overthrown and there was some kind of replacement regime that then would become perhaps more pluralistic.

**Perry:** So did you worry—and tell us if we're now jumping too far ahead to 2000, but—I think about the 2000 election and George Bush 43's, "We're not going to do nation building" and "We're going to focus on domestic policy." He was focused on domestic policy and those were his concerns and his issues. But did you have concerns leading up to 2000, since you were thinking that there should be regime change? Did you have concern that he wasn't interested in that based on what he said on the campaign trail and in the debates?

**Edelman:** My concerns were slightly different. I did not have concerns about his view about Iraq in the sense that so many of the people around him had been signatories to the public letter that had been organized by Bill Kristol and others to get rid of the Saddam regime. I was concerned about the "no nation building" and whatnot. I saw that as of a piece with the more narrow realism that I had identified earlier that worried me about the Bush 41 administration. I thought that my colleagues who had been part of Bush 41 were not—I think they were—I was concerned a little bit about how they'd approached Kosovo. I mean, the fact that Republicans in the Congress had opposed the operation in Kosovo, in some cases almost refused to fund it—Bosnia as well. That they didn't understand some of the issues that they were likely to inherit if they won. But I wasn't particularly concerned about Iraq, actually.

I'm sorry, let me rephrase that. I was concerned about Iraq, because I thought it was unresolved after Desert Storm and you had UNMOVIC, which seemed to me to be a much less useful instrument than UNSCOM had been. Because there were all these unresolved issues about the

WMD program and you had the defections of Saddam's sons-in-law and the revelations about the bio program and the chem program. I was very worried about all of that, but I wasn't worried that Bush was insufficiently committed to regime change.

**Bakich:** At this point in time, we don't want to read too much subsequent history into where you were and where your colleagues were at this moment. Where did Iraq and all this Gulf security—writ large or writ small in terms of Iraq—where did that fit into the hierarchy of your concerns?

**Edelman:** We probably ought to cover how I actually got into the Bush administration before we get there.

**Bakich:** I was meaning in the late Clinton administration—that's where I was.

**Edelman:** I was very worried about it.

**Leffler:** I think the literature shows that among the Clinton people, Iraq was a very high priority in 1998, '99. They couldn't solve it, but it was hugely on their minds.

**Edelman:** Right.

**Perry:** And you agreed.

**Edelman:** I agreed. I thought it was a very big problem. I became more concerned during the transition, because Saddam was having these big military parades. It looked like he was getting very active and the sanctions regime was clearly under enormous pressure and was kind of falling apart. I was really worried about what the long-term prognosis was.

**Riley:** You're talking about the Presidential transition?

**Edelman:** Yes.

**Riley:** OK.

**Edelman:** So December of 2000.

**Riley:** Had you personally been supporting Mr. Bush or Mr. Gore? You can not answer if you prefer.

**Edelman:** I had my view because one of the questions you suggested was what was my view of President Bush before I entered the administration. I didn't know President Bush at all, obviously. A lot of my friends and colleagues like Scooter Libby were very involved, and Paul Wolfowitz and others who were part of the Balkans were telling me what great instincts he had, how terrific he was. I had enormous admiration and respect for Dick Cheney, whom I worked for in Bush 41 who was now the Vice Presidential nominee. George Shultz actually, for whom again I had been his Special Assistant—I had enormous respect and still do for Secretary Shultz. I disagree with him about nuclear weapons, but that's another story. He also had vouched for President Bush.

But I guess I had just sort of the average citizen's view of him, which was that he didn't seem really all that prepared to be President. I was disturbed by some of the malapropisms to which he was inclined. I had a certain amount of uncertainty. I had a lot of confidence in Vice President Cheney, but I had a certain amount of uncertainty about President Bush going in.

Then during the transition, I was somewhat torn because I thought Gore was better prepared for the Presidency in a lot of ways. But I also knew, from a career point of view, it would be much better for me if Bush were elected. What happened is that after the election—when the disputed election started to—it was not being resolved, but it was going through litigation and whatnot—Scooter Libby contacted me and told me, “Once this is all resolved, I’m going to get back in touch with you and we’ll figure out where you should end up.”

Once the election was resolved, Scooter asked me to come back and be his principal Deputy. He explained to me he was going to be the Vice President's both Chief of Staff and National Security Advisor. So he was going to in effect be both Ron Klain and Leon Fuerth. I thought that was particularly attractive, because I'd never worked in the White House, which I felt would be a good thing to do, but also I figured Scooter was going to have a lot on his plate, and as the principal Deputy I'd have a fair amount of scope.

In effect, Scooter, obviously, was both the National Security Advisor and the Chief of Staff and in terms of NSPD 1 [first National Security Presidential Directive, created the Organization of the National Security Council System] actually had a seat at the table as a principal, which was for me great because it meant I was a plus one at all the principals meetings and NSC meetings. It gave me access I would never have had otherwise, and I had Leon Fuerth's old office. So de facto I was day-to-day running the national security shop for the Vice President because Scooter was way too tied up in other things both domestic and foreign to be able to take it on.

Then after 9/11 it became even more—My scope of authority became even greater because he and the Vice President were frequently off in undisclosed locations, so I had to really run the show in Washington.

**Riley:** Why don't we give you a couple of minutes?

**Edelman:** I'm good, I can keep going, unless you all need a break.

**Riley:** We'll give ourselves two to three minutes.

[BREAK]

**Riley:** We got you into the White House. What's it like there? What are you finding when you get there? You had a lot of experience in the United States government, but you'd never worked in the White House before. Tell us about it.

**Edelman:** I think part of the problem with working in the White House is that it's really—It's a truly extraordinary experience. The problem is your life is so driven by the day-to-day, what you're doing is the proverbial drinking from a fire hose. It's hard to generalize, but I think most people don't really get enough opportunity to kind of step back and say I can't believe what I'm doing. It manifests—I ended up being in the Oval quite a bit, which I hadn't anticipated when I took the job.

Because of the arrangement that Cheney and Bush had, the Vice President basically had a seat in pretty much every meeting with foreigners in the Oval Office. But the Vice President's interests were really sort of particular. He was interested in the Middle East and Iraq and Russia and Europe and Asia, but not so much Latin America, so because Scooter had both his Chief of Staff and his national security responsibilities and spent most of his time basically with Cheney—I mean, Mary Matalin once described Scooter as “Cheney's Cheney,” from Cheney having been Chief of Staff to Gerald Ford. I ended up going to the Oval when the Vice President or Scooter had other things that they were doing. In particular, when a lot of the early visitors in 2001 were from the western hemisphere, where Bush had a particular interest, but Cheney's interest was less.

My introduction—My first meeting with the President was prebriefing him for a meeting with Gerhard Schroeder, actually. I went to the prebrief because Scooter couldn't make it and Condi [Condoleezza Rice], whom I'd known in Bush 41, introduced me to the President. That was the first time I'd met him.

**Riley:** You had not met him before you took the job?

**Edelman:** No, I had not met him before I took the job. It was my first introduction to Bush. It was kind of interesting because he walked in and sat down. I can't remember—

**Perry:** This was in the Oval?

**Edelman:** No, actually it wasn't in the Oval. We did it downstairs in the room that—I can't remember the name of the room. It's not the Map Room, it's next door to the Map Room. It's where you come in from the South Lawn.

**Perry:** The diplomatic—

**Edelman:** Yes, the diplomatic entrance from the South Lawn. We had chairs set up in there. [Yasser] Arafat had done something; I can't remember what it was. But as he sat down with all his group of advisors around and I had never met him before, he said, “How big an asshole is Arafat? Is he a big-league asshole or what?” That was of course the comment that Cheney had made in the open microphone during the campaign. That was my first introduction to George W. Bush.

**Perry:** Let the record show there was a bit of head snap back that Eric portrayed for us.

**Edelman:** That was—The thing about President Bush, which I came to really admire and enjoy, actually, was he was extremely direct with people. There was no pretense. He was very direct and very honest with people. It had its own diplomatic charm to it. I had seen Bill Clinton in



action a couple of times in the Oval. He was different; he kind of just enveloped people with his knowledge of stuff and his wonkiness about policy. He knew a lot of detail and could be very granular with people. Bush was not that way, but Bush was very direct with people.

For instance, he had a meeting with the Serbian President, I'm trying to remember who that was, after Milošević, was Milošević's successor. His name escapes me for the moment [Vojislav Koštunica].

**Riley:** My experts here.

**Edelman:** I'm trying to remember who it was. But anyway, he asked this guy a question—This was early on too; this was in the spring. Actually, the first thing we had to deal with in the spring was the crisis not in Iraq or anything, it was the Presevo Valley problem in southern Serbia and Kosovo was leftover business from the Kosovo campaign. It was the preoccupation for a couple of months in the spring of 2001.

Anyway, it was in this meeting with the Serbian—I had gone to all these meetings with President [Andrés] Pastrana [Arango] of Colombia, the President of Bolivia, the President of Brazil. I was sitting in this meeting with the Serbian—We did it in the Roosevelt Room and it was a meeting with Vice President Cheney. We had arranged that Bush would do a drop by and join the meeting rather than have him meet in the Oval with the Serbian President.

Bush came in and Cheney was introducing him to the Serb and then was introducing him to the U.S. side and he said, "Do you know Eric? You've met Eric." Bush looked and he said, "I know, Eric is your Latin America expert," because I'd been to all the Latin America meetings. I said, "Mr. President, I don't even speak Spanish."

But in that meeting with the Serb—This was one of my early views of him, too—he turned to the Serb and he said, "Mr. President, what's the view in Serbia of America today? What is our standing with your public?" He said, "Because I can imagine that it would be pretty negative since the last couple of years we've been bombing the shit out of your country." Literally, that's what he said. Again, the Serbian was a little taken aback by the directness of the question, but he also I think found it a little bit disarming.

**Perry:** He spoke English, did he, or was it translated?

**Edelman:** That's a good question, Barbara, I don't remember that detail. But it was clearly translated for him. He gave quite an expansive and very nuanced answer to the question. That was sort of Bush's strength, this incredible directness with people.

**Perry:** Back to your first meeting when it was a briefing session for the President. You told us what he did to start with in reference to Arafat. What was your impression of him in a briefing setting?

**Edelman:** He clearly read his briefing memo; he knew a lot about Schroeder. It was part of my education into George W. Bush, which was that—I said earlier that I had had sort of the garden variety view of him—not too bright, et cetera. But look, he was *very* smart. He'd gone to Yale; he'd gone to Harvard Business School. He had been Governor of a major state, even though

people say it is not a very powerful Governorship. He was much more knowledgeable about things than I had realized. He read his briefing memos and he absorbed them. He came prepared for everything that I ever saw him in.

Now there was also clearly a kind of towel-snapping, locker room side to him. All that business about giving everybody nicknames—Interestingly, I never got a nickname. He could be very brusque with his staff. When he and Mrs. [Laura] Bush came to Turkey when I was Ambassador, my wife and I spent a lot of time with the Bushes in the limousine because there was a bilateral part of the visit and then there was a NATO summit in Istanbul. My wife actually was a little bit taken aback with how brusque he could be to his staff.

He was smart and he read a tremendous amount. I was very impressed by that, how much reading he did.

**Perry:** Of what? Did you get a sense?

**Edelman:** Yes, we would talk about books all the time with him. It's well known that he and Karl Rove used to have a competition to see who could read more books. Inevitably he beat Karl. But I remember, for instance, when I went to brief him in the hotel in Turkey, he had Ron Chernow's biography of [Alexander] Hamilton on his table. We had one meeting at Camp David I recall where he went around the room and asked everybody what they were reading. When he got to Eliot Cohen he said, "I've read your book, *Supreme Command*." He read a lot, although as Eliot has sometimes said, he was kind of an incurious reader. That's Eliot's phrase, which I think is accurate. He clearly was reading for sort of moral instruction and role models.

I know he read for instance [David] McCullough's biography of [Harry] Truman, in which I think he took a lot of solace because at that point he was getting really beat up post-Iraq invasion. I think it gave him some solace that Presidential reputations wax and wane and whatever was going on at the moment—

**Leffler:** A few historians—I was there, I met with Condi Rice at the end of her Secretaryship. She talked exactly about this, about how she and Bush individually sort of—in 2005 she was talking about, 2006; I think she was specifically talking about the summer of 2005—went off during their vacation, and read a series of books about Presidents in crises. It was specifically, she said, to try to get a sense of how others dealt with the emotional part of the job.

**Edelman:** Right. Yes. I think it's very hard to work in the White House, particularly if you're working in a White House where decisions about peace and war are getting made. When I went to the White House in the spring of 2001, none of us had any idea of what was going to happen, obviously. I don't just mean we didn't know the future, of course we didn't know the future, but we didn't have any idea of the scope or scale of what we were going to end up doing was going to be. It's hard to work in that environment and see the President and the Vice President wrestling with these literally life-or-death issues and not walk away a bit humbled, a bit impressed by what you're watching.

One thing I really observed was the incredible power of the Presidency itself and the person of the President, no matter what people think of them, when you walk into the Oval Office. Whenever I went into the Oval and as I said, I went a lot, I never, ever, in the two and a half

years I was there got over the fact that I can't believe I'm in the Oval Office. I would see world leaders come in and you would read the intelligence before the fact—I'm going to lecture Bush, I'm going to tell him this, I'm going to tell him that. Then you would see these people just—

**Riley:** Freeze up.

**Edelman:** I mean, they're suddenly in the presence of the most powerful person in the world. It has an effect; it has a huge effect. It is true of Presidential advisors, it's true of foreign visitors, it's true of everybody.

**Perry:** What does that mean? What does that mean for you as a briefer and as an advisor? What does it mean for what the President is hearing or not hearing?

**Edelman:** I think it imposes on everybody who briefs the President a special responsibility to make sure that what they're telling him is accurate, that they're not giving him information that is casually gathered or received. I have in mind that story about K. T. [Kathleen Troia] McFarland giving Trump this magazine story that had been debunked already years ago. You really need to have a sense of responsibility of what you tell the President.

All of us who are in government understand this. I remember early in my time in the Pentagon the first time, when I was working for Cheney and I briefed him on something about Russia—I can't even remember what the subject was, but—David Addington, who was his assistant, came out of the SecDef's [Secretary of Defense] office right behind me. David is a big, tall, imposing guy and has a pretty gruff demeanor to boot. He literally, physically, grabbed me and spun me around and put his finger in my chest and said, "Are you absolutely sure about what you just told the SecDef?" This was something about Russia and the Baltics.

I said, "Yes, I think so." He said, "What do you mean? Do you know so or do you think so?" I said, "No, it's right, David." He said, "Good, because that's going to come out of his mouth on *Meet the Press* six months from now and it damn well better be right." David was telling me that—It was actually an important thing about Cheney, because Cheney really had this incredibly photographic memory. He would absorb everything that you told him when you briefed him. Then he had this really great ability to sort of disaggregate everything that he had been told and then put it back together in a way that was particularly compelling on *Meet the Press*, which is why I think [Tim] Russert had him as a guest so often. David was right. It was something you really needed to be careful about with Cheney.

Of course, when you're talking about the President it is even more the case; you really have to be—

**Leffler:** I think Barbara's question in part was intended to evoke some comments about given the power of the Presidency, how difficult is it to convey—

**Edelman:** Bad issues.

**Leffler:** Bad news or advice that you deem well-conceived, but you know—

**Edelman:** Won't be well received.

**Leffler:** Will not be well received.

**Edelman:** That's the classic problem I think every President has. And not just Presidents, by the way. My wife would point out to me that when I was Ambassador if I gave a speech, if I came out afterward and if I said, "How was that?" I'd get, "Oh, that was great, Mr. Ambassador. It was really wonderful." It put me in mind of a story that the late Phil Habib used to tell, which was he said, "You know why everybody in the Foreign Service wants to be an ambassador? Because when you're an ambassador and you walk down the hall of your embassy, everyone's door flies open and they all come out and kiss your ass. That's why everybody wants to be an ambassador." [laughter]

My wife would point out that she would be the only one to say, "You had your frownie face on when you walked in, you really need to smile more, and by the way, part of what you said didn't make any sense at all." With Presidents it's even worse. But, look—

**Leffler:** Do you remember any examples where you felt intimidated in part by the President's presence, where you sort of reconfigured what you wanted to say on key points?

**Eric:** I'm not sure, Mel, that I ever—I didn't find him intimidating in that sense. I'll give you an example. Early on I mentioned that I was in some of those meetings with the Latin American leaders. I was in the prebrief for his meeting with President Pastrana of Colombia. It was like an early lesson in this, I guess.

We were briefing and Bush was really pissed off because there had been a UN Security Council vote on an Israel resolution condemning Israel. I guess there was a question of whether we were going to have to veto it and did we have enough votes. I can't remember all the specifics. He had called Pastrana and asked Colombia—which was on the Security Council at the time—to vote against this resolution with us. Colombia had voted for it. Bush was sort of venting about this in the prebrief and basically saying Colombia didn't have a dog in that fight, why the hell—He said, "I asked him to do it, he told me he was going to, and he didn't do it."

I kind of just piped up and said "Yes, just think about what it would be like if we weren't giving them 4 billion a year." Bush said, "Yes, damn it." As we walked out of the Oval, Colin Powell grabbed me and said, "Don't do that. Don't spin him up any more. He doesn't need to be spun up about this." I said, "Well, he does have a point." But I took Secretary Powell's point also, which is you don't want the President to be acting out of emotion; you want him to be weighing the balance of interests carefully, et cetera. So even Colin Powell—The story tells you that even Colin Powell was thinking, *How do I tell the President?*

**Bakich:** Did you ever get the sense of how the President evolved or changed or grew into the roles, specifically in those first few months? I can imagine Vice President Cheney coming in and not really having a steep learning curve on how to do the job. President Bush may be different.

**Edelman:** I'm not sure about that, because Cheney had never been Vice President before. It's true that he had worked in the White House; he had been Chief of Staff to the President at a ridiculously young age. I once had to introduce him and I did a variant of Tom Lehrer's joke about when [Wolfgang Amadeus] Mozart was my age, he'd been dead for 10 years. It's people like that who make you realize how little you've accomplished in life.

Cheney had been Chief of Staff to the President at age 34, but he had never been Vice President. So he was defining his own—As he put it, he said, “I only have two real jobs, which are to preside over the Senate and inquire as to the health of the President.” He was very careful to define his role in a particular way and different from what he perceived to be Gore’s role.

**Leffler:** In what sense?

**Perry:** Please explain that.

**Edelman:** Gore had—The urban legend about Cheney’s office in the Bush 43 administration is that we had this giant NSC staff that was parallel to Condi’s staff and it was pulling all the strings, and this, that, and the other thing. It’s just not true. We actually had the exact same number of people that Gore had, because I inherited it and I’m the one who did the staffing. We kept on all the career people. When we left the office, by the way, the [Barack] Obama people dispensed with all the career people who were in the Vice President’s office. We kept all the Gore people on. Maybe it wasn’t such a smart idea on my part, but my view is these are career professionals, they’re here to serve, and we’ll just replace them as their tours of duty come to a natural end. They were all detailees from DoD [Department of Defense], CIA, and State—I was the one from State.

He had the impression that Gore had been very operational. He had run all these commissions, the Gore-Chernomyrdin Commission, the Gore-[Nursultan] Nazarbayev Commission, Gore-[Hosni] Mubarak, and we were instructed to stay totally away from anything that was operational. He did not want to be—What he wanted to be was extremely well informed about all elements of national security, all elements of the process, where did things stand. He did not want us to characterize his position to anybody, because he really wanted to be in a position to give his unvarnished advice to the President in private.

**Bakich:** OK.

**Edelman:** He did not want to have us signaling or telegraphing—which is not to say we didn’t have our own views, or that we were doing things at variance with his views, but we just were not supposed to be characterizing his views to others. There was a whole bunch of stuff in the Bart [Barton] Gellman book *Angler* about how we were kind of keeping tabs on the rest of the interagency—It’s all nonsense.

By agreement with Condi, we were all on the NSC email system. So we were included on all their emails and we got to see the briefing memos before we did our briefing memos for the Vice President. The only thing you could say is we did a memo for the Vice President that they didn’t see and we saw what they were providing the President. But that was by design, not by some nefarious plan.

**Perry:** So it’s interesting and very believable—you used the term “unvarnished”—that the Vice President didn’t want other people characterizing what he thought. He wanted to be able to go in and give the unvarnished vision or truth or idea that he had to the President. But it is interesting to think—and we can see Vice President Cheney doing that—I would have guessed that he wouldn’t have been one of the people who might be overawed by being in the Oval Office, in part because he had been there. Even though he hadn’t been Vice President before, but by virtue

of his experience and personality. So it's kind of an interesting concept to think of others perhaps feeling in awe or holding back and maybe the Vice President not feeling that way. Would that be fair?

**Edelman:** I think that's probably right, Barbara. I did not get the impression that the Vice President shied away from telling the President things that he thought the President might not want to hear. I don't think he wanted to do that with anybody else around, because I think the nature of those kinds of exchanges—If you've got an audience it's different than if you're doing it kind of one-on-one. He had a lot of one-on-one time with the President and that's where he did it. Our job—in my view—was to help protect his ability to do that.

[Several pages have been redacted here, per interviewee's request.]

**Riley:** I hope you'll let some of it go, but we'll negotiate that later. It would be helpful for us to look at an example of the process at work. There is the shoot down of the plane.

**Edelman:** EP-3.

**Riley:** Right. Is there another example, or better—?

**Edelman:** Early?

**Perry:** Pre-9/11.

**Leffler:** There is also the argument over Korea policy.

**Edelman:** Yes.

**Leffler:** The policy in South Korea, those are the two early ones.

**Edelman:** The EP-3 there's not that much light I can shed because Scooter worked that one pretty much directly. Asia wasn't my bailiwick. I was apprised of everything that was going on, but I wasn't really very directly involved. The North Korea one, however, I was because I was in the principals meeting as a plus one. There I think Powell was very clearly at fault for what happened, because the interagency discussion we had—Powell came in and briefed us. He had been briefed by Wendy Sherman and Bob Einhorn—and by Madeleine—about all the late Clinton administration negotiations with Kim Jong-Il and Kim Dae-Jong and this was in anticipation of the Kim Dae-Jong early visit to meet with Bush.

What happened was that Powell briefed and basically said this missile deal they were negotiating was terrible. He said that it would have been—and I reviewed my notes several times after the fact to remind myself of what he had said—would be “the biggest pickpocket job in the history of diplomacy” if we let that go through. So we were not going to pick that up; we're leaving that alone.

On the agreed framework we're going to leave that in place and see how North Korea behaves. Condi very carefully at the end of the principals meeting said, "So if you get asked about this, what are you going to say?" Powell said, "I'm going to say that we're going to abide by the agreed framework and we'll monitor North Korean behavior and I'll leave it at that." In the event, he met with Kim Dae-Jong before Bush did and what he said at the press briefing was, "We're going to pick up where the Clinton administration left off," which was a 180 from what he had said in the principals meeting, which infuriated Condi, and understandably. So the President then had to kind of go out and correct all this and basically said no, we're not going to pick all of this up.

The thing that was amazing about it was that Powell was the one who had come in and told us what a terrible idea the missile proliferation deal was.

**Leffler:** I think the story goes that President Bush read about it early in the morning in the *Washington Post* and he called Condi.

**Edelman:** Yes.

**Leffler:** He said to Condi Rice, you've got to speak to the Secretary and he has to reverse himself.

**Edelman:** And Powell did go out and say something about well, I was leaning a little bit too far forward on my skis. But the damage was done. In the end it wasn't Powell who reversed it; it was really Bush. I think it was terribly unfair to Bush, because it made him appear to be disrupting something that in fact was not the case.

**Riley:** The timing on this was?

**Edelman:** It was about February.

**Riley:** Was it that early?

**Edelman:** February, March, maybe early March.

**Leffler:** It's March.

**Riley:** So is it your sense that that was an important inflection point in all of these relations or things that come to be—?

**Edelman:** That was just the precursor of what was to come. That became the template. It was that kind of thing would happen and then there would be leaks about he was out in front of himself and he shouldn't have said it and then back and forth.

**Riley:** So decidedly that's not a failure of process at this point.

**Edelman:** Not in that instance; that was a failure by the Secretary of State.

**Riley:** OK.

**Edelman:** That was clearly Colin's bad and he kind of owned up to it.

**Riley:** I guess what I'm trying to understand—

**Edelman:** It did enormous damage. The other thing that happened is that Powell made it a point—I've been thinking about this a lot recently because of all this business about the unmasking of sources and intelligence and all. Powell would go out and tell foreign dignitaries you have to give me something on this because I've got all these crazies around Rumsfeld and Cheney. Now at one level that happens a lot in government—it's not unprecedented. Dean Acheson and Oliver Franks and [Ernest] Bevin—the British did this during the Korean War with State Department colleagues about [Douglas] MacArthur. So it is not unprecedented. On the other hand, there was a degree to which this was—Powell kind of soliciting this and overhyping the differences. It really was, I think, damaging. Of course people knew it, because they would see it.

**Riley:** Is the intelligence community fitting into this at all? Are they getting caught up in this at this stage before 9/11?

**Edelman:** George [Tenet] and John McLaughlin were held over by the administration. John of course was a career professional and—I mean, John is my colleague at SAIS [School of Advanced International Studies], he's a friend. We go back a very long way because he was doing Russia stuff in the '90s and eastern Europe—He and I started working together in 1984 when he was on an excursion tour from CIA working for Richard Haass and I was on the Soviet desk. So I'd known John forever.

George I got to know in Clinton when I was working for Strobe. They were kept on. George was actually pretty close to Armitage. George of course had taken on a quasi-political role in Clinton because he was doing all this stuff with the Palestinian Authority as part of the Clinton negotiations between Israel and Palestine. So George was already kind of in a quasi kind of political capacity. They get caught up in it in the sense that CIA has some very strong views about Chalabi and the INC.

**Riley:** This is pre-9/11?

**Edelman:** Yes, pre-9/11 and then post-9/11 as well. The other way they get caught up in this is—So early on I got briefed by Roger Cressey, who worked for Dick Clarke, who was another holdover from Clinton into Bush. He had actually been held over from Bush into Clinton, so he kind of spanned it. Clarke and I knew each other; we got along OK. I had a somewhat acerbic view of Dick.

**Riley:** Based on?

**Edelman:** I thought Dick was—First of all, he was a not totally pleasant personality. Second, he was an inveterate, bureaucratic empire builder. I remember when I was working for Strobe, Madeleine Albright asked Strobe and me to come to a briefing that Clarke gave when he was over at the Clinton NSC doing kind of counterterrorism but also counternarcotics. This was in the period when we had Plan Colombia. We were doing a lot of counterdrug stuff. So Dick had



this big briefing about creating this riverine counternarcotics force and we needed to give him—I don't know, I'm making up the number—\$8 billion and put him in charge.

Early on Clarke wanted to brief Cheney, and Cheney asked Libby and me to take the brief, so we took the brief for him. It was a very big brief; it had two pieces to it as I recall. One part was a whole thing about al-Qaeda and the al-Qaeda threat. The second part was about cyber. The punch line was lifted almost exactly out of the earlier brief on the riverine force. It was give me \$8 billion and put me in charge of all this. So I had a somewhat— But his Deputy, Roger Cressey, came to brief me and he showed me some video.

It was full-motion video taken from a Predator over Afghanistan and it appeared to be [Osama] bin Laden—It was a tall man walking—and the basic point was we've got this interagency process, we need to arm these Predators with Hellfires. Just think, if we could have taken this shot, we could have killed bin Laden. I said, "OK, makes sense to me." So we had this interagency process over the summer of '01. I assumed that we would agree to do this. I recommended to Cheney and Libby that we go ahead and arm Predators. It foundered at the principals level because of a disagreement between CIA and DoD about who would pay for it. In retrospect, that seems like a really stupid bureaucratic fight, and it was; it was very stupid. I couldn't believe it had happened. It just seemed to make so much sense that we do it. It didn't seem to be completely outside the ability of human beings to come to some agreement about how we would fund this thing. But it foundered, and then of course 9/11 interceded. All of a sudden, somehow bureaucratically we solved that problem.

**Leffler:** That's a good example of the process—If the process had been working, that issue would have been resolved.

**Edelman:** Yes, before. Would we have killed bin Laden in the one week before—I think the principals met on September 4th or something.

**Leffler:** They did.

**Edelman:** Would we have killed bin Laden in that week? No, probably not, but still it was typical. Another example is Iran. We never figured out what our Iran policy was going to be; we never came to a conclusion. We had interagency meeting after interagency meeting. I believe it's accurate to say that there never was a signed NSPD on Iran in 43 unless it got done while I was in Turkey or something. But we had all these debates about how hard we could push the Iranians, and did the Algiers Accord preclude regime change, and the lawyers got involved. We never, as best I can recall, came to a conclusion.

The worst example is that we never came to a conclusion about the future political leadership of Iraq post hostilities, because we had a number of briefings about all this. I remember having conversations with Frank Miller and Zal [Zalmay] Khalilzad about OK, who is Admiral [Karl] Dönitz here? Who is going to take the surrender once we—because we had a war plan, 1003 Victor, that was based on decapitation of the regime. So then the question is what's the source of political authority in Iraq after that? My predecessor in OSD, Doug Feith, in his book argues that there was a decision made in March to do something like we'd done in Afghanistan and that somehow mysteriously—I don't recall it ever having been a decision. I remember his briefing,

but I don't remember anybody saying OK, the President has decided that's what we're doing. If it had been decided as Doug suggests, then it wasn't a very deeply rooted decision, because it clearly got totally undone once we were actually in Iraq. That I think was one of the biggest problems, and we never resolved that before we went in and then spent a lot of time trying to sort ourselves out after the fact with some very untoward results in Iraq.

**Bakich:** That's an interesting example. It speaks to another issue where a decision that was clearly made but in a way not too many people understood precisely how it was made. That's of course the decision to go to war in the first place.

**Leffler:** Was the decision clearly made?

**Bakich:** Ostensibly because we did go to war and the President would have had to make the call. My only point is—

**Leffler:** Not the decision to go to war. This is a decision about the end of the war, what would happen at the end.

**Bakich:** Right.

**Edelman:** But there is some question about the other decision as well.

**Leffler:** Which other decision?

**Edelman:** The question about when to go to war. Rumsfeld used to say occasionally in my presence, "The President never asked me my view ever about whether or not—" and I think he has this in his book.

**Leffler:** He does.

**Edelman:** "That he never asked me whether or not I thought it was a good idea to go to war." That sort of leaves open the suggestion that perhaps Rumsfeld, if asked, would have said don't go to war. I just don't believe that. But it does go to the issue of the murkiness. So there was this restricted deputies process that I was part of that Hadley had that was about Iraq. It was called the Regional—It had some cover name like the Regional Contingencies Group or something like that; I can't remember the actual name. But it was all about Iraq and it went on throughout 2002 until the war.

I went over to State a couple of times and did meet—because I was over there for other meetings and I would sit in with Marc Grossman on the CVTS [compressed video transmission service] when we were doing these things. I actually had the pen on the paper that we wrote about what would the future of Iraq be post conflict? What kind of Iraq did we want to see? I drafted it and Marc commented on it. Marc was actually very complimentary about it. So sometime around late August I think, I think probably after the Vice President's VFW [Veterans of Foreign Wars] speech, Grossman calls me and says, "I want to get together on neutral ground." It seemed odd. I said OK, fine. I said, "Why don't we meet down in the Corcoran?" There was a coffee bar there.

Grossman came over and he said, “I just want to know, are we—Has the President decided we’re going to war? Is this just a giant circle jerk that we’re engaged in here in this interagency process?”

**Leffler:** When was this, do you think?

**Edelman:** August of 2002. I was a little bit taken aback. Marc was normally pretty mild mannered. He was really pretty angry and vociferous about this. I said, “Marc, honestly I don’t think the President has made a decision for war, but I do think the President has made a decision that the problem of Saddam has got to be resolved one way or another, that we can’t just keep kicking this can down the road.” By the way, I still believe that to this day. I’m probably the last person who would admit it. I still think we did the right thing and I don’t think there was much alternative.

I think if Anthony Kennedy had been—had voted the other way in *Bush v. Gore* in December of 2000, I think we would have ended up doing something—maybe it wouldn’t have been the same. It might have been different. I’m sure they would have made different mistakes than the ones we made, but I think a Gore administration would have probably done something—post 9/11—would have probably done something pretty similar in Iraq. They wouldn’t have been able—If you think about it as a thought experiment, an administration that sat there for eight years, had all these al-Qaeda bombings, now has 9/11 and the sanctions are falling apart in Iraq. They bombed Iraq themselves in 1998 and told the entire country that this big a bag of ricin could destroy, kill everybody in the world twice over. They’re just going to let him sit out there and not do anything about it? I just don’t believe it.

The political pressures would have been immense on Gore to take care of the Saddam problem, just as they were for us.

**Leffler:** You know there’s a whole 500-page book that deals with exactly this question—

**Edelman:** Yes. [Francis] Frank P. Harvey, and I find it actually very—

**Leffler:** —that comes to that conclusion.

**Edelman:** I find it very compelling and I assign it to my students in my course at SAIS about Iraq. I find it very compelling. On the other hand—My colleagues in the Clinton administration whenever I say this practically have aneurysms.

**Leffler:** I once presented that to Jim Steinberg, who got furious, really furious.

**Edelman:** I had the same experience.

**Leffler:** What do you mean when you say we had to resolve “the problem of Saddam”? When you say that, what do you mean? Do you mean that the only way to resolve the issue was for Saddam to leave or be killed, or was “the problem of Saddam” a way of saying we need to find out what is the situation with regard to weapons of mass destruction and if we can do that, then we’ve really solved our problem? Is that what you mean or is the former? I think there is a lot of ambiguity about exactly that issue and it’s a very critical issue.

**Edelman:** You're right and I think that it was ambiguous. I think there was at a certain level an irreducible ambiguity about it in the sense that the main thing was the WMD. I know that sounds odd since we didn't find any WMD, although we did. I keep reminding people we found 900 shells with traces of sarin or mustard on them after the war. C. J. [Christopher John] Chivers has written a whole series of stories in the *New York Times* about how we have any number of veterans who are sick from their exposure to this stuff. But we weren't allowed to publicly say we found this because the CIA insisted these were pre-1991 stocks that weren't accurately or adequately demilitarized and that's what we found, as opposed to what we were talking about before the war, which was post-1991 stocks.

**Leffler:** But that's true, isn't it? I mean, just as a matter of fact, isn't that true?

**Edelman:** It is probably true. We don't 100 percent know because we don't know exactly the chain of custody of these shells. It's probably true that they were pre-'91 stocks that weren't demilled. But I once had this discussion in front of the President in the Sit [Situation] Room. I was sitting catty-corner from him because I was representing DoD at the time. We were having a big fight with the IC [Intelligence Council] about whether Hadley—whether we could make this public. The administration was in this giant fetal crouch about anything because it was post [Valerie] Plame and all the rest of that stuff.

I remember Bush sort of sotto voce saying, "I don't remember saying anything about pre- or post-'91, I just said the son-of-a-bitch had WMD." This is what I mean by the kind of irreducible ambiguity of this. We needed to get to the bottom of the WMD thing. There was plenty of reason to be skeptical. I mean, if we had Madeleine and Strobe, and Sandy [Samuel Berger] were still alive, Bill Clinton, any of them, and put them under sodium pentothal in this room, they would all tell you that they believed until 2003 that he had WMD. They said it; they said that he was going to use it.

**Leffler:** I totally agree with that and I think that is beyond doubt in the record.

**Edelman:** Right.

**Leffler:** But that's not the question I'm asking.

**Edelman:** So the question was, how do we do that? It's in some sense an epistemological question really. How will we know that we know the truth?

**Leffler:** But my question is more of an empirical one. Did folks like you, Scooter Libby, Paul Wolfowitz, think you could solve the problem of Saddam or the problem without getting rid of Saddam, or were you thinking at the time the only way to deal with this is getting rid of Saddam?

**Edelman:** I don't want to speak for anyone else. I thought personally that there were a variety of ways that he might—that the problem might be—I'm trying to find the right word; "adjudicate" is not the right word—but be *resolved*. One was what we did, a military operation to remove him. I thought there were things short of that that might lead to his departure. I thought if we could get the right kind of Security Council resolution that imposed the right kinds of restrictions, the regime might come unraveled, that somebody might kill him. That was Richard Haass's view all along.

Richard believed that we needed to have some other general shoot him. Now, I didn't find that totally satisfactory, but I was willing to—

**Leffler:** Richard believed what? I'm not sure I caught that.

**Edelman:** That we needed to have some other Ba'athist general put a bullet in Saddam's head and lead a coup and that would solve the problem. It was really very personalized to start—which it was, I think. It had to do with a specific—if they were willing to give up the WMD as well as kill Saddam.

**Leffler:** Was anyone among your colleagues thinking that there was a way of living with Saddam and nonetheless finding means to feel assured that there were no weapons of mass destruction?

**Edelman:** I think we thought that if we tightened the noose about him enough there was a possibility that he might either be overthrown or would leave. I remember conversations that we had with people about the Idi Amin option that we had, or Baby Doc [Jean-Claude Duvalier] had left. And that of course is what the President ultimately talked a lot about. Should we give him ultimatums, that he and the family have to go, but otherwise—and the President did that in the last two days before the war. He said if you leave—

**Leffler:** But I'm going back toward that month of August, let's say, and September, when the President actually makes a very key decision to go through the UN route and to try to once again find means of getting the inspectors back.

**Edelman:** We had a big debate about that internally because a lot of us actually were worried that if we went back to the UN we'd get something less than what we already had. We already had 16 resolutions that were very powerful resolutions. My view was that Saddam was in material breach. That was the big debate we had with Powell and State. They said we can't get the others to agree it's a material breach. My view was we say it's a material breach, it's on the books, and we go. We do whatever we think we have to do to make good on what the UN has told us to do. But obviously others had a different view. Then the question became, once we made the decision to go to the UN, how could we make sure that we get enough in the resolution—which was 1441, I think it was.

**Leffler:** Yes, 1441, or a regime of inspection and a process—

**Edelman:** Yes, that was sufficient.

**Leffler:** That could provide assurance that there actually were no weapons of mass destruction or—

**Edelman:** I thought, and I think others thought, that if we get enough in that inspection regime it will ultimately bring him down, sort of like Milošević. Eventually you put enough—If it's intrusive enough and it creates enough of an incentive for people to say, "Look, we've got to get rid of this guy because look what it is imposing on the country," you might end up with something short of a U.S. military invasion.

**Riley:** One more and then I have to intrude, because we've got lunch waiting for us.

**Bakich:** With these short-of-war-Saddam options that you're talking about, this process—Is it going through the formal interagency—?

**Edelman:** Yes.

**Bakich:** So there's paper on this, there are—

**Edelman:** Yes, the interagency process—We had this paper, what does Iraq look like? We had a lot of stuff about what needs to be done, what do we need from inspections. There was a ton of stuff that got done in this interagency process on a variety of things. One of the things that bothers me the most is that there has been so much focus on the WMD intelligence failure. In fact, I think the intelligence failure was much bigger and much more colossal in the sense that if you take something like Michael Gordon and Bernie Trainor's book *Cobra II*, which I think is one of the better books written on this stuff—and Michael is a friend and I have very high regard for him as a journalist. You read that book and you see what the intelligence community was telling the military and the civilians, and almost everything is wrong about Iraq.

It's not just that they missed the WMD thing somehow. By the way, on the WMD, if you read some of the stuff that has come out of the Iraqi Perspectives Project from the captured documents in the Harmony database, all the Iraqi general officers thought that Saddam had WMD. It wasn't just neocons. It was all the Iraqi officers and they all just believed that *I don't have it because he doesn't trust me enough to give it to me, but the guy in the next unit must have it*. So they all thought that he had it.

I've just been reading the debriefings of Saddam and I talked to some of the different people who debriefed him because there were a variety—there were the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] guys and then there were the CIA guys; there were different teams that debriefed him. I still don't know that we know all of the story here. When you think about Saddam and the debriefing saying, "Oh, yes, I didn't have any WMD"—this was a guy who was awaiting trial. What benefit to him would it have been to say, "Oh, yes, I have WMD, but we buried it" or "I sent it to Syria"? He had obvious motive to dissemble. Yet some people are taking all of this as the literal truth.

**Leffler:** Just so—

**Edelman:** I think we still don't know completely what the hell happened with all of it. We know he had it.

**Leffler:** What was the intelligence failure that was even more colossal?

**Edelman:** They told us that they had these sources, the DB/Rockstars [DB = CIA designator for Iraq] and that all the generals were going to turn their turrets around and not contest the military when we came in. That was all wrong. We were told that—nobody told us that Saddam was not going to actually try and fight with a conventional force but use the Fedayeen Saddam to fight an unconventional war. I mean, there were all these great comments in the *Cobra II* book of General

[William] Wallace and others saying, “Jesus, this isn’t the war they told me I was going to be fighting. What the hell is going on here?”

They told us that the police would be reliable once the senior Ba’athist leadership was removed and that they could provide security behind the lines as our lines move forward. The police turned out to be a completely corrupt and hollow institution. We didn’t know anything about Iraq, in my view. Part of it was—and this had a political repercussion—they didn’t tell us the most important thing, which was—It’s not only what they told us was wrong, Mel. It’s some of the things they didn’t tell us that were important.

So a big fight interagency about should we recognize the INC as a government in exile? No, we’re not going to do that. Powell and Armitage and CIA say the INC doesn’t stand for anything; they’re exiles. We need to rely on political leaders from inside the country. What they didn’t tell us was that Saddam had so totally atomized Iraqi society that there were no leaders inside who could amount to anything. The interesting thing post-Saddam—and we’re now 14 years in—who are the leaders? All the exiles. They’re all exiles. All of them were out of the country under Saddam. Nobody who was in the country under Saddam is in a highly senior position.

**Leffler:** I’m just curious given what you just said, “We didn’t know anything. There was so little that we knew,” do you think there was then too much confidence among all of you who made decisions that you *did* know?

**Edelman:** Fair, but in our defense, we thought we knew because we were relying on what the intelligence community told us. This is I think one of the great ironies of the accusations against Cheney. The accusations against Cheney are that he was trying to shape the intelligence community and he was forcing them to come to conclusions they didn’t agree with. That’s all nonsense as far as I can tell from my involvement in it. Actually, he was the closest student of intelligence of anybody in the administration. If you can fault him for anything it’s that he took the intelligence too seriously and that he wasn’t skeptical enough of it. Me too; we all were. But at some level radical skepticism of the intelligence community is probably not a good place to be either, because we now see what that looks like.

**Leffler:** We should come back, but a key question here, really a key question, is were you guys really working as a result of intelligence or were you working out of a result of predilections?

**Riley:** I can let you think about that one.

**Leffler:** That’s the big issue in the entire literature.

**Edelman:** I need to respond to that one. You point out to me a single decision maker who is not operating from some set of predilections.

**Leffler:** Of course, we all do.

**Edelman:** We all have some set of ideas that help us organize reality. When you get all this flood of stuff from the intelligence community, you have to have some construct for looking at it. So, did we make some assumptions? Yes. We assumed he had WMD because that’s what the

intelligence community had been telling us, because he had used it both on Iranians and on his own population, because he was threatening to use it. He said he was going to burn all of Israel. So that was a matter of concern for us.

The one thing we didn't talk about, how this is connected to 9/11—

**Riley:** We're coming back to that.

**Edelman:** Why we needed to resolve this after 9/11, which is the part of this discussion that never gets talked about. What is the biggest complaint that bin Laden has in his fatwas? It's not the Palestinians; they're like at the bottom. It's about the desecration of the land of the holy mosques by the presence of infidels in his territory. Why were those infidels there? Cheney, when he went to talk to King Fahd [Bin Abdulaziz al Saud] in 1990, tells him we're going to go, we're going to complete the mission and we're going to leave. But we couldn't, because as long as Saddam was there we couldn't leave and the Saudis didn't want us to leave.

So we had this presence in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia that was driving the recruitment for al-Qaeda, and as long as we were there that was going to continue to be a huge problem. The only way to get them out of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was to get rid of Saddam, to end the problem, to get it to the point where it was no longer a regional security threat. That's one of the things that drove us. Was that a predilection? Yes. But it was based on I think reasonable inferences from the intelligence and the circumstances we found.

It is also the reason, by the way, that I think the Frank Harvey thing is compelling. President Gore would have faced that quandary as well. He would have had to face how do I get these guys the hell out of Saudi Arabia so I can stop giving a talking point to bin Laden with all these young Muslim men around the world. I think it was going to be a problem for anybody, not just us.

**Riley:** I'm going to hit the pause button and we'll come back to this.

[BREAK]

**Riley:** Are you set?

**Edelman:** I'm ready.

**Riley:** I'm going to have to drive this back in the timeline because we jumped around a little bit.

**Edelman:** I apologize.

**Riley:** No, no, it's fine, because anybody using the transcript will be able to follow it, but I did want to ask—I was a little confused about a question that Mel had posed to you and I'm not sure that I got this right. Your sense about the occurrence of 9/11, is that a sign of a failure?



**Edelman:** On the part of the Bush administration?

**Riley:** Yes.

**Edelman:** No. I think—This is a complex question. It became highly politicized, I think, because of the 9/11 Commission and the partisanship of the various investigations and people's concern about blame being lodged in different places, which was so great, for instance, that Sandy Berger felt compelled to scissor-up material from the National Archives related to this issue. So my own view was—and I know there is this whole controversy about the PDB [presidential daily brief] item in August of 2001 that talked about some of this stuff.

My recollection of this is that I, for instance, mentioned I got the briefing from Clarke about al-Qaeda. It was not that anybody was unaware that al-Qaeda was out there. We'd had the *Cole* in the fall of 2000. That investigation was still going on inside the Navy about what had happened. So there was not any lack of attention to it. There was a lot of attention to it in June and July when all the intel was coming in about an impending attack. But I think what people miss is that the bulk of that intelligence was suggesting that there was going to be an attack, not in the continental United States, but somewhere in the region, which of course is what we had experienced in East Africa, Khobar Towers, all this kind of stuff.

There was a lot of focus on the G-8 [Group of 8] summit, which I think was in Genoa that year. So there was a tremendous amount of focus on the security for the G-8 summit and how they were going to do that. I think part of it was because Genoa was a port, that was part of it, where they were on boats. So there was a very complicated security question.

Then of course August came around and everybody was on vacation. We came back in September. I very distinctly recall on September 10th, as I went home for the night, bumping into Zal Khalilzad, who was the Senior Director for the Middle East, who had been my colleague in the Pentagon in Bush 41, where he had been Policy Planning Chief. But I had known Zal for years because he'd been on the Policy Planning staff at State when I was on the Soviet desk and we worked the whole Afghan issue together.

Ahmed Shah Massoud had been assassinated on the 9th. I bumped into Zal and we were saying, "What do you think that's about? What's up with that?" We were just sort of exchanging notes and we didn't think really very much of it. The next day, of course, was 9/11. I think a Gore administration again would have been confronted with a lot of the same—Actually, it would have been much worse for them. I think there would be much more hell to pay for a Gore administration because that would have been seen as the ninth year of Clinton. They had all this stuff in East Africa, why didn't they do more? I think they would have been really excoriated had it happened on their watch.

I think in our case we were still getting organized, in part because—This is another fact I think is not appreciated, which is that the transition was truncated because of the contested election. Even though Bush had ordered Cheney and Libby to go forward with the transition even while the legal wrangling was going on, the reality was it was hard to do much until that was resolved. Then I think the case was resolved by the Supreme Court on the 20th of December or something?

**Perry:** Twelfth or thirteenth.

**Edelman:** But I mean, immediately we're in the Christmas and New Year's holidays. So effectively the administration had about a three-week transition, which is really way too short. I actually sometimes think now that we need to go back to a March 4th inauguration, because you need actually more transition time, not less, to staff up a government under modern circumstances. But people were barely in place on September 11th; you barely had everybody in place.

**Riley:** So the process issues we were talking about earlier, you don't credit those with compounding the problem?

**Edelman:** I don't think it would have made much difference. Before he left the government, Dick Clarke went out and actually briefed on all this after September 11th about what we had done. We had taken reasonable precautions. Although it is true that that PDB piece said that they might fly planes into buildings, we had plenty of evidence of massive hijacking—the Khalid Sheikh Mohammed plot from the Philippines in the late '90s. This was just outside people's experience; nobody had anticipated they would do this.

**Leffler:** Whether rightly or wrongly, of course, in terms of the process issues, Dick Clarke's key claim is that a lot more could have been done. I think that analytically speaking somebody needs to systematically look at all the particulars that he said should have been done. One of the things, of course, in terms of process was he was very critical of Condi Rice and Hadley for not expediting the decision making, such as arming the Predators and things of that sort. So I don't think that anyone would make a claim that if you had done all those things you would have prevented 9/11, but I think it certainly would have had a different impact on the people who I suspect knew they had not done everything.

**Edelman:** As I said, my view of Dick Clarke is a little—I have a kind of acerbic view of Dick.

**Riley:** That's not unique.

**Edelman:** I suspect you've heard that from others. Look, he wrote his book after he left the administration under not very happy circumstances. He didn't get to be the czar of all cyber, which he wanted to be. I thought his testimony before the 9/11 Commission was a cheap shot when he said, "your government failed you." He certainly didn't say that when he went out and briefed people in September of 2001. Also, by the way, if anybody failed them it was Dick Clarke, and it was not, "I failed you." It was this kind of thing. So I don't have a whole lot of sympathy for that kind of—The other thing is there is a giant contradiction in the heart of Clarke's book, which I find amazing that no one has ever pointed out.

He spends the first hundred pages of the book excoriating the intelligence community for being so stupid about al-Qaeda because the only person in the U.S. government, the only Cassandra who was crying out for more organized action against al-Qaeda, was Dick Clarke, and the intelligence community was stupid and moronic and they didn't understand anything about al-Qaeda. Then he says, oh, and on 9/11 Bush said to me, find out if Iraq had anything to do with al-Qaeda in the attack, and Clarke says OK. He says I called the CIA and they said, no, they had nothing to do with it. Case closed. Really? There's a giant contradiction there. They didn't know

anything about al-Qaeda, but they must have known everything about Iraq's relationship with al-Qaeda.

So I take Dick's stuff with a boulder of salt.

**Leffler:** The intelligence community knew a whole lot about al-Qaeda.

**Edelman:** Right.

**Leffler:** They didn't know about 9/11, but they knew a whole lot about al-Qaeda.

**Edelman:** And George—to his credit—put CIA really on a war footing already in the late '90s and had trouble getting—He had trouble getting President Clinton to pull the trigger any number of times on taking shots on bin Laden. Look, do I think that means that the Clinton administration is responsible for 9/11? No. I think bin Laden is responsible for 9/11. We sometimes attribute an omnipotence to the U.S. government as if we can solve every problem, and we can't. That was one of them.

**Leffler:** This gets into the whole issue of relationship between al-Qaeda and Saddam or Saddam and al-Qaeda and other terrorists. One of the interesting things about this big loose-leaf book is about half of it is actually comprised of documents from your office trying to justify—

**Edelman:** My response to the OIG [Office of the Inspector General]?

**Leffler:** Right, which is about half of this book, trying to justify Doug Feith's policy, Counterterrorism Evaluation Group. So I'd like to ask you this. What precisely do you think Doug and his assistants and perhaps Rumsfeld and perhaps you guys thought about the relationship of Saddam to al-Qaeda or Saddam to other terrorists? What were you thinking at that time and to what extent was it a very minority view or not?

**Edelman:** Well, let me start with the intelligence community. The intelligence community's view was that al-Qaeda and Saddam had nothing to do with one another. Saddam was a secular Sunni Ba'athist and Osama was a Sunni religious extremist, fundamentalist, and never the twain shall meet. My view was that was a pretty big blinder for the intelligence community about the potential for a relationship between Saddam and al-Qaeda of some kind.

By the way, the intelligence community also had the view that between Sunni and Shi'a never the twain shall meet and therefore there couldn't possibly be any kind of connections between al-Qaeda and the Iranian regime. There's now a new book out called *The Exile* about Osama's time in Pakistan in Abbottabad, and apparently it's full of stuff about the collusion between al-Qaeda and Iran, the safe haven that Iran gave al-Qaeda, and which, by the way, is no secret to some of us who were in government at the time, because there were clearly connections.

The 9/11 Commission actually suggested that there was an operational relationship—again, this is not news—between al-Qaeda and Iran even if there wasn't enough intelligence to say with any certainty that there was a relationship with al-Qaeda.

So, a couple of data points. One: there were huge celebrations in Baghdad after 9/11, and Saddam and his sons were clearly rejoicing in the giant black eye that Bush's son had gotten from 9/11. Did it merit looking into? I think we would have been delinquent in our responsibilities had we not looked into it. I personally wasn't involved in all that. Doug, as you say, had the Counterterrorism—whatever it was.

**Leffler:** The Counterterrorism Evaluation Group.

**Edelman:** The Counterterrorism Evaluation Group and later the Office of Special Plans, which obviously should have been renamed the Office of Ordinary Plans, because it would have had the wonderful acronym of OOPs, which would have been more apropos of the entire affair. But look, why did I do what I did? I think your question might really be, Mel, why did I spend all my time defending Doug since I had no responsibility for this?

What Doug had his people do was pull the string on a whole bunch of intelligence to try and see what kind of connections existed between al-Qaeda and Iraq. As I said, I think it would have been irresponsible for someone not to have done that, and the intelligence community clearly wasn't inclined to do it. For their own reasons, they had their own predilections and blinders that made it—

**Leffler:** Let me just ask a technical question. Reading the response, is there a legal issue why you could not do this? It seems that there is a legal issue here.

**Edelman:** That's the problem. All of this became incredibly politicized. His group did their thing. They sent some of their memos around. The IC hated all of this. The IC hated this in part because they don't like anybody grading their homework, literally. Paul got into enormous trouble as Deputy Secretary of Defense because he used to scrawl—as the former dean—grades on intelligence papers. A lot of them were like D, F, which really infuriated the analysts. By the way, not a smart thing to do, Paul. But he wasn't wrong.

**Riley:** We won't let him read this until you let him.

**Edelman:** A lot of the analytic products sometimes lacked rigorous logic. I in particular found a lot of the products very annoying, because I wanted to see the underlying intelligence that supported these judgments. My view was I spent a lot of time before I came into government reading documents and jumping to conclusions. I can jump to conclusions as easily as you can. Show me the evidence and then let me make up my mind about what I think, whether your case is correct or not correct.

So when I first came back—This became a big issue for Senator [Carl] Levin, who was the then ranking member of the Senate Armed Services Committee. He asked for an IG [Inspector General] investigation. What's not frequently appreciated about the IGs is that they answer really to two masters. They answer to the department, but they also answer to the Congress. So they're kind of subject to political pressures.

When I read the IG report, I really thought it was a very deficient piece of work. What I was worried about was the issue you put your finger on, Mel. I believe it is the responsibility of policy makers to intelligently question intelligence. It's sort of the analogue on the intelligence

side of what Eliot Cohen calls the unequal dialogue in civil-military relations. You need to be probing the analysts for what are the assumptions they're operating on? How did they come to this? Where is the evidence? Why do they believe this evidence but not that evidence?

When we get to the discussion of the Powell presentation—when we were involved in OVP in putting together the alternative presentation to the initial one that John McLaughlin briefed the President on in December of 2002, we had enormous—We in OVP, although we were separate from what Doug was doing, had collected enormous amounts of intelligence because we pulled the string as well, asking our briefers, “Well, what's the antecedent to this? Show us this evidence.” We had huge voluminous files. When all of that stuff gets declassified, I hope people start going through it, because we're looking to see what kind of connections existed, and there clearly was evidence of stuff. The issue was what did it mean? What did it represent? That was the question. I think people of good faith can come to different conclusions on was there a relationship or wasn't there. But what we were trying to do was essentially be part of that unequal dialogue.

What I was worried about with the IG report was the IG report took a standard from inside DIA [Defense Intelligence Agency] for how you should handle alternative intelligence analysis, and tried to apply it to the policy makers and said they violated this DIA standard. If they had been DIA analysts, they would have been violating the DIA standard. My view is that's not an—What I didn't want is to saddle my successors with the inability to have an Under Secretary say, “I want you to go and pull all the intelligence on this problem and really dig into it and look at it.” We would have been essentially forbidden to do that and then do a memo to the Secretary. I didn't think that was right as a steward of the position to leave my successors burdened with.

So I asked Michael Mobbs, who had worked for Doug and Abe [Abram] Shulsky, to put together those responses. I said I want to fight every contention. Every place we think they've made a mistake; I want to point it out. I wanted to set the record that we rejected the notion that policy makers could not question intelligence, come to their own conclusions about intelligence, ask people to look at the intelligence and come to an alternative point of view from the intelligence community.

I mean, the IC, a lot of people in the IC, not all of them, but some of them have the view that their hands are touched by God, they're the high priests of intelligence and only they have the skill to interpret intelligence, which I think is an insult to the intelligence of every policy maker.

**Leffler:** How would you summarize the views of Doug and his subordinates as well as, let's say, Scooter—Scooter's view may have been a little bit different. But how would you summarize their views and to what—?

**Edelman:** You mean on this question?

**Leffler:** On this question of the links. I think it's a mistake—correct me if I'm wrong—that the only issue was the links between Saddam and al-Qaeda. I think they were actually interested as well in the links between Saddam and terrorist groups writ large, which is very—

**Edelman:** Absolutely, which is a different question, and which also is—Again, that seems to me to be like incontestable. We know Abu Nidal, until he met with death from natural causes, lead

poisoning in Baghdad, was resident there. We know that Saddam was awarding the families of suicide bombers on the West Bank \$25,000 bonuses. There's no question that there were linkages with terrorist organizations, as there were between most Arab states and terrorist organizations.

We also know, because we've got the stuff from the Harmony database, we know that there were other kinds of connections. Mel, I've shared with you the five-volume study that was done by IDA [Institute for Defense Analyses] on the connections between Saddam and terror. There are a lot of people who have written about this, including Joel Rayburn, who is now on the NSC staff, but there clearly was—and others have written about it. The Israeli scholar Ofra Bengio has written about it. Saddam became more religiously oriented in the '90s. "Allahu akbar" was added to the Iraqi flag. There were conferences with Islamist extremists in Baghdad, which obviously couldn't have gone on without the knowledge and/or acquiescence of the Mukhabarat and the regime.

Some of them involved al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya, which was the Egyptian Islamic jihad, which was headed by [Ayman al-] Zawahiri at the time. Now, when you would present this kind of stuff to the intelligence community they would say, "Oh, yes, well, but that was before Zawahiri swore bayat to bin Laden, so it's not really al-Qaeda." OK, it's not really al-Qaeda, but there clearly is a pattern of connections here. You have to always assume, in this kind of wilderness and mirrors, that whatever you're seeing is only the tip of an iceberg. There's obviously more where this lies.

So trying to put it together and to assemble everything we understood about both al-Qaeda but also more broadly the connections to terrorism seems to me to have been logical, appropriate, not in any way forcing the IC to come to some conclusion that they didn't agree with. It's alternative analysis. By the way, the Agency itself, now in the wake of the [Charles] Robb-[Laurence] Silberman Commission, accepts that it needs to have internal alternative analysis, red cells and all the rest of this. In some sense you can think of what Doug was doing as a red cell. [REDACTED]

**Leffler:** My questions weren't to suggest that he was wrong, because actually I think he was correct in trying to pursue—

**Edelman:** But it became very politicized.

**Leffler:** Right, and what frames your answer, and I guess there was a legal technical issue and it frames to this day much of the debate and it's around that quotation, whether there was a "mature" "operational" relationship.

**Edelman:** Right.

**Leffler:** Which frankly to an analyst, whether it be a scholar retrospectively or even to an analyst at the time, doesn't strike me as the right question, whether there is a mature—because if you're

trying to deal with imponderables and contingencies, you're not going to wait to confirm that there is a mature operational relationship.

**Edelman:** Because it's too late.

**Leffler:** It's too late.

**Edelman:** I agree. That's precisely—This was the accusation about pre-9/11, that we didn't connect the dots. So this is an effort to say OK, they didn't connect the dots on that one; let's look at a lot of dots and see whether we can connect them. I agree completely. But the way this got politicized was—When I came back from Turkey to succeed Doug, I went to have the first of what my wife called my three discourtesy calls with Senator Levin. I went in for the first one with Senator Levin and he was threatening at that point to put a hold on my nomination, which he ultimately did. It was because he was trying to get some of the documents from Feith.

He and [John] Rockefeller had asked for this IG investigation from the intelligence community point of view. He had had an exchange of letters with Doug that was really—With each round it got worse and worse. I mean, they were talking past each other and a lot of invective, so I went to see him. He had done a report on the Office of Counterterrorism Evaluation Group and Office of Special Plans. He said, "Have you read my report?" I said, "No, Senator, I haven't read it." He said, "Then there's no point in meeting, you can leave." I said, "Well, I did just fly 3,000 miles from Turkey to have this meeting, Senator." He said, "You need to go off and read my report; there's no point in meeting otherwise."

I said, "Well, I'm familiar with the issues. But I'll go back and read it if you want." He said, "Well, OK, you can stay here." So he opens up a folder and he says, "What would you say to this article in the Turkish press that you were like an Imperial Proconsul and ordering the government of Turkey around while you were Ambassador?" This clearly had been part of some Google search that his staff had done.

I said, "Well, I think what I would say to that, Senator, is that I know where that quotation comes from. It comes from a newspaper that's about three steps to the left of Osama bin Laden. It's one of the Islamist newspapers in Turkey." He said, "What about this quotation where you're quoted here as saying the neocons have been Turkey's biggest friends in Washington?" I said, "Yes, I did say that, Senator, and it was in response to a question about the neocons punishing Turkey because of Turkey's role on March 1st of 2003 in not allowing the Fourth Infantry Division into the country. I was merely pointing out as a matter of fact that Doug Feith had been a paid representative of the government of Turkey, that Richard Perle had been a longtime advocate of Turkey's interests and Paul Wolfowitz, et cetera. So if you want to accuse the neocons of punishing Turkey—" He said, "OK, well, let's move on." This went on and on for like 45 minutes.

Then I went back and I read his report. I went in to see him. My response to him was pretty similar to my response to the IG report. I said, "Look, Senator, I've read your report and here is my basic proposition. No policy office should be engaged in intelligence work. That is to say nobody working in the policy office should be in a foreign country collecting intelligence or engaging in paramilitary activity or whatnot. But I have to tell you that if I'm confirmed I don't

want to be in a position of not being able to look at the intelligence and call it into question.” Then I quoted a speech he had made on the floor in which he said exactly the same thing.

He said, “That’s right, of course, I agree with that.” He said, “By the way, you do a much better job of defending Feith than he does of himself.” So it was another kind of inconclusive meeting. Then he put a hold on me. Then I got recess appointed. I asked to see him again. I said, “You know, Senator, I’d like to come up and see you and I’d like to see you alone, actually, without anybody from legislative affairs minding me, and frankly without anybody on your staff there, just the two of us.” He said fine.

So I came up and I said, “Senator, I can’t help but feeling that our relationship has gotten off on a bad foot here. I regret that. I actually—I’m a nonpolitical career Foreign Service officer.” That’s true; I didn’t consider myself a political person at that point. I said, “My approach to national defense is that it’s not a partisan issue.” He said, “I agree. I don’t think it’s partisan either.” I said, “Look, I really would like to have the kind of relationship with you—I don’t want to have an epistolary relationship. I would really prefer if you have a problem with something we’re doing that you call me and I will drop what I’m doing and I will come up to see you and I’ll explain to you what we’re doing and if there’s a problem we can try and work it out. But I don’t want to get involved in long exchanges of correspondence about this to no point.” I said, “That’s the way I hope we can work together.”

He looked at me and he said, “I like you, Eric.” He said, “I’ve heard great things about you from Strobe Talbott and John Hamre and Stu Eizenstat. I didn’t like your predecessor; I didn’t like Feith. I like you. But,” he said, “I want my fucking documents.” That’s a quote, literally. He said, “I want my fucking documents and you’re the only way I can get them. It’s not personal.”

I said, “OK, Senator, I get it.” I said, “If I could give you the documents, Senator, I would hand them to you. There is not a pony in that pile of shit. I would be happy to give them to you.” I said, “The problem is a lot of these documents originate with other agencies; some of them are NSC documents so they’re covered by executive privilege. It’s not even in my power to give them to you if I wanted to, and I do want to. I’d like to get them out of the way because there’s nothing—I’ve reviewed them all and there’s nothing in there that I’m worried about you knowing. I’d be happy for you to have it all. But I can’t control it.”

So off I went and I had my recess appointment, which actually, by the way, gets to an issue that you flag in here, which is the lovely Doug Jehl article on me in the *New York Times* that came out at the time of Scooter’s indictment. Interestingly this was not a subject of any of my courtesy calls either with Levin or Chairman [Mark] Warner. The issue on that is—Doug Jehl called my office after the indictment came out and, although the indictment didn’t mention my name, there were things that were taken out of my testimony to the grand jury, where I was identified by title, so it was pretty clear who it was.

Jehl had read the indictment and he wanted me to comment on it. The last thing I wanted to do was comment on—get involved in a discussion with a journalist about—an indictment where I might be testifying in front of a court and all that. So I refused to comment. So he wrote the story saying that I—he then called Levin and Warner and said, “Oh, did he tell you that he was part of the investigation of Plame?” No, he never told us. Well, I had been interviewed by the FBI both



about the Plame investigation, and about the Steve Rosen-Kelth Weissman AIPAC [American Israel Public Affairs Committee] investigation. I mean, I'd been interviewed by the FBI for a zillion leak investigations.

In my SF-86 [standard form], and when I was interviewed by the FBI for my SF-86 to come back to the job—which the committee had—it's all in there. Yes, I was interviewed by the FBI on this and that and the other thing. It also said that I had been told by the prosecutor's office that I was neither a subject, target, focus, or person of interest, I was purely a witness in the Plame case. It didn't occur to me to go in, in my courtesy calls with these guys, and say, "Oh, by the way, I've been interviewed by the FBI on the following occasions about various investigations that are ongoing." I did call after the story appeared, I called Levin and called Warner and said, "Look, I'm sorry that this has created embarrassment for you guys, but it's in my SF-86, here's what it is." Both of them were "Oh, that's fine. We don't care about that."

I was held by Levin until I think roughly February of 2006, at which point Senator [William] Frist dropped a cloture petition, invoked cloture on my nomination, which is why I'm really terribly opposed to all these changes in the filibuster rules, having had some personal experience with it. Levin actually went to the floor and said, "I don't have anything against Ambassador Edelman, he's a fine civil servant," and I was confirmed by unanimous consent. But when people ask me do I miss government service, that's the part that I don't miss.

**Riley:** I want to draw you back in the timeline again. We haven't talked about 9/11. I don't know whether you want to tell us your account of what happened on that day or you feel like that has been covered other places.

**Edelman:** It has been covered in a whole lot of places. I gave Jon Karl a long interview and Evan Thomas in *Newsweek* and whatnot. The long and short of it—There was one slight mistake, by the way, in here: on 9/11 I was actually in Scooter Libby's office. There had been a spate of leaks over the weekend about Powell, and Powell's office was very angry about it. Hadley had called me and said Armitage had called to complain. I was in talking to Scooter about who was responsible and I was vigorously defending OVP and saying we had nothing to do with this, which I'm firmly convinced we did not. I wasn't sure where it was coming from.

At that point Jenny Mayfield, his secretary, came in and said a plane has just hit the World Trade Center. So we said is that an accident or is that terrorism? She said, "We don't know yet." We turned on the TV in the office and we kept talking. Then the second plane hit. We looked at each other: "That's not an accident." So he went off to join the Vice President and I went down to Condi Rice's staff meeting, which was happening at that moment.

Condi was then called out of that staff meeting by the President; she had to take a call from the President in Florida. Hadley sidled up to me and said, "You know, the Vice President is down in the bunker, and you need to go down and tell him Dick Clarke and I think he needs to relocate to a secure location," one of the evacuation sites for continuity of government. He didn't actually give me a note; it was an oral message. I think the interview said note, so just for the record it was an oral message, not a note.

So I actually was badged as emergency staff for continuity of government purposes. In case Scooter wasn't around and the Vice President had to be evacuated, I would have been the national security person to be evacuated. But I had no idea where the Presidential Emergency Operations Center [PEOC] was; I'd never been down to it, so it took me a while to work my way down there and I got stopped by the uniformed Secret Service at several places. All of them had their Uzis out. Again, I have the right badge, but, "Who are you? Why are you here?" They finally called into the PEOC and said, "Eric Edelman is here," and they said, "Let him in, for God's sake."

I went in and the Vice President was there, Scooter was there, a lot of people. Nick Calio was there, I think, who was the head of White House legislative affairs. Secretary [Norman] Mineta, the Secretary of Transportation, was down there.

**Leffler:** What was it like?

**Edelman:** Condi came later; she was not there yet. It was extremely tense. While we were there—I think shortly before I got there the planes hit the World Trade Center. The timeline is a little bit vague in my head because it took me a while to get down there. Then once I was there the television was on. We were getting reports of car bombs by the State Department and elsewhere; those all turned out to be false reports.

So I went and gave Cheney the message and he said: "No, I'm not going to leave here." He said, "I've established communications with the President here. If I leave now and I take a helicopter, it will be 45 minutes before we have communication again. That's too much time to lose. This thing was built to withstand a nuclear blast. I'm going to stay here, so you go back and tell Hadley and Clarke that."

So I said OK and I started to leave, and he said, "Where are you going?" I said, "I'm going to tell them you're not leaving." He said, "No, no, stay here and call them. Scooter and I are going to need you down here." So I said OK. I called Hadley and I relayed the message. This is one of the things about Dick Clarke that really annoys me; he complains that when he came down there—because he came down there as well—And Mrs. Cheney was there; Lynne Cheney was there. She was actually pretty upset because I think she had just spoken to Ted Olson and Barbara Olson had been on one of the planes that had flown out of D.C. [District of Columbia] As time went on, we had a lot of trouble with the telecommunications down there. The idea that we were going to run a nuclear war from this place was pretty unbelievable.

Clarke was having a CSG [Counterterrorism Security Group] meeting or whatever it was and Cheney asked me to monitor the meeting. I tried to do that, but literally on the phone line that I had into their meeting, which was just going on upstairs in the Sit Room or one of the conference rooms off the Sit Room—it sounded like I was in the bottom of a swimming pool: a lot of echo, a lot of static, voices covering one another. After a while I just gave up on it. We took it off the screen and put CNN [Cable News Network] on because at least we could hear CNN. That was at least giving us some information that was helpful to have.

Clarke came down and was very outraged that we weren't following his meeting and that we had CNN on and all this crap. Cheney was incredibly focused. I don't think I've ever seen a person

concentrate as hard as he was concentrating that day. He was preternaturally calm, which I think, at least for me, had a pretty calming influence, because you don't want to look like a chicken without a head when there is somebody who is sitting there—

**Leffler:** How would you define the nature of his concentration? What was he concentrating on? Who did this? What's the next—? Probably in these few minutes there was the Pentagon too.

**Edelman:** Right, the Pentagon got hit. We knew—I think it happened before I actually got down there. I think we only started to get the reports after I got down there. We had a SVTS [Secure Video Teleconference System] with Secretary Rumsfeld, who had been on the scene actually policing things.

**Leffler:** Was the thought where else right now?

**Edelman:** First of all, it was—Even before “who did it” was the question of “what is this?” How big is this? What else is out there that we don't know about? He and the President talked and made the decision to ground all aviation in the United States. I remember Secretary Mineta was there and he had a legal pad and he had a direct line to the FAA [Federal Aviation Administration] operations center and he was literally taking down the tail number of every plane as it got on the deck until he could assure us that literally—I remember when he said, “OK, everything is on the ground.” I was thinking, *Wow, we literally have nothing flying in the United States*, which was like mind blowing. We had a bunch of—There were planes coming in from Europe, which weren't responding, and there was a question about whether they might have been hijacked as well.

We still had the plane that went down in Shanksville, Flight 93 was still out there. That was still out there. That was actually one of the more nerve-racking parts of this, because it was headed back to Washington is what they told us. The assumption that the military staff had made was that it was heading toward the White House. Now I think that was wrong. Having read the 9/11 Commission report, I believe they are correct and we were wrongly informed, but they were literally coming in every few minutes saying it's 20 minutes out, it's 15 minutes out, it's 12 minutes out, 10 minutes. At one point I think everybody wished, *Would you guys shut the fuck up and stop coming in here and telling us this*, because it was actually creating more tension than it was helping.

Then the flight went down and the Vice President was actually several steps ahead of everybody else in the room, I think. That's what I was saying; he was concentrating very hard. He said, to nobody in particular, but I was standing right behind him when he said it, “I think an act of heroism just took place on that plane,” before we even knew anything about the cockpit conversations or the phone calls to loved ones. We knew nothing. He just intuited that if the plane went down, it had been taken down by passengers.

I know when the first tower collapsed—You know, Scooter and I were saying how the hell did that happen? Is this like *Diehard*? Did some emergency response vehicles drive in there with explosives or something? He said, “No, I suspect what happened is that the heat of that has melted the girders. Then once that top cement floor comes down, it just pancakes down.” He had

all this experience with construction at Halliburton. He was thinking his way through all of these things ahead of us. It was really kind of remarkable.

Then it was the question of who is responsible. What do we do with the President? The President wanted to come back. With all these imponderables, with other aircraft still up in the air—We got a false report at one point that there was a threat to Air Force One that turned out to be false, but again, we didn't know that at the time.

**Bakich:** Can you describe—I don't know if you heard it, but can you describe the way the Vice President actually spoke to the President? What was his voice like? How was he phrasing things?

**Edelman:** I was present for some of the phone calls, not all of them. The most important ones that he had actually took place before I got there, which were the ones in which the President relayed to him to get combat air patrol up and if there are other planes out there and we can't force them down, shoot them down. That was the big order, which he then relayed. But he was very calm and very collected in everything he said. He was trying to be very precise about the information and he was very mindful of the old military adage that first reports are always wrong, which I'd learned early in my Foreign Service career unfortunately. So he was being very careful about what we relayed and we were checking things very carefully.

In the afternoon when Mary Matalin and Karen Hughes and I think Barbara Comstock were going out to make this public—at Justice—because the White House complex had been shut down, so they went over to Justice to have a press conference. The Vice President was very fixated on the question of making sure that no U.S. Air Force aircraft had in any way been responsible for Flight 93 going down.

He said to me, "We only have one shot at this; if we don't get the information out accurately and correctly, we will never have the confidence of the country again, so we have to be very careful. So go check with the NMCC—" Now, as it turns out, none of the aircraft that were put up were even armed, so they couldn't have shot it down, but again we didn't know that at the time. He sent me back three times to double- and triple-check it with the NMCC before he would sign off on Mary and Karen and Barbara saying nothing happened; we had nothing to do with it.

**Leffler:** Was there fear that this could be followed then or later in the day with other types of attacks on nuclear power plants? I mean, what actions were immediately taken? I think that's what Clarke was in part doing with his counter—

**Edelman:** Yes, with the CSG. There wasn't that much explicit discussion then of that, as I recall. That really started the next day when we—I mean, there was a lot of concern that there might be other elements to this attack, and it was basically trying to get our hands around this attack. Once we had all the planes down, there was a fair amount of confidence that we weren't going to have another air assault. But people were worried about what might—We didn't have enough bandwidth to even focus on that yet. We just had to get through the initial part of this.

Starting on the 12th, when we started meeting all day for several days on end, we were going through all that stuff. What could be next? What's in a second wave? There was a lot of intelligence about there is going to be a second wave of attacks. We were very focused on that. But on 9/11 itself we were more focused on getting our arms around that.

Rumsfeld proposed that we move the DEFCON [Defense Readiness Condition] up to DEFCON 3, which was only the second time I think that had happened since the Cuban Missile Crisis. I guess the other time was '73. Actually, that was when I recall that there had been some indications the Russians were having an exercise as well, a nuclear command post exercise. I told the Vice President, "We probably need to let the Russians know why we're doing this, so they don't misinterpret this as related to their exercise."

Condi was sitting there at the time and she said, "That's a good idea." She said, "I'll go call Sergei Ivanov." She called and they actually put her through to Putin, so she ended up talking to Putin.

It's hard to recapture now the sense of tension and emotion that was there. Condi was, I would say, in a kind of shock. She was really in shock. At one point she was looking at one of the television monitors outside the PEOC and we were watching videotape of the north tower coming down, which was being replayed. She said, "God, this is like your worst nightmare." I said, "Condi, this is not a dream, this is real. We really have to stay with it." She was really—She was trying to figure out what to do, as all of us were. I don't mean to single her out. There was a limit to how much you could actually productively do.

**Riley:** Sure.

**Edelman:** And everybody wanted to be doing something. Mostly we were just trying to figure out what the hell was going on and then connect with various government elements that were involved in doing stuff.

**Bakich:** Apart from the Vice President, who else do you think was operating at a very high level that day?

**Edelman:** Well, Colin was out of the country. He was in Peru and was on his way back, so Rich was running the State Department. The President wanted to come back, and the Vice President and the Secretary of Defense and others urged him not to come back immediately until we had a better idea of what was happening, because we didn't want to have him in jeopardy. It was the Vice President's idea I think that he should go to Offutt [Air Force Base], because that was again a place from which we were meant to conduct a nuclear war and he'd have communications there and be safe there. We had a secure video conference with the President that afternoon from Offutt before he came home. He got home I think around 8 or 9 o'clock at night. Then there was an NSC meeting in the PEOC, but I was kicked out because I was too junior for that, so I wasn't in there.

The President seemed actually quite calm and self-possessed as well, and Ari Fleischer and others who were traveling with him told me that he was always pretty calm and he was pretty good in the secure video conference, in the SVTS. He was pretty good, very calm, and very clear that we were going to have to approach this not as a criminal matter but as a war, one in which we had to bring all the elements of national power together, not just military intelligence, financial, et cetera. He pretty much already had in his head a bit of a template I think for the GWOT [Global War on Terror] and how he wanted to conduct it.

**Riley:** Did you get to go home that day?

**Edelman:** I did. I went home around 11:30 P.M.

**Riley:** Did you talk to your family at all during the day?

**Edelman:** No, in fact, this is one point, a sore point, that Scooter and I both had with Condi, because we were told we were not allowed to have any communications or tell anybody where we were. They did later confirm that the Vice President was in the bunker, but that was late afternoon. So we had no conversations.

I know that Scooter's wife, Harriet [Grant]; and Trish [Patricia Edelman] both were talking to one another, saying do you know where Scooter is? No. So both of them were pretty nervous about where we were, particularly because of the damage to the Pentagon and the possibility that we had gone over there, because that wouldn't have been out of the question for us to go to the Pentagon for meetings. Come to find out that Condi had called her family. I think her parents were both deceased, but aunts and uncles, calling all her family. "Oh, I'm in the bunker with the Vice President and I'm safe; we're all fine." But until about 7 or 8 o'clock at night, my wife—until I finally called her and said, "I'm OK, everything is fine; I'll be home a little later"—had no idea where we were.

**Leffler:** Were you saying during the day this is al-Qaeda?

**Edelman:** We knew it was al-Qaeda very quickly. We had a SVTS with George too, and he told us that very quickly. George also told some members of Congress, and Orrin Hatch and a couple of others actually went out and said it and said that they—told them how we knew it as well. I think they made reference to the SIGINT [signal intelligence] upon which all this was based. There was this huge groan when we saw that on CNN. We saw that on the screen and I went, "God, I can't believe these guys just did that."

**Leffler:** Was it an inevitable reaction that you decide, as you said, by that night, we're going to fight essentially a Global War on Terror? We usually accept that, that that was the inevitable response. But in some of the recent writings, Frédéric Bozo's book on the French reaction, there's this growing suggestion that other nations' governments right then were not thinking, *This is not the right response*. Was there much interaction, thinking, reevaluation? I know the President immediately thought that, and maybe as a result of thinking that nobody was going to question it. Was it instinctive and smart—both instinctive and smart—to react that way?

**Edelman:** Certainly it was instinctive. I think frankly, politically, it's hard to imagine having any other reaction. If the President had come out and said, "This is really a heinous act. The largest number of Americans killed on American soil since Pearl Harbor and we will pursue these guys and try them in the Southern District of New York once we find them," I think the public would have found that somehow insufficient to the moment.

**Leffler:** Yes, but how—

**Edelman:** At 16 years removed, just to put it in perspective, that's the same amount of time that elapsed between the end of World War II and the inauguration of John Kennedy. So the urgency of the moment and the sense of national anger—I mean, Walter Russell Mead would say this is a kind of [Andrew] Jacksonian reaction. I think it would have been very hard to channel that

productively into anything other than some kind of war. Among other things, I think, there might have been much more violence in the United States directed against Muslims had Bush not played it the way he did, which was, we're going to focus on finding these people and killing them, and oh, by the way, I'm going to go to the mosque in Washington and I'm going to make it clear that this is not a war on Islam, but a War on Terror.

**Leffler:** Other nations that are not so powerful don't react that way to terrorist attacks.

**Edelman:** Because they can't.

**Leffler:** Because they can't. Here it—Your own sense of your power is a clear determining factor here.

**Edelman:** Absolutely.

**Leffler:** Even recently, if you think about it, how did the French react to that attack—to their attack? They weren't thinking, *OK, now we've got to fight a war, we've got to mobilize, we've got to get ready*. Right? It's interesting.

**Edelman:** But they put 10,000—I was in Paris shortly after the Charlie Hebdo attack. What really struck me was all these French soldiers walking around with guns in the streets of Paris. So the President could have reacted that way and said, OK, screw *posse comitatus*, we're going to mobilize the National Guard; we're going to put troops in the street and all that. I think that would have been much more unnerving to Americans than doing what we did. I mean, some of this is national character too.

**Leffler:** Yes.

**Edelman:** And you're right I think, Mel. Some of it is because we could. I mean, if we couldn't have done it, we wouldn't. But we could. We did have global military reach and we could go after these guys. I don't—I think it was the right thing to go after the Taliban regime, which was housing these guys.

**Leffler:** For certain that's the case. But of course, as Bozo writes in his book—and he has memos from [Jacques] Chirac's conversations, he had privileged access in which allegedly, based on his memos—Chirac saying this is not the right—He wasn't opposed to Afghanistan—

**Edelman:** But Iraq.

**Leffler:** The whole—

**Edelman:** But the French also came out again in the most recent French Presidential election. The French had their own experience in Algeria.

**Leffler:** Yes, sure.

**Edelman:** That made it—Their reaction is this is going to be different because they'd gone through something like this in Algeria, and as a result—I mean, I remember in 2006 going to

meet my French counterpart, M. Michel Miraillet, and saying “Hey, Michel, we’re going to have this big counterinsurgency conference and we’d really love to have some guys come back from your side and tell us a bit about Algeria.” Oh, my God, you would have thought that I committed some great faux pas. “Oh, Eric,” he said, “I don’t think we can do that. It’s still very sensitive here. We really don’t like to talk about that.” I think they, for their own historical reasons, did not want—

**Perry:** I’m just pondering—no pun intended at all—but the trigger point from—because people always do point to the difference between the Clinton administration handling terrorism as a criminal act and this being viewed immediately as a—

**Edelman:** Although not George Tenet, as I pointed out. George was saying—had told his staff—“We’re at war,” and he put CIA and the CTC [Counterterrorism Center] on pretty much of a war footing. He just couldn’t get the rest of the administration—

**Perry:** Exactly, so the executive branch goes down the criminal justice route. I’m trying—Obviously the magnitude of this and the number of people lost and the brazenness of it, but I’m thinking of Andy Card saying to President Bush in the school room when the second tower is hit but before there’s any collapse—so before—

**Edelman:** Is the United States under attack?

**Perry:** Yes, it almost seems like just from the very fact that it is those two towers, that we know it’s terrorism, but it seems that it just very quickly goes from it’s a terrorist act to America is at war. Because we were, so why else would you call it anything but that?

**Edelman:** In October, six weeks after the attack, Vice President Cheney had to give a speech in New York, so we went up to New York and we went down to Ground Zero. This was six weeks after the attack. It was an overpowering experience. I mean, even for people who have seen films of the collapse of the towers and all that, this was like a five-block-square area that looked like it had been the subject of a nuclear attack. Everything was just obliterated: some girders sticking out of the ground, some girders in neighboring buildings had flown into them. The smell—It was still burning—I mean, the debris was still burning six weeks later. We could smell it as we came down, as our helicopter from LaGuardia—we landed the 757 in LaGuardia and we took a helicopter down the Hudson River to Ground Zero.

I grew up in Manhattan. When we crossed the George Washington Bridge, 150 blocks away, we could smell it. You could smell the burning and the fire. It’s hard to—It was an attack. I mean, what is a fully fueled airplane flown into a building? How is that different from a missile? It’s what a missile is. It’s like they fired missiles that had human hostages on them into our buildings. They had declared war on us.

**Riley:** Let me ask you—

**Edelman:** So we were—That’s what bin Laden’s fatwa is; it’s a declaration of war on the crusaders and infidels. They had been at war with us for a number of years. It was only on 9/11 that we decided that we were going to be at war with them; I think that was perfectly appropriate.



I don't second-guess that, notwithstanding my affection for the French or the fact that I have the Légion d'Honneur.

**Riley:** Tell us what it looked like from your perspective to see the conversion of the United States government from a peacetime footing to a wartime footing, and how was it affecting your day-to-day existence in the White House?

**Perry:** And could I just add too, how is it affecting the process you described to us before lunch, the rather dysfunctional process and the bureaucratic tribalism?

**Edelman:** Well, the bureaucratic tribalism is an ongoing condition. It just is.

**Riley:** So it doesn't get remedied by—

**Edelman:** No.

**Bakich:** No hiatus?

**Edelman:** There was probably a brief period where it—No, actually there's no hiatus, when you think about it. Right away Bush is asking the question what about Iraq? Powell and Armitage are saying no, no, not Iraq. There's the meeting at Camp David where they discuss whether they should go after Afghanistan or Iraq and the decision is made to go after the former first, which I think was the correct decision. Tony Blair is playing a part in this too, because he's talking to the President about all these things.

The way it affects your day is like I worked continuously until well after October 7th, when we launched the first strikes on Afghanistan. We didn't have any time off. We were working very long days in the Sit Room, meeting from pretty much 9 o'clock in the morning until 4 or 5 o'clock, and then you had a couple of hours to clean up whatever other business you have and then go home and go to sleep and start over the next morning. So it was an incredibly intense work rhythm. Bob Gates actually said to me, after he came back into government, that there were a couple of things that really impressed him. One was that he left as DCI [Director of Central Intelligence] in early 1993 and then came back as SecDef 13 years later. He said he was really stunned by the velocity of issues, the number of issues. In the Cold War everything was like a lesser included case of the U.S.–Soviet thing. Now you were going to meetings about al-Qaeda, Iraq, Afghanistan, what was going on in Sahel, conflict diamonds, SARS [Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome], H1N1 [swine flu]. It was on and on and on. It was like too much stuff going on.

The second thing he said was the degree—It struck him the degree to which the government was traumatized—not the government, the people in government—were traumatized by 9/11 and the concern that all of us I think had that OK, this happened, but we can't let this happen again on our watch. We've got to stop any—That's another reason why we had to be on a war footing. There was all this intelligence coming in telling you second wave of attacks, this and that. Philip Zelickow and I have talked about this a bit. The intelligence community having not connected the dots before 9/11 now remedied the situation by putting out a daily threat matrix, which had every bit of intelligence that had anything to do with any kind of potential threat to the United States in it. It was pages and pages long. It was the first thing I would read every morning.

There was a period of time in October and November of 2001 where I was petrified to go to work because we knew that al-Qaeda liked to revisit targets. After the World Trade Center in 1993, they came back in 2001. We knew that the White House had been a target in 2001, so maybe they were going to come back. Car bombs, dirty bombs, you name it. Then we had the anthrax attack. We had the false positive about the ricin on the day we were in New York at Ground Zero. Again, 16 years removed, it's very easy to say this was all a big overreaction given the totality of everything that was going on at the time, and probably it was a bad thing that they gave us all the threat reporting, but it certainly created the sense that you were like a hockey goalie and shots were going to come at you from every corner of the rink and all at 90 miles per hour, so how did you defend yourself? The best defense is a good offense; keep the puck out of your end of the rink.

**Riley:** Afghanistan? Is there—Were you much involved in planning?

**Edelman:** Not in the military planning. In fact, I was pretty much excluded from a lot of that. That was kept in a very tight box. Where I did get brought in was Scooter was very concerned that the plan that we—I mean, the initial plan they got from the Joint Staff was really pretty—it was just something they had off the shelf. It seemed not very creative. The biggest problem we had as the plan went on was there had been so much—The CIA essentially was using the assets it had, which were its connection to the Northern Alliance, essentially the Tajiks who had been headed by Ahmad Shah Massoud, who was killed on September 9th. The concern that we had was that there didn't seem to be—Since it's a majority Pashtun country, there didn't seem to be any southern strategy or Pashtun strategy. We agitated a lot about that.

[Henry A.] Hank Crumpton and others, and Bob Grenier, who was the station chief in Pakistan at the time—Ultimately that's where [Hamid] Karzai came from—On the effort to get some Pashtun buy-in, Crumpton and Grenier will say, “Oh, yes, we were already on this before those pains in the ass from OVP started goading us,” but I think we pushed pretty hard on that. I think that helped bring it more into focus and force them to move faster and quicker.

**Leffler:** What was your own particular focus on in the weeks after 9/11? What did Eric Edelman focus on?

**Edelman:** Mostly at that point we were in a series of interagency meetings focused on how to harden the United States as a target. So we were focused on airport security; we were focused on the security of critical infrastructure, LNG [liquefied natural gas] facilities that could become attractive targets. You mentioned nuclear facilities. Every time something popped up in the threat matrix, we said, “Oh, we hadn't thought about that. Let's get all the agencies of government together that have to do with that.”

**Leffler:** Those were the things that people like you were sort of coordinating, making sure—

**Edelman:** We were focused very heavily on that; biodefense—We were particularly concerned in OVP about biodefense. I was particularly sensitive to that because I knew a little bit about the Soviet bioweapons program from my misspent youth as a Soviet expert. So I knew that weaponized diseases existed and some of them in really ugly ways. John Hamre came in and briefed us on the Dark Winter exercise that CSIS [Center for Strategic and International Studies]

had undertaken, which really made us all focus on the difficulties we have as a government dealing with something that happens in the homeland.

In that particular exercise, you had a whole bunch of former government officials and senior members of Congress like Sam Nunn and others, where they almost came to blows, and it was an exercise. There were jurisdictional issues and who was going to do what. We were trying to get the government better organized to deal with a lot of those challenges. Then once—I mean, I helped coordinate all the notification for Afghanistan, phone calls the Vice President was going to make, the phone calls the President was going to make. We got a lot of the leaders on—

**Leffler:** Talk to us a little bit about Vice President Cheney during these weeks following 9/11 in terms of—Was he conveying the idea there is going to be another attack, we really need to worry? What was his agenda, would you say, if there was an agenda?

**Edelman:** His agenda was—In the spring, before 9/11, the President had given him the assignment of coordinating an approach to homeland security. So we'd had a whole series of commissions that looked at the issue of catastrophic terrorism. There was the [Paul] Bremer [III] Commission, there was the one that Jim Clapper had been—I'm trying to keep them all straight now. There had been one, the [Gary] Hart-[Warren] Rudman Commission, which had looked at this. There was the [James] Gilmore Commission, which looked at catastrophic terrorism. I guess that's the one that Clapper had been the executive director of. Clapper briefed us on that. Bremer came in and briefed us on his counterterrorism commission. We brought on a former colleague from OSD, Carol Kuntz, who organized—She became homeland security advisor to Vice President Cheney and ultimately ended up going out and getting a PhD. She was working on a PhD, which she then finished on biodefense. So she was there. We were very focused on bio. In fact, I think Cheney gave an interview to the *New Yorker* in the spring of 2001 and was asked, "What keeps you up at night?" and he said, "Catastrophic bio attack."

**Leffler:** Scooter Libby was working on that during the summer of 2001.

**Edelman:** Scooter was working on that; that work continued. In fact, we had to accelerate all that work after 9/11. Some of that, a lot of that, gave rise ultimately to the creation of DHS [Department of Homeland Security] and Scooter was very involved. I wasn't involved in that per se. Then as the Afghanistan operation moved forward, we got into the whole question of post-Taliban governance of Afghanistan, Bonn Conference process, and there was a whole interagency process back in D.C. backstopping the Bonn Conference process.

**Leffler:** So your office, the OVP, was involved?

**Edelman:** In all of that.

**Leffler:** With regard to post-Taliban Afghanistan.

**Edelman:** And also the Vice President was very concerned about the intelligence we found in Afghanistan about al-Qaeda and what it was up to and what that implied for the future in our national security policy. So this is where the business about the nexus between support for terror and WMD comes from. You've got—We had the anthrax attacks in the United States. Again, by

the way, people seem to think that this can all be laid easily at the doorstep of Bruce Ivins—I'm not at all convinced of that. I mean, maybe that's right.

**Leffler:** Even to this day you're not convinced of that?

**Edelman:** I think—There's an article in the *Journal of Biomedicine* from experts who looked at the samples and say we don't think these samples could have been made by an American and by Ivins in these labs. There is still, I think, a big question mark about all that and the way the case was botched by the FBI. I don't know how anyone could have much confidence in the conclusion they came to.

So we have that, we have the anthrax case in the United States. Then we discover that al-Qaeda is experimenting with anthrax in Afghanistan. People remember I think the videos of dogs being subject to anthrax. We discover that there are some al-Qaeda guys who are trying to penetrate the Pakistani nuclear program, which Rolf Mowatt-Larssen, who served with me in Moscow, has written about. So there's this whole question of the nexus between WMD and terrorism. And, oh, by the way, who has active programs on these things who might share them with terrorists, which is how the connection to Iraq—

Then after the President spoke in January of 2002 and gave the Axis of Evil speech, he sent the Vice President on the trip to the Middle East to basically talk about how do we now—what do we do beyond Afghanistan and how do we deal with Iraq? That was the trip that we took, 12-country/10-day trip in February/March of 2002.

**Riley:** You're on the trip?

**Edelman:** I was on the trip. So the planning for the trip and the preparation for the trip.

**Leffler:** Did you do one of those sword marches that I've seen?

**Edelman:** We didn't do a sword dance.

**Leffler:** No sword dance?

**Edelman:** I notice that Secretary [Rex] Tillerson said that wasn't his first sword dance, but I never did any sword dancing.

**Leffler:** I see. I would have liked to have seen Vice President Cheney on a sword dance.  
[laughter]

**Edelman:** We didn't do any sword dances.

**Leffler:** Tell us: that trip is an interesting trip. In which countries did you find support? I mean, part of the trip was to discuss next steps. What was the sentiment that you were finding in different countries?

**Edelman:** What the Vice President talked a lot about was what we found in Afghanistan, what I just described, and why that left us uncomfortable because of what we knew about Saddam. He

really didn't tell them, "So now we're going to go and invade Iraq and take out Saddam." What he did say was we're trying to figure out—"The President is now trying to figure out what to do next and we welcome your views about this, but we see Saddam as an ongoing threat to the security of the region and to the United States and we think we've got to figure out some way to solve this problem for you and for us."

You know, you have varying degrees of answer in different places. The Saudis, as I recall, their message was look, if you're going to do this, please do it right and don't leave us saddled like you did the last time with a wounded animal out here that is an ongoing threat to us. We're not going to tell you what or how to do things, but whatever you do, don't screw it up. Don't leave us to pick up the pieces.

It was a mix, really, of people who shared the concerns about Saddam but were nervous about what the United States might do and not sure at that point which way we were going. But there was not—There was nobody who said gee, we think Saddam is fine and it's OK to just leave him there. Nobody said that.

**Leffler:** Did anybody say the opposite, you've got to get him out?

**Edelman:** No, not in so many words. There was mostly one thing: just don't leave us with a half-solved problem if you do anything.

**Leffler:** My sense from reading in the literature is that some of the Gulf leaders were very much afraid of the street, the Arab street.

**Edelman:** There was that and there was a lot of talk about the Palestinians. This was about the time of the Abdullah [bin Abdulaziz Al Saud] initiative, Crown Prince Abdullah's initiative, later King Abdullah. That's why when we got to Israel, despite the fact that John Hannah and Scooter and I had major reservations, the Vice President decided to extend an opportunity to Arafat to kind of get out of his isolation if he were willing to call off the intifada and stop the campaign of terror against Israel.

**Bakich:** What are the Turks saying at this time?

**Edelman:** The Turkish part of the trip was very interesting because we wanted to meet with the TGS [Turkish General Staff] and we did meet with them along with—I think there was some representative from the MFA [Ministry of Foreign Affairs] so it didn't look like we were meeting with the TGS separately. It in a sense was separate, but the Turks were worried about what you would expect: They were worried about fragmentation, about Kurds, about—They were worried about Turkey bearing the cost of any sanctions or operation against Iraq, since they had borne so many costs from the First Gulf War they felt because of the cutoff of trade with Iraq and stuff like that. I would say they were very cautious about the whole thing.

They didn't say this is not a problem you need to worry about, they just said Turkey doesn't want to bear any costs. I guess we got the strong sense that [Turgut] Özal had made a big difference in 1990, '91, and there was no Özal in Turkey then. [Bülent] Ecevit was pretty reticent and [Ahmet Necdet] Sezer was also pretty reticent. They were very focused on Turkey and what's the best thing for Turkey, how are we going to benefit from this?

**Bakich:** It sounds to me from the snapshots you've given that each state is looking very much internally, but there doesn't seem to be a regional focus.

**Edelman:** No, there wasn't—None of them thought in big regional terms; all of them were very focused on their own, which is what you'd expect, I think.

**Riley:** One might expect, after an event like 9/11, that there would be a considerable effort to examine what happened, what went wrong, why didn't we know this? Ultimately the 9/11 Commission does this, but was there any energy within the Vice President's office to look back, or is it the case that the agenda ahead is so busy and so full that that—

**Edelman:** Mostly I don't think there was a whole lot of—There was a political concern that any retrospective look was going to be politicized and used against Bush in the 2004 election. So mostly the desire was can we try and make sure that whatever Congressional investigation goes on or whatever independent commission, that it's not politicized.

**Riley:** OK.

**Edelman:** That probably was a vain hope.

**Riley:** Right. I guess my question is whether in your own internal discussions are you thinking, *How did we miss this? Are there things that we can do to—?*

**Edelman:** I think that manifested itself really in OK, if we didn't connect the dots last time around, how can we make sure we're connecting the dots this time? That's why you get I think a lot of this effort at let's look at the intelligence ourselves, not just rely on the IC blindly, and are there connections we're missing here?

**Perry:** Are you still, Eric, playing the role that you described when the President came into office, that you're in on briefings if Scooter and the Vice President aren't there?

**Edelman:** More, because they're in undisclosed locations so much of the time. The Vice President had been very involved in the Ford administration, and then when he was in the Congress and as Secretary of Defense in a lot of continuity of operations, continuity of government exercises. He was very seized of that matter and so he was very insistent, even when some of his staff thought that this wasn't great because it was leading him to be caricatured on *Saturday Night Live* and this and that for being in undisclosed locations. But he was very insistent on—for a lot of that period, that lasts really until about I would say until the Iraq War. After that it fades a little bit.

**Perry:** Just a follow-up: what are you seeing in those meetings? Is there any change in the President's style of receiving information? Is there more questioning? Anything different or the same?

**Edelman:** I think the President became very focused on the War on Terror.

**Leffler:** Is it not true, Eric—I may be wrong on this, this may be an answer to Barbara, that prior to 9/11 the President rarely, if ever, went to a formal NSC meeting, and it's only after 9/11 that

really the National Security Council as a formal construct, so to speak, of the real principals starts to meet. Isn't that true?

**Edelman:** The principals are meeting plenty before.

**Leffler:** But not the President.

**Edelman:** I'm trying to remember.

**Leffler:** I don't think that there were, that the President—

**Edelman:** Probably not, that's probably right. I'd have to go back—

**Leffler:** So it's a big, big difference I think.

**Edelman:** But the focus is very much the GWOT. He gets involved in other issues, for sure, China and various other things—big issues—but the focus of most of what he is doing—

**Perry:** Is the demeanor the same? I go back to the first meeting that you were in on where he used the A-word to describe Arafat. Is there that same kind of bluster—I'll use the term "bluster"—to describe it, or is the manifestation of focus somewhat less on that that aspect of his personality?

**Edelman:** The President is still—He had a sense of humor and he still—but he was a bit more—Once this got going, I think he was a bit more self-confident and a bit more—I think he may have lacked a sense of what his national security policy or strategy was going to be before 9/11; after 9/11 it kind of snapped into place that this was going to be the focus of his Presidency and he was going to be judged on whether or not he prevented another attack on the United States and whether he was able to successfully dismantle al-Qaeda.

**Bakich:** I want to pull on one thread. You said the Vice President was seized by continuity of government. Did you mean anything by—You seem to be very precise and you used the word "seized."

**Edelman:** He was very preoccupied with the notion that we might be subject to another attack and that we needed to make sure that the government could function if something happened to the President. That is, after all, from his point of view, one of his only two mandated, Constitutional responsibilities, so I think he felt he was exercising it.

**Bakich:** How did you interpret that?

**Edelman:** I knew of this; he talked about it a lot. I knew this was something that was a major matter of concern for him. He pointed out that Powell was out of the country when 9/11 took place, so how would we organize something if something happened to the President? So he was pretty—There's actually a funny story about this. His CIA briefer's name was Dave [Terry]. The Vice President also had a dog, which I think he inherited from his daughter Liz, a Labrador named Dave. He was getting briefed out at the naval observatory one weekend day, Saturday I

think. The briefer's back was to the window at the observatory and the Vice President was on a couch opposite him.

Dave the dog kind of got up on the furniture with his paws and the Vice President barked out, "Dave, get down." This briefer hit the deck, assuming there was some incoming into the observatory. *[laughter]* There was a preoccupation about more attacks, the danger that existed and the importance of maintaining that.

As I said, he never completely gave that up, but I think after the war in Iraq got underway full time, it lessened. I think he was less worried about it as the prospect of a successful—another attack from al-Qaeda began to recede a little bit.

**Bakich:** Can you say—I guess it's appropriate to bring this up because this is the right context, but is there anything at this point that you can say about the infamous 1 percent doctrine? Is this the way that he is—?

**Edelman:** I never heard him say that, but it certainly reflected a view of his, which is that the prospect of an attack with either chemical, nuclear, or biological might be a low probability event, but it was very high impact. Therefore, if there was even a slim probability, we had to bend the efforts of government to make sure it didn't happen.

**Bakich:** Right.

**Edelman:** I never heard him say it quite the way the [Ron] Suskind book purports it, nor do I think that that then justifies a bunch of other stuff that Suskind attaches to that.

**Riley:** I was going to ask about David Addington. In the post 9/11 environment he becomes an important actor in the administration, mainly on the home front issues and dealing with the aftereffects of the overseas actions, interrogations, and things of that nature. Were you apprised of what he was doing, or is that going on at a remove from your portfolio?

**Edelman:** I wasn't—David was kind of a world unto himself in OVP. He's an incredibly talented lawyer. He had almost no staff. He did a lot on his own, including his own clerical, secretarial stuff. He could go to a computer and draft up a really pretty good legal brief pretty quickly. He had very strong views. A lot of lawyers would maybe contest the view he had, but David was a pretty formidable intellect.

**Leffler:** Talk to us about his views.

**Edelman:** He was very hard line. He sort of had John Yoo's views about unitary executive authority. He had been with Cheney for a very long time; he was very close to him. He'd been on his Congressional staff. He had been part of the group that came in and took over the Defense Department when Cheney was tapped in the wake of the [John] Tower confirmation cratering. So he had the Vice President's total confidence. I always actually got along with David and worked well with him, but he had his own views. He drafted the Gitmo [Guantanamo] EO [Executive order] and all that stuff pretty much on his own without any input from us. Again, hindsight is 20/20. Did we err maybe on the side of being too draconian on some of these things? Maybe. That's a fair criticism, I think.



On the other hand, what were we going to do with these people who we caught, these al-Qaeda people? They weren't traditional combatants in the sense that they weren't wearing uniforms. Were we really going to give them all the Geneva Convention rights, let them have a band? Let them have their own prison camp, let them elect their own officers, and what not? It just didn't make a lot of sense in that context. Were we going to bring them back and try them? There is not a good solution to a lot of this problem.

Think about if we had taken Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and the other guys who were the authors of the 9/11 attack and we brought them to the United States for a trial and they ended up not being convicted and we had to let them go free, were we going to let them go free? How was the American public going to react to that? How would people in New York react to that? This was not—These were not easy issues. These were conundra that were not easily resolved. There's a lot of moralism that's associated with all this, particularly by the JAG [Judge Advocate General] community and the Pentagon.

While I have some sympathy for the position that we would have been better off if we had applied Common Article 3 to all these guys, and I get all that, I also remember what it was like at the time and how hard some of that would have been to actually do politically. So I'm very ambivalent about a lot of this stuff. Same thing with enhanced interrogation and waterboarding, et cetera.

**Leffler:** Were any of these issues discussed openly at principals meetings?

**Edelman:** Not that I was in.

**Leffler:** In some of the literature there is a recounting that Condi Rice was not part of these decisions. Powell says he was not part of some of these decisions, and of course Addington becomes the fall guy for much of this. But of course, if it's Addington, it's Cheney.

**Edelman:** There's no question that some of this was not, I think, done in normal regular order. There's no question about that. I know, I think, Secretary Powell probably did find out after the fact. But I don't exactly know how all of that got decided, because it wasn't in meetings that I was involved in and because David's stuff tended to go directly to the Vice President.

**Leffler:** Some of this, though, getting back to one of the things Russell seems to be interested in and I'm very interested in: That very circumvention of process is what continued to poison the waters.

**Edelman:** Right.

**Leffler:** Because Armitage and Powell were—allegedly were—very angry about it.

**Edelman:** Oh, no, I heard it directly from the Secretary of State, who wanted to know if I knew about it. "No, actually, Mr. Secretary, I didn't know what was going on." I knew about it after it had happened. I knew that David was working on the problem, but I didn't know exactly what was going on.

**Leffler:** What do you speculate was the chain of causation here? Addington comes out strongly in favor of this in his memos? Cheney thinks about it and says yes? Then Bush just signs on? Or is it Cheney sort of says—What would have been the nature of the interaction? Cheney intimates to Addington we need to take a tough stand and Addington says, “OK, Mr. Vice President, I’ll write—”?

**Edelman:** I really can’t speak to that because I wasn’t party to any of the exchanges David and the Vice President had, although I’m not sure how much Cheney needed to say to David, because on these issues I think they were both of one mind. But my impression was that the President and Vice President would talk about these things and the Vice President would say, “Let me get something for you on that.” Then Addington would produce something and the President and Vice President would talk about it and the President would turn to Al [Alberto] Gonzales, who was the White House Counsel at the time, and say, “David and Al, go work it out.”

**Leffler:** As a top advisor to somebody who was really important, like Mr. Cheney was at that time, in your daily interactions are you basically thinking all the time, *What does the Vice President really want?* Or are you thinking all the time, or a large part of the time, *What is my best advice to give the Vice President?*

**Edelman:** Mel, what I’m trying to do is capture an answer to your question as to how much less exalted all of this is than it seems. Ninety percent of what you’re doing is trying to survive the day. The Vice President has two or three meetings with foreign leaders and he’s got a meeting or two interagency—a meeting of the principals, a meeting of the NSC, or whatever, and you’ve got to get the paper to him that prepares him for that meeting and maybe you need to go brief him if there’s some subject about which he is not completely current that you need to fill in for him. So a lot of my day was trying to make the trains run on time—getting him the paper. That was a chore, because Scooter, for all his many virtues, was really slow to process paper. It got to the point where I kind of said, “Look, Scooter, I’m going to have the authority to send meeting memos forward without you, because otherwise they’ll never get to him on time.” So Scooter would have only things that were policy or think pieces.

**Leffler:** Stepping back then, would one—I take that as a very important statement. Is a lesson to be learned that, especially when there are intense crisis situations, trying to step back from getting the trains to run on time and thinking about what should be the schedule—maybe that’s a lesson?

**Edelman:** Schedulers are the most important people in Washington. I tried to convince my son of this, as he just became scheduler to a member of Congress, and he was upset about it. I said, “No, you don’t understand.”

**Leffler:** My point is, if so much is spent on getting the trains to run on time, does that mean that there is insufficient time to really spend on the two, three, four, or five most important issues?

**Edelman:** Yes, chronically in government that’s the problem.

**Leffler:** Is there any conceivable way—

**Edelman:** Just getting the time to think for a second without having the daily pressures of something bearing down on you is an incredible luxury. Look, the most valuable—In national security terms, the most valuable commodity in Washington is the President's time. In the Bush 43 administration, I would say the second most valuable thing was Cheney's time. So how—But I only had a little piece of input into the schedule. I could suggest that he take or not take this or that meeting with foreigners, but I couldn't ultimately decide it. I worked closely with the scheduling people, but—I was only one part of that.

That's not to say that there weren't things that I tried to create some kind of—tried to influence how he thought about things. When we had the *Karine A* incident for instance, John Hannah and I really dug into that and all the intel on that. Then we arranged to brief the Vice President, who was at an undisclosed location. So we did it by SVTS. But I wanted to make the point to the Vice President that this was Iran working through its proxies in Lebanon, Hezbollah, in the form of the late Imad Mughniyeh, to provide arms to Arafat personally that were being used to fuel the intifada in the West Bank, and that this was a huge—this was a big sea change in Iranian behavior that we needed to pay some attention to. I think we got his attention, big time. So there were elements like that.

The other thing is Cheney was acutely aware of the problem of being trapped in the bubble in the White House and being prisoner of only USG [United States government] sources of information. I knew this because one of the things I had done when I was in the Pentagon working for him the first time, while the Soviet Union was in the process of collapse, was to organize a series of seminars for him on Saturdays, usually quarterly, where we'd bring in outside Soviet experts to brief him on what was going on in the Soviet Union, what was happening with Gorbachev, what was happening with Yeltsin. This was a bipartisan—It was people like Peter Reddaway, Frank Fukuyama, Steve Sestanovich. Rose Gottemoeller came in and did a couple. Rick Ericson at Columbia University on the economy, Greg Grossman from UC [University of California] on the economy. We had all sorts of people in talking to him. I knew that he had this hunger for that kind of stuff.

Among my other duties as assigned was putting together, usually each weekend, for him, a bunch of stuff, nongovernmental stuff like Bob Kagan's essay in *Policy Review* that became the book *Americans Are from Mars and Europeans Are From Venus*. There were things like that. Or I was sending books home to him. Marin Strmecki, who was the vice president of Smith Richardson, would send me stuff that Smith Richardson had sponsored; Max Boot's book on small wars, for instance, we gave to him. He had a voracious appetite for information that was outside—or even inside—the government that he might not get otherwise.

While it was being developed I got him a draft of the [*U.S. Army U.S. Marine Corps*] *Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, which I got to him through John Hannah. I could never get Rumsfeld to read that thing.

**Bakich:** Really?

**Edelman:** Yes, Rumsfeld I don't think ever read it, but Cheney read it from cover to cover. Cheney read John Nagl's book on counterinsurgency; I arranged for John to go over and brief

him. So he had this appetite. A lot of the influence came from my selection of what I gave him to read, knowing that he would absorb it and try—

**Leffler:** To what extent in the midst of this keeping the chains—trains run on time—This is for six, nine months.

**Edelman:** It felt like chains.

**Leffler:** This is the first six to nine months of 2002, and one of the most standard criticisms of this decision-making process was that there never was a moment in time when the top decision makers really said should we or should we not go to war in Iraq. Never a moment in time when let's say the [John] Mearsheimer-[Stephen] Walt argument would have been presented by somebody inside. Is that a fair statement or not a fair statement?

**Edelman:** I'm not aware of any moment where we had a meeting of the principals in which the President put the question should we or shouldn't we go to war. But it was clear that we were approaching a moment where we would have to make some decisions about—or the President would have to make some decisions—about whether or not we used military force against Saddam and we started deploying forces. So if anyone had had an objection and said, “Geez, Mr. President, I think this is like a really bad idea,” they had ample opportunity to voice that. I think when all the record is declassified it will show that Colin Powell was largely silent on a lot of this stuff. Powell did have the Pottery Barn conversation with Bush in the summer of '02 and pushed him to go to the UN, which he did. That wasn't Bush's first inclination, by the way. I had a conversation—

**Leffler:** What wasn't his first—?

**Edelman:** To go to the UN on Iraq in the fall of 2002. His actual inclination—because I had a conversation with him about it—with a couple of other people—was he had read in the summer of 2002 the Arab Human Development Report of the UNDP [United Nations Development Program] and he really wanted to talk about the absence of gender equality, freedom, and education in the Muslim world, in the Arab world in particular, as being the generator of a lot of the terrorism and the need to address all those questions. That was his first instinct.

Powell kind of got him to go in a different direction and take Iraq to the General Assembly instead.

**Bakich:** I want to be clear that I'm understanding that correctly. The President had—it sounds to me—a different theory about where terrorism comes from, what it's about?

**Edelman:** He was very struck in the summer of 2002 when he read the UNDP report, so he wanted to address that at the UN in the fall of 2002.

**Bakich:** Right.

**Edelman:** Then in August, Powell came in after the Vice President gave his VFW speech and I guess the President had given a speech too—

**Bakich:** In Cincinnati.

**Edelman:** Right. That's when Powell comes in and says we really need to go to the UN and we need to address this there, and all that. So Bush kind of agrees.

**Bakich:** Interesting.

**Edelman:** The UNDP stuff kind of gets put on a back burner to be dealt with later, although he kind of addresses that in his AEI [American Enterprise Institute] speech in February of '03. He kind of comes back to that. So I think there was plenty of opportunity if somebody wanted to object to the trajectory that we were on and say no, this isn't really a problem, Saddam's OK, we've got him right where we want him. I don't think anyone believed that. Certainly no one was ready to argue that.

**Leffler:** The standard criticism, of course, is that there were many good reasons to go to war against Saddam and then there were many good reasons to think about what would be the ramifications of going to war, and that—I mean not only that—but Secretary Rumsfeld had a so-called “list of horrors,” right? All the terrible things that could happen—

**Edelman:** Could go wrong.

**Leffler:** —which was sort of a rhetorical thing to cover his behind.

**Edelman:** Right, it was a CYA [cover your ass] exercise in part, but only part.

**Leffler:** I only raise this because one would think OK, there are a lot of good reasons to go to war, but there are a lot of good reasons *not* to go to war, given that that's what Powell was intimating when he said the Pottery Barn. That's what Rumsfeld was saying, “Mr. President, you really need to think about these sorts of things.” So the thrust of the criticism is OK, there obviously are reasons not to go to war.

**Edelman:** Sure.

**Leffler:** Should a good decision-making process be one in which let's all of us sit down and really talk about this?

**Edelman:** I'm willing to stipulate—as lawyers would say—that the process was not a good one here, and in many ways it failed the President. I believe that. By the same token, as I said, if anyone really felt strongly that they needed to say, “Stop the world, I want to get off,” they could have; they had plenty of opportunity.

**Leffler:** But the best reason for it is not to really necessarily stop the war. I would say the best reasons to have had a meeting like that would have been for the proponents of war to say, “These are all the things we've really got to think about that maybe we're not focusing enough attention on.”

**Edelman:** Fair enough. I went back—I probably should have read it before we did all this in 2003, but I read it when I was Under Secretary, I reread it. My predecessor as Under Secretary,

Fred Iklé, wrote this book called *Every War Must End*. It is about—It basically makes the argument—which I think is correct—that the process of getting into war is so exacting on most governments that they never really think through what are the consequences and how do we end this thing. That’s certainly my experience in government, and I’m not sure there’s much way around it.

There are mechanisms, I suppose, like [Woodrow] Wilson’s Inquiry or the Harley Notter group, where you can charter some people to go off and think about what do we do with the postwar? How do we end this? It is very difficult for the people who are actually in the government trying to get the government geared up to get to a certain end, to actually think about, *OK, what’s the endgame here? What’s the right end state?* This is a preoccupation, of course, of my military colleagues, who always say, “What’s the end state? What’s the end state?” Of course, the truth is you never know what the end state is going to be. There’s no way to know it. There’s not even that good a way to describe it. I’m saying that advisedly. I’m the one who drafted the paper, as I said—or took the first draft—of the paper we did. We want an Iraq that’s at peace with its neighbors, doesn’t support terrorism, is pluralistic and allows the expression—protects minority rights, blah, blah, blah. Great. You’ve now created a lovely wish list of what you’d like the world—but then the world kind of gets in the way, and it’s this messy, ugly, difficult-to-control thing.

So when people say, “Well, we want to know what the end state is going to be,” you’re not going to know it. You’re not going to know what the end state is going to be. You’re trying to accomplish certain ends; you’re taking certain actions. You hope they’re going to lead to certain outcomes, but you know the outcomes at least in some degree are going to vary from what you anticipate and what you want.

Part of what government is about, and I knew, is adjusting as it happens. To figure out OK, how do we now reposition ourselves, which is one reason why I have so much admiration for what Bush and Cheney did with the surge. That was done essentially over the opposition of most of the military, and the Secretary of State and everyone else. They decided on it because they said this is the best shot we have to reverse the way things are going, and it’s probably our last role of the dice and let’s do it.

I sat in the tank with the President; the Vice President; and with the outgoing Secretary of Defense, Don Rumsfeld; and the incoming Secretary of Defense, Bob Gates, in December of 2006 as we were coming to the surge decisions. Both Gates and Rumsfeld were silent. Rumsfeld is on his way out; he told me at that point Bush just wants something different from Baker-Hamilton; it’s Bob Gates’ problem, I’m done. Gates basically hasn’t been sworn in yet, so doesn’t want to say anything; he’s got his predecessor there. So they’re both quiet.

The Chief of Staff of the Army, Pete Schoomaker, says, “Gee, Mr. President, if we do this surge thing, I don’t know if the American people will stand for it.” Bush basically says, “General, thanks very much for your political advice, I really appreciate it. That’s my job though, I’ll take care of that. I’ll take care of the American people. Your job is to get the troops there.”

Then the other is Mike Mullen, who was the CNO [Chief of Naval Operations] at the time, and Jim Conway, who was the Commandant of the Marine Corps, and they’re both saying, “Gee, the

rotation base. I don't know if the Army and the Marine Corps can handle this. It could break the Army; it could break the Marine Corps." Bush basically says, "Hey, look, I get it. I'm going out there. I talk to the families; I talk to the Gold Star parents. I get all this. But there's nothing that would break the Army more than having them come home from Iraq with their tail between their legs because we lost this war, so I'm going to do what I think is right to win this war." It would have been a lot easier for him to say, "OK, we tried. Let's call it a day. I won't have all this trouble with the Congress," et cetera, and we would have had in that case, I think, something that looks like the Islamic state seven years earlier than we did.

**Bakich:** So the forcefulness of the President, and the insistence on not just accepting recommendations from uniformed personnel and otherwise that you just described—was that at all in evidence in the decision to go to war? And if not, where in the interim do you see him evolving? Sorry to put that second part of the question, but that's where I'm going.

**Edelman:** The short answer, Spencer, to your question is no, it was not in evidence to the same degree earlier, and I think some of it was a learning process for the President. Eliot [Cohen] talks about—the President read *Supreme Command*, and Eliot and I had speculated in some of our conversations together that he kind of took the wrong lesson from it. The lesson he took from it initially was don't be like LBJ [Lyndon B. Johnson]; don't be sitting in the White House picking aim points for bombers. Find out if the military feels they're resourced sufficiently to do the job and then let them go do their job. I think that was his initial disposition.

**Bakich:** Right.

**Edelman:** I think it worked in 2002, 2003 because Secretary Rumsfeld, to his credit I think—and he doesn't get enough credit for this—but to his credit worked Tommy Franks over through the iterations of [Oplan] 1003 Victor pretty well. That is to say, we had this long buildup, right, yet in March of 2003 when we go in, we managed to both maintain strategic and tactical surprise. Saddam, as we know, was actually surprised that we do what we do. Pretty amazing actually. How did that happen?

In my view it happened because the initial plan was oh, yes, we're going to redo what we did in Kuwait and we're going to put this massive Army in and then we're going to plow into Iraq. Rumsfeld kept running them through this, in part because he had this whole business of transformation; he wanted to make the military quicker, more agile, more lethal, less manpower intensive, et cetera. So he kept running the thing through and whittling it down to the point of can you do it with this? How much do you need, can you do it with less? That led to a pretty amazing military operation. The Iraqi Army was what, the fourth largest army in the world, or fifth maybe in 2003? It wasn't a very good army, we know that, but still mass has a quality all of its own, and so just being able to do that was a pretty remarkable feat, and I think Rumsfeld deserves credit for it. He doesn't get much, but he deserves credit for it.

Now, the problem became what to do afterward. Rumsfeld was very wedded to a notion of get in and get out, as we did in Afghanistan. Light footprint, leave. Oh, by the way, this is precisely what the Obama people end up wanting to do too: light footprint, let's not put too many troops in. I used to tell Derek Chollet, "Oh, you guys are for the Rumsfeld plan." It used to drive him crazy.

[REDACTED]

**Leffler:** [REDACTED]

**Edelman:** [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

**Bakich:** Can you shed some light on this? You talk to 15 different people who have a piece of the surge and you'll get 15 different stories as to where the surge idea comes from. It can be [Raymond] Odierno in the field, it can be Keane, it can be Peter Feaver working with—

**Edelman:** [*chuckles*]

**Bakich:** —Eliot Cohen to press the point to the President. Can you give us an idea where the genesis of this resides?

**Edelman:** Success has a thousand fathers; failure is an orphan.

**Leffler:** The Under Secretary of Defense for Policy. [*laughter*]

**Bakich:** Now's your chance.

**Edelman:** No, I wish I could say that's true. In part it's true. Look, there were a lot of people who were thinking the same thing, which was we didn't have—It was not just a question of enough troops. It was really, in my view—Troops were a part of it, but it was less the number of troops than the right strategy and what they were doing. It was increasingly clear to me that the strategy George Casey was following, which was a train-and-transition strategy, was not going to be able to keep up with the deteriorating security situation, particularly after the Samarra bombing in February of 2006. It was possible throughout 2005 to be moderately optimistic about where things were going, in the sense that you were getting better buy-in from Iraqis in the political process, growing numbers participating in the January election, the October constitutional referendum, and then the December election.



But once that bomb goes off in Samarra, it really—It starts to fall apart at an accelerating rate. Although you didn't really have sectarian civil war per se before then, you really start to get it after that. It's not so much civil war as it is just sectarian violence. It's sort of taxonomic. So a lot of people—now I had started reading when I got to the job—I read a little bit about counterinsurgency; I read [Douglas S.] Laufer's book and a couple of other things. But I sort of went back and said, "I've got to go back and read this stuff in earnest." John Nagl was down the hall, and I knew John had written a book on counterinsurgency—so I read John's book. I said, "Hey, John, can you get me a copy of [David] Galula's book?" So I read that.

Throughout '05 and '06, I'm trying to figure out how we can move to a more counterinsurgency-like strategy.

**Bakich:** Why? Why were you thinking this way? Were you talking with people who said you need to be thinking this way?

**Edelman:** Dave Petraeus was off in Leavenworth doing the Center for Army Lessons Learned and doing the *Field Manual*. I saw him in September of '06—was it '06 or '05? We had a coin [counterinsurgency] conference, I think it was September of '06. Yes, it was September of '06.

**Bakich:** Basin Harbor?

**Edelman:** No it wasn't at Basin Harbor; it was at the Reagan Building in Washington. It was cosponsored by John Hillen at State and my stability operations guys, Jeb Nadaner. So I spoke and I basically gave a speech—I had Janine Davidson write it for me. It tried to—I had her go back and read [R. W.] Komer's RAND study on *Bureaucracy Does Its Thing*. I think it's correct to say that it was not the numbers that mattered. I think at the height of the surge we had 171,000 boots on the ground. In December of '05, January of '06, we had 166,000 boots on the ground because we had augmented—we'd delayed some rotations and accelerated some rotations—so there was more overlap to cover for the election.

So it wasn't the numbers—although numbers were not insignificant. What really mattered was—And of course the number of Iraqi security forces had grown after [Paul] Eaton was replaced by Petraeus and [Martin] Dempsey. They had actually grown the force significantly, so we had a lot more Iraqi forces to deal with. It wasn't so much U.S. numbers, it was Iraqi numbers and what we had U.S. forces doing. Ray had been thinking about this because he had also had his own pretty hard experience from when he went in with the 4th ID [Infantry Division]. He was now down at III Corps in Texas.

He came to see me in November before he went out to be the Corps Commander in Baghdad, and he said, "Eric, I think I need more troops." I had just given a version of the speech I gave in September. I had just done a talk at—Actually it was the day Rumsfeld resigned. I was in New Haven speaking to the Yale Grand Strategy Seminar for John Gaddis and Charlie Hill, who had been my boss in the Foreign Service back in the prehistoric era. And Don Kagan, who had been one of my mentors in graduate school, was berating me and beating me up, saying, "You guys need more troops." I was going, "Look, some of us agree with you." And I told Ray when he came to see me in November—Rumsfeld had already resigned at that point—I said, "Look, I

have a new SecDef coming in; the old one doesn't want any more troops and I can't get him to buy into this. Give me a chance to work with Gates; maybe I can help on that score."

But J. D. [Jack Dyer] Crouch [II] and I had talked about this for some time in the September, October time frame. Meghan [O'Sullivan] and I had talked about it. There were just a lot of people who were in—Hadley apparently had come to this view and he had sent Bill Luti off to do some operational availability studies to see how much force could we throw at this problem if we had to. So there were a lot of people thinking along the same lines. What I think really made it all happen was—I don't know that he had the idea, but Ray I think deserves way more credit than he gets for having—including—Dave gets a lot of credit, but Ray was the one who took these ideas of the *Field Manual* and turned it into operational art on the battlefield by creating these joint security locations with Iraqi forces and getting our guys partnered with Iraqi units, down to battalion level, and helping them plan and execute missions.

Once they start doing this in spring of '07—from around January, February until about July, you see a huge increase in casualties because our guys are out there in the fight much more closely in contact with the enemy. But you're also seeing other signs. You're seeing the number of tips from Iraqis about bad guys' locations, et cetera, spiking as well. So on the one hand the casualty numbers were daunting and problematic for us politically, which is one reason why Gates does what he does on MRAPs [mine-resistant, ambush-protected vehicles] and stuff like that, correctly in my view because it bought us some time. But you're also beginning to see real payoff in the activity of the Anbar sheikhs and the Sawa and all of that. So you're seeing real impact.

Then of course our casualties start to come down very seriously, because we really are eliminating al-Qaeda in Anbar and elsewhere.

**Bakich:** Two questions.

**Edelman:** So I think there were multiple fathers, and mothers—There were multiple parents. I don't think it was one individual's bright idea.

**Riley:** We have a little under an hour. Go ahead.

**Bakich:** The "surge," in quotes, means many different things, obviously. It's not only an increase in troops, it's also the adoption of the *Field Manual*, the change in strategy to go along with that, but also a substantial amount of latitude on the part of General Petraeus to buy off a lot of the Sunni triangle. To what extent is this coordinated?

Petraeus says that no, I had \$400 million on pallets that I was giving out and no one knew what I was doing. Is that true? Or maybe they knew only in retrospect.

**Edelman:** No, we knew what he was doing. This was the whole business of the creation of the Sons of Iraq. He was getting these people to buy in to our strategy. This was, by the way, the source of my 15 minutes of Andy Warhol fame when I answered Hillary Clinton's letter to President Bush about this. We knew what Dave was doing. We were doing a lot of stuff that I knew we were doing at the time. In Anbar we were taking out five- and ten-year leases on stuff because we were trying to convince the Anbaris that we were there for the duration, we weren't

just coming in and going away—which of course is what we did, which is why now we have a lot more difficulty getting people to buy in, when we tried to make them believe we were there for the duration.

We might not have known the specifics about how much money Dave had, but we knew he had CERP [Commander's Emergency Response Program] and we knew he had other money that he was giving out to people in order to buy their allegiance so we could clean out al-Qaeda. I think that's a little bit of myth-making myself. Not that Dave doesn't deserve enormous credit; I think he does. I think he did a phenomenal job as commander and deserves enormous credit, as does Ray. I just think the share of the credit that Dave gets is maybe a little exaggerated and the share of the credit Ray gets may be a little underappreciated.

**Bakich:** I have a phone call, so I'm going to step outside, excuse me.

**Riley:** Sure. I keep going back in the timeline to pick up some bits and pieces of things that we didn't pick up. One was, Philip was very involved in 2002 in drafting a national security strategy. Did you have any piece of the action on that?

**Edelman:** I reviewed various drafts. I knew that Philip was working on it. I had a couple of conversations with Philip along the way. There were other people who contributed to the drafting process as well on Condi's staff, like Bob Joseph and others. But it was mainly a Philip, Condi, Steve Hadley production.

**Riley:** OK, the outcome was acceptable to you? Were there problems for you?

**Edelman:** No, I didn't have any particular problem with the 2002—I know the whole business about preemption in there. In my view this is a lot of hullabaloo over not much. I mean, if you go back and read NSC 68 and think about what our nuclear strategy was under Truman, the idea was we were always going to try and preempt—If we had indications and warnings of an imminent Soviet strike, we were going to try and strike first. I don't see what's so exceptional about that. I think that's well in the mainstream of U.S. strategic history.

**Riley:** Mel, do you have any questions on that?

**Leffler:** No.

**Riley:** I have a sort of global question about Congress and any interactions that you might have had with Congress, particularly in the post-9/11 period before you go to Turkey. There's a sort of sense of unity of purpose nationally immediately after 9/11. How fast does that fade on Capitol Hill, from your perspective?

**Edelman:** You know, I didn't have much direct dealing with the Congress when I was in OVP, other than if I happened to be involved in a meeting that the Vice President was having for one reason or another. I remember meeting with him with some members of Congress, Norm Dicks and a bunch of others, in the fall of 2002 after the President's UN speech when the Vice President was talking to them about the intelligence that we had on the WMD program.

**Riley:** Right.

**Edelman:** That's about the time that the NIE [National Intelligence Estimate] is coming out and all of that. My sense is there are two things that sort of fray—well, three things that fray the unity, if you will. One is Bush and Cheney made a conscious decision to act as if they had a popular mandate for their policies, despite having lost the popular vote in the election, the election having been so contested.

I think there were a lot of Democrats in the Congress who never really accepted the legitimacy of Bush as President, and were hoping that this would be reversed in 2004. They had every reason to believe that for a variety of reasons they would be in much better competitive positions in 2004.

**Riley:** Sure.

**Edelman:** After 9/11, there is this sort of, as you say, rallying factor, but it starts I think to dissipate pretty quickly because of the 2002 election cycle, in which I think the Democrats were actually quite shocked by the fact that instead of losing seats, we picked up a couple of seats in the Senate, and the House was pretty much a wash, if I recall correctly. But Democrats don't make any big gains. There are a lot of very rough campaigns. There was the Max [Joseph Maxwell] Cleland campaign in Georgia, and the other real shocker I think was when [Paul] Wellstone dies in the plane crash and Walter Mondale briefly replaces him and then gets beat by Norm Coleman. So I think there's that shock to the system.

Democrats are, I would say, cowed a little bit by the fact that in retrospect they think that the debate that they had on the First Gulf War was bad for them politically. When you think about it, Al Gore gets picked because he's one of a handful of Democratic Senators who actually vote to authorize the war in January 1991. So you get the vote on Iraq in the fall of 2002. All the Democrats vote for it, and they vote for it because they think this is going to be like the last one and you don't want to be on the wrong side of that, and then the war goes south. Then all of a sudden everyone is vying with one another to see who is more antiwar.

This was, in my view, the origin of my problem with Hillary, which was that she was getting killed in the summer of '07 by Barack Obama out on the hustings for having been a supporter of the war, and she was. So when her letter goes to Bush and, because of the law of fecal gravity, [laughter] ends up on my desk to reply to, the first draft—for some reason the first draft that the system produced was for General [Peter] Pace to sign and it basically—not in so many words but pretty close—said, Screw you, Senator Clinton. We don't talk to civilians about our contingency plans and therefore thank you for your interest in national security. Signed Peter Pace.

I looked at that and I thought, *This is the wrong answer. It shouldn't be coming from Pace and she has been a supporter of the war; she deserves a fuller and better answer.* Now her staff—some of whom are now my business partners in Beacon Global Strategies and I've had occasion to yuck it up with them about this now in retrospect; it wasn't funny at the time—made a kind of error in her letter. The letter basically says, what are your contingency plans for withdrawing our troops from Iraq because we're embroiled in this ethnic civil war now. Contingency plans are actually a term of art; they are actually war plans. As part of my Title 10 responsibilities as Under Secretary, one of the statutory responsibilities I had was to advise the Secretary of Defense on "contingency plans," which are in the family of war plans. We don't discuss them

outside the building, nor has—the Bush administration didn’t do it, the Obama administration didn’t do it. The Clinton administration certainly didn’t do it.

Anyway, we gave her this much longer answer, part of which said, If we were to discuss this publicly, it would give aid and comfort to those in Iraq who are saying the United States is on its way out. We were just talking about it—This was in the midst of trying to get Iraqis to buy in with Dave’s \$400 million and five- and ten-year leases and all the rest of this. The letter was sent to her privately; we didn’t publish this. She chose to publish the letter and make it into a political issue and accuse me of impugning her patriotism, even though the word “patriotism” nowhere appears in the letter. Nor do the words “aiding or abetting the enemy,” which is what she alleged in her press release.

I had already cleared it with the Secretary’s office. Secretary Gates’s staff had reviewed it; they were fine with it. It was actually one of my most unhappy experiences in government. I told the Secretary’s office, “I think actually this letter ought to come from Secretary Gates, not from me. She deserves that, plus this is really political. It shouldn’t be coming from a functionary; it should be coming from a political appointee.”

“We’ll think about it. No, Secretary Gates wants you to sign it.” OK. So I actually came up from my vacation home down in Chincoteague, Virginia, sign the letter, get in my car, and go back. The next day my Blackberry just starts blowing up. Philippe Reines, who is now my partner at Beacon Global Strategies—I’m on their advisory board—has done this press release for her. They put “Under Secretary Edelman has impugned her patriotism.” This all has to do with her positioning herself vis-à-vis Obama.

Gates gets the letter—Bryan Whitman, who is the spokesperson, called me and said, “Hey, I just talked to the Secretary. He told me to say ‘I’m going to review the letter’ or ‘I haven’t read the letter’ or something. I’ll get back to you.” I said, “Well, Bryan, you do realize that this is going to be hanging me out to dry a little bit, particularly since the SecDef’s Chief of Staff Robert Rangel signed off on this letter?” “Yes,” he said, “I know, that’s why I’m calling, I’m just giving you a heads up.”

I come in after that weekend, that Monday, I come back, happens to be an NSC meeting. Bush looks at me and says, “Great letter to Hillary.” Cheney is interviewed on PBS [Public Broadcasting Service] *NewsHour* either that night or the next night and says—He’s asked about the letter—he says, “Great letter, I have no problem with the Under Secretary on this letter.” Meanwhile, the answer to Hillary is percolating in the bowels of the department and Mary Beth Long and Mark Kimmitt, the DASD and Assistant Secretary, are working this letter.

So the letter comes, I look at it, OK, it’s fine. It goes to the Secretary’s office. Gates goes over to talk to Hadley and apparently goes over the letter with Hadley. I get this call from Robert Rangel, who was just terrific. He was Gates’s Chief of Staff, had been Rumsfeld’s Chief, had been the staff director for the House Armed Services Committee for 10 years, a fantastic guy. I worked very closely with him, still good friends. He is now vice president for Washington operations at Lockheed.

He calls me and says, “You need to come down to the front office.” I say, “OK.” I go down to the front office. He says, “The boss just called in a bunch of changes that Hadley wants him to make on the letter and you need to look at this.” So I look at the letter and basically, pretty much everything that defends me has been stripped out of the letter. I said, “Robert, I can’t live with this.” He said, “That’s why I asked you to come down here.” I said, “OK, look, you need to get some time on the calendar. I need to talk to the Secretary before he signs this out.” He says, “OK.”

The Secretary comes back from the White House; I get called in. I said, “Mr. Secretary, I really need to talk to you about this letter.” I said, “I have a real problem with the changes Hadley made to the letter.” I said, “My problem is this. The letter was cleared with your front office. It represents the department’s policy. If you don’t defend that position, then I am totally useless to you. I can’t go testify on behalf of the department. The first question everyone is going to say is are you speaking for yourself, Secretary Edelman, or are you speaking for the department? Has the Secretary cleared your testimony? Does he agree with your testimony? I mean, I will be useless to you. I will have to resign. I’m not going to resign in a huff and create a big problem; I’ll wait for a while, but in a couple of months I’ll have to leave because I just won’t be able to help you.”

He said, “Well, look, I don’t want to lose you; that would be a big problem for me. But Hadley has the idea that if we defend you in this letter it’s just going to lead to a spiraling, escalating exchange of letters with Clinton.” I said, “With all due respect, I’ve known Steve since he was a senior in college at Cornell and I was a freshman. I love him, but he has no political sense at all and it is 100 percent wrong. The only way to stop this now is for you to send a letter that says—I mean, the President has supported me privately, you heard him.” I said, “And the Vice President has supported me publicly. The only way to stop this is for you to say, ‘This was the department position. We don’t talk about these kinds of plans in public. We’ll be happy to brief you privately if you want. End of story. There is no story here.’”

We ended up—He said, “OK, I take your point.” We massaged the letter to the point where it was—in my view—the kind of bare-minimum defense that I needed to continue to be effective on the Hill. He sent the letter.

Then I went to testify in front of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence and Carl Levin is there and Carl pulls me aside and he says, “Eric,” he says, “I need you to go apologize to Hillary. I’m sure you thought what you wrote in that letter was fine. I read it; I thought it was outrageous. I can’t believe you said it, but I need you to go apologize to her.”

I said, “Senator, why is that?” He said, “Because I need you to be able to come up and testify in front of the Armed Services Committee and if you and she are like—I can’t have this.” I said, “Well, Senator Levin,” by now by the way he’s Chairman of the Armed Services Committee. “Chairman Levin,” I said, “I really appreciate the spirit in which this advice is being offered. Let me take it back to the Secretary and see what he says. I’m personally not inclined to apologize because I don’t think I did anything that requires an apology. I was representing the department’s long-standing position that we don’t discuss contingency plans in public and you’re aware of that.” He said, “I know it.”

So I went back and I told Gates this. He said, “No, you’re not going to go apologize to Hillary. Holy God, who knows what would happen if she had you up there in her office apologizing? No, we’re not going to do that.” Instead they sent me, along with Gordon England, to brief the Armed Services Committee in classified session on how we were planning the ultimate retrograde out of Iraq and all the different considerations we had and all of this.

I went up to S403 or whatever, 408, whatever the classified room is on the Senate side, and I walk in and Joe Lieberman is there. Joe walks up to me and he says—He shakes my hand and he says, “Eric, I read your letter. It was a great letter, hang in there, this is all political, it’s bullshit, don’t worry about it.” While I’m shaking hands with Lieberman, in walks Senator Clinton. She walks up and shakes my hand and I say, “Senator.” Lieberman says, “I wish I had a picture of this. I could sell this on eBay.” Clinton says, “Yes, me and my pen pal Eric.” I’m thinking, *Oh, my God.*

We go into the hearing, and it was a classified hearing, but there’s nothing classified about this exchange, which was at one point she said to me when it got around to her asking questions, she said, “Did you clear your response with the Vice President or the Office of the Vice President?” I said, “No, ma’am, I did not.” She said, “Did you clear it with anybody in the White House?” I said no. So it was like—She had this whole theory that this was—Anyway, so when the hearing was over, Jim Webb walked in. He had already denounced me on the floor. He walked in and kind of made a speech about how horrible I was as a person and then got up and left. He didn’t even ask a question.

Robert Corker and Richard Burr were in there. They said, “We don’t even understand why we’re having this hearing. We’re not getting any useful information.” Gordon England and I walked out and high-fived each other. “Great, we gave them nothing useful.” *[laughter]* That was my penance for having offended Hillary.

**Riley:** That was the peak of your Congressional relations? *[laughter]*

**Edelman:** There were a couple of codas to this. One was after she got named to be Secretary of State and Gates was named to be ongoing SecDef, I was in talking to Rangel, whose office is right outside of Gates’s office. As I was walking out, out walks Clinton, who has just been having lunch with Gates. This is now like January of ’09. We’re all about to leave office. She says, “Oh, Eric, it’s so great to see you. I really miss our exchanges in the committee.” I’m thinking, *Oh, my God, lady, you are the biggest liar. I know I don’t miss them.*

Then a year later, in the summer of 2010, I get a phone call from Secretary Clinton’s office: “The Secretary would like you to come in with a few other experts on Turkey to brief her on Turkey.” I said, “Do you have the right former U.S. Ambassador to Turkey? Are you looking for Marc Grossman? Grossman, Edelman, easy mistake to make; I’m not going to be offended, don’t worry.” “No, no, she wants you.” OK. If the Secretary of State wants my advice, I’m not going to deny them the opportunity.

I go in and she comes into her conference room, like we’re long-lost friends, “Oh, Eric, it’s so good to see you.” “Yes, ma’am, it’s so good to see you too.”

**Leffler:** Talking about Turkey, what should we know about your Ambassadorship there?

**Edelman:** It was totally uneventful.

**Leffler:** You sure?

**Edelman:** First I want it duly recorded that the U.S. standing in the Pew poll of nations was I think about 15 or 16 percent when I left, and it has been all downhill since. I don't think it has ever been as high as it was when I was there, although I don't think I can claim credit for that. Look, I got there at a very awkward, difficult time after the vote on March 1st, the failed vote. Then after a bunch of Turkish Special Forces guys were hooded and cuffed by people from the 173rd Airborne Brigade, commanded by at that point Colonel Billy Mayville [Jr.], now Lieutenant General Mayville, or has he gotten a fourth star? He was Director of the Joint Staff for a while. I'm not sure what Billy is doing now. It was very dicey.

It was a very tough time in the U.S.-Turkish relationship because of what was going on in Iraq, because of the failure, a lot of anger directed against Turkey and CENTCOM [central command], a lot of Turkish angst about Kurdish developments.

**Riley:** Did you have a sense about whether the Turkish rights—in terms of cooperation with the invasion—Was that a solvable problem that was messed up, or was it—?

**Edelman:** We had—When Cheney went on his trip, the thing we heard consistently from the Turks was a lot of anxiety and concern on the part of the Turks about the costs that Turkey had borne from the '91 Gulf War in terms of lost revenues because of sanctions, promises of assistance from the United States, which was supposed to be grant assistance, which then by act of Congress got turned into loan assistance.

One of the things we decided to try and do in the winter of 2002 to smooth this over was to—First we invested a lot of money in upgrading the infrastructure that would be necessary if we were going to mount an invasion and use Turkish seaports and airfields and whatnot as transshipment points, which was a boost to the economy in those areas, because it's mostly in the southeast, which is the poorest part of Turkey, the most economically underdeveloped part.

We were putting together an assistance package. The Turks had all sorts of escalating numbers for how much they needed, 24 billion, 150 billion. Some of the numbers were really, really outlandish. We put together a package of loan guarantees and loans that would have been worth I think something like 26 billion to the Turks to help offset their losses. There were some people who intruded themselves into this.

There was a back channel that Cüneyd Zapsu, who was an intimate of Recep Tayyip [Erdoğan], who was friendly with an American—actually it was a Brit—Anglo-American, Grenville Byford, who for some reason, very well-to-do, had decided he was going to make Turkey his pet project. He had gotten to know a lot of these AKP [*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* or Justice and Development Party] people; he was at Harvard. I can't remember, he had some affiliation with Harvard. Anyway, he got himself inserted into this and did a lot of back channeling to different people in the U.S. government, Paul Wolfowitz, myself, Grossman. He was talking to former Ambassadors like Mark Parris and people like that.



So there were these messages flowing back and forth through these guys. My view is that that got in the way of a lot of what happened. Back channels, in my view, frequently confuse things. The main problem I think as we learned—ex post facto—Minister [Yashar] Yakish, who was the Foreign Minister in the early days—the government of Ecevit, which was the government there when Cheney and I and the others were there in the spring of 2002, fell in the summer of 2002. Then there was an interim government that got put together with some very professional folks who started to do a lot of smart things for Turkey, like privatization and things like that.

Ecevit was kind of on his last legs. He was really old—I think he was beginning to be a little senile. So in November we got the AKP government, which won overwhelmingly. In fact, it had such a large majority, almost had a supermajority in the Parliament as a result of the very skewed—There is a proportional representation system in Turkey that has a big skew of vote to seats. So they got, I think, 34 percent or something in the election and because of the 10 percent threshold that you need to get into the Parliament, which was created to keep Kurds out essentially, the AKP ended up with like two-thirds of the—They got one-third of the vote and almost two-thirds of the seats in the Parliament.

We started putting this together. Yakish later said that the Turks didn't think the Americans had a Plan B. We managed through our—Inadvertently, in part through some of these messages going back and forth through Zapsu to Erdoğan, in part because we were inhibited—This is where bureaucratic tribalism sort of inhibited us. Paul Wolfowitz went out there at one point to talk to the Turks about this, but nobody in DoD wanted Powell to go because people perceived Powell as not sufficiently committed to all this. Nobody wanted Rumsfeld to go, because people were scared to death of what would happen if Rumsfeld met with the Turks, because he could sometimes be impolitic in his comments, so nobody wanted that.

We were a little bit inhibited, I think, by our lack of high-level interaction with the Turks. Tommy Franks went out there and told them point-blank, "Look, we could do this without you guys," but because we kept coming back to them, they drew the conclusion that we couldn't do it without them, that they were too big to fail and therefore we had to—so there was like a political moral hazard problem that we had.

The President met in February 2003 with Ali Babacan, who was the Treasury Minister, and Yakish, who was the Foreign Minister. Yakish started the meeting—It was actually kind of funny. Yakish said, "You know we're not here to horse trade with you, Mr. President. We have these serious problems and needs and we need assistance from the U.S., but we're not here to horse trade." Bush said to him, "Oh, Mr. Minister, I'm from Texas. I know something about horse trading. The guy who comes in and sits down with you and says, 'I'm not a horse trader,' you need to look down, because the next thing you know you're not wearing any pants."  
[laughter]

Yakish I think was a little taken aback. But the horse trading thing became a problem, because even though it was the Turks who started that—They were the ones who said, "We're not horse trading here."—that got into the Turkish press and it became—There were all these accusations, that we were treating them as if they were a bunch of *bazaaries* trying to sell us a rug.

**Bakich:** Right, right.

**Edelman:** That got in the way of it. Then the vote, when it took place on March 1st—I remember talking to Marc Grossman a night or two—We were at a social event together; my wife was there. We were on our way out there that summer and she said, “Marc, how’s the vote going to go?” Marc said, “It’s going to pass. There will be a lot of kabuki, but in the end it will pass.” It almost passed. It actually led to a pretty funny moment. Saturday morning they had the vote, and although people keep saying the vote failed, it’s actually very technical.

The vote—actually there were 14 more votes for letting us in than there were against, so it actually had a plurality in the Parliament. But there was a point of order and it turned out that because there had been a very high number of abstentions—They did it as a secret vote so members didn’t have to reveal how they were voting. Allegedly the Turks told us they did that because it was so unpopular in Turkey to allow this that people were afraid that they would be voted out of office if they voted for it. So a secret vote, we were told, is the way that they can vote for this, because the government told them to do it, without paying a price.

But there was a way higher number of abstentions than anybody understood, so they were four votes short of a quorum as a result of those present and voting. So it failed on a point of order, not actually on the vote.

I got a phone call from Dan Fried, who was the Senior Director on the NSC at that point for Europe, an old friend. He was two years behind me at Cornell. Dan said, “OK, it just passed by 14 votes.” So forgetting my normal caution that first reports are always wrong, which I should have—I called the Vice President. I said, “Mr. Vice President, the Turkish Parliament just passed the motion on the 4th ID by 14 votes.” He said, “Thank you.” He hung up.

About 10 minutes later Dan calls back and says, “There’s a problem.” I said, “What?” He said, “There’s a problem.” He said, “There’s a point of order.” I said, “What do you mean there’s a point of order?” So he explains to me about the abstentions. I said, “Would you call me back when the parliamentary rules on this and tell me what the hell is going on? I just called the Vice President of the United States and told him it passed. When I call him again I want to tell him the right, accurate story.”

**Riley:** You were doing the David Addington—

**Edelman:** Pretty much. Believe me, Dan and I are really old friends, so I could afford to do it. He calls back and says, “No, it’s not—It has failed.” So I called Cheney. I said, “Mr. Vice President.” He said, “Yes, Eric.” I said, “You know that phone call I made to you about an hour ago about the vote in Turkey?” He said yes. I said, “Well, what I told you is no longer operative.” He said, “Let me guess. Someone demanded a recount?” *[laughter]*

I said, “Something like that.” I explained to him what happened and he said, “OK, great.” Now, what happened after this—

**Leffler:** Didn’t they have a second vote then?

**Edelman:** No, they never did. What’s interesting about that is we on the Deputies Committee—So the Deputies Committee spins into action. Steve Hadley—All weekend we’re having these conference calls of the deputies for hours, with Bob [W. Robert] Pearson, the Ambassador in

Turkey. We're saying, "OK, is there going to be a second vote?" Pearson says, "Yes, they're thinking about a second vote; it's not clear when it will be."

We're saying, "OK, what do we have to do and how do we position all this?" Now Erdoğan was not in government yet; he was not Prime Minister. He still was under the ban for political activity that he had been put under by the military when he was mayor of Istanbul. But on March 9th there was a by-election in Siirt and he was running in that by-election, which would enable him to be elected to Parliament so that he could then fleet up and become Prime Minister and Abdullah Gül, who was Prime Minister, would become Foreign Minister.

So the deputies were busy beaver away, trying to come up with a new package. We got to 26 billion; we need maybe some more asks, blah, blah, blah. There was all this work and we're spinning around. March 9th I'm behind Condi in line at the White House mess at like 6:00 in the morning to get a cup of coffee. I say, "Condi, you know there is a by-election in Turkey today and Erdoğan is going to get elected. It probably would be a good idea if the President made a congratulatory call, maybe could kind of goose him a little bit to have a second vote."

She looked at me and she said, "What are you talking about? What do you mean second vote?" I said, "You know we've been talking with Bob Pearson; the deputies have been working on this." She said, "You guys have been working on this? The principals, they've all moved on. We're done with Turkey; it's like way too late." I said, "You've got to be kidding me." She said, "No, no, they've had it with Turkey; there's no way. If the Turks expect they're going to get anything from us after what they've done, they're not getting anything."

I said, "Oh, my God." So I went to see Hadley. I said, "Houston, we have a problem. We deputies have been busy working away, but there is this big disconnect between the principals and the deputies here because the principals, according to your boss, have moved on and we're not—" He goes, "Oh, my God."

I did talk to the Vice President, and the Vice President in the end did make a call to Erdoğan, a congratulatory call, which put an end to all of this. He called Erdoğan—It was a very interesting phone call, actually. I've had many occasions to think back on it. The Vice President asked Erdoğan point-blank after congratulating him, "Are you going to have another vote?" And Erdoğan said, "I don't know; I'm going to have to see." He said, "I'm a populist-type politician and I cannot afford to lose any votes; I have to go from strength to strength. I can't be seen to ever be losing anything, so I'll have to see what the traffic will bear, whether there will be another vote or not."

Cheney got off the phone and said, "So much for that; we're done. It's over with Turkey." Powell then had conversations with Gül about opening Turkish air space to overflight both for missile shots and aircraft and what not. There never was again a chance of—Part of the problem too was Tommy Franks had this idea that—So a lot of us who were involved in this negotiation with the Turks kept saying, We've got to—the 4th ID was like floating around in the Med [Mediterranean] waiting to disperse, to debark in Mersin, and a lot of us kept saying, "We've got to move them through the canal, or move them toward the canal so we can tell the Turks, OK, we're heading out." Instead they kept it floating out there because Tommy had this idea that as long as there was a chance that they might come through Turkey, that Saddam would have to

freeze his forces up in the north—I think the Hammurabi Division was up there. He was going to have to keep the forces up there so that they didn't reposition down where we were actually coming.

That kind of impeded the negotiation too, because the Turks thought, *Well, they're still floating out there. So they still think there's a deal to be done with us*, but there wasn't any. The 4th ID, by the way, was commanded by Ray Odierno, and they ended up getting—Odierno is still pissed off at the Turks. Today he is still pissed off at the Turks because he didn't get into the fight because the 4th ID didn't get there until after all the shooting was done.

**Riley:** Did that have any material consequences day three, day 30, two years down the road?

**Edelman:** I know Rumsfeld believed—and some members of Congress I think believed, and Tommy Franks told people—that yes, it did have consequences, because as a result—If we had gotten the 4th ID in, we would have completely smashed the Hammurabi Division; we would have killed a lot more of them. They wouldn't have been able to go off and become insurgents. Somehow this is responsible in part for the insurgency. Who knows, it's counterfactual; there's no way to know. I took that with a huge grain of salt, because it's not clear whether the Hammurabi Division would have stood and fought against the 4th ID or would have just broken and fled, in which case they would have been back home to become insurgents anyway.

But there certainly was lingering animosity against the Turks, certainly in Rumsfeld's case and Odierno's for sure and [John] Abizaid, CENTCOM. There was just a lot of animosity toward the Turks, so it had some consequences.

**Riley:** We're awfully close to our appointed hour. With your indulgence, what I would like to do is go ahead and close this off today. If you'd allow us to come back at some point to pick up the bits and pieces, I'll try and go through the topics with my colleagues here to see what we didn't get to and flag that.

**Edelman:** Sure, there's plenty more.

**Riley:** We pledge to you not to put you through quite as long a day.

**Leffler:** Don't make that pledge.

**Edelman:** If I'm down here, I might as well be here for the day.

**Riley:** We'd be delighted to have you as much as possible; this has been absolutely riveting and extremely informative for us. There are a lot of pieces of the puzzle that you know about that nobody else knows about. What we find with these interviews is that it creates a mosaic of the administration and nobody can color in every piece.

**Edelman:** But pieces of the elephant.

**Riley:** It has been terrific. You've been a good sport to indulge all of our many questions.

**Edelman:** It's my pleasure. I do think there is actually more for us to go through on a lot of these topics; we've only scratched the surface of various pieces.

**Riley:** Exactly. If you have an opportunity, look at the topics again and maybe just flag some notes for yourself.

**Perry:** While it's fresh, jot it down, what you'd like to emphasize.

**Riley:** We'll try to do this without a lot of delay. We'll work on it.

**Edelman:** I'll be happy to figure it out. We do have my testimony in here to the government operations investigative subcommittee and that's a great story, because that has to do with trying to get Chris Shays reelected in 2006 and why Under Secretaries are sometimes piñatas for the Congress. There is a whole very amusing story to that.

**Riley:** Any descriptions of what it's like to be a piñata we definitely want to get on the record, so thanks for the tip. Thank you very much, Ambassador.