GEORGE W. BUSH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

FINAL EDITED TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW WITH PETER FEAVER

January 10–11, 2012
Charlottesville, Virginia

Participants

University of Virginia
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Barbara Perry

Sweet Briar College
Spencer Bakich

Rhodes College
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Riley: This is the Peter Feaver interview as a part of the George W. Bush Oral History Project. I'll report for the record that all of us here at the table are obligated to maintain the confidentiality of the proceedings until such time as the project is completed and you've signed off on the content of the interview.

I'm going to ask everybody to go around the table and say a few words so that the transcriber can figure out who is talking. Anand Rao is also keeping some notes. His notes are merely a sequence of interventions to help the transcriber. I'm Russell Riley, I'm the chair of the Oral History Program.

Feaver: I'm Peter Feaver and I'm glad to be here.

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

Bakich: I'm Spencer Bakich and I'm assistant professor of government and international affairs at Sweet Briar College.

Nelson: Mike Nelson, professor of political science at Rhodes College.

Riley: We like to begin by getting some background information of the people we're talking with, as an exercise in political sociology to figure out who staffed an administration and so forth.

Feaver: Sure.

Riley: Would you start by telling us a little about where you came from before you became an important person in the White House? What was your family background?

Feaver: When I was in third grade, I wrote what I want to be when I grow up and I said I wanted to be a professor of classics at Lehigh University because that's what my dad was.

Riley: No kidding.

Feaver: Although I said I might not be good enough to be a professor of classics at Lehigh so as

a backup I would be a professor of classics at Oxford [University]. [*laughter*] When I became a professor someone in my family reminded me that this was something I had long claimed to want to do. But I also had a long interest in policy. I discovered when I went to my high school reunion a couple of years ago that all my high school friends said I had claimed then that I was going to work in government in some post. Some said I had said Secretary of State. I can't believe I was that obnoxious in high school, but maybe I was.

So academics and policy have long been interests. I was fortunate to do my graduate work at Harvard where that model was very typical. My dissertation chair, Joe Nye, particularly embodied the idea of someone who did scholarship but also goes into government when the time was right. I knew I wanted that kind of career. I got my PhD and then got the job at Duke. I tried to maintain a toe in both waters through the course of my professional career.

I had the fortune of having an International Affairs Fellowship, a CFR [Council on Foreign Relations] Fellowship early on in my time at Duke, which allowed me to go and work in the [William J.] Clinton administration on the NSC [National Security Council] staff there in '93, '94, which was a very pivotal time in the Clinton administration and a very interesting time to work at the White House, but also just an extraordinary baptism in the deep end of policy making. My first real job in government was on the NSC staff, admittedly at the very bottom, just as a director, but still a very interesting vantage point.

I learned a tremendous amount. Came back from there, energized on a number of research projects but also was definitely looking to go back to D.C. [District of Columbia] when the time was right.

Riley: What was your portfolio with Clinton?

Feaver: Cats and dogs. When they hired me, my boss, Bob Bell, wanted to have the Clinton administration do a serious roles and missions review alongside the bottom-up review that Les Aspin, Secretary of Defense, was doing. That was in the spring when he and I talked. By the time I got there the administration had lowered its ambition substantially. The gays in the military controversy had really spooked them, poisoned civil-military relations, weakened their leverage over the Pentagon. So the last thing the White House wanted to do was launch roles and missions, which of course is something so painful that no one since [Harry] Truman has attempted it seriously, although you get wind that it may be happening today.

In any case, Clinton clearly wasn't going to do it. That left lots of cats and dogs for me to do. I had a number of regional arms control responsibilities, the South Pacific nuclear-free zone, which the U.S. after many years decided not to accede to. That was mine. I had counterproliferation–nonproliferation; but counterproliferation was the term reserved for DoD [Department of Defense] efforts in the nonproliferation area. I was dual-hatted so I reported to Bob Bell but also to Dan Poneman, who was Senior Director for Nonproliferation.

Riley: Dual-hatted within the National Security Council?

Feaver: Dual-headed, I had two heads I reported to. In NSC, in Defense the Policy and Arms Control Director, but also reporting to Dan Poneman on counterproliferation stuff, which overlapped the two. Their two portfolios overlapped, one reason why they had me do it.

The National Security Strategy [NSS] was in my bailiwick as well. When I arrived it was largely done, or so they thought. They spent the next year rewriting it and trying to catch up to world events, Black Hawk Down, Haiti, Rwanda, North Korea. It took a lot of rewriting to catch up to world events. We finally released it in June of '94.

Nelson: How did you decide to do a dissertation on civil and military relations? And I can't help but note that the year you get your PhD, you also become a U.S. Naval Reserve Officer.

Feaver: Right, so the dissertation was not first and foremost in my mind about civil-mil, it became that. It was first and foremost about the politics of nuclear operations. The dissertation came out of a flurry of activity in the nuclear studies area focused on operations. Up until that point, all the debates had been about structure: Do we build the MX [missile experimental] or not? Or strategy, what is required for secure second strike and does it confer any advantage? Important debates about operations were lacking because they were so highly classified and little was known outside to debate it. But the windows were just cracking open as I was coming into graduate school, first with Paul Bracken's book and Bruce Blair's book, both of which opened up lots of new information that hadn't really been out there. Then Ash Carter's big project on managing nuclear operations, which hit right when I was looking for a dissertation topic.

There was an element of serendipity because I didn't have a great dissertation topic. At the time I was assigned to work on a project that Joe Nye wanted done, an oral history of permissive action links. This was a pilot project for what became the later stuff on the Cuban missile crisis, but they wanted to pilot that technique, the method. So they picked a smaller-sized thing, namely the decision to deploy permissive action links through the system. They already had the idea, they had the project, they had the money, and they needed someone to do it.

They assigned me because I was a Fellow, I was going to do whatever they told me to do, to work with Peter Stein, a senior physicist at Cornell who was interested in this project. He and I did it. We interviewed all the people who were involved in the initial decision to develop permissive action links. As you know better than I, they each had stories that didn't perfectly latch up. This was a great decision, so they all claimed credit for it. It wasn't until we brought them all together in the room for the conference in some cases that they realized that they were not the one who had invented permissive action links.

It was a fascinating historical method.

Riley: You were doing the interviews?

Feaver: Yes, and we wrote up the results. I wondered if there was a dissertation in that larger question. As I thought about it, I thought there was. What was the politics behind the decision to deploy permissive action links? As I thought about what the politics were, I concluded it really was an instance of civil-military politics.

I was writing about nuclear control and then moved back to what was the politics of nuclear control—it's really civil-military politics—and from there got the idea that it is about civilian control of nuclear weapons. So backed into the civil-mil thing. Then because of the civil-mil angle, I had Sam Huntington on my committee.

Nelson: Yes.

Feaver: I was fortunate to have three very different committee members, each with their own distinct area of expertise, but they complemented each other so well. Ash Carter, the nuclear weapons expert, Joe Nye, the larger theorist in the American foreign policy angle of it, and Sam Huntington on the civil-mil side. My dissertation is really at the intersection of their three circles of interest. I was very fortunate to get their mentorship.

I was also fortunate because a lot of my colleagues who finished their dissertations right around '89–'90 were victims of the end of the Cold War. They had dissertations that made a whole lot of sense in '85–'86 when they launched them and less sense in '89–'90. Mine seemed to have a slightly longer shelf life because, like most of the rest of the field, I quickly retooled myself as a nonproliferation guy. So even though my expertise was on U.S. nuclear command and control I said, "What does this tell us about spread of nuclear weapons to other states?" That was a hot topic in the early '90s. Career-wise I was fortunate to have that—to maintain my viability in the system, as President Clinton would have described it.

I came out of the Clinton years recognizing that civil-mil really was important and that the theories I used needed revision—I already was a little dissatisfied with the Huntington model for explaining nuclear command and control. That is in my dissertation book. But I became even more dissatisfied with it as I worked in the White House and saw civil-mil on a daily basis. I said, "The model works in theory but not in practice. It is not capturing what I'm seeing," and I came out of the White House experience with the idea for what became my next big book: *Armed Servants*. Ironically it had a very abstract game theory model but it was inspired and motivated by a desire to have an argument that would ring truer to people who were doing the day-to-day civil-mil. That came out of my Clinton experience.

Nelson: Why join the U.S. Naval Reserve? Why at this time?

Feaver: When I was in high school trying to figure out how to make my way in the world—maybe it was in college too—I asked one of the leading figures in our town, a very successful businessman, what I should do. He said, "Join the Navy."

He was also the father of the girl I wanted to marry at the time and I don't know that he wanted me to marry her, so his advice might have been contaminated by the desire to get me out of town. I'm joking because it was sincere advice. He felt that the Navy had taught him a lot. So I wanted to do that. My dad had served in the Canadian Air Force in World War II. He was a pacifist until [Adolf] Hitler, he said, and then joined the Air Force and taught navigation. He left the war not quite a full pacifist but very skeptical about the military. But for some reason he was not opposed to my going into the Navy.

I thought about it seriously and weighed that option and then got the graduate scholarship so went to get a PhD. I assumed that was the end of it. I couldn't go into the Navy at that point. But a good friend of mine, Kurt Campbell, who was at Harvard at the time, joined the Navy Reserves. He had discovered that there was a direct commission [DirCom] program developed to bring doctors and lawyers into the Navy, people who had civilian skills that were hard for the Navy to get. It was a direct commission program where on day zero you're a civilian pediatrician

and on Day One you are Lieutenant Commander or whatever. So you bypass a lot of the boot camp, OCS [Officer Candidate School], a lot of things like that.

They extended that DirCom program for the intel [intelligence] program, for people with specialties in the Soviet studies. It was a little cell of the Navy's fighting professors. Dale Herspring, a professor at Kansas State, was in it; David Allen Rosenberg was in it. A half dozen or so pointy-headed intellectuals. Then when the Soviet Union disappeared they broadened their mandate and opened it up to professors like me who didn't have Soviet expertise but had broader strategic studies background. Kurt encouraged me to do that. Once I joined, David Rosenberg, whom I knew from my nuclear studies course, thought it was a great idea, Dale Herspring from my civil-mil. I had a bunch of sea daddies who said this was a great thing to do and it was. It was a very good opportunity to see the military institution from the inside.

Back in those days the reservists didn't deploy quite as readily or quickly as they do now. They mobilized the doctors and lawyers for Desert Storm but not the intel people, and they quickly demobilized them. For the '90s there was not as much opportunity to be operational, but I drilled throughout that period. I did strategic intelligence memos that I could have done as a professor, but I did them while in uniform for the Director of Naval Intelligence for the CNO [Chief of Naval Operations], those kinds of strategic-placed folk.

Nelson: You were in the Clinton White House in a particularly and publicly ugly time in civil-mil civility.

Feaver: Right.

Nelson: Starting with the draft issue in the campaign and then issuing the order about integrating gays and lesbians into the military and then public signs of disrespect by private officers toward the President. The fact that you were an expert in this area, as a scholar you knew something about it. Did being a uniformed officer give you a perspective on what was happening or a way of contributing to what was happening?

Feaver: By the time I got there, which is summer of '93, something of a ceasefire had been established. Colin Powell and the White House had formed a modus vivendi, and actually Powell was on his way out. Indeed the most consequential thing I did in my first month on the NSC staff was arranging the President's involvement in Colin Powell's retirement ceremony. It's a great story, doesn't belong in an oral interview so I'll tell it to you afterward. I've been dining out on it for 25 years.

But the point is they had reached a level of extreme hostility. When the President would go to the base and there would be people telling reporters disrespectful things. By the time I arrived, that was past a little bit but at the price of the ambition of the White House being focused more on domestic policy. There were certainly civil-mil tensions during my time. Most vivid early on was Black Hawk Down, what to do about Somalia. For a couple of days it was very tense in the White House.

I would contribute a little bit to those, but the White House posture was set, and they were not going to force something on the military. So whether it was Black Hawk Down or a month later or a week later, I forget the dates, but in Haiti when the *Harlan County* steams in and the White

House is trying to get the *Harlan County* to stay there and the military says, "No, it's not" and backs it out, to debates over what to do in North Korea in the crisis over their nuclear program.

In each of those times, and most famously in Rwanda, the White House posture was much more circumspect. The outright conflict that you saw, say, from January to July of 1993, wasn't as great in the next year, but at the price of the White House asking for less or deferring more quickly.

Perry: You mentioned your father's pacifism and his impact on your choices. Politics in the family?

Feaver: They're Canadians. I was born with dual citizenship and traveled under a Canadian passport probably until I joined the Navy. I was born in the U.S., so I had dual citizenship from the start. Politics weren't a big part of my childhood—discussions about politics were not. International relations was.

My dad's close friend was Carey Joynt, a professor of international relations at Lehigh. When I went to study at Lehigh, he became my mentor. Indeed, he was the earliest inspiration I had to go into this field because I would hear him talk about the world at Christmas dinners and events at their house, and it was just fascinating.

A lot of international affairs discussion. We did a family sabbatical to Greece in my tenth-grade year. Lived abroad but not much discussion of politics. I remember my brothers getting their draft notices, and one of them had a number that would have made him likely to be drafted, but it was right as they were shutting down the Selective Service. So they were too young to deploy to Vietnam. The Vietnam War didn't touch us quite as much, and I don't remember many family discussions about it.

Perry: Not partisan, therefore? Not partisan discussions in particular.

Feaver: No.

Riley: And it is not possible to say on a liberal/conservative spectrum?

Feaver: By American standards very devout Christian and prominent Christian. So by European standards off the charts. My parents were both children of missionaries. We had a house church that met in our home on Saturday nights. Then we worshiped at another church on Sunday mornings. The dominant influence growing up was not political but religious.

Riley: Nondenominational?

Feaver: We attended a PCUSA [Presbyterian Church (USA)] church on Sunday mornings and the charismatic house church that met in our house Saturday nights. My mom led a Bible study for women on Tuesday mornings. So then you say left/right. There wasn't the term back then but compassionate conservatism is the modern term for it. *Very* heavy on social work. Mom was very much involved in prison work, particularly working with women in prison and when they came out. We were sometimes the only family they knew, so we had a parade of very unusual people through our house.

Riley: Did you have trouble when you were trying to get a security clearance?

Feaver: No, thankfully that was far enough in the past. I had an uncle who founded an international mission for world development work. Very heavily involved in ministry to the poor and development work on the one hand, but also conservative on other social issues. That term didn't exist, but that would be the category.

Riley: Would you say your father's interest in classics derived out of his interest in religion?

Feaver: No. I think it was to the great disappointment of his dad, because he was the first kid in his family ever to go to college, and his dad at the time was a salesman for GE [General Electric] and was phenomenally successful. You've heard the saying about selling iceboxes to Eskimos. He actually went up to the Inuit region to prove that you could sell them a Frigidaire, but then took early retirement to head a mission to shantymen, which is what loggers are called in Canada, so there is a Shantyman Mission that was basically a missionary outreach to loggers.

At the end of World War II my grandfather was offered the monopoly for GM [General Motors] for Toronto, and he said he would only do it if his son would go into business with him. Dad didn't want to do it. I have forever held that over my parents. We could have been rich. But he wanted to go to college and graduate school for classics and it was not "useful."

Riley: What area within classics?

Feaver: Ancient Greek music.

Riley: Thanks for indulging these questions, it's fascinating. Just to push on the question that Mike had a few minutes ago, did you have occasion to witness any of the tensions between the White House and the military during the time you were there? There were anecdotes that we occasionally hear from that project.

Feaver: Sure. I'll tell that. One more anecdote about my dad. It doesn't belong here, but you triggered it.

Riley: It all belongs.

Feaver: As professors you guys will appreciate this. The sabbatical was to finish up his book on Greek music. He was the first person to get access to some new finds in the museum and spent the whole sabbatical poring over them and doing whatever it is archeologists do with stuff in a museum. Had the manuscript done. This was a life work. He had been working on it for a decade or more. We're driving back on our way through Rome, and while in Rome someone broke into our car and stole the briefcase with the manuscript. Of course, this was before the days of backing up hard copies or anything. It was the entire life work gone.

I can still remember my dad walking around the car coming to terms with what that meant. It was profound. I wish I could say that as a tenth grader I was sensitive to it. I wasn't. I was immediately thinking that I wanted to go to dinner. It was a real blow. He handled it with remarkable grace. It did put into perspective the fleeting nature of academic achievement and scholarship.

You were asking about tensions in the White House. Yes, there was all sorts of debate over the terms of the National Security Strategy. Indeed I was getting ready to send it out for a final review, can't make any changes to the document, just spelling errors can be fixed at this point in early October 1993. That was on my to-do list that Monday after Black Hawk Down. Of course we had to pull the document right away because the document leaned forward quite far on assertive multilateralism, this was the wave of the future, using the UN [United Nations] in peace-enforcement missions. The U.S. would be involved and take a leadership role but joined by—we were going to do what Somalia was supposed to be the exemplar of.

Of course the support on the Hill evaporated, both Republican and Democrat, I remember Senator [Robert] Byrd was livid with the administration over the mission. But also civil-mil conflict. The military did not want to be put in these kinds of restrained missions. There was tension across those two on exactly that issue. We were negotiating the text, and it took us until June before we had text that everyone could live with and the President released it.

Riley: We'll probably want to ask you to reflect a little later on experiences in a comparative perspective to see if there were lessons picked up. I'm particularly wondering about any observations you might have about Tony Lake's position as the National Security Advisor and how he fit in the orbit of the White House at the time.

Feaver: I am somewhat at a disadvantage in comparing them because I was very junior in the Clinton administration. There might have been a more junior director than me but I didn't know who that was. I think I was the lowest of the director level on the NSC. I had limited visibility into the suite and the West Wing whereas much more in the [George W.] Bush years.

That being said, I did see some comparisons. I was constantly comparing, of course, and I would talk about it a lot with my friends who were the permanent civil service. One of the great things that I discovered going back the second time was the permanent secretarial staff of the NSC were the same. Not all of them, of course, but many of them were still there, and they remembered me and I remembered them. I was closer to their level in the first term, so I spent a lot more time with them than other directors probably did. I got to know them and I got their perspective, the differences between them.

The other comparison was that things weren't going well for the administration in '93–'94 and for a large chunk of '05–'07 things weren't going well. In fact, more than one person noted the strong correlation between the arrival of Feaver and the problems, departure of Feaver and things improved. I got that pointed out to me many times. With those caveats of visibility, it seemed to me that there was more of a bunker mentality in the Clinton years than in the Bush years. There was more anxiety, sense of despair, morale problems in the Clinton years than in the Bush years. That is not to say that there were no morale problems or no bunker mentality in the Bush years, there were little bits here and there, but it seemed to have a bigger consequence on the mood in the Clinton years, at least the year I was there, than it did in the Bush years.

Now there was an overlay of scandal that seemed more consequential in the Clinton time. That was the Paula Jones—It was my night to do the Christmas party in the Clinton time and that was the night that I think ABC [American Broadcasting Company] broke the story that they had found the trooper who had allegedly been involved. That was leading the nightly news. We were

watching the news and then we go down and try to sing Christmas carols with the President and the First Lady, and it was a surreal experience.

There weren't those kinds of scandals in the Bush years. There were problems. There were really consequential things. They were hard on morale, Katrina being the number one, but also Harriet Miers and a couple of other things like that. Yet there seemed to be less despair is what I would say—no, that's the wrong word. It wasn't despair; it was—here's the best way to describe it. Friends who stayed into the second term of the Clinton—after successfully dealing with the Balkans, reelection, they said the morale was much higher, much more confident. So those who experienced both in the Clinton years would describe it as a darker period in the '93–'94 years mood-wise.

Bakich: You just talked about external events, circumstances affecting morale in both administrations. Do you think the leadership styles of Lake versus [Stephen] Hadley had anything to do with it?

Feaver: Both Lake and Hadley are extraordinarily decent human beings and I think everyone, even people who disagree with them on policy matters, would describe them as stand-up, decent people who had high integrity and cared about their staff. That was certainly my take. I have worked with other people who don't always have that reputation but are very successful and very consequential. Both of them had that reputation. A fondness for both of them emerged. You got the sense that both of them cared about the staff and staff morale.

The difference I detected was that Hadley's position with the President was unquestioned and Lake's position with the President was not. When [Samuel] Sandy Berger took over, he had more of that unquestioned relationship with the President that Hadley had. I think that was important, the staff would pick up on it.

Nelson: Did your experience on the Clinton NSC staff lead you to have certain expectations when you joined the next President's NSC staff?

Feaver: It taught me what I call Feaver's Iron Law of Potomac Fever, which is that the closer you are to power, the more acutely you will resent the gap that remains. In the Clinton years I was in the White House. I could see the cable traffic, I could know about meetings that outsiders didn't know about, but I couldn't go to the meetings and that would drive me nuts.

I talked to my boss and said, "You're in the meetings." He was in the meetings but he was not sitting at the table, he was in the note-takers area. I could tell that he would have preferred to be at the table. The people at the table were sitting at the table but they were sitting at the sides, they weren't sitting at the head, and they knew that after this meeting a group of them, Tony and others, would go up to the Oval Office and they weren't in that and that would drive them nuts, particularly Secretary [Warren] Christopher.

But it would bother Tony Lake that he would leave the Oval meeting and George Stephanopoulos would stay behind. If you read Stephanopoulos's memoirs it's quite clear that it bothered him that he had to leave the Oval Office and Clinton stayed behind. Stephanopoulos felt so acutely about this that he actually arranged to have his office closer to the President measured by feet, accepting a smaller office several feet closer, and the gap therefore was all the more

acute for him.

If you read the President's memoirs, President Clinton felt powerless. Here he was at the great center, but everything he wanted to do he couldn't get done and the staff wasn't listening to him. I reflected on that once I was back at Duke where I had zero impact on national security but I could opine on anything, and in some ways I was more content with my lack of influence at Duke than I was while a director where I had marginally more influence but my distance was much more rubbed in my nose.

I came back the second time aware of this phenomenon and steeling myself against it. Of course, you can't totally steel yourself against it, but I was aware of it.

Riley: We don't want to miss any piece of the story. You finish, you go back and get your degree afterward?

Feaver: No, I was already a professor and Duke just suspended my tenure clock.

Riley: So you go back to Duke.

Feaver: Get tenure.

Riley: Teaching? Are you occasionally consulting with people in Washington?

Feaver: No, I would go back and visit all my friends in the Clinton administration. I wouldn't call that consulting. I might have told my dean that it was consulting, but it was more going back and talking with friends and I didn't get any money for it. I don't know whether I should say this here or at some other point in the thing. People always ask me, "What do you miss most?" I miss the camaraderie most. I didn't have a lot of power but certainly the trappings of some things, but compared to the academic life there is so much more camaraderie, teamwork, esprit de corps, even in the Clinton administration where I had the finest team of directors I worked with and the finest boss on the NSC staff, Bob Bell. But even more so in the Bush years.

Working on a team with them was what I missed the most. I was in the Navy though, and writing my stuff for the Navy and doing a lot of work for the Navy intel. I did a little bit of op-eding. I got very good advice from Joe Nye, which was, "Get the tougher union card first" and tenure is the toughest union card. Do what it takes to get tenure even if that means lowering your investments on the policy side, delaying or whatever. I did that. I didn't do many op-eds because I was trying to maximize publication for tenure purposes.

After I got tenure I did a little more op-eding but right around the time I was getting tenure, I launched the big study with Dick Kohn on the civil-military gap, which produced quite a large body of scholarship. There were several dozen scholars and lots of data, lots of findings, many of which were of interest in a current media environment. Starting in 1998 or '99, I started doing weekly trips to D.C., speaking to audiences inside the government, outside the government, all on the civil-mil gap stuff. Then on the civil-mil and the use of force and then on casualty sensitivity. That wasn't outright consulting, but it was definitely being part of the policy milieu in D.C.

Nelson: Did you do this as an officer?

Feaver: No, that was very definitely as an academic.

Perry: The op-eds were leading to the invitations, do you think?

Feaver: No, it was a little bit of invite and it was more of a push. We had done a big grant. We had promised the donors and the foundation that we would promulgate our results as widely as possible. I was calling up everybody and telling them we'd gotten a number of prominent mentions in the media, which of course leads to more. People want to hear what it is. The topic—is there a gap between the military and civilian society; if so, what does that matter—it was easy to persuade people that it was very important in the late Clinton years, by which point there were real questions about the military becoming isolated from civilian society.

Bakich: This is all through Triangle Institute, right?

Feaver: Yes.

Nelson: I'm interested in the specific time. Was it late Clinton, was it during the Presidential campaign? Was it in any way affected by the knowledge that there would be a new President? Was any of that background?

Feaver: It was triggered by Clinton in the sense that it was triggered by probably the case of the military crisis and Clinton's difficult relationship with the military, at least in his first term. Also triggered by Tom Ricks's influential book *Making the Corps*, which argued that the Marines were alienated from civilian society. Then the reaction to that. It was also triggered by—now I'm thinking in partisan terms—conservative concern about what was happening to military institutions, readiness was dropping. Were we turning the military into social work and not capable of fighting and winning our wars? These were all feeding the concern about this. Some of those themes Governor Bush picked up in his candidacy. But I think they predated him. I think he was opportunistically picking them up rather than being the issue entrepreneur who introduced them into the setting. It was driven by the changing nature of American military involvement in the '90s.

Nelson: Did you have a particular interest in having your findings seen by people who might be the next President? Were you prospective in your talk about this research or was it mostly reflective about what had happened?

Feaver: More so in 2004 than in 2000. We were briefing widely in 1999, 2000. There were three waves of results, three waves of briefings that I gave in D.C. The first one was the general omnibus of the civil-mil gap study, which was published with impeccable timing in September 2001, the blue-and-white edited volume. That one I briefed conservatively 80 times in different settings, some academic, some policy, some military, some political.

Then we talked to people who were advising the President, then turned out to be President Bush. Also talked to people who were advising [Albert, Jr.] Gore. But there was less political interest at the time. That was the first wave.

The second wave was the military and the propensity to use force. So civil-military relations and the propensity to use force. That came maybe six months later. It was another wave, again talking widely. That got more of an interest in academic circles and/or in military circles, less so the political. But it got a lot of press attention for several reasons. One was, did Bush count as a military veteran or—remember one of the Gore attack lines was Gore had served in Vietnam and Bush had not. So the whole draft dodger issue arose in 2000, and this fed into the question about civil-military relations. Then the 2000 election results seemed to turn on absentee ballots in Florida, if you recall.

Nelson: By military personnel.

Feaver: By military personnel and there was a lot of attention to what are the military ballots? Are they going to be Republican, Democrat, who are they going to vote for? Our study had shown that a growing percentage of military identified with Republicans, and there was a quote to the state Republican chair in Florida. They were interviewing him during the days before they counted the ballots. He said, "I'm not worried about this. It is going to be for Bush." There was this study we read that said the military was growing Republican. So we invested very heavily in military absentee ballots.

Nelson: The research done for the book was mostly about officers, wasn't it?

Feaver: Right, they extrapolated.

Nelson: Yes.

Feaver: So then the later wave was the casualty sensitivity wave.

Nelson: Oh, right.

Feaver: That came later. People got much more interested in that in 2002–2003. I stopped getting invites to present the "old stuff" in 2002 and started getting the new stuff, which I was working on then, and starting in the end of 2003 we had results.

Nelson: Were any of you who were talking about this study hoping that you would end up part of the next administration and able to influence the civil-military relationship?

Feaver: A lot of us were professors, academics who were interested in contributing to policy in some way. We saw this in some cases as basic research, but even the most academic of us worked very closely with policymakers—someone like David Segal, a very prominent military sociologist and pure academic. I think he spent his entire career in the university but is one of the leading scholars of the U.S. Army. The Army consults with him all the time. Many of his students have become leaders in the military. There is another guy, Jim Davis, who is even more purely a sociologist at [University of] Chicago, who maybe didn't have as much interest in policy.

The rest of us, even if we were academics, were very much involved in the policy discussion and op-eding and advising. Dick Kohn, my colleague, had long-standing deep ties to the Democratic Party and would advise people, usually from a distance. Others, like Eliot Cohen on our team,

had served in the [George H. W.] Bush administration or late [Ronald] Reagan. We thought we were doing real academic scholarship that could live in peer-review settings, but we were also interested in policy.

Riley: You keep talking about an interest in policy, and you just mentioned one of your colleagues who you said had deep ties to Democratic politics. What we haven't gotten you to tell us about is your own sense of how you were feeling in the partisan environment. You worked in the Clinton administration. Going into and coming out of that, did you consider yourself a Democrat or were you on foreign soil there? How were you positioning yourself within your own mind as to where you fit in the partisan environment? As a corollary to this, how do you construct a partisan identity that at the same time allows you to retain your scholarly integrity as you're working on these policy-based issues?

Feaver: I was in a nonpartisan job in the Clinton administration, so it wasn't Schedule C.

Riley: Right.

Feaver: I got the job first of all because I was free. I got the job because President Clinton had promised to cut the White House staff by 25 percent, did that, and then discovered, holy cow, there's way too much work. Someone said IAFs [International Affairs Fellows] don't count against that 25 percent benchmark. We were literally free. So they allowed the CFR folks to come. I'm sure that's how I got the job. The other way I got the job was that all of my mentors, Ash Carter, Joe Nye, Graham Allison, Sam Huntington, another, Joe Kruzel, he was at Ohio State, later died in the armored personnel carrier in the Balkans.

Perry: Political science person.

Feaver: Yes. My dear friend, he was the DASD [Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense] for Europe. They all had impeccable Democratic partisan credentials, and they all were vouching for me as a student. I probably wouldn't have passed political muster otherwise.

Riley: Because there were signs that you—?

Feaver: I was more sympathetic to the Republican side. I was torn in '88 when all of my mentors were fitting drapes for the [Michael] Dukakis administration. But I was assigned as the token Republican flunky to work with Bob Blackwill, who was the token Republican senior figure for a briefing book project for the new Dukakis administration. I got assigned to him. They might have had some suspicions about my political loyalties even then. But I didn't feel like a Republican mole in the Democratic White House. I worked very hard to promote American foreign policy, but also Clinton's foreign policy and Clinton's interests and protect him. Of course I came away with a deep fondness and sympathy for the people I worked with.

As many people will attest, I spent the next five years defending American foreign policy, which meant defending Clinton foreign policy at Duke, which didn't win me any friends at Duke. But where I got more of a partisan connection was in the run-up to the 2000 election. Not because of our research but separate from our research, I said, "I'm going to get these books out but there is going to be a new President in 2000, and I'd like to be in a position where I can go in and help them. I'll be tenured and it will be easier to do that."

So starting in 2000 I did informal consulting with the Bush campaign primarily through Rich Armitage. There were a number of senior players like Bob Blackwill, whom I knew because I had worked with him at Harvard. But Rich Armitage was in some ways more receptive to my kibitzing. I was linked up with Richard through Kurt Campbell, who is a very close friend of mine but also was close to Armitage, through work Kurt did in the Defense Department. I told Kurt, "I'm interested in this and I want to work for the other side." Kurt was kind enough to link me up with Armitage.

I fed Armitage my reactions, my analyses, various things—

Nelson: On what?

Feaver: Weaknesses in the Gore claims, weaknesses in foreign policy opportunities, interpreting poll results.

Nelson: So pretty broad gauged?

Feaver: Very broad gauged. A little bit on civil-mil. During the campaign there was this line of attack that Gore was the Vietnam vet and Bush was not and how to respond to that. A little of that kind of thing, but much more broadly foreign policy. With an eye too that if Bush wins I would be able to interview for a job. So President Bush won. By virtue of that I had earned—the way it was described to me was I had one bullet and Armitage was willing to expend that one bullet. He got me an interview with Richard Haass, who was going into Policy Planning, the typical place to park academics. The interview did not go well.

Riley: This is during the transition?

Feaver: During the transition, yes. I knew Richard well from grad school days. I knew the interview was not going to go well. At the start of the interview he says, "I'm told I have to interview you for a post because Richard Armitage asked me to, so I'm now going to interview you." [*laughter*] I thought, *This is not going well*. He wanted people with more policy experience. He didn't want neophytes like me.

Riley: Got it.

Feaver: I pointed out that I had worked on the NSC staff, but he wanted people with more State Department experience. Actually, I don't know what he wanted; all I know is that he didn't want me. So I didn't get the offer from Richard.

Riley: And your bullet was gone.

Feaver: My bullet was gone. Perhaps I botched my interview with Richard, but the more consequential problem was that Senator [Daniel] Coats fumbled his interview with President Bush and because of that—

Nelson: For Defense Secretary.

Feaver: Right. Because of that, Armitage couldn't go to Defense. If Armitage had been at

Defense, which is the natural place for me, there would have been perhaps more opportunities, but he was in State and there were fewer posts in State that made sense for someone of my background. There is a whole daisy chain because of the Coats thing. That's why [Donald] Rumsfeld is SecDef [Secretary of Defense], and I have a whole riff on not just how important personality is but how important personalities in a given post are because the same personalities but with [Paul] Wolfowitz at State, Armitage at DoD—

Riley: Give us the riff.

Feaver: The riff is that if Coats had come out as Secretary of Defense, then Rumsfeld would have been CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] Director. His penchant for critiquing and second-guessing might have improved the intel that came out of the CIA. But also Wolfowitz, who was the most forward-leaning on Iraq, would have been at the State Department. It is very hard to push a war from the State Department. Armitage, who was much the most leaning backward, would have been in the DoD, much easier to step on the brakes from there, and Powell, who was also very skeptical, would have reined in Wolfowitz and could have, through Armitage, stepped on the brakes more. It would have been a totally different Iraq story.

Riley: That's worth the price of admission already.

Bakich: The way you describe it is very interesting—leaning back, leaning forward, cautious. The two words I didn't hear were realist versus neocon [neoconservative]. Do these resonate at all for you?

Feaver: Not really. They are useful, but only if you're at a level of precision that almost never appears in the popular discourse. Even knowledgeable journalists will talk about "neocons," like [Richard] Cheney and Rumsfeld, which is nonsense because they're not neocons. They were Iraq hawks, but they weren't neocons. The neocon position was hawkish on Iraq, but it was more precise than that. The numbers, the ranks of them much fewer. Wolfowitz, yes, neocon. [Douglas] Feith, yes, neocon. But they are about the only, and even Wolfowitz won't claim the label neocon. Feith will. There are very few people who would claim that label and in fact hold the views that are attributed to neocons.

I think the other isms are a little more helpful. But I'm also reacting to it because it is so misused. I think it could be helpful if very precisely and carefully applied. Anyway, that's why I didn't go in the administration the first term.

Nelson: Why if Coats had been Secretary of Defense are you sure that Armitage would have been at Defense?

Feaver: That was the position he wanted. He was eminently qualified for it, was likely to get the top position that he was qualified for because of his work on the campaign. Indeed he did, he got a Deputy position.

Riley: That was partly to keep an eye on—

Feaver: Powell. One of the lines is perhaps Secretary Powell wanted his man in the Pentagon and Powell was very close to Armitage, which is part of the reason why Rumsfeld did not want

Armitage to be his Deputy, but also the way that Rumsfeld wanted to do the job as SecDef, he needed a slightly different type of person in the post. That's why I'm speculating. I don't know for sure that that is how it would have worked—and this is all of course before my time so I'm relying on journalistic accounts—but it does appear that Coats was being seriously considered for SecDef and then didn't get it and got Ambassador to Germany. And Rumsfeld, who was being seriously considered for DCI [Director of Central Intelligence], then got seriously considered for Secretary of Defense.

Riley: When did you get tenure?

Feaver: Around '98.

Riley: And between '98 and 2000 there are certain things going on. Interest groups, people looking at Iraq on the conservative side, I can't call the names of them to mind right now.

Feaver: PNAC [Project for the New American Century].

Riley: Were you a party to that?

Feaver: I was not. I did publish something in a PNAC project on China and so a critique of Clinton's policy engagement strategy on China. But not on Iraq. To the extent that I was doing anything on Iraq, it was defending Madeleine Albright at Duke. There was a strong critique of our Iraq policy, mainly from the left, in the '90s on the grounds that Clinton was too hawkish—the allegation of 500,000 children killed through the sanctions policy and others and why are we trying to contain Iraq. Those kinds of critiques. I would talk about Iraq policy and explain the context and everything in public fora. At the time as sympathetic to the Clinton position as critical of it. But I was also critical of Clinton foreign policy and other aspects of it.

Riley: One of the things that has always interested me and in some ways is a little bit perplexing from the outside is that there is a large community of people you've already talked about, of scholars who are policy activists in the foreign policy arena in a way that you don't see on the domestic side. It is very difficult, again for those of us on the outside, to identify really prominent people working in the foreign policy scholarly area who perhaps have never been in and out.

Feaver: I think there is a number. Steve Walt, John Mearsheimer, Ken Waltz, who have not gone back and forth.

Riley: But it is much more common.

Feaver: Bob Keohane. Right, it is. I don't know that it is more common, domestic policy, the health policy, actually I don't know.

Nelson: I think more economists.

Feaver: Yes, there might be more economists than political scientists, that's probably right. If you internationalize it, compared to our colleagues in Britain, France, other countries, there is worlds more interaction here than there. I'd accept that premise. But there is actually a lively

debate among political scientists about the cult of irrelevancy and the fact that the kinds of things I've done allegedly are not fully valued in the academy, do not get the credit some people would say that they should. In my department, for instance, there's Bruce Jentleson, who does it as much as I do. But my other colleagues, Joe Grieco, Emerson Niou, even Chris Gelpi who worked very closely with me on my projects, less so. Joe Grieco did a Council on Foreign Relations fellowship, but he didn't go back and forth as much after that as I did.

There are other colleagues who consult but more at the technical level in DoD, not in the policy level.

Riley: I'm wondering if there is a higher value on firsthand experience in the subfield than there is—?

Feaver: In the security subfield I think that's true. There are enough of us who have done it and even the ones who have not spent a lot of time in the policy world, I was mentioning Mearsheimer, Steve Walt, Mike Desch, they are the leaders of this movement to fight against the cult of irrelevancy. That term, cult of irrelevancy, is their term. Even though they're not the in-and-outers, they're very committed to scholarship that speaks directly to a policy and meets peer-review basic political science requirements, but also has some relevance to policy debates. Their argument would be that you should be able to do this even if you're not sitting in your cubicle inside the government. From the perch of academia you should be speaking.

They do a lot of consulting where they would never stop being a professor, but they'd be the professor consultant who comes in and does what I was doing when I was briefing the results of my research.

Bakich: I've got a question specifically with the casualty sensitivity work that you were doing. Because it is so important in 2005, who were you briefing within the government?

Feaver: That was different. We briefed much higher level people on that once that result came out, in part because of the obvious timeliness of it. In our first survey the argument comes out of the stuff we did in the civil-military gap, and we were surprised by the results that we got in the gap study. It was not at all what we expected. We didn't realize how rich and important a topic it was. We knew we had to improve our instrument.

We had very bad measures of casualty sensitivity in the first book, so we raised money to do a follow-on project that would be much better than we had done it originally.

Nelson: The first book is?

Feaver: The first two books, *Soldiers and Civilians* and *Choosing Your Battles*. Both of those use the same survey instrument and measure of casualty sensitivity, which I'm saying was rudimentary and not that good. The argument came out of that work, but we knew we had to do it better empirically than we did there. Raised money. Our first survey goes in the field in October 2003. It is just around the time people are realizing this is going to last a lot longer than expected. It is not going to be the short war that a lot of people in the Bush administration thought it would be.

Then we did monthly waves of surveying throughout 2004. So from October '03 through May of 2004 we're in the field every month or six weeks. I can't remember the exact timing, but I think it was monthly waves. Our last one then is in October 2004, so maybe we did five throughout the spring and then one last one in October 2004. In any case, the concern about public support for the war and how casualties would affect it becomes a major preoccupation of the pundit world, the political class, and policy makers. We briefed those results quite widely. I don't know how many times I went to D.C. and how many different audiences, but academic, think tank, Hill, DoD, and White House.

We were quite explicit about wanting to hit all bases including Republican and Democrat. So my colleague, Chris Gelpi, stout Democrat and somewhat chagrined that work he had been involved in was blamed for the absentee ballots in Florida. I was determined that we brief the next President, and he was determined that the next President be a Democrat. Of course I had maintained my ties to the Bush people. So we were briefing both campaigns.

As it happened, our argument was much more congenial for the Bush position and indeed when we were translating our findings into what it would mean in a political partisan way, the message for [John] Kerry was that he should say the exact opposite of what he had done. I remember vividly briefing it to his staff. An expletive comes out from his staff. They realized that we were right and that they were perfectly ill positioned on the issue from the point of view of the survey.

Nelson: So what should Kerry say?

Feaver: Should have been opposed to the war but now promised we're going to win it. Instead he had supported the war but said we're going to lose it, so it was the exact opposite of what he should have done.

Perry: Couldn't he have said he was for what you were saying before—?

Feaver: They may have tried that. We briefed it widely in a nonpartisan but more explicitly bipartisan way. We got excellent access and respected hearing. We got lots of academic criticism and it has been a lively academic debate, but the policy makers saw the importance of it, understood it.

Perry: You mentioned Vietnam in a couple of connections but particularly in reference to your older brothers who just missed being drafted into it, and then your Canadian roots.

Feaver: Yes.

Perry: Do you think in a way you arrived at this study about casualties with a blank slate regarding Vietnam that allowed you to be more open-minded in doing this study and presenting it to policy makers, including the staff of John Kerry, whose whole life is governed by the Vietnam War and his experience related to it?

Feaver: I probably was a blank slate regarding Vietnam, but I wasn't a pure blank slate on the casualty issue. One of the things I remember from one of my many unsuccessful ventures in government was writing a memo right after Black Hawk Down happened. This was when a debate was going on in the White House about whether to still go after [Mohamed Farah] Aidid,

whether to pull all the troops out, what to do.

I remember Monday morning, running down the hall to Jane Holl, she is now Jane Lute, but Jane was a director in the Europe office and an Army officer and one of my buddies on the NSC staff. We were talking and she said, "It may have been a mistake to go after Aidid before, but now after Black Hawk Down we have to get him or it will be open season on the military. The word will go out that if you kill a few Americans you can chase them away. Whatever the wisdom of going after them before was, now we have to get him and then get out."

Talking to her bucked up my courage and I wrote the memo that said, "We have to go after and get him." I wrote it for Tony Lake, but my boss, Bob Bell, said let's send it to the guy who is in charge of that issue first rather than doing an end run around him to Tony Lake. The guy in charge of that issue was not at all interested in this argument because he was arguing, "Get out, cut our losses." That was Dick Clarke. I write the memo, it goes to Dick Clarke, and next thing I know I hear, "You have to vacate your office by 5 o'clock today." I said, "Why?"

They said, "Your space is being taken over by Ambassador [Robert] Oakley, who is coming in to supervise the withdrawal." That was my introduction to brass-knuckle politics. I had very desirable office space. It was tiny but it was in the only vault, so you didn't have to lock up your stuff at night. It was in George Tenet's spaces. I loved it but for about four months I was kicked out while Oakley supervised the withdrawal, then he left and I went back in.

But to your point. I felt at that time that the American people could have been rallied. It was obvious Republicans and Democrats on the Hill were screaming for the U.S. to get out of Somalia. I believed at the time that if the President had gone on TV and given whatever story about how we got there and then said, "No one kills Americans, drags them through the streets and gets away with it. The thugs who did this will be hunted down. We will take them out and then we will hand over Somalia to the Somalis," the American people would have rallied to him. I'm convinced of it.

I didn't know it at the time, but I now know there is some polling evidence to support that view. It was just a hunch for me at the time. I feel vindicated by the results though, and it is interesting that [Osama] Bin Laden, when he cited what his strategy was for going after the towers, he believed that if you kill Americans they'll go home. What was his evidence for it? He said the Mogadishu raid, which he said he had helped orchestrate. He said he trained the Somali gunmen who shot down the thing.

There is a delightful passage in Dick Clarke's memoirs where he wrestles with Bin Laden's "misinterpretation" of the evacuation from Somalia because Dick Clarke says, "That was not at all a sign that you could kill Americans with impunity. That's not at all what we meant." That's how he read it. I'm convinced the American people could have been rallied to that. Casualty phobia was with President Clinton more so than the American people.

There is also a legitimate debate about whether this was even worth it, should we have been there? I think he felt it was not the place where he wanted to spend his political capital. That was an argument in the back of my head when we were doing this research but I believe—I may be wrong, but I believe we were shallow enough empiricists just to take the findings. We didn't

have strong conclusions before the data came back and told us what the results were. The data came back, told these results, and every time we reanalyzed it, every time we looked at it a different way, it reinforced these results. We felt very sure that we were right, but it was by that point more empirically driven than theory driven.

Riley: Let's take a five-minute break.

[BREAK]

Nelson: Back to 2000 when you were helping out the Bush campaign, what was your impression of Bush?

Feaver: I didn't know him, had no interaction with him personally. The part I liked most about him actually was compassionate conservatism. That was the aspect that resonated with me, probably because of my upbringing and my own political values. I was sympathetic to his critique of Clinton foreign policy and what was then the more realist critique, particularly of Kosovo. I thought Kosovo had been mishandled and that the civil-military dynamic of Kosovo had been problematic. So I was sympathetic to his critique there.

Riley: Mishandled how?

Feaver: President Clinton had said we were going to intervene but no one on our side can die. In order to make that assurance we're not going to use any ground troops. Also for a while there were restrictions on rotary aircraft, which was a classic case of tying one hand behind your back and then entering into a fight. It very nearly went poorly for NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization]. It ended up OK, but there was a long period when it didn't look like it was going to go well. It wasn't until the threat of ground troops got reintroduced in a way that [Slobodan] Milošević was more likely to cave, also Russia started to withdraw some of its support, some of its shield for him. It's a complicated story. I thought the civil-mil dynamic was still problematic. I thought Governor Bush would be more inclined to get that right.

I supported him on the foreign policy side, but I was attracted to the compassionate conservative side and in foreign policy the commitment to ramping up U.S. involvement in the world, which I thought was a good thing, but doing it in a different way.

Riley: By '98 or so I think most of the Republican establishment was pretty much lined up, and Bush was the heir apparent for the nomination anyway. Were there other Republicans that you followed closely? Had you gotten into the networks of any other potential candidates that you were prospecting for?

Feaver: That's a good question.

Nelson: [John] McCain was running then.

Feaver: No, I did not have any. I have never thought of why I didn't have any better ties. I suspect the reason is at the crucial time while the field was shaking out, I was still trying to get tenure, trying to finish this project. We were adopting another child. My wife was having surgery to remove a pancreatic tumor, so my life was full of that stuff.

Then by the time I had the spare capacity, it was clear who was going to be the Republican nominee. So I just channeled into the Republican nominee.

Nelson: Did you ever encounter—?

Feaver: It was fortunate for me that I found things that I really liked about him, but also at a distance. No, I never met him. Never met him in the 2000 setting. Never met him in the 2004 setting. The first time I met him was after I came on board.

Bakich: So then you're looking at Governor Bush, you get a sense of what his foreign policy orientation is going to be. Condoleezza Rice's first *Foreign Affairs* article comes out. How does that speak to you?

Feaver: I didn't see the problems with it that I see now. At the time I was probably more sympathetic to it. I think now I see the same problems that Condi would say she saw, which is you don't always get to tell the world what we're going to do. You have to deal with the problems that come at you. You may not want to do nation building, but you may find yourself in a situation where you have to.

Bakich: So it was just that at the time everybody comes out and sings.

Feaver: I don't want to state with confidence what my views were at the time because I don't remember. I was teaching a course called "Foreign Policy and the Presidential Campaign." So having to debate both sides we had half the class is Bush, half the class was Gore.

Riley: Sounds like Florida.

Feaver: They were artificially made half and half. We were debating it. I'm sure I said lots of things, but I don't remember what my actual views were because at the time I was trying to get the students to critique it all.

Riley: Apart from what you already told us about in terms of how things shook out with your own interests, do you remember having any observations about the way that the team finally came together?

Feaver: For my personal career prospects it wasn't ideal because there wasn't a natural place for me to go. But probably for my greater happiness, selfishly, it worked out well because I got a sabbatical at Cambridge [University]. We were free to adopt another child. My life went in a different direction. I won't judge whether it was good for the country or not, I'll leave that unaddressed.

Riley: Then 9/11 happens fairly soon thereafter.

Feaver: Right.

Riley: Are there things about the way the political system responded, that the White House responded, that surprised you? Did it look like your political science and international relations theory and experience told you the U.S. would in fact respond to something that looks like this, or was this so far off your radar that there wasn't any relevant—?

Feaver: Obviously the attacks themselves surprised me and shocked me, but the Bush response I did not find shocking. I was part of a group that immediately started debating, there were pundits debating the best way of understanding this. The early frame that people put on it was Pearl Harbor, surprise attack, World War II, "Oh, this will be World War III." I was in the group that said, "No, this is better thought of as Cold War II." I wrote a piece in the days after 9/11 that ran in *Weekly Standard* that said, "Think about this as another cold war, not as another world war." There would be much more law enforcement and intel in the shadows, and the ideological context was as important as any hot war theater activity. Eventually the Bush administration embraced that same cold war frame. I'm not saying because of my argument. I think we were seeing things and interpreting them in the same way.

I would have been surprised if they had not gone that route, or I would have been dismayed if they had not viewed it that way because I thought that was the best way of making sense of this larger conflict. But I was in Cambridge on my sabbatical so my perspective was very different. Because I was on sabbatical I had a lot of freedom. I had to finish my book, but other than that I had a lot of time to read and get involved in various debates, and it really hijacked my sabbatical. I shipped over four boxes of books expecting to read them. I shipped them back.

Perry: Unread.

Feaver: Unread. In one case not even opening the box a year later. It changed everything that I thought I had to read. But I started at the time a project with Steve Biddle on what does this mean. Everyone was trying to write the Kennanesque article for the New Age. He and I took our stab at it where we debated what should be done. The path that the administration ultimately took was different from the path that he and I were arguing for in our piece.

Riley: Which was?

Feaver: There are three ways to look at it. One was to say state sponsorship of terrorists is the big problem, and that's the way the administration looked at it. The second way was to view ungoverned spaces as the big problem and so places where the network could weaponize resentment. You had to survey and basically govern, at least at a distance, govern just by militarily ungoverned spaces, so hold at risk all sanctuaries. That was my idea. Steve had more of a law enforcement frame. I can't remember what his was, but there was a third one. The Bush administration picked more that the problem was state sponsors.

That is what led to everything else. But he and I were in that, trying to contribute to that debate. He was working in the Army at the time and he couldn't get the paper released, so it never saw the light of day unfortunately. We would have looked a lot smarter in retrospect if we had gotten it out.

But at that time, another old graduate student friend of mine, Bob Beschel, very close friend, had gone to college with a guy named Peter Wehner, who worked as the President's speechwriter. I don't know if you've interviewed him yet.

Riley: No.

Feaver: You should. I can't remember when Bob first put me in touch with Pete, but it probably was shortly after President Bush got inaugurated. I remember our emails ramped up substantially after 9/11. I know it was before 9/11 because I remember a whole series of email interactions with him over the summer of 2001 when Bush felt like they had to relaunch their White House. What should be the new themes when the 100 days run out of steam? Something in the August doldrums of 2000. I was pushing for reviving compassionate conservatism, which I thought was a good theme. Then of course 9/11 happened, and it wiped all that off.

In the wake of 9/11 there became a regular email correspondence with basically me providing commentary, kibitzing. It turned out that Pete went from the speechwriter shop over to Karl Rove's shop and then eventually got, as one of his assignments, emailing people. He is famous in the White House for his Wehnergrams they're called. It was basically blogging before you could blog from the White House. He was sending emails out to George Will, Rush Limbaugh, the media, everybody. Often Pete would get involved in media debates and things like that. He had a separate email interaction with people like me and others who were his kitchen Cabinet.

Perry: Sounding board?

Feaver: Yes, sounding board, kitchen Cabinet type thing. I sent hundreds of unsolicited emails over the years with advice. "How can you have the President say something so stupid," this kind of thing.

Riley: Those are Presidential records.

Feaver: I know. Boy, the email traffic scares me when 20 years from now some of the stuff—Like lots of email debates, they would eventually devolve to one of us accusing the other person of supporting [Adolph] Hitler. "If you liked that then you must have liked Hitler." But a very freewheeling discussion about everything—domestic policy, foreign policy. But my area was foreign policy.

Nelson: I'm also wondering, under the domain of your subspecialty, civil-military relations, what you thought of Rumsfeld in Defense prior.

Feaver: I was more sympathetic to what he was trying to do prior to 9/11. It is striking that every Secretary of Defense since [Jimmy] Carter's day has arrived feeling that the building is out of control, and they have to come back and reassert civilian control. That was Les Aspin's view, but that was [William] Perry's view taking over from Aspin. That was certainly Rumsfeld's view, that the building had gotten out of control. It is telling that that was [Robert] Gates's view taking over from Rumsfeld. [Leon] Panetta may be the first Secretary of Defense in a long time who didn't feel that he had to reassert control over the building, although you get the sense that the White House is a little bit concerned. Moving [David] Petraeus was partly trying to strengthen political control. Maybe even today it is still the same.

For sure it was then. I was sympathetic to that and to some of the reform efforts I thought needed to be done. There was a certain hideboundness to the institution. I was sympathetic to some of it, not entirely to the style per se, but I also thought he was getting a bum rap on some of the style questions, but I didn't know enough to know for sure on that score. On the substantive merits, did it make sense to change the way business was being done in the Defense Department? Yes. Did there need to be stronger assertive civilian control? Yes.

Nelson: Had you abandoned your thoughts of working in the Defense Department?

Feaver: You mean 2001, 2002, 2003?

Nelson: Yes.

Feaver: Yes, for various personal reasons. We had just moved back from Cambridge, so can't move the family right away. Then we adopted a third child, can't move the family right away. So I had it in my mind that if there was a time to do it, the next swing at the plate was going to be after the 2004 elections. I was setting that up in part staying in close touch with Pete Wehner and that got expanded to Mike Gerson, someone he was close to in the White House. But also separately working with Mitchell Reiss, an old friend who was Director of Policy Planning at the State Department. He arranged for me to have a consultancy with Policy Planning and was putting that in place, which would get me in the system and get my clearances converted over from the Navy to the State Department; that way if President Bush won, Mitchell would move on to another position and I would be available to go work for Mitchell somewhere or if Mitchell stayed at Policy Planning. His expectation was that he would stay if President Bush got reelected. My expectation was that that would give me another chance to swing.

Nelson: When you were briefing both candidates' people during the '04 campaign, did you have any fear that that might be making you tainted to both?

Feaver: I knew I wouldn't get a chance to work in the Kerry campaign because—

Nelson: Kerry campaign or Kerry administration?

Feaver: Either. By that point I had made enough public statements that were supportive of President Bush and enough critical comments of the Democrats so that while I maintained lots and lots of friends who were Democrats, they wouldn't have hired me.

Riley: And in the wrong publications too.

Feaver: Yes, *Weekly Standard* and places like that. And briefing Rove's shop at the White House wasn't going to hurt me with the Bush people. But we were quite clearly briefing nonpartisan scholarship in a bipartisan setting. There wasn't any concern about that.

When I was getting vetted there was concern about me having worked for the Clinton administration so that was a different thing, and being an academic was a problem as well.

Riley: You throw those two things out, but I want to get you to elaborate on them. You said it was problematic that you worked for Clinton.

Feaver: It was both problematic and a plus. I would say in the end it was a major plus given the responsibilities I had. But I know that a number of the hardened Bush—hardened meaning hard core, there from the dark days of Florida on—those Bush people were skeptical about people who hadn't been in the trenches with them. And I served in the Clinton administration. They had been burned several times already by 2004 by people who had written tell-all, kiss-all memoirs, stab-the-President-in-the-back kind of memoirs. Ron Suskind's work had come out by that point. Paul O'Neill. John DiIulio's wasn't quite so much a stab in the back but it was more of, "That's what an academic would do."

Riley: Which goes to your second point.

Feaver: Yes, an academic will feel it necessary to criticize. So it wasn't a stab in the back. Some of the more malicious stuff came later, David Kuo's stuff. But John DiIulio's was more like, "That's a typical academic. They don't understand how the government works, they're shocked to find gambling in the casino, and then they come out and say things that are naïve that feed into partisan critiques unfairly." So there was skepticism about academics in that setting.

I was told at one point, "The President doesn't like pollsters and doesn't like academics, and you're an academic pollster." But the academics were not a part of the Bush base, let's put it that way. I had helped out with Armitage in 2000 a little bit. Mitchell Reiss was vouching for me and I was setting up a consultancy with him. Pete Wehner knew me, vouched for me. So when Hadley was going to staff up this new office and create this new strategic planning cell, and he determined that he wanted an academic for it—and he and I have a disagreement on this memory.

He claims he doesn't remember this story. I remember vividly him telling me that he was looking for either an academic or a journalist because only an academic or a journalist would be arrogant enough to write across all the different areas that he wanted written, but you couldn't hire a journalist for obvious reasons. So he was left with an academic. He claims he never said that. I remember that story, he doesn't remember it that way.

He got my résumé from three or four different people. One of them was John Hillen, who was a Duke alum, but more importantly for my career had been very much involved in the civil-mil literature debate, the gap debate, a serious defense intellectual. I think he was the first guy Steve Hadley approached for this job. John said, "I don't want it but if you're looking someone there's Feaver." So Hadley got it from Hillen, maybe also from Mitchell, but also from Karl Rove. Hadley said, "OK, I might be able to get this guy through White House Personnel."

Riley: And your connection with Rove again?

Feaver: Was through Pete Wehner. Pete was briefing Karl on the work I did and occasionally, the way Pete would say it, if I sent an email that had actual useful things to say, he would pass it along and sometimes even leave my name on it. In 2004 I did a lot of emailing, kibitzing with Tim Adams and Joel Shin, who were in the campaign and their job was to be the focal point for this kind of kibitzing from outsiders. They were the foreign policy issue directors for the campaign. I'm sure that Karl saw it through there as well.

Bakich: When did you meet Mitchell Reiss and how did you know him?

Feaver: Mitchell and I were friends back from graduate school. He had been a Fellow at BCSIA [Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs] at Harvard, Kennedy School. I was at two centers there and he was there. He was another person that I would send unsolicited email. When you're an academic you have a lot of free time and a lot of opinions, and email made it very cheap for me to share my opinions.

Now having been on the other side and received these, I'm sure they didn't always get read. But they may have gotten read enough times for it to be known. In any case, this is a lengthy way of saying, when I sort of pulsed the system and said, "I'd like one more swing at the plate," the White House Personnel Office called me and said, "Would you like to come in and interview for this post on the NSC staff?" I said I'd love to.

Nelson: A new post, right?

Feaver: They did not tell me what the post was.

Nelson: Really?

Feaver: I thought I was interviewing for the communications one. I just made the wrong inference that it was my polling and public opinion stuff that got their attention. I'm interviewing with Dina Powell White House Personnel. She is the one who interviewed everyone for any—

Riley: OK, Personnel first.

Feaver: Yes, and I'm thinking it is for the communications job and then she gets a phone call. Fifteen minutes in I realized—what job are you interviewing me for? "Oh, no, it's not for that, it's this." Totally had to shift about what I was interested in, what I was prepared to do. It wasn't at all the communications, that's not what Hadley wanted me for. He wanted me for strategic planning. The polling stuff wasn't of direct interest to him at all. What he wanted was an academic who would do a Policy Planning shop kind of thing but without all of the resources of Policy Planning, which of course is not that great compared to DoD anyway. But it would be a two-man band to cover the waterfront and do long-range strategic planning activities, also to write the National Security Strategy. That was the biggest lane we were given but not the only—

Bakich: Did that come up in the job interview?

Feaver: The NSS?

Bakich: Yes.

Feaver: Probably. Not quite as baldly as I just put it. I'm guessing he probably said something like, "We'll also issue another National Security Strategy, and you'd contribute to that."

Bakich: What are you thinking when you go in for a job thinking it is going to be in communications and then all of a sudden have in front of you long-range strategic planning, probably National Security Strategy. What is going through your mind?

Feaver: The surprise happened when I was with the first interviewer, not with Hadley. This is

why I remember the anecdote so well. Academics are arrogant enough to write across a wide range of things. I had done a fairly broad, for someone at that stage of my career anyway, had written on nuclear proliferation issues, information warfare issues, civil-military issues, and I had worked on the Clinton National Security Strategy. I was already enough of a dilettante to be in a generalist's office rather than someone who is just "our guy for biological weapons," who has to know everything about bio but nothing about anything else but bio.

I thought it was a good match for me. When he was describing it, I didn't have the feeling, perhaps I should have, that this is a wildly impossible job, you can't manage it, you should run now. I thought this would be an exciting opportunity and I'd love to do it.

Perry: Steve Hadley had a Navy background as well, as I recall.

Feaver: Perhaps, if so—

Perry: He had gone into the Navy Reserves in fact when he came out of Cornell, the late '60s.

Feaver: I don't remember that.

Perry: He didn't bring that up as a link that you had?

Feaver: No, it was a very unusual interview. It was very different from my interview with Richard Haass, let me tell you. [*laughter*] But Richard and I were already friends. I didn't know Hadley from anyone. Or JD [Jack Dyer Crouch, II], the two people—

Perry: Crouch?

Feaver: JD Crouch, the two people in the room. I didn't know them from Adam and I expected to get grilled on foreign policy, a little bit of a quiz bowl moment, or maybe get grilled on my research or something. Instead, they wanted to talk about my family, my background, my father, what I did—a lot of the stuff that we covered initially in *this* interview.

I subsequently learned, because I got to know Steve very well, that he cares very much about character and in particular how people interact, partly a character integrity issue but also personality, demeanor, and he felt he could learn more about me by hearing me talk about my family than talking about substantive issues, which he could figure out by reading my published work.

Nelson: Just because I'm interested in the general hiring process, did everybody have to go through this person in the Personnel Office first?

Feaver: At a certain level you did. For levels below, no.

Nelson: So what would that person be asking about?

Feaver: A little bit more, "Tell me about your time in the Clinton administration." A little bit more, "What do you like about the President?" A little bit more of a political vetting to make sure I was not going to betray the President.

Nelson: Could interviews stop at that level?

Feaver: Yes. She is extremely charming and gifted. I am sure that she could determine in 30 seconds that she wasn't going to hire me and still talk nicely with me and I'd leave the room thinking, *I did really well*, and she's thinking, *Never hire this guy*. So, yes, she can kill your candidacy at that moment if you don't pass.

Nelson: And you'd never get to Hadley?

Feaver: My résumé would have gotten to Hadley because my friends were sending it to him directly. But a no-go from White House Personnel is a no-go. Either you can't be hired at the White House, or you can't get a Schedule C anywhere in the government, or even if it is a non-Schedule C, forget this guy, don't let him in the administration. It was important in that respect. But I supported the President so it was easy to pass that phase of the interview.

Riley: Is she asking you if there are any skeletons in the closet? Does that come later?

Feaver: I had active TS/SCI [Top Secret/Sensitive Compartmented Information] clearance. They knew that there was a certain level.

Riley: OK.

Feaver: I'm trying to remember. She may have asked, "Is there embarrassing—" I don't remember that. But I had active clearance. I had already passed a certain level of vetting.

Riley: Did you have any background about Hadley's interest in setting up the shop?

Feaver: No. As I said, half the interview was him getting me to talk about my family. The other half of the interview was him describing the reorganization of the NSC and asking my opinion of it.

Riley: OK.

Feaver: I thought that was unusual. Of course, I was going to say, "Yes, it's a great idea. Great idea, SJ." But I was something of an org chart connoisseur anyway from having been in the Navy. I was very interested in it. I knew they had always had someone like this with something like this in their portfolio, like Bob Blackwill had it. It was this and Iraq and Iran. Guess what he spent his time on? Iraq, Iran, and strategic planning. He did Iraq and Iran, then not even Iran, he did Iraq.

There were people in the Clinton era but it was speechwriting and strategic planning or something. Sam Huntington, I think, was the last person who was kind of a free-floating, for [Zbigniew] Brzezinski, academic. Of course he had a very close relationship with Brzezinski, and also a lot more stature intellectually than I did. He was something of an independent force. As I looked at it I thought, *This will be very difficult to do. It will depend very much on my capacity to maintain a close relationship to Hadley*. I was surprised that he would hire me not knowing me and not having any personal connection to me.

Nelson: Did he interview anybody else?

Feaver: I think he did. I don't know for a fact, but I suspect he approached John Hillen initially. He would for sure have interviewed Aaron Friedberg, who was doing something similar for Vice President Cheney and a logical person, a very distinguished academic who would have been perfect for this job. I suspect he interviewed Aaron as well. There might have been more.

Bakich: He's written on strategic planning.

Feaver: Yes, subsequently.

Riley: It sounds to me like the definition must have been very task-driven. In other words they knew that they had a new strategy document coming up, and they knew they needed to deal with that. Part of the reason I say this is because the NSC staff is so professionalized, there is such experience there that it is curious that all of a sudden in the middle of an administration somebody says, "Guess what, we don't have a cell that we should have." It's kind of counterintuitive.

Feaver: It wasn't just a cell. Hadley had a riff on this that I heard him give a number of times. He'd say, "We do pretty well in policy, in crisis management. I give myself an A or A-minus for crisis management. We even do pretty well in policy development in the near term, B-plus on that. We do not do well on implementation; I give us a D." In 2005 he would say this, and/or long range over the horizon, we just don't do it.

It was quite clearly him thinking about what had gone well and what had not gone well in the first term. He determined that long-range strategy development had not been done and implementation had not gone well. Therefore he was going to create two new offices, one focused on the long range, the other focused on implementation. This would be with a heavy eye to institutional reform. So my title was Strategic Planning and Institutional Reform. I think he saw the institutional reform piece as important as strategic planning. I ended up doing more on the strategic side than institutional reform, and the institutional reform migrated more to the implementation execution cell for reasons that we can go into later.

Bakich: Sounds kind of like [Dwight] Eisenhower's New Look policy.

Feaver: A little bit. One of the big things about the Bush second term that I don't think is fully appreciated was that the administration saw themselves as laying down the institutions that would guide American foreign policy for quite a long time in the same way that Truman had done. Not just the doctrines, but even more the institutions and the networks and the ways of doing business.

The President was very keen to be ready to hand off in 2009 to his successor. So in 2005 he is thinking about handing off in '09 an institution that is adapted to this new world that is different from the one he had inherited. Institution reforms like fixing the NSC system to make it better.

Bakich: Is he thinking of doing away with the Principals Committee, the Deputies Committee, and the subsequent tendrils that go down from deputies?

Feaver: Sort of. Steve would say to me, "I want outside-the-box thinking. In fact, I want no-box-at-all thinking, so far out of the box that there is no box." On the one hand we had license to come up with all sort of crazy ideas. On the other hand, my small-C conservative instincts led me to be skeptical of those kinds of things. My read of the energy level in the White House, the available political capital—maybe I'm bringing this in from my Clinton days, but it was, how many fights can we have? We've already reorganized the intelligence, the DNI [Director of National Intelligence], that's barely working right yet. That's a lot we've done, Homeland Security, that's barely working.

Even though Hadley would say, "No box, think outside the box," my instincts were always for modest reforms, tweaks, improvements. The stuff we mostly came up with that ever saw any traction was in that latter category. But there were plenty of people in the broader national military/security establishment who were thinking the kind of stuff you're talking about, and I was the forum shop for them. I sat through many briefings about getting rid of everything, starting from scratch, building a new building, putting it right in the middle of the Potomac to symbolize—every radical idea I heard and would sift and pass along the juicy bits for Steve. But the ones that I thought were actually useful tended to be more modest reforms.

Bakich: You wrote in your piece in Dan Drezner's edited volume that your cell didn't have budget—

Feaver: Did not. Yes, that's a weakness.

Bakich: Was that something you pushed for, didn't think about? Wanted?

Feaver: Didn't think about it at the time until we had been there about six months and then we realized that was the missing piece. We had someone with some budget experience in the PIE [Policy Implementation and Execution] cell and we thought that they might want to ramp up, augment that side of it. Our recommendation going forward was to augment it, and our recommendation to the [Barack] Obama people was to add budget people. But at the time I didn't know enough to know that we would need that.

Nelson: When you interviewed with Hadley, did you get the job right then?

Feaver: No. I remember I had to wait what seemed like a very long time. It was probably weeks afterward. I now know from the other side that that is fairly standard. But it was a little nerve-wracking from an academic point of view.

Nelson: Was it during the interview or after you took the job that you talked about what resources you would have, staff?

Feaver: He showed me the organization chart. I'd get one Senior Director and one secretary, which we turned into a research assistant position. I did lay down a little marker, which was me saying, "This job will be hard, the success of it will depend on how closely you and I can work together, how closely I can work with you, and the perception of how closely I'm working with you," which was about as far as I could go. I wanted the job so I was going to take the job whether or not I got everything I asked for. But it was my way of saying that I understood that for this job to work you have to be perceived to be close to the suite. I forget his response but it

was more or less supportive, and indeed he proved to be very supportive of that aspect.

[BREAK]

Feaver: I thought of something important. One of the things Steve was concerned about for me, but also concerned about in having an academic in there, did come up in the interview. He was very concerned whether I would play well with others. He said, "Academics have a reputation for wanting credit, being prima donnas." He asked if I had done stuff where I wouldn't mind other people getting the credit. So the collaborative work I had done, running multiperson research projects—both running it but also coauthoring with others, he said was an important part of what he was looking for, a box he wanted to see checked.

Of course as you all know, working on the NSC staff, that is a huge part of it, the ability to collaborate and work well with others.

Nelson: Did he see your NSC experience with Clinton as a positive?

Feaver: Probably, in the sense of knowing where the men's room is and minimum things like that.

Nelson: But you would also know about that norm of working collaboratively.

Feaver: I think so. I'm sure he called Bob Bell or Tony Lake or had someone call them. As it turns out, and he would have surely understood this, for me to do that job effectively I would have to be in a position where I could, if I were otherwise motivated, do serious damage to him and/or to the President. That is a position of trust that was very sensitive, and they had to make sure I was not going to be one of those guys who says, "You're not going to do it my way? I'm going to go to the *Washington Post* tomorrow."

Nelson: What's their assurance? You don't sign a nondisclosure statement or anything, do you? What's their assurance that you won't? Obviously you'll say you won't breach confidence.

Feaver: Right.

Nelson: Presumably all the people who wind up doing that do.

Feaver: It is a bet they have to take. I can remember several times Steve would look over to me and say, "You'd better not be writing a kiss-and-tell book about this." So there is no assurance on that.

Bakich: You get the job. How do you prepare for it mentally, intellectually? Do you feel like you're ready to hit the ground running or do you take a moment to read something?

Riley: Or talk to people.

Feaver: Yes, I definitely—already in talking to all of my contacts all of the time, on both sides of the aisle, what is the best thing Bush has done? What are the worst things Bush has done? If you could change something, what would you change, what would you keep? I had those kinds of conversations pretty extensively. I don't remember reading anything in particular in preparation. I might have. I don't think I did.

Coming from outside D.C. it was as much how to move the family, the logistics of the move. The final stage was an interview with Andy Card, the Chief of Staff. He would interview everyone at a certain level in the White House.

I found out later that one of the issues was, would I have a commission or not? There were only so many commissions given out to the NSC, and they had used up all their commissions so I didn't get a commission. But Hadley wanted me to have all of the access trappings of a commission, including the interview with the Chief of Staff, which was a marker that—It turned out to be very important because Card's view—and I got the impression that he was saying the West Wing's view outside of Hadley, so the President and others—was that my position was to form something of an in-house think tank for the White House with Pete Wehner, who was the number two to Rove; and Mike Gerson, who had this free-floating counselor to the President portfolio, so he was it for the President, as Wehner was to Rove. I was supposed to do it to Hadley. We would together be a place for free thinking inside the White House that was too sensitive to go outside. That was an important thing Card wanted to communicate to me.

The other important thing he wanted me to do was to help improve relations between the NSC staff and the rest of the White House. It worked fine at the Hadley level, but he said the NSC staff tends to have a reputation across administrations as prima donnas. It wasn't a Bush phenomenon. The NSC staff are not political by and large. They are subject matter experts. He said sometimes they seem a little prima donna-ish. The rest of the White House has been with the President since Austin or whatever and they don't know how to plug in with the NSC, and the NSC has everything classified so they can't share things. It creates, he says, problems, friction.

He wanted one of my functions to be something of a point of access so when the non-NSC White House wanted help and they couldn't figure out who of the 200 experts in the NSC to go to, they'd go to me and I would link them up. Very much a lateral cross-fertilization.

Nelson: I'm surprised. It must be enormously impressive through this process. I'm surprised they would hire somebody who didn't have a lot of White House experience and know how that stuff is and how it works from having been immersed in it.

Did you feel like, *My God, I have to do an enormous amount. I'm going to have a very steep learning curve because there are a lot of potential problems here that somebody who hasn't been here for a long time might not even know were there*?

Feaver: Yes, but only in the same sense of I'm in at the deep end. Ever since I got to graduate school I've always felt, *How in the world am I going to survive? I'm not nearly good enough to survive whatever challenge.* I did feel that same way. I did, though, have friendships already with Pete Wehner and to a certain extent—primarily with Pete but developed over time with Mike Gerson. I wouldn't email Mike, but Pete I would interact with more regularly prior to this point.

So I felt that I already knew somebody in the other White House.

I had friends throughout the administration, so I didn't feel that I was coming from far afield, and I had worked in the White House before. I knew a little bit about how that worked. Yes, it was in some sense daunting, but it also made it seem more interesting, a more rewarding job as well.

Bakich: You're coming in to think about institutional reform. The NSC staff, from when Rice was there to this point, had shrunk and then grown back up.

Feaver: Yes.

Bakich: Was this a concern for you? Was this something that you didn't want to necessarily think about because you had to shrink the staff?

Feaver: No, I was not one of those who thought we should shrink staff, from my experience in the Clinton administration where they had shrunk staff too much and they were scrambling. I also had a very White House-centric view. My friends who were not at the White House tell me that I have a White House-centric view, which is to think that the White House is like the proverbial cowbell. More cowbell. So more White House, that's my solution to many problems.

Riley: We may have to footnote that reference in the transcript.

Feaver: Twenty years from now they won't know what that reference is. I was skeptical about proposals to get rid of the whole thing and start from scratch. My principal concern about size was that it is hard to give all those people access to the President and/or to Hadley. One of the things I knew from my days in the Clinton administration was that was crucial. On my exit from Clinton I wrote a memo to Lake saying, "Here's what I think is working and not working," sort of a critical memo.

I remember him calling me within seconds of my getting back to my office after handing him this. It was one of the only times he called me directly. He wanted to talk to me about it. I think he wanted also to make sure I didn't have another copy of that memo that I was about to deliver to the *Washington Post.* I told him I didn't. I never gave the memo to anyone else, never published it. But one of the points in that memo was that the NSC under Lake was not as powerful as it could have been because few directors had access to Lake, let alone to the President. I thought he needed to come up with more ways, even artificial ways, to get directors in the room with him so that when they went out into the interagency they could say things like—you give anecdotes about something that Tony had just said, which would make it seem like they were a lot closer to Tony than they were, but that was important for their effectiveness in the interagency. The size militates against that. To the extent I have a concern about size it was that.

Bakich: That gives the Deputy National Security Advisor a heck of a lot of direct reports.

Feaver: Yes. You don't even need direct reports; they need to be in the room. This is an age-old tension in the White House and in Washington. The principals, the big boys don't like to have lots of people in the room because they're concerned that they're all taking notes. What are they doing with these notes? Where are they ending up? They're convinced that that is how leaks get

out, and they're probably correct. So they clear the room. But that limits the effectiveness and weakens implementation and that weakens their staff. So it is a tension. The Bush White House would go—whenever there was a leak, shrink access, clear the room, and for a couple of weeks no one was in the room and nothing would get done. Eventually they'd bring them in the room, then there would be leaks, and they'd go back and forth over time doing this. It is a dilemma and there is no perfect resolution, but the administrations will oscillate in more access, less access.

The point is it was an insight I brought from Lake.

Riley: I have a couple of preliminary questions still before we get you firmly ensconced in the White House. One is, how did your colleagues at Duke react to your going to work for the George W. Bush White House?

Feaver: They were tolerant, indulgent, but I wouldn't say my colleagues in the department were wildly supportive. To their great credit what I fondly remember them doing—at one point another professor at a school out west, I forget who it was, it was after the *New York Times* piece that you guys have in the portfolio here, so-called exposing my involvement in the National Strategy for Victory in Iraq. This is an academic who circulated a memo to every one of the senior faculty at Duke in the department saying, "You should censure this guy for being involved in war crimes."

A number of the senior faculty wrote back to him saying, "How dare you? Do you think we don't know his political views? We have intellectual freedom here. Shame on you" basically, including the most rabidly partisan anti-Bush people wrote that letter back to him, so it spoke well of them and they were supportive of me.

I would see them at intervals along the way while I was there, and they would use this as their chance to do EST [Erhard Seminar Training] therapy. Scream at me for the stupidities of the Bush administration and hope that I would take this back and scream at the President. So there was some of that. Now that I'm back, I liken it to the way that large families deal with an uncle who had a midlife crisis, left his wife, went for two years with his secretary, then realizes he is wrong, comes back, remarries his wife, comes back to family reunions. They like the uncle so they never mention any of it. That's the way they treat me now. They don't ask me about my time in the White House. They're not really interested in any insights I might have from the inside because they would just as soon keep the conversation on safer terrain.

Nelson: It is automatic that the university would grant you a leave and also that you have to come back in two years?

Feaver: Right, more or less. The reaction I was describing was more my colleagues. The higher administration was much happier. President [Richard] Brodhead was very supportive of it. At that level I think they are particularly grateful that when an alum calls them and says, "How come you have a university with no intellectual diversity?" and they can say, "We have one right here." I'm their exemplar of diversity. They recognize the value of it.

Nelson: Is it just as firm at the other end, that if you were asked to stay on longer?

Feaver: That came up. Two years is the expectation. It was a very painful decision that I had to

make, whether to come back or stay. At that point I learned that Steve's expectation had been all along that I would stay until the end. I did not know that initially. It was a very awkward conversation with him. I made the decision to come back for my kids. No one believes the cliché, but it is true that it was very hard on the kids, and my wife said, "You've got to stop what you're doing and come back."

The kids were there up in D.C., but I didn't see them much at all.

Riley: School-age kids?

Feaver: Yes. At that point seventh grade, I think sixth and seventh grade was the oldest and he was having the hardest time.

Riley: Were you in D.C. or northern Virginia?

Feaver: Fairfax.

Riley: Public schools?

Feaver: He was in a private school, Trinity School, which was good.

Nelson: That's a terrible age.

Feaver: It's a tough age. He had good friends, there was a lot of good but it was hard for him. One of the hardest things I ever did was telling my son I was going to stay another year. My son thought it was one year. When I told him I was doing two—

Riley: You got chewed up both ways.

Feaver: Exactly. Then I made the decision that we're going to come home or I at least have to leave the White House. There were options to stay in D.C., so I had to negotiate do I stay in D.C. or do I go back to Duke. At that point Steve says, "If it's the two-year rule problem, President Bush is friends with President Brodhead. Let me get those two people to talk to each other and we can solve this."

I said, "That's not where the problem is. I need the President to call my wife, which would be a harder sell." I'm pretty sure Duke would have given me the extra time although nominally the rules are that you couldn't—from Duke's point of view—I just never had to test it because I ended up coming back.

Riley: I still have my two preliminary questions.

Feaver: We haven't gotten to the staffing of the office.

Riley: No, we haven't but that was—

Feaver: We got to the end, you've got me done and I haven't done anything.

Riley: You're coming in to deal with thinking about long-term planning and so forth for an

administration that has a rich history from the first term. I'm wondering about your own thinking and evaluations about two particular aspects of the first term as you're coming into the second term.

The first one is, particularly because you're going to be dealing with the National Security Strategy, whether you had given any thought and attention to the first one that was drafted by our good friend Philip [Zelikow] and whether you had participated in the debate over the extent to which that was something new or a continuity. Secondly and much more generally is about your own thinking about Iraq and your sense about the wisdom of the decisions made about Iraq and what needed to be done as a continuation of that strategy in the second term.

Feaver: Right. My views on Iraq had been complex and had oscillated. I had not supported the shift to Iraq when it was first done, and in the fall of '01, a petition was being circulated of the outsiders, and "time to do Iraq" was the message of the petition. I didn't sign it because I didn't think we should. As I explained earlier, Steve Biddle and I had written this memo analyzing that I thought the problem was ungoverned areas so I thought we had to do Afghanistan, and after Afghanistan Yemen or Somalia or the Philippines. Not invading each of these countries but rather forcefully watching over and denying safe havens was the strategy I was advocating, and Iraq was orthogonal to that. So I didn't support the initial shift to Iraq.

However, once the President made that commitment in September of '02, once the decision had been made to move this off the back burner to the front burner to the absolute issue number one, I shifted to support it because I thought we were in a credibility trap at that point. To back down would have been worse than not having gone in. I went from not supporting the Iraq War to saying, "If you've committed the country in the fall of '02, we have to see it through."

But one of my many emails that was probably unhelpful and untimely in February, I was sending in recommendations for delaying. I thought it was important to try and get one more resolution and get the second resolution. I had a cockamamie scheme for doing that, which would have involved delaying by six weeks to two or three months. My position was a little bit different there.

In other words, I was on the wrong side of the issue pretty much. Whenever the issue was being decided I was always advocating something slightly different from what was actually decided, but we were there. By the time I got there, those policy battles were done and we were in a very different problem. I had no qualms about working on—to the extent that I was going to do anything with Iraq, which I didn't think would be as much as I ended up doing, but I had no problems about figuring out the best way to succeed in Iraq so as to leave it successfully rather than unsuccessfully. No problems with that.

What was the other policy dispute you asked about?

Riley: The NSS.

Feaver: Oh, the Bush doc, the NSS. I had taught it for many years, and I knew all the problems with it and was tired of the academic debates. I was somewhat hopeful that when I got a chance I could fix some of them. I couldn't fix as many as I wanted to because the prime directive was to stay in the President's voice. It became very obvious to me that this was not Feaver's National

Security Strategy, this was Bush's National Security Strategy, so that limited the number of "fixes" I could do.

We'll talk later about all of the process of 2006 and writing that one. We did a pretty systematic effort to find out all that was right and wrong about 2002. I did not believe, as Senator Kerry would have argued in 2004, that Bush had made fundamental disqualifying errors that meant I couldn't work for this President, that I couldn't try to see this succeed because the mistakes were fundamental and irredeemable. I thought to the extent that there were mistakes, we could fix it and that Bush had gotten the big things right.

Riley: Were there any other major policy areas or initiatives from the first term that we ought to talk about that create a predicate for your service in the second term?

Feaver: The Freedom Agenda was a huge piece of it. I was more sympathetic to that. There was a case in 2001, this is what I had in the back of my mind when you were asking me about Condi's *Foreign Affairs* piece from 1999. I had come to agree with the President's view that the nature of the regime matters. The idea that you could ignore the nature of the regime and just focus on realpolitik calculations was not right. That in its fullest form is the Freedom Agenda, is the second inaugural, and I was supportive of the broad view that the nature of the regime matters. That was a crucial thing I had to buy into because that was the essence of the second national security strategy.

When Steve hired me he gave me three tasks, three big to-do items. He didn't prioritize these, he just said, "These are the three things I know I want you to do. I want you to do the new National Security Strategy. I want you to do something to reform the way we are tracking what the President is doing and promising." Something on the implementation side, but it became something called Record 2008, which I can talk about later. It was the part of this that made the least sense to me when he explained it the first time. I didn't quite understand what it was. I later figured it out. Then the third one was, "I want you to write the unified field theory of the Bush Doctrine because there are multiple Bush Doctrines out there. What is the unified field theory?"

I list those three things. He said that in the interview or very shortly thereafter when he called to hire me and say I got the job. For six months I only did the first one, the NSS. I did a lot of other stuff, the NSS plus tons of other stuff, forgot the other two. I assumed he had forgotten and didn't want me to do—Then one day in one of our meetings he says, "When can I see the draft of the second—?" I had forgotten that he had wanted—so I had to scramble to get that back into place. We did the first two. Never did the unified field theory of the Bush Doctrine. That is, we never got one passed. I wrote I don't know how many drafts. Never could get it approved by Steve. We could never find a way to describe the Bush Doctrine that linked all of the things that the President had in mind with that, that stayed in the President's voice. It was the one thing that I left saying hadn't been done.

Bakich: Could you quickly describe the difference between the NSS and the unified field theory?

Feaver: The NSS is more of the white paper, 50–60 pages that lays out the Bush vision and applies it to different regions, different subfields. The Bush Doctrine unified field theory would

have been the DNA code that tracks across each one of those. I talked to the President afterward. I said, "So what do you say is the Bush Doctrine?" Even when he did it, he had three. I had six more that he didn't. I'd say, "What about this and this?" He'd say yes. The top three—

Perry: Can you spell those out? His three and your six? The extra three?

Feaver: Yes. His three are: first, states that sponsor terrorism will be treated like terrorists, that if you harbor terrorists or support them, you will be treated as terrorists. Second, you have to go on the offensive, you can't wait while threats gather, which became the preemption. But the idea to fight this, it is an offensive fight as well as a defensive fight. The third is that the Freedom Agenda piece of it—the ultimate way to defeat terrorists is by providing an alternative vision that is more attractive to the hearts and minds we are competing for. Those are his three.

Bakich: Is that last one the President's? He didn't say democracy—?

Feaver: I'm paraphrasing. The alternate vision is freedom, democracy, "protected by democratic institutions" is how we phrased it in the NSS. But he would carry it all the way through to the democratic as the alternative vision because that was authentic, resonates in the hearts of other people, and could compete effectively with the ideology that the terrorists were presenting with the false doctrines of Islam. Then there are six others that aren't quite Bush Doctrines but would be—in the theoretical sense, but they would be Bush doctrines in the same way that the [Richard] Nixon Doctrine or the Carter Doctrine were, which were more narrowly tailored doctrinal statements.

So what were the other six? There's compassionate conservative foreign policy, particularly on development reform. There is the outreach to India as a hedge against China. I can't remember what they are off the top of my head.

Perry: You said when you would talk to the President about these and he would list the first three and then you would say, "And how about these others?" he would say, "Yes, of course." But he would not name those out himself. He would name the first three.

Feaver: Yes, those are the big three. The conversation I'm relating now was after he left while he was writing his memoirs, he and I were talking about this. It was right on the heels of when—it wasn't on the heels of [Sarah] Palin—Palin got criticized for not knowing—

Nelson: It was several years after that.

Feaver: It was several years after that, so it wasn't then. But somehow we got into this discussion. I forget the exact predicate for it. I was saying, "This is the one thing I didn't do for you. I was supposed to write the unified field theory, and what do you say it is?" and he gives me those three. I said, "Yes, but then there are these others." But even when I was trying to write it, I didn't do the other six, because they are lesser ones. But the first three of the Bush Doctrine are much more ideological or philosophical than the Nixon Doctrine or the Carter Doctrine.

The Carter Doctrine was really quite precise, region-specific, time limited, no outside power will dominate the Persian Gulf. That was akin, I would say, to the India outreach. Consequential, hugely important but not at the fundamental level that the way to defeat the enemy is to provide

an alternative ideology. That's a more philosophical one. That's why I would say those were at a higher level of abstraction than the other six.

Bakich: Primacy?

Feaver: That wasn't one of them.

Nelson: Huge innovation for the second term.

Feaver: Although if you pressed him on it, he would say, "Yes, of course." In other words, it is an uncontested assumption.

Bakich: A huge innovation in the second term was AIDS [acquired immunodeficiency syndrome] in Africa, which I know the memoir features.

Feaver: Yes, and that was one of my other six with the compassionate conservatism.

Bakich: I was going to say, compassionate conservatism as a rubric might well be among those three.

Feaver: I was trying to find the logical, philosophical, ontological connections that crossed all of these. I wrote a version that I liked, which I still think is pretty good but I couldn't get Steve to approve it.

Riley: How long was it?

Feaver: Oh, three, four pages. It's buried in the archives. Some day when the archives open I will dig it out and publish it. One of the common threads that I identified, and you can trace this to his No Child Left Behind as well, is an optimism about power and about people. Optimism about American power, that we're going to commit more mistakes through inaction than through action, and our mistakes through action can be corrected. Our mistakes through inaction are more costly.

There is an optimism about human potential, which you see in No Child Left Behind and in the Freedom Agenda, that translates from the domestic to the international. But then it is restrained by a willingness to use hard power, which doesn't fit the pure liberal framework. I don't remember all of what I wrote but I remember thinking, *Oh, I've nailed it*. But it wasn't in the President's voice. It was too academic and Steve said, "That's not quite it," and it never saw the light of day.

Riley: Did you have access to the President when you were working on this? What resources would you avail yourself of to try to—?

Feaver: Lots of access to Mike Gerson and Pete Wehner, and Mike in particular could channel the President as well as anyone. Minimal access to the President, particularly when I'm writing rough draft stuff. They're not going to have me bouncing ideas off him when Steve still hasn't approved it.

Riley: Let's systematically go through these things, but there are still a few preliminaries, including you said something about staff.

Feaver: Staffing, right. This is one of the things I think I did right. Since you'll hear about all the things I did wrong, I want this for the record. I got to hire two people. The secretary is sort of a research assistant person and then the Senior Director to work for me. I made wise choices in both cases. The NSC, particularly on the administrative side, was primarily made up of people who had been there for a very long time. They could go back and tell you what Carter did. This was fascinating. These were people I knew and liked from my days before. I was sympathetic toward them, and they knew everything about the NSC. They knew how the systems worked and had a lot of institutional knowledge, very positive, but senior and perhaps more set in their ways would have been the downside. Or you could get junior people who didn't know where anything was. I wanted the best of both and I found it in Rebekah. Rebekah Rein is her married name, her maiden name was McDonald.

She had started in the White House as an intern in 2001 maybe. She graduated from Patrick Henry College and started as an intern in Rove world and had worked for four years in Rove world and wanted to transition into the national security arena. She was on the cusp of going back to graduate school to get a master's in international affairs, but if she could get a job on the NSC staff she would continue doing administrative stuff. She had been Pete Wehner's assistant. So Pete told me about her and I thought, *This is perfect*. She was young and energetic, but she had four years of experience and she knew the entire White House part that I didn't know, which was the non-NSC, and she had contacts through Rove world for everything. For instance, we got the good soda. A tiny, trivial example, but she knew everything.

She also was very smart. The very first memo I wrote for the President I actually had her write because I wanted her to know that I didn't want her to just be a secretary. I said, "We're going to treat you more like a research assistant." Then we got the position converted to count as a research assistant. I had her write—obviously I edited it and made sure it was right. I put her name on it. Steve said, "Your first memo to the President and you want your secretary's name on it?" He made me take her name off and have it go under my name. But she wrote most of it. She was excellent.

She was so good that Steve stole her from me. When Steve's scheduler retired, he grabbed Rebekah and then after he left Rebekah went and is working for The RiceHadley Group [RiceHadleyGates] to this day. She was excellent. That was extremely valuable because part of my job was to be fully in the NSC world but also Andy Card's admonition that they wanted me to operate as much as possible in the West Wing. She knew that world and could help me navigate it. That was a great choice. I would say other officers, when they saw how well it worked, started to hire newly minted college students as well. By the time I left there were about a half dozen of them in secretarial positions throughout the NSC.

The other person was the Senior Director. That was a harder one to fill. I interviewed a lot of people for that. The trick was I was trying to complement me, my strengths and weaknesses, with one person, and I had lots of weaknesses. How could I complement that in one person? I decided the thing I lacked the most was State Department savvy, so I needed someone with a State Department connection. But for this office to work we had to be 100 percent trusted in the

West Wing, and the State Department wasn't 100 percent trusted, and particularly the Powell State Department had not been 100 percent trusted in the West Wing. Finally, I needed someone who was a good writer, which was crucial because most of what we would do was writing.

I interviewed everybody I could, tried for a number of folks. At one point I was looking for someone with more of a strategy background in DoD and interviewed some very senior people for that. The last person I interviewed—of course it is always the last person you interviewed—and I tease him now about searching the byways, highways, and last person standing—was Will Inboden, who was in Policy Planning, and had a PhD from Yale history department. He had a background in religious freedom issues. It turns out he was an inspired choice in a number of dimensions.

He and I got along very well together. He got along very well with Pete Wehner and Mike Gerson, so it was an extension of that relationship. He knew everybody I didn't know in the Bush administration. He had served for a number of years in the Bush administration. Whereas I had more contacts actually among Democrats than Republicans, he had way more contacts among Republicans. Our Rolodexes complemented each other very well. He had completely earned the trust of the West Wing. I think that the choice of those two people, Rebekah and Will, and the ability of the three of us to work well together probably is a significant portion of the success. To the extent that we accomplished anything in the office it was that and the connections and network that allowed a three-person band to punch well and play well above that.

Bakich: West Wing, State, you're kind of running point on DoD, what about the intelligence community?

Feaver: I had been in Navy intel a year or so. I had some connections there but not as much connection. But there is only so much we could do.

Nelson: How much interest was the Vice President's Office taking in NSC, the decision that Hadley made to create these two new units, who'd staff them?

Feaver: Steve wanted me to have John Hannah, who was the number two behind [I. Lewis] Scooter [Libby] as my point of contact. I talked to Scooter before he left. He left in fall of '05, I think.

Nelson: I think he died in October '05.

Feaver: I think he left September of '05. I talked to him before I came. At that time John was his number two. John was doing for the Vice President what Steve wanted me to do for him. Steve wanted me and John to be sort of sidesaddle on all of this. John is a Duke alum, by the way. I didn't know him from Adam, but we developed a good relationship very quickly and I invited him to everything initially.

He would come to whatever he could. When Scooter left he took over, so he became more of a Hadley equivalent or a JD equivalent than a me equivalent. He and I spent lots of time in his office hashing out things if there was a problem. Not a problem between our offices but say we think the administration is going off the rails on issue X or Y, he and I would talk about it

extensively and try and figure out do I push from this end, does he push from that end, whatever. But he wouldn't be involved on a daily basis because he was just too busy.

The next time we ended up doing that much close together was on the Iraq strategy review. But throughout he was invited to all the meetings, could come whenever he wanted to. The Vice President's office would tend to pick the issues that they were interested in and one or two of the ones I ended up working on, Iraq and Iran, he cared very much about. Some of the other issues were lower priorities for the Vice President so therefore a little lower priority for John.

Riley: Can you paint us a picture of what it was like when you first started working there?

Feaver: So I get there, it's a new office—

Riley: Where was your office?

Feaver: I didn't have one.

Nelson: You should have gotten Dick Clarke's office.

Feaver: I did actually. The admin moved back into Dick's old spaces so I was temporarily in Dick's old spaces.

Riley: Sweet justice.

Feaver: Yes, it goes around. This was a real problem. The standard problem for policy planning shops, strategic planning shops, is that you don't own any land. Everybody views you like you're here from the government to help them. They don't need your help. They don't want your help. There was not a single thing I did that someone didn't think was their job, including the National Security Strategy. Bill Luti's office in the previous administration had actually had it, so it was in Defense Policy and Arms Control. Back in the ancient days when I was there the NSS had been run out of that office, so Bill Luti didn't think we needed a new office to do this.

Bill and I got along well, but he offered me spaces in his office and he would have liked me to be reporting through him. He had a shop devoted to strategy and Hadley had created this separate one. Finding office space was a problem. It's a standard joke because I ended up having the least glamorous office in the NSC. It was a small cubicle farm, four cubicles for five people. I said, "If anyone comes to this office and sees me here, they'll lose all respect for me and I won't be able to function."

I would have to borrow other people's offices or meet them at Caribou Coffee. Pete Wehner had one of the glorious offices in the Old Executive Office Building [OEOB], and occasionally if there was an unclassified visitor that it was safe to, I'd meet in his office and let people think what they wanted. Of course, I'd have to befriend the other folks who had great offices. Bill Luti had a great office, so I tried to have meetings cohosted with him in his office. So did Elliott Abrams and Juan Zarate.

We had to set up the office. It turns out that mine was the pilot for what became the norm for them for a little while because of the remodeling. Coincidental with this, the Bush administration

was remodeling the whole OEOB, and they were dividing it up wedge by wedge. The unattractive thing I endured ended up becoming more standard and we were the pilot for it. So I had little headphones.

Riley: Noise canceling?

Feaver: No, because you can't bring in any electronics. They were just the old-fashioned, sweat-inducing—I was the standard joke in the NSC, me wearing these little things because I'd put them over my head halfway to hear people.

Perry: So you looked like a baggage handler.

Feaver: I did. When Will and I were writing the NSS, it was my cubicle, then Susan Sweatt, who was my counterpart on implementation and execution, and then Will Inboden's cubicle and then Traci [Sanders], who was the Senior Director working with Susan. In this corner was Rebekah. Will and I would get a notion, a phrase, "Why don't we have the President say it this way?" Will would shout it out from his side—and I'd say, "No, change this thing." We'd go back and forth and then we'd say, "It's so beautiful, I can't stand how beautiful it is." Susan in between us would say, "I can't stand it, but it's not because it's so beautiful."

It was a little bit like the 1930s movies of reporters' rooms. That kind of feel to it where everybody was in everybody's business and calling out across the offices and trying desperately to do business when you had to focus quietly. The office space was never great.

The bigger issue was access to the suite and access to the rest of the NSC or liaison to the rest of the NSC. The thing I had learned from the Clinton years was that you need a West Wing pass. If you don't have a West Wing pass you're toast in the NSC system. That's one of the few things I got, the all-access pass to go anywhere in the West Wing. If I hadn't gotten it, I would really have made a fuss.

Bakich: Did you have to call over there to get cleared?

Feaver: Right, if you don't have that pass. And if you don't have one of those passes it is a visible sign that you don't need to be in the West Wing often enough to have one of these. And if you don't need to be in the West Wing often enough, then I don't need to be listening to you. That's the way the White House works.

Riley: Plain as the nose on your face.

Feaver: Yes, so I got one of those passes, and I had one in the Clinton days. They were freer with Clinton. That was important symbolically for an office. Otherwise people were saying, "Why do we need you?"

Then the other and more substantive part was going to all of the other directorates and establishing relationships with them. That was a significant part of my first two or three months, trying to establish that relationship with all of them because they didn't know me. I did not have pre-established relationships with anyone on the NSC. I knew Victor Cha because we were both professors. I knew the secretaries better than I knew any of the other professional people.

Nelson: Because they'd been there.

Feaver: They'd been there before. A significant portion of my time and effort was establishing that link and relationship with each of the ones that I could. It was a different courtship with each office because they had different interests, different suspicions. I think I was successful with a number of them. I was successful with Elliott Abrams, who had human rights and Middle East, and he and I ended up working together a lot. He had everything in the Middle East except Iraq. The Iran stuff I did was done with him and some of the war of ideas stuff was done with him. That was one of the more fruitful relationships I had on the NSC.

I had a very good working relationship with Juan Zarate, who had the terrorism file and was very interested in the big ideas, big strategy, big-think stuff even though his operational background was as a lawyer, prosecutor, going after financial stuff. He was a big thinker as was Elliott Abrams. We would augment his office.

Very early established a relationship with Meghan [O'Sullivan]. I think Meghan, who had Iraq and Afghanistan, initially was maybe a little bit concerned because of my Iraq work that I was coming to poach on her territory. We had to work out a modus vivendi that I wasn't poaching, I was kibitzing. I was advising her and trying to empower her.

Bakich: How far into this job are you having these conversations with Meghan O'Sullivan?

Feaver: With Meghan that was probably in June, the first week or two, just because of the importance of the issue and my background working that issue. Also a little bit harder with the press, in part because I had initially thought it was Michele Davis was going to be more communications strategy, war of ideas and that kind of thing, and she was more oriented on the press management side of the daily communication work of the White House NSC, which was not my area.

I got in a little bit of trouble with that office because about a week after I got there Peter Baker ran the story about me coming, which somewhat misstated the reason I was there. That office was a little suspicious that I had so many friends in the press, so many reporters who knew me. There was some overlap in interest in my connections with Dan Bartlett and Karl Rove. It was a little harder to reassure that office that I would be a team player. Eventually they gave me a much freer hand to talk to the press. Initially I was on a very tight leash.

Of course Bill Luti, defense policy. A significant portion of my time was spent going from office to office talking to them. It helped that I didn't have a daily in-box of memos that the President had to write that were meeting memos for tomorrow. It wasn't that I had nothing to do, I had a lot to do, but I didn't have as much urgent stuff as they did. I could meet with them on their time and at their beck and call.

By August, I had at least earned their trust that I was not going to steal an issue from them and run down the field without them. But I also convinced them that I could help with information that they didn't know about from the suite or from the rest of the White House or just heads up that they might not know. We developed this exchange of information. In the end I could get things to Hadley that they wanted. If something was languishing in Hadley's in-box because there were too many other things on his plate, they could tell me and at my next meeting with

him I'd say, "What about X?" Then he would dive in, saying to the pile of papers, "You mean this?" That moved it back up to the top.

There was something of an information barter and access barter that I had to establish with them to make that office work. I've seen other offices in the NSC that had similar functions that weren't able to set that up. Then they get cut out. The office will just disappear because you're not urgent and even though you have important things you're supposed to be working on, you can't plug it in. Everyone is too busy and you end up never getting off the ground.

Riley: Could Hadley have played a role in additionally facilitating this, or is he just too preoccupied with everything in his in-box? I am assuming that a memo must go out that says this guy is doing this. But how might a National Security Advisor facilitate what you're doing?

Feaver: He did several things that helped. First, he gave me access to all the senior staff meetings in the NSC. I forget what they were called. One of them was the Senior Directors meeting. There was another one that was more of a schedule planning meeting.

Riley: You got a seat at the table.

Feaver: Right. Anytime there were meetings of groups of the Deputy NSA equivalents, which is sort of where my rank was, DNSA [Deputy National Security Advisor] equivalent, I was invited to those meetings. Other people saw that I was there. More important than that, he had Saturday meetings with me, which were for the most part unscripted. That was a lot of time just for one staff person to have with him. And the rest of the staff thought it was even more time than it was, and I wasn't going to disabuse them of that.

I had a lot of other people say, "Man, I wish I could come to those Saturday meetings." They recognized that that was a time to raise issues that didn't have to be decided right that minute, and you could have more of a laid-back conversation and more free-flowing discussion. There is not enough of that in the NSC setting. Every Senior Director, every DNSA wanted more of that with Hadley and they saw that I had that carved-out time with him.

Bakich: [Brent] Scowcroft had that going in the first Bush administration. It seems to have worked out well for him.

Feaver: It was very valuable. Oftentimes Steve would get too busy or it would be scheduled for 9:00 A.M. and would happen at 2:00 P.M. I'd be sitting there for hours waiting to have the meeting. But it was extremely valuable. You ask what did Steve do to help my job, he did that.

Bakich: I want to make sure I get this right. You did sit in on DC [Deputies Committee] meetings?

Feaver: I sat in on a bunch of DCs, did I do some PCs [Principals Committee] in the beginning? Definitely DCs. The first two months basically Steve said, "Any meeting you want to go, you can ask and probably we'll let you sit in at the DC level."

Bakich: Yes.

Feaver: I did a couple of those just so I got a feel. After a while I realized I should not do too much of that because first of all I'm taking a seat from a Director who would otherwise get to sit in on that and if I'm not actively working on that issue—it made sense to do it once, but not the second or third or fourth time.

The more valuable thing he gave me was to put me on the email collective. The way the NSC email system works, it is considered bad form to email a person because if you just email that person they get a gazillion emails. They may be away from their email for an hour, and if you need an answer, you can't assume that they will be available to answer your email. Most of the time you email the collective.

If you have a question you want to ask the Asia people, and by the way, that was another office I did work well with, Mike Green, who had Asia. That was one I worked very closely with. Mike is very strategic and he invited me to every one of their meetings. But if you wanted something from Asia you would email @Asia, which would then go to the Senior Director, every Director, plus all of the secretaries. Then they would know this needs to be answered in five minutes and the person you're asking is not there, so here is the answer. The President of Fiji is whatever. Or "No, the U.S. has no arrangement like that with the Philippines. You can get away with whatever it is." You email the collective. So a lot of emails get duplicated, triplicated.

The collective that we were on was the suites collective. If you mailed something to Hadley it went to everybody in Hadley's suite, including me. That meant everything. They finally took me off that collective and put me on a different one, but initially that was a very powerful signal to the rest of the NSC that everything that goes to Hadley, Feaver sees. It swamped me with this stuff, but it was a very quick way to learn what was going on, to get situational awareness. To learn what was important, what got answered when, how it got answered. I quickly developed an understanding of how the pulse of the NSC works. But more importantly it probably exaggerated to my colleagues how important I was, which was helpful for them giving me a hearing.

At that point you have to earn their trust, but at least they gave you a hearing because "he's on the collective."

Riley: All right. We're off to a flying start.

Feaver: We haven't gotten to anything substantive.

Riley: There is a lot more substance in what we've talked about already than you're remembering. We have a full day tomorrow and all the preliminary stuff has pretty much been cleared, so we'll have ample opportunity. As always, if you feel that we're heading off in fruitless directions then let us know.

Feaver: OK.

Riley: We're doing great on time. You're being very accommodating.

Riley: This is day two of the Peter Feaver interview. I always begin by asking did anything come to mind last night?

Feaver: No.

Riley: Very good. The first big thing on your plate then was the revision of the National Security Strategy, is that correct?

Feaver: Yes. I want to make one preamble point about this. I imagine we'll follow issues in a narrative way, which is necessary to add coherence, otherwise one forgets parts of the story. But that's a fundamentally misleading way of understanding what happened, as you know as historians. This is my critique of the instant histories by Bob Woodward and others. Otherwise they're very good, but you get a false sense of order to it. While I can trace the narrative working on the NSS from July through February when we released it, in fact there were about eight other things I was doing that were interspersed. At times the NSS was in the background and not my number one priority. Other times it would become priority number one.

The vivid way of demonstrating this point is that you lost opportunities, or things that you spent a lot of time on didn't bear any fruit. People say, "What were you doing during all that time?" The best example is that since August of 2006, when the second effort at [George] Casey's tweaking the Baghdad plan was not working, finally that's when Meghan and I said, "We're just going to launch this strategy review on Iraq on our own, no matter what." But there were about two weeks during that period when Meghan, of course, was working Iraq full time but all of the other senior people, and I, were diverted on something else, which bore no fruit, which was the apparent impending death of [Fidel] Castro.

Castro got sick and it looked like he was going to die, so for two weeks there was a giant interagency strategic review—this is a strategic opportunity, what are we going to do? How do we manage this? There was a crisis management aspect of it, but it was much more in strategic planning, seize-the-moment kind of thing.

So PCs and brainstorming sessions with Hadley, all on Castro. It becomes clear he has ridden out the thing, so now back to Iraq. But for two or three weeks your attention is diverted and if Castro had died or if we had been able to orchestrate a shift in regime change there, people would have said, "That was a strategic opportunity. Well played." As it was it just didn't happen, but it took a considerable amount of staff time.

Riley: Let me ask you two questions before we proceed. Is there a better alternative for talking with you about this?

Feaver: No. I think it makes sense to do it the way we're doing it. Peter Baker is writing his book on the Bush administration. I told him the missing piece from all of the stuff that has already been written is showing how these different issue areas crisscrossed or conflicted in time and sometimes in space with each other. It is really a narrative challenge. Can he write that

narrative? It's much harder than the way—if you look at all the memoirs, even President Bush's memoirs, it's all as if it were discrete decisions. It imposes far more narrative clarity onto the events than they really had, than one experienced.

Riley: Is it possible for you to speak of a normal day then? Is that a way of thinking about how chaotic it is, or were you so far removed that you couldn't even reconstruct the chaos of a normal day?

Feaver: It would be hard for me to pick a normal day. I think I'd probably end up picking a salient date, which was not necessarily normal. I think it is fine to do the oral history this way. It is just that whoever is consulting the oral history should have that footnote there because I think there is an analytical opportunity for someone to figure out these tradeoffs.

Riley: One of the things I try to do with my students is to present exactly that argument because we get this same point, not always and I wouldn't even say often. I think it comes from people like yourself who have some sense of how academics work. There is this natural tendency to want to impose some order on things as a way of communicating to people what is going on. But with my students I try to say that this is exactly what is lost, it is the chaos of what is coming through the in-box, the component of taking a sip out of a fire hose, which is the metaphor that we often hear.

Nelson: Can you think of a day that illustrates your general point or a week where you just get started on one thing and, boom, along comes something else?

Feaver: I can't think of an example that works on a day basis, but I can think of an example that works on the big issue areas. So the Castro situation was one. The other one we'll get to later was the shift from Iraq to Iran, which happened in December of '05. That is an illustration of this point where you think an issue is put to rest or from a strategic planning point of view, *OK, I'm going to divert my resources elsewhere for a time,* and then events in that area are still going on and people who own that issue are still doing it on a 24/7 basis. Then you shift to four or five months later and the problem is in a very different place. I would illustrate it that way.

I remembered two points I wanted to make about items that Hadley had tasked me with, which is relevant to the things that we'll get to today. These weren't the big three assignments, but these were the lanes. I said I wasn't given a lane except for doing the National Security Strategy, which is the one big lane I owned. The other lanes I had involved outside thinkers. The way Hadley put it was that he wanted to insource inspiration and outsource perspiration.

He said, "There are all these think tanks with brilliant people and academics working these issues, and most of their work doesn't help us at all because we don't know about it, or it is not quite on what we need, or it is off cycle timing-wise." He had, of course, come from, is it the Wilson Center? He is on the board of one of these think tanks and recognized the great assets that were there but weren't being leveraged. Of course DoD had a huge research budget, they could just pay people to do what they wanted. NSC had no money.

He wanted me, in my position, to leverage that somehow. To find the best stuff that's out there that was relevant, bring it in, be something of a forum shop that they could send stuff to. I would cull the best stuff and take it to Steve or to other people on the NSC staff. On occasion to ask

folks to do stuff for us. His idea was that we as a White House could make much better use of the intellectual resources that were already working the same problems we were working but we weren't getting their benefit.

That allowed me to go places and to interact with people in a more sensitive way than the typical NSC staffer who is usually chained to a desk. I could go to Aspen Strategy Groups sessions, Aspen Ideas, things like that, which I think proved to be very valuable. Some of those came to fruition later on in the story.

The second aspect of it was that he wanted me to be something of a liaison to two key groups. One was to the President's base, the core supporters, the people who were with the President to the bitter end. In intellectual and foreign policy terms obviously, not in political terms. But the people who supported Iraq and still supported Iraq and were with us to the end on Iraq on the one hand, and the loyal opposition, if you will, on the other. Democrats who had good ideas about what should be done. He was very keen to rebuild some kind of bipartisan middle-ground support for things, where we could all come together to agree.

I had both of those lanes. I used to spend a fair bit of time talking with folks at AEI [American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research] and elsewhere who were critics of the administration but from the right. Likewise with people who were critics of the administration from the left, from the Democratic Party. By the end of my time there, '06, '07, Steve was the only member of the administration who had any credibility with Democrats. They were so alienated from the rest of the administration they didn't want to hear it. But they trusted Steve.

The White House gave Steve some very difficult portfolios, the detainee one—I didn't work that issue, but Steve spent hours on the Hill working that issue. Then I was bringing in folks on Iraq and Iran and War on Terror, Democrats to meet with Steve. A lot of my Democratic friends complained that the first-term administration had no interest in them. They weren't invited to any consulting sessions, a lot of the common courtesies that go on in Washington were completely denied them. Ironically, the Obama administration has done the exact same thing as sort of a payback. Maybe it is a first-administration, first-term kind of phenomenon.

I took that message to Steve, and Steve said, "Yes, we have to fix that." I had marching orders to reach out to Democrats, to bring them in to meet with Steve, to hear what they had to say, to make sure that they were briefed on what we were trying to do. It was really the two wings, the conservative wing and the moderate Democrat wing.

Riley: We definitely want to come back to both of those lanes and get you to flesh that out. So if you want to start there we can do that.

Feaver: It's up to you.

Riley: I actually would like to dig into that a little bit because it is such a fascinating topic. Could you tell us a little more about some of the specifics of the academic outreach?

Feaver: It took several forms. One form was just bringing in intellectuals to meet with the President. The President loved to read, particularly loved to read big history books, loved to debate and discuss these kinds of things. We had something of a salon series.

Riley: You started this or was it started?

Feaver: I don't know if I started it or maybe Pete Wehner started it. Pete and Mike would pull together people on domestic policy, race or—I think there was one after [Hurricane] Katrina that was making sense of that kind of thing. You'd have to ask Pete about the ones he did, big historians of the Presidency, those kinds of things.

I would pull together ones on divides among the Sunni Shi'a and tribalism or something like that. I remember another one on constitutional efforts to deal with divided societies. The reason I remember this vividly is the number one expert in the world on that subject is Don Horowitz, my colleague at Duke. The lawyers were saying I couldn't invite Don Horowitz because I was a Duke professor, it was a conflict of interest and unethical. I was violating some sort of back channel. I said, "This is absurd. You ask anyone in the world and they'll say, 'Yes, Don Horowitz, you definitely want to talk to him.'"

I had to go around and around with the lawyers before they would allow me to bring in this guy.

Riley: These are NSC counsels or White House counsels?

Feaver: They're dual-hatted. I forget who it was. There are a number of these ethics rules that you understand their purpose but their application can be kind of nutty, like that one. I finally got them to agree that it was OK to bring Don in, so he came in.

Riley: This was to meet with the President?

Feaver: Right, and there would be two or three other scholars. This was around the time that the Iraq Constitution—injecting more federalism, would that be the solution, what are the pitfalls? You can see the kinds of things they'd be discussing.

Riley: Right.

Feaver: We, the staff, would design these around either issue areas that were very salient in the media or that we knew the President was very interested in. In some cases, we wanted to start a debate so we orchestrated it. This was a device for starting a debate. When we come to the Iraq story that plays. There was one important one we did that way.

We would do that for the President but also for Hadley or other members of the NSC staff. Juan Zarate had a salon series on new thinking in terrorism studies. He would bring the various experts in terrorism. It would be an academic seminar type thing.

Meghan did a number of these on Iraq. Another way we would do this is Will and I developed a list of questions that we wanted answered that were too sensitive or inappropriate or otherwise didn't seem right to task the intelligence community. We had a great relationship with the IC [National Intelligence Council] unit devoted to us. Mat Burrows, who was the guy for long-range intelligence, met with Will and me a fair bit, and we had a very good working relationship. We tasked them on some deep-dive studies that were perfect for the IC to do. But there were other ones where either the IC was already providing and we wanted a second look, or we wanted an outside perspective. In one or two cases it was too sensitive to give to the intelligence

community.

We would reach in and call someone we knew either in a university or in a think tank and say, "If you write a memo on such-and-such a topic, I will guarantee you that the National Security Advisor will read it and possibly the President will read it." If you're in a think tank, that's what you want to do. We had no money to give them, but in most cases these were things that they had already been studying, so it was the case of just pulling together—or to ask a specific kind of question. We would get those memos back and they were helpful.

Often they would confirm what we already thought. We had sketched out, "It seems to be one of these three things. Here's how we'd rank these policy choices." They would do the same. That was good. It was helpful confirmation that we hadn't missed something.

A couple of other cases they would challenge it, and that was also good for thinking. In no case did it actually tell us something we *never* thought of before, but it was helpful. That was part of the channel that the AEI study Jack Keane and Fred Kagan did that was brought into the White House, partly through that kind of channel. That we didn't task them, they were doing that on their own. But the fact that we had this process already in place made that a little bit easier to inject into the system. That was a way of outsourcing the perspiration piece.

Then the outreach to Democrats, we set up—I'm not sure what the interval was, monthly, every six weeks, something on that scale—meetings with people who ended up staffing the Obama administration. People like Jim Steinberg, Kurt Campbell, Michèle Flournoy, Richard Danzig, Jim Miller. Who else? Just stepped down as Deputy SecDef, Bill Lynn. These folks who were friends of mine from a variety of settings and who I had heard complain about the administration in great volume and detail.

We'd bring them into the Roosevelt Room to meet with Hadley and JD Crouch and Meghan O'Sullivan and the senior leadership of the NSC. They would tell us what's working, what's not working from their perspective. It was very helpful. I don't think it necessarily resulted in big changes in policy, but they did tell me they appreciated finally getting an audience, finally getting a hearing. I think it reassured them in some respects that we had thought about the problems they were identifying, that we weren't so blind.

There is this image of the White House, they're in a bunker, Bob Woodward's stupid title, *State of Denial*. I had a big argument with him about that. The title is very misleading, but in any case you think, *Oh, the White House is in denial, they're not seeing it*. Have them meet with Hadley and they realize they are seeing it. The more photo-oppy kind of way that that took place, it wasn't meant to be a photo-op and I think it emerged in something better, was the idea I had of bringing together all the living SecDefs and SecStates [Secretary of State].

Riley: That was you?

Feaver: Yes. The plan was to do that in conjunction with the big push we did in the fall of '05 on Iraq, culminating in the Iraq election in mid-December and the President's address to the nation. My idea was follow that up with this meeting as an effort to relaunch the bipartisan consensus on Iraq. When we get to Iraq I'll explain why I thought there was a bipartisan consensus. The idea was that this would symbolize that, but also be a vehicle for moving forward

and could be a regular thing.

For scheduling reasons it was too hard to do during the Christmas season, so we moved it to early January. We had all of the living ones except [George] Shultz wasn't able to travel. But there was a discussion inside. Do we really want to invite "that one" or "this one"?

Riley: Can we entertain guesses as to which—?

Feaver: The political people in the White House said, "Couldn't we just do Republicans?" I said, "No, that is *exactly* the wrong message. It is better to do nothing than to bring just Republicans back." I said it had to be all living. That was the rule. I remember Karl Rove indicating that if this went poorly, as he thought it was going to do, he was going to chew me out for having been so stupid. His fear was some of the more partisan ones would walk out to the sticks and now they have a national audience with the White House in the background and say, "The President is out of touch, in denial, doesn't know—" That would have been disastrous.

I assured him that that is not what they would do—I hoped. [*laughter*] So we had the meeting. I remember being surprised that one or two of them were still alive. The first one went really well. Bill Perry and Madeleine Albright didn't think it went well, and they complained a little bit because they felt it was too staged. I talked to her afterward. I said I thought that was unfair.

We gave them the same briefing that we had been giving legislative leaders. We had Casey and Zal [Zalmay Khalilzad] come in on the CVTS [compressed video transmission service] from Baghdad. Then the President made a few brief remarks. There wasn't a lot of time to go around. Madeleine and Bill Perry both complained that it wasn't the free-flowing thing that they wanted, but the President loved it.

As I had hoped, no one went out and slammed the President or took a cheap shot at the President in response. So the political people loved it. Karl loved it. Karl was in the session. He and Dan Bartlett all agreed that it had been a great success so we got another one scheduled.

Nelson: The first was January of '06?

Feaver: Right. Then the other one was scheduled in—I want to say April of '06 on Iran. That was much more of a free-flowing thing. I told Hadley and the folks, "They don't need to hear the briefings. They feel like they've got that." Actually, what I said is, "Let's make it twice as long, and the first hour they get the briefing from the NSC people. Then we bring the President in. No more briefings, just free-flowing discussion."

Riley: No press?

Feaver: You bring the press at the very end for a photo. The meeting itself was off the record. That worked much better. Madeleine said very tough things to the President. Bill Perry had some tough—Colin Powell had some tough advice. But my point was it worked, doing what I wanted to do, which was to show that there really was, in a capacity of the leading Republicans and Democrats to talk about the national security issue, maybe disagree a little bit but not shouting at each other, not questioning each other's motives. That went very well. It was a staffer's nightmare to negotiate all those VIPs, however.

One anecdote. Bill Cohen was there and I asked, "Is there anything you need?" He said, "You could get my scarf back from Hadley." I said, "What's this?" He said, "We were at the Kennedy Center the other night in the same box and Steve accidentally left with my scarf." I said, "Oh, very sorry about that, I'll run that down for you."

I go into the suite and I ask Steve's scheduler, "There's an odd thing. Secretary Cohen asked me about—" She says, "Is he mentioning that scarf again?" I said yes. She says, "Dadgum it, Steve did not steal his scarf, this is crazy." I said, "I know, I'm sure whatever it was, inadvertent, misplaced, can we just go through the closet to make sure? I have to go back out there." She was frustrated with this.

I went back out and said, "Could you just describe the scarf for me and I will go buy you a scarf?" I don't want this moment of bipartisan kumbaya to be lost because of a misplaced scarf. It was a classic staffer moment. I think those were the only two big ones or maybe they continued it after I left. I'd give us a B for effort in the area of outreach across the aisle. I'm not sure we were able to substantially change the tone, but I do know that my Democratic friends say they had better access in the second term. They thought the second term managed that better than the first.

Bakich: On the Iraq meeting in particular, I remember hearing Albright's comments on that too. She was concerned that there wasn't enough time.

Feaver: Right.

Bakich: How was it a success for you guys?

Feaver: It was a success because there had been wariness in the White House. Do we even want to do this or would we just be empowering our critics to bash us more? Will the partisans on the other side take advantage of this? The answer was no, they didn't take advantage of it. They also didn't ambush the President and use him as a piñata for an hour. It was a success in that it accomplished what I thought was necessary—people got a chance to say to the President something that they feel like he hasn't heard even though he has heard them all. But let them realize he heard it. They left not saying the administration is in good shape, but they left also not saying, "These guys are idiots who are in denial." It was a success in those terms.

Perry: Can I ask about the meetings, the seminars with the academics?

Feaver: Sure.

Perry: Was there an attempt to get the word out to the press and the public about that?

Feaver: No, indeed we didn't want that. The one time it didn't work, from our point of view, there was an academic who got a call from the *New York Times.* "Oh, I understand that you were with the President." Of course it might have been that guy's first *New York Times* interview and he chatted away. The reporter twisted his remarks to make it seem like—the press had a line, the administration out of touch or in denial, or wanting to launch a war with Iran. Whatever was the story line they were pursuing, they twisted this guy's comments to fit that.

He didn't feel it was a fair representation of what he had told the reporter. We asked everyone who came in, "Please don't tell the press what the President says. You can talk about what you say but please don't characterize others—We want this to be off the record and thus a freer form of discussion." The purpose wasn't to get credit in the press's eyes that we were doing bipartisanship. The purpose of it was to make sure that we had access to the full spectrum of informed criticism and comment and, in some cases, like when Meghan and I were trying to push a certain line, to have that injected at a very high level into the discussion. It is sometimes easier to do it from outside. It wasn't a press thing. Obviously the photo-op of all the living SecDefs and SecStates, that was photo-oppy but that wasn't the principal purpose of it.

Riley: Can you tell us about the meetings themselves? What is the dynamic like?

Feaver: With the academics?

Riley: Yes, with the academics. Where were they conducted?

Feaver: The ones with the President would be in the Oval.

Riley: Daytime?

Feaver: Yes, or nighttime. The ones I remember are during the day. We corralled the various academics and I'd pre-brief them and explain how it worked and encourage them not to talk to the press afterward, or at least not to talk about what the President said. These are the world's finest, most self-confident, most self-assured men and women, but the Oval Office is very intimidating. Karl loved to tell these stories of Members of Congress who'd come to his office and say, "I'm going to tell the President, I'm going to stick it in his ear, he's hurting my people." Then they get into the Oval and it's all pat each other on the back and love-in.

So it was rare that an academic, even a sharp critic of the President, would come into the Oval and just let the President have it in quite the way that I'm sure he or she was describing how they'd do it in the faculty lounge. We'd go around the room and I would tell them, "Usually it is good to have one or two points that you want to make. No speeches, certainly no 50-minute lectures. The President doesn't want that. He'll ask questions, and he'll tell you what is on his mind."

Riley: Is he behind the desk or over by the fireplace?

Feaver: He'd sit over by the fireplace and they'd be on the two couches and then the staff would be around, sitting in front of the desk or—

Riley: How many staff?

Feaver: A half dozen or so. Depending on the person and the team, there would be something of a staff pile-on exercise because it would be interesting. Andy would be there, or later Josh [Bolten], the Chief of Staff would be there. Mike Gerson on occasion. Certainly Steve Hadley would be there. If it was an Iraq issue, Meghan, maybe one of her Directors. If it was Iran, Elliott, or War on Terror, then Juan. Whatever the issue was, me or I'd try to get Will in there as much as possible. Oval time is extremely precious, so the more staff you can get Oval time to,

the better it is for everybody.

Riley: So you're in front of the fireplace.

Feaver: The President would just ask questions and go around—I remember the one on Iraq because I've written about that. In that case there were a couple of messages Meghan and I really wanted the President to hear, so I would tell the people, "I know this is your view, whatever else you want to say, say it, but make sure you say this particular thing because the President needs to hear this coming from you." They would make sure that message got through.

There would be some back-and-forth. Sometimes the President would challenge it. Sometimes he would say, "I know that, but what can I do?" Questions like, "Is [Nouri al] Maliki a Shi'a sectarian?" Great question. How do we determine that? The President would say, "Here's what Prime Minister Maliki has said to me in private. How would you guys interpret that?" That kind of thing.

I remember we had a deep dialogue on Russia. They were criticizing him for being too "I can look into [Vladimir] Putin's soul" kind of thing. The President gave his account of why he said that. It was very compelling to me; I think maybe to them too. People still say it was a messaging problem. But at least it wasn't the naiveté that the messaging seemed to indicate. The President said, "Of course I know who Putin is, but here is—" and he told some great anecdotes about Putin. I think it helped also with the academics to see the President is not the cartoon figure they thought he was.

My favorite story from these is the one with Sir Alistair Horne. On the margins of another meeting the President mentioned that he had read a book on Algeria and he found it very interesting. I piped up, "Oh, do you mean the book by [David] Galula on counterinsurgency?" The President said, "No, not that one. *A Savage War of Peace* by Sir Alistair Horne." He looked at me and said, "Have you read it?"

You never ask a professor, "Have you read it?" I said, "I'm familiar with it." The President said, "No, have you *read* it?" I said, "I'm familiar with the book." He said, "I want you to read that book, it's a great book." I thought, *Oh, brother*. I said, "Yes, sir, of course." I leave the meeting, go to the White House library, get it out and it's 700 pages. So I stick it on my desk and I think, *This is crazy*. *How am I going to have time to read 700 pages on the Algerian War?* So I left it there for a day. The next day I looked at it and I thought, *What is the likelihood that the President of the United States is going to remember that he told me to read that book? Very low. He's a busy man, lots of higher priorities. I'll read it when I get a chance*. It worked its way to the back of the desk and then I lost it in a pile of stuff and forgot about it.

The next thing I know I get a little card—That's how these things would happen. You'd get a little card, highly embossed, that says, "The President requires your attendance at a meeting for" whatever. But this one says, "The President requires your attendance at a meeting with Sir Alistair Horne tomorrow to discuss his book." [*laughter*] *Oh, no*. I told my assistant, "Clear my schedule" and I sat there and just cannibalized that book. Thankfully in graduate school you learn how to do this. Every hundred pages or so I would read five pages very carefully, put a little Post-it note, circle something, some comment to make. So I had these little Post-it notes

throughout the book. I did a prebriefing with Sir Alistair Horne, and I'm just hoping against hope I don't get called on to ask anything. Of course I wasn't. I was spared the indignity.

But the President just wanted to talk about Algeria in the context of whether you can win a counterinsurgency or are they Pyrrhic victories? Those kinds of things, very related of course to what he was thinking about Iraq. Sir Alistair was working on his book about [Henry] Kissinger at that point. He was more interested in the mechanics of the White House, so there was a great back-and-forth. The President really enjoyed that time. I survived it.

Riley: There were other channels for academics and authors coming into the White House than the salons that you were—?

Feaver: Sure, but it would usually be—I think in that case the President must have said to Karl or Dan, "I really liked that book. We should get that guy in here." I didn't bring Sir Alistair Horne in, the other ones I did.

Nelson: Was there anything going on along similar lines with Democrat Hill staffers and other groups?

Feaver: Yes. Steve was meeting with Members of Congress. One of the other channels was Members of Congress. I worked with our legislative guy, Michael Allen, and developed a list of Democrats who we thought were persuadable. We called them persuadable skeptics. So people like—

Nelson: [Joseph] Biden?

Feaver: Less Biden than his staff. Tony Blinken was a friend, so he was in the foreign policy experts' group.

Perry: [Joseph] Lieberman? Had you mentioned Lieberman?

Feaver: Yes, but he was so obvious. People like Jane Harman and others who would occasionally vote for an administration position but were sharp critics of us and were paying a price any time they supported the administration because their side was very hostile. Senator [Hillary] Clinton was one of them.

I remember when we brought Senator Clinton in I introduced myself. I said, "I worked in your husband's administration." She said, "I know who you are and I know what you're trying to do and it's too late." She said that if the White House had tried this in '03 maybe we could have done something. I'm guessing this was '06 when she said that to me.

We did one with the Senators, so Biden and Clinton, that would have been December '05.

Perry: In other words she was no longer persuadable. She fell out of your persuadables, or did she mean that it was too late overall?

Feaver: Too late to rebuild any kind of bipartisan center on Iraq. Even though there was substantial overlap between what she wanted us to do on Iraq and what we were doing, and like

Biden, leaving aside the partition side, but a lot of his other advice was exactly what we were trying to do. The message we were trying to give them was that we're trying to do exactly what you want us to do, what you say we should be doing, so can you support us in it? I think that's what she was referring to. She said, "You're trying to rebuild something that was irrevocably—" I'm adding words to it "—irrevocably broken by the 2004 election and the poison that that injected in the system and events in Iraq."

I think the Democrats knew what we were trying to do and recognized that there was a different receptivity in the White House from the first term. They were willing to come. Sometimes we'd sneak them in the back door so they wouldn't get criticized by their allies, but they were also saying that there was too much water under the bridge.

Perry: And this was just prior to or leading up to the '06 elections?

Feaver: Right.

Nelson: More to the point, the Senators you mentioned were running for President or trying to.

Feaver: Exactly.

Bakich: All of these are happening in the Oval Office, leaving aside the intimidation factor. How conducive is the Oval Office to free flow, exchange of ideas?

Feaver: It has astonishing convening power. You can get people on their own dime—we wouldn't pay for any of these people to fly to D.C. They would have to fly to D.C. on their own dime and we wouldn't—I would give them a free soda, basically; it was all that they would get. Why were they willing to do that? Because they could say that they'd been in the Oval. Doing it in the Days Inn in Reston might have been more conducive to a free-flowing discussion, but they'd be less willing to come.

Riley: Did you have people reject your invitations?

Feaver: Not that I can remember. We had one who was too sick to travel, Secretary Shultz.

Perry: I just think it is fascinating that the word did not go out generally to the press, and I understand your point about not wanting to have people say what the President says or characterize what he says, but given your point about the cartoonish caricature and people would say that he wasn't a reader, or that he didn't care deeply about this information or he wasn't getting this information—In fact, in this very same time period in '06, '07, I saw him in a small group setting, and he mentioned to this academic group that he had read over 200 books since he was in the White House.

Feaver: Right.

Perry: But even he didn't go on about what he had read or what characterized the books. It just seems that it would have been very helpful to his persona to talk about what he was reading and the people who were coming in. Did anyone think about that?

Feaver: Yes, and we would talk to reporters and explain this to them. Sometimes they would mention it because the booklist made it into the press. There was a certain amount of it that would seep in, but the cartoon images made for better sound bites. In the cable war media environment it is very hard to penetrate that. The administration, for whatever reason, wasn't willing to spend a lot of time trying to correct that cartoon image.

There was a big debate inside the administration—this isn't directly on what you're talking about but it touches on it—big opposition to relitigating the past. Karl writes about this in his memoirs. I think he says one of the mistakes that he made was squelching the relitigation of the past. I argued and a couple of other people argued that yes, support for what we're doing depends on a prospective judgment—are we going to win? So it is right to emphasize that, but it is not at the expense of the retrospective. The model is that they work in tandem. The prospective judgment has more explanatory leverage than the retrospective, but the retrospective still matters.

You need to relitigate the past, you need to keep arguing the past and not merely arguing the present. In that one instance I think they may have overlearned or overinterpreted or overemphasized one aspect of the work that I had done, to their detriment. And one or two others were consistently arguing, "We've got to engage the historical arguments." One of the things I worked a lot on that never saw the light of day was a white paper saying, "Here is the criticism levied on the administration on Iraq. Here's what we knew at the time. Here is what we've subsequently discovered. Now here is how we would call it."

It got reviewed by the IC multiple times and cleared by everybody. They never released the paper. It's in the archives somewhere. It required us acknowledging that on one or two of the things, things that we thought were true turned out not to be true, and/or maybe we should have realized at the time they weren't true. So it wasn't 100 percent vindication of everything that the administration said. When I say "we," it is before I got there. "But," I said, "it's worth releasing this because the conventional wisdom is that our truthfulness record or our accuracy record is much worse than it actually is."

On many issues people believe that the truth is X, and the truth is not X, it is closer to what we said than to the conventional wisdom. I thought even though we'd have to take some hits with this paper, we'd gain more territory. In other words, it was worth relitigating the past, it is not a loser for us, given how extreme the judgments are about the past. They wouldn't release it.

Nelson: It sounds like sacrificing a rook in chess.

Feaver: Yes.

Nelson: Because that's part of a larger strategy to win.

Feaver: Some of the statements that didn't hold up quite as well were some of the ones made by the Vice President, so there might have been some sensitivity on that issue. But some of his did hold up very well. It wasn't a total rebuttal of him.

The administration had this view that the 2004 elections had decided the matter. Is President Bush a cartoon figure? Is the Iraq War a mistake? No. How do we know? Because the President went before the American people, decided in 2004, end of story, we're moving forward. That

was a mistake. Karl now admits it was a mistake. If they could replay the second term I think they would do more litigating of the past, perhaps outreach and perhaps more talking about the outreach.

Riley: Let me ask one more question about this and then I think we need to get you back on the National Security Strategy. This is fascinating stuff that we could talk about all day.

Tell us about your perceptions of the President in these environments. You're accustomed to evaluating students, and this is in effect a student of history.

Feaver: Right.

Riley: There is this cartoon image of this President. When it becomes public knowledge that he and Rove are having this competition for the number of books that they're consuming, that kind of information is arresting—What are you finding out about the President? Help us understand what you're seeing of the man, the environment, interacting with people who are very smart, who are experts in their field. Is it a political thing? Is it just the power of the Oval Office and its ability to intimidate, or has he got a turn of mind that is different than you might expect?

Feaver: He has a tremendous amount of charisma. The sensory perception you get from him is strength, a charismatic strength and a steel-in-the-backbone kind of person. That would sometimes play out in the macho, competitive, who read more books, him or Karl. But also telling him bad news and he doesn't go, "Oh, geez," that kind of thing. That was a political side to him but different from Clinton.

I remember vividly the distinction I drew from my meetings, I had only one or two with Clinton versus President Bush. When I briefed President Clinton on a silly project I was doing regarding gifts for Colin Powell's retirement, it was the least important thing on his schedule that day. But he made me feel like he had been looking forward to this meeting for a week. I wanted to tell him, "Sir, I already work for you, you don't have to win me over. I am in your camp." But he was charming and winsome and funny. He was winning me over as if he were trying to persuade me to vote for him, and I was already on his team.

President Bush was not that way in the business settings. If you go to a Christmas party or something you would get that. He had great charisma and could do the rope-line kind of thing very well. I saw him do that when we were bringing more political moments for him to charm people. He did that very well.

But when you're a staffer coming in he did not make you feel like he had been looking forward to this all day. He was like, OK, clear, next thing. He was very businesslike, almost brusque. I remember the first time I came out of there because I was expecting a little bit more of the charm thing that I got from President Clinton. I remember thinking, *That's not his style. He's not trying to charm me*. He is a little more businesslike, a little more impatient, a little more annoyed. Not annoyed in the sense of why do I have to do this, I'd rather be playing football or watching football. But rather didn't want me to slip into lengthy, verbose stuff, very businesslike and cutting staff off sometimes, at least me.

I think those who spent a tremendous amount of time with him, like Karl and Dan and Mike,

would have a little more give-and-take. Because of my personality and because of the fact I had a tenured job so I knew if I were fired I had a great landing, I would occasionally crack jokes with him or push back on teasing or something. I was one of the only staff who did it.

I remember the first time I did it, he did a double take. He wasn't used to that, at least not from junior staff like me. I had fun doing that. You ask impressions. There was that. Much smarter than people gave him credit for. I remember one time he did a tour of the horizon. This would have been spring of '06. There was a little bit of morale problem on the NSC staff, a little exhaustion. Steve arranged for the President to come and do an all-hands meeting with the NSC staff.

I had been telling them, "You've got to get the President to meet with more staffers." So he did this. He walked into the room and then just talked around the globe. "Here's what I'm trying to do in China, here's what I'm trying to do in Latin America," and so on. He would pepper it with anecdotes. This was right around the time that Hamas did better in the parliamentary elections than expected. So he gave his analysis of that and others. It was an impressive tour of the horizon. I remember sitting there thinking, *I doubt I could do as well as he did*. I know I couldn't go as deep on some of the issues as he did. He would hit an issue area and then go way down into the weeds on what was the parliamentary list system in the West Bank versus the Gaza and all this kind of thing. Very confident, big vision. The staff left there totally energized and encouraged. So *much* smarter than people gave him credit for.

The other thing I remember—this will finally get us back to the NSS—a stickler for the written word. His reputation for being inarticulate and a bumbler, but he was ruthless on editing, almost mocking on editing. One of my meetings with him was to go over a draft on the NSS that I thought was pretty far advanced. He reads it, we're sitting in the Oval. The Chief of Staff, Andy Card, is there and Steve Hadley. I can't remember if the Vice President was there, but certainly the President was and probably Mike Gerson, one or two other people.

The President says, "I know this is supposed to be in my voice, but I can't find it anywhere." He starts to just read the first page, and he looks at me and says, "Do you even know what a topic sentence is?" I said, "Yes, sir, I do."

"So why didn't you—?" Then he is doing line edits. "Why don't you move this sentence," which was the last sentence of the previous paragraph, "that's a better topic sentence. Move that, but then you've got to move—" He was diagramming the paragraphs for me. He reads another line and says, "Why do I have to say that?" I said, "Sir, there is this critique in the literature about the previous NSS, so this sentence inoculates you against that critique."

He goes, "That critique is stupid." I said, "Yes, it is not accurate but it is widely held. So this sentence—" He was very frustrated with things that felt academic or—the kind of writings that you do as an academic to cover yourself against every possible thing. He didn't want that. He wanted simple, declarative. He line edited that paragraph and it came out much crisper, much better. I had to smuggle some of the protective language back into the document later, but it was very humbling and somewhat humiliating.

I left that meeting and said to Dan, "That was a disaster." He goes, "No, it was very successful.

As those meetings go, that's one of the best ones. It is partly a rite of passage." The President would do this to anyone who was supposed to write in his name. He would really give them the wire-brush treatment up front so that they would then be more sensitized to it.

Dan said it went very well, but it felt quite humbling to have someone treat me—The only other time I had had that done to me was by Bob Blackwill back in graduate school. I'm grateful to Bob because—since it was done to me once, I was somewhat able to withstand it when it was done to me again.

Bakich: As a professor, as somebody who interacts with people who read a lot, you clearly established the President is smart, he's thoughtful about policy, he is thoughtful about strategy.

On a number of occasions it came out in the press that the President was reading things on leadership. For example, an article came out with a picture of the President carrying *Supreme Command*, Cohen's book.

Feaver: Right.

Bakich: Later on he convened, whether it was you or someone else, groups with historians on his legacy.

Feaver: Right.

Bakich: Were you able to get a sense of how the President's reading list affected the way in which he viewed his role as Commander in Chief, his leadership style? I got the impression that the President might have been carrying around *Supreme Command*, but I was unconvinced that he had read it.

Feaver: I know he read *Supreme Command* in 2002 because when we brought Eliot in he talked about it with Eliot. But I didn't think he got the full message from *Supreme Command*, so in 2006 when we were trying to push him to overrule his generals in the field, to more intrusively interfere with the strategy in 2006, we brought in Eliot precisely to hammer that point.

The issue wasn't that he'd read 200, 300 books since then, so maybe he'd forgotten the message. The message of that book is more timely now, or the moment for that message is now, '06.

Bakich: Right.

Feaver: So I brought in Eliot precisely to hammer that point to him. There is no question that he would read these books with an eye to, "OK, what does this tell me about my Presidency?" We'd get occasional emails, "The President has run out of books to read, can you please suggest books?" I said, "You should read *Dereliction of Duty*," this would have been spring of '06. I sent that email and forgot about it.

The next thing I know, I get a call at around 6:30 in the morning. They said, "You need to be in the Oval Office now." I think that was probably the only time that ever happened to me. My stuff was not time urgent where I had to be in the Oval Office. I usually had ample opportunity and warning for any Presidential meeting. But I rushed through—got my clothes on, running in. As

I'm running through the West Wing Hadley's EA [executive assistant] hands me the email and says, "It is about this."

As I'm walking down the hall past the Roosevelt Room I'm quickly scanning my email that recommended the President read *Dereliction of Duty*. That's as much preparation as I had. I walk into the Oval and it's the President, Hadley, and me. The President says, "Why did you recommend I read that book?"

I said, "The reason, sir, is that the generals—" This is the revolt of the retired generals, they had just gone on TV criticizing Rumsfeld. I said, "I wanted you to understand what was their understanding of their professional norm that was motivating them to do that. They are criticizing Rumsfeld because they've all read this book, and they interpret [Herbert Raymond] McMaster as saying that the generals were derelict in their duty for not standing up to [Robert] McNamara and [Lyndon B.] Johnson."

The President had thought I was saying *he* was derelict in his duties and that I wanted him to read it, that I was featuring him as Johnson or something. I said, "No, that's not it. I want you to understand why the generals are doing what they're doing."

He says, "Do you think we're going to have a revolt of the generals on our hands?" and I said, "They have this norm. This book has been on their reading list. This is what they believe. A number of them clearly believe that their moment was 2002 and they didn't do it then and they should have done it, so by golly they're going to do it now."

We had a very vivid discussion, 15 minutes or so on that book and interpreting it and what it meant. It was a hairy moment for me because I'd taught the book many times but I hadn't read it for years and had about 30 seconds' preparation to try to recall the arguments. But he would read the books in that way, maybe putting himself in the place of one of the characters and saying, "Which one of these—" and he thought I was doing that with *Dereliction of Duty*.

Bakich: Did you give him the punch line—The generals didn't have any better ideas—?

Feaver: I did talk about that and I pointed out that these—we dissected the retired generals' critiques. They were flawed in all sorts of ways. But this was at a time when a number of us were thinking that a change in leadership at the Defense Department probably was timely. There were a number of us kicking that idea around. It came up in that setting, discussing *Dereliction of Duty*. I said "One of the problems, sir, is the complaints of these generals make it almost impossible for you to replace Rumsfeld now because it would then be in response to them. The perversity of what they've done is that it has made it less likely that you could replace Rumsfeld even though that's what they claim was the reason for saying what they said."

That was the only time I got yanked into the Oval Office on an emergency basis, so it is vivid in my memory. But it is also one of the few times where my academic preparation, the fact that I knew this literature as a professor, had taught it, had researched and contributed on my own, and the moment of the Presidency where they all came together in one—that's what you imagine is going to be the case all the time. It doesn't happen that way. As a White House staffer most of the time you don't have that happy confluence, but every once in a while you do and that was one time I did.

Perry: Was his style, in that meeting, any different from the others you described? In other words, was he just as clipped?

Feaver: Oh, yes.

Perry: And brusque?

Feaver: No, obviously he wanted to talk about it. It was brusque in the sense of provocative, "Why did you tell me to read this book?" I was waiting for him to say, "You serve at the pleasure of the President and the pleasure is gone." That is what Andy Card said in my opening interview. He said, "You serve at the pleasure of the President, and when the pleasure is gone so are you." So I was waiting. I had that feeling. His tone and demeanor to me made me think that might be what I was going to experience. But, no, he wasn't impatient. He wanted to discuss this stuff.

Riley: One other thing and then we'll break and come back to the beginning and the NSS. Did you have occasions in your interaction with the President to talk about religion? You said you had an evangelical Christian past. Did you see this side of him? Was your own experience in any way discussed?

Feaver: In a number of ways. I would tell him that we were praying for him. Every time my wife got to meet him she would say that she was praying for him. My mom wrote a sort of memoir, it is more of a devotional—lessons that she had learned, which she would teach in Bible study. We gave that book to him. There were moments like that.

He had a little spiel he would give about the Oval Office to visiting dignitaries. Actually, he would give it to the professors too, after the substance was done and he'd do the "Let me give you a tour of the Oval Office." He would often in those settings talk about what surprised him most. People would ask him, "What surprised you most about being the President?"

He said the thing that surprised him the most was how many people around the country would tell him they were praying for him. He said it was really quite humbling. Wherever he would go, on every rope line, there was always someone who would say they were praying for him. He was very touched by that.

Will had the religious freedom background as well. We knew that issue was near and dear to the President's heart, probably not uppermost in the national security bureaucracy. So we would smuggle texts into the National Security Strategy that would get that issue, and we would look for opportunities to have the President meet with persecuted Christians from around the world, knowing it was something the President really cared about.

We had one meeting with underground church members from China. There was a lot of controversy because our Ambassador to China said, "Timing is not good for this." Of course it is never good. There is always a good reason not to annoy the Chinese right now. Our argument in the staffing debates was, "It's never a good time. This is something the President cares about, let's just do it and let's break the taboo or break the Chinese hold on the President's schedule that they can tell him who he can't meet with." Sometimes we'd win those and sometimes we didn't, but we did win it this time.

Nelson: And the "we"? You said sometimes we would win.

Feaver: Will and me.

Nelson: Gerson?

Feaver: Mike Gerson was an ally, Pete Wehner was an ally. They're all very committed Christians. Elliott Abrams, who is not Christian but devout of the Jewish faith, is also a strong supporter of human rights so he was an ally in those things as well. Mike Green, the Asia person, is very strong on religious freedom and human rights issues. But State Department less so and the Ambassador less so. We would have to fight interagency—Treasury Department not so interested.

We set up this meeting. In order to manage the optics we decided not to have it in the Oval, that it would be less offensive if it was in the residency. I heard afterward about the meeting. The President of course loved it, he *loves* those meetings, he loves to hear personal stories, is very moved by personal stories. At the end of it the pastor said, "We'd like to pray for you, Mr. President."

The President said, "That would be great." They said, "When we pray in our culture we hold hands." They all stood up and held hands. Mike Green, who was the staffer for that, said the funniest thing he's ever seen are these two Chinese pastors grabbing the Vice President's hand and then bowing their heads while they prayed. The Vice President looked a little more awkward with the setting, but the President looked very much at home.

Nelson: None of it unfamiliar to him.

Feaver: The White House joke would be that the Vice President was not a warm and cuddly guy. His staff who worked with him said he really was. There is a grandfatherly aspect to him that you would see if you *really* were close to him. They would swear that those of us who didn't work with him much were missing his real personality. But in those kinds of settings it didn't seem the natural thing for him.

Nelson: But President Bush, from his evangelical background, would have been very familiar with—?

Feaver: President Bush had no problem with it. So the faith issues would come in that way.

Riley: Why don't we take a break?

Feaver: We still haven't gotten to any of my subjects. The historical record is going to think I did nothing but arrange meetings.

[BREAK]

Nelson: We've got about five hours. How much of that time should we spend on Iraq? How much on Iran? How much on other things?

Feaver: The Iraq one is the one I've written the most about, so I actually don't think we need to spend quite as much time on Iraq because the historical record has more of that.

Nelson: Your commentary, your national security articles?

Feaver: Yes, you put those two together and you get—I think it is pretty clear my sense of the tick tock. I think if you guys found historical flaws or questions that you had or you thought I was unclear or where I've contradicted another record for me to clarify, that might be the best use of that time.

Bakich: I've got a couple.

Feaver: There are one or two anecdotes that I didn't put in the—one of them I've already told, which is the *Dereliction of Duty* story. I did not put that in any of the written stuff. There are one or two anecdotes like that on Iraq.

Iran I haven't talked at all about, I haven't *written* at all about, so that I think would be of some value. What was the other one I said? Record 2008 would be the other piece. It is a tracking device that we developed for the NSS. That's not out in the public record, so those would be ones that I would flag.

Nelson: War of ideas? Is that a separate topic or does that weave its way through?

Feaver: That's a separate topic. We won't take a lot of time on that but thank you, that is one I did want to mention.

Riley: Let's go back to the NSS then and pick up on that.

Feaver: The challenge on the NSS was we had the same President, roughly the same administration, and the President had just won a second term without repudiating anything from the first term. We were not writing a new National Security Strategy from a blank page.

On the other hand, the 2002 NSS had received a lot of criticism and, from the White House view, had been misinterpreted in some fundamental ways, so there was a lot to be clarified and/or addressed. And so much had happened since 2002, the world was in a different place. Some of the assumptions underlying the administration's policies clearly had to be rethought in light of events. How hard was Iraq going to be, for instance? That obviously had to be rethought.

The challenge for the NSS was to write it in a way that would thread the needle through all of those various concerns. I was given two prime directives. One, stay in the President's voice. Two, no leaks. The President was adamant, no leaks. This was Hadley, very clear to me, "You have to keep this close hold. We do not want to see drafts of the NSS making it onto the front page of the *New York Times* debating change in strategy or anything like that."

Those two directives drove the process. It meant that we would have a very top-down approach

to the NSS. The Clinton approach had been the opposite—it had been bottom up. So when I did the first Clinton NSS, it was bottom up. First, the coordinator, me, was a low-level director. There were several dozen people in the interagency—whenever we'd do a draft I'd fax it over to "Snake" James on the JCS [Joint Chiefs of Staff], and he would blast fax it to the 22 combatant commands. Then it would get to PACOM [Pacific Command] and they'd make ten copies and distribute it. So the Clinton NSS was bottom up and *everybody* played.

The Bush NSS was the exact opposite. Very top down and very senior people who had good reason to think they should have been playing did not play in it. Steve, Will, and I came up with some basic guidelines of what we wanted to do, including the idea that this was, in Steve's words, standing in the shoes of the previous NSS. We were not repudiating 2002, we were standing in the shoes of the NSS of 2002.

A couple of other ideas about process. Steve had me develop a couple of things. How are we going to talk about Iraq? How are we going to talk about a couple of the hot-button issues? What are we going to say about preemption? The big questions for the NSS. He had me brief that to what they called the National Security Team.

It wasn't a principals meeting, it was Steve Hadley, Secretary Rice, Secretary Rumsfeld, Vice President Cheney. I can't remember if the Secretary of the Treasury was there, but I think it was just those four. They were in Steve's office for lunch. This was a separate meeting that they would have regularly before or separate to PCs, maybe to handhold the really sensitive stuff before they'd get into a full PC.

On one of those, I'm guessing this would have been in the August '05 time frame, I briefed them and said, "Here's how we think we're going to do it. The structure for the NSS, the structure for the process, and how we're going to deal with these type questions." We got feedback from Rumsfeld and the Vice President and Secretary Rice. The feedback was generally of the sort, "We do not want to have headlines that say, 'Bush repudiates his own failed National Security Strategy.'" That was quite clear from the Vice President and the Secretary of Defense, and of course Hadley had already given me that directive. Yes, we've got that message.

I had a couple of ideas for how to talk about preemption. Did we want to grasp the nettle and re-call it "prevention"? It was decided no, we wouldn't do that, we would not grasp that nettle. Later on in the process I decided that the best way to avoid it was to just cut and paste the language, so that's what I did, just literally cut and paste from 2002 to show that. But then all around it make it clear that what we meant was not the cartoon image that professors around the world were teaching, which is that the Bush 2002 NSS is the President committing to attacking any country he doesn't like, which is not at all what he meant. We kept the actual paragraph language on preemption the same and yet broadened it in sections surrounding that text.

That meeting with the national security team was basically getting that guidance, and then I went off with Will and we developed the outline. We developed the idea that we would keep the exact same—I can't remember if this was an idea suggested from that leadership meeting or whether we already had it and briefed it to them, but I know we developed the idea of keeping the exact chapter headings of the previous one, having a mini section where we summarized what the previous one said. My point for that was that is where I would be able to fix some of the

misinterpretations. I'd rewrite it maybe with a little more of an eye to how it had been misread.

Then a second section saying what is the water under the bridge since then, and the third section of each chapter would sketch out the strategy going forward. We developed that outline and briefed that to what Hadley called the trusted agents, who were my counterparts in each of the core departments. That would have been [Charles Thomas] Fingar at the IC, Philip Zelikow at State, and I can't remember if also [Stephen] Krasner because Krasner at Policy Planning was my primary counterpart. That's something else we should talk about, the early efforts to institutionalize interagency strategic planning. I can't remember if Krasner was in it, but for sure Philip was as counselor.

Then at Defense, was it Feith at that point? Later on it was [Eric] Edelman but whoever was the Under Secretary of Policy. At the time, it was Feith. I can't remember if Feith was there if he sent someone else, but I think it was Feith and [Robert] Kimmitt from Treasury. The five of us met briefly, sort of an ersatz DC to approve this outline and also the stuff that we had already briefed to the principals about "here's how we're going to talk about preemption, here's how we're going to talk about Iraq," the politically delicate stuff.

I got them to approve the outline and also got lots of helpful feedback from that group. Took copious notes and then went off and wrote it. Did not send it to them again for the most part. Now I'm going to qualify that slightly.

At that point Will and I divided up those chapters, so Will had half of them and I had the other half, and we sat down and wrote it. It was just like writing a graduate paper. We would try out language on each other. We'd try out ideas and bounce it back and forth across the two of us, but there was very little feedback from outside until we had a stable draft.

At one point we had a draft that I thought was really quite good. This was mid- or late fall '05. Of course I had wanted to go to the President and get feedback from the President early, and wiser heads who knew the President better than I did would say, "No, you don't want to do that." He had already given the top-line guidance on what to do. We finally had a draft that Steve thought was strong enough to take to the President. That's the one I told you about where the President just ripped it to shreds. I had to rewrite everything. But that was much more on tone than on substance. At that point the substance was pretty clear because it was already his policies, and we were not inventing new strategies. We were describing and explaining the strategic logic behind things that the President had already decided and committed to.

I said we didn't get a lot of feedback. The one exception was a back-channel arrangement that I had with Barry Pavel, who was the point person for the QDR [Quadrennial Defense Review] in the Defense Department. Barry was an old friend. He and I started at IDA [Institute for Defense Analyses] together back when I was a graduate student. I knew him very well, trusted him, and we knew that we had to have the QDR and the NSS latch up perfectly. The NSS was supposed to direct the QDR in timing. The QDR was on this inevitable, inexorable timetable, we couldn't stop it if we wanted to. It was probably going to come out before the NSS, so we needed to have that very tightly coordinated.

Bakich: Pavel was under Feith?

Feaver: Yes, he was the action officer who had the pen. The QDR is a much larger process, so no one person has the pen. But he was the point of coordination on the QDR. He and I were swapping texts back and forth. I would say, "Here's how we're going to talk about whatever that has a defense equity," and he would say, "OK, here is how the QDR is talking about it." We would negotiate across that and make sure we had not just the same words, but more importantly a common strategic understanding.

Bakich: Big-ticket items or—?

Feaver: Yes. One of the big issues was that 2002 had made it seem like there was no role for deterrence. You can't deter a suicide terrorist who has decided to blow himself up. The 2002 language left the implication that therefore there was no room for deterrence. Of course the DoD's view was you might not be able to deter the suicide terrorist, but you might deter the state that wants to sponsor the terrorist or the financier who might want to finance the terrorist. So there was room for traditional deterrence in the War on Terror even though you couldn't deter the guy with the backpack strapped to his back.

The 2002 language was imprecise on that. He and I worked out language that would make it more clear. Another, even more substantively important one—I can't remember if this came from Barry Pavel or from JD Crouch—we recognized another significant flaw in the 2002 NSS. Interestingly, this came from inside, not outside. No one outside told us this. But the 2002 NSS provided no justification for the U.S. nuclear arsenal. The only moments that it mentioned nuclear weapons were always negative—those guys having nuclear weapons.

Of course the NPR [National Performance Review] in 2002 and the President's view and our policy was that there is a vitally important role for American nuclear deterrence, and our strategy document in 2002 provided almost no justification for that. So we had to write more language on how we saw our nuclear weapons fitting into the overall strategy.

The other exception to no feedback, quite separate from the inside channels that I was describing, I went to Joe Collins who was a professor at NDU [National Defense University] and a friend from before on the civil-mil gap study. He had run a gap study the same time I had run my gap study. We had been kind of wingmen on the gap issue for a decade. He had then gone to DoD, was a DASD for Peacekeeping, and now was back at NDU. He was someone I trusted, someone with access to all of the NDU resources.

I asked him, "Would you please pull together the people you trust and do a line-by-line critique of the 2002 NSS, every possible complaint?" So they produced a compendium that they gave me, chapter by chapter, in some cases line by line. I had already read lots of the critiques so I knew most of it, but this was a helpful omnibus, every possible thing, every possible complaint that anyone could make, along with their own suggestions about things to do. I never showed him the text of what we were doing, but I did have that as a sort of back-channel critique.

We set out to write it, did write it, get the text. At some point in the December 2005 time frame, during the Christmas week, that's when Steve and I spent most of our time on it. I think Will went away for Christmas that week, but I didn't so I was here at the White House. Steve's schedule was much lighter, so we would spend several hours every day going over every single

line of the NSS. It was during that week that Steve and I did most of the line edits, but I can't remember whether it was before or after that that we also chopped up the NSS by subject matter and gave each of those sections to the relevant Senior Director or Deputy National Security Advisor.

We gave the section on Iraq to Meghan. We gave the section on Iran to Elliott Abrams. We gave the section on econ to the econ people. The development to Mike Magan and so forth, down the line. The nonproliferation we gave to John Rood. John was the toughest negotiator of any text I've ever dealt with, so I was glad that his office had the North Korean nuclear file—he was kibitzing on it. He was adamant on everything. Every negotiation with him would go this way. I would say, "I can take that word but I'm going to leave these other three words."

Then he'd say, "Fine, then let's start with the new text and negotiate the three words." He would just keep going until he got me to give up each word. He was ruthless on that. Then the Regional Directors or Senior Directors would come back. Cindy Courville, who had Africa, did not like the way we treated Africa. She complained and said we were understating the Africa stuff. I pointed out that we had three times as many lines on Africa as the 2002 one did. She wanted more lines on Africa.

Then she said, "I don't think you're capturing the President's heart for Africa with this line." I said, "This line here was written by Mike Gerson, who knows—"

Nelson: The President's heart on Africa.

Feaver: She was not persuaded. I had a harder time convincing her that the Africa section was acceptable, so I said, "You write it then." But she didn't want to write the Africa section. It was that kind of negotiation with each of the Senior Directors and/or DNSAs for the text that was in their lane.

Hadley also convened brainstorming sessions with me and people in his office on these kinds of picks. First it was staff-to-staff negotiations on the text, then we would meet with Hadley and discuss it at a slightly bigger meeting. I want the historical record to know this story because I haven't forgiven Elliott Abrams for it. We shared chapter two with Elliott, which was the one on the Freedom Agenda piece. Will had taken the lead on writing it. But we had worked that language very hard because that was really the heart—we wanted the message of 2006 to be the Freedom Agenda and how that permeated the strategy in the way that preemption had been the story line from 2002. That was missing the point. The second inaugural, the President's thinking on this was very much *primo inter pares*—So that in some ways was the most important chapter. Will worked on that one very hard.

We massaged that text the most. We gave it to Elliott Abrams and he wrote back, "This is *the best* explanation of the President's vision on this that I have seen." He praised it lavishly. So we're walking over to the meeting in Hadley's office, and I said, "I hope you'll mention that." He sort of nodded. We sat around the room and Hadley says, "OK, let's talk about it." It's Elliott Abrams, Meghan, Juan Zarate, all the DNSAs. "Who wants to go first?"

I'm looking expectantly at Elliott hoping that he'll go first. He says, "I'll go first." I'm preparing myself to get praised and Elliott says, "I think the language in paragraph three is a little bit

imprecise, I wonder if we couldn't—" He didn't say anything nice about it and he dove right into a line edit critique, which of course everyone else followed. It was just a pile-on exercise of an hour and a half of criticism about the little things. I haven't forgiven Elliott for not giving me my one moment.

But this was Steve's way of protecting the President from the downside of a very close-hold process, because the downside of a close-hold process is two people in a room make a mistake because they don't realize what they don't know. But he didn't want it to leak. We couldn't send it to the whole interagency and get the benefit of all of that wisdom. So his solution was to share it with the senior staff, and they got quite angry.

I remember Elliott getting angry, "Why can't I see the whole NSS in context?" Steve had given us quite explicit instructions. "No one can see the whole one except you and Will. They can only see their parts." It was a very close hold. But we needed to get more wise heads than just our four, JD, Steve, Will, and me. So he did it this way. I think that actually worked.

Elliott is a wonderful writer so he helped on that. But they also had Juan, Meghan, the guys in international economics, very high quality staff. They were able to identify gaps or mistakes, things that we weren't aware of, and without leaking. They were a very trustworthy group.

At some point we sent it back to my trusted agents. To Philip, to others. I think at this point we had swapped out Philip with Steve Krasner, or maybe we had added Steve Krasner because I know I sent it to him as well. This was pretty late in the game because the text was pretty stable, the President had seen and approved, so it was hard to change anything. We deliberately did it at that point. But we had committed to the principals that their guys would get it. Their trusted agents would get it. So we sent it out to them.

I know that Rumsfeld sent it further than just—because we were getting a little bit more feedback than—I guess by that point it was Eric Edelman because Feith had moved on. There was relatively little input from them. Word leaked out into the interagency, not into the press, that we had a document, so Nick Burns's office was calling and wanting a copy. Now in a normal interagency process Nick Burns would have been in there from the get-go. But I was under orders not to share it with Nick.

Their office couldn't understand why the Under Secretary for Policy couldn't see it. They were very frustrated with us. So we had to do some delicate interagency diplomacy. They would tell us the issues that they were most concerned about and then we'd talk about what the text was saying on those things.

The reason I'm emphasizing this aspect of it is we got the upside of this process because it never leaked. When the document hit the press it was the very first time. The downside of it was there was relatively little buy-in below the White House for it. So Nick Burns never gave a speech on it. If you track, even members of the administration when they talked about the NSS, some of the very senior ones wouldn't mention the 2006 one. They would mention the early one, which was the more famous.

In our judgment it had been superseded by 2006, and you should have referenced 2006 and in official things they would. But there wasn't the same buy-in. I think, and I do teach on this topic

in the War College and elsewhere, you have to make this trade-off. You can get more buy-in at the lower levels, but then you risk more leakage. Also the text is more of a committee text, a camel rather than a horse. We did what the President wanted, but the downside was we didn't get the buy-in.

Nelson: Things were done differently in '02?

Feaver: Yes, the '02 process is not well understood, and I would encourage you to interview Steve Biegun, whom you probably haven't interviewed. One of the very first things I did was ask how the 2002 was written. I knew the popular wisdom of how it was written. It turns out that it is a bit of a Rashomon story, so there are three or four accounts that don't fully match up on how it was written. Steve Biegun managed the process. In the end I think his account is the most authoritative, so you should talk to Steve.

Nelson: What expectations were set by the 2002 review that caused Nick Burns and others to be upset this time around?

Feaver: I don't know the answer to that question. I think they were just upset because, understandably, at that level you are a senior player, you should be able to play. This bit the Bush administration in another setting. We didn't distribute the National Strategy for Victory in Iraq [NSVI] very widely either before it was released. That was a mistake, I think, because the day the NSVI hit the press, the reporters found someone who was a pretty senior guy who hadn't played on it, Marty Dempsey, now the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff but then he was MNSTC-I [Multi-National Security Transition Command-Iraq]. They asked General Dempsey, "What do you think of this strategy?" He said, "This can't be anything real because I never saw it, and I'm in charge of training in Iraq and I would have seen it. Therefore it's nothing."

It had actually been read extensively and cleared extensively by the people above him in the chain of command, it just didn't reach down to his level. But that quote did significant damage to the way the document was read in the press. That was the downside of it. If I had a critique of the Bush administration it would be in this regard, that they were so concerned about leaks that often documents or meetings would be closer hold perhaps than they needed to be, and as a result they would suffer the downsides that come with that, like Marty's quote or a lack of buy-in from midlevel staffers.

Bakich: So would PIE be involved in pushing the NSS down through the interagency?

Feaver: Right, and I'll come to that in a moment, that's Record 2008. A little more on the endgame of the NSS. In the final stages, we're trying to decide when to roll it out. I was hoping for a big rollout, Presidential speech, the whole nine yards. Partly because I had worked on the issue, I wanted it to get a lot of attention. But Dan, the communications guy, did not. The window in which it was going to hit was in the February time frame. We had done several big pushes on Iraq prior to that, November/December, big push on Iraq with our messaging. He was about to launch another big push on Iraq messaging in March and April.

The one in November/December did move the needle and was significant. The one in March/April didn't move the needle at all. I think he may have sensed that the President was overmessaging on national security perhaps. He may have also thought it was not newsworthy

enough and to make this newsworthy we would have to be repudiating the 2002, which we didn't want to do. Anyway, the decision was made not to do a big rollout, that Hadley would give a big speech, which he did, at USIP [United States Institute of Peace]. Our hope was that other Cabinet-level people would give speeches and messaging on it, and we had a whole rollout plan for them, but none of them did. By not having them more intimately involved none of them took ownership. I think Secretary Rice would have ownership on 2002, she felt, but not 2006.

Nelson: It wasn't as if there were serious disputes over the content, it was just a sense of people feeling locked out.

Feaver: That's my takeaway. I can't prove that was the case. There was some disagreement on policy/text. That was with Secretary [Robert] Zoellick, Deputy Secretary on China. At the very endgame he, who was the point person for China policy, came in and wanted to change and soften the China text. We had quite deliberately wanted language that was balanced, not hawkish, not saying China was an enemy, but not leading with a dovish line, so balanced. We were looking for balanced text, and he was trying to soften the language a little.

That was one case, on China, where there was a policy dispute. The other point gets back to the process. This was the very last change that was put in the NSS. Of course a staffer wants to lock the text down so it will never change because you want to protect yourself from an error. So we were fighting and saying no to all sorts of changes that were being recommended at the last minute, and they were mostly happy-to-glad changes, but Secretary Rice reread it at the very end of the game. I'm going to say within 48 hours of when it was going to pop.

I remember that she was on the plane and we had to fax it or email it to the plane and talk to her on the plane. The connection was bad so it was very difficult, but she had one change that she wanted, a number of changes that were minor but one change that turned out to be significant. She added a line that toughened a sentence on Iran, and it said, "We have no harder national security challenge than Iran" or "no graver national security threat than Iran." I forget the exact language, but it is in the text. She wanted this sentence, she dictated it, we typed it in. It was a change after the President had seen it and after everyone else—I know Hadley saw it because I showed him. I said, "Sir, this is *the* last change, I wanted to make sure you saw it." We looked at it quickly and he said, "Yes, that's OK." So it goes in and then we release it.

That was the line David Sanger picked out and said, "That's the message of this NSS, isn't it?"

Nelson: Wow.

Feaver: So when we're briefing the reporters, especially David, he said, "OK," and the story he wrote about the NSS was 2002 was laying the groundwork for war against Iraq, 2006 is laying the groundwork for war against Iran. The evidence was that sentence.

Nelson: Do you think Rice directed his attention to that sentence?

Feaver: That's a good question. I hadn't thought about that; they're friends, of course. David is very smart and reads things very closely. It was something of a stark sentence. Of course, there are a whole lot of other Iran developments going on at the time, so it wasn't totally nutty. But what was striking and the reason I'm putting it in the record was that wasn't the message we

were trying to send with the NSS. It is perhaps significant that the sentence that popped out was the one added at the last minute, which hadn't been looked at by us a thousand times. Every other word in there had been looked at a gazillion times except that.

Nelson: Did the President know it was in there?

Feaver: I do not know whether he knew that that was in there.

Nelson: There was no eruption when he saw the story?

Feaver: No, it wasn't making policy, it was certainly consistent with things that we had said. One of the reasons why we didn't say, "We can't say that" is because we believed it. As we'll get to it in a moment when we talk about Iran, the President was very concerned about Iran. It didn't strike us in staff terms as wrong or alarmist or anything like that, but it was the one line of text that didn't get multiple vettings.

Bakich: Because it was in the NSS gives it—

Feaver: Gave it great authority. The end of the story is we didn't get the rollout that I had dreamed of because that became the message. We had to knock that down. "That's not what this is about." So the 2006 did not do everything I had wanted it to do. I wanted it to really supersede the 2002 and become viewed as the authoritative or the one that everyone had to quote. I wouldn't say it was a failure. Afterward Will and I went on a mini rollout tour of our own where we went to every think tank and talked to anyone who would want to hear about it. We went to Brookings [Institution] and Ivo Daalder, who was one of the sharpest critics of the administration, gave a little presentation on it and then allowed us to respond. Ivo was very positive about it, so positive I told Ivo, "Look, you're going to get me in trouble if you keep praising this thing."

He said, "This is much more reasonable, balanced. Why couldn't the 2002 have been this reasonable and balanced?" The thoughtful experts who read it very closely appreciated the text and saw what we were trying to do, but very quickly it dropped off and the critics of the administration, who were the ones that kept alive the 2002 one, would just go back to quoting 2002.

Riley: I have what may be a naively provocative question on this. My area is not foreign policy. What purpose does this serve?

Feaver: The document?

Riley: You spent a lot of time on this. What does it do?

Feaver: It does a number of things. It lays out the authoritative vision of the administration for America's role in the world. For that reason, precisely because it is public it has to be authoritative. It is exactly the opposite of what most people think. They think that if it is public then it must be meaningless and the real stuff must be secret. No, because it is public it will be what David Sanger goes back and quotes every time he says, "The President said on Egypt we're going to do blah, blah, but here he is standing by [Hosni] Mubarak, who is killing protestors."

"The President said that we had no graver threat than Iran, but the President has done nothing on enrichment."

It becomes the benchmark against which you evaluate the administration. Therefore it has to be authoritative. I want to be measured against that benchmark because that is really what I, the President, am trying to do. It is authoritative in that respect.

It communicates to the rest of the government what the administration is trying to do. If you think about it, 99.9 percent of the people who are working for the President never meet the President, never talk to the President, and never talk to anyone who has met the President. How do they know what the administration wants to do? They read about it in the press or they read about it in unclassified things like the National Security Strategy. It becomes something of marching orders for them. Of course, they don't read that every morning and say, "What am I going to do today?"

Where I want to go with this is we buried some Easter eggs in there for things that the President cared about but that the system did not. Trafficking is one that I remember and religious freedom. Human trafficking and religious freedom were issues the President cared a lot about. They were stepchildren in the interagency system, didn't get a lot of high-profile love. We made sure that there was text in the NSS for them so that they could quote that in their internal budget arguments and say, "Why should we get our budget plussed up? Because in the NSS the President said this is a priority for us." We buried a number of Easter eggs like that in there.

Early on in the process I get a call from AID [Agency for International Development] saying, "Whatever you do, you must leave the three Ds in the NSS because we have based our entire marketing and budget strategy on the three Ds, defense, diplomacy, and development," which of course elevates AID to be on par with the State Department and DoD. So they said, "Whatever you do, make sure that sentence stays in there."

I told them, "I'm happy to do that. The President cares very much about development, it is a major priority for him." I went to the 2002, read it, and I couldn't find the exact language they were talking about. So I emailed them, "Could you just let me know what is the sentence and I'll make sure that gets cut and pasted into the new draft?" Don't hear back for a couple of hours. I call them, "What's up? Where is it?" They said, "You know what, it's not in the 2002 NSS." I said, "You're right, it's not there." For four years they had been claiming that it was in the NSS. They had developed marketing tools, they had little tchotchkes that you put on your desk with the three Ds. They had done this huge push and still if you Google "three Ds" you'll find all of this stuff. That they were distressed doesn't capture—to find out that it wasn't in the 2002.

We told them that we would get it in. So there is a sentence in the 2006 that has all three Ds mentioned in it, and that was for them to be able to hang their thing on it. Now the Obama administration has formally talked about it in three-D terms, so the Obama administration has been clearer about the three Ds. But that's the kind of thing that the NSS does.

Now it is supposed to be the strategic guidance that guides the QDR, the national military strategy, and the service strategies. To a certain extent it does that, in part because it is not carving out new things, it is authoritatively collecting what the administration is already trying to

do.

The other thing we did in this NSS is we tried to explain the logic. This is where the academic in me made a contribution. I wanted to devote more attention to the logic of it. Whereas chapter two was the most important statement about the President's vision on democracy, I thought the new language in chapter three was important because that's the one I wrote. It explains why if you thought terrorism was the problem, you thought democracy had any part of the solution, which is only asserted in the 2002 and I think we do a little more logical analysis, a little more of the causal mechanisms that we are alleging are out there. It explains the logic, so it is useful for that.

Bakich: I've got a couple of larger questions. You're writing, for example, the logical connections, terrorism, democracy. To what extent do you have the critics in the field—Greg [F. Gregory, III] Gause, democracy and terrorism, to what extent is [Robert] Jervis in the back of your mind or [Melvyn P.] Leffler, or [John] Ikenberry on these big—?

Feaver: I read them all. So the language, within the limits of staying in the President's voice, is our answer to them, explaining precisely. We're not saying, "OK, Greg, you say this, here's your footnote, now here is our response." But it is meant precisely to get at those critiques. So whereas the 2002 one is more assertive, we wanted the 2006 to be more explanatory and hopefully more persuasive. But very much with those critics in mind. I think I mentioned that the President said, "Why do we have to say that?"

I'd say, "There is this critic"—I won't mention his name—"who said this about you." Then the President said, "That's stupid." I said, "Maybe, but that's out there and we should answer it."

Bakich: So you've been given the task of standing in the shoes of the 2002 NSS. To what extent does standing in their shoes prevent you from going in a direction or pushing the administration in the direction that you would have otherwise liked it to have gone?

Feaver: Didn't do that in the NSS. Did those things outside of the NSS. So whether it was Iran, Iraq, on other documents, in the NSS itself there wasn't much push except—I mentioned the Easter eggs. The other thing I pushed for was a new chapter on globalization. That had been a bad word, you couldn't say that in the first term. The President didn't like it, it seemed like an academic-y term. I argued that one of the things we'd learned since 2002 was that these other issues really were of national security importance. Whether they were climate change or pandemics, SARS [severe acute respiratory syndrome]. By the way, SARS is another example of an issue that we spent a whole lot of time on, thought that this might be a game-changer problem, thankfully it wasn't and you get no credit whatever or no awareness. I almost never talk about SARS, but it consumed a lot of our time for a while.

I grouped all of these issues under the chapter on globalization. That was a case where I was maybe inserting my political views into the NSS a little bit. I thought since the President has already talked about these in other settings, we should bring it together under the NSS, which gives it an elevated status, protected status. So we moved the ball a little bit forward on the climate change issue. The text in the NSS leans further forward than earlier text, than he had said in the first term on climate change.

That was the one exception where I'd say there was a little bit of trying to move the policy needle. But for the most part what we were doing was articulating the President's vision.

Bakich: Right.

Feaver: Even there I would say to Steve, if somebody criticized me for including this language, "Look, the President already said this in that speech." It is already there.

Bakich: This may be in the historical record and I might have missed it, but you indicated that the debate over preemption versus prevention was discussed at the highest level.

Feaver: Yes.

Bakich: Do you know if that rhetorical choice was—

Feaver: Deliberate.

Bakich: In 2002 as well?

Feaver: That I don't know, you'd have to ask—but in ours when we talked about it they decided they didn't want to engage on that. I heard Condi talk about it and when she talks about it, it really makes sense. But it doesn't travel well, it doesn't franchise well. When other people talk about it, it doesn't make as much sense.

Bakich: You need to footnote her—

Feaver: Yes. She talked to people, Steve Biegun especially, who ran that process. But what we did is we literally cut and pasted the language because we just didn't want to have to deal with it. Our argument would be, we've manifestly not preemptively invaded every country that has ticked us off. Note that we're not invading Venezuela, for instance. This is a very precise, narrowly delimited doctrine. Leaving aside the big WMD [weapons of mass destruction] intelligence failure in Iraq, the President intends to apply it only in very narrowly specified circumstances. So we don't need changes where the prevention understanding makes more sense—that's why we just dodged it.

Two other points about the NSS I just remembered. There are multiple audiences. Some of them are foreign audiences, and we are very acutely aware of that. That drove a number of the scriptwriting challenges. For instance, we'd want to write about our major allies in Asia, especially Japan, which the President had excellent relations with, and Korea. The President did not have excellent relations with Korea but a major ally and of course Australia, superb relations.

If you mention those then you have to mention Thailand, which is our historical ally, and as a parent of Thai-adopted kids I was determined to get Thailand mentioned. But if you mention Thailand then you've got to mention the Philippines, at which point not mentioning New Zealand is an insult. You can see what could be language that would be crisply prioritized. There was no question that we had a priority that relations with Japan were very important, a higher priority than relations with New Zealand. Nevertheless, you blur that a little. That muddies the crispness and strategic nature of a text like this.

The other aspect, though, is some people—we knew [Hugo] Chavez wanted us to mention him and we refused to do so, precisely to not give him the satisfaction of being able to say, "This document is all about me." He did not deserve to be elevated, so we never mentioned him by name. It was a deliberate choice to both our friends and our enemies or adversaries, to write about them in a way knowing that this was going to be a public relations document for them to a certain extent. That was one thing that drove the process.

The other hobbyhorse I have about this document is there is a lot more continuity than change across administrations. The fact that I had done the Clinton one and the Bush one made this a very resonant idea for me. At one point in the process I took the text from the Clinton and from the Bush 2006 and I sent them to Mike Gerson and Pete Wehner. I said, "See if you can guess which one is from Clinton and which one is from Bush." They got some of them right and some of them wrong because there is actually a lot of fundamental continuity across administrations on big issues, even issues like the importance of democracy and human rights promotion and how that can have national security payoff. There is a lot of continuity.

My last little anecdote, a couple of weeks ago I was at a conference and a State Department person was bashing the previous administration for its folly on unilateralism and how this annoyed our allies, and it was this kind of unilateral cowboy stuff that was a problem and it was enshrined in the NSS.

I said, "Was this the sentence that you were talking about?" I read a sentence about how the U.S. would use force unilaterally and he said, "Yes, that's precisely what I'm talking about." I said, "That's from the Obama 2010 NSS." [*laughter*] There is a lot of continuity even across those. So those were the two points I wanted to make. Did you have any more on NSS?

Bakich: One last on preemption versus prevention. Talking about how you cut and pasted that from 2002 but at the same time you're trying to extrapolate and lay bare the logic that connects the various pieces to deal with within the political objectives. To what extent did you feel compelled to expand on that or to say the conditions under which preemptive use of force would be—?

Feaver: Where we should have perhaps done that was on Iran and we didn't. In part because there was a separate strategic review going on with Iran. The policy was somewhat unstable on Iran. We were changing our policy on Iran, so we didn't talk about it in the NSS more precisely than that. The other place would have been North Korea. The policy was in flux there too, so we just did not engage on that.

Nelson: Thinking of foreign governments probably reading this not so much to see if their names are in it but because they take it to be, like you say people in the U.S. government are meant to, an authoritative statement of foreign policy. Were you thinking, *This is what other countries will look at to see what our policy is*?

Feaver: Yes.

Nelson: Surely other countries would tend to value continuity from administration to administration.

Feaver: That's part of it. I think there is continuity because the NSS deals with issues at such a high level of abstraction. At that high level of abstraction the U.S. interests are pretty enduring and common. President Obama wants the U.S. to prosper as much as President Bush did, wants to avoid a nuclear war as much as—Where there are disagreements is, "Do we offer to negotiate with Iran without conditions or not?" That's at a level of detail that you could include in a strategy document like this, but you probably wouldn't because it is one level down and so we didn't. But that's where there would be real debate across the administrations. Very important, consequential debate and those one-degree changes could be the difference between success and failure. But at the broad level of strategy there is more continuity. It is not 100 percent continuous, but more continuity than change.

Nelson: In that instance I'd really be interested in knowing what keeps that continuity going. What happened between the last Clinton administration NSS and the 2002 NSS, because somebody had to be consciously looking back to the previous administration to make sure that the continuities were acceptable.

Feaver: One of the things that may have come out of this interview thus far, and I don't know how well this is appreciated by average Americans, at least in the foreign policy world there is a lot more of the bipartisan mingling that used to be the case in the political world but perhaps is less so. All of the people I brought in were people I interact with regularly even though they were Democrats. Many of them were friends of Hadley and had worked with Hadley on projects for decades. Of course that's multiplied a hundredfold across the administration.

The point is there is something—I don't want to call it a foreign policy elite, but there is a foreign policy conversation that goes on continually across the aisle, across the partisan divide. It could be stronger, should be stronger. It has been weaker in the last decade. The Iraq War really hurt it. We need to rebuild it. It is not a panacea because you can get group-think that way. So part of the continuity is similar people who have argued this issue for decades, and the crazy positions lose out and the sensible positions remain.

Let me quickly go to Record 2008, which is the natural follow-on. Hadley also wanted us to figure out a way of improving the implementation. As I said, he gave us, the administration, bad grades on implementation. And this was one of the three big things that he had told me to do.

I worked out what we called Record 2008 and then handed it off to the PIE cell, which was geographically co-located. The rest of the NSC assumed we were one directorate—and much to the chagrin of my counterpart, first Susan Sweatt and then Lisa Disbrow, because we were equals. But they all assumed that I was the office head, so I would regularly tease her about that and tell her I was tasking her, even though we were equals.

We took the NSS and broke it down to objectives, goals, and milestones or something like that. We had a big debate over whether an objective is higher than a goal or a goal higher than an objective. I remember whatever one we picked, it was the opposite of what Condi thought. She said, "Isn't goals higher than objectives?" or whatever it was. I remember saying, "Oh, Condi, please don't make me change everything."

The idea was, "What is the top-line goal that the President is describing?" That would often be in

incredibly lofty, poetic language, "end of tyranny" or something like that. We would break that down into goals. How would we know that we had ended tyranny? We would end tyranny when—and then we would set these goals and describe them. Underneath that we would say a milestone or something or other, I forget the word for it, of what we thought we could hit by 2008. That is, by the end of the President's administration our goal, objective, whatever—

Riley: Target?

Feaver: Target, yes. Target might even have been—so goal, objective, target, and then milestones. I think you're probably right, that was it. And of course the high goal might have been the work of a generation or a lifetime, "end tyranny"—maybe several lifetimes. The target was we thought we could see Cuba on the way to democratic reform or something by 2008. That would be an example. End tyranny was "a free, democratic, post-Castro option looks viable" or something. Not we're going to invade Cuba, but rather by the end of 2008 we're going to do that.

Then the milestones were—OK, if we're going to get there by December 2008, and this is January 2006, what do we need to be doing? It was a massive outlining exercise, goal-setting exercise, all derivative of the NSS, but we would negotiate with each of the directorates. We asked the Asia people, "Tell me what is reasonable to do in Burma by 2008." We would negotiate with them and they'd say, "I don't think we can do this in Burma or that in Malaysia. But we could do this in Thailand."

We could be in negotiation—OK, is that important enough to be in this document? Is that Presidential level? Sometimes we'd say, "No, but we think we can do it so let's put it in there." Other times they'd say, "That seems to be a very difficult thing to do, but the President has talked about it so we've got to put it in there."

We wanted to have quarterly assessments where we take each section, give it to the Senior Director, and have them do green light, yellow light, red light. Green light meaning we're on track to meet that 2008 target. Yellow light meaning we're not on track to do that 2008 target but we don't need a change in policy, we just need to try harder or we know what we need to do. Red light meaning we're not on track to reach that target and we are not going to reach it, we don't know why, so we either need to downgrade the target or change our policy. Iran without nuclear weapons is a good red light example.

The idea was that we would have Hadley do quarterly meetings looking at each of these things and it would force the system, force the President, force Hadley to look at the entirety and not just Iraq, which was always going to be at the top of the in-box. The President made all of these promises. How are we doing on all of them, not just these. This was a very difficult management tool to build. We were only somewhat successful with it for a couple of reasons.

One was there was real unease about putting out a report card that was going to grade us C's and lower on a lot of things. Whenever we'd talk about this, and Steve was a big believer, he wanted us to do it, push us, but then he'd say, "This is delicate. We are writing a report card that we know we're not going to do well on across the board." So how to manage it, when to involve the other principals? The other Cabinet principals were not keen to do this. That's not exactly right. I think Rumsfeld liked it because it graded the State Department on a lot of stuff that they were

not, he felt, getting graded on. And it took techniques that he was using inside DoD and applied them to the rest of the government. The State Department was a little reluctant to do this, perhaps for that reason. Then it was a huge amount of time. To go through it in detail would be a deep dive so when we scheduled it, it would be two hours of Steve's time, which is a huge amount of time for him to devote to something that was not the front-burner issue, a "the President needs to be briefed on this in the next hour" type thing.

Then the NSC Directors weren't all that keen for it because it felt like one more work item that they had to do that also was going to outline all the things that were not working. They made the very good observation, "The world has changed in the last nine months, and what we thought was important to work on nine months ago is not important now and we're working on something else, not this."

As I was leaving, I think we had that document in a fashion where it was useful or could have been useful. But it would have required Steve regularly saying, "Yes, I'm going to do this no matter what. I'm just going to force this onto the system." After I left the office it was handed off to PIE. They didn't have quite as much relationship with the other offices as we had, so the NSC Directors would push back a little on it and it didn't become what I thought it could be.

I started out thinking, *This is not going to work*. Then after we did it I thought, *This really could work*. But then by the end I said, "I guess it didn't work as well." The missed opportunity is that we gave that to the Obama people. I said, "The way to make this work is you build it in from the very beginning" so then everyone just assumes that's what we have to do, it has always been thus. The Obama people did not take it. I'm not sure why. More recently they came to me and asked, "How do you do those kinds of things?" If you had done this from the beginning—so they are now in the same boat we were in, which was trying to add it after structures and systems get in place.

That was the kind of thing Steve wanted us to do. That would have been incremental reform. If we had done that, it wouldn't have been a game changer success on implementation but it would have nudged the ball forward a little bit. I'd say we nudged it half as far as it could have been nudged. That's Record 2008.

Riley: OK, we've got about ten minutes. One of the things you wanted to touch and deal with was institutionalized interagency strategic—

Feaver: Yes, good.

Riley: Is that a short one?

Feaver: Yes, we can do that. We were reviving a strategic planning cell in the NSC that hadn't been in existence for a long time. We were still finding our way, but we were joining a community that had been doing strategic planning to a certain extent, most obviously in the Defense Department where there are a large number of people doing this. But there was also the intelligence community, which had a long-range assessment cell. Then there was Policy Planning at State.

They were my natural lane counterparts, and what Will and I did was start regular meetings with

them first bilaterally and then eventually multilaterally. We would regularly connect with Matt Burrows, our counterpart at the IC. Also regularly with Steve Krasner. I knew Steve as an academic, and we would have an every-other-week lunch. It was partly time to just share what's happening, gossipy type stuff, talk about priorities in our area, priorities in his area. We worked one or two issues together so we would talk about the actual issues we were working, but it was more of a time to—is the administration giving as much attention to Cuba or Latin America as we should? No. How can we do more on Latin America? Do we need more resources?

When Tom Mahnken came and joined the DoD he was the DASD for Planning Policy or whatever his title was. He was the point person at DoD for this. We added him, and Tom was an old friend as well from academic and Navy circles.

Bakich: He came after Edelman?

Feaver: No, Edelman was the Under Secretary for Policy, Tom Mahnken was his DASD. Tom worked for Eric. We could have included Eric but Eric is so busy, so broad. The right person was the person who does long-range planning on a 24/7 basis and that was Mahnken. So we added him to our lunches. For a year or so it was Tom, Will, me, and Steve Krasner on an every-other-week basis. We dramatized the imbalance of resources across our three offices because when Will and I showed up the entire strategic planning part of the NSC was at that meeting. Krasner was heading a staff of 50 or so, and Tom Mahnken was having drivers drive him over, he had a budget of $500 million, some absurd, disproportional amount of resources at his disposal. We were always teasing him and trying to get him to share his resources, and he was actually quite good. Occasionally we said, "We think there needs to be something on X, Y, Z," and he would say, "OK, I'll feed that into the RFPs [request for proposals] for plans and such." We could get him to do some of the work that we didn't have the staff to do.

That was successful but very modest. What we didn't think to do until very much at the end of my time was something that Will—because Will stayed on two months after I left—did and got finalized, is we turned that into a standing IWG [interagency working group] where it became part of the interagency coordinating process, which later on met much more regularly. When Mary Habeck came in after me, it was well established and that is something that the Obama people kept. They got handed that and said, "Yes, that's a great idea, we're going to keep that going." And they've taken it and developed it further. Now there are people who do strategic planning, or have that in their title or in their portfolio, somewhere throughout the interagency. And they meet regularly and that is a shop for the broader system to put issues that need to be dealt with in this kind of setting.

We got the ball rolling on that, but we were slow in formalizing, in institutionalizing. It was primarily a relationship-based thing we were doing. This is something that Hadley would regularly push us to do, not just Will and me but the whole NSC staff. He would say, "You should be meeting regularly and informally with your counterparts at the other agencies, not just in the formal IWG settings or sub-IWGs." And the successful NSC staffers did that. They would have a biweekly breakfast or something with their counterparts at the other agencies, so that when they were in a formal meeting they already had a fair amount of relationship to rely on. I think the process worked well.

Bakich: Was this type of directive offered by Condi in the—?

Feaver: I do not know. I imagine she wouldn't be opposed to it, so I would have thought she would have. But what was striking was how it didn't—there were some staffers who didn't do it. The NSC staff has such a draining schedule that some just didn't have time to do it. Now my schedule wasn't quite as draining as the typical one, so it was easier for me to do it. But it was important.

It allows me to tell also for the record my favorite Steve Krasner story. One of the issues he worked was a proposal to develop the capacity to help do development. The specific issue isn't important, but it was how to do a kind of development, helping states outsource some of their functions. Rather than them trying to replicate every function they had, there could be a regional consortium that handles this kind of government-capacity function. You don't have to learn how to do it in Fiji because you can outsource it to the Australians, that kind of thing. It was a great idea, very innovative, the kind of thing that Steve Krasner would come up with and push. This was his baby, and he was taking this from the sub-IWG all the way to a formal NSC directive authorizing this. Since it was his baby I was the NSC staffer to coordinate with him on it. We were working the process, and it is a whole staffing exercise.

We get to the day of the PC where this will be one of three issues on the table. When it is his turn he is supposed to brief it. I'm meeting with Steve and he is white as a sheet, sweating and looking nervous. I said, "Steve, how many times have you given lectures around the world? Come on, don't be nervous about this. This is nothing, you know these people very well, there's no reason to be nervous."

He said, "I just don't feel right." He made it through but it really looked like a graduate student stressing out—

Bakich: Hard to imagine.

Feaver: It is hard to imagine. It turns out he was having a heart attack. He discovered later that afternoon that he was having a heart attack. It wasn't because of nervousness of the issue; he separately had a heart condition.

Bakich: I just want to connect the dots on this IWG, so it got the PCs, Mahnken at Defense, was the IC involved in the interagency in any way?

Feaver: Yes, Matt would sit in.

Bakich: Was this an informal channel up to Hadley, or did it go up to the DC?

Feaver: When they formalized it, it became just like every other one. So just like the IWG on development or on whatever, this was on strategic planning. That was after I left so I don't know how it functioned at that point. I gather that they played a role in the Afghan strategy review, which was done in '08 after I left.

Bakich: But when you're involved, are you getting the sense that Condi is buying into this and Rumsfeld is buying into this? Is this '05 or '06?

Feaver: I started in ’05 and it grew slowly over two years. Rumsfeld felt we didn’t do this kind of thing well at all. That’s pushing on an open door. We regularly had Rumsfeld saying, “You have to do this better,” you meaning everybody else. Rice, I don’t know—Krasner had a very unusual and close relationship with Rice, so it was something of a channel into Rice through Krasner, but I don’t know her views on this particular process.

Riley: Let’s break for lunch.

[BREAK]

Riley: OK, for the record we had a couple of conversations. Your sense is that the Iraq story has been pretty well told.

Feaver: Right.

Riley: There may be bits and pieces of this that we’ll want to come back to, but we’re going to try and focus on that which hasn’t been told. You mentioned specifically Iran.

Feaver: Right.

Riley: In that regard I’m going to make one observation about my own reading of the briefing book. It was striking to me in a comparative reading of the National Strategy for Victory in Iraq, which I’ve got a publication date of November ’05—

Feaver: Right.

Riley: Then the highlights of the Iraq Strategy Review document that comes in ’07. There is virtually no mention of Iran or Syria. They get some brief mentions in the thick text of the document, but I think the executive summary has no mention of it. Yet by the time you come to ’07, almost the third or fourth bullet point features Iran and Syria. I thought I would tee you up by mentioning that as the evident transition and focus that a political scientist or historian would find in the documentary record and want to query somebody about, about how this comes about.

Feaver: Iran’s involvement inside Iraq ramps up substantially over that time period, ’05 through ’06. Information about it was in very tightly held, classified restrictions so the NSVI—which was a public document—is not going to talk about the Iranian piece of it so much. But it gradually becomes more publicly known, so that by the Iraq Strategy Review that was released in January the Iranian story is talked about in a more public way. That may be more of what you are capturing. In other words, there is less significance to that story than you are attributing to it.

The other reason was that Iran was viewed very much through the lens of the nuclear file, which Meghan didn’t have. Meghan had Iraq, not Iran, so the NSVI, which was a Meghan operation, is not going to be talking about the nuclear file on Iran. But at least in my mind it is linked up in the following way: The summer/fall of ’05 the White House believes it has the right strategy for Iraq

for the most part but a serious communication problem. So the NSVI is a way of explaining to the public what the strategy is and dealing with the communication problem. That's something of a simplification because we all understood there were implementation problems with the strategy and there were some critiques.

The State Department in particular, Philip Zelikow and others, had more of a strategy critique of our '05 effort even than a messaging critique. But the President believed that with Zal and with Casey and with the changes they had made to what had been done before, and with the big push toward an Iraqi government, that we finally had the right strategy and moreover it was a strategy that to a large extent dealt with the complaints that our critics had made. If we could only explain this to them, we had a chance of winning them over, not to "it was a great idea to invade Iraq" but at least "now you're on the right track, we now have a way forward." Something that, just to be ahistorical for a moment, we thought we might be able to get them to talk about Iraq the way Obama talks about Iraq '09 to '11, never relinquishing the idea that it was a mistake in his view to invade, but at least now he is saying to implement the Bush status of forces plan and relaunch a bipartisan way forward. That's what we thought we had in '05 on Iraq.

We learned later we didn't have that. But that's what the President and the consensus in the White House was. The President thought we had a strategy problem on Iran. So in the midst of the President doing this big push on messaging on Iraq in '05, the NSVI followed by three or four major Presidential speeches and then the address to the nation from the Oval, the big hammer of communications with the Iraqi elections, we thought, *Message going out, we've moved the needle. We've relaunched Iraq without changing the strategy dramatically*. The President said, "We've got a problem in Iran. We don't have an Iraq problem; we have an Iran problem."

Riley: How does this get communicated to you?

Feaver: Steve Hadley asks me, Elliott Abrams, John Hannah, John Rood, and I think Bill Luti. Elliott owned the Iran file, John Rood owned the non-pro file, Bill Luti tied to Defense Department, and John Hannah was the point person for the Vice President's team. He says, "The President believes we have only a few more months at most on our current policy line with Iran and we are going to reach a point very shortly where our effort—" which had been based on having the EU [European Union] three be in the lead trying to negotiate suspension with the Iranian enrichment program— "everyone is going to recognize this has failed."

We've been trying it, we're saying we're sticking with it, but we can tell six weeks, several months away from that line failing. At that point we will either have no strategy and have to concede that we are going to be living with a nuclear Iran, or we'll be faced with the choice to go and use military force, and we need a new strategy on Iran. We need outside-the-box, no-box, thinking. That's one of the times when Hadley did his "there is no box," outside-the-box thinking.

Elliott Abrams convened that group for a series of brainstorming sessions. What is the problem? What is the strategy? What has been tried? What has not been? We came to the conclusion that there was a regime change line on Iran and there was the nuclear file line. We needed to speed up the regime change and slow down the nuclear. The question was, what could we do to slow

down the nuclear line in Iran and allow the regime change more time to come to fruition?

There was little optimism in our group that we could come up with a deal that the Iranians would actually accept and forever give up nuclear weapons, a deal that we could live with, that they could live with, that there was a diplomatic sweet spot. We were skeptical that there was such a thing. But we also recognized that there were diplomatic gambits that had not been tried, that could be tried, that in due diligence had to be tried just to make sure there was no such option. You couldn't use force if you hadn't at least tried those options.

Moreover, properly done, they could slow down the nuclear line and/or speed up the regime change line. Then we said, "Are there other things we can do on either of those?" To my knowledge we didn't have a notetaker, because it was very sensitive. We came up with a lot of ideas, some of them outside the box and nutty and others more creative that had more promise. That's probably all I can say about that line of it.

The other thing that came out of that was a decision to recraft our public strategic posture on Iran.

Riley: You were talking earlier about there being occasions for looking retrospectively at policy.

Feaver: I think the other person on that team, now that I think about it, was Steve Slick, who was intel.

Riley: You said earlier that there was some value—you had to fight against a White House urge to always want to be looking to the future rather than back. In this particular group, was there discussion or cognizance of the complications created in Iran by virtue of U.S. policy toward Iraq during the course of administration?

Feaver: On Iraq?

Riley: Yes.

Feaver: Yes, and as we talked more about the public posture there was a crucial realization that because we had invaded Iraq, and the intel failure, so the WMD we discovered was not the WMD we thought we would discover. That posed a huge political constraint on what could be done with Iran. Also the fact that we were in Iraq meant our military was severely tapped. Some of the options that were formerly on the table were recognized to be very unpalatable because of the strain on the military. So there was a link to Iraq that way if that's what you mean.

Riley: Again, this is not my primary area, but my understanding was always that U.S. engagement with Iraq for many years was driven partly by an interest in supporting Iraq as a balance against Iran.

Feaver: Yes.

Riley: And that equation shifts after—?

Feaver: Right, we were not going to support [Saddam] Hussein as a balance against Iran. But at

that point we believed that an Iraq that could defend itself, govern itself, be an ally in the War on Terror—whatever the triplet, I can't remember right now. Once we got that Iraq, that would be a huge point of pressure on Iran, particularly on the regime change because the Iranian citizens would say, "Why should those Iraqis, who we know are lower forms of life than us Persians, be able to pick their own government and we're not able to pick our own leader?"

There was a belief that once Iraq got stable and was an exemplar of what we hoped it would be that it would be a huge point of ideological pressure on Iran, not a launching point for an invasion but an ideological pressure. To get that sort of leverage on Iran is going to take longer than the administration had thought in 2002. They probably thought they'd get there in '03. It is '05 and we're not there. We're now back on track to getting there, or so we thought, on Iraq.

What else can we do to slow down the Iranian nuclear program? As I said, a lot of creative ideas came out of that to slow it down. But there was also the question of what is our posture vis-à-vis the negotiations? We at the White House were getting signs that Secretary Rice—Nick Burns believed that the solution was to have the U.S. join the negotiations. In particular Ambassador Burns was keen to have a chance to sit down with the Iranians and see if he couldn't hammer out a deal.

This team and the White House were open to that. At this point now the team skinnied down to Elliott Abrams, Mike Doran, and me, because it was mainly the diplomatic piece now that I'm talking about. The others were more involved on the other side of things. We were open to the U.S. joining negotiations, but we recognized a couple of problems with that. First that was a huge carrot that we were giving up front because the Iranians had been asking for that. In fact the Iranians wanted to clear out the room and just mano-a-mano the U.S. and Iran. So this was a huge carrot. You give them this carrot up front and you should get something for that. That was the first problem with it.

The second problem is we were very skeptical that there was such a deal out there. It wasn't as if once they sit in the room, 15 minutes later they'll hit upon it. It was going to be long and time consuming. Third, if the Iranians are allowed to continue enrichment while we're doing the negotiations, they can string out this long thing and you can spend hours and days talking about the size of the room and the size of the table, all the diplomatic tricks, while they are marching ever closer to the redline point of no return on the nuclear program.

The challenge was to join the diplomatic negotiations but in a way that would not put us at this point of weaker leverage with the Iranians. One other problem. Once you joined the negotiations, the Europeans would not ratchet up any more pressure on the Iranians, we were sure of this. They would not want to do anything that the Iranians could say, "Aha! Because you slapped that sanction on it we're now leaving the negotiations and the failure of negotiations is your fault, Germany, because you sanctioned us." The Germans would have been terrified to have that happen.

Whatever level of pressure we were going to get on Iran, it had to be gotten before we joined the negotiations. From that point on we couldn't ratchet up more squeeze to the Iranians.

Bakich: Were the Europeans inclined to do that anyway?

Feaver: Not so much. But whatever inclination we could get from them, we had to get before we sat down to the negotiations. So we came up with this idea—Elliott called it the suspend-for-suspend idea. It was an effort to induce the behavior we wanted from each of those players, that we would join the negotiations and talk to them for as long as they wanted—years, decades if they wanted—as long as they had verifiably suspended enrichment. So the time pressures would have been reversed.

If they had accepted that then the longer they delayed—if they were entering in bad faith negotiations, which is what we were afraid they were going to do, they could waste their time if they wanted, but they were getting no closer to the nuclear redline. So the nuclear file was halted, allowing time again, that was what we were hoping, to buy more time for the internal regime change.

Nelson: How did you think regime change was going to happen?

Feaver: We thought pressure from within. The regime was already under pressure. The Iranian people would see the Iraqi example and say, "We want it." The very phenomenon that happened in June of '09 was exactly what we were looking to do. If we couldn't get a ground-up popular thing, that the fissures within the regime could be fractured if they were under enough pressure. Then they would be a fractured regime at that point.

Bakich: What was the intelligence telling you? Is it out there? Is this intuition?

Feaver: There is enough intelligence to say this is possible but not in the near term. You basically need to buy time. We weren't getting intelligence that says this was weeks away, it was going to be longer than that. But simultaneously we wanted to use this offer as a lever on the Europeans to ratchet up their pressure. At the same time we were making this offer, actually sequencing it before we made this offer to the Iranians, we go to the Europeans and say, "This is what we're going to do, but to make this work we have to put more pressure on the Iranians so that they'll be under pain while they're negotiating from us. So you Europeans have to join us in a new round of sanctions, ratchet it up much higher. We know you don't want to do this, but in exchange for doing this, we're going to offer to sit down with the Iranians and everything will be on the table. We'll talk about everything they want."

The Iranians had a long ask list and not just the nuclear. The strategy was that if we could get the Europeans to ratchet up the pressure before we go in and get the Iranians to suspend, then we can sit there and talk as long as we want. We can talk about all the things on the table and it will buy time. And my theory was that this would be so painful for the Iranian regime that they might fracture under the stress of these negotiations. It would put too many of their internal logrolls up for negotiation.

The problem was that you present this to the State Department and they'd say, "Oh, we can't get the Europeans to go along with it, so let's just agree to sit down with them. And we can't get the Iranians to suspend, so let's just sit down with them." We'd say no. For this strategy to work you've got to have both points of leverage. It is not a sit down and talk to the Iranians, that's been tried. We've tried that many times. You've got to sit down with the right amounts of leverage.

So big debate back-and-forth between the White House and the State Department. Secretary Rice talks a little bit about it in her memoirs. The State Department got very much engaged by Easter time on this issue. The issue came to a head in the May time frame. But we were at the same time developing what would the larger discussion with Iran look like? What ideas would we put on the table? Our other idea was you'd have to situate this discussion with Iran in a larger regional context. Simultaneously as you do this, you have to reach out to the Gulf states, who would be very alarmed that we would be sitting down with the Iranians and offering them up as—

There was a large, simultaneous institutionalization of the GCC [Gulf Cooperation Council] system with more of an Iranian security focus that we would launch at the same time with this. That was the idea anyway. And there was even some discussion that maybe we could float some regional arms control, Helsinki-like arrangements as another carrot that could be offered.

Bakich: Including the Israelis?

Feaver: That was the question, initially not without the Israelis because that just—too big of a lift to get them in. But the idea was now we're on the totally speculative last bullet of the strategy proposals, but if this gets enough momentum and becomes proper, then at a later date you could bring in Israel and they'd be joining something that was moving as opposed to something that was not.

State Department did not like any of these ideas. So something of a tension—

Riley: State doesn't like it because they don't think it will fly or because they have some principal objection to how it is being presented? I can understand why Iran wouldn't do this because their argument would be, "You're asking us to do what you won't do." You're trying to buy time and part of the reason—you won't negotiate with them open-ended as you phrased it. The time advantage is—

Feaver: I know the objections that were raised. Do they sincerely believe these objections? I don't know what they sincerely believe, but they would raise objections like, "We can't get the Europeans to go along with it." My argument would be, "You're not going to get the Europeans to go along with it unless they are convinced you are committed to it. The alternative is worse for them unilaterally."

We had a long debate at a meeting that Condi chaired. It reminded me very much of an academic seminar. What do the Europeans fear more? That we are just crazy enough to go to war again or that we can't accept a deal with the Iranians? We have to simultaneously reassure and dissuade, and it reminded me very much of an academic seminar. Of course you had a number of academics in the room, Philip Zelikow, me, Condi, and others with lots of experience in this area.

It was a vigorous debate but in large measure what Condi eventually came to present in the end of May in her big speech on Iran, which was a policy shift, it was largely this suspend-for-suspend idea that Elliott had developed, obviously with changes. The one piece that fell out, and I don't understand why it fell out, was our argument—The White House view was that at the same time you do all of this you should message to the Iranian people, over the heads of the

regime if you will, and talk to the Iranian people. We had an idea for publicizing this whole proposal, putting it on the website so that the Iranians couldn't claim that it was something less than it was, which of course they immediately did.

They rejected it, claimed it was less than it was. We wanted to box them in publicly by releasing it. Also take advantage of the other fact we knew, which is the Iranian people think very highly of the American people. They don't necessarily like our policies in the region, but there is a natural affinity between the Iranian people and a lot of American culture, and there were things we could tap into. Our idea was that the President would give a big speech, not to Iran but to the Iranian people. We had a number of ways that we were going to try to have the President speak over the heads of the regime to the people. State Department blocked that too. Not sure why or how that happened. There may have been some implementation disagreements.

What was finally launched was good and a significant improvement over the policy line. The President's instincts were right. The other one did run out and we had to have a replacement, and this was an improved replacement to what we had had. But it didn't work exactly the way we had hoped. I can't tell whether it was because we didn't implement all the pieces or we didn't get the Europeans to ratchet up the pressure first. The State Department accepted the European proposal that they would promise to ratchet it up, no kidding, if the Iranians said no. As the White House team feared, the Iranians said no and then the Europeans said, "We need to reconsider and be sure. We want them to say yes and if we ratchet up pressure now, that will make them less likely—" All the arguments that we had made about how once you make this offer it will be hard to get the Europeans—It did take us two years before the Europeans were ratcheting up the pressure again at the level that we had wanted.

It was a modest improvement but not a total success. I think the Iranian nuclear file was delayed over the path it was on, but we weren't able to delay it long enough and we weren't able to make enough progress on either the diplomatic or the regime political reform track for it to fully work. That is why today, as of January 2012, there is a large debate about what to do in Iran that sounds almost exactly like where we were in January 2006.

Nelson: Your point about State trampling on the idea of having the President speak directly to the Iranian people, what about the 2006 State of the Union address, "Tonight let me speak directly to the citizens of Iran."

Feaver: Yes, that's like one sentence or two sentences. We were going to do a whole buildup on that, a much more dramatic—and he did. If you look at the President's remarks in June of '06, he gives a speech at some think tank in Washington where there is a section like that. "Now let me speak to the people of Iran." But our idea was that is not going to get the attention like here's a speech *only* to the Iranian people. So the beginning, middle, and end is that rather than a throwaway.

Nelson: So this inclusion in the State of the Union address was a sop to your side rather than—

Feaver: The State of the Union in '06 comes before we've really hammered out all of this. It is a foreshadowing of the kind of thing that we hoped we could do more of. It ended up we did do more of it than that, but not as big as we had hoped.

I don't pretend it is a panacea. In fact, I know it wouldn't have been a panacea, but the strategy called for doing it all at the same time. I think if we had done it all at the same time, there would have been a dramatic increase in the pressure felt by the Iranian regime. We would be entering negotiations with them feeling the time pressures that otherwise we were feeling. That's the theory behind it.

Nelson: If you were to write a scholarly account of this the way you did about Iraq decision making, what would it be an example of, a case study in?

Feaver: That's a good question. I don't know what it would be a case of. There's a bit of bureaucratic politics with who controls this. There was a legitimate disagreement about what was the second-best policy. Obviously it would be best to have something like this work, but if we don't think it is going to work is it better to sit down with the Iranians anyway, which was one of the State Department positions. We were saying it would be better not to be sitting down with them and have the Iranians be blamed for having wrecked this opportunity. That was the White House view.

We would have both agreed that plan A would have been best, but which plan B is better? There was some disagreement on that, that is, legitimate policy disagreements among people who are otherwise very compatible on the goals, on ways and means. The teaching point I would make is that reasonable people can disagree on some of these questions.

Then there is a strategy implementation piece of it that turned out to be very difficult. We had a pretty good strategic concept, but we couldn't implement all of it.

Riley: How actively was military intervention considered at this point?

Feaver: Not as actively as the press accounts would have it. This is at the time when there are press reports about secret plans to invade Iran.

Bakich: Seymour Hersh.

Feaver: Yes, his quarterly report. [*laughter*] That was exaggerating the degree of imminence of the military threat. No one wanted to take the military threat off the table. In the U.S. government there was certainly a broad consensus that that was an important coercive sort of shadow that made the other things work. If you start by saying, "We're definitely never going to invade Iran" what else can we do? You're going to get nothing from Iran.

Riley: The option of missile strikes at this point is impractical technically or politically?

Feaver: It's not technically impractical. It is easy to do missile strikes. But the tough question was what to do then? One of the big debates we were having at this time is who has escalation dominance, the U.S. or Iran? From a simplistic point of view you'd say the U.S. because at the end of the day we have thousands and thousands of nuclear warheads, so once we get to that level of the escalation ladder we're going to win. They don't. But the intermediate steps had more attractive, to them, options than we did.

We would be left with a missile strike followed by, OK, what next? Whereas they could take a

missile strike but then retaliate with Hezbollah in Latin America or Iraq. They were killing Americans in Iraq already at this point. They had more intermediate levels. There was some concern they might have an escalation advantage on us even though we had dominance at the top level. We didn't have enough intermediate steps that were attractive enough to deter them from going up the ladder. That was one of the debates that we had.

Bakich: Did you get a sense as to why the Iranians turned away from it? Was it that conditions were established or was it suspension of enrichment?

Feaver: They won the messaging war in terms of framing this offer. You had otherwise very smart observers like Fareed Zakaria, who should know better, writing op-eds about how you can't ask them to give up everything before they even sit down to negotiate, that's not the way negotiations are done. I told Fareed, "That is not at all our policy." We weren't saying, "You must give up your nuclear program, now we'll sit down and negotiate with you." We were saying, "You must temporarily suspend."

Bakich: Turn off the centrifuge.

Feaver: Right. That's a totally different, much lower bar. Yes, it is the one they didn't want to take, but the Iranians were able to frame it as—so you also had political figures, you had Barack Obama talking about negotiations without conditions. He wasn't the significant figure then that he turned out to be later, but you did have Democrats criticizing the President. Condi's speech and the framing, launching this new policy—we lost the messaging war. The framing war and the PR [public relations] battle about it.

Bakich: She took a harsh edge in that speech. The preamble was a hard line.

Feaver: It was very hawkish.

Bakich: Did the messaging get lost then?

Feaver: I don't think so. My argument would be that we did not have the Europeans fully on board with the full strategy. We may not have had the U.S. team fully on board with the U.S. strategy. Some were willing not to stick with the tough line. The paradoxical thing, this is where someday we'll have to figure this out in our retirement homes, but the State Department was simultaneously criticizing it for being too hawkish but also too dovish because we were making lots of big-ticket offers. The State Department would say, "No, don't mention that, it's too big." I think there might have been some internal disagreements on exactly which strategy, what is the exact mix of hawkishness and dovishness that we were following. That may have also contributed to losing the messaging war.

Bakich: Where is Hadley on this? Where does he stand on the approach that you three have—?

Feaver: Steve's mandate was to not have the Rumsfeld–Powell fights that debilitated the first administration and played out on the front pages. He was very keen to forge consensus and not to have pitched battles where the three sides, four sides, whatever, were all yelling at each other behind their principal. Everyone lined up behind Powell yelling at everyone lined up behind Rumsfeld.

He did not stake out a "This is my position and I've got to persuade Condi of this and persuade Rumsfeld of this." What I have been describing as the White House position was the White House staffer position. He was sympathetic to that. He certainly wasn't telling us to shut it down or not to push it. But he was also not championing it and forcing an agreement with State. It was more of a "can't we keep working this issue until we get consensus" type of thing.

Nelson: This starts out as the President saying, "We don't have a strategy on Iran and I want one."

Feaver: Yes.

Nelson: Does he get one?

Feaver: Yes, he did. Condi's speech outlines it. It is essentially the strategy that has been followed since then. Obama temporarily tried a different one. Came in, campaigned, promised a very different one. Tried it for six, nine months, it didn't work. Then he went back and now is basically doing exactly what we laid out.

Nelson: Her speech came from State just seizing this issue away from the White House?

Feaver: No. What I was trying to say is that starting in December of '05 through May 1 the White House was pushing this, then we join up with a State Department team that is working it. It was very much two people pedaling this bicycle. From a process point of view what was interesting is DoD was not playing. I don't know if they were in any of the meetings. When it got to the PC level of course they were, but they were not in the staff, in the back channel, in the back-and-forth. That was very much White House and State.

Bakich: Was that a problem, do you think?

Feaver: I think it was an indication that Rumsfeld's influence perhaps was waning by this point. They were preoccupied with Iraq. It was also recognition that the military option is not what we're leading with, it is not the first, second, third iteration on this strategy. We're trying other things besides the formal military option.

The other process point I'd make on this is that we tried to use the Iran issue as a test bed for a new approach to strategy development and implementation. This is what PIE was doing. Are you going to interview Lisa Disbrow? You should interview her if you want to for the White House, she was my counterpart at PIE.

Nelson: Susan Sweatt first?

Feaver: Susan Sweatt first and then Lisa Disbrow took over in winter '06. Lisa came over from the Joint Staff. She had run their strategy, plans, assessment stuff so had a DoD mentality. She tried to get the NSC staff to take this Iran strategy and take the section of Iran from Record 2008 and develop it further in more of a formal strategy development process that DoD would do with assessments and things built in. We went over to her, "her" meaning the JCS, as a room, computer setup for translating a verbal strategy into a planning document.

I remember vividly everyone who did Iran in some way or other going over there. It was a total culture conflict, a clash of cultures. Almost all those people were State Department, or State Department oriented, on the NSC. They were not thinking in these terms at all. She was trying to introduce JCS methods, which worked perfectly if what you're talking about is how we are going to get the 82nd Airborne to such-and-such a place at such-and-such a time, but a little harder when you're talking about "what is the offer that we're going to make to Iran and then what?"

Of course the strategy was also somewhat in flux. We didn't know the precise sequencing we could get State to agree to, so that inhibited the planning. But when I read lots of articles, usually written by military personnel, about how to improve interagency strategy development and strategic planning, what they have in mind is this JCS model. We actually tried it. It was a mixed success. I would say we didn't get the buy-in from the NSC staff. They didn't see it as all that valuable.

Bakich: Trying to impose a military strategy on a—

Feaver: Exactly. It was a culture clash. But it was a reform worth trying. This period is when we tried it. We had to be very sensitive at the time because if that had leaked it would have been "White House goes to JCS to develop war plan for Iran." That was not at all what we were doing.

Nelson: Did you think about that?

Feaver: Oh, yes. We were very concerned about the sensitivity of these kinds of issues. Of course at that time, this is overlapping when David Sanger is writing, "Oh, that's what the NSS is about," so there was a lot of sensitivity.

Bakich: It has to be enormously frustrating that you have to think about how one branch of the government—one branch of the executive speaks to another branch of the executive because the mere fact that you're talking could be front-page news.

Feaver: Right, and press leaks about contingency planning—I understand it's an interesting, newsy story but I don't like when they do it to Obama. The effect is it chills off contingency planning, which is not helpful.

Nelson: At the beginning of your discussion on Iran you said that to some extent your hopes for regime change in Iran made assumptions about how rapidly progress would be made in Iraq.

Feaver: Right.

Nelson: And it didn't happen as rapidly as you had hoped.

Feaver: Right.

Nelson: Would that feed back into the Iran strategy as events turned out in a less positive way in Iraq?

Feaver: Yes, because by the end of '06, Iran's position in Iraq was much stronger. They were

killing Americans with impunity, and there were serious doubts about whether what we had in the leader of Iraq was actually an Iranian, an arm of the Shi'a sectarian that Iran could exploit.

Rather than Iran being under more pressure in, say, December '06 than they had been in December '05, which was our hope, in some ways they were under a little less. But their rejection of the offer did give us a little bit of pressure points that we could make on our European allies to ratchet it up. There was some payoff in that channel. We did get higher rounds of sanctions on Iran by the end of the Bush term. That laid the groundwork for significantly higher that came after.

Nelson: How does Iran win a messaging war with the United States? All of the public relations, how does that go wrong?

Feaver: The U.S. did not do the war of ideas as well as we wanted. This was an issue that the President cared very much about, and he would ask the same kind of question. "We invented Hollywood. How can we not get—" This was a consistent source of frustration. I suspect that if you interviewed President Bush and said, "What is something where you think the government let you down, didn't do as well what you wanted to do?" I'm guessing he would say the war of ideas.

I spent a lot of time on that issue with Juan Zarate, Will Inboden to a certain extent, and Elliott Abrams. Juan and Elliott and I all had the same view of what should be done. We had a 2x2 table, it is part of the offense, it is partly defense, it is partly messaging about them, it is partly messaging about us. You have to do all of it at the same time. Yes, there are major self-inflicted wounds like Abu Ghraib and similar kinds of things that set you back, but that's not why we're not making progress. We're not making progress because we're not doing all these other things. Michael Doran, who was also very much involved, then went over to DoD to work that side of it.

Two problems with it. One was that this is not the way the State Department views things. If you talk about offensive messaging—the USIA [United States Information Agency] of the '50s, which knew how to do that, had been totally disintegrated. There was no institutional memory or capacity in the State Department, it's not what they did. Yet they had the lead for international diplomacy, diplomatic image. The public diplomacy side of it was good on defense, meaning explaining ourselves and saying positive things about America and encouraging people to travel to America.

But on delineating the enemy, explaining their downside and frustrating their attempts to gain message advantage on us as the Iranians, say, were doing, they were not set up to do it. At the very end, the last Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy took this very seriously and instituted some reforms, and they started to get into the game more.

Riley: Was it a mistake to put Karen Hughes in that position?

Feaver: No, she was great at branding and on other things, very close to the President, which elevated that office dramatically. But her team was not made up of people who—the State Department didn't *have* the people to do it. I'm not sure that I would directly blame her. But it was frustrating because the President's vision was pretty clear. The White House, what we needed to do seemed pretty clear. We just could not get the system—

Now kinetic things could get done. The Defense Department was very good at doing kinetic things, but less so the ideological, messaging things. The other point I want to make about the war of ideas is this was an area where Hadley thought we could make better use of think tanks and the private sector. He had me set up a number of meetings with major foundations—MacArthur, Bradley, Smith Richardson—and think tanks and say, "Can you become think-and-do tanks?" By "do" meaning more proactive on the messaging side, be a bit more strategic about what you're doing, not merely doing reports but being more strategic in the kinds of reports and the timing.

We had those meetings, there was a lot of agreement around the table, "This would be good, we should do more of it." But we could never get it going. One of the very last meetings I had in my time in government was another meeting on this topic. I remember looking at Juan Zarate and Elliott Abrams and we said, "Two years ago we were saying the exact same thing"—same list of to-do items, could not move that meeting.

Riley: Let me suggest for your response that there is a strategic obstacle to this kind of communication and in one word it is Israel. How did U.S.–Israeli relations fit in? You're charged with long-term strategic planning. I've heard people from the administration in various ways suggest that part of the original rationale for Iraq was related to solving the Middle East problem. The phrase was "the road to Jerusalem goes through Baghdad."

Part of the messaging issue, I would think, in that region is the fact that regardless of what we say, the vigorous support that we provide Israel out-speaks all of our words. We are something of hostages to Israeli policy in their perceptions because they act in ways that would be inimical to furthering this kind of relationship with Iran. I'm being a little bit provocative in that.

Feaver: Sure.

Riley: It's not something we've talked about. Maybe it wasn't something that was talked about or something that was on somebody else's mind.

Feaver: It would be talked about because it was a very common critique. The White House response, the way we thought about it was at a couple of levels. The first level, which is perhaps more snide than you'd want it, is yes, it is a problem for us in the same way that our respect for equal treatment for women is a problem, our tradition of free expression of religion and strong Christian heritage among American culture. That is to say, it may offend them but we're not going to give it up. We think it is more important than not offending them.

Certainly no one in the Bush White House was going to say, "If we could throw Israel under the bus and get rid of this pesky women's rights thing, we could make great progress with the lobbies." That's a snide reaction, but part of it was the President thought the commitment to Israel was a vital part of American national security and American values.

The second level was a recognition that we needed something on the Israel–Palestine file. You couldn't do war of ideas and have nothing in that basket. So what do you put in that basket? There was a debate inside the administration between State Department and White House. I didn't play on this issue as much. Elliott Abrams had the lead for this and didn't need much help from my office, whereas on Iran—not that he needed the help from my office, but that was an

issue that there was more room for me to help Mike Doran, Mike Singh, and Elliott, who did Iran.

The State Department view was we needed something in that basket. The thing that should be in that basket is a big, heavy push relaunching, and Secretary Rice talks about this extensively in her memoirs. The White House view was the time is not ripe for that. That will only suck up Presidential capital, principal time away from higher priority issues or issues likely to be more successful. What we can put in that basket is tangible, marginal improvements in the quality of life for Palestinians on the ground. So work closer with the [Mahmoud] Abbas regime, particularly after Hamas has split so now there are two Palestines, a Gaza where life is miserable—let us improve the quality of life in West Bank and gradually shift more of the security functions, improve the security forces.

Elliott's idea was to do a thousand little baby steps so that every week on some measure, a few more minutes of electricity per day, a few more checkpoints manned by Palestinians every month. There would be a steady increase in state capacity, institutional capacity, inside the part of Palestine that Abbas ruled—and the contrast with the Gaza world would be stark and would undermine Hamas' popularity. It would delay the big thorny issues about settlements, Jerusalem, right of return, all the things that were choking the diplomatic track. We delay them until some more propitious time.

Yes, we have to do that. Yes, the President was committed to that. Yes, there would be a two-state solution. But the time was not ripe, and you could just look at things on the ground in '06, '07, '08 and know the time was not ripe.

Secretary Rice's view was that this was the most supportive President of Israel ever, he could deliver peace on his watch. He had a better shot at it than any other President would have had, so she wanted a big push. She won that internal debate. There was a major push for reviving Arab-Israeli—

Perry: So this is middle of '06, is there any talk in your shop about the midterm elections in November of '06 and the fact that there is such an antiwar sentiment and what this is going to do to the complexion of Congress and that in turn will have an impact on foreign affairs?

Feaver: Yes. We looked at it in a couple of ways. One was, are there things that we need from Congress that we have to get now in '06 because in '07 we're not going to get it? So we did an inventory. There was some stuff on detainees and things that they tried to do while Republicans—because there was some fear that we would lose one or more of the chambers. There was that kind of strategic planning.

There is a pretty bright line between—we're not allowed, of course, to campaign at all, but we were doing a lot of outreach on Iraq and talking to everybody. We were talking to Democrats, Republicans, Members of both Houses, both chambers. There were many meetings where we were talking to Members of Congress and saying, "Here is our Iraq strategy so you know what we're trying to do. I know you're getting lots of questions about this, here is what we say."

If you look at White House logs you'll find lots of meetings with Members of Congress. In the case of the House they're all up for reelection. I'm sure that in their minds they were looking at

this as arming them for going out to speak to their constituents. This was part of the NSC's broader effort to talk to as many people as we could about the President's Iraq strategy, whether they were Republican or Democrat.

Perry: But does Iran come up at all in those discussions?

Feaver: Not that I recall. It is more of a legislative ask. There was some military commission stuff and things like that that were legislative asks.

Riley: Peter, we have a couple of hours left. Maybe the best way to deal with this is to ask you to think about the rank of things of importance that we haven't talked about, issues or process or anything that you feel we ought to get on the record. We're happy to probe into it, but you'll have a better sense than we will about the kinds of things we're missing so far, and we still have enough time to deal with whatever we need to deal with.

Feaver: Right.

Bakich: Where is the OVP [Office of the Vice President] in all of this? I've heard very little of the Office of the Vice President and I want to get a sense of where it fits.

Feaver: Right.

Riley: Let's take a five-minute break and we'll come back.

Feaver: And I would say there are myths about the Iraq surge.

Riley: Great, if you'll allow us to do that.

[BREAK]

Riley: Maybe the best way is to ask you to do an eight- to ten-minute tour of the horizon on your engagement with Iraq to set the high points of the narrative, and then you said you wanted to come back and deal with the myths.

Feaver: OK.

Riley: You might also want to help us or help the reader by letting us know which accounts you've looked at secondarily that you found persuasive and authentic and which ones you think have to be absorbed with a grain of salt.

Feaver: Before I do that, let me do one more process thing because it will turn out to be relevant to the Iraq piece. One of the issues for an office like Strategic Planning is how short a tether to put on it. The longer I worked there, the more trust I built up with Steve and the other NSC staff people, the longer my leash got to be. I was allowed to talk to reporters much more. The official NSC way is you can't talk to a reporter unless you have an NSC press person in the room taking

notes at the same time so that the press can't—Initially those would be my encounters with the press. By the end I was able to just let the press people know, "David Sanger wants to talk about X, can I talk to him, what can I say?" "Peter Baker wants to talk about this, that, and the other thing." I could have conversations with them without someone else right there in the room. That was important and it also meant I was part of the team that would meet with Woodward when the White House was meeting with him to tell our side of the story for his books.

The other way the leash got loosened was the ability to meet with the other offices in the White House. I mentioned I had a weekly meeting with Pete Wehner and with Mike Gerson. But beyond that, multiple emails a day back and forth on topics of the day. Sometimes it was things that were in their world, like Harriet Miers, "We're getting killed on Harriet Miers, what do you guys think?" That obviously wasn't in my lane. It was lunchroom talk more than anything else. But also Pete had his ear very close to the ground on what our base was saying about Iraq policy, Iran policy, War on Terror, what was working, what was not.

Pete had the role of internal critic. To a certain extent this was assigned to me as well, but Pete had it and had a much freer hand than I did. He could and would write letters to the Chief of Staff, just to the Chief, saying, "This is not working, we're getting killed on such-and-such. So-and-So"—naming a principal—"is the problem. So-and-So needs to go." Or it is this policy line. It was a level of candor, an internal critique that was far more persuasive than the critiques we were getting from the outside because it was first of all grounded in very good knowledge of what was going on, but also done from someone who was loyal to the President. Obviously he wasn't trying to sabotage the President, he was trying to improve policy.

Riley: And your sense is that this role was exclusively Pete's?

Feaver: Everyone to a certain extent would do some critique. But he had the virtue of being the internal armchair, Monday-morning quarterback. To a certain extent me as well. Not day-to-day operational responsibility, so it is a little harder for someone who is day-to-day operationally responsible for this to say, "It ain't working."

But this guy could sit back and say, "It ain't working." Whenever it touched national security he would always run that by me and we would discuss it. I couldn't stop him from talking, so it wasn't the case of trying to rein in what he was doing but to inform it better. I would say, "You're unfair here, you're missing what So-and-So is doing." That might soften or shade the critique somewhat.

He had the trust of Andy Card and Josh Bolten and of course Dan and the White House principals. An email from him saying it's not working or critiquing something had traction, got an audience. Occasionally, with Mike Gerson, Mike could do that all the way to the President. Pete could do it to the President, but my understanding was that he would more often do it to one of the other principals. Mike had the freedom to go straight into the Oval and say it because he had weekly or monthly one-on-one meetings with the President.

As a consequence of these, the varied portfolio and of Chief Card wanting me to be kind of a forum shop for the rest of the White House meant that I had regular contact with these folks, whether it was Karl or Dan or to a certain extent the Chief of Staff. Then on messaging it would

be Tony Snow and later his replacement. If I thought something was not working inside the NSC system, I had access to Steve and JD to bring things up to the NSC system. But if I thought the NSC system was not working, we were stuck on something, there was a second channel within the White House channel that I could avail myself of.

I would do that on minor issues that weren't all that consequential but were easy fixes. The one big issue where that did happen was Iraq. We were stuck inside the national security system and the Presidency looked to be somewhat stuck by the same "stuckness" that the national security team was stuck on. It was of such importance that there was a side conversation with Dan, Karl, and Josh Bolten on how we were going to fix this.

The Iraq problem was figuring out that our strategy was not working. It took us a long time to do that. Now, critics were saying all along the strategy was not working, but in '05 most of the time they were critiquing a cartoon version of our strategy. I remember this vividly going to the Aspen Strategy Group in August of '05 and hearing scathing critique after scathing critique from very knowledgeable, mostly Democrats, some Republicans, saying all the things we were doing wrong and what we should be doing instead was X, Y, Z.

I knew what we were trying to do was X, Y, Z. I came back from that telling Hadley, "Good news, bad news. Good news is the loyal opposition thinks we should be doing what in fact we're doing. Bad news is they don't believe we're doing it. We have a messaging problem." Now, it's not just a messaging problem. There were some legitimate strategy disputes or implementation problems. But to a very great extent, the large lines of action that they thought we should be pursuing, we were trying to do.

My role in the NSVI was birthed out of that. It actually earlier was Meghan's conviction. So Meghan had the same idea, she had had it before I got it, that there was a need for a white paper to explain the way forward in Iraq. We had two goals that we wanted to achieve.

One was explain the strategy, in fact what we're trying to do. As I said, we thought if we did that a number of our critics would say, "That's what we wanted you to do, so it's about time that you did that." The second thing was, we wanted to sketch the horizon. We were getting killed because we didn't want to announce timelines, and we fervently believed that there were problems with timelines; we were doing no messaging, no explanation of the long-range vision. It looked like what we were talking about is permanent bases in Iraq and 150,000 troops ad infinitum, and we were getting killed on that. That was not our vision. We had a long-term glide slope that eventually was what transpired. That was the plan from the beginning. In '05 it was very clearly the plan. But we didn't have dates associated with it. It was more a conditions-based vision of what it would look like.

Bakich: Just so we're clear: when we're talking about a strategy, that boils down to bumper sticker "stand-up, stand-down"?

Feaver: Precisely. So I come back from Aspen saying, "We should really do this." Hadley says, "You're right, it's time to do that." That being the first thing, explain our strategy. We never did do the second one. We tried several times to come up with that. We had a briefing. We could never get the Defense Department to agree to do the messaging on the long-range picture. That

was a case where Rumsfeld just did not think we should do that kind of messaging, perhaps for fear that it would become a timeline. I think they did some messaging finally on that in ’08, but it was overtaken by events because the strategy got broken in the interim.

In ’05 we didn’t get the long-term vision stuff. We did work on explaining what we were trying to do. So Hadley says, “Yes, go do this.” I go to Meghan, “Meghan, we’ve got clearance for this.” She says, “I am swamped, you take the first crack at it.” I say, “I’ll be happy to take the first crack at it.” So I open a Microsoft Word file and take Casey’s campaign plan and the National Strategy for Supporting Iraq, which was a large document governing all of the interagency working groups that were working on Iraq, hundreds, maybe thousands of people who were doing Iraq on a daily basis in the interagency, and this was the document that tracked and explained what they were doing.

I took these two things and said, “OK, we’ve got to merge them and describe this in a coherent white paper.” The reason I’m describing it that way is that Microsoft remembered that I opened the first file and labeled me the author. I took a first crack at it and about two weeks later handed it off to Meghan. So from September through November Meghan has the pen. In November, Brett McGurk, her staffer working this issue, has the pen and is pulling repeated all-nighters. I’m just doing kibitzing and stuff from October on.

When they release the document and the reporter checked the metadata for the PDF [portable document format] file, they had forgotten to the scrub the metadata, so they see Feaver is the author. That is how the myth that I was the principal author—I had opened the first Word file and it had remembered my name. But it was very much Meghan’s document, Brett was the staffer who worked on it the most. More importantly it was Casey’s strategy and the interagency’s effort to support it. I was not creating anything that wasn’t there. I was describing what was there.

Riley: So you’re making it into an accessible public document.

Feaver: Right. But that failure to scrub the metadata produced the problem that we’ll get to in a moment.

The structure of the document, which I was responsible for, didn’t work—was a stunning failure. It was my idea to have the document be pyramidal in form, a two-page executive summary followed by a seven- to eight-page explication in detail, followed by 20 pages cut and pasted from the interagency document on NSSI [“National Strategy for Supporting Iraq”]. My argument was some people will only read the first two pages, so I want them to get the whole story in two pages. Other people will spend a little more time, they’ll read the next eight pages. I want to give them more in eight pages. The wonks will read the last 20 pages.

The problem with that format is that it made it very repetitive. When the level of superficial analysis given to that document—people were doing word counts—they would say, “Oh, you mentioned the word ‘victory’ 85 times” or whatever is the number. That’s because we’re repeating the thing in pyramidal form. Yes, it is quite repetitive, it is designed to be repetitive. That got lost. That was a stunning failure. I thought the concept was a great one, but it worked out very poorly.

Nelson: What got lost was people's understanding of the organization of the paper?

Feaver: Right. So they did simplistic analyses like word counts. If you do a word count, you misunderstand the repetition.

Nelson: The title of the thing is the National Strategy for Victory in Iraq, so why would you not want victory to be prominently—

Feaver: Two other things. That wasn't the title I gave it. I gave it the title "National Strategy for Success in Iraq," NSSI. "National Strategy for Supporting Iraq" was the existing document, so I thought just keep the same initials NSSI. And none of our polling evidence (Feaver, Gelpi, and Reifler) suggested that the word "victory" was a magic talisman. That is not what our research said, I didn't believe it, and the logic from our research that was behind this, to the extent that it informed the strategy document, was not if you say victory enough times you can fool the American people, which is the way the press treated it. That is not what we said.

What we said was, if you have a credible strategy it will lead to success, and all of my academic surveys used the word "success," not "victory." Then you could persuade the American people, but you had to be candid. The part of my research that did inform the document wasn't the title, wasn't the word "victory," it was all the bits where we were candidly admitting mistakes.

This was something Meghan and I felt very strongly about, that we had to break this logjam. Peter Baker asked the President, "What is the mistake you've made?" and the White House was getting tripped up on that. Let's admit all the things that were going wrong. My argument, I thought, was that our research said you can reason with the American people.

Nelson: The research you did like between public tolerance for casualties and hope for success?

Feaver: Yes, that's the research.

Nelson: That's the success context.

Feaver: Right, that's the context.

Riley: Did you do the subtitle, "Helping the Iraqi People Defeat the Terrorists and Build—"?

Feaver: No.

Riley: I was struck by that being cited as the purpose, the first one is to help them defeat the terrorists.

Feaver: Right. I don't know who came up with that. At the end everyone had worked the document a thousand times, and I can't remember who wrote what. But the parts that were very much Meghan's and mine—we wanted more acknowledgment of things that went wrong and laying out our assumptions.

The argument was, we've got to persuade, it's not the American people, they're not going to read this document—We've got to persuade the Stephen Biddles, the Ivo Daalders, the Tony

Blinkens, the people in think tanks who are going to read this and who have been telling us what the correct strategy should be. I wanted them to read this and say, "OK, you guys get it, you are trying to do it."

A lot of the assumptions, a lot of the candor did get noticed. A number of people pointed out that this was more candid about previous mistakes. That was helpful. Then we devised a large rollout with a big Presidential push to launch this in conjunction with the Iraqi elections. The argument was that this would demonstrate that the political piston of the strategy was working and making progress.

It worked to a certain extent. The public approval of the war moved in a measurable way by about five, ten points, depending on the poll. It was a noticeable bump. But in a larger sense it failed, or it was a temporary thing. It failed in recreating the bipartisan consensus for several reasons. One, it turned out that the strategy was not working and we discovered that later. The second reason was that the Democratic opposition had shifted in the interim from the middle critique, sort of the Aspen Strategy Group critique, to Congressman [John] Murtha, who came out and preempted us by about a week or so with, "This thing is over, we've lost, we've got to get out now." Congressman Murtha's proposal was a *radical* alternative. It was get all the U.S. troops out by May of '06.

Nelson: Which was logistically as fast as you could do it if you decided to do it that day.

Feaver: Barely, if you didn't mind people shooting you in the back while no one was protecting you—it was hopeless. But our premise had been, you guys are telling us to do an alternative, but your alternative is really what we're trying to do. It turned out that the alternative had shifted. So Murtha shifted it—and the other thing that happened was we were beginning to see the rise of—we would run against the Iraq War in '06 and we're not going to join you because our plan for retaking the House involves a slash and burn on Iraq.

I think this was part of what Senator Clinton was telling me when she said, "It's too late for that." They're already committed to a no-holds-barred, slash-and-burn critique on Iraq, and they don't want to find that middle ground.

Nelson: The House and the Senate.

Feaver: Right. While it worked temporarily in moving the needle of public opinion, it didn't build the elite consensus I had hoped. The document itself got ridiculed in part because of this metadata thing. This was one case where the White House press operation failed us. They told me, "You're not allowed to talk to that reporter," the reporter who had this scoop about my name. It had already been released that I was in the White House. Peter Baker had done a story in the summer, and I had some leeway to talk to reporters but they said, "Not to this one, you can't talk to him." Scott Shane was his name. "If we talk to him, we will elevate the story. So we're going to not talk to him and then maybe the story will get lost." I said, "No, let me talk to them. If I do I can explain how the caricature that this is based on my research and is a public relations document is all spin, it's misleading. The truth is much better than the cartoon image, better for the President, better for us." "No, that will just elevate the story."

When it comes out, it is above the fold, second column in the Sunday *New York Times.* I called

our press person and said, “Good job. Otherwise it would have been the first column.” It was a complete mash-up, connecting dots into a story that wasn’t accurate. You had the Marty Dempsey quote about “I never heard of this; this can’t be real.” It of course deeply annoyed Brett McGurk who had spent multiple all-nighters in a row on this, and I’m getting credit for the document and he was mad about that.

It was something of a disaster. It didn’t work. But the more significant problem was a strategy problem, not a communications problem. That became clear as the year unfolded, especially after the Golden Dome mosque, and by April the intelligence is pointing toward a self-sustaining, sectarian cycle of violence. This is also the time when the Iran stuff is really heating up. For a couple of months I was off the Iraq thing, then in April-May getting back to Iraq with Meghan and saying, “This doesn’t look like it is working.” She says, “Yes, it’s not. It really doesn’t look like it is working. We have to do something.”

She wrote a POTUS [President of the United States] note to the President every night summarizing the Iraq policy. I was on distribution for those. They were very candid and somewhat bleak assessments—more or less “here’s what’s happening.” It was also, “Here are the policy lines we’re pursuing.” Often we’d have to report mixed success on this and mixed success on that.

The challenge was figuring out whether our strategy was broken or needed more resources. Were the resources needed State Department resources? The Defense Department at this time, Rumsfeld and others, was saying, “The problem is the military is doing all of its part, but we’re not making the progress on the political side because the State Department is not doing its part.” The political and development—“We need more State Department representatives.” And Condi in her memoirs talks about a couple of awkward sessions where Rumsfeld zinged her in public.

I can remember one of them where he zinged her in front of the President for the State Department not doing its part. Very tense back-and-forth between State and Defense on that issue. But the more fundamental issue we were struggling with was the analytic one. Do we have the right strategy or the wrong strategy? Is our premise wrong? Meghan and I were trying to launch a review that would ask these fundamental questions.

Bakich: You used the word “strategy” here, and I’m going to ask you to be precise about this.

Feaver: Yes.

Bakich: Are you talking about a theater-level strategy? Are you talking about military operations on the ground?

Feaver: Both, the whole thing. Our existing strategy had a theater component to it, but it was very much politics first. We would make progress on the political front and then security could catch up because we’d make space to siphon off the Sunni resentment.

Meghan and I are trying to figure this out, and what I thought we needed was something of a [Project] Solarium-style thing. Now a number of folks had said, “You should go in and do a Solarium, and your office would have been the natural one to do a Solarium for our whole grand strategy.” I quickly decided that that wouldn’t work, at least the old-fashioned Solarium style

would not have worked in preparation for the NSS because the President thought our overarching strategy was working, whereas [Dwight] Eisenhower very much wanted a fundamental relook. But also he couldn't get the principals to go offline as long as they were able to do in the Eisenhower period. And the fundamental problem for any overarching grand strategy review, the very first slide was "What is your assumption about Iraq?"

So are we going to be a success in Iraq, failure in Iraq? I came to the conclusion that a grand strategy Solarium had to await getting the Iraq strategy right first. That was the more urgent priority because if Iraq was in a good place then there is a whole range of options. If Iraq is in a bad place, there is a whole other range of options and there is almost no overlap between them. But I still thought something like a Solarium exercise, maybe mini Solarium focused just on Iraq.

The backdrop is Rumsfeld getting criticized by the retired generals. Most of their criticisms were dated, they were misguided, or in some cases they were fundamentally wrong. That wasn't helpful. But that wasn't the model that I was pursuing. And worse, that was contaminating the internal political climate for a real review. You didn't want to say, "Oh, so you're just going to do another hatchet job on Rumsfeld from inside."

There was also the question that Rumsfeld believes this strategy is working, more so than other people do. Is Rumsfeld part of the problem? So there was this West Wing discussion at my level, Wehner, Gerson. How do you relaunch Iraq without changing SecDefs? Could you change SecDefs? We debated lists of who would be a good replacement. The only reason I mention this is that Gates was never on any of those lists. We did quiet soundings around, trying to come up with great names. We got a whole long list of names; Gates was never one of them.

Riley: This is summer?

Feaver: That was spring of '06.

Nelson: How do you do quiet soundings? Was something published in the *Times* when you were talking about who would be a good replacement for Rumsfeld?

Feaver: I had friends, one of them was a reporter, who didn't go with it.

Riley: No kidding.

Feaver: Yes, but also there was a certain plausible deniability, which is this is not Feaver saying, "Yes, the President would like to replace Rumsfeld, can you suggest someone?" but more crazy—"OK, you guys don't like Rumsfeld. Who would you replace him with?" That kind of thing. So there are ways of doing it.

Nelson: And it must have worked because there weren't a lot of stories about it.

Feaver: And of course it went nowhere because the revolt of the generals made it impossible to do it *then*.

Nelson: Some of those generals were pretty politically savvy people. Didn't they realize that they would in effect be writing Rumsfeld an insurance policy if they attacked him?

Feaver: They got played up very heavily by Democrats. My Machiavellian assumption was the more sophisticated partisan Democrats who did that were doing that precisely because they knew it would keep him there so they'd have a whipping boy.

Nelson: Wow.

Feaver: I should backtrack. There was one positive story about Democrats I wanted to tell in the wake of this *New York Times* article critiquing me and the NSVI. For a week I was a whipping boy for some of the talking-head partisans. In particular [James] Carville was taking whacks at me, he had me as "the next Scooter Libby" kind of thing. Carville went on *The Situation Room* with Wolf Blitzer and talked about "this college professor who is writing strategy. What kind of operation is this with a college professor—this is crazy, they don't know what they're doing with a college professor." He was going on and on about college professors. Finally Blitzer said, "There's nothing shameful about being a college professor. We all went to college, right?" But their point was, this was a way of attacking Bush.

I'm told that they stopped attacking me because of Biden—I knew Tony Blinken, and they said, "This is not fair, this is not right, there's not a scandal here." Biden, I'm told, was the one who stopped that line of attack. The next time he came to the White House I made a point of thanking him for doing that. I thought it was a very stand-up thing. But for a while there I was the whipping boy.

Back to trying to figure out how to do it. The idea Meghan and I came up with was to have a debate among outside experts, in front of the President, in fact, in front of the whole national security team. That could trigger a top-to-bottom review. We set up this idea of sending the team to Camp David for a day- or two-day top-to-bottom review of Iraq, and launching it would be a discussion among outside experts who would present the different positions.

We knew Mike Vickers, who was an advocate for accelerating the transition to training, so he said that we had the right strategy and our problem was we're going too slowly and we had too many troops there, so accelerate the drawdown. That was Mike Vickers's position. Very persuasive argument, very compelling. I had brought him in to talk to a number of people in the White House. I wasn't sure I agreed with him. In fact, I thought he was wrong but I thought this was the best description of it. He had met the President, really resonated with the President because he had been in the *Charlie Wilson's War* book. He is the chess player in *Charlie Wilson's War* so the President loved that, had read the book, loved Mike Vickers.

We bring Mike to argue that piece and Fred Kagan, who was arguing for the surge, which made a little more sense to us. Our fear was that the President connected so well with Mike Vickers that it would be an unfair debate. He would naturally gravitate to Vickers, and Fred, even if he had the better side of the argument, we thought, might not connect with the President as well. So we added Eliot Cohen in a two-fer role. One was we knew he was more supportive of the surge idea, so that would be a two-to-one, and also what we were talking about required interfering with the generals, which was the supreme command argument that this is what successful Commanders in Chief do. They don't just say whatever the commander on the field wants, they may be overruled.

We wanted Eliot to inject that message into the debate. Hadley was concerned that it might look like a team-up exercise against Rumsfeld because what all those guys had in common was they had criticized Rumsfeld, at least Kagan and Cohen did. It would not work if this looked like an ambush of Rumsfeld. Rumsfeld, to his great credit, reviewed the list and never complained about the list or the proposal. He had no objections whatsoever.

We added Robert Kaplan to blur a little bit so it wouldn't quite feel like a set piece debate, just to blur it was the idea, make it a little bit easier.

It was a great plan and, like many of the things I tried, a great plan that failed in execution. They all did what they were supposed to do. The President enjoyed it very much. There was a fairly good discussion among the Cabinet principals. We thought that they were going to return from Camp David with all of these issues hanging and come back and empower us to do a big review of the Iraq strategy. Instead the President sneaks off to Baghdad that very night, which Meghan and I did not know about. The President had already decided he was going to meet Maliki and use the Camp David visit as the cover for security purposes so as to be able to fly overnight.

The next morning, instead of having the follow-up meeting where we hash out, "OK, now we're going to do the strategy review," the President is joining the meeting from Baghdad and the whole optics was this incredible opportunity, surprised all his national security team, he's in Baghdad. We're going to empower Maliki; we're not changing our strategy. We have a strategy for Maliki. We had devised a 100-day strategy already that we thought would be implemented in January. We had elections in mid-December, take a couple of weeks to find a government, 100-day plan in January.

We finally get that in May, now we can run the 100-day plan so let's do that. Instead of launching a strategy review, it relaunches the original strategy.

Riley: So what's your reaction when you wake up and see the President in Baghdad?

Feaver: It's a reminder that there is a whole lot going on that I'm not privy to, a reminder of where I am in the pecking order. I was happy that I was joined by a lot of very senior people who hadn't known that he was going to Baghdad, so I wasn't the only one.

Nelson: Who were the senior people there when the scholars were debating?

Feaver: Cheney and Rumsfeld and Rice and the President of course, Hadley, JD, Meghan.

Nelson: Tenet?

Feaver: No, Tenet was long gone. Would it have been [John] Negroponte at that point? The DNI, whoever was the DNI at that point. Yes. So it was his national security team. Not the full Cabinet, just the national security team.

Nelson: I'm interested in the dynamics of a room full of people. Did they really just sit there and listen to the debate and discussion or did they enter into it?

Feaver: I wasn't in the room, so ask Meghan. She was staff to that meeting. I briefed the

outsiders, but I didn't get to be in the room. Meghan can answer that. Her take was, "Good but not great." That is what she initially told me and once we woke up and found the President in Baghdad we said, "OK, that's why it wasn't great."

The point was it delayed the launching of a real strategy, and Meghan and I and Brett McGurk and Kevin Bergner were the four people most working this issue. We were throughout the summer trying to inject this somehow in the system. We came up with the idea of the President asking a long series of tough questions to Casey, directly taking a page from the [Winston] Churchill approach. This is what Churchill would do and the President can be Churchillian.

Casey did not like it; it didn't go well. His reaction to it is described pretty well in the Woodward book. He felt the President was second-guessing him and misunderstanding the strategy. The published commentary that I did in an *IS* [*International Security*] article described this. Baghdad security plan one didn't work, not enough troops. Baghdad security plan two didn't work, Maliki interfered with the deployments. So it is late August, early September. At this point Meghan and I say, "This is really not working and if we don't do something, we're really going down," meaning the Iraq project is going to go down.

Riley: Where is Hadley at this stage? Are you communicating this to him and he's on board?

Feaver: Yes. My read of what was happening, he was trying to avoid a fissure in the top leadership of a forced review. Casey was saying, "I'm reviewing the strategy every day, a thousand times, this is a dynamic thing, we're constantly changing this." Casey would have rejected the notion that he has target lock or he is locked into a static strategy. He would say, "We're revising it constantly. Don't give up on it."

[Peter] Pace was at the same time having his own doubts, and he is launching his own strategy review. We knew about that, but I think Hadley was still not sure he wanted to commit, at least in August, September. Within a couple of weeks, yes. But the point is Meghan and I say we're starting this anyway. And what we do is we take the old NSVI—that's why the critique of the NSVI is a little bit unfair. That describes what we thought we were trying to do. We said, "Let's begin with this" and we listed every single assumption in the NSVI and said, "These are the assumptions on which the existing strategy is based. A year ago we all more or less signed on to those assumptions. A year or ten months later, do we still believe those assumptions?"

It was shocking how many of them said, "No, we no longer believe that assumption." Our conclusion was you can't do the existing strategy because the assumptions on which it is based are no longer valid. Within a week or two of us launching that Hadley comes back and says, "I want you to do a review." He commissions Meghan, me, Kevin Bergner, Brett McGurk, and John Hannah from OVP to do a bottom-up review. We had already started so we said, "Great, yes."

Riley: Is this in reaction to the conversation that I think is reported in the President's book about his reaching the conclusion it was not working?

Feaver: It could be. I wouldn't say that Hadley changed his mind because he hadn't said no before, he just hadn't said yes.

Riley: I just didn't know in the sequencing whether that meeting comes later, whether they had already authorized you to have this in stream and then the President reaches the conclusion—you can probably figure it out.

Feaver: No, you can't. I tried very hard. What I find in all the accounts, probably including mine, is that everyone remembers that moment coming earlier than I remember it coming in the process. It was not at all clear to Meghan and me that the President was going to decide on the surge until late into December, whereas the President's memoirs have him pretty clear on that much earlier. That may be just because he was not communicating to us, the same with Hadley—

Riley: My question was not his deciding on the surge, but at what point does he decide the old policy is not working and that we need to set something in motion?

Feaver: I see what you're saying. I suspect that the precipitant for Hadley coming to us and saying, "Launch this" was the President going to Hadley. I suspect Hadley was probably nudging the President in that direction too. There was a dance. That was probably around the time he comes to us. Now he could have on his own authority, and often did, told us to do stuff that I'm not sure was coming directly from the President. Other times he'd ask me to do something and I'd find out later the President had said something. I would get tasked many times with doing stuff off books, just you sit down in a room and second-guess a policy line that we were doing.

In retrospect I think what happened is the President would say something and Hadley would say, "Yes, I need a second set of eyes on that. I'm not going to ask the person who owns that strategy to do it because they're locked in it, so I'll just ask Feaver to sit down, no discussion, just on your own do a second one." It might have been triggered by that. I think some of the delay in August was, as I indicated in the earlier part of this interview, the apparent imminent death of Castro. One of the reasons why this thing happened in September instead of August was for a while there we were all in a goat rope on what we were doing in Cuba.

Riley: I've got to ask a follow-up question on that because you rather tantalizingly said, "We ultimately came to understand that there wasn't anything we could do to precipitate turnover in Cuba" or something like that. It was as though there were ideas in mind about how you might have managed regime change.

Feaver: No Bay of Pigs. Everyone understood we didn't want to do that. But the question was what our diplomatic posture ought to be. Should we reach out to Raul [Castro]? Should we do intensive messaging? My idea was that the regime was in such turmoil that if we made a big push to them, not outreach, not engagement, not exchanging ambassadors or something, but just elevated the Cuba issue to a top priority and set a series of requests and exchanges, requests for information with Cuba, that the pressure that their regime would have might crack in response. They were obviously so oriented to the U.S. and responding to the U.S. They might crack under the pressure of trying to respond to U.S. overtures.

Riley: There were a lot of friends in Latin American leadership positions who would happily broker something like that.

Feaver: What we didn't want to happen is what happened, which is Raul just stepped in. For a while it looked like they were having trouble navigating that glide slope, and they didn't want to

admit that Fidel was non compos mentis. I was saying, "Let's challenge them. The President would like to talk right now and force them into—"

Riley: OK, so that's a two-minute diversion.

Feaver: Back to Iraq. Hadley says to do a very quiet review. Hadley would do this from time to time. There were many times when he would pull one or two people, sometimes just me, sometimes me plus another person, and say, "We need a review that is not through the normal processes. Don't want you to file, certainly don't go to the interagency, but even within the NSC if there is a formal NSC system of paperwork movement, don't do it there. Just give me some nonpaper brainstorming ideas on this kind of thing."

So this was a larger, more complicated version of something like that that he would have us do quite a lot. I don't know where all those are. I assume they're on some hard disk in the Presidential Library with all the other papers.

We started this process and very quickly concluded that there was a series of options. One of them was a surge, what we called double-down at that point. Another option was just ride it out. Another option was bet on Maliki and empower Maliki, which was a version of the current strategy but just increase the bet on Maliki. There were one or two variants that I'm forgetting right now.

Bakich: Pull out?

Feaver: Pull out was probably there for analytical comprehensiveness.

Riley: Partition?

Feaver: I can't remember if partition—I think not. I don't think that one was in. A week or so into this Hadley says, "You can add [David] Satterfield to the team." He had gone to Rice and said, "We're doing this." Rice said, "I've been thinking about doing something like that myself and my man is Satterfield." Steve—I'm conjecturing now—but they said, "We need to keep this quiet, but we do need to cross-pollinate." So Satterfield came. For several weeks in September and October, Satterfield, Meghan, McGurk, Hannah, and I would meet to debate, shape these options, refine them, refine our critique.

Part of this was also needing to talk to every single Iraq expert we know and trust. What are they saying? We divided up the list. Tony Cordesman, Steve Biddle, Kenneth Pollack.

Bakich: Juan?

Feaver: Not everybody. I knew what Juan Cole was thinking. We would meet with them, sometimes over coffee, sometimes separately, sometimes in groups. It was just a wide range to cast a pretty far net.

Riley: Did you have a private office by then?

Feaver: No, I'd have to have these meetings in Meghan's office or Caribou Coffee. I remember

one walk in the park with Steve Biddle. I felt I was in a bad Cold War–era movie. Mike Vickers too, I remember that.

We developed the range of options and the questions that we didn't know the answers to. A lot of the questions we didn't know the answer to concerned Maliki. There was a big debate. Satterfield was more inclined to doubt whether Maliki was a nationalist or more of a Shi'a sectarian. Our strategy required him to be a nationalist. So a series of questions like that. We took these to Steve and said, "These are the things we don't know and these are the—" We briefed him on the status of it.

Out of that came his desire to go to Iraq to assess for himself and to meet with Maliki. So he, Meghan, and I—maybe Kevin Bergner was on that trip. Then the Europe person joined us at the back end. Tony Harriman because Tony did Afghanistan.

We went to Baghdad. We went first to Kabul and did the Afghan piece because there was an Afghan strategy review also going on, which we can talk about later, but recognition that that wasn't going well. At the bottom line our conclusion was, yes, it's not going well, it is going to need more resources, but we've got to do Iraq first because that's the higher urgent priority—we can do a holding action in Afghanistan, we have to turn around Iraq.

Then we went to Baghdad and met with a variety of people, the middle-level commanders, and we were trying to get the sense from them, "Could you make use of more troops?" Every time we would ask, Casey was saying, "You don't need more troops." "Could you make use of them?" What did they think was going right, going wrong? We met with [Peter] Chiarelli, whom we knew. We had some back-channel ideas and wanted to get his critical assessment. But mostly Hadley wanted to take the sounding of Maliki and that's what this trip was, especially for him. And I now suspect a sounding of Casey.

Nelson: The articulation of the surge idea that was out there, was it fleshed out to the point of saying "and here's what these additional troops would do"?

Feaver: Yes, to a certain extent. Not as detailed as Petraeus eventually did it. He made many refinements, even beyond that, innovations. Elevating population security above force protection, putting them in street corners off of FOBS [forward operations bases], all of those operational details. Going into the Baghdad Belt? No.

Nelson: When you were asking commanders in Iraq, "Could you use more troops," were you saying, "Could you use more troops to do this?"

Feaver: No. We were saying, "What is your mission? If you had more troops, what would you do with them?" We were not authorized to discuss a surge with these people. We would not say, "Do you want a surge? How would you use a surge?" We were trying to elicit that kind of information without asking that direct a question. But the core idea that you needed troops to protect the Iraqis long enough for them to make the bet to come onto our side, that core concept we had.

Brett McGurk had this example from Ghazaliya, which he said so many times we said we were going to make a new drink called the Ghazaliyan in his honor because he kept on using this

example of troops where we had left too soon and the Iraqis had kind of cooperated and been decimated. So there is an awareness that there had to be a longer-term commitment of more troops, that's what that option would entail with some changes in its operational deployment.

Bakich: Are you aware at this point that FM [field manual] 3-24 is coming down the pike?

Feaver: Yes, we knew about Petraeus's reforms of counterinsurgency doctrine. Meghan is talking to Petraeus a lot. Of course, the Petraeus reforms were things that had already been tried in Iraq, particularly in Mosul. Kevin Bergner, who had been up in Mosul, would often talk about "the different operational concepts that you can use." We had a pretty fleshed-out thing over the summer, an idea of what a different approach might look like. Not fully detailed, but there were a couple of sticking points, which I'll get to. One of them was did we have the troops. The other of course is could we trust Maliki.

Bakich: So this is elevated in the assumptions that need to be made, the questions that are left extant—can we trust Maliki? Do we have population security focus in the U.S. military? Their basic assumption is that you're looking for the surge to—

Feaver: Not do we have population control. That wasn't the mission number one. So we have to make—

Bakich: That's what I meant.

Feaver: But one of the questions was, do we have the troops? Are they available? There was an argument that we were out of Schlitz and there were no more troops to be had.

So we're back to the Baghdad trip. On the way back, Hadley, Meghan, and I start to draft the memo he produced that was his trip report. We were wrestling with exactly these questions. We realized that the questions we went to Baghdad with were still somewhat hanging at the end. They weren't sure things. We had a little more clarity on them, but not sure things. It was going to be a bet about Maliki, a bet about a number of these features.

Unfortunately, that memo leaked to the *New York Times* and is available for anyone to read. I remember when I discovered it was in the *New York Times* I panicked because there were only three of us who had done the memo initially. I thought, *I know I didn't leak it, but I'm the junior person in this group, so I'm going to be blamed for it*. Happily the version that leaked was the one that had been sent out to the interagency FYI [for your information]. Still very close hold but there were enough there, so I think we decided it was someone from DoD who had leaked it.

In any case, we returned with those questions unresolved. Also with a determination—we had heard some encouraging signs. Hadley says, "We're going to send JD back out." I believe the sequence is right that JD went after Hadley did, but maybe JD went before Hadley. In any case, we'd gotten some encouraging words that some things were going well. We sent JD, Hadley's number two, back to Iraq to focus on the parts that we heard good things about. That was the SOF [Special Operations Forces], the hunt—the very kinetic night raids that were taking down al-Qaeda, and the Anbar awakening stuff.

JD comes back and says, "We've got some things that are working and we should reinforce

those. We've got other things that are not working and they need more troops because that's why they're not working." This is a week after we get back. It's the midterm elections. Of course Rumsfeld steps down. At the same time the President makes the decision that these secret, close-hold reviews need to be brought together now, and we need to do a formal interagency review under JD. JD launches that. That becomes a permanent Deputies Committee meeting that meets for weeks reviewing this. That part of the surge story is pretty well told.

Nelson: I assume meetings were still going on sometimes with Wehner and Gerson. Is there any sense after the election results that we might as well just forget about sending more troops to Iraq? The only thing we can do politically is just decide how to cover our losses, withdraw rapidly? Did the election send that kind of message that you had to take into account that the political climate now was war averse?

Feaver: To some. I think that was Secretary Rice's view, which you get in her memoirs. The State Department view was that we're out of Schlitz. There are no more troops and even if we had more troops, Casey was saying they don't know what to do with them, and the American people won't stand for it. Politically it is not viable.

I disagreed with all those claims. I knew that we had more troops, or you could make more troops available, because at the same time that Hadley had asked Meghan and me to do the strategy review, he had asked Bill Luti to do a resources review. Luti, who was the Senior Director for Defense Policy, was to determine if we wanted to surge, how many could we do? How many could we find?

He tasked his person to work on it, but the person who really knew how to do that kind of study—Every one but one of those people who knew how to do that study were in the Pentagon and you couldn't go there. Basically we were back-channeling or end-running the Pentagon. The other person who knew how to do that was Lisa Disbrow. So that tasker, which had been given to Bill, ended up on Lisa's desk and she was showing me that we do have five combat brigades. But I knew as far as Hadley was concerned these were two stovepipes he didn't want crossed. Unfortunately Meghan didn't find out until later that there had been a whole separate Luti study.

Now it was a painful thing because you would have to extend tours from 12 to 15 months and shorten dwell times to nine months. Lisa and I said, "This is not going to fly with the military unless you ease the personnel pressure. So we need to increase the top line. But how to increase and by how much?" I said, "Why don't you do a study of that?" This is one time I went directly to Bolten and said, "Here's the problem. If we do a surge we can do it, but the pain is going to be very great. You need to ease that pain with an increase in troops, roughly this size, but that, of course, is way above my pay grade. The Pentagon is not asking for it, not formally." This was October. I didn't know that Rumsfeld was going to be replaced. "You're not going to be able to get this past Rumsfeld. This is a real problem."

Bolten authorized us just to do the study. Found out later that he knew Rumsfeld was going to be gone and that the White House subsequently was going to authorize an increase in the top line as a sweetener to ease the pain.

Nelson: So that was the way of addressing the problem of are there enough troops. I don't think

that was an issue in the election. Iraq was under—

Feaver: The political thing. That was a huge piece, were there enough troops. The second piece was political. There was a bet about American public opinion. I knew the person who was paid to make those calls for the President was Karl Rove, no one else. I wasn't authorized to tell Karl about the Iraq review at all, but I was free to ask him, "What are your assumptions about what the public would accept?" He and I had a number of conversations about what was the political calculation of what traffic—what could the Presidency tolerate in terms of the politics, political pressure? What if we lost both chambers, then what could we do? What would be your advice to the President if no Republican House, no Republican Senate, and we're trying to tough it out in Iraq?

I had a good understanding of what the political side of the House was going to recommend to the President under different scenarios. I was confident that the State Department view was not the White House political view. Now, it might be the correct one. No one knew for sure; we were making bets about what would go on. But Karl was pretty sure about his political judgment and was also pretty sure this was how the President would call it as well. It turned out he was right. But the reason we were pushing back against the State Department view was that we thought it was driven by either inaccurate understanding of how many troops were available and an inaccurate understanding of the American public's view. Then the question was, what can we do with these troops? We thought there was a different operational concept for them from what Casey was doing.

As Condi puts it in her memoirs, when she back-channeled herself to [Robert] Odierno and heard from Odierno, "Yes, there is a different way we could use these," she said, "OK, now I get it" and she dropped her opposition. We had a meeting in Hadley's office where the State Department view was presented and we pushed back against it. "We" meaning the NSC staff and in particular me. I remember thinking, *This is another one of those times when I have tenure and if I get fired at the end of this meeting, I'll still have a job*. Meghan wasn't timid by any means, but I was an easier sacrificial lamb.

Secretary Rice was very sharp in critiquing my analysis, but I still felt that I was right. In any case, there was an understanding that things are bad enough, we have to be able to argue this stuff without much pushback. Now the question becomes we've launched a major review and Hadley wanted us to get the surge option, to elicit that from DoD so that it wasn't a White House option. Because the White House is supposed to be honest broker, not pushing anything. We could not get this Defense Department to present that as an option.

Nelson: Even after Rumsfeld was gone?

Feaver: No. The initial stuff and the JCS stuff, everything that came from them was the Casey plan.

Nelson: They're backing up their man in the field.

Feaver: We knew that their own study had presented this as an option. But when it went through the tank it got stripped from the JCS study. When the JCS formally presented, "Here is the JCS review," their private counsel colonel's review, it was just one option: Do the same thing that

you're doing. It was not the surge.

They had a number of objections for why they weren't going to do the surge. But our challenge became, can we elicit that from this interagency process. That was essentially what JD Crouch was trying to do. I subsequently learned, and this is what I covered in the *IS* article, that the President wanted this to happen without a crackup, without ramming a surge down the throats of a military that didn't want it. He had asked Hadley to find a process that would elicit this rather than force it.

Meghan and I were all, "This is not happening, we're stuck, we've got to force the issue." We're constantly trying to push that piece of it, but that's where the *IS* article makes the argument that if we had forced the issue we might have had more of a civil-military conflict than we did. In the end they did things like raise the size of the Armed Forces so as to ease some of the pressure.

Nelson: Were you confident that Congress would appropriate the money?

Feaver: No. We knew we'd have a fight on our hands. But I was confident that President Bush would fight for it and be willing to spend his political capital down to nothing. Here is where I did disagree with Rove, and of course it turned out he was right and I was wrong. But I argued inside that there was a reason for the Democrats to support this. The reason was that they knew the next President of the United States was going to be them and they were going to inherit Iraq and she [*laughter*] would not want to have Iraq as a sucking chest wound.

We knew private back-channel that she was sympathetic to the surge, or at least she had told Jack Keane that she was sympathetic to the surge. I was arguing, "Look, she's going to figure this out. She is going to want us to pay the price on our watch." There will be hemming and hawing and pounding on the table, but at the end of the day they're going to let us do this, which is what is needed to turn around Iraq so that when we hand over the Presidency to her—which everyone at that point knew was going to happen—she would get it.

Of course, it turns out I was wrong. She opposed the surge as strongly as everyone else did. What I had failed to realize was the rise of Barack Obama. She was bulletproof against attacks from Biden and [John] Edwards and all of the others who had also endorsed the original Iraq War. She then got a challenge from someone who had not, so she had to move to the left on Iraq. That's the piece I misjudged.

Karl thought I was naïve all along about what the Democrats would go along with. In any case I was wrong, they opposed it. But we were right that the President was willing to spend all his political capital, and he did and it became a very close-run thing. By this point, some of the strategic planning aspects of the office—this is May of '07—were starting to go by the wayside. I was becoming more operational partly because the Iraq issue was so crucial, maybe also because I was a short-termer. I couldn't do long-range stuff because I wasn't going to be around.

I was much more involved in the regular strategy meetings with the Chief of Staff and Leg trying to figure out how we were going to save the surge long enough to give it time. When we did the original surge strategy I had said, "Let's build in a midcourse assessment, a year from now, as a promise that we're not going to get strategy lock, we will constantly assess it." We did do that, but then that became like the deadline. Rather than the midterm, that became the final exam.

Fortunately we had built that in long enough—sorry, it was about seven months out or something—until September—so seven months or nine months, long enough for when it came July we were in very grave concern that we would lose Republicans. It had come down to one or two Republican Senators. When they bolted, we would lose it all. Our message to them was, "Wait until Petraeus and [Ryan] Crocker come in September. You don't need to do this before the recess." They wanted to do it before the recess, they didn't want to have to go back into the district and face everyone. We said, "Petraeus and Crocker are coming. You don't want to say that you pulled the plug on them before they even had a chance to tell you." Our hope was that that would just buy us six weeks. We didn't know what we could do beyond that.

It turns out that that left enough time for the Iraq facts on the ground to gradually shift and become more positive. By the time the Petraeus–Crocker thing happened there was enough of an indication that things were going well that the political moment had passed.

[BREAK]

Nelson: When you were planning this, was it part of your calculation that you needed *the* right person in Iraq to implement this strategy?

Feaver: Yes.

Nelson: Did you know who that person was? What made you sure you could get the right person?

Feaver: We talked about this as if we're relaunching Iraq. In the spring when we were talking about replacing Rumsfeld, one of the arguments we made is that the President has to do all the messaging on Iraq because Rumsfeld is toxic. Casey is not toxic, but we need a new face for the Iraq thing and the President's messaging is starting to not work. This big push in April, May doesn't move the needle at all. We needed new faces, that was one thing.

Then we probably needed a new leadership team because what we were talking about doing was the reverse of what Zal and Casey, at least in sequencing terms, had been trying. So yes, there was some discussion about the need to replace it.

One thing I want to talk about is AEI because their work was very important in a number of ways. First, of course they'd been arguing for a surge for a long time and bringing Fred in in June we absolutely wanted the President to hear that view and stimulate a dialogue: "There are a number of different ways to do this, sir, here's one of them." But then it was very helpful in the later fall when we were stuck with this "how do we elicit the surge option" from the DoD without ordering them to do the surge option, which was not how the President wanted to do it.

We saw a way of using the AEI brief as what I would call a stalking horse. Tom Donnelly, who was part of it, asked me if I wanted to come in and help work on it when they were doing their exercise in November. I decided I'd better not, better to be more arm's length so there wouldn't

be controversy. But we knew we wanted to hear the results and when we heard the results we were happy to tell other people, meaning the Pentagon, "Hey, we heard this great briefing. You guys should hear it. What do you guys think?" as a way of stimulating their responses.

If they were going to say it was wrong, OK, tell us how it is wrong. In what ways is this wrong? Are there no troops? We know there are troops. Would this not work for them? The troops being done in this way? It was a way of prodding the system to elicit that. To a certain extent it worked that way. The Pentagon was very frustrated to hear that the President was listening to this, or the White House was listening to this.

It did help nudge along a little bit the Pentagon's option-development aspect. It was important in that way. What it wasn't was the birthplace of the whole idea of the surge, which they then sold to a White House that hadn't thought of this, that said, "Why didn't we think of this? Now, great, let's implement that." That's a little bit how some of the press treatments of it go. All of the core strategic elements about the surge we had developed long before they did that study. It turned out not to be a very vital piece of the puzzle in persuading the President to change his mind. He had changed his mind before he saw that. So its role was not so much in moving the White House or persuading the White House or enlightening the White House, but it did play an important role in nudging along the Pentagon and the JCS piece of it. I think that clarification is helpful.

If it hadn't existed, we would have needed to invent something like that. Maybe what we would have done is the NSC would have had to come up with a version of it ourselves, which would not have been as good as what they came up with. I think it played an important role.

Nelson: Where did Petraeus come from, and how important was it that Petraeus was the one who took this strategy?

Feaver: He was vitally important because what he did was figure out the whole implementation. This is the part that Ricks gets right. What the President decided on and released January 10, 2007, was a strategic shift that involved changing mission priorities, increasing resources, increasing bottom-up rather than top-down so that would mean empowering the tribes. All those things were part of the surge decision. But how to actually do it, that was all Petraeus and Odierno and in particular going out into the Baghdad belt rather than staying inside the city. That was all innovations he was doing. He rejiggered it and realized he needed more helicopters and a couple of other resources.

The implementation was all his and the tweaking of it was all his. Without those innovations, tweakings, implementation, the thing wouldn't have worked. It is something of a false statement to say who is more important. Are Petraeus and Odierno the father of the surge? Well, without their changes I don't know that it would have worked, but it required the President first to decide to go down that route, and they didn't play a direct role in persuading the President.

Now, both Odierno and Petraeus were helpful in persuading various members of the team that there were senior military besides Casey who thought that there was a different way to fight this. That was crucial. There had to be, otherwise you're going to say, "Who are we going to pick to do this?" There were other generals who thought you could do it differently.

Riley: I have a question about the logic of the surge. How certain were you or what was the

consideration—because there is a limited time, right? It was going to be for a specific length of time. How certain were you that the terrorists or the adversaries wouldn't just wait this out, that this wasn't just a signal that OK, we've got a year, 18 months, or two years? We'll go to the beach for two years and then we'll pick back up and do what we're doing.

Feaver: Right. A couple of responses. One was we weren't going to put a time limit on it. Remember I talked about how we were struggling with that long-range time horizon. We didn't want the thresholds, and one of the ways Congress tried to defeat the surge was by imposing these arbitrary timelines. We knew that was a mistake and we resisted that. That's the first reason.

The second reason was we were more afraid that they would try to strangle the surge in the cradle, particularly Sadr, with a Shi'a uprising, where all of the logistics training came through Sadr territory in the south. I was more afraid of that. Then you could have imposed such high costs on the U.S. and operational setbacks before we made any progress—yes, we could have destroyed Sadr in the process, but you could have had a Tet. That was more worrisome to me than Sadr going away for two years of peace during which time we're building up a stronger Iraqi army, a stronger Iraqi state that is capable of dealing with Sadr.

Riley: There was no formal timeline but there was an understanding that this would be a buildup and then it would go back down to the existing 130,000—

Feaver: We called it the bridge. This was the bridge strategy to get us back to stand-up, stand-down. Stand-up, stand-down was the right long-term strategy for Iraq. But we needed a bridge to get back to there. That reminds me. One of my assignments was to develop contingency—game changers. Fifteen things that could go wrong.

One of the big critiques of the original invasion of Iraq was they hadn't adequately planned for the contingencies that actually arose. I said it would be fatal if knowable or anticipatable surprises happened and we said, "Oh, we hadn't expected Shi'a to rise up" or whatever. I came up with 15 game changers or potential game changers. So I tasked the interagency to work these contingency plans. This gets to the process point I made yesterday.

The interagency was incapable of doing the contingency planning. I said, "This has to be interagency contingency planning." The State Department said, "OK, we have nobody to do that, so which desk officer do you want me to take off duty? Do you want there to be no desk for Saudi Arabia for two months?" No, you have to have a Saudi Arabia desk.

The State Department said they had no capacity. MNF-I [Multi-National Force-Iraq] said, "This is what we'll do, we don't need your help, thank you very much." We're saying, "Not good enough. Heard that from CENTCOM [Central Command] in '02, '03, not good enough. We have to see these." They were holding us at arm's length. DoD had the capacity, but many of these things were diplomatic. So we got very few workable planning or analysis papers in response to those contingencies. At one point seven of them had happened and we still had none of the planning papers back.

I remember pulsing the system saying, "We need them. Look, seven of the list have already happened, and you guys are still not delivering." It just was a capacity question. The interagency

said they did not have the capacity and couldn't do it.

Bakich: What would it have taken to get them to do it?

Feaver: It would have taken Gates pounding on the table and Rice pounding on the table, and they had many other fish to fry so we didn't do it. But it was revealing.

I know I had one thing I wanted to talk about but is there any other—?

Riley: No, I think we have covered a remarkable amount of territory, so go at it.

Feaver: I want to describe one of the process things that I did to protect the office and partly to protect me from the charge of freelancing, out of control—Because I had, by the end, a fair amount of leeway, and I was free to talk to a whole lot of senior people, I had to be very careful not to give Steve the impression or the reality that I didn't want him to think or believe or discover that I was back-channeling or operating without a license.

Riley: You didn't want to provide Colin Powell's going-away—

Feaver: Exactly.

Riley: I'll have to explain that in a footnote since that was covered at lunch.

Feaver: Yes. I had weekly meetings with Hadley, so I could keep him apprised of a lot of it, but often in those meetings I had other things that I had to get done with him and it would have been a waste of time just to list "Here's what I've been doing, sir." What I did was I had weekly meetings with JD Crouch all the way through until late spring of '07 and then JD moved on.

JD was also a professor. It was about a half hour every week. Maybe 15 minutes of it was an academic seminar on whatever. He was so operational and so in the crisis mode, he liked stepping back and having more of an academic discussion, and we would do that. But the other 15 minutes were me telling him, "JD, I talked to Dan about this, I talked to Josh about that. Mike Gerson and I are working on this thing." So if any one of those ever blew up and Hadley came to me and said, "What in the world have you been doing?" I could say JD was fully apprised. Once or twice JD would say, "No, dial that down." So I'd have to pull that back.

I kept JD informed on a weekly basis of pretty much everything I did, which gave me the comfort—that plus having tenure—to range a little farther afield than other people in that office might have felt comfortable with.

Riley: There is a corollary protection there if I can. [Richard] Neustadt used to write about his concerns about hunting licenses. That you give an ambitious young White House aide a license to go out and deal with a problem, and they set up shop on their own. In this case it sounds like it might have been a particular problem because of what it could telegraph to people elsewhere in the government about what the President wanted doing. I'm particularly thinking about this in relation to your soundings about finding a new Secretary of Defense. But did you ever worry not that your cover was going to be blown, but that the very fact that you were inquiring about something, particularly as it related to the surge, would set off an alarm bell with whomever you

were talking that the White House really is up to something on this and we'd better watch out?

Feaver: Yes, and one of the first things I learned about Steve Hadley, the one fact that unlocks the code of Steve Hadley as National Security Advisor, is that he was the principal author of the [John] Tower Commission. That is probably the single most important fact about his approach to his job. That was the review of Oliver North and everything that went wrong. It was drummed into me from Steve, "You are not operational. You don't run anything," and I never did run any policies, anything operational. When I said I was being operational in late May I meant in terms of daily meetings about what the White House is going to do today, operational in that sense. I wasn't doing it that day. I was in those meetings where we decided what others were doing that day.

It was hammered into me, "You cannot do that." I never went out into the interagency to do something that hadn't been cleared with Hadley. An example of where we were very careful about this is—and I have to be careful in talking about it. We haven't mentioned this issue at all, but the issue that came up most often from the President that we weren't doing enough on wasn't war of ideas, it was Darfur. The President really was frustrated with the administration that he couldn't make progress on Darfur. He would get very angry that he was the only head of state who would bring up Darfur, no other head of state would mention it in any of his head of state calls. He would mention it even if it wasn't in his talking points that we prepared. "When you're talking to So-and-So, be sure to mention these three things." He would do those three things and then mention Darfur. He cared about it.

I picked up on this and said, "Steve, our Darfur policy is not working." He said, "You're right, go work on that." I said, "We need to have other options. We can't get the military to give us any options, so what are the options?" I was brainstorming, suggesting a variety of different kinds of options. That set off alarm bells for Steve. He said, "You work with Steve Slick," the internal NSC guy. "You can talk to Steve Slick about this and to me, but you can't go anywhere else."

As a forum shop lots of people who cared about Darfur would come in and talk to us. I could hear any ideas that they would take, but I couldn't pitch any ideas to them. I heard a lot of creative ideas, some very—I remember one very creative idea, when Blackwater [Worldwide] came in, Erik Prince, with a proposal on Darfur. As a forum shop I could be in receive mode. But Hadley was very clear about what I could do. When I was saying I had a certain amount of loose rein I meant just to talk to other people in the White House, not to go out and actually do something operational.

My point about JD is that even within that I made sure JD always knew what I had been doing so that if it came back that Hadley would say, "Why was Feaver talking to Dan?" this is why.

Bakich: Did Erik Prince pitch an idea to you directly?

Feaver: Yes. But the fact that he came was not as interesting as it sounds because I also would meet with lots of people who had all sorts of ideas. That was part of my job, to hear people. That one just triggered my memory because it was about Darfur.

Riley: Have you got a six-minute riff on Afghan review?

Feaver: I was less involved in the Afghan review. Tony Harriman, who was the Senior Director for Meghan, was doing that at the same time that Meghan and Kevin Bergner and I were doing the Iraq one. I knew about it, nothing more than the strategic judgment that I was advising them on, which was important but have to do Iraq first. Can't not do Afghanistan, but in the sequencing you have to prioritize Iraq. I don't have anything more to share on that.

Riley: It was noticeable again in doing my own exegetical reading last night that the NSVI begins as *the* central front in the War on Terror, and this line gets repeated in several places, *the* central front. It becomes *a* central front by the 2007 slides in January.

Feaver: Right.

Riley: Is that a meaningful change?

Feaver: Yes, that's a recognition that Afghanistan had gone from being not a problem to being a problem. In '05 we knew things weren't great in Afghanistan, but we didn't think the security situation was spiraling out of control. What happened was over the course of '06, [Pervez] Musharraf's challenge to [Iftikhar Muhammad] Chaudhry and the deal he cut with the tribes, which we all thought was going to be a disaster and it was a disaster, and as a result of that the security situation spirals out. That's when we said, "OK, we're going to also do Afghanistan." That's another front. You're right, the language no longer works. We were stuck with "central front" because we had said that for six years, but probably if we could have invented language at that point we would have said "an important front" or something.

Nelson: A very different kind of question. You talk about President Bush's personal qualities in a way that's very interesting. He was known for spending a lot of time talking with the families of people who had been killed or injured in the wars.

Feaver: Yes.

Nelson: Did you see the effects of that?

Feaver: Less on Bush and more on Clinton. I saw more of those effects in the Clinton administration because Clinton also met with them, and it had a paralyzing effect on him. I was staffing one of the visits of the parents of a slain member who came and challenged Clinton and said, "You had no authority. What moral authority did you have to send my son to die?" That usually doesn't happen in the Oval Office. Very angry, grieving father. So I was worried about—I was talking to Dan and others and to Steve Hadley. The President has to connect emotionally but not too much. The President has to still maintain some distance without appearing to be cold; it's a very difficult line to thread.

I think Karl told me that they got it wrong one time during the first debate in 2004 with Kerry. They arranged for the President to meet with families of slain members right before or the afternoon of the debate, and it just drained the President emotionally. He went on and did a very flat debate performance on TV. Karl said, "We know now that we have to plan his schedule such that he spends this time, but then he has to have recuperating time because it's a very emotional thing." There was sensitivity to that.

For the record, another myth I often hear out there is that the White House tried to block photographs of Dover. Never, not in the time that I was there. The idea of forbidding photographs of caskets. If such a thing was happening, if the White House was involved in such a thing it was before I got there, ’05, and everyone had changed their minds by the time I got there. I think more likely they were never involved in it. It was a Pentagon policy. The White House did not have that view that you couldn’t photograph. The White House often got blamed for message managing things that we weren’t involved in.

Riley: I always say at this point that we seldom exhaust every possible avenue of discussion, but we do a pretty good job of exhausting the person in the chair.

Feaver: I want to spend a moment thinking if there are other things. I can just imagine I’ll be in the car going, “Aah!”

Nelson: You can come back.

Riley: We’d be happy to reconvene. If you’ve got a tape recorder and you wanted to speak some words, an addendum, you can do that and we can have it transcribed. If you just wanted to sit down at the typewriter, if you see that there are some—and produce that as an addendum we’re happy to do any of those things.

Perry: You can invite us to a Duke basketball game and we can sit behind Coach K [Mike Krzyzewski].

Riley: Any of these things. And I’m happy to stick around. I don’t have trips to make, so it is fine with me to take a few extra minutes at your disposal.

Feaver: OK.

Riley: Looking back on it, what did you find to be most rewarding out of your time there and were there certain regrets that you had in leaving? After that—that’s my last question, think about—even if you want to take the topics page.

Feaver: Let me take a look at the topics page.

Riley: Sure.

Feaver: Some things I want to say and then I’ll answer your question. One is, I think that there is a place on the NSC for someone who can straddle the politics–messaging–policy thing in the way that I did. I think you could get in trouble in that thing so you have to be careful, there have to be built-in protections, but an NSC where that function is limited to the National Security Advisor only, and he is or she is the only one who is fully a White House staffer and fully an NSC staffer and fully a political appointee—he or she will embody that, he or she is the only one fully empowered to do it, but there is more to it than they can do as a single person. Their time is so drained that they need to have someone else.

I think Ben Rhodes does that and Derek Chollet for Obama, a combination of Derek Chollet, who is my successor, and Ben Rhodes, who is Michelle’s successor. I found that there was a

need for that, maybe even precisely because the critique of the Bush administration in the first term was that they had politicized national security. You can argue whether they did or not, I wasn't there so I don't know the mistakes that were made in that term. If you don't have good communication channels across what could otherwise be stovepipes, then you get a dysfunctional White House.

I think it worked well having the communication channel at my level rather than having Karl Rove sit in on PCs, on Iraq strategy review. That would have looked like a politicization. Do you know what I mean?

Nelson: Yes.

Feaver: I criticize the Obama administration for having the political people sitting in what was supposed to be a policy strategy thing. You don't want it by having the principals doing it. I think it worked to have someone at my level, which was more information coordination than driving policy.

What did I appreciate most? Of course it was a great privilege to work for the President. I appreciated working for someone I respected, who showed great strength. That was a great privilege. But it was the camaraderie of working with my team, Will, Rebekah, and then the later folks who joined us. And working closely with Mike and Pete Wehner and all of the other folks. I really miss that. I miss that much more than I miss any of the trappings or the perks.

There was a sense of common purpose and decency. Not the backstabbing and stuff that you often hear about in a bureaucratic setting. I appreciated that and I appreciated working for Hadley, who had a remarkable integrity. I almost *never* heard him take a cheap shot at anyone. He was remarkably loyal and yet not sycophantic. He wasn't saying, "Everything is fine." There was an integrity to him and a commitment to his staff that made people willing to take a bullet for him without creating a cult of personality. He did this without making himself the center of adoration.

I learned an awful lot about people and people management and office integrity from him. I really appreciated that. I had the good fortune of getting a great boss even without knowing I was getting him. I could have been stuck and I wouldn't have known it, but I got a great boss. Was that your question?

Riley: I don't know if there were any regrets.

Feaver: A number of regrets. The loss of family time was important. The policy issue that I was most sad about not being able to do anything was the fate of Christians in Iraq and Afghanistan. In raw human terms there was a lot of suffering around the world that probably was of larger portion, Darfur was certainly a frustration, but there was an issue where I wish I could have done more. We would occasionally hear about cases in Afghanistan and especially in Iraq. The most painful issues for me were when people who did the religious persecution file would come to me and say, "You've got to do something, you're in a position to do it." Will and I would say, "Yes, if we can't do it, who is going to be able to do it?" We were not able to do much. We felt trapped by the circumstances. I have a regret there.

I have a regret that I didn't push the Iraq strategy review idea more vigorously in the spring. I wonder if I had—in response to the Golden Dome if we had realized that—Of course, what we thought had happened is, as Hadley said, we stared over the precipice and then stepped back. That happened and then they went forward again. I sometimes wonder, could we have moved things along faster? I don't know. So I have a regret about that.

I regret that we didn't accomplish more on the war of ideas. I think we had the right concept, the right idea, and we just could not advance that issue. Darfur, of course, we didn't make as much progress as we should have. Those are probably the regrets that I think about.

Bakich: In neither of the things that you were proud of nor your regrets do you mention the outcome of the surge.

Feaver: I'm very grateful for the surge. I was only a small piece of it. I would give JD and Meghan more credit than me. For that matter Steve Hadley more credit than me, Brett McGurk more credit than me. It is one of those few areas where I staked out a position and turned out to be right. There are many areas where I staked out a position and turned out to be wrong, but that was one where I was right. I think that we—Meghan, me, Brett McGurk, Kevin Bergner, JD Crouch, and the West Wing people, Dan and others—worked very well as a team under pretty adverse circumstances in terms of the politics and the bureaucratic politics of it. We worked pretty well to get it done. I'm proud of that and the way we worked well together.

I interpreted his question as what are the things that you *liked* the most, not that I was proud of. I was proud that the NSS never leaked and that we delivered a document that I know was very good and at least captured the President's vision. I'm proud of the fact that a lot of people said our office could never function because it was hopelessly—"it doesn't fit well." We made it function and did so without having a bitter feud with any other directorate. Yet most of them would have said, "They didn't make us worse." Some of them maybe I helped more than others, so I'm proud of those things.

Nelson: For your successors, has the job been easier because other Directors take it as a given?

Feaver: Another thing I'm very proud of, the outreach across the aisle. That I do think was something I was able to do perhaps because of my background. It would have been harder for most other Republicans. We had a very good channel of communications with our successor in the Obama administration and talked to them, first Mary Yates and now Derek Chollet. They've been very open to let us talk to them and asked us for advice on how to structure and so on. I do think our experience helped the Obama people start not on square one but somewhere down the thing.

Nelson: It's been institutionalized.

Feaver: To a certain extent, yes. If they wanted to, they'd be well poised to take it to a new level but if, whoever comes in, if it is a Republican, I think there are now two terms' worth of experience in this office so I think we can institutionalize it, which would be good.

Riley: Thank you very much. You've done us a tremendous service by spending this much time with us. It is an incredibly rich set of discussions that will be available for people for a very long

time. It is nice to associate a face and persona with this name that all of us were familiar with for so long. So thanks for making the trip.

Feaver: My pleasure.