



GEORGE W. BUSH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

FINAL EDITED TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW 1 WITH PHILIP ZELIKOW

July 28, 2010
Charlottesville, Virginia

Participants

University of Virginia

Russell Riley, chair
Melvyn Leffler

Rhodes College

Michael Nelson

© 2019 The Rector and Visitors of the University of Virginia and the George W. Bush Foundation

Publicly released transcripts of the George W. Bush Oral History Project are freely available for noncommercial use according to the Fair Use provisions of the United States Copyright Code and International Copyright Law. Advance written permission is required for reproduction, redistribution, and extensive quotation or excerpting. Permission requests should be made to the Miller Center, P.O. Box 400406, Charlottesville, VA 22904-4406.

To cite an interview, please use the following general format: [name of interviewee] Interview, [date of interview], George W. Bush Oral History Project, Miller Center, University of Virginia

GEORGE W. BUSH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

FINAL EDITED TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW 1 WITH PHILIP ZELIKOW

July 28, 2010

Riley: This is the Philip Zelikow interview as a part of the George W. Bush Oral History Project. Thank you, Philip, for coming. We just had a brief conversation before we went on tape about the ground rules. I should note that this is only the second of the interviews that we've done as a part of this project, so we're still very green in trying to find our way through it.

Zelikow: May I ask who the first person was?

Riley: Michael Gerson, speechwriter. So we have a fairly limited knowledge base right now, but from my perspective you're the perfect person to be in this position. As a friend of our activity, you'll know how to help us along in areas where we may still be a little fuzzy.

Zelikow: OK.

Riley: Then we agreed that we would proceed at a reasonable pace to cover everything that needs to be covered, with the idea that we'll do more later if we need to.

Zelikow: There are some topics about which I have firsthand knowledge. There are a number of topics for which, although I was not a player, I had a pretty decent seat close to the field and was an above-average informed observer. I've also tried to look at some of these issues as a historian, so if there are some topics in which I did not directly participate but which puzzle you, feel free to ask me about them and I'll try at least as best I can to offer some tips for historians about places to look, kinds of materials that might help solve some of these puzzles—some of which, by the way, are things that still puzzle me.

Riley: Great. I appreciate it. You know this is not a legal proceeding, so you don't have to have firsthand knowledge of what we're talking about. There are a couple of things that I wanted to ask you at the outset. We always like to get some biography before we get into the campaign and Presidential years. There are two general biographical questions I'll throw out to let you start with. One is tracking for us how your own interest in foreign policy and foreign affairs developed from your time as a young man on. You trained as a lawyer and then moved to a doctorate in diplomatic affairs. So I'm interested in hearing something about that.

More generally, then, how it is that you come into the orbit of George W. Bush, presumably through the [George H. W.] Bush 41 network, and particularly through your relationship with Condi [Condoleezza] Rice. So that sort of frames the general subject for discussion to open with, and I'll just turn it over to you and let you run with it and my colleagues will intervene as they wish to get clarification.

Zelikow: I was interested in foreign policy issues even in school. I was just one of those young people who was an avid reader of history even going back to the *We Were There at the Alamo* sorts of books, that sort of thing. That *We Were There* series was very popular among young people 50 years ago, like all those Landmark books that they used to have. Actually, I'm not sure that the market of history books for young readers is as saturated now as it used to be then. But anyway, I was interested in history and foreign policy issues and military issues. In college my major was history; my minor was political science.

Riley: This was in Houston?

Zelikow: For my undergraduate work, I did three years at the University of Houston and then I transferred and completed my senior year and received my baccalaureate degree from the University of Redlands, which is a small college in Southern California. I transferred there principally for reasons to do with my involvement in intercollegiate debate. I was very active at the national level in intercollegiate debate. Houston had had a strong team; it was running into problems. Redlands was in a rebuilding year and recruited me to come there for my senior year. I actually debated there as a senior with a young freshman named Mark Fabiani, who would later become a staffer in the Clinton White House, helping to defend them against all of the many charges.

I came out of college and then went straight into law school back at the University of Houston without any particular intention of trying to use this to pursue a career in foreign policy, although I was very active in law review, moot court, and mock trial in law school. One of the moot court competitions in which I took part and got to nationals was the international law moot court competition. So I took courses in international law and followed that a little bit.

Then I went into practice as a criminal and civil rights and constitutional lawyer with some extraordinary case opportunities to work on in that world. I first worked as a briefing attorney in the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals, a law clerk for a judge on the high court. Texas has a system where the supreme court does civil cases and they have a supreme court for criminal cases that's different, which is the court of criminal appeals. I was a clerk for a judge on that court. Then I came back and worked for a small litigation firm in Houston run by someone who would later be a very prominent trial lawyer named David Berg. But I was restless in the practice of law.

Riley: Was this a politically active firm?

Zelikow: To some extent. David was long connected with Democrats and briefly worked in the [Jimmy] Carter White House for about five months and was involved in the amnesty for draft dodgers stuff. But the basic milieu that I was working in was a Democratic milieu, I would suppose. I tended to be representing citizens accused of crime and people whose civil rights had been violated, which aren't the traditional ways to work yourself into the Republican establishment in Houston.

Nelson: Can I take you back just a little bit?

Zelikow: Yes.

Nelson: Did you grow up in Houston?

Zelikow: I did.

Nelson: I guess it was in the middle 1960s that the older George Bush was elected to Congress from that district?

Zelikow: Right.

Nelson: And he ran for the Senate in 1970 and maybe missing a race or two—were you aware of Bush, and did you have any opinions about him?

Zelikow: I was as aware of him as an ordinary person would be in Texas. I was interested in politics. My politics—you might have called me a Scoop [Henry] Jackson Democrat to the extent that I voted for [Richard] Nixon in 1972. Not only did I vote for Carter in '76, I worked for Carter in '76, actually gave public speeches for Carter in '76. I'm trying to remember now, but I assume I voted for Carter in 1980. I'm pretty sure I did. I would have identified myself as a centrist Democrat.

In '84 I might even have voted for [Walter] Mondale, just to give you a sense—in '88 I would have regarded Bush—[Michael] Dukakis as a toss-up. I'm not sure right now who I voted for in '88. I was trying to recall. It's possible I voted for Dukakis. I might have voted for Bush. I don't think I ever voted for [Ronald] Reagan.

Nelson: What was the attraction to Carter that caused you to get actively involved in his campaign?

Zelikow: He was a New Democrat. It was a kind of fresh voice in the party that I identified with. He portrayed himself as someone who was going to be relatively strong on defense, which I thought back then was important, but also was a strong Democrat on some of the civil rights issues that I'd been spending a lot of my time on. I was not as hard over—because I'd written an article on the death penalty as a law review article that got some play and was eventually cited in the Supreme Court opinion that eventually decided this issue in the [Sandra Day] O'Connor concurrence, I had some connections with some of the larger circles like the Lawyers' Committee, NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] Legal Defense Fund. But I wasn't an ACLU [American Civil Liberties Union] member. I was still a young lawyer not very deeply into that world.

I'd worked briefly in the Civil Rights Division in the U.S. attorney's office in the Southern District of Texas, working on police brutality cases and also on appellate stuff. I loved doing both trial work and appellate work. I must have tried 10, 12 jury trials. I argued appellate cases in the Court of Criminal Appeals and in the Fifth Circuit. Indeed, I argued a very tough and pretty big First Amendment case to the very last en banc sitting of the old Fifth Circuit before they broke it into two, with 24 judges. That was probably in 1981.

I was involved in representing the Vietnamese shrimpers on the Texas Gulf Coast who were being harassed by the Klan and was a key lawyer in the litigation with the Southern Poverty Law Center that shut the Klan down in Texas with a court order from Gabrielle McDonald that was

unprecedented, that actually invented and used an old Texas law from the 19th century on paramilitary organizations and applied it in this novel context. Morris Dees, who headed the Southern Poverty Law Center, has written about this case in his memoir. Some other things.

Riley: But you said you were getting restless.

Zelikow: I was getting restless while I was practicing law. The legal discipline is intellectually powerful but confining in the ways enveloping intellectual disciplines can be, like law or engineering or Roman Catholicism. So I actually began going back to graduate school at night in my spare time while I was practicing, studying history at the University of Houston with two or three good historians there, especially a Revolutionary-era historian named James Kirby Martin who was teaching at Houston back then. I had no really clear purpose; I just was taking these graduate seminars. I found it interesting and enriching and they were tolerant, but ultimately that fired my interest in returning to graduate school and also was the source of a letter of recommendation or two when I did so.

I was curious about the possibility of working somehow in foreign policy. I had no idea how you get a job working in the foreign policy world. I'd actually never met anyone who had worked in foreign policy. Most of my students and a lot of the people I worked with are much better connected and know much more than I did. I knew these people existed because I'd seen them on television and read about them in books and somehow—there's some sort of career track that they had, but I had no idea what it was.

So I looked up in catalogs and there were schools that claimed to teach people, to prepare them for these careers. I applied to several of them. One of these schools took a gamble and admitted me. That was the Fletcher School at Tufts University. So I went to Fletcher. No scholarship money. I had just gotten married. My wife, who thought she was marrying a very promising young Houston attorney, discovered that in fact she was expected to support a starving graduate student. All this actually just before the ceremony in 1982. But she was great about it. So I went back to graduate school.

My law firm viewed this very tolerantly. They simply said, "We'll try to shove some work out to you to help you pay the bills and work your way through school. When you've got this out of your system, you come on back here and we'll give you real work to do."

Riley: You were going to get a master's degree?

Zelikow: Yes.

Riley: In what? I don't know what the master's is at Tufts.

Zelikow: It's called the Master of Arts in Law and Diplomacy. So I went to Fletcher. I did well at Fletcher. I was at the top of my class, tied actually with someone who would later become a four-star leader in the military named Jim Stavridis, who was in my class. That was working pretty well. I actually went back and tried a murder case in Houston during my Christmas break to make a little extra money. I sat in the second chair in the trial with Berg. Then I got a summer internship at IISS [International Institute for Strategic Studies] in London. I began working there

on my master's thesis, which was on the British suppression of the Arab revolt in Palestine in the 1930s, using records in the Public Record Office and in the Imperial War Museum.

Nelson: How did you choose that topic?

Zelikow: I had long been interested in the Arab-Israeli issues. My senior honors thesis at Redlands in history had been on the Egyptian-Israeli arms competition. It probably wasn't very good, but I was able to spend a lot of time reading about that subject and writing about it with not much guidance. This was a little more serious. I was also very interested in the borderline between law and national security. Clinton Rossiter once referred to this as constitutional dictatorships. I was very interested in the problem of how democracies adjust to extreme situations of internal conflict, how they try to reconcile the waging of internal war with democratic values.

I thought that was a way to leverage a little of my work in both the law and international law with my interest in some of these political-military issues in the Arab-Israeli stuff. Indeed I found it was quite helpful for that. Ultimately I developed a master's thesis written mainly under the supervision of an international law professor at Fletcher named Alfred Rubin into a dissertation proposal. It turned out at Fletcher I was actually able not only to satisfy the requirements for the master's but also to satisfy the requirements and take oral exams in four fields. So I was in an all-but-dissertation status when I left Fletcher in the spring of 1984, master's ABD, and with a dissertation topic that was going to expand the master's thesis I had already done into a broader understanding of foreign internal defense and democracies, adding the additional case study of the Americans in the Philippines during the late '40s and early '50s, the Huks [Hukbalahap] insurrection. Actually, in connection with that I went and interviewed Ed Lansdale and began doing some work on that material as well.

I was able to get a job as a teacher at the Naval Postgraduate School working for the Navy in Monterey, California. But my main goal was not to try and develop a career in academia. I had concluded while I was at Fletcher that if you were really interested in foreign policy and wanted to work on foreign policy, the best thing to do was just go to work in foreign policy. The best way I could see to do that was just to go up to the front door and ring the doorbell, which meant join the Foreign Service. So I went and applied for the Foreign Service.

I also went through what was then called the Presidential Management Intern Program. It's now I think called the Presidential Management Fellows Program. I cross-registered while at Fletcher, had been taking a lot of courses at Harvard and MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology] as well, including Bill Kaufmann's force planning classes at MIT, which were extremely useful to me. It was a powerful experience for all the cadre of students who took Bill's classes. Actually, that's when I first studied with Ernie May and Bob Blackwill and Dick Neustadt at Harvard and Joe Nye.

Riley: This was in '84, Philip?

Zelikow: Yes, this was between '82 and '84. I was offered a Presidential Management internship. I turned it down. I took the job with the Navy, which I loved, but while I was there in my first year teaching for the Navy and probably was about to actually become commissioned in

the Naval Reserves, I was offered a position in the Foreign Service and promptly accepted it. I joined the State Department in the summer of 1985.

Nelson: You said a minute ago that you decided not to go into academia, rather into active participation in foreign policy, so why did you turn down a Presidential Management internship and take the teaching position?

Zelikow: I wanted to try to go for the Foreign Service.

Nelson: And that was a better—

Zelikow: In the Presidential Management program I probably would have ended up working in the Pentagon, maybe in a place like what they used to call PA&E, Program Analysis and Evaluation, or in the Navy Department, something like that. I preferred to take my chances on the Foreign Service. Actually, I was curious to see where things went with the Navy. I liked working for the Navy and I was very interested in my dissertation and wanted to finish that. So if I had stayed at the Naval Postgraduate School for several years and completed the dissertation, who knows where that would have ended up. But what happened is the Foreign Service let me in, offered me a position as a political officer, and I grabbed it. I joined the department in the summer of '85, wife and young son in tow.

Riley: Still ABD.

Zelikow: Still ABD. Then soon went overseas, actually was pulled overseas in part by Bob Blackwill, who had become acquainted with me at Harvard. Blackwill has always had an eye out for bright young talent that he tries to keep track of. Blackwill had just been appointed the ambassador at the MBFR [Mutual and Balanced Force Reduction] negotiation in Vienna that did conventional forces in Central Europe. Blackwill essentially asked for me to come out, which is a very unusual assignment for a first-tour Foreign Service officer. But I had a very eccentric career in the Foreign Service.

I went to work for Blackwill at MBFR, and then when the negotiations weren't in session I would work at the Embassy in Vienna doing my consular duties to get that part of my requirement out of the way.

Riley: And at least once in Salzburg, if I recall.

Zelikow: Yes. Filled in for the vacationing consul general in Salzburg once or twice. At the end of 1986 Blackwill left MBFR, and MBFR itself began to change. This becomes a little important later because MBFR transformed—MBFR, which was a long-running and inconclusive negotiation transformed into what was a short-lived and extremely conclusive negotiation, which was the CFE [Conventional Forces in Europe] talks, the negotiations and the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, the Atlantic to the Urals negotiation. This turned out to be an extremely consequential arms control negotiation. Actually, I don't think scholars have fully internalized or adequately understood the significance of this politically as well as militarily, including the role it played in the collapse of the Soviet military and the turmoil in the Soviet Union. It is a long story and a digression from the main point we're getting into today.

When Blackwill left, the new ambassador was Steve Ledogar. I became the political advisor for the new CFE negotiation, developing the mandate for those talks, and then was broken out of that assignment at the end of 1987 to work at the State Department Operations Center, which is the 24-hour crisis center of the State Department. After about four or five months there I was broken out of that assignment to work on what is called the Secretariat Staff, colloquially known in the department as “the line,” basically a number of bright, mid-level officers who staff the Secretary of State. It’s the central nervous system of the department. It’s getting the paper they need, transmitting orders down, advancing the Secretary’s trips. This is Secretary [George] Shultz. That was an extraordinary—the people on the line in that second half of 1988—sitting behind me in another office was the young Nick Burns, a couple of offices behind him was John Beyrle, who is currently our Ambassador to Russia, a few other notables.

Burns and I were selected to become the staffers who would help the [James Addison III] Baker transition team. Both of us ended up getting jobs in the new administration, though I think in my case that was not the reason. I think Burns’s appointment with the transition team did help him get the job on [Robert] Zoellick’s staff in early 1989. I think Blackwill comes back into the government running European and Soviet affairs, and his first two hires to join him on the NSC [National Security Council] staff for George H. W. Bush are me and Condi Rice. I tell you this story at a little bit of length because you had asked me the question of how did you get into the orbit of the Bush people and the appointment. Nothing to do with politics and nothing to do with Texas.

In fact, when I went to the NSC staff in 1989 no one even asked me what my political affiliation was. That wasn’t the way Brent Scowcroft ran his staff. No one asked. If they had asked me, I probably would have described myself as an independent.

Nelson: What did they ask? What did they want to know?

Zelikow: Actually, the political people never talked to me. I was just detailed from the State Department to the NSC staff. The hire was blessed by Brent Scowcroft and Bob Gates. Gates was Scowcroft’s deputy and that was that.

Riley: But your Texas roots had no—

Zelikow: Nothing.

Riley: No connection with Baker or anything.

Zelikow: NSC staff jobs are political appointments, but in this case Scowcroft basically just wanted the best people. Condi’s situation was a little different, but he was told that these were very good people. So they hired them on that basis. He hired people on merit. He very strongly believed, I think, that the NSC staff is not a place where you try out rookies in the major leagues, like people who haven’t worked in government before. Let’s give them some experience by working at the White House managing large foreign policy issues, which by the way, is not at all uncommon, I’m afraid. It’s unfortunate, because of course these are often very smart people who are put in situations where they don’t even know what they don’t know.

In general that staff—there were one or two exceptions—had no rookies. Everyone who was there had prior significant executive branch experience in which you could calibrate them a little bit and knew a little bit where the light switches were and how things worked. Condi had been an intern in the Pentagon in the 1980s, so she had had some experience in government.

Nelson: But you described her as in some ways an exception. In what way was she an exception?

Zelikow: She was a little bit politically connected; people knew her. She had some political ties, and ties to Brent, but not very strong.

Leffler: She had been at Stanford when he spoke there.

Zelikow: Yes, and Brent had noticed her. She was a bit of a protégée, but there was actually a little tug-of-war to get Condi. Baker and Dennis [Ross] wanted Condi over at State. Brent said we want her, and the White House won. Then they filled out that office with several other hires—Bob Hutchings, Adrian Basora, Barry Lowenkron, who was there when I arrived and left shortly thereafter. Then I had the European security portfolio and the U.K. [United Kingdom] and Condi did the Soviet Union, both working for Blackwill until the summer of 1990 when Blackwill left government and went back to Harvard. Then there was kind of an interregnum there for a while. We didn't have much adult supervision.

By that time we had just been through some pretty big stuff and Brent and Bob Gates knew very well who we were. Then later in 1990 they brought in Dave Gompert to take Blackwill's place, but promoted Condi so she didn't really have to report through Gompert. Both of us left after the Gulf War was over in early '91. I went back to the State Department. I was about to go overseas to go to Embassy Tel Aviv. I'd lined up a good assignment there as the pol-mil [political-military] officer in Tel Aviv. Then Harvard turned my head by asking me if I'd like to consider being a professor there.

Riley: You finished your doctorate when?

Zelikow: I didn't finish my doctorate until after I'd been hired as an Assistant Professor at Harvard after the process worked out. They told me, "You can come in as a lecturer or as a tenure-track assistant professor." I said, "I'll take the assistant professor job." It was nominally more junior but I'd take my chances. Then I reactivated my ABD status at Fletcher, but instead of completing my old dissertation, I decided to write this book on German unification instead. It was a burden to do a dissertation, because still you need to write it in a way that would make it clear that this was a work of scholarship and not just retelling of war stories so to speak.

So I worked fairly hard on that dissertation, which was supervised at Fletcher by Alfred Rubin. Ernie May was on my committee, I think. I got the dissertation done and essentially the book manuscript by '93. I got my PhD probably in '93. Shortly after that the manuscript was accepted by Harvard University Press. This was before Condi got involved in the manuscript. Then I actually asked Condi if she would help make this better. "Let's work together on this and really improve it and spend some time on it in '93 and again in '94." We worked hard on it together. Harvard of course was happy with that, although she was not as well known back then. So it ended up being published with Condi as my coauthor. I think she made the book better than it would have been if I had just gone with it alone.

It was a complicating factor for tenure purposes and so on whenever you introduce a coauthor, but I thought it made a better book. I had a lot of the Russian material in translation. She not only could read the Russian sources in the original, but also it gave access to more Russian sources. Just in general she had a lot of insights and added a lot of value in a lot of different parts of it. She was very busy in her own right by then as Provost at Stanford.

I should add by this time I am a little bit more in the Bush orbit, so to speak, because I was politicized by the time I left the White House. It's worth maybe taking a minute or two on that. Because as you can tell from my background I was not far from being a card-carrying Republican. For me, I actually became a Republican and worked hard for George H. W. Bush in the '92 campaign, as hard as I could. I was really strongly influenced by the experience of the Gulf War.

Leffler: In what sense?

Zelikow: I was very involved—I wasn't at the very center of that, but I was involved a lot in some of that. I did a lot of the coalition management work for that. I was just horrified at the position that the Democratic Party and Democrats in Congress took. It's hard to remember this now, but that was an extremely close-run thing. I'll never forget it—in early January 1991, when we were going to the Senate for that vote and yes, maybe we could have gone to war without the Senate, but boy, that would have been hard. The coalition stuff we had done to that point was, I think, as fine a piece of diplomatic work as I've ever seen in my professional career. We actually put together three different coalitions. No one has really written this up.

There was a political coalition to win the UN [United Nations] resolution in November. There was a military coalition to actually field a genuine coalition force including Arab military units in the field, and a financial coalition to pay for the whole war. These had different members and different agendas and different timetables and we did all three of these coalitions successfully in order to be able to position ourselves just so. And by the way, as we get closer to the war, I become increasingly convinced that it's a good thing that he invaded Kuwait. Because the more we actually looked at Iraq and the more we began to understand about his weapons of mass destruction program, the more convinced we were. Thank goodness we're going to have a chance to attack this.

Back then we didn't know the half of it, what UNSCOM [United Nations Special Commission on Iraq] would later find. Then for us there was really the sense of a *Perils of Pauline* story as to what was going to happen in the Congress. We lost most of the Democrats in the Congress anyway, and we barely carried just enough Democrats in the Congress to win this in the Senate by five votes. I don't think we knew how that vote was going to turn out 24 hours before it was settled. It was that tense a piece of business.

To me, the fact that the Democrats were in such a neuralgic place on the use of force and America's role in the world, that with all we had done to do this in a coalition way, multilaterally, with the United Nations behind us, with really almost as clear-cut a case of international aggression as the world is likely to present, in a situation where it was just clear that this is going to decide what kind of world the post-Cold War world is going to be like, that in

that situation most of the Democrats would deliberately vote against the war, that was a potent experience for me.

Nelson: So that was your discovery that there aren't many Scoop Jackson Democrats around anymore.

Zelikow: No, not many. As I became radicalized, I also became convinced that in general Republicans I knew were smarter on political economy issues I thought than the then-prevailing Democratic orthodoxy. So I worked wholeheartedly for George H. W. Bush's reelection in '92. I was a principal drafter actually of the Republican Party platform on foreign policy at the convention that year.

Riley: Philip, let me interrupt and ask a question. I don't want to park too much on this, but I certainly want to invite Mel, if there's anything from the 41 experience that we ought to probe into, to do so. You mentioned that there were three different coalitions. Were there three different orchestrators of those coalitions, or were there—?

Zelikow: No, primarily in all three Baker, Baker, Baker, but with the different cast of supporting characters helping him do it. At the time it was very stressful, but it was also very exciting. I knew I was working with extremely capable people. I was very fortunate in my early career, as I tended to work with a cluster of really competent people who trained me well and taught me well. Because frankly—I'm very critical of this now—we don't do a good job of training people for policy work.

The academy doesn't know how to train people for policy development or policy work, including at the public policy schools.

Riley: Including the one here?

Zelikow: Well, the one here is embryonic. I chaired part of the core curriculum at the leading one in the country for five years, so I think I know this a little bit. But I'll just mention that the way people learn is the way medieval craftsmen did. They learn through apprenticeships. If you don't apprentice with a good craftsman, then you don't learn well.

I was fortunate. You kind of luck out. Actually, I lucked out in this period. I didn't know how bad things could be. My early formative years in government happened to be years in which I worked with above-average competent people in administrations that had below-average infighting. Though I had heard, when I was in the service in the Reagan years, I knew a lot about what the Reagan years had been like. People would tell me a lot about that, but I didn't have—I was in a little bit of that. Blackwill was deeply scarred by that experience because he was a [Henry] Kissinger, [Helmut] Sonnenfeldt protégé and was an expert bureaucratic knife fighter, and I probably picked up a little bit of that too.

Nelson: You mentioned that on the NSC staff there were no rookies, no people who came in from the political side. James Baker—how did he get to be such a competent, to say the least, Secretary of State?

Zelikow: Baker had been Chief of Staff for four years for Reagan and knew a lot about the foreign policy world from that and actually had tried twice, I think, to become National Security Advisor and had almost pulled it off both times, was outmaneuvered the second time and ended up settling for the Treasury Department, I think. I think that's some piece of the story. Then at Treasury he was very active in international affairs. The Treasury Secretary has a very full international agenda. Moreover, one of Baker's gifts, among several, is that Baker, like all really outstanding leaders—no, not like all of them but like some of them—recognized their weaknesses as well as their strengths, and they compensate for their weaknesses.

Baker would not tell you that he is a gifted strategist—

Leffler: He would say that he's no genius.

Zelikow: Yes, but he hired geniuses around him. These were sometimes people who were unbalanced, eccentric personalities, as geniuses usually are. Often these geniuses need adult supervision, so to speak, to be able to actually achieve their greatest potential. So when he was working for Reagan, Baker is reaching out to hire people like [Richard] Darman and later on Zoellick, [Margaret] Tutwiler, a lot of the people—Darman was a genius, by the way. Darman later as Chief of Staff in some ways needed someone to help him a little bit and to rein him in a little bit.

Riley: He would tell you he's a genius, right?

Zelikow: Actually, he might, the late Dick Darman. But Baker reached out, and he had above all Zoellick and Ross and then also Bob Kimmitt and Margaret Tutwiler and others, and then eventually, too, he began to forge relationships with some of the key Foreign Service officers whom he calibrated and felt he could really rely on and trust. But he knew how to really use people like Zoellick and Ross. In turn those people would not tell you that they were the puppet masters and Jim was just dancing at the end of their string. But also it was very much an administration that quite consciously worked as a team. There were some tough arguments on the inside, but there was a sense of mutual respect and teamwork, and a lot of this is set by the tone the manager sets.

We tend to project the personality of the President in sort of a 60-foot-high shadow character along the wall projected by these giant spotlights, and we then anthropomorphize everything that is going on in the government as "Clinton wanted" or "Bush said." But what these people are is they are the leaders of a very large, sprawling team that has many small factions and subelements inside of it. They do a lot to set the tone for the team, both in the kind of people they hire, the kind of body language and signals they send, about the way the team is going to be run, what kind of behavior is acceptable and not acceptable. That's very influential.

Bush early on—it just felt like it was a team. Bush is very generous about sharing credit. The result then is the paradox of the Bush 41 administration, that there are so many strong personalities and huge egos and they're all winners. They can all win at the same time. One doesn't have to win at the expense of others. Baker has a strong record, but no one would say that Baker completely ran over Scowcroft. That's not true. No one also would say that [Richard] Cheney was just a wallflower. So it was an administration in which actually a lot of different

strong personalities could flourish simultaneously, because you created this team environment in which that's possible. This is very rare in the higher levels of American public life.

I perhaps did not appreciate at the time that I was living in it how rare it was, which is a bit of a prelude to begin moving us forward into the Bush 43 administration.

Riley: Let me ask one question about that.

Zelikow: Sure.

Riley: To what extent—you mentioned Scowcroft, but the dynamic that you describe seems to me to be traceable as much back to him as to anybody else, because he's sort of this self-effacing person who doesn't choose to be out front, and has, at least from exterior appearances, a manageable ego. Is that a fair characterization?

Zelikow: Yes, that's very fair.

Riley: Am I giving him too much credit?

Zelikow: No, that's very fair. Then there is a sense that develops, not at the outset but I think by the end of '89 and then continuing thereafter, in which Bush and Scowcroft are almost like a single person, the two-headed Bush/Scowcroft. There is almost a sense that they can complete each other's sentences. So that Scowcroft is just understood to be able to speak for Bush. By saying that I don't mean to demean Bush, but they meshed together very well too because Scowcroft complemented certain important weaknesses that Bush had, while Bush had brought some very important strengths.

Bush 41 provided a very strong emotional compass, and for Bush 41 politics is a lot about relationships. As I've written elsewhere, these portraits that you sometimes read that the Bush 41 administration is coldly realist, like in Oliver Stone's movie, Bush 41 is like this stony realpolitik kind of guy. This so completely misunderstands George H. W. Bush. If you read his correspondence you can get a little bit of this. The repetitive uses of words like "heart" over and over is—he is not an extremely analytical person. He is not an extremely reflective person. I don't think he ever participated in the Bush 41 oral history project. Not so much because he was fiercely defensive as I think he regarded that sort of thing with a sense of unease and discomfort about being "put on the couch."

I interviewed Bush for the German unification book and that was unusual. He'll sit down with a group of people and just talk and reflect about the past and then people will download that. The memoir that he and Scowcroft wrote is in effect the Bush oral history. It's actually a quite candid memoir from the two of them. It's a very strange memoir but a very successful memoir. It's a very good glimpse into—if you look at it carefully, the way they—the voice— There are the passages that are the neutral passages that are done by the ghostwriter, and then there are these passages that are highlighted that are basically their voice. These are, in fact, long excerpts from oral history interviews.

Leffler: They are dialogues.

Zelikow: Yes, correct, and should be taken in that light, that they then reviewed their transcripts and edited it, but the voices that you see there are actually fairly authentic voices. So if you understand that, then you begin to see too how Bush and Scowcroft can complement each other so well. This then puts a heavy burden on Bob Gates to do a lot to run the machine. Gates was very much up to that task. But it also accounts for some of the problems that the Bush 41 administration begins to run into in its last year as it begins—

They're very tired. They're running out of gas. Gates leaves to become the Director of CIA [Central Intelligence Agency]. When Gates is replaced it's not at the same level. In fact, a lot of people leave. I'm not important, but other people also have left. A lot of the people in the first generation of the staff had left. In general they were not replaced by people who were quite as good. Plus Brent is tired. Those first couple of years were just incredibly busy years. I think they are among the two-year periods that are the busiest in modern American history. By '92 they were running on empty really, and they knew it.

Leffler: I'm wondering—Bush gave two, in my opinion, very interesting speeches and very thoughtful speeches after he lost the election involving the use of force in diplomacy. One in Texas at Texas A and M in December, and then almost as a reflection on that speech, another one that he gave at West Point just a few days before he left office. I don't know if you've ever read those speeches, but in my opinion they're extremely thoughtful speeches. You would have no idea who wrote those speeches?

Zelikow: I do not. I know I did not. I had no part in them and I don't remember them. I might have read them at the time but I don't remember them now.

Leffler: They're never cited. I just happened to pick up on them and I think they're very thoughtful and introspective. He doesn't really come to a terribly clear resolution, but for reasons that he explicates they seem, in my opinion, very thoughtful. In my mind it shows a pretty deep and reflective person and just triggers a—

Zelikow: I can't imagine that such speeches would not have gone through Scowcroft at some point.

Leffler: I'm sure they did.

Zelikow: At least to be reviewed. Beyond that I don't know. That's a good question and it is probably knowable. Maybe I'm too hard in saying that he's not reflective, because he would do these sessions where they would talk and go over stuff and they'd second-guess their own performance on things. They had a fairly good eye for what they'd done well and what they had not done so well. They tried—I think they did. Then they were very—but more than that—maybe not reflective in an academic, formal, intellectual style of reflection. But he did keep a diary. He was reflective in the sense of what did I feel about that? How do I feel about certain things? Noticing his feelings, recording his feelings. That's typical of the man.

Leffler: He has a little memoir that he wrote in which there are excerpts from his diaries in which he really does not appear very much as a realist. There is a lot of emotive feeling.

Zelikow: He's really not. The German unification thing is a very interesting example of this. He essentially overrules Brent on this. Now he sides with his staff, but he'd been getting discordant advice. This is before the wall comes down. Blackwill and I were pushing very hard to go all the way on this. Unbeknownst to me at the time, I didn't know how much Brent was uneasy about this advice, which we kept pushing. Blackwill may have had a better feel for this. Bush himself though—his gut, and if there was a way—was to side with our view. He effectively overruled Brent.

Brent recalls, either the September press conference in Montana or for sure when he called Johnny Apple in October of '89 and just planted Johnny Apple down to hear him say that he supported German unification as an explicit play to put that on the front page of the *New York Times* the next day to back Helmut Kohl. This is all weeks before the wall opens. By that time Scowcroft heard that, saluted, and then all the daylight between Bush and Scowcroft closes, never to appear again.

But up to that point—and then Baker, who also is getting conflicting advice, also tacks in on, “Let's go with this.” But Bush plays a key role in—you'd have trouble analyzing it too deeply. When I wrote about this in my book, for example, I asked Bush, “Talk about how you thought about Germany.” I think it's very important.

Biography and people's formative experiences—I think the histories of people and institutions are very important in understanding them. Not analogically, like in direct knowledge of what informs this decision. One of the revealing things—immediately Bush tells me this anecdote about his trip to Germany during the Euro Missile Crisis as Vice President, which I allude to in the book, and what a strong effect that trip had on him, not only in establishing Kohl as a reliable friend in his mind—Kohl had reached out to the Vice President and forged that friendship—but also how impressed he was with German democracy.

But also there was this level at which I always regarded Bush very much as a person whose views about foreign policy were very much shaped in the early postwar era. He is kind of a man of the '40s and '50s. By the way, I think Scowcroft is too, with a slightly different sense. So when we'd said all that stuff in the '40s—and, by the way, Kohl too. I always thought Kohl in his heart was a [Konrad] Adenauer man. As a young politician he campaigned for Adenauer and the slogans and philosophy of that period I think never left him and then just resurfaced when the opportunity presented itself and he could go back to that in the summer of '89.

But Bush too I think basically had internalized the nominal goal. When America said that it believed in all these things Bush just kind of believed it. See, he wasn't a Europeanist. The Europeanists knew better, because they all knew from the '70s and '80s, *Yes, we say that stuff, but we know better*. Bush had never internalized that kind of smart guy; we don't really believe all that stuff we said back in the '50s. No, Bush kind of believed it. That's very much like him.

Scowcroft was also very much a person of that era, with a significant wrinkle, as he was deeply marked by the arguments of that era from people like [George] Kennan and [Hans] Morgenthau [Jr.], which were very prominent in the 1950s, and for people who were being educated and trained in that era, and then reinforced for him a lot by his tutelage with Kissinger, which I regard as all just—but these are intellectual fashions that I think never really affected Bush in

any significant way at all, or Baker for that matter. Baker comes of age during the Korean war, also not a Europeanist.

Nelson: I want to ask you about your impressions of some people at the time who were important in the first Bush administration and later became even more important in George W. Bush's administration. So Cheney.

Zelikow: Yes, I actually conducted the Bush 41 oral history interviews with Cheney when he was CEO [chief executive officer] of Halliburton, about a 16-hour session with him going over this, which hopefully will become available someday.

At the time Cheney was regarded as a very smart, very impressive conservative Congressman from Wyoming. He had this previous White House experience, and although he was considered a very conservative Republican, he was also considered to be a very savvy, competent person. Cheney had been on the losing side of some of the big arguments we'd had in the spring of 1989 when we began making our big moves. The existence of these arguments, the scholarship on this, which is basically about passive, dilatory Bush reacting to everything that is happening in Europe, is overdrawn. I've written about this, so I won't recapitulate it. My views of this are complicated. It's not that I'm trying to put Bush at the center of European history. But neither is he playing a passive role. Partly he's not playing a passive role because he's defining his Presidency and who he is in contrast to [Mikhail] Gorbachev, but there are huge arguments that ensue in the White House that are formative for the administration in the spring of 1989, really gathering steam in April, but especially in May.

I was very close to these arguments because they involved initiatives that I was drafting. There were the big CFE moves for one, which will end up breaking that negotiation open, but they were making big concessions to the Soviets that violated all the existing orthodoxies. I won't go into all the details.

My point is in those arguments Cheney and Admiral [William] Crowe, who was then the Chairman of the JCS [Joint Chiefs of Staff], were strongly on the other side versus Baker and Scowcroft. Then Bush sided with Baker and Scowcroft. Cheney kind of reached out his little finger to say something about his attitude toward Gorbachev and Baker clobbered him. Bob Gates would actually later try to do something similar and Baker clobbered him too, almost overkill. There's always a little bit of uneasiness in the relationship between Baker and Gates. Just like when Kissinger had come in early on with his idea of how to do a modus vivendi with Gorbachev and he'd helped negotiate it and Baker clobbered that. Partly it was process, as only Baker was going to drive U.S./Soviet relations, and partly it was substance. He didn't like the substance of what Cheney and Gates were arguing. But he intervenes to settle that issue pretty affirmatively in the spring and then jumps on it a couple of times in the summer and fall just to make sure.

So Cheney has a position in those arguments, but it would be an exaggeration to say—actually in some ways Scowcroft was fairly close to Cheney's views on the U.S./Soviet issues at the time. The alliance between Baker and Scowcroft was intriguing, but Scowcroft's position is complicated about Gorbachev and is actually fairly close to Gates's position.

It was really more of an argument about hedging. Everybody knew that what Gorbachev was doing was supported by a coalition that had multiple supporters. There are all these good guys like [Alexander N.] Yakovlev. But he is also being supported by people who have a very different agenda in mind, which is: We're going to renew and come out of this a whole lot stronger. They're not sure which of these camps is going to prevail in defining Gorbachev. They ultimately decide that the real litmus test for learning the real Gorbachev is actually what is going to be his attitude on these Eastern European changes. It was those things that happened in the spring and summer of '89 that then decisively turned the Bush administration to totally backing Gorbachev. That was the key test, and boy has he been passing it. So we need to support him and we need to support him pretty unequivocally.

Also, Baker had been working with them successfully on Central America in the spring. I'm giving you a little bit of nuance here because I want to stress that this image of Cheney as this wild-eyed conservative at odds with these—Cheney was just more on the hedging side. *I'm being more cautious. I'm not sure this guy can survive, and what happens when he goes down if we've disarmed ourselves too much?* Cheney is very close to where Margaret Thatcher is. Frankly, he's very close to where George Shultz is in many ways.

These are people who believed in détente through strength. "We have a real détente now." They believed the détente in the '70s was a false détente. They believed they now had a true détente, but, "We have a true détente because we stood up to them, we were strong. They respected our strength. Then we got a real modus vivendi, not a fake one that was just an excuse for them to do what they wanted to do while we stood by." That's the way they interpreted this history. So Cheney and—so Thatcher regards what the Bush administration is doing with a lot of unease, and Thatcher of course as you know was supposed to be the big believer in Gorbachev. I'm just trying to recapture a little bit of the shadings of the time to make it clear that Cheney's conservatism doesn't brand him then in the way we're inclined to view him today retrospectively.

Then as you get into some of these issues of the use of force, Panama at the end of '89 and then above all the Gulf War, Cheney really demonstrates his mettle as a war Defense Secretary. He was a pretty good manager of the Pentagon. Actually, with [Colin] Powell he was leading the Pentagon to make very large-scale cuts in the aftermath of the Cold War. The Bush administration was already turning the machine with the notion of probably cutting a quarter of the defense spending. That's pretty much the trajectory they follow on into the early 1990s. That's slowed up some by actually the Gulf War and the invasion of Kuwait in the sense of all that forward defense stuff is now relevant in new ways.

But the very day Saddam [Hussein] invades Kuwait was the day they were going to give their speech on defense reorientation, and Cheney was part of that because Cheney at that time still believed that you had to get the deficit under control. Bush had decided politically that he was going to put a lot of chips on deficit control. See, in that respect he is very much an old-fashioned Republican and is part of the centrist Republican consensus that believed you have to do huge things to get the deficit under control. He's a [Dwight D.] Eisenhower Republican in that way, as was Scowcroft.

So Cheney was part of that and Cheney played a very constructive role in the Gulf War stuff, including big arguments on the inside in the fall of 1990 for which there is still no adequate historical account. [Norman] Schwarzkopf almost got fired. The war strategy was reinvented. They did a gigantic surge before the war where Bush decides to double the troop commitment in the Gulf and move the whole Seventh Corps out of Germany and move it to the Middle East. This is all before the war. These are decisions principally driven by the White House and the SecDef [Secretary of Defense]. This is not a bottom-up set of ideas primarily.

It is a complicated story and it turns out the key mediator in making all this work is Colin Powell and the Joint Staff, I believe.

Nelson: He's the next one I wanted to ask about, but the other widespread impression of Cheney is that he is this master at operating the subterranean levels of bureaucratic politics. Is that something that was apparent at the time, or something that developed over time while he was in that executive role?

Zelikow: At the time actually neither he nor the Pentagon were perceived as menacing bureaucratic players, partly because the menacing bureaucratic players were in the State Department. People in the Defense Department didn't hold a candle to that. It was never a close call.

Leffler: How would you define "menacing bureaucratic actors"? What does that mean?

Zelikow: I'm trying to label the image that Michael was invoking with his use of the adjective "subterranean," moles worming their way in. They're going to outmaneuver you because they're going to position their people and they're going to be bureaucratically clever in writing proposals and rigging the meetings and who participates. Of course Scowcroft was running the process, so you couldn't get away with that kind of stuff. And there weren't multiple affected camps in the Bush-Scowcroft White House like that.

I'll just say back then he and his people at the Pentagon just did not have this reputation. Paul Wolfowitz if anything was regarded as a rather ineffective bureaucratic player.

Nelson: Then Colin Powell. Your impressions of him at the time.

Zelikow: Powell at the time was regarded as an immensely capable person. He had already been the National Security Advisor and he seemed competent on the military, practical, handled himself extremely well in public, and got things done. Just very impressive. We're spending a lot of time on Bush 41, but that's not unwise. I never did an oral history for Bush 41, but it's not unwise because of course a lot of these people and relationships will carry over.

The legacies of the Gulf War interplay among these people is important. Powell was regarded as cautious about the use of force in the Gulf during the crisis. I mentioned how early in the administration Scowcroft is aligned a lot with Baker against Cheney. On the Gulf crisis Cheney is a key ally of Scowcroft from very early on. But the unhesitating decision to confront Iraqi aggression very strongly is a top-down decision driven by Bush and Scowcroft. Bush writes about this and talks about this very much with the mentality of a man of the '40s and '50s, and I think that captures it totally.

In my view, by the way, it is an axiomatic form of thinking, but I don't think it is a foolish reliance on those axioms. I believe in those circumstances. I don't fault them very much for that. But I have to recognize it as a historian as strongly axiomatic, very reminiscent in many ways of [Harry] Truman's reaction to the invasion of South Korea. The way Truman and [Dean] Acheson are almost responding neuralgically, Bush and Scowcroft are almost responding instantaneously. As you know, in the early Korea decisions, in those first days there was actually a lot of uncertainty among a number of people, especially in the Pentagon.

In this situation the constellation is a little different. Bush and Scowcroft are very clear, and then they're reinforced in this, right away, it turns out coincidentally on the first day by Thatcher. I was the staffer for those meetings so I know a little bit about that. I went out to Aspen, was on the margins of a little bit of that.

Riley: This is the "Don't go wobbly" ?

Zelikow: Yes, actually the "Don't go wobbly" stuff is later. That's in September. See, Thatcher was against relying on the UN, so was Cheney. Bush didn't agree with Thatcher on that; on that one he sides with Baker. "I will use the UN route. I will disagree with both Thatcher and Cheney on this." But early on Cheney sees this issue very much the way Bush and Scowcroft see it. Baker isn't there. [Lawrence] Eagleburger actually tends to see it that way too. Baker is cagey. It's not so much that Baker doesn't want to do it; he just doesn't respond to it as powerfully, instinctively as the others do.

Leffler: But Powell is more reserved, isn't he?

Zelikow: Powell is definitely more reserved.

Leffler: And much, you said before, scarred by the Vietnam experience?

Zelikow: I would say that and also Lebanon. Again, it is useful when you trace these people's histories, ask yourself what are the formative experiences that they would have gone through in the jobs they held. For Colin Powell, actually Lebanon is very important because of the job he held at that time. If my memory is right, he was a military assistant to [Caspar] Cap Weinberger at the time and so saw those arguments very well and had strong views, by the way, at the time about it all. So he's uneasy about it. Then he sees the President's resolve.

They start getting going on Desert Shield. Schwarzkopf develops this very limited plan that is unsatisfactory. There is a very interesting account—it's only in Baker's memoir, I believe it is omitted from Powell's memoir—of a conversation that Baker and Powell have at a key phase in this in late October of 1990, where they get together on a Sunday afternoon, Baker and Powell. This is at a key point where they're deciding how we are thinking now about expelling him from Kuwait. Is that feasible? How are we going to do that? How committed are we to doing that?

In effect what they decide is not so much that we shouldn't, but, "All right, damn it, if we're going to do that, here's the way it has to be done." You have to do it all the way. See, there's a little bit in Powell of, "I put soldiers out there for politicians and they get burned. So I'm uneasy about sticking soldiers in bad places where the political will is uncertain." Partly Powell has a

general wariness, but some of the wariness is the fear of getting in a false position and soldiers paying the price.

So in a way, for Powell the critical bargain is not so much that he's in principle opposed to the use of force, it's more, "If you want to do this, I need to see that you're prepared to do this 100 percent," and boy did he see that, without any hesitation. Then when he sees that, he sees how problematical Scowcroft's planning is. He and the Joint Staff and Tom Kelly and the J3 intervene I think to really help CENTCOM [U.S. Central Command] rewrite their plan. They take a lot of that White House energy and they work to refashion the plan to the new plan and play, I think, an absolutely vital role that has not gotten enough credit.

But politically the important thing about this, what comes out of this, is Powell and George H. W. Bush are then cemented together. Powell comes out of this very impressed with George H. W. Bush because Bush told him he was going to be committed and he backed it up all the way from Powell's point of view. That counted for a lot with Powell.

After that point I never saw a shred of daylight between them and don't really see any thereafter. Personally they remain—there's a lot of mutual loyalty there. I don't see any sense then of hard feelings, like *You weren't with me*. It wasn't really like that. I think once Powell sees that Bush and Scowcroft were going to play it this way and that they backed it up all the way, that they were going to see it through no matter what and in the right way, that was huge for him, and then of course he plays a key role in making it work and making it effective.

Cheney, interestingly, is also playing at ways to reinvent the Scowcroft plan. Particular Cheney ideas like the western excursion that he's putting forward in the fall of 1990 don't end up getting adopted. Instead Powell and the Joint Staff end up rewriting the plan with CENTCOM, not the kind of wacky stuff that OSD [Office of the Secretary of Defense] was putting together. The relationship—Powell in his memoirs writes somewhat about his relationship with Cheney as clearly one of mutual respect but also a somewhat guarded relationship.

Riley: Mel, I want to come back to you and ask if there is anything else from this period that would be useful for us to know to delve into as it helps cast a light on the later Presidency. You'll know better than Mike and I will what kinds of questions.

Leffler: Some of the significant differences in the administration actually appear as I understand it in '91, '92 as the issues developed with regard to the dissolution of the USSR [Union of Soviet Socialist Republics] over policy toward the Balkans and what you saw in particular. But you were gone by then.

Zelikow: I was.

Leffler: So you probably—

Zelikow: I heard about them second hand because by this time I've got pretty good relationships with a lot of the people and I'm staying in touch with things. Actually, from Harvard, one of the first things I started doing at Harvard was working on the problem of nuclear weapons in the former Soviet Union and was part of the founding group of cooperative denuclearization folks in '91, '92 with [Ashton] Ash Carter and Graham Allison and that crowd.

Leffler: Is it true that some of the significant differences between some of the folks around Baker—Baker of course migrates over to the White House during this period.

Zelikow: Right.

Leffler: But there are some emerging differences strongly felt between Zoellick, for example, and Wolfowitz, both over whether to support Gorbachev or [Boris] Yeltsin and subsequently whether or not to use force or become involved with the use of force in Bosnia Herzegovina.

Zelikow: I'll offer my reading of this as a hypothesis that I'll pose as a question that historians could explore. Where I would actually start the story is not with—you're right, that there is an increasing divide that is showing up on issues like this between conservatives and pragmatists that is beginning to echo of the old Reagan-era divides. My hypothesis is that the origins of this are domestic, not foreign. When Bush made the budget deal he broke with a significant fraction of his party domestically. At that point a number of conservatives in the party decided that Bush was fair game politically and that it was OK to just go ahead and attack him.

So people like Bill Safire started coming after Bush too. So Bill Safire is a constant echo of these arguments about "chicken Kiev." Bush wants to keep the Soviet Union together, that kind of argument, which is overdrawn, I believe. But I think the roots of this lie deeper, and the judgment among some conservatives that their discontent and unease with the Bush administration breaks out into the open, becomes politically acceptable to voice in '91, '92. Then the foreign policy piece of that is also legit. Then the foreign policy dissenters are also making their dissents more public. Basically, the arguments that have been inside the team are now spilling out into the public because there is a kind of license that has been given in order to attack Bush from the right within the Republican Party that I think has significant domestic roots. That's my hypothesis; I'm not sure that's right.

Then the [Patrick] Buchanan insurgency plays a part in this. In a way what's happening with [Ross] Perot, and one reason Perot is so damaging to Bush in the '92 campaign, is Perot is actually mobilizing, too, a lot of unhappy conservatives. Many of them are not people who label themselves formally as Republicans, and so the polling data on this is weird. But the dynamics of the campaign was that in effect Perot was attacking Bush from the right also. He was attacking from the right on deficit issues partly, but also, "You're a free trader and I'm against all that free trade you're doing with Mexicans."

Leffler: That's more than an attack from the right.

Zelikow: In a way it's an attack from the nativist right, and nativists in America have historically found refuge on the wings of either party but often the wings of the American right. So Perot is mobilizing the nativist right as well as some other things. But then that's also working with the Buchanan insurgency and these other things.

Mostly then what it's doing is it's hurting Bush, who is already a little bit tired as he's trying then to fend off this very energetic Democratic challenger whom he scorns and who wasn't given very high odds of success early in the campaign. It just puts Bush off. It's like he's carrying this ball and chain. It's hurting him in ways [William J.] Clinton can't hurt him. Then that opens him up for other things that Clinton can press. It just creates a dynamic in the campaign where Bush

is fending off arguments from both sides and he looks tired and weary and that ends up taking a long-term toll. They don't begin turning this around seriously until too late. They don't really recognize how serious the problem is until way too late, and that partly has to do with stuff that is very well discussed in the Bush 41 project.

I could see this because of my role in the campaign, but frankly foreign policy wasn't the big issue in the campaign. You're right that these conservative arguments of '92 foreshadow a little bit the arguments that will return later. In a way, there are a lot of disgruntled conservatives out there in the Republican ranks during these years. When Bush comes into office in '89 they don't rehire a lot of the Reagan people. Richard Perle doesn't get a job and Richard Perle's people don't get jobs. A lot of the hiring in government involves these personal factors.

If I may digress, because this is a very important point for Bush 43. Among the methodologies that can successfully be used in political history is one that ancient historians, like those of Rome, call prosopography, which is doing these collective biographies. Ronald Syme's *The Roman Revolution* is an example, or Lewis Namier, who worked on English history at the accession of George III, does collective biographical work. Often even number-crunching stats about different bio profiles. You'll notice that a lot of the stuff that journalists do that is often very effective has the feel of being group biographies—Walter Isaacson, Evan Thomas liked to do group biographies, even James Mann.

Because what these journalists are sensing is the potency and significance of these cliques, these little personal factions that in a way are throwbacks to things that you might have seen in the Whig caucus of 1770s England. They're little factions that are organized around some leading individual. They're usually patronage networks that have some ideological kinship. These things exist very much in our world. You essentially have a world of politicians. Then there is also a world of careerists. But in the middle there is a large segment of what you could call officials. These officials tend to organize themselves in these patronage networks, these factions. Then theyglom on to one or another politician.

Leffler: Would you say that a particular faction gravitated toward George W. Bush in the late '90s, '98, '99, 2000? Because he really has—or alternatively would you say he has a diverse number of foreign policy experts advising him in 1999, 2000?

Zelikow: It was very much the latter. What it felt like even then was the Reagan era all over again. The old camps are now distinct and they're eyeing each other warily, but they're very much aware of who they are.

Leffler: How would you define those camps pre-election in terms of foreign policy advice to George W. Bush? Who constituted the camps, and did they actually perceive one another as alternatives, or was there a degree of hostility, et cetera?

Riley: That's an excellent question. I'm going to intrude to allow Philip to catch his breath and to take a break. Then we'll come back and pick up with that as the bridge into the next stage.

[BREAK]

Riley: We're ready to pick up. I don't know if Mel needs to repeat the question.

Zelikow: No, the question was about—Mel is trying to develop the portrait of the emerging foreign policy factions by 1999 and 2000.

Leffler: If these were, I'm really not clear yet on whether there were.

Riley: And if I may put only one modifier on this, if there were, can you help us understand how they were evolving or emerging during the interregnum and your own positioning within the factional networks?

Zelikow: Sure. I got out of the political side after the '92 campaign. I played I think no part in the '96 campaign and really just wasn't involved in Republican Party politics. I was doing other things at Harvard, other preoccupations. I probably voted for [Robert] Dole. I didn't think Clinton had been a very good President and in the 2000 election I certainly voted for Bush over [Albert, Jr.] Gore. I actually at the time kind of disliked Gore because of some things Gore had done during the 1992 campaign that I thought were ugly. But I just really wasn't involved in Republican Party politics.

So I actually wasn't really close to these emerging factions that were beginning to surround the candidates. I just wasn't very much in that mix. I had good friends who were and I'd occasionally hear about this or that meeting. So I heard that they created kind of a "Vulcans" organization. I think in 2000 I was consulted because I had worked on platforms before. I was consulted about the Republican Party platform and may have offered some suggestions from afar, but I didn't go to the convention.

Leffler: You weren't intimately involved with Condi Rice during the '99—

Zelikow: I was not.

Leffler: —as she emerged as a key advisor.

Zelikow: No, I was not. We talked from time to time but we were on opposite coasts. We had already done our book together and I was mainly working on other things. Also I had taken on the directorship at the Miller Center in 1998 and it was very important that as Director of the Center I not participate in and not be seen to participate in partisan political activity. It wasn't formally barred; I just thought it was inconsistent with the place that the Miller Center needed to be in in order to accomplish the things that we were trying to accomplish. I didn't think we wanted to be considered a research center that had a distinctive partisan alignment.

There are some who—that's their play. I just didn't think that was the play for the Miller Center.

Leffler: Subsequently did any of the people you got to know much better talk about that period 1999-2000 as a formative one in terms of looming differences, or was that not the case?

Zelikow: I think it was a period in which lines were beginning to form again along ancient lines. Some of the people who were involved in this group were people who had known each other for a very long time, some of whom had disliked and distrusted each other for a very long time.

Leffler: For example?

Zelikow: Well, one thing you'll see, [Richard] Armitage is a volatile personality. Armitage is highly quotable and often quoted. But partly this is because he has his perfectly scathing views of his enemies in the other camps. His enemies could figure out that he felt this way about them. They tended to reciprocate. But believe me, Armitage did more than his share of lobbing grenades. And there's a little bit in Bob Blackwill—Bob Blackwill was part of the old arguments in the Reagan era. He'd been in a particular faction in those arguments. Rice was above some of that and Powell was kind of above it. Paul was not, and Armitage, and there was a little bit of tension and friction and where do we really stand on some things that was kind of latent but was simmering for some of those people.

Nelson: After Bush was elected, did you play a role in the transition?

Zelikow: I did. I had a little bit of—during the 2000 campaign, at one point or another, I had one or two conversations with Condi and at least one with Steve Hadley at one point. He asked for some advice to help them for one of the debates. I sent him a memo, but I was pretty distantly removed, like here are some ideas. I had personal opinions about some of these issues and people, but I didn't publicly take part and wasn't actively involved. After the election—

Riley: Philip, if I could interrupt—we'll come back to the after-the-election piece, but I do want to ask one question about this interregnum again, tracking off what Mel asked. That is, during the course of the '90s there is the emergence of what later on becomes more widely known as neoconservatism, this notion most specifically of a kind of big government conservatism and projection of American values abroad. Are you paying attention to that and are you in any way engaged in this debate? Or are you at conferences where this is being dealt with? I'm just trying to get a sense of—

Zelikow: Sure. I taught about foreign policy and you can track my writings during this period and the things that I'm writing about. There's a pretty voluminous record. But I was not deeply involved in those arguments. The leaders in those respective camps probably would not have regarded me as an important member of their camp, of either side. Surely Bill Kristol and his allies didn't regard me as one of their allies, but I'm not sure that folks on the other side—I just don't think I was important enough or had a strong enough coloration on issues like the Kosovo—

Leffler: I'm just curious. Who would you have defined in those days, mid-'90s, as the "other side"? Who is the "other side"?

Zelikow: I tended to still key off Brent and Condi, and basically Brent and that circle and Baker and that circle, those were my friends, and a lot of people whom I respected. I didn't really know Paul—I mean I knew Paul Wolfowitz, but I didn't really know him particularly well.

Leffler: And you think there was a looming adversarial relationship between those people in the mid and late '90s?

Zelikow: At that time not much.

Leffler: I wouldn't have thought so.

Zelikow: Actually, the defense planning guidance business, for instance, which got so much ink later and is so overblown, but at the time actually—because I was out of government. In '92 I was very much involved in, partly because I was helping draft the platform, what were the views of the party. So I kept up. I at the time did not regard it as terribly important, like some stuff that people had overwritten and then Brent reached out and slapped it down; it was not a big deal. It actually wasn't all that terrible. It was some folks in a bit of a hothouse who were cultivating some orchids that wouldn't survive in nature. Then they got exposed to a little bit of natural climate and immediately withered. But it wasn't more significant than that. It wasn't an important argument. The party basically was pretty united over the fact that Clinton was feckless, that whatever you thought about foreign policy you could agree that Clinton was doing it badly.

There was an interesting argument in the party about whether to intervene in Bosnia, but it had not yet become a real cleavage point in the party. Dole could paper that over pretty well. In general, however you thought about intervention, the way they're doing the intervention is the worst of all the possible choices. Either do it competently or don't do it, but to do it incrementally and incompetently, that's the worst thing you could do. Everyone was united on that. So in the mid-'90s not big issues.

By the time you get into the issues on Kosovo and also by the time that it looks like you actually might retake the White House, then partly there is more tension, but partly I think some of the tension was less over substantive issues and more just jockeying for factional, jockeying for prospective power and who was going to be more important in writing this or doing that.

Leffler: Would you use the term “factional power” because that implies that people thought of themselves as constituting clear factions, or was it lobbying for simply personal—

Zelikow: Well, both. The factions weren't very clearly—

Leffler: Let me ask you this, for example. Do you think Condi Rice saw herself as representing a faction that was opposed to or in contrast to, let's say, Wolfowitz?

Zelikow: Not strongly and again, not with respect to Wolfowitz in particular yet. Or maybe ever. In a way it was just more—to the extent there were differences they were differences that were more interpersonal. You respected certain people because you used to respect them as competent. More like that. The Kosovo issues weren't really dividing things and the kinds of issues that Condi and Steve, Condi helping the President a lot, Steve increasingly helping the Vice President a lot, along with some other people—the Vice President nominee and then elect.

Condi and Steve's relationship began to grow closer during the campaign; that's an important development. They were always well acquainted, but during the campaign the two of them become close and become a team, the team in a way that is very important later and that really

hadn't happened until '99, 2000 in that kind of distinctive way. Powell is kind of above it all. Then most of these other things are kind of—interpersonal tensions, nascent wariness, some dislike—but not a marked ideological cleavage.

After the election, Condi and Steve contacted me. I was following, of course, all the Florida mess. I did have opinions about that, but I didn't make them public. By the way, my opinions were very much that I tended to take the Bush camp side of those arguments on the legal issues. But there were plenty of lawyers on both sides of this argument. I don't need to repeat my views on it. But Bob Zoellick was involved in helping Baker on the legal work and I was very simpatico with the legal efforts that Baker and Zoellick were trying to orchestrate in Florida, but I wasn't in Florida and playing a party role in any of this. It was obviously a gripping story and I was following it carefully.

Then Condi and Steve asked me if I would help them with the transition for the NSC staff. In effect Condi was going to be the National Security Advisor. That was announced right away, and on her behalf Steve and I would run the transition team along with a few other people, mainly people from the campaign.

Riley: Your brief was policy, personnel, or both?

Zelikow: Both. But that effort didn't really get itself organized and in gear until very late in the game because of the Florida imbroglio, and therefore I didn't start work on that until shortly before Christmas, like the middle of December. Literally just didn't even start working. I thought a little about it.

Leffler: This is just the transition team for the NSC, right?

Zelikow: Right.

Leffler: So tell us about it. What did it do?

Zelikow: You have your offices in the transition team area and it did several things. Number one, try to think through issues and agenda items that might confront the administration in its first months and put those on paper so that people could look at that and think about it. Two, think about action requirements that are definitely coming your way. What choices you're going to have to make about trips early on. Three, organization of the staff itself. So one of the jobs that I undertook was working with [Samuel] Sandy Berger. Don Kerrick, who was Sandy's deputy, was doing debriefs, out-briefs of all the existing NSC staff officers. Then I systematically, by myself in most cases, would simply meet with people from the office. "Tell me about your office. What are you doing? What do you feel about your portfolio? What are some things that we need to know?" Just do that for every single office. That would also give you a portrait of what they think is their big pending business and also just some of the staffing issues.

Then there was nitty-gritty administration stuff like, "How large should this NSC staff be, how much money do we have, what people do you want to be sure to let go, what people do you want to keep on, what people already tell you they're leaving? Do you plan to leave? Do you want to stay?" Just do that kind of inventory for the whole staff. In the case of Dick Clarke and his large office, Steve Hadley joined me for that debrief.

Riley: Was that common?

Zelikow: No. We knew that terrorism issues were important and that that office was unusual. Both Steve and I had known Dick going back a long way and he is unusual and we knew that.

Leffler: He's unusual?

Zelikow: Clarke, yes.

Nelson: What do you mean by unusual?

Zelikow: Dick's personal history—again, you unpack a lot of context that everybody involved knows and takes for granted, but which outsiders don't know at all. Dick Clarke came to work in the federal government during the Reagan years. He came to work as a career civil servant. He is in a very interesting group of young civil servants who come in around the same entering cadre as Arnold Kanter, a couple of other people. Bob Blackwill is in the same bureau, Rick [Burt] is the Assistant Secretary of that political-military affairs bureau at the time, and then I got to know Dick later more when I was on the NSC staff in Bush 41, but I'd heard about him before then because even then he was a formidable bureaucratic player.

He had become the Assistant Secretary of State for pol-mil [political-military] affairs under Baker. Then in the Bush 41 period he got in some trouble with the Hill. He could not stay in a Senate-confirmable job, so he was moved over to the White House and they found a job for him on the NSC staff. But he had been very effective and administratively able during some of the wars and some of the coalition issues. He also has a faction of people who worked with him for many years in a variety of different capacities. He has almost an orbit of his own that he has developed over the years. He actually had been one of the holdovers from the Bush 41 NSC staff who then stayed into the Clinton years and very early on established himself with the Clinton people and then had been there for eight years.

By the time we're debriefing him, he is the longest-serving member of the NSC staff. He'd been at the NSC staff at this point for at least nine years. That is extraordinary. His office is the largest office in the NSC staff. It does things that everyone else on the staff would refer to as "whatever they're doing over there." They're clearly doing a lot of stuff for which there is virtually no paper record kept at all. A lot of it is clearly very highly classified. So obviously important, obviously sensitive, very difficult to understand.

Leffler: No paperwork, or just very highly classified?

Zelikow: I did not fully grasp this at the time. I would later discover that actually no paper record at all, literally. He ran what was then called an "un-group," a group whose existence is not openly acknowledged, that was kind of a deputy-level group. That group kept no meeting records. I mean, there were no briefing memos, no records of what was decided. That meant if you wanted to know what was on the agenda, you asked Dick Clarke. If you wanted to know what had been decided, you asked Dick Clarke.

So the institutional memory of American counterterrorism policy was Dick Clarke, in his head and through his office and his computer. If you think about this for a while and reflect—this has

very large strengths and it has very large weaknesses in the management of a big government when you do things this way. There are acute trade-offs. I did not at the time fully understand all of this. At the time I did not have the top-secret code-word clearances that were required for this particular set of business. These were clearances that involved the covert action compartment, which I did not have. Hadley would get those clearances and the follow-on discussions on those issues would be with Hadley, not with me. But I was present at the initial debrief of him in his office where he went over these issues.

Leffler: Getting down to the larger issue of the transition team, did the transition team write a general memo at the end of it? Did you wrap up and present things in a series of memos?

Zelikow: Yes, what I would do is I would write memcons [memoranda of conversations] for summarizing a lot of my meetings with these different offices. There is a document where I wrote up the meeting with Dick Clarke for Condi to read. Basically, “Here’s what I’m learning, Condi,” without my verbally debriefing. She’d just read stuff.

Leffler: Thinking about it in terms of substantive issues, organizational issues, personnel issues, what were the recommendations of the transition team and what were the consequences?

Zelikow: On substance we made a list of what we thought were the highest priority issues.

Leffler: Which were?

Zelikow: Actually, I thought I still had a copy of this because it was not a classified document, it was a transition team paper. I can’t lay my hands on it but I gave it to the 9/11 Commission staff. At the time they were looking at this I recused myself from this part of the investigation and then turned over to them all the records in my possession on it. I had this document that—by the way, they were very interested in the fact that at the time we had terrorism in the top ten. There was a list of eight or ten top issues, ranging—everything: regions, economy, everything, and terrorism. The danger of a major terrorism attack was up there as one of those. But they weren’t so much in clear rank order. It was, “Here are the most important issues.”

Leffler: And what were they?

Zelikow: For sure terrorism would have been on there. I would have made sure that readiness for another major financial crisis would have been on there, because remember, they had just come through a series of fairly serious financial crises in the late 1990s, so you had to be wary that maybe we’re going to get another in this series, maybe we’re not out of the woods yet. Iraq would have been on the list. Because one of the things you learned right away is that there are ongoing combat operations. So that’s a place where in a very low-grade way we were actually at war. You get that right away. Because the public is not reading this, but the White House, the President, is being briefed every day on combat operations. So it gets your attention. That’s something you’re hearing about every morning. They’re shooting at us.

So that’s naturally—also the general belief on Iraq that we were told. I don’t remember, maybe I did debrief Ken Pollack, I probably might have, I actually don’t remember it now. Maybe I didn’t. But certainly would have been told what you can read in Ken Pollack’s book, in *The Threatening Storm*, in effect a memoir of Pollack’s service on the NSC staff during this period.

Actually, he was a carryover. He stayed on the staff at least six months into the new administration. He basically had a very strong view about Iraq, which you can gather from a lot of things like [Richard] Butler's memoir, which was published in 2000. Butler portrayed this as Munich all over again. It's happening right now before our eyes. So we got that. OK.

So the Iraq situation is falling apart. It has been falling apart for at least two to three years, and we're going to have to fix that somehow, we don't know how. But it's not in a stable equilibrium; it's in a bad place. You've got to do something. But that was very much the conventional wisdom about Iraq that was broadly held among people who followed Iraq at the time. It wouldn't have been any more than that, but it definitely would have been on the list.

Arab/Israeli, Palestinian stuff would have been up there because the intifada had just exploded again, and the Taba deal they were trying to do. That was very much alive. North Korea would have been on the list. I had been exercised about North Korea personally for a long time and worked on it actually in the Clinton Pentagon in 1993. That's another story we didn't get into.

Leffler: When you say North Korea are you meaning in particular the nuclear—?

Zelikow: Yes, the North Korea nuclear issues. Because there was some pending effort and business, and in general the new administration did not think that Madeleine Albright's trip to Pyongyang had been a very good or effective thing and was very skeptical of the bilateral agreements that had been struck with the United States and North Korea in the early '90s. Anyway, North Korea would have been on the list. Also Russia and the nuclear arms control agenda with Russia, both offensive reductions and missile defense would definitely also have been on the list.

This was a very big thing for Rice, and especially Hadley, that they had during the campaign—we're going to make a big move. The Citadel speech, actually they made speeches during the campaign talking a lot about this. If you had asked them early on what is one of the things where we're going to make a big, positive diplomatic move early on, it would have been this U.S./Russia agenda and the combination of very sharp offensive missile reductions with—and an agreement that we're both going to pursue missile defense. They have a long argument about that and why that's important and good.

I didn't disagree with that, but I didn't follow that very closely. Actually, I did follow the terrorism some. I had just fairly recently been one of the cochairs of a study group on catastrophic terrorism along with Ash Carter and John Deutch. By the way, Bob Gates had been in this study group—a number of people were in the study group that involved people at both Harvard and Stanford—and published a pretty high-profile article entitled "Catastrophic Terrorism" that was pretty alarmist, frankly, and had come out at the end of 1998. We had the World Trade Center scenario and it made a pretty strong pitch of why we really needed to be much more energized about this problem now, before something happened, than later. So I was following those issues some.

I must say, knowing what I know now, I probably understood only a fraction of what the U.S. government then knew about this problem. Because so much of what we were doing and what we knew was secret and was classified in ways that I didn't have access to.

Riley: Philip, Mel has asked you about issues. There are two other things—

Zelikow: Yes, about the organizations—

Riley: Structure and personnel.

Zelikow: Actually, I pretty well covered a lot of the major topics. There are probably one or two others that I'm forgetting. Mexico actually would have been on the list. Bush wanted to do something with Mexico right off the bat at the time.

Leffler: China?

Zelikow: Less so. In general they were interested in patching up relations with the great powers in the belief and hope that we were actually entering a period in which general great power cooperation is a genuine possibility and is something to be sought.

Leffler: Who would the great powers have been?

Zelikow: They would have been seen as the United States, Europe variously defined, Russia, China.

Leffler: Not Japan?

Zelikow: Not Japan. Depending on who you ask. Armitage would have said Japan and might have put Japan ahead of China, and I probably should have said Japan, because Wolfowitz would have said Japan too from a different perspective. Probably at the time actually I would have said Japan. I'm thinking with a little too much hindsight.

Leffler: On substantive issues, let me just finish this up. Would there have been a focus in this transition team on issues of democratization? One question—issues of opening and fostering more open and fluid capital and commercial markets?

Zelikow: Those are very good questions. The first question on democratization, no. The mantra out of the campaign is the U.S. has been doing too much nation building and we've been using the military too much for it. So to the extent there was an agenda having to do with democratization, it was a negative agenda.

Riley: Because it had been Clinton's agenda? You nodded yes.

Leffler: I'd like to just add as an aside I don't think nation building and democratization are necessarily the same.

Zelikow: I completely agree with you about that. I'm saying that they didn't even see it as an issue category.

Leffler: OK, fine.

Zelikow: If you had asked about democratization they might have answered by sliding it into the familiar issue category of nation building—the then-familiar category. It wasn't prominently even on the agenda in that way.

Leffler: And trade, capital markets.

Zelikow: Trade was a big deal. Trade was a very important issue. In addition to the financial there was a sense that—this incoming group was appalled by what had happened in Seattle and by the collapse of the WTO [World Trade Organization] negotiations and felt very strongly that this was a bad thing. This is one area where Rice and Zoellick and others really could agree. They agreed with Clinton that globalization is the emerging great phenomenon of world politics in our time and that a central challenge for us is how do you adapt to globalization. Then they felt very strongly that the United States needed to adapt to that actually by having a really strong positive agenda for the open world economy. That therefore meant that letting trade negotiations collapse, letting the multilateral trade system wither—actually, there was grudging respect and no clear position on what had been done on the financial side. But on the trade side there was a very clear point of view. So when Zoellick gets the USTR [United States Trade Representative] job, Zoellick is given a very broad writ and a lot of autonomy to go, and boy, he then does a lot.

Leffler: How early did Zoellick get that job?

Zelikow: It was clear he was going to be USTR pretty early on, during the transition, because he wasn't going to be Treasury and he—

Leffler: So did your transition team also recommend organizational changes?

Zelikow: We did.

Riley: Let me come back and follow up on your question about issues with two others that I think I know the answer to, but I want to ask them anyway.

Zelikow: Sure.

Riley: Climate change.

Zelikow: Probably not on that list. Folks had followed the Rio Treaty issues and the Kyoto stuff, Rio even going back to their period and then the more recent Kyoto stuff. They had noticed that Kyoto couldn't get more than a vote in the Senate, one vote. I think it got one, maybe it got zero.

Leffler: It got zero votes.

Zelikow: So Kyoto was dead. The issue then was OK, what do you do going past Kyoto? I would get involved in climate change, I would kibitz on climate change myself a little later in 2001, but I don't remember that I did anything about it in the transition.

Riley: OK, and international organizations or—

Zelikow: Not as an issues category.

Riley: Fine, now on to the structural questions.

Zelikow: On the NSC staff, generally there was a decision that it needed to get smaller. This is a long-standing hobbyhorse of mine. I won't belabor it at great length but I believe that the NSC staff is actually more effective when it is smaller. In some ways—read Matt Dickinson's *Bitter Harvest* to understand why. It's a long story, but the bottom line is I was doing everything I could to make it smaller. The best I could do was to cut it by about a third.

Leffler: And how large would you say—

Zelikow: And we were appalled by how large it was then. I'm trying to remember what the numbers were. Probably the numbers were, in professional staff somewhere in the hundred to 150 range.

Leffler: It had gotten over a hundred.

Zelikow: Yes.

Riley: That includes detailees?

Zelikow: Yes, it's actually substantially detailees. They don't have the money for a whole lot of direct hires. Almost at any point in time the NSC staff is made up of a majority of detailees. Maybe this has changed under the [Barack] Obama administration. But it is mostly detailees, which are still quasi-political hires. I was a detailee when I was on the NSC staff at the outset of the Bush 41 administration.

Leffler: Other than making it smaller, were there things that you and Steve Hadley proposed in terms of reorganization?

Nelson: Back to Clarke?

Zelikow: At the time I didn't perceive that there were a lot of other things beyond that. It was all pretty much just blocking and tackling and how to get it smaller and what to do about particular offices. There were some particular things about maybe consolidate this or that office, a few things. I just don't even remember the details anymore. I remember the business with Clarke because that came up much later as an issue. So I had to exhume pretty thoroughly my views about all of this. The situation is interesting and ironic and the perspectives on this are also interesting.

The fundamental issue for Rice was whether to keep Clarke. That was the fundamental issue. Clarke was clearly—Clarke and the way he ran his office was an unusual thing in the NSC staff. He's been there longer than anyone. He had a little bureaucratic empire in the NSC staff and that was run in a highly unusual way that was very dependent on him personally. She heard a lot of hard stuff about Clarke. Clarke was very unpopular in the Clinton administration.

Since this is for history, I think I can disclose this. Madeleine Albright told Condi Rice during the transition that Richard Clarke was the most dangerous man in the United States government.

Leffler: Because?

Zelikow: She may deny that she said it. I didn't hear it, but I don't think Condi would have made it up.

Leffler: What would she have had in mind when she said that?

Zelikow: Because he was running a lot of stuff, including a lot of paramilitary stuff that no one understood and knew about and had no paper record, which if you're at the State Department is a little scary.

Leffler: He couldn't—

Zelikow: He literally would run meetings where people could not take away the papers that had been handed out. If they took notes the notes were destroyed and they could not leave with them. Jim Steinberg, when I asked him about this later, told me that he had no notes from all those meetings he attended. Every note he took at those meetings was destroyed. Yet this is a group that is involved in lots of issues and arguments having to do with military strikes, the development of new kinds of weapon systems, and other things. The State Department in general thought that he was a rogue. He wasn't answerable to them; he wasn't answerable to an ordinary system.

Janet Reno had tried to get him fired. Bill Cohen had tried to get him fired. Sandy Berger I think once told me, "If I had a nickel for every time one of my colleagues asked to have Dick Clarke fired I'd be a rich man." We heard this. That's my point. In the transition we heard this from a lot of people. So she then makes the decision to keep Clarke. That was a big decision for her.

Riley: On what grounds does she decide to do this?

Zelikow: She thought that the terrorism issues—she can tell you better than I can and she testified to some of this before the 9/11 Commission both privately and publicly. But my own take on it at the time was that she and—I don't know what she and Hadley talked about privately. I was asked to look at possible replacements, who could replace Clarke, and I looked at some different names.

Riley: Can you share any of those with us?

Zelikow: Wayne Downing was probably on my list then, there may have been a couple of other people I thought of. At the time I don't think I took a particular stand on whether to keep Clarke or not. At the time I was kind of ambivalent about it. I've said some hard things about him in some ways, but he's also a very capable bureaucratic player. He's very competent and he knows a lot and he cared passionately about this issue set. So it is actually a tough problem for her. I didn't have a strong—I don't think I had a passionate view one way or the other about it.

I think she just looked at it and decided that on that particular front they wanted continuity. Maybe someone else had talked to her about this, maybe [George] Tenet had said something. I don't know. Maybe the Vice President had a view about this too. But my point is, keeping him was a significant and very much not an automatic decision.

Riley: Right. Were there any structural changes recommended to make this a more manageable proposition?

Zelikow: No, actually we left his office alone. The famous issue of the demotion is a puzzling issue and in part may have been a misunderstanding. He believed that we recommended that he be demoted. I have to explain this a little bit, go into the detail. One of the things I also did is I drafted the organizing document for the interagency process and National Security Presidential Directive 1, NSPD-1. I drafted that document and then worked with the various stakeholders to make sure they were happy with the way they were described in that document.

In that document you have to decide what rank is Dick Clarke in the NSC staff. Well, he's a Special Assistant to the President. That was his rank. Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director. So what we did is we basically just set up the standard Principals Committee, Deputies Committee. In that set up Clarke is not a deputy. He just doesn't have that rank. We actually looked at the relevant Clinton-era document that described Clarke's role in the relevant committees that he ran, and also he is not a deputy in those documents.

What I did not know then but discovered later is that actually there had been a big fight over that document in the Clinton administration, that Clarke had wanted to be listed basically as a member of the Principals Committee and as a deputy and that Janet Reno in particular had fought back against that and said no and the White House had given in and had written the document. I think maybe it was PDD 62 [Presidential Decision Directive] or PDD 63, had written the document in a way that did not make Clarke a deputy, but then in practice did it that way. So they basically managed their problem in the administration by not writing the Presidential directive in a way that offended the other principals but then they in practice let Clarke play that role. But what I'm doing in the transition is I'm reviewing the documents and I'm seeing here's the way it was nominally set up. So it just seemed like—but it was not—it would have been so unusual to make a senior director a formal member of a Principals Committee. In other words, he wasn't treated any differently from any other senior director on the staff.

Riley: But what you're saying, Philip—

Zelikow: We were normalizing a system that we didn't really quite understand how odd it was at the time. I didn't understand how odd it was.

Riley: So you—

Zelikow: Clarke saw this as a de facto demotion and I didn't understand that. Now if Clarke had come in and said, "You don't understand. I am the deputy for these issues and this means I really report to Condi Rice on my issues, not to Steve Hadley." If he had made that argument he would have lost that argument in a nanosecond. Knowing those people, there is no way that Condi would have derogated Steve Hadley's authority. Dick had a relationship with Sandy Berger that went back to when Sandy was a deputy. Then when Sandy became the principal, Dick effectively reported to Sandy and bypassed Don Kerrick and bypassed Jim Steinberg before him. And by the way, neither Steinberg nor Kerrick was very happy about that, but they had sort of accepted this was the way things worked, and then they played more or less in a collateral way with Dick.

The Rice/Hadley setup is a very structured, organized, very much paper—Steve Hadley is a very methodical guy, as you will see when you interview him. The notion that you're kind of running an ad hoc process with different people reporting in different ways, that's not the kind of ship they ran. So Dick would report to the Deputies Committee the same way everybody else did and Steve would chair the Deputies Committee and everything would go through the Deputies Committee.

Leffler: Is it clear during the transition process that Steve Hadley would become the deputy?

Zelikow: It was.

Leffler: So that was definitely clear.

Zelikow: Yes. I think there may be something somewhere that speculated that I had hoped to become the deputy; this is not true. I never had any such thought. It was obvious to me, even from right after the election, that it was Condi and Steve. And then in their interactions with me it was very much that way. Sometimes Steve would meet with me—

Leffler: Were there any key personnel decisions that your transition team recommended?

Riley: Let me hold off on that, Mel, and let's go back to structure, because we only dealt with the Clarke piece. Were there other structural—

Nelson: I have one more question along that line.

Riley: On the Clarke piece?

Nelson: Yes, that is, given your particular interest in catastrophic terrorism, that article you wrote was unusual in drawing attention in that way. How did you think that in this new administration concerns about terrorism would be properly expressed and averted?

Zelikow: The same way that concerns about Iraq and North Korea nuclear and all other dire and urgent issues would be thought about and heard. You'd have a process. The people who run those issues bring them to the attention of their betters.

You see, again, what I don't think I really understood very well was that Clarke's group in the Clinton period had effectively become a Deputies Committee of its own. So you have a Deputies Committee that Don Kerrick or Jim Steinberg is running, then there is another Deputies Committee that is actually chaired by Dick Clarke, not by the deputy. But that wouldn't happen. They were going to go back and if they had asked me I would have urged them to go back. We all expected we were going to go back to the old Scowcroft-Gates model, which we were effectively rehabilitating. Other structural things we did.

We found a lot of different—there are a lot of ad hoc officials, many special envoys with all kinds of reporting lines, and we tried to get rid of as many of them as we could. We regularized—the way I would think of it, the Ambassador to the UN is an ambassador to the UN, it's not like a Cabinet member. That doesn't say anything about the UN. To me that was always

an anomaly done for political purposes. That's your ambassador to a particularly important multilateral organization. That's the normal reporting chain, like a lot of your ambassadors.

I pressed and got Treasury in as a full member from the start of the NSC. I had actually worked on economic issues, on economic policy making. I took an interest in that. I wanted to mainstream Treasury in the NSC. That was actually in NSPD 1 from the start. Then the dual hatting of one of the deputies also for international economics, how to handle international economics, was something I spent some time on in the transition.

Riley: But you kept the double hatting?

Zelikow: Yes. There was an issue as to what to do about the NEC [National Economic Council] and what to think about the NEC model that the Clinton people had created. In effect we kept the NEC but tried to strengthen the double hatting, learning some lessons that the Clinton people had learned and imparted to me and others, then worked on who should be members of what groups.

One of the things that came up, and there are records of this, the Vice President's office got their draft of NSPD 1 and basically wrote the Vice President's office in in a big way in everything. OK. Condi is—my betters—clearly this is a matter being worked at more senior levels. There was also an important issue that came up in this process. At the time it seemed important. Actually, I think it was important.

Let me just explain the issue to you. The Vice President made a play to become the chairman of the Principals Committee instead of the National Security Advisor. That to me would be a big deal.

Riley: After your draft is distributed?

Zelikow: Right. What happened is I'd do these drafts, so I gave my draft to David Addington, who was representing the Vice President's interests. He would glower at me and take it away and return it to me later. In this case he returned to me, in writing, suggested changes signed by Dick Cheney, his signature on the page to let me know these are not coming from David Addington. So that included this one. Now I mentioned this because—and I immediately go to Condi and to Steve. Even in the transition they were both very worried about the role of the Vice President and the role of the Vice President's office, because they could see that this was creating a new power center.

By the way, partly juxtaposing against Condi, but more importantly against Andy Card and the Chief of Staff, because in effect what was happening was the Vice President was becoming the substantive Chief of Staff.

Riley: Across the board or only—

Zelikow: Yes, because in my view, one of the most important substantive jobs of the Chief of Staff is legislative management. It is the Chief of Staff who manages the President's agenda on Capitol Hill, which is the core of the President's domestic policy agenda. It seemed to me that the Vice President was setting himself up to actually be the President's Chief of Staff for legislative management. By the way, I believe the President and the Vice President played this

role until 9/11. I believe this changes radically after 9/11. That's partly a hypothesis and I'm not confident with others—

Riley: We'll explore that later.

Zelikow: But it certainly would affect Condi if he is playing this kind of role. It's a very awkward thing interpersonally, politically, but also constitutionally, because the Vice President is a constitutional officer. He is not another bureaucratic player, as he would be the first to explain. That's important.

Nelson: Because he can't be fired.

Zelikow: Correct, and because it is a different kind of meeting.

I took this issue of the VP [Vice President] chairing the Principals Committee to Steve I think directly and then maybe to Condi. Steve basically said, "I'll work this." In effect the Vice President withdrew. There are different stories. I don't know exactly what happened. The story that [Irve Lewis] Scooter [Libby] has told me about this is that—because I asked Scooter about this last year after a conference on the margins. Scooter said, "Oh no, the Vice President didn't ever really want that. That's Addington." Addington wrote that in and he gave a bunch of changes and Cheney just signed off on it to lend it suitable gravitas. Maybe that's right. I don't know. All I know is what I got and I know that Steve Hadley had to go in with someone, maybe Scooter, maybe even the Vice President, and the tone I got was more of do you really want to do this, because in effect—I don't know if this was said, but if he wanted to do this, this was going to go to the President.

If it went to the President—you've got to think about this for a moment. It's foreseeable that it will go to the President. Only one of two things will happen if it goes to the President. The Vice President loses or Condi loses. If Condi loses, Condi maybe resigns before she has even taken office. Would you actually roll that kind of hand grenade into your administration during the transition unless you felt pretty damn strongly about it? To do something like that in the transition requires at a minimum a certain amount of moxie because there is a relationship between the President and Condi Rice. In other words, the thinking that would have been behind a suggestion like that, the risks that you're willing to take, the crockery you're willing to break, told me a little bit.

Maybe the real story is just more benign, which is Addington did it. Cheney didn't really understand what Addington had done. Once Hadley said, "Look at this, oh no, no, no." If that is true it is actually not as interesting a story as it might be. But at the time, for a little while, that was interesting. There was another effort that [Bob] Woodward recounts after 9/11 where the Vice President wanted to run the war cabinet.

Nelson: Yes.

Zelikow: Again, I don't have firsthand knowledge of that, but it is useful to call attention to both these data points, simply observe them, because they speak volumes to me about the Vice President's, or someone's, conception of the Vice President's role, but also someone's conception of Condi and her role.

Riley: It takes a while for all this to get resolved, right?

Zelikow: This particular issue that I'm mentioning was resolved pretty quickly.

Riley: I thought the issuance of the directive was delayed by some—

Zelikow: I think that was more delayed by other bureaucratic issues. The issue that I'm describing here was resolved pretty quickly. I think it was delayed for more minor reasons than that. So it goes out. Actually, then my service in the transition comes to an end with Inauguration Day and I returned to the University of Virginia and the Miller Center. So I worked in the transition as an unpaid volunteer for about four weeks.

Riley: But there was a personnel component to this as well. You were asked to help staff?

Zelikow: I was asked in a couple of different ways what did I want to do in the administration. I was offered two different senior director jobs in the NSC staff, either to run a general planning staff in the NSC, which I turned down partly because I have jaundiced views about "planning staffs" that are disconnected from line operations. There can be exceptions, but generally I'm skeptical about how well those work because I'd seen the example of Peter Rodman and Bush 41, which had been a failure, the kind of failure that people remember years later.

Then I also was offered the European directorate and turned that down. I did develop a—I said, "Look, if you want to use me in some way, here is something that might be interesting." I had identified early on that there was this very interesting intersection between the legal jobs and the policy jobs. Also as an old staffer I very much am interested in staffing procedures and the way things work. I take some pride in my understanding of how bureaucracies work and how to get things done. So I came up with a notion in which they would combine the legal advisor's job with the executive secretary's job in a novel way. There would be an office on the ground floor of the West Wing, which is where the executive secretary sits but you'd see the paper flow.

Bob Kimmitt had an interesting exec sec version of this job back in the Reagan NSC days where he was relatively powerful from the exec sec's position. But that's unusual. The paper flow, therefore the ability to see a lot of what was going on, usefully opine about it, but also anchored in a line job, legal advisor's job that in itself also gave you a window on some things, but also included some of the terrorism issues that I knew would be important. This was a real stretch. It was kind of like well, gee, let me imagine the dream job that has never been invented. If you could invent it, then maybe I'll talk to my wife, who will hate this idea. Because I actually did not really want to come in for both professional and family reasons. I had just taken on the job at the Miller Center. I did not think it was a good time to leave the Miller Center. There were a lot of things that were just being stood up, and I felt that I needed to stay at the Miller Center a little while longer at least. But it is gratifying to be offered it.

So I said, "If you want to look at something like this—" Apparently as best I can tell, Condi and Steve were willing to play with this, but it would have required me to be dual-hatted to Al [Alberto] Gonzales. Somewhere between Al Gonzales and the Office of the Vice President this was vetoed. At the time I wasn't his cup of tea, and the whole thing had been a stretch anyway. But if they had actually given me this unusual design—now that would have been a job

compelling enough that I could have felt like, *OK, I've really got to think about this*, given a lot of the circumstances that I was interested in. But as it happened it fell apart in that realm.

Now I mentioned this a little bit because it is interesting. I didn't know what had happened, I just knew it had been vetoed. I actually didn't fit the profile of Al Gonzales's corporate lawyer. Even looking back at my older legal career; I hadn't worked at Vinson & Elkins when I had been in Houston. But the job that I designed, it turns out, and this only dawned on me years later, the job that I had designed was created and filled. It was filled by David Addington.

That is, David created a job for himself within the Office of the Vice President that essentially had this portfolio with this range of duties and this particular nexus of issues. I don't know to what extent in the early days—and there are so many reasons why they would have vetoed me for this. It is possible that even at that time Addington saw that *A critical national security law job in the West Wing is not something that I want to give to somebody whom I don't trust. Indeed, that sounds like the kind of job I should have, and I'll just do it from the Office of the Vice President.* Then Condi will end up hiring a legal advisor, John Bellinger, because she does get to have a legal advisor who sits in the OEOB [Old Executive Office Building]. At the time Bellinger was seen as conventional and nonthreatening.

Riley: Just to wrap this up, when I questioned you about personnel earlier, I had wondered whether as a part of your portfolio in the transition it included staffing at some level beneath the principals. In other words, were you being asked to make recommendations for who would serve in the key positions on the National Security Council staff or elsewhere?

Zelikow: I'm sure I was asked about which people looked like the best ones to hold over. I probably had some influence on a variety of lower-level staffing assignments. I don't remember that I had influence on any big jobs. I certainly didn't have any influence on jobs at the Cabinet or sub-Cabinet level in the administration. I did tell Bob Blackwill that he ought to try and get the India ambassadorship, that he ought to shoot for Ambassador to India. I think that in that respect I gave him good advice.

Eventually when I went back to the Miller Center Condi again asked me, "Is there anything that you want?" I said, "Actually, when you constitute the PFIAB [President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board] I'd like to be on PFIAB. I think I could play a useful role there." And when they constituted the PFIAB at the end of 2001 under the chairmanship of Brent Scowcroft I was indeed one of its members.

Nelson: It sounds like the relationship with the Clinton National Security Council staff during the transition was really amicable.

Zelikow: My relationship with them was. To be clear, my relationship actually with many Clinton people was quite friendly. I don't think I was perceived then as a hostile, Republican partisan to the extent they perceived me as partisan at all. I can tell from things that have been written over the years that there are clearly some individuals who don't like me. Usually they're anonymous, not always.

I can tell you my personal relationship with Sandy Berger both in this transition and later was excellent and is excellent. Jim Steinberg, excellent. Actually, Kerrick, at the time, very good. My

attitude toward them was very respectful of what they knew. I knew how much I didn't know. I probably didn't know just how much I didn't know. I wasn't modest enough, but I was somewhat modest.

Nelson: Beyond that though, beyond your personal relationship, did this seem like a part of the transition that was more cooperative, more amicable than was generally the case?

Zelikow: I had very little window into what was going on at the transition of any other agencies. I occasionally would hear something. I think actually we were a little better organized and a little quicker off the mark.

Leffler: Your transition team at NSC, did it have any ongoing contact with the transition team in the State Department, the transition team in OSD, or places like that? Did you all just operate independently?

Zelikow: Yes.

Riley: Mel, I had stepped in earlier when you had—

Zelikow: There were a few particular things where I'd have to consult someone about something like answering some message from a foreign leader or there was a trip issue or something would come up where I'd have to talk to somebody, but in general there was no real structural contact. There was no transition interagency process to speak of.

Leffler: So during these three, four weeks, did you have constant ongoing contact with Condi Rice?

Zelikow: More with Hadley. Hadley was more the man on the scene. Condi was usually in other meetings often with the President-elect or doing other things. Then I would get some time with her. But we weren't sitting around all day scheming over the diagrams. She was pretty busy. Then I would get some time. So that's why a lot of the work I was doing I was reducing to writing so that she could read it when she had time. But it wasn't an intimate working relationship.

Leffler: Was there a sense of the difficult situation that NSC might be in vis-à-vis such strong actors who were looming elsewhere in the administration and what this might portend over the years to come?

Zelikow: Not much. I think I did actually have a meeting with [Donald] Rumsfeld in the transition when I went over with him some stuff, the NSPD, or having to do with DoD [Department of Defense]. He may have even made a comment to me like, "Colin and I have just talked about you. We've already been comparing notes on this, on the product you're selling." I have some memory of something like that. At the time it seemed to me, I kind of accepted, as many people did, that this is a very strong and talented crew of people who were being put into these top jobs.

I knew a little bit about the history of Rumsfeld and the [Gerald] Ford administration and a little bit about what people had thought about him back then, but not much. I had heard a little bit

about how Armitage didn't want to work with them. I had some inkling that Rumsfeld had initially been up for the CIA job before he was slotted instead over to DoD. Then there were other people who were up for DoD initially; I think Paul may have been an initial candidate for that. It wasn't clear, I don't really know very much about it. I know the Vice President was very involved in managing the higher-level personnel decisions. I had some contacts with Paul O'Neill. I thought he was very impressive in my little dealings with him, and his reputation was good from people I knew and respected and some things I'd read about his work when I had been teaching at Harvard.

Leffler: What was your sense of Condi Rice's feelings about dealing with such strong actors as Rumsfeld, Powell, Cheney? Did you get a sense that she felt perfectly self-confident about this, as people often say, or that she had a sense she would be in a very difficult situation?

Zelikow: If she had private qualms she did not confide them to me, I saw no sign of them. That would not be unusual. She is a private person by nature. She can be charming, voluble, yet reticent.

Leffler: In the literature there is often criticism of the way the NSC performed in subsequent years. Do you think, at least in retrospect, that the organization of the NSC staff or personnel might have been configured in ways that would have facilitated more effective coordination subsequently, or do you just disagree with the critique that there was poor coordination?

Zelikow: Well, at the time I was relatively hopeful as to how they would do. I can't really say that I foresaw a lot of the problems that would emerge later. It was understood that there were these big experienced people and the press was already writing stuff about that. But Condi is a solid, poised person. Her relationship with the President-elect was strong. Hadley is someone I respected at the time. I had known and worked with him in the old days. He was steady, methodical, well organized. They clearly planned to run a tight ship. More than that I can't remember feeling.

I thought maybe they could use some more help, but at the time I would have been relatively optimistic. At the time too—it's hard to recapture this now, but the President's agenda was not dominated by foreign policy. The President's incoming agenda was dominated by domestic policy. There were a number of important foreign policy issues, but none of them seemed screamingly urgent to me based on what I knew at the time. There's a famous line actually that Dick Clarke would later utter criticizing the Bush administration, saying that for them counterterrorism was an important problem but not urgent. Ernie May later commented on that, I think correctly, that that statement was true and it was true of both the Clinton and the Bush administrations.

I think that, having now lived through periods where I dealt with agendas that had screamingly urgent things in them, there was nothing that felt like that. There was not a raging war that was killing Americans every day and was going to kill more tomorrow.

Leffler: What do you think, as you look at the transition team, were Condi Rice's greatest preoccupations?

Zelikow: I don't know. I know what we wrote down and sent forward to the President about his agenda, and there is a documentary record of that somewhere in the transition files, the Bush Library. What that reflects, if anyone finds those documents—we worked over those documents. Bob Blackwill helped a little bit too. Those pretty well reflect what we wanted to say to the President-elect about the agenda at that time. Some of the stuff that has been testified to in the British, the ongoing Chilcot Inquiry Hearings about what [Christopher] Meyer was reporting to London also feels representative and accurate to me.

But aside from the interest in the U.S./Russia stuff and the need to tackle some of these currently simmering issue areas, I can't really point to one thing and say that's where her passion was. This would change. But I'm still in January 2001.

Riley: Philip, we're going to break here in just a minute. We've talked all morning and we haven't put you in the same room with the President yet.

Zelikow: Well, I haven't been in the same room with the President yet.

Riley: Have you not met George W. Bush by this time?

Zelikow: I have not. Gosh, I'm just trying to remember whether I sat in a meeting in which he was there and watched him, and I'm not sure I did.

Leffler: So what's the first time you did? I'm just curious, just so we know that.

Zelikow: I'm actually not sure when was the first time. It might have been in connection with some of the election reform work I was doing in '01. But I didn't actually have much opportunity to observe him firsthand until his second term.

Riley: So your knowledge of him is the public Bush supplemented by what you're getting from your friends.

Zelikow: Yes, I'm always a step removed. No one should think that I was in the President's inner circle.

Riley: But your confidence in him as a President is derived from your confidence in Condi?

Zelikow: I didn't really know what to make of what Bush was going to be like as President. Probably my views were pretty similar to a lot of the mainstream wisdom at the time, which was that he's been a reasonably effective Governor. Well, here are a couple of things I could observe. One is that he was a very gifted politician. He was actually a much more gifted politician than his father. Second, that he was highly disciplined in agenda setting and action and this was itself a strong theme of the administration. I've written elsewhere that if the new administration had any one theme it was that we're about discipline and that we're the anti-Clinton. Actually, in some ways I always thought of Bush even then as the polar opposite of Bill Clinton in every way, both good and bad.

Leffler: So tell us with some degree of specificity what that means.

Zelikow: The notion of discipline?

Leffler: Yes.

Zelikow: It meant we're going to be disciplined in our agenda setting. We're going to be disciplined in our processes. We're going to be disciplined in not leaking and chattering to the media. We're going to be a tight-knit, disciplined team. We're going to be disciplined in our time management, in the way we work through the schedule of our day. We're going to be disciplined in the way we treat our subordinates. We're not going to tell the staff, "We're taking a trip to Zambezi in '72 hours, make it happen for me, would ya'?" Things are going to be orderly; they're going to be disciplined. Trains are going to run on time. Intellectually and substantively the agenda is going to be organized that way. We're going to march out with a game plan. It is primarily going to be about domestic policy and we know what it is going to be.

But there is a sense I'm trying to convey in which this is a personal ethos that transcends and goes well beyond any substantive policy agenda that had come to mark the President and his personal style.

Leffler: But Philip, that's kind of ironic, because if you read the contemporary comments of the foreign policy and national security policy of the Bush administration of January 20th to September 10th, 2001, one of the most frequent comments was, "There's no agenda here, no sense of priorities. What are the objectives?"

Zelikow: Yes, but that's because you're probably reading about foreign policy.

Leffler: Yes, that's exactly right.

Zelikow: There is no agenda in foreign policy. There was an agenda in domestic policy, and everyone was clear about it. Here's what we're going to accomplish our first year. Above all, education and taxes. Those are two big things we're going to accomplish, and that's where we're going to devote our energy. Foreign policy is something we take care of so it doesn't bite us in the back. Therefore the foreign policy agenda is serendipitous.

Now there is a kind of a list where the President says, "Here are the issues, eight or ten things that we think are most important, things that we need to keep worrying about." But within those eight to ten things—and then here are some trip decisions that you're going to make. Early trip with Mexico, things like that. Reach out to allies right away. Ostentatiously, immediately, visit Europeans. That was the thought, anyway. I know this seems ironic in light of what would happen later, but that was what people were thinking then.

But there is no foreign policy agenda that is anything like disciplined in the sense that the domestic policy was.

Leffler: That's very notable.

Zelikow: No, in fact, really until 9/11 there is no foreign policy agenda. It is really deeply serendipitous. This has a lot of pathological effects. It is kind of catch-as-catch-can in which

there are a lot of different claimants for time and attention and no one of them trumps all the others.

Riley: I think this is a good place for us to stop and get some sustenance and we'll come back and pick up if there are any loose ends in the first period before 9/11.

Zelikow: Just as a coda on that, I did mention earlier the U.S./Russia business and maybe to the extent that they had a piece of business they were immediately going to launch on it and they did a launch on that.

Leffler: BMD [ballistic missile defense].

Zelikow: Actually, their whole conception of this all along was both offense and defense and they were going to do them both and it was paired. That they were going to do dramatic offensive cuts combined with the BMD work—they saw that as a combined agenda and they stepped out smartly on that. I must say there was a positive momentum of something they wanted to accomplish, but that didn't mean that that was more important than everything else.

So basically a lot of issues just start crowding in and all these issues have entrepreneurs.

Riley: OK, very good, thanks to all of you. Off to a rousing start.

[BREAK]

Riley: Mike, you said you had some questions left over from this morning.

Nelson: Two questions. One is, when you were talking about Richard Clarke and the way in which his unit operated semiautonomously within the NSC staff, and so the concerns attributed to Madeleine Albright and others that you heard. Was there some sense that this might be another Oliver North-style problem, in other words, a sort of rogue unit within NSC, and that's why somebody might characterize it as dangerous or at least worrisome?

Zelikow: That, yes, I would have drawn the same inference from hearing about the comment that you did, but I don't know why she said what she said. But there were other comments of that tenor. On the other hand, Sandy Berger wasn't nervous about it. Actually, I didn't see anything. I felt as if I halfway understood more or less what he was doing and it didn't seem so ominous to me. But on the other hand Madeleine knew more about what he was doing than I did because at the time I wasn't cleared to know the full range—very few people really knew the full range of what that group was doing. Our Commission Report in a very concise way has a fairly accurate—

Nelson: The 9/11 Commission Report?

Zelikow: Right. The material we have on what his group did in the Clinton years was a piece of detective work. I mean to find out even when meetings were held and what their agendas were we would actually put together emails and fragments from multiple departments. It was very difficult. The contrast when the Bush people take over is striking in the documentary record. What historians will find is they'll look—I don't know, there may be two dozen of these meetings that Clarke runs in '98, '99, 2000, especially '99, 2000. They'll be lucky if they find two dozen pages for many of them, all together.

Bush people come in and everything is—because it is all going up through the deputies process and so on. It is very orderly, very papered. Then the people who are in that group—because actually almost all the people who are doing this work hardly changed at all. Not just at the NSC staff, they didn't change at all at FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation]. They didn't change at the CIA. It is still really the same policy people working these issues. They're very frustrated with this deputies process because it seems to them very paperbound and sclerotic.

Clarke was very comfortable with an agile process where he can get right to the—but there is a deeper problem here, which is that frankly that process worked because of Dick's relation with Sandy. That's what made it work. That's what protected Dick the whole time. Sandy both protected Dick and gave Dick the shelter and the supervision that Dick needed in order to manage that and also utilize Dick's strengths most effectively. His style was functional in that kind of setting and it relied a lot on Sandy to make it work.

Riley: Why was Janet Reno a critic?

Zelikow: You could ask her, but in our interviews she spoke somewhat guardedly about some of this. In general she thought that he was a person doing stuff at the margin and would kind of—his attitude was shoot first and dot the i's and cross the t's later, which is not usually the kind of attitude Attorneys General like.

Riley: Right, but—

Zelikow: There is a deeper problem going on here, which is if you study the record of that activity—it is maybe a little interesting to digress about this for a moment, because it says something about how to be effective in government. What Dick successfully did is he organized highly functional people around the government who were concerned with counterterrorism, who were at the peripheries of their organizations. Mostly these are people who are kind of marginal in their organizations, with some exceptions. The CIA and FBI are different. But they glom onto his group as a group where all the people who share these interests get together. They mainly all share in common a frustration with their home agencies.

This group is very good at coordinating things among the secret sharers, and at that level it is very effective. What you look for is what happens when this group tries to get anything done by big government. By big government I mean the big executive departments of the government: State, Defense, main Justice. When they need any of those three departments to do something, it's not successful, because all three of those major departments are actually alienated from this group and feel that mostly this is a group that tries to circumvent and work around them and

bypass them and so on, aside from the interpersonal issues that individuals had with Clarke himself.

So therefore at one level it is very effective, and it is very effective as long as you don't need to coordinate and get action from the major muscles of the government. This in a way is a good capsule of the story of American counterterrorism policy before 9/11. You have a frustrated energetic community of people who are very concerned about this issue, who mostly can't really seem to get action from the major departments of the government. The White House in that sense—see, this is the sense in which the White House therefore is ineffective.

So literally a week before 9/11 Dick writes that famous note to Condi Rice—he is railing above all about Defense and CIA in that note. These major agencies of the government just won't take this problem seriously. But that is actually a very characteristic mode for him and this group. We keep trying—but it is a symptom of frustration and also a symptom of failure. Because your job at the White House is not to be angry at the President's inability to effect the executive departments of the government; your job at the White House is actually to get action from those very departments.

Riley: OK, Mike?

Nelson: The other question I had I guess was inspired by your election to local school boards during the '80s and brought to mind that famous comment in [David] Halberstam's book where Sam Rayburn turns to Lyndon Johnson and says, "I wish some of these brilliant minds had run for sheriff one time." The idea being that people in positions of responsibility really gain something from having essentially asked people for their votes and risked disappointment. Did your understanding of government or your attitude toward government change at all as a result of having gone before the voters?

Zelikow: It did. I don't talk about this very much, but I felt that, I feel it very strongly. An interesting sidelight—another rather effective public official named George Shultz I believe was also a school board member in a Massachusetts town when he was a young professor like me. I think he may have even lived in the same town I did for a time, although I think he was on a different school board. My memory of this may be wrong, but I think I'm right about that.

Actually, I ran for office and was encouraged to do so by members of my town, and ran against an incumbent whom I barely beat in a very close election. It was a totally nonpartisan race. Massachusetts school committee races certainly in my town aren't partisan at all. It was very grassroots. In my town, and this is not unusual in Massachusetts towns, it is actually very important. The reason it is very important—if you don't live in Massachusetts you don't understand this. Towns in Massachusetts actually control quite a lot of the school money. They tend to be relatively small and they actually control their own property tax base.

So what you get is actually an incredibly complicated patchwork of school systems in Massachusetts where just in the Boston metro area there could be 75 different school systems. You could go literally one mile over in the same suburban area and get a totally different cost per student relationship, because of just different towns' policies. The school committee presents its arguments to citizens, if they want them to do something big, in town meetings.

I spoke to a high school auditorium, which was standing room only with actually a fairly significant percentage of the adults in the town there. It's not quite Norman Rockwell, but I'll tell you that in my town, which was a highly educated town, just to the west of Concord, average citizens were much more likely to know the names of their school committee members than the names of the people who were in the Cabinet of the U.S. government, and their home phone numbers. So this is very healthy.

Here I am, I'm teaching at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. The transcript may not convey the awestruck and deferential tones in which I utter those words, so I'm very full of myself. I've just come out of the White House; I've been involved in high diplomacy and this and that. This was a really good useful takedown for me; maybe it didn't take me down far enough. But it took me down some. Because I realized—it was one more reminder of a lot of things I didn't know and didn't understand as well as I thought I did. Actually, I am interested in education policy and I was interested in some of those issues. But it was just a really healthy experience for me. It's hard to explain how that translates into any concrete insight other than it reinforced an emerging sense for me as I tend to think that it is very important to understand local politics and local community developments in looking at some of the large issues that one wrestles with in the foreign policy world. That actually becomes important in some of the things I'd get involved with later.

Riley: OK. We've got you through the transition.

Zelikow: Yes.

Riley: The Election Reform Commission kicks in before 9/11. Is that—

Zelikow: Yes, goodness, it's really done before, it's all done.

Riley: Tell us about that.

Zelikow: This is very interesting. At the time it was important. Again it's hardly written about, mostly taken for granted now. January 2001 the country is still pretty seized with what happened over Florida and the election debacle. The miasma from that is really all over Washington and widespread. So the idea comes up, not invented by me, that there ought to be a commission to figure out how to reform the American electoral system that should be—and it has got to be bipartisan. The idea that is ginned up is to involve Jimmy Carter and Gerald Ford together in cochairing it.

Somehow someone got it in their head that the Miller Center could be the key institutional home for such a commission and that I could run it. I don't remember, I was trying to remember, could I have played some part in actually—was I clever enough to press this idea?

Riley: That's my question.

Zelikow: Frankly I don't remember whether I was or not. All I know is that certainly by January, even while I'm still working on the transition, I'm on the phone with Lloyd Cutler and others on how to set this thing up. So really the first thing I do after I leave, after the inauguration, is plunge into setting up this national commission based out of the Miller Center.

Riley: Did you talk to Condi?

Zelikow: It got some help from the Twentieth Century Fund. Didn't talk to Condi about it at all as far as I can remember. I ended up talking a lot with people in the Bush administration about it, but not her at all, I don't think. It's all on the domestic side.

Riley: You weren't worried that this was at cross-purposes with what the White House wanted done?

Zelikow: No. It seemed like the right thing to do. It would either succeed or fail based on whether or not we got buy-in from key people in both parties. So you get Carter and Ford involved and then beneath them Lloyd Cutler and Bob Michel, with Cutler much more active than Michel. So my principal boss to some extent is Cutler and actually to some extent above him is Carter more than Ford, although I had some interactions with Ford. Then the Miller Center is going to run it with help from the Twentieth Century Fund.

Then I was able to work with the Knight Foundation, which also put up a good deal of money behind this because it was a privately sponsored effort, not a government commission. But Carter and Ford in their different ways must have reached out to people and gotten the green light that if you take this on, we'll listen to what you have to say. So Ford picks Michel and Carter picks Cutler. Then I really set about organizing. We picked the rest of the commissioners, who were actually a pretty interesting group of people in themselves. They included Leon Panetta, Chris Edley [Jr.], Bill Richardson, Slade Gorton, Michael Steele, others.

Then I got this going. I organized a schedule of hearings, recruited a small staff, and then I drafted the report. Underneath the report were some supporting papers that I'd commissioned from some political scientists and others. Both the report and the supporting papers were later published by the Brookings Institution as a book. Developed the draft report. Bob Pastor, helping Carter, was involved in this too. Carter was very involved hands-on. Carter actually chaired the meeting here at the Miller Center where we went over the draft report line by line, an 11-hour meeting, a knock-down, drag-out in which Carter held the whole commission together unanimously behind every word of the report. This would change, but it didn't change too much. It was unanimous for a while.

Now, at this point, while this is going on, before the final, I already have a theory about how these things work. It's not that you write brilliant stuff and throw it over the transom and people are amazed by its loveliness and then do what you want them to do. I was working with interesting figures in the Bush White House and also among Democrats and Republicans on Capitol Hill basically to kind of find out what their main concerns were, what they thought might be addressed. I was looking for as much play space as we could find and trying to figure out what the core political bargain was that would make this work. Basically, the core political bargain is Republicans like to enforce voting laws and worry about vote fraud; Democrats like to be inclusive and want to make sure that more people can vote.

So if you have an election reform, it has to be an election reform that promises more inclusiveness and less rigging and gerrymandering or abuse by local districts to keep people from

voting on the one hand, but also adds greater integrity to the voting process and addresses vote fraud concerns. If you can manage that and some novel ideas, then you can get somewhere.

My key point of contact in the White House was Josh Bolten, Deputy Chief of Staff for Policy. Margaret Spellings may have been involved at some point, but Bolten was key. [Karl] Rove got involved. This is important stuff. How elections get run in America is something he cares about, but also key people on Capitol Hill. Above all the people I remember best is the ranking Democrat on the House Rules, Steny Hoyer. Hoyer was enormous on this bill and everything we did. I have a ton of respect for Steny Hoyer coming out of this, now House majority leader.

The House side in general and the staffers on the House side I actually found much better than the people on the Senate side, where Chris Dodd and Mitch McConnell were the key Senators you had to work with. The report is done. I have effectively previewed the report with these key figures because the goal is—the choreography I’ve tried to design is that when the report is done the report is going to be welcomed in a Rose Garden ceremony at the White House and then we’re going to the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue where it will be welcomed by leaders of both parties in the Congress. Now if you can accomplish this on election reform six months after Florida, that would be a neat trick. That was what we were trying to do, and actually that’s more or less what we succeeded in doing.

But one of the hiccups—we got it to the point where the Bush White House was on board and actually the meeting with Rove was kind of interesting to me. I didn’t know Rove; I had never dealt with him before. Of course you’ve heard; I’d read the stuff everybody had read. The key issue to me basically was Bolten struck me as a pretty straight shooter. I just didn’t know whether Rove was really going to sit back and let this happen or whether he was just going to—in other words, was he going to play this the good government way or was he just going to play this another way? To my pleasant surprise actually a little bit, he was totally Mr. Good Government on this. He was a little bit cynical about how others would view it, but he decided to play it straight.

It turned out that some other people were a problem. You see, the problem you have on something like this in Washington, there are a lot of people in Washington who care about issues, but they want the issue, they don’t want the solution. If you solve the problem, then you eliminate the issue. Having the issue is really important. You raise money and gather political support by using the issue. You don’t raise money and gather political support by eliminating the problem. So we actually did not have a lot of support from key civil rights interest groups and so on because they really want this issue. There are Republican versions to some of this too.

Anyway we kind of worked it with a lot of folks and then what happens is I and some of the Democratic commissioners went up and briefed some key Democrats on the Hill. “Here’s the report we’ve all agreed to.” Cutler and a couple of others like Bill Richardson, and they got a blast back. “Don’t you do this; we don’t support this.” Chris Edley, who was there, practically got called a race traitor to his face by people like John Conyers [Jr.]. Then what happened was very shortly thereafter, a few people began dissenting. A few of those Democratic commissioners began dissenting from portions of the report. Cutler never wavered a bit, but a few of the others then began falling off of some selected pieces and distancing themselves a little

bit. But the majority held. We had unanimity for it as a whole, but then people carved out their dissents. You can read the report and see where all that was.

By the way, meanwhile people are writing stories in the Washington papers, the *Post*, others, saying yes, election reform, not going to happen. Indeed it was pronounced dead. But we executed, then we get the bill. It looks like the bill is not going to get through Congress that year. Its death is predicted again. Actually, though, the bill is taken up in the next session of the Congress in 2002 and it is passed. On an issue as poisonous as this it is passed with bipartisan majorities in both Houses. But to give you a sense of the politics of this in the House, where it passed by, I don't know, a 60- to 70-vote margin—one of the committees of jurisdiction on this was Judiciary—we lost both the chairman [F. James] Sensenbrenner, and the ranking member, Conyers. But we had on our side John Lewis of Georgia, who said it was the most important thing since the Voting Rights Act of '65.

Riley: Was Carter involved in keeping him on board?

Zelikow: I don't know. But Carter was out there advocating for this. It's the right thing to do. So the Help America Vote Act passes. It is the first time you've set up a federal framework for the administration of local elections. Now I'm not talking about civil rights enforcement, the Voting Rights Act; I mean the general administration. I'm saying the first time in the history of the Republic you have created such a federal framework. It actually pumped billions of dollars into reforming and modernizing the election processes, which given the fact that the private funders, the foundations, had put about \$2–3 million and then got a \$3.6 billion federal appropriation a year and a half later, that's good repayment.

Among the things that have held up, there were a couple of things that we could quarrel about. We did actually want written, auditable records out of machine voting and some other things. But one of the major innovations was the general, now national, adoption of provisional ballots, which takes a lot of poison and toxicity out of daily Election Day processes where it was like, all right, we just put a provisional ballot down.

Now, they didn't adopt as generous rules for provisional balloting as we supported; there is another story there, there are differences. But in general I think the Help America Vote Act has proven to be a really good foundation for future work. Obviously I'm interested in this story because it was very important to me. Certainly the first half of '01 I spent a lot of time on it. The commission was all done in six months. Then there was an aftermath in which I was involved in working the issues on the Hill and helping the people who were trying to get the legislation adopted. Again mainly my key partners, above all Steny Hoyer and then Roy Blunt, actually Bob Ney was the other relevant—but Roy Blunt was the more important on the Republican side in the House.

The story is an interesting story because it's actually kind of a bipartisan good government story at a period of time where there should not have been any such story. So it is a little bit of a healthy reminder that even on a politically charged issue, if you do things in a certain way, sometimes you can actually get the government to work, so it is a little heartening.

Riley: And this was an example for you later when you come back?

Zelikow: It was actually an example for me later. This ended up being the first of three bipartisan commissions I ended up directing. I did that one in '01. I did the Markle, another private effort that had some influence, the Markle Foundation Task Force in '02, and then the 9/11 Commission in '03-04. They're connected too, because the success with this work against odds is one of the things that commended me to some of the people who were thinking about who could direct the 9/11 Commission.

Slade Gorton actually was on all three commissions. Gorton, a really quite intelligent—he had just become an ex-U.S. Senator from the state of Washington. He had been defeated in 2000. He was a leading proponent of provisional balloting, which has been pioneered by Washington State beyond any other state in the nation, and it had beaten him in 2000. He had lost that election because of provisional ballots, losing to [Maria] Cantwell. Nonetheless, he recommended it to us as something that actually ought to be done for the country. I thought that was exemplary and I think actually at the time he made this point it made quite an impression on his fellow commissioners.

Riley: Was the character of the electoral college ever a subject of conversation?

Zelikow: It was. It was discussed extensively. There were a number of people who thought we should have proposed a reform of the electoral college system. We didn't agree and I didn't agree. There wasn't a lot of appetite for taking on anything quite as big as that. Frankly, I didn't agree with the argument on the merits.

Riley: So on the substance rather than on the politics of it.

Zelikow: It was problematical on both grounds. But I just want to add that I actually thought that there were substantive problems with the idea. I'm persuaded actually by some of the people who argue—it has to do more with whether you think of the way the United States of America is organized as simply just a collection of people with these arbitrary little boundaries around them called states or whether you actually see the states as important political units in their own right. Because the electoral college system is designed to help promote the identity of states as voting entities and states as relevant units rather than just saying essentially ignore state lines and just go for people wherever you find them, no matter where they live. But there is a good argument on the other side too.

Riley: Anything else on this?

Nelson: What was the Markle Commission?

Zelikow: The Markle Foundation, which was headed by Zoë Baird, is very interested in information technology issues and was very interested in how all the new IT developments that seized people's imagination during the 1990s would affect the world of national security after 9/11. So all the issues about data mining, privacy versus security, how ought the government collect information about people and how should we share information, how can we improve information sharing in the government were issues they wanted to get into.

Zoë formed this task force cochaired by her and a leading tech executive at the time named Jim Barksdale, who had just finished running a company then very prominent called Netscape. They

then asked me to be the Executive Director of this task force, which was going to be a challenging task force because these privacy/security issues have very charged communities behind them, and some of the people on the task force were going to be in effect representing those communities, the civil liberties community and people who had worked at NSA [National Security Agency]. Jim Steinberg was on that task force too.

In that task force we were unanimous and held the unanimity. That task force actually spawned at least three sequel task force reports after I left it. Others then came in and kept developing it. Its recommendations have now found their way into federal legislation, a number of agency practices. I think they've given a lot of very useful advice. It was a very constructive exercise.

Riley: When were you—

Zelikow: That was in '02.

Riley: When was your appointment to the PFIAB?

Zelikow: Late 2001. After 9/11.

Riley: So is there any—

Zelikow: Interesting, it just took a while. I think the Bush administration either just wasn't interested—but it took a while for them to get around to reconstituting the PFIAB. Then when they did, they asked Brent to chair it.

Riley: Following the chronology then, basically your relationship with the White House must be dominated in 2001 by the Election Commission.

Zelikow: The first half of '01, yes.

Riley: Are you having ongoing contact with Condi or others?

Zelikow: Not a lot before 9/11.

Riley: After 9/11?

Zelikow: Oh, there was one thing. Occasionally some people would ask me what I thought about something. Condi or Steve might ask for my advice. I think I was asked actually at one point what to do about the climate change issue. I either wrote something for them or I may even have participated in a video teleconference with them from the Charlottesville facilities that the Army maintains here. I was very struck at the time and certainly said this and I think wrote it, "All right, I understand why you want to dump Kyoto, but you actually need to have the story when you do that of what will take its place. Otherwise it just sends the wrong message." In general, on a couple of these issues, it wasn't so much that I disagreed with the impulse, but you have to develop an alternative. You have to have a positive story rather than just saying what you're against. You have to explain what it is you're for.

I think that was one of the mistakes they made in how they handled the climate change issue. There was a certain scornful, dismissive quality to it in which, if they had come in with at least some kind of constructive alternative that was trying to keep the discussion going and showing that they were interested in the problem—and actually they *were* kind of interested in the problem. What was happening, though, is that a lot of different parts of the national security bureaucracy were working these things in an entrepreneurial way. They'd seize a chance to knock at something.

For example, there is the story that is told about how Cheney knocks at something in the environmental world and basically circumvents Condi and gets a letter signed on something that is sent up to Capitol Hill about EPA [Environmental Protection Agency] that affects some of these environmental issues. Cheney actually—I'm sure his attitudes about the international environmental negotiation are not what some people would like, but a lot of this is motivated by domestic energy and beliefs about domestic energy policy. It was, but it was a bit cavalier. They paid a disproportional price for that, because the issue actually hadn't been hugely important to them.

The issue became more powerful symbolically, like a couple of things they did. People already had this image of Bush as the crude cowboy, as Bush himself would put it, the "toxic Texan." That was the image people were already forming. Then they would seize on things that would seem to confirm that image and that stereotype, and this is constantly trooped out as an example of that. They scorn multilateralism. In fact, they could find people in that administration who were pretty scornful about multilateral institutions, and actually if you've worked in those institutions for a little while, there's a lot to be scornful about. The problem is if you just let those people vent, meanwhile you're working with multilateral institutions all the time on any number of issues. So it just creates a state in which you're letting some of your cockier and more strident voices set the tone. If you want to set an alternative tone, people have to speak up and they have to have something to say. But then that requires you to do some work about what it is you're going to say.

Mostly they're preoccupied with other things and bouncing from issue to issue, as we were discussing earlier, until 9/11 when things begin to get a lot clearer. With the great exception in the summer of '01 of this decision to really focus a lot of energy on the compassionate conservatism for the world, which is a very important development for the administration, one in which I had no particular part but which I noticed at the time it happened with great interest. When he gave that first speech in July I read that speech and I was taken aback. I talked to Condi a little bit about it and read some things that Condi was beginning to write during that summer as she was trying to crystallize her own evolving thinking about these issues. I thought it was very interesting.

Nelson: Issues such as?

Zelikow: I don't think that this is something that Bush came into office with in January. I think this was actually an outgrowth—as an aside let me just note: I think this image that Presidents enter office with a suitcase of ideas and then just spend the next couple of years unpacking the suitcase—yes, it's a relatively small bag and they unpack it pretty quickly. Then really after that they are actually reinventing themselves and deciding who it is they really are as President.

They're actually discovering a lot of things, not just about the world and about government. They actually discover stuff about themselves. They reinvent their identity and their sense of what works and who they are.

Oftentimes things that will happen that are bad, or things that will happen that are good, will help them figure *Ah, that's the way I want to work. Those are the people I want to work with. Or Those are the issues—those are the things I don't want to do.* Then really change them. You see this a lot with George W. Bush, you see this a lot actually with Clinton before him, even more so with Clinton. This is a case where the President came in very strongly with this compassionate conservative agenda. You'll hear it from a lot of other people. That's for real. He and others can explain it better than I can, but I think I understand it. I think I understand where it is coming from, even in the gut.

Education policy is a really interesting place to understand it. He has this vision that's an extremely inclusive vision of what conservatism means to him. A lot of it is about love, in a way, even Christian love, coupled with a sense of accountability, but support. I'm just putting it in terms that I think actually, genuinely capture a little bit of the sense of what it really is about for him and for some of the people around him. Karen Hughes, Michael Gerson, some of the others.

They come in; the domestic stuff is what they know. Then as they're doing the domestic stuff they're increasingly thinking about how this agenda relates to the world and then how this relates to this increasing critique about globalization, which Condi—frankly Condi and I, our views on this I believe are just identical, although I don't think that one produced the other. I think that somehow we just came to see this almost exactly the same way.

Leffler: That being?

Zelikow: We had both believed that in this era, the great issues are transnational more than international. There tend to be issues that cut across societies and that therefore are defined more by these cleavages within societies or within civilizations than they are defined by international frontiers and rival blocs of powers. In this sense the kind of Westphalian image of international politics or the image of great power bloc rivalries that is very strong in international relations riding from the seventeenth century all the way through most of the twentieth century, that actually we have been transitioning to a different age. No one, including Condi, will say that this means power doesn't matter or that states don't matter. They think it matters a lot. It just means that the major issues on which they're acting increasingly have a transnational shape to them.

These issues actually present themselves primarily as domestic issues in individual countries concerned: public health, terrorism, poverty, you can just go through the list. Yet the line between what is a domestic issue and what is a foreign issue is increasingly blurry, since we need to take greater and greater concern of how your domestic policy on public order in, say, Afghanistan and Pakistan is going to concern us and so on.

Leffler: Where do you see Condi Rice saying those things?

Zelikow: I don't know for sure. The empirical evidence for it I can't point to until 2001. But I think it's there before then. I can't point to written evidence and I can't remember particular conversations, but I think it's there. You'd have to ask her about her ideas about this. But one

thing to remember about her that is very important is that when people talk about her academic background, and academics will get this right away, her core background is in comparative politics, not IR [international relations] theory. She taught IR theory; she knows IR theory. People keep trying to classify her in the lexicon of IR theory. “Are you a realist?” She’ll kind of play with that a little bit. She might regard herself as, “Yes, I kind of was,” with [Stephen D.] Steve Krasner and some bastard version of realism. But her core disciplinary origins are in comparative politics.

Comparative politics is really about comparative domestic policy or ways of organizing political institutions. It is very interested in the political culture of different societies, and that is actually a core interest of hers, from an intellectual point of view. So when she is looking at these issues, that is a really important thing she keeps in her mind. A lot of her key intellectual and course work is in the comparative politics world where she feels very comfortable—civil-military relations in different societies, Sam Huntington kind of stuff.

Riley: Is there a developing world component to that, or was her intellectual interest mostly—?

Zelikow: No, there is a strong developing world component to it in the field. Her own particular work was—I don’t know how you’d classify Warsaw Pact satellites. I suppose they were developing. But she is just in a milieu that—you can’t work, you can’t get a PhD in effect in comparative politics and not spend a lot of time in the literature about the developing world. So she is conscious of that. Where you see it manifesting itself in writing, in government, you don’t see it in that *Foreign Affairs* article that she is writing in 2000. But there wasn’t really an article that offered scope for that kind of thinking. I don’t know.

Already by the time she is drafting some notional National Security Strategy ideas in July of ’01 you see a lot of this stuff surfacing. Then a lot more of it surfaces as the year goes on. I’m contributing a lot and there is a real meeting of the minds there. You’ll find plenty of my own writings that read this way. I’m just stressing the point that I don’t think that I’m teaching her how to think about this. I think that she is already there and that in a way we’re just recognizing that we’re both on exactly the same wavelength, which is why she is turning to me a little bit maybe when she wants to find someone who can articulate her views.

Riley: Exactly. Let me pose a thought experiment for you that might help to refine the point a little bit. That is, take 9/11 out of the equation. Is it possible for you to project what a path of a Bush foreign policy would look like based on the trajectory that you’re trying to explain to us in 2001? If you’re seeing something important in the summer in the President’s public statements, what is it that they’re focusing on? What does it look like?

Zelikow: That’s a really interesting—the kind of counterfactual, what would this administration have looked like without 9/11. I have thought about it a little bit, but not deeply about it, but it is a terrific question just because it forces you to unpack a lot of assumptions.

Before 9/11 it is a bit inchoate. They’re struggling to figure out what it is all about. The Clinton people went through the same exercise. You can read a lot about it. In ’93, ’94 they’re having these big, endless Oval Office discussions about what are we going to call our foreign policy and all of that. In a way the Bush people are beginning to do this all over again, actually with a very

similar set of premises. We're not in the Cold War era anymore. It is about globalization. How do we define American purpose? And they're struggling to figure out how to do that. The compassionate conservatism speech, the Bush World Bank speech, and then this thing that Condi writes in July are extremely revealing and interesting glimpses of how they're beginning to struggle to explain this.

Leffler: What does Condi write in July? What are you referring to exactly?

Zelikow: Actually, it is in the papers that I donated to the Miller Center to be posted. There is an initial document; she writes a draft National Security Strategy¹.

Leffler: Oh, that's what you're referring to.

Zelikow: Yes, in July of '01.

Leffler: I've read that.

Zelikow: Yes, and I think that's a very interesting document. I think she is the principal drafter. I can't remember for sure who actually held the pen, but for sure it represents her ideas. I wrote something later in early '02 where I refer to this document as hers and back then I knew. So if she didn't write it all, she wrote a lot of it and it reflects her ideas. I may even have been involved in it a little bit, but I don't know. And, by the way, her reference to Iraq in that document is about containing Iraq.

So they would have tried to develop these compassionate conservatism ideas to a much greater extent. There would have been a really interesting reinvention of the foreign aid agenda along lines that you see unfolding anyway. I think that would have happened and then played— since it was a pretty big deal in its own right, it actually would have loomed much larger in their foreign policy agenda because it gets obscured by everything else given what happens. But I think that would have happened anyway.

You get a glimpse of how they're doing crisis management in how they handled the Chinese episode in the spring of '01 where Powell works it out for them and the *Weekly Standard* screams "appeasement."

Riley: Evidently Admiral [Joseph] Prueher had a hands-on role in that.

Zelikow: On the other hand it's hard to resist the sense that somehow something was going to break there, because they were all very unhappy and quarrelsome in the administration. Everyone was pointing fingers at everybody as failing. If you looked in the papers before 9/11, Powell is failing. There's a big story, like the cover of *Time* magazine, but also Rumsfeld is being regarded as the big failure. He's probably not going to be in office very much longer. Then of course they're all pointing fingers at Condi Rice and the NSC staff as a big failure. So that just gives you a sense of the climate. Foreign policy isn't dominating the agenda. People are jostling for position to try to make their issues stand out.

¹ This document exists at <http://faculty.virginia.edu/zelikow/documents/nationalsecuritypolicy.pdf>. The format of the file requires downloading the file, then opening it with Adobe.

By the way, all of this in my view is symptomatic of the kind of absence of a broad, meaningful framework for what America is trying to do in the world after the containment plus deterrence framework has increasingly faded. What results then is the natural drift and cacophony of American public life.

Leffler: Just as a curiosity, do you think Condi Rice has ever read the defense policy guidance document of 1992?

Zelikow: Maybe she did, but I have no reason to believe she did. She would never have cited it to me. Actually, I'm not sure I ever read it. I think I read the news stories about it, but it was so unimportant, really. Maybe I should have thought it was more important. The National Security Strategy and all of that—but as you know, the stories about this just made me smile many times. So then comes 9/11 and everything changes.

Riley: On 9/11 where are you and are you—?

Zelikow: I'm going to work at the Miller Center that Tuesday morning, like everybody else riveted by the television.

Nelson: Did you hear about the two attacks sequentially or did you hear about them both at once?

Zelikow: Sequentially. Someone called—like everybody—someone said, “You’ve got to watch the TV.” There was a TV somewhere in the center. I think we had it on. We all went to watch.

Nelson: What did you think after the first plane hit the tower? Did you think it was an accident, or did you think it was—?

Zelikow: I think by the time I started watching—I immediately remembered the B25 that hit the Empire State Building in 1945, I think it was. This seemed weirder than that. Then, like everybody—as soon as the second plane hit, it was off to the races. Then I must say I felt bad that I had not gone to work in the administration, because I felt that the country was at war and I wasn't able to help very well. But I ended up finding ways to help a little bit. I got involved in helping fairly soon thereafter in a number of capacities, through the PFIAB and more unofficially, I kibitzed a lot on the creation of the Office of Homeland Security and bits and pieces of advice to Tom Ridge and Tom Ridge's staff about all of that. I was already writing stuff for them about some of that by early October.

The PFIAB constituted itself in November, and right away we started working on intelligence community issues and so on. I was also at this time the Director of the Aspen Strategy Group, which is a policy program at the Aspen Institute. We spent a lot of time on homeland security and biological weapons issues in 2002.

Riley: Was there more frequent contact with Condi at this point?

Zelikow: Well, I don't know—she was overwhelmed with a lot of things, but I know we started conversing more frequently in late 2001 when she asked me to take a cut at writing a National Security Strategy for the country.

Riley: How did that come about?

Zelikow: At some point we had talked about the need to have some kind of quality strategy document. I don't know if we talked about it before 9/11 or not, but for sure after 9/11. We both had this sense that this is a really important time to talk about American purpose in the world and to provide a sense of leadership, that we're really living in different times.

In a way 9/11 doesn't create a bunch of new trends. I mean it creates a lot of things in its own right, but in a way the 9/11 trauma is a catalyst that shocks people into the recognition of emerging trends that have been present on the scene for some time and have now manifested themselves in a way everybody can see and feel. These are not the old challenges; this is a different kind of world.

One thing that Condi would often talk about, and I agree with this, she would frequently say that the key problem now is not so much clashes between states but the implosion within states. Or another version of this is we both hate the notion of a clash of civilizations and strongly disagree with this Huntington argument. We both believe, and she has said separately, that no, it is a clash within civilizations. But that means then, if these are fundamentally conflicts within a civilization, within a culture, within societies, how does the outsider, the United States, position itself with respect to that? If there is an implosion and a state failure in Afghanistan, and that state failure then breeds all these incredible dangers, but that state failure is fundamentally a local domestic problem that clearly has external consequences, how does the outsider relate to that? These are really novel issues.

So we thought the United States needed to provide leadership, and you needed a strong, coherent strategy document that could do that, not the kind of bureaucratic, lowest-common-denominator document that was the way these things are usually written. We both had some memory of Kissinger's attempts to write relatively coherent documents, especially in his first couple of years. One way of measuring the quality of the document is did it tell you something you did not already know before you read it. It turns out actually to be a pretty high standard.

Kissinger actually made a game effort to write documents that had a little bit of that quality, so that was kind of the goal here, to write something that would be relatively jargon-free and sound like something that could be in the President's voice, because it would be something that the President would carefully read, edit line by line, and be sure that this was something that really expressed what he wanted to say. There was already a bureaucratic process underway that had produced the draft state document, which was actually drafted by a protégé of mine named [Andrew] Drew Erdmann, who was then on Richard Haass's staff partly at my recommendation. He was a PhD student of Ernest May at Harvard in history, an extremely good one, A+. I and others had recommended Erdmann to Richard, and Erdmann had gone to work for Richard on his staff and then had helped shepherd this thing together. Actually, Drew, I think, would be pretty candid about its strengths and weaknesses.

So I had inherited that document and thought, *We can take some stuff out of this but we can do a lot better than this*. So that's the genesis of this project, which is in late 2001. I don't think I need to go into a whole lot of detail about what it is I wanted to say in the document because I'm donating to the Miller Center, and they'll post by the time any of this is available all the

successive drafts of this document that are in my possession, including all the annotations I made at the time of how people were reacting to the different drafts. You'll see "CR" in little marginal notes, which is what Condi said about this paragraph that I'm noting for when I do the next draft. Then people can judge for themselves if they want to go over carefully the way the draft changed and the kinds of arguments that were being made in it.

Nelson: What's the relationship between this document and the President's June 1st speech at West Point, and did you have a role in that speech at all or the thinking that went into that speech?

Zelikow: I didn't have a direct role in that speech, but actually what's happening is by early '02 Condi encouraged me to rope Mike Gerson into the process.

Riley: —of?

Zelikow: Writing this document. Because Gerson had a sense for the President's voice and Condi had a good opinion of Gerson. That sounded great to me because I knew Gerson had drafted these really quite memorable speeches the President had given in late '01 that I had admired. I was, by the way, also a particular admirer of the President's State of the Union address of January '02, which I still think is one of the President's most thoughtful addresses. Condi worked very hard on that address. I did not. It may be a little bit informed by some of the paper that I had been passing to her. Gerson gets involved in the strategy document in the spring of '02 and is providing a lot of input for that drafting, so that is beginning to reflect some of his "voice" on behalf of Bush.

Why is that important? What is important then is that Gerson is actually playing on this document, and then where Gerson was seeing phrases and ideas that he liked, well before the document came out, Gerson is already cribbing from the document and then just working the material into Presidential speeches. So the West Point speech, Condi and Gerson are pulling stuff out of the document they're already preparing to use, for use in the West Point speech. Although interestingly, the West Point speech, which was later read as being about preemption on Iraq, is actually not mainly about preemption on Iraq. It is mainly about preemption against terrorists.

That is a speech above all about the lesson of 9/11, and the lesson of 9/11 is about Afghanistan. The axiom that they got from Afghanistan will later be applied by them to Iraq. But if you actually read the document's drafts, from which they were cribbing as of, let's say, May of 2002, you'll see actually that the preemption language is in the section of the document that is on terrorism, not the section of the document on WMD [weapons of mass destruction].

Also, one of the documents that I'm depositing is when Condi is backgrounding David Sanger on the West Point speech in the middle of June 2002. She explains this and she is already a little bit uneasy then in explaining about, "No, no preemption then is—" Then what is the difference between preemption and prevention? There it gets a little more complicated for her, and she basically—preemption is where prevention has failed, that's all. To her there's not a fundamental difference there. She may have had more thinking about Iraq by that time in her head, but the document from which Gerson is borrowing is not so much. I think the Iraq stuff is nearing a

certain level of fruition at that point but is not quite there yet at the point the West Point speech is being drafted.

But what they had decided very early is that the lesson that they took away—they all ask themselves after 9/11 privately, they don't say it publicly—but I'll just tell you, anyone in a position of responsibility after 9/11 asked themselves what they could have done to stop it. Whether they admit it or not, I'll tell you confidentially that there was just no way, if you were a responsible human being, you didn't privately ask yourself this question. They privately worked this through. I could see evidence of this in many ways, because privately they had come to their own judgment about what is the lesson to take away from this about what we as a country did wrong. The fundamental lesson was you don't wait until they get you.

They knew that they had not taken Afghanistan quite that seriously. No one had. The notion of invading Afghanistan—on the morning of 9/11 the invasion of Afghanistan was inconceivable. Literally inconceivable. It is inconceivable in the sense of no one could even conceive it enough to write it down as an option on a piece of paper—no one, not Dick Clarke, no one. By the afternoon of 9/11 not only was it conceivable, it was the obvious policy option we should have thought of six months or a year ago. When you register that fact to yourself, that is a profound realization.

Then there is a lesson you take away from that. If you're the kind of person who has an allergy to wasps and a wasp sting will kill you, you just don't ignore the wasp nest that has planted itself under the eaves of your roof even though going after a wasp nest can be a messy and risky thing. You just can't just let it slide, and that in effect is what we did. We let it slide. They hit us once and we kind of let it slide. Then they hit us again and we kind of let it slide. Then they finally hit and scored big. We just kind of waited until they could hit us really, really well. They actually lucked out and hit us with a terrific blow. This kind of realization that I'm talking about, I think a lot of people sensed this.

Nelson: Yes. Who was the “they” that are realizing it?

Zelikow: Well, for sure I think the President, Condi, the Vice President, Don Rumsfeld, all of those people. I can't prove it, but I will confidently assert it.

Leffler: What is the “it?”

Zelikow: That you have to go on offense once you see dangers like this start to gather; you can't wait. Against this new kind of terrorism you have to go on offense once it really is a clear menace, and we have to reinterpret norms of world public order to allow us to protect ourselves in this way and that that is going to be a major challenge for us. But the terrorism in Afghanistan context is predominant. When they're first reacting to my draft of this—I'm already writing it this way because this is how I felt. But I knew I was in sync with them on this issue. When they're reacting to that, they're strengthening that language. In fact Condi and Steve suggest actually using the term “preemption.” I was already using very similar words. But where they wanted to use the word preemption was in the chapter on global terrorism.

The term we used in the chapter on WMD was “prevention.” The way the Iraq issue gets fused, gets pulled into that new post-9/11 axiom and that new post-9/11 attitude toward risk is a parallel

narrative. But we were going to be in this place of talking about—we are now going on offense around the world and we're going to conduct ourselves differently. They were going to write and say all that whether there was an Iraq issue there or not. We were going to be finding ourselves in effect waging armed conflict in perhaps multiple places in the world under novel conditions, regardless of whether—as we are doing in 2010 today. We are waging armed conflict in at least three or four countries in the world that are not Afghanistan and Iraq right now under these sorts of new norms.

Riley: Philip, but to further your metaphor, if you get stung by a wasp one time, it also makes you more susceptible to swatting at a fly if you hear it buzzing nearby. You can overreact or you can interpret signals in a distorted way because of your experience in the one instance of having been hit.

Zelikow: You're right. Let me be clear; I'm trying to explain the mindset. Whether or not folks think this is right or wrong or excuse it or not, I'm trying to explain what people were thinking at the time. Yes, there are a number of potential dangers in this course.

So then what? From my point of view, if you're adopting this kind of very forward offense approach, which I personally totally agreed with, we have to go on offense. Actually, it is consistent with—if you go back with my writings well before 9/11, not just the catastrophic terrorism article, but I had written an essay in 1993 about offensive military options against possible WMD dangers. That was actually entirely motivated by the scare we had during the First Gulf War.

What would have happened if Iraq had continued its nuclear weapons program that we later discovered they had, the one we discovered in '91, and he had not invaded Kuwait? The best guess of the inspectors is that Saddam Hussein would have had an atomic bomb by 1991, certainly by '92 if he had not invaded Kuwait. Whoa. Now that is a different world and would have presented some—if he had not invaded Kuwait.

In other words, for a long time I had been troubled by how do we move the norms of the international system to accommodate the diffusion of extraordinary lethality in this different kind of world. These problems, as [Francis] Frank Gavin and others point out, are not entirely novel to the post-Cold War era, but there are some facets of the problem that I think are novel.

I was troubled by the notion that if the burden of proof is you have to wait until he actually detonates the nuclear weapon on your soil before you can head it off, this creates what I'd long thought of as a paradox. This is actually in the 9/11 Commission Report, which is the point at which you can most effectively eliminate these threats is before they reach full fruition. Yet you cannot rally a strong political consensus to attack these threats before they have reached full fruition and actually have attacked you. So how then do you reconcile this? It is a true paradox in the Afghanistan 9/11 case, you couldn't rally a political consensus to—this is why the invasion of Afghanistan seemed inconceivable at the point you could have most easily stopped the attack. Yet at the point at which it was easy to conceive and would rally complete support, 3,000 people are dead and the enemy has caused 100 billion dollars of damage and all kinds of trauma. So how do you solve this paradox?

Their solution is you need to go on offense. If you go on offense, there are significant trade-offs with that. There are trade-offs in how you conduct yourself and how you adjust the international system. One of the ways you can fault the Bush administration in this period is they don't really make an effort to develop international institutions that will normalize this and reassure people about what they're doing. That failure will manifest itself in many ways.

Riley: When is—

Zelikow: It is, by the way, not the cause—the cartoon version of this is that that's because they're just unilateral cowboys. They're actually—the more you know about what they're doing in this period, the more you realize that what they're doing involves a bewildering amount of multilateral cooperation. Tenet is working bilaterally with about 30 different countries. It is an incredibly complex network of international cooperation, but they're not institutionalizing it.

Leffler: But Philip, there is a difference between working bilaterally, or even working multilaterally, with accepting the multilateral constraints imposed by international institutions.

Zelikow: I agree, you're right, and that's a trade-off that you make.

Leffler: And my sense—

Zelikow: And that's a danger.

Leffler: And the critique of these folks. I think the way you said it cryptically, and I'm sympathetic with that, that it is silly to think of these people strictly as unilateralists, because they all realize you do need cooperation to achieve their very goals. But at the same time my question to you is are any of these leading people—Rumsfeld, Cheney, Bush, Condi Rice, Powell—which of them, if any, is willing to really accept the constraints that go with multilateral collaboration after 9/11?

Zelikow: Right. The answer is latent and unknowable because the thought experiment was not adequately explored. Now let me just explain a little bit more about this. This is a very good question, very important. The way they would have thought about it is we have these existing—“Oh, we're going to go through the UN for everything.” Then people would have critiqued that. Actually, even if you get past the scornful one-liner and critique, it would turn out to be very difficult. In some ways the UN would have been fairly tolerant of the United States doing a lot of stuff.

So what you needed then—take the Gulf War example. I mentioned these multiple coalitions. One of them works through a formal existing institution, that is the United Nations, for a particular purpose. The other two do not. But you created in effect an institutional environment in which you had to have an agreed understanding of rules of the road and you had to compromise with other people. Because if we're going to work together, you have to then work with some of the political limitations and viewpoints that they bring to this party.

So the creative thing that you would have done is with NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] or with some ad hoc group of countries. You would actually have tried to develop and institutionalize methods of multilateral cooperation. If you're in a coalition war, to wage

coalition war successfully over time you need to develop coalition military institutions for regularized, routinized cooperation. Exchanges of information, but then also that would be exchanges of, “Let’s talk about rules of engagement. Let’s talk about appropriate practices and treatment of enemy captives.” Then we’ve got to talk about strategy and we have to be willing to have that kind of conversation.

As best I can tell, the idea I’ve just talked about in this period of time is never even proposed. It would have required actually some creative thinking about ways to adapt or reinvent or conjure new kinds of international institutions to manage in a more effective way this kind of multilateral effort. Then you would have had to take these potential trade-offs into account and listen to what people had to say. Then people could have their arguments about whether it’s worth—this alternative, as best I could tell from a little bit of a distance, never gels to the point of even being a concrete alternative to consider. It would have been—because someone would have had to do some creative work to invent these alternatives.

Leffler: Is it conceivable—so you’re criticizing them now respectfully for not doing this, but is it a reasonable criticism in light of what you admit was the pervasive fear and high degree of risk that they felt that doing these sorts of things takes time and involves trade-offs that are incredibly difficult when there is a perception of very high risk?

Zelikow: Again, it is a very shrewdly put question, and my answer is I’m very tolerant about that for a while and my tolerance goes down as time passes. In general I think what happens when a government receives a huge shock is the government basically just goes. It grabs everything it has on the shelf and then it just goes and it reacts spasmodically. During that initial period of spasmodic reaction it would be a very high demand. It would have been good if it had done more. I don’t actually excuse the lack of creativity. Because some of these issues were apparent fairly early on. But I cut them some slack for a month, two months. As time passes I cut them less slack, because as time passes, especially once the initial campaign is done in Afghanistan and basically the enemy has fled, you’re still getting new alarms every day, but increasingly you do have the chance to kind of catch your breath now.

This is the moment when as a government you catch your breath. *OK, we now actually need to organize ourselves to do this for another year or two or three or who knows. Let’s think about what we’re doing.* They actually begin to move into this phase during the winter of ’01, ’02 and then increasingly in ’02. I become less forgiving of these omissions as these months go on. By the way, they will ultimately come up with this idea, I participate in it, but they won’t really come up with this idea in a serious way until ’05.

Riley: It suggests another paradox though, right? The point at which this kind of multilateral cooperation is probably most sellable, immediately after the shock, is the time when they have the least enthusiasm for embracing that as an option.

Zelikow: Yes. But here, actually, I still don’t quite let them off the hook. To his credit, Nick Burns got NATO organized very early on to give strong support, which shows—he was Ambassador to NATO and so he saw his opportunity and grabbed it. I actually fault the State Department a lot on this. Because that’s where the idea should have been developed. Look, we’re

moving into—we want this to be seen as a coalition fight, right? We don't want this to be seen as America against the world. We want this to be seen as a general international cause.

So very early on there are people who should have the time and energy to think about how do we conceptualize this as an international fight. And if it is an international fight, what does that mean institutionally? That's a very hard burden in the first week or two weeks, but especially at the State Department. I don't think that's an unreasonable intellectual demand to place on them.

Riley: OK.

Zelikow: Especially as they're thinking about how do we rationalize what we're already doing with NATO. We're already doing stuff; we're getting the UN to support us. A bunch of countries are offering to help. The notion that you're just passive and letting all this unfold serendipitously just because you're really busy I think is a failure. A lot of the story you get into in this period and a lot of the pathologies that the Bush administration will end up getting used to are pathologies in which some parts of the government are highly entrepreneurial and creative and working on how to get ready to do the things we think should be done and that we care about, and other parts of the government are relatively passive and reactive.

The State Department is losing the battle of ideas, in part because it doesn't put too many ideas of its own on the table. Again and again you read these accounts, and the tenor of the accounts is somebody else makes a move and then they react and complain and squeal rather than they're actually proactively taking the initiative and trying to frame the argument. That's not what happens. And in fact I think this partly has to do with the particular strengths and weaknesses of Powell and Armitage and of their team. These are extremely capable people, but proactive policy development is not their strongest suit.

Leffler: When you meet somebody like Richard Haass, you get a feeling that the folks in the State Department who might have wanted to be proactive are being really put down and are being outfoxed, outwitted, outpowered, outmaneuvered by people they see as their adversaries.

Zelikow: Yes, you definitely do see that. I'm just saying, OK, grant whatever interpretive force you want to that, but from my own experience I have a limited degree of sympathy with people who whine about being outfoxed and outmaneuvered. No, they should be complaining about you. Or show me the plan *you* put on the table. Let's just take a very concrete and very important example, which is the treatment of enemy captives and the Geneva Convention issues.

For instance, the folks who were the entrepreneurs on how to handle this problem will end up developing a notion that they want to be able to do this stuff and they need to circumvent all Geneva restrictions to do what they want to do and they develop their plan, which they begin unfolding in the late fall and winter of 2001-02. Then there is the story in which basically State and even Condi to some degree are taken aback by this and are outmaneuvered. The President—but these guys have a plan and a story. This issue was not an issue that was coming by surprise. The reason these guys are developing a plan for it is it has been coming for weeks and months.

My reaction in 2003 in the 9/11 Commission, when I really began work on this, but it was my reaction sooner, is do not come in at them and say, "We need Geneva applicability" and make a lawyerly argument. The argument I would have made at them and the argument that is in the

9/11 Commission Report is no, come at them and say you've got to do Common Article 3. If you don't want to do Common Article 3, accepting it as a preemptory norm of binding international law, which is troublesome for some people for technical reasons I won't go into, then just accept Common Article 3 as a policy guideline, Common Article 3 of the four Geneva Conventions then, because it is going to be your necessary rules of the road for coalition warfare.

I explained it in the piece I drafted for the report. It makes it as a policy argument. I don't make a sanctimonious international legal argument, although I actually think the international legal argument has some merit. That's just not the argument that will have the broadest appeal. The argument that has the broadest appeal is if you want to fight a coalition war, you need a coalition standard for how to treat these people. If you don't adopt a coalition standard for how to treat these people you're actually going to run into war-fighting problems, which we did later run into.

Leffler: But isn't there a real debate about whether high people in the administration wanted to fight a coalition war? In the literature that exists there is a lot of emphasis that the folks—Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz, Cheney—explicitly did not want to fight a coalition war. Do you think that is a true statement?

Zelikow: It is not quite true. I'll offer a stab at this.

Leffler: Is it mostly true?

Zelikow: There is a sense in which it is emotionally true, but in fact what they are doing, they have a particular notion of what their coalition is. Their coalition totally includes people like Egyptians, Jordanians, and Pakistanis, and some others. It does from the start, from the get-go, because those are simpatico people. It is a narrower definition of the coalition because especially early on they want to work with people who are as bloody-minded as they are. I understand that. Emotionally I can understand that, intellectually I can understand it, especially during the period in which you're just frantic about the risk that the country faces.

Leffler: But is that—

Zelikow: And you want people who are going to be as tough as you are and you don't want to have to deal with milquetoast Europeans and all of that. Now I'm just trying to recapture a little bit of the emotional reality. But as time passes, and not a lot of time, your international interactions and your necessary partners, not your optional partners, your necessary partners, are actually a much broader circle than this. You've got to figure out how to regularize these patterns of behavior in ways that will be sustainable, and no one is really even making the argument to them that, "Guys, if you do things this way, this is just not going to be sustainable internationally over time."

Leffler: Did Condi Rice make this argument in summer, fall 2002?

Zelikow: I don't know. A lot of this is still a mystery to me. I've tried to keep up with the literature that is extant as of summer 2010 on how these policies were developed, the policies on how to wage the War on Terror, treat and question enemy captives. I think I'm up to date on what has been declassified on this. But I don't actually think there has yet—we now know quite a lot about the output of the U.S. government, like when orders were given to do certain things

and when we started doing things. We actually know very little about the policy development that produced those outputs.

Leffler: What's the best literature for us to read to be well informed about precisely that issue? I'm just curious.

Zelikow: The *New York Times* stories that were focused on the SERE [Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape] program and the role of [James] Mitchell and the other contractors and when and how they kind of sold the idea of applying that program for the treatment of enemy captives and the quality of the arguments around those choices. There were one or two important *New York Times* stories about that that shed some light, that were interesting, in which [John] Bellinger is quoted, among others, about what they did or did not understand about what was being sold.

Beyond that, there are the standard journalistic accounts, [Barton] Gellman, [Jane] Mayer. But again, most of them have this problem. A lot of the way I've reconstructed it to develop hypotheses that I consider plausible is knowing the way the system works and the people who are involved. I work backward from things that I know happened and then try to figure out what necessarily would have had to occur involving which people when for these things to have happened. Also, if certain kinds of documents had been prepared, there is a good chance I'd know about it. So the absence of certain documents. Then occasionally I might ask someone, "Do you remember anyone writing something like this?" But I still can't really point you to an account that I regard as satisfactory for this critical policy development.

I think you can get a good feel of the climate of the times by reading things like Ron Suskind's *The One Percent Solution*. Suskind has a number of interpretive conclusions that he draws with which I do not agree, but what Suskind is very good at is recapturing the mindset and the mental outlook of his sources about the climate, what things are like in Langley in late '01, early '02, and the relationship of Cheney and Tenet during that period.

If you just kind of imagine that—then separate yourself from what Suskind is saying, Suskind is essentially repeating what his sources are telling him with these word pictures. Then imagine those word pictures. Those are very powerful pictures. They strike me as quite accurate because I did have a little bit of insight into that world during that period because of my own responsibilities on the PFIAB and some other things.

Leffler: I was struck recently; I had a lunch with a very high policy maker from that period of time and he said to me that one should never underestimate the importance of the anthrax scare—

Zelikow: I agree with that.

Leffler: —and its percolating resonance on people's ongoing fears about what might occur and the fact that a bunch of people had had personal run-ins with the anthrax scare in which they thought in one way or another that they might have been infected.

Zelikow: Yes.

Leffler: So not that it was a sense of personal motive, there was this confluence of both being personally endangered but also underscoring and reifying one's responsibilities to the collective well-being.

Zelikow: Well, a couple of points I tried to stress, and I've actually written up some of this in an essay in your collection. Yes, the anthrax is very important. Remember at this time they still don't know who did it or how this happened. They don't even have a good theory as to how it happened at this time. There is an argument as to whether even today—

Leffler: Do you remember arguing at that time that the anthrax was directly linked to Saddam himself?

Zelikow: No, but I was not privy to a lot of the arguments about this. I'm not in the administration. What I can say with confidence is that it alarmed them. From stories people have told me later, and I repeat this anecdote in your collection because I've heard it independently from both Eric Edelman and Condi, is this scare when both the Vice President and Condi thought they might have actually been exposed to a fatal biological agent for a period of time.

Riley: Where does this come from, may I ask?

Zelikow: This actually is not in print.

Leffler: The Cheney episode is in one of the accounts. It may be one of Suskind's books.

Riley: I just don't remember having seen that.

Zelikow: I don't know. But it made an impression at the time—it made enough of an impression on Condi that she told me this story years later, remembering it pretty vividly. At one point on a plane flying back, she was just trying to unpack what things were like back then to help me understand it even better. We were just reminiscing about what that period was like.

You start with this incredible sense of threat to the country that no one really had experienced in their lifetime. They knew Pearl Harbor from books, but they didn't have any personal memory of Pearl Harbor. And this was a worse attack in many ways than Pearl Harbor had been, but unlike Pearl Harbor the attack actually is aimed practically at them almost directly. One of the targets was either the White House or the Capitol. So there is that first level for the country and second level, by the way, they're actually trying to kill you personally where you work. The White House was actually a potential major target, so you actually have to do things about your personal safety.

You have to flee from places. The Vice President has to relocate and the President, literally, the President and his family are woken out of bed in the middle of the night and rushed to shelters. This happens to Condi and the Vice President. There are alarms about the family and then there are biological weapons detectors that go off and read false positive. Then for some of a day in the fall of '01 both the Vice President and Condi think they might have been fatally exposed to ricin, which is a terrible deadly BW [biological warfare] agent. Meanwhile the anthrax thing really has happened; that's for real. You have no idea who has done it. It's just a strange episode, but it was real anthrax and it really did kill people. There is even some controversy today as to

whether or not the FBI has gotten to the bottom of this. But back then they really didn't have a good theory for it.

You very quickly have evidence that al-Qaeda is definitely interested in biological warfare agents. This is one of the reasons why on the Iraq story where there is this huge attention on the nuclear piece of this and the fears about the nuclear side of this and very little attention to all the biological warfare fears that are associated with Iraq—

Leffler: This is what this person was actually just saying to me last week who was intimately involved.

Zelikow: —the Iraqi biological stuff, also the forensics of tracing—if someone disseminates biological warfare agents, the forensics of tracing that back—you had to prove it came from Iraq. One of the reasons too you know this is important to them, on the bio thing particularly, is they make a gigantic, multi-billion-dollar commitment to bio warfare protection right away. There's a massive effort to devote time and energy to bio protection.

I ran the Aspen Strategy Group on this the following summer and actually there is a report of some of that that captures a little bit of the climate of the times about the seriousness of this danger. In addition, because the government doesn't have established institutional repertoires to do a lot of what it is doing, it is inventing new ways of trying to protect itself. Because it is inventing and improvising stuff all over the place, you can't basically just turn it over to the departments and then they do their stuff and then report to you every day. You're actually involved in this invention and improvisation all the time. So they're making constant decisions about, "Well, let's start that, let's try that, let's experiment with this."

They get in a habit of thought that is a routine of continuous improvisation to defend the country, of making stuff up and trying things out and taking chances. Then they actually get in that habit of thought and it seems to be really effective. Afghanistan collapses like a house of cards, surprisingly, easier than they thought it would be. Note you haven't gotten another attack.

The President—and by the way, domestically the President's popularity is sky-high. Then you go almost through a period like—we've been basically running and gunning here, making stuff up and coping and doing massive stuff for the last couple of months, and you know what? This is working. It's working on all indexes. It is working overseas, it's protecting us so far, and actually it is extremely popular in our domestic politics, which is not a trivial factor, at least for some. Then that induces—as I mentioned earlier, Presidents invent and reinvent themselves after they're in office. They discover things about themselves and the things that seem to be working for them. This strongly reinforces these habits as being positive habits.

We've been taking risks, we've been operating at the edge of the envelope, and so far that works.

Leffler: And might I add, this all alludes to inclinations to participate or not participate in coalition collaboration, right? All these habits that you're emphasizing—improvisation, risk taking, all of that probably orients people toward working unilaterally rather than in coalitions.

Zelikow: Absolutely it does, your point is profoundly right. So then to the extent there is any justice to my argument at all, then you can just sort of step back and say: At what point should

they have caught their breath and been reflective enough to see that they needed to do business in a different way? I think I will argue that 2005 was late. At the point where we begin engaging the argument from the inside, at the point—you can argue that even by the time I'm drafting this recommendation for the 9/11 Commission in '04 that that is late.

Maybe you can make the argument that you have to be more empathetic to them and cut them some slack on this for a while. Then it is a judgment call as to what point should they have started making the transition to figure out how to regularize this stuff and make this more sustainable. I think actually, though, that some of these issues about coalition sustainability would have come up as part of a set of issues if they had run a proper policy process on interrogation methods. This would not have been the only thing that would have come up in that process, but it would have been one of the things that would have come up in that process if you had run a proper process, and I fault them for that, I really do.

Riley: Well, arguably—

Zelikow: That's not a historian's comment. I'm now being a vicarious policymaker.

Leffler: So there wasn't a proper process on that. Is it fair to say, as many writers have said, that there wasn't proper process with regard to the essential question of war making against Iraq?

Zelikow: The answer is probably yes, but that's a more difficult question.

Riley: Do you need a break?

Zelikow: I'm doing fine. If you guys can hold up, I'm fine. I'm still pretty interested in all this.

Riley: As are we.

Zelikow: But partly it is because my notion of how the Iraq decisions end up being made. So I then ask myself what should they have done differently, when, and my answer to all that is a little bit complicated.

Riley: Can you march us through that narrative? Maybe you get to Mel's question by—

Leffler: I'm going to take a break.

Nelson: To fill the void left by Mel's departure, my memory is imperfect but it's hard for me to think about Bush's West Point speech or this National Security Strategy document that you drafted apart from the building case for war in Iraq. In other words, given the general debate that was going on in the summer of 2002, remember specifically the speech by the Vice President in Nashville in August of 2002? How could you think that somebody would read this document and not think this is fighting the case for invasion of Iraq?

Zelikow: Actually, that's the way that most people did read the document. It's just that. It is a hindsight reading, it is—

Nelson: But you're a very politically savvy—as you demonstrated. Surely you would have known—

Zelikow: Yes, but when I was writing this, I didn't know we were thinking about invading Iraq.

Riley: Which is the question on the agenda when Mel comes back.

Zelikow: Really, I didn't even have a very strong inkling of it. It wasn't really written with that in mind at all, which is I know ironic in light of the literature, but it's true.

Nelson: When did you actually write it?

Zelikow: The first draft was prepared and given to Condi and Steve at the beginning of March 2002. At the time I was really working hard on this, in the first months of 2002, the notion that we might invade Iraq wasn't even in the foreground of my consciousness in connection with this document. In addition to the document itself and the initial drafts, there are other things I was writing for Rice about—I'm just a secondary or maybe even tertiary character in all of this, but my notions about world order and what we were trying to say in all of this—I was giving her stuff in December of '01 and January of '02. That's in my papers. Iraq just doesn't come up.

I guess rather than recapitulate what is in there, people should just read it. But I urge them, if they're interested in these questions, to read—because there is actually an intellectual structure in those papers and about the nature of the world, the nature of what the problems are, how America can most effectively relate to those problems, and what we have to do as a leader in order to play that role. I thought the Iraq problem was a serious problem, but I thought we were a long way away from actually having to try to invade Iraq.

Just speaking for myself, the notion that we might actually be invading Iraq soon, that that was really going to be pulled to the foreground and we were actually contemplating, had not quite dawned on me even by August of '02. I remember this really quite vividly, because this debate had exploded in July publicly. [Joseph] Biden held his hearings. I remember going out to Aspen. Everyone was buzzing about it at the Aspen Strategy Group meeting that year. I remember talking to Brent. I said, “Brent, do you really think that this is for real?”

Brent said, “Yes, I think it is.” I argued against him. That's why I remember. “It's premature, isn't it?” Then I went back. I actually had a chance to talk to Condi and Steve right after I got back from this meeting. They said, “Yes, this is pretty serious.” At that point then I wrote a little paper on how I thought we ought to approach the Iraq problem, which actually is in my files, which was written sometime in August of '02. I had my own conception, which would have been to create—it was a whole different way of making the argument that wasn't pinned on WMD. It was much more actually along the lines of what we did with Haiti in 1994 and the approach we took then, toppling Saddam on the same grounds we toppled the junta in Haiti. Then you would have an international authority come in that would be led by Muslims. I actually mentioned that probably [Lakhdar] Brahimi as a likely—

In a way it shows—you can say that I was ignorant or naïve, but I was a little bit behind the curve. I remember Hadley looked at this paper of mine and said, “You may be right that this is the way we should make the argument, but we're already dug into making the argument a

different way and partly we're already dug into making the argument a different way because Powell has won the argument about going to the UN. He has won the argument about going to the UN by making the argument in a certain way." I don't know whether Steve was just being polite to me or not, but that is what he said at the time.

Now let me go back and reconstruct a little bit as to what—but the point I was making out of all this is the National Security Strategy itself was not written to justify Iraq. The big offensive we were going to do, we're going on offense, and preemption is the War on Terror that I was talking about earlier. We're going to be very tough on trying to prevent the spread of WMD, because the marriage of WMD with these terrorist dangers is something we're extremely worried about. So we need to really keep a tight grip on Iraq or others who might be possible proliferants. So the document is definitely about all of that. But the notion that the situation with Iraq is so out of hand and so unmanageable that we have to immediately plan to invade it this year, or start getting ready to do that this year, was a little bit beyond my ken.

The preemption language gets changed very significantly during the summer of '02, and the preemption language is moved into the WMD section, where it now is found in the document. But the irony about that is, that drafting fix was suggested not by some neocons—by the way, the notorious neocons weren't even part of this drafting process, or hardly at all. But that suggestion actually came from Condi's lawyer, from John Bellinger, who wrote an insert that would move preemption there. Why did Bellinger do that? Because Bellinger was a neocon in sheep's clothing? No. It is because Bellinger had worked up an international legal argument and I think he did have Iraq in mind. Of course he had no particular views on whether Iraq was a threat. He'd been told it was a threat, so he'd been told to work on legal arguments. So by July he's working on legal arguments. He has come up with a legal argument for how we're going to do this under international law.

His argument is that we have to do it as UN Charter Article 51, Self-Defense. The only way we can do it as Article 51, Self-Defense, is by making the argument as preemption. So we now have to rewrite this document so that we're actually making a preemption argument in this chapter of it. Then Bellinger actually wrote the insert that was then plugged into the document. Now if you had asked Bellinger whether he thought he was actually lowering the burden of proof, he would have said no. Indeed, Condi will give a speech in October of '02 to defend the document that actually Bellinger substantially works with her on. I think I had no part in that speech. Bellinger is making the argument that actually the bar is very high, which I think Bellinger sincerely believes.

There are two problems with it. I actually didn't agree with Bellinger's argument at the time. In the original drafts of the document I even drew a distinction in writing between preventive war and preemption and thought that if you did a WMD thing like Iraq that's preventive war. That was my view. Maybe I was just—that was one of the things that was taken out of the document in that July '02 redrafting. Then the document passes out of my hands and the NSC staff took control, held the pen until the thing was done.

But there are two problems with Bellinger's argument. One problem, in addition to my argument, which other political scientists and lawyers have made, that these are not the right uses of these terms, then you can have an argument about that. Condi actually thought this was a

semantic argument, that it was an idle argument in some ways. She explains this to Sanger in her background interview in June of '02.

The two problems with Bellinger's argument—number one is the concept that preemption carries with it the baggage of imminence, the proof of an imminent threat. By pushing that language in there he had accepted the burden of proof of an imminent threat. That turns out to be a pretty problematic choice, given the state of the evidence, quite problematic.

Second problem, it actually puts Iraq and Saddam Hussein in a far more advantageous position politically and legally than he had been in beforehand, because beforehand, the way the Clinton administration had properly justified the preventive war against Iraq in December 1998, which most people had forgotten, but which was kind of a small-scale preventive war. Hundreds of air strikes the length and breadth of the country to essentially try and wipe out a massive WMD program that they could no longer manage through international inspections.

They chose that particular kind of warfare among a menu of options, some of which had much higher stuff. Pollack actually talks a little bit about this. Then they were very frustrated that it was so inconclusive. They bring Pollack in and Sandy Berger tells him in part to start planning for regime change.

But the point is that the legal justification they had in December '98 was essentially the legal justification used against a parole violator. In 1991, and this I remember well, we didn't sign a peace treaty with Iraq; it was an armistice. We suspended a war against Iraq conditioned on Iraq doing a variety of things we said they had to do, and if they didn't do those things, we could resume hostilities at will. That was the way the original structure was set up in 1991. So it is like when someone is on parole you don't have to go back to a jury trial if you violate your parole, we're just going to put you in jail with a very different burden of proof.

But here's what happens now: he violated his conditions under the original resolutions of 1991. We can resume hostilities at will under the original resolution. But if you introduce the burden of proof of imminent danger, which you do when you introduce the concept of preemption, you've actually—we've now shouldered a huge burden of proof that we didn't have beforehand in order to make our argument politically and legally in a way the Clinton administration did not have to make their argument in 1998.

By the way, to this day I believe that some of the people in the Office of the Vice President are actually bitter about the introduction of all this preemption language in the National Security Strategy precisely because they were smart and they figured all this out. For all I know they blame me for it, except I wasn't the genius who did this and I had argued against it, but they may not know that. So some of the people who are most ardently in favor of attacking Iraq were opposed to the use of the preemption language here because they understood the effect that that would have on your political and legal case in contrast to where you had been before you'd done it. But that was the reason.

So in a way the whole story is ironic and paradoxical on so many levels in comparison to the way this is understood. It wasn't introduced for the reasons people thought it was introduced. It wasn't introduced by the kind of people or faction that is generally portrayed in the literature,

and, indeed, to the extent those people had a view of the introduction of this language they thought it was a bad idea.

Leffler: Ultimately when they talk about—there is a consensus that WMD is the key focal point for justifying the war, but not necessarily because it constitutes an imminent and pending threat but because Saddam’s alleged development of WMD constitutes an abrogation of the 1991 armistice.

Zelikow: Absolutely. That is actually a relatively straightforward case and then makes things much easier. And here is a further irony. When you introduce this preemption language in this way and then you accept the burden of proof of imminence and then you say, by the way, Iraq meets it. Then you scare a lot of people, not just Iraqis, because the world says, if Iraq is an imminent danger, then man, there are a lot of imminent dangers out there.

The advantage of couching the argument the way Mel was just describing is that that is unique for Iraq. So then your argument isn’t as scary to the rest of the world and it doesn’t look like you’ve become this menacing fear-crazed empire, which is the way we end up getting portrayed subsequently. So this is a pretty significant choice.

Leffler: I have not gone back and recently read Colin Powell’s famous speech at the UN, but to the extent I remember it, it seems actually conflicted on this very point. That is to say Powell is saying that the Iraqis are doing this stuff and we have evidence they’re doing it. But he’s not necessarily saying, as I remember, that that constitutes an impending threat or an imminent threat. But that it actually constitutes a violation of what he agreed not to do. There is this ambiguity in the speech itself, right?

Zelikow: I think that’s very fair and reflects basically the awkward position in which the U.S. government then found itself, having advanced their justification in this way. It is a very curious and unfortunate byproduct of the strategy and of course therefore the strategy document is read and misread by the overwhelming audience for it in just the ways we’ve been discussing. A lot of other things that the strategy document is trying to do simply pass unnoticed. I view this philosophically.

I must say, once you redrafted the document in this way, some of these consequences arguably were foreseeable, especially once the document is released in conjunction with all the Iraq decisions, which frankly in early 2002 I didn’t quite see coming.

Riley: You’re going to give us your account of what you see based on your own inside wisdom about how the Iraq decision was taken?

Zelikow: I have a brief summary of this in writing in the essay in the collection that Mel and Jeff Legro assembled. To just offer some of the brief signposts: I think there is a series of decisions about the new agenda of the United States during the winter of ’01 and ’02 as they catch their breath after the initial Afghan campaign and are deciding what are the big things we’re going to do in ’02. Remember, I mentioned this is an administration that liked to have a disciplined agenda. This is not quite as tight as it was the beginning of ’01, and it is mostly about foreign policy.

They haven't described it in these terms and maybe they might not agree, but I think there is kind of a four-part agenda that I see emerging at the beginning of '02 on, which is, on Iraq, one way or another in '02 we're going to come to grips with this Iraq problem and get to a comfortable place with it. We can no longer tolerate the uncertainty and risk associated with the Iraq problem. That risk was somewhat tolerable before 9/11; it no longer feels tolerable to us anymore.

Before 9/11, as best I can read the evidence—I have good, hard evidence that Rumsfeld is an advocate of strong military action against Iraq before 9/11. I have fairly good evidence that before 9/11 Condi believes we can do containment, and some indirect evidence that Cheney also is in what Ken Pollack called the “moderate hawk” faction that was tough on Iraq, but containment, because anything else is too hard, even though some of Cheney's staff are more hawkish than Cheney himself, according to Pollack, who was in a position to know for a while, until about the middle of '01.

What I think then happens is that after 9/11 Cheney's position swings above all on the willingness to tolerate risk and uncertainty on Iraq, and is also I think very strongly influenced by the successful campaign in Afghanistan as an analogy for likely military prospects in Iraq. The second point is much less well understood than the first. I also think that Rice is also similarly influenced in this way, but exactly how and what compound I don't know. So a lot of this is conjectural.

It comes to a conclusion in early '02 that we're going to grasp the nettle on Iraq and somehow resolve the uncertainty about it. As soon as you say that, it had been understood for years that that meant you actually had to have a military plan for Iraq. It doesn't mean you're going to execute that plan, but you can't say that one way or another we're going to settle it unless you develop that option to a point of viability. The Clinton administration, according to Pollack, who was in a position to know, had actually walked up to this elephant, had written the plan by spring 1999 under Tony Zinni and then they had decided it was too big, too hard. They had stepped back from it, which bitterly annoyed Pollack at the time.

Now flash forward to early 2002—they made that agenda-setting decision, but what is the role of diplomacy in that? What further ultimatum do you give? As the British cabled back to London, they haven't answered any of the big questions yet, but they're leaning in this way. Now, that's very important. That's what I would call an agenda-setting decision. Iraq is going to be a big item on our agenda in 2002. I think that decision is made in the winter of '01-'02. I don't know exactly how or when. I don't see any evidence that it is made in a formal process, but contra Tenet and verified by the British Embassy's reporting, there is an Iraq strategy review that is being conducted in the winter of '01 and '02 that does produce the decision to somehow come to grips with this in '02.

Leffler: Who is on this Iraq strategy group?

Zelikow: I don't know. But the Embassy in Washington reports back to London that this is going on and I had seen references to this in other sources as something that people knew was going on. Now, what I then see is a sign that this progressively hardens through the spring. Rumsfeld is now developing military plans that look increasingly tempting and viable. That story has been written elsewhere to the point where Bush is now leaning more and more forward. That

just sort of drifts to a point where by July of '02 you've now made a pretty firm decision that we're willing to prepare a possible invasion of Iraq. We are at the verge of doing something like that.

You'll see evidence in July of '02, in Richard Haass's book or in the famous Downing Street memo, [Richard] Dearlove comes back. He says, "They're getting ready." Haass comes back to Powell and he says to Powell, "They've made their choice." What those accounts tend to leave out is the sequel to what happened next. The sequel to what happened next is—because actually at this point they have a notion that we're willing to go to war. Before we get to the next chapter of the story, there is another big factor here that is hard to calculate.

They make a decision not to go to war in northern Iraq. That is a decision that they appear to have made in June of '02. There is an interesting article that has been written about this in I think *Security Studies*.

Leffler: Strategic studies.

Zelikow: OK, this is fairly important. I've seen other material about this, but there is a lot we don't know about this. We have some fairly serious evidence. By the way, unlike some other alarms about Iraq, turns out to be substantially true. Some bad people working on BW and other things up in northern Iraq. There is a serious effort to developing a military plan for a limited invasion of northern Iraq to clean out these guys. The evidence is that the President looked at such a plan and decided not to execute it. So we decided not to go to war in a limited war in northern Iraq in June of '02.

It seems to me, though, that the implication of that decision is it strengthens your momentum—if you're not going to do that, it redoubles your commitment. I'm not going to do this half-assed; I'm going to do it the whole way, and if I do it the whole way I'd better do it pretty soon because I have to address this fairly urgent threat that I've heard about in the North. The role of that factor in this calculation is very hard to assess, though. We know very little about this.

July, now, I've got increasing momentum for war. The reaction to this then is from both London and Powell. The sequel to the famous Dearlove account and the Downing Street meeting is actually that [Tony] Blair sends his representative, David Manning, to Washington to talk to Condi. Manning's message for Condi is extremely blunt, is a very powerful message. It is, "If you don't go through the UN, we're not going to be with you; we just can't do this with you. If you want to address this thing with Iraq, you have to go through the UN and try to resolve this diplomatically."

Condi is impressed enough by what Manning has to say that she actually arranges or calls in the President to hear it directly from Manning's own lips, which he does. Then Manning goes back to London.

Riley: Resolve this diplomatically.

Zelikow: This is a very private meeting to deliver a sensitive message like this.

Riley: Meaning that you need UN—

Zelikow: If you want to bring Iraq to a conclusion, you can't just do some bolt from the blue invasion. You actually have to do this by trying to resolve this diplomatically, going through the United Nations. Otherwise you Americans can go ahead, but you're going to have to do it without us. Since I think Blair has fairly close to a de facto veto power over this American move, including the interaction with American domestic politics, I think this is important. Since I have this directly from David Manning and since Manning has also testified to this under oath, I believe this is true, though I haven't seen any published accounts about this.

At the same time, by the way—this happens I think at the end of July, last days of July, almost at exactly the same time Colin Powell prepares his 32-gun, full double deck broadside on this. Powell takes in the news from Haass. But Powell then decides, *I'm going to hit this about as hard as I can*. Powell has the longest and most intense meeting he has with the President during his whole tenure as Secretary of State in the first days of August. It turns out Powell's message and the British message are identical. Because Powell gives them all this stuff about all the problems. We now have multiple accounts of this; I presume probably from not just Powell, but also from Powell and Rice. The accounts all tend to dovetail. You can read them. The bottom line of all those accounts, the President basically says, "OK, what do you want me to do?" Powell says, "Here's what I want you to do."

What he wants is what Blair wants. The bottom line is that the President decides to do what Blair and Powell want him to do; he accepts their advice. This does not happen instantaneously.

Nelson: Are you implying that Powell threatened to resign? That he was telling Bush, "You'll have to go ahead without me" too?

Zelikow: No, I don't think he put it that way. Whether or not that was implicit others can judge.

Riley: But the route he wanted to take was the same route that the British wanted.

Zelikow: It was. If you want to do this, here is the way you've got to do it. If you do it this way, it actually leaves open a route to diplomacy.

Now there hasn't yet been a meeting on whether to go to war. There will actually then be a series of meetings that follow up on all this in August. So for the first time you're actually having road-to-war meetings. Here is one of the critiques I have of a lot of—what Powell and Blair both see and sense and what they're essentially saying is, "You have a plan for war, but you actually have no plan for how to go to war. None." It's like someone who has a plan for how they're going to occupy all of France in 1944, but no one has actually bothered to work out the cross-Channel invasion part. OK, we have this plan. OK, what's the road to war? Congress? What are you going to do about Congress? Allies? What do you do about that? The region? Or is this the notion that the President goes on TV tomorrow and announces we're going to war with Iraq?

This is, of course, why they have—their plan at that particular time still had a code word revealingly titled "running start." Well, we'll just start going to war, ordering forces to the theater while we're going to war and presumably allies and the Congress—this is feckless; this is not serious. Frankly, when someone like Powell points out that this is just not serious, that's the point at which, OK, if we really want to think about going to war, we really actually do have to

write a road to war and then we have to have a bunch of meetings about that. Then they have a bunch of meetings in August of '02 about the road to war.

Of course here is the great irony. The great advocates of going to war actually have no plan as to how to get there. The plan for how to get to a road to war is supplied for them by Tony Blair and Colin Powell with support from Condi Rice. They are, in effect, the enablers who help figure out how to do this in a way that is actually professional and coherent.

Leffler: Philip, is it not fair to say that there are serious people like Cheney and maybe Rumsfeld, but certainly Cheney, who actually believe, contrary to what you're saying, that you can go to war without allies and you can go to war without Congress and they sincerely believe that?

Zelikow: Right. That is a great question and it is entirely possible that you are right. It is my argument, it's just an argument, that, a) I think if the President actually was obliged to make the decision to do that he would have quailed as he and others around him began to reflect on what that would actually mean in practice the next day and the day after that. But b) if the President had however, not quailed and decided to execute just such an option on these lines, a lot would have frustrated this plan very quickly. This would have foundered fairly quickly. They would have found that they had miscalculated what country they lived in and what world they lived in. But I may be wrong about that. Some of these other people know America pretty well too and they may be a lot smarter about this than I am, but I'm just offering my view.

Riley: There was an argument that the AUMF [Authorization for Use of Military Force] had done this already?

Zelikow: Yes, you can make that argument.

Riley: But politically it wasn't viable?

Zelikow: I don't believe that was. You have to—because then the AUMF—then you're even more in it's all al-Qaeda; al-Qaeda is Saddam Hussein and Iraq. Of course at this point the President goes—the more you do stuff like this, every day in which you're doing stuff the President's political exposure is colossal because he has no political base underneath him at all.

Riley: I see.

Zelikow: This is one of the things that is not as well understood, the way our country works and why all these powers are actually shared. Partly they're shared because—you can initiate a lot of stuff from one side or the other, but it is actually very difficult to sustain anything large for very long unless you have a broader political base than that in the country. So the congressional side of this is important.

[phone interruption]

I'm just making—this is my point of view on how these things work out in practice. The President did not have a sufficient political base in the AUMF to have launched an invasion of Iraq from a standing start. You see, think about all the weeks of mobilization that would have

been involved, the call-up of Reserves. Meanwhile probably the strikes they're already launching. Then just work out how that is going to feel week in and week out. The President has not gotten any congressional approval for this. Again, maybe he could have pulled it off. You've got the midterm election coming up. The President is still very popular. Indeed maybe this could have worked for a little while. But then of course if you get into even a little trouble, the political base underneath you to handle the trouble is extremely slender.

Riley: OK, one further question on this, Mike, and I'll come back to you—

Zelikow: But that's why—to circle back, when should they have had the meetings about road to war? They end up having them in August of '02. By the way, it's not a coincidence there are big arguments in August of '02 about what the road to war should be, which, by the way, are extremely reminiscent of arguments I remember from September 1990.

Riley: That was what I was about to ask you a question about, Philip. You had already indicated that you felt that that was an extremely important time for your own conception of political reality.

Zelikow: Yes.

Riley: It must have been the same for the others, and ultimately it succeeded in giving Bush 41 the political cover he needed to do something he was inclined to do anyway. How do you interpret that experience as being relevant, if at all, to the period that we're discussing now?

Zelikow: Frankly, those of us who had been through the first war (1991)—and this is an important point—in general all of us were actually relatively optimistic about our ability to work with allies and form coalitions and work things internationally. We weren't naïve about the problems of doing so, but we had done so successfully on a number of very hard things. Maybe that was an artificial—a mistake in judgment. I'm serious.

Riley: I'm smiling because—

Zelikow: I think people are influenced about their formative experiences. Our formative experiences had been a successful performance of some pretty difficult high-wire acts of multilateral diplomacy, including in this war situation (in 1990-91). That therefore encouraged the predisposition to think that we can pull off stuff like this. We shouldn't be intimidated. Cheney had been on the other side of the argument in September 1990 as Thatcher had been. He had lost that argument then, and he lost it again in August of 2002. The President after some tough arguments ended up adopting the approach that now was supported by both Powell and Rice and also by Blair, who comes to America himself in August, essentially to play his part in the American debates. All kinds of people are weighing in, including Jim Baker. Scowcroft's op-ed, by the way, is very famous. The Baker op-ed is worth more attention. There is some level at which Baker was still, in a different way from Brent, someone whom people attend to.

Leffler: Are these arguments really about whether to go to war or how to go to war?

Zelikow: They are both, but you're right that in a way they implicitly to some degree make the "whether" decision. What they say is—both Powell and Blair—here is what Powell and Blair

have yielded. What Powell and Blair have yielded in this is they have said, “If he won’t satisfy us on the WMD, we agree to war.”

Leffler: That’s a big—

Zelikow: It is. They have agreed to that. This is why—Condi and Bush probably regarded this actually as helpful in some way; they’re anxious to codify a Presidential directive, the first key Presidential directive on the Iraq war is written around the third week, mid third week, of August. It comes out about August 24. But that’s the one that then codifies for the first time if he doesn’t do X, Y, and Z we’re going to invade Iraq, and here are going to be our goals. Now Powell and Blair have in effect signed off on that.

Yes, you’re right. If they didn’t want to accept that view, they needed to have said something different in those critical meetings in July to try and head this off. In fact, I think Blair didn’t say something different because Blair didn’t believe something different. I think Blair said what he genuinely and sincerely believed. I think those beliefs for Blair had been in gestation for years. You can go back to a lot of things, including even in his experiences in the Balkans and with Kosovo and his view of internationalist intervention and world order that he hoped to help foster.

For Powell perhaps a different and more complicated story, but you’re right, that’s the trade-off that’s going on there. At the point in that conversation where Bush asked Powell, “What do you want me to do?” I hoped Powell had given careful thought to how he was going to answer that question, because in effect he made an argument that was persuasive. He may or may not have known that the British were making the argument almost simultaneously. Rice’s role in all of this is still a little obscure to me even today. But Rice is clearly not playing the lead role in making this argument, at least not visibly. Powell thought about how he was going to answer Bush’s question and he answered it.

Incidentally, Powell’s answer at the time, or in Blair’s answer, is not a strange and anomalous answer. In a way if you had asked Dick Holbrooke the same question, he would have given you the same answer in August of 2002. Holbrooke wrote an article, an op-ed in September of ’02, that did give that answer. Al Gore might have given you a very similar answer in August of ’02. So there was really such a broad consensus about Iraq.

The major disputes were how to go to war in a way that was smart and not *whether* so much as if you can’t get satisfaction, *when?* Is ’02 too soon? Do we need to concern ourselves with Afghanistan for a while longer? For lots of reasons the Bush administration had already concluded Afghanistan was done. Actually, by their lights it was done. That’s another story that also implicates Iraq quite a lot because they didn’t want to do nation building in Afghanistan, so of course they weren’t done with nation building in Afghanistan, but they didn’t think that was going to be their job.

Nelson: The President’s Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board has presumably been meeting.

Zelikow: From time to time.

Nelson: What has it been doing? What has been your role on it? Scowcroft is chair; is his decision on march toward war in Iraq apparent in his role as chair of this board? Let's talk about that aspect of your story.

Zelikow: We had nothing to do with Iraq. After I left the board they did a report for the President on the "Sixteen Words" issue in the State of the Union. They dug into that issue a little bit, but I didn't participate in that work. I don't know what they said to the President. The key thing that we were working on was organization of the intelligence community, but especially organization to work on counterterrorism. How functional and effective is the community organized for the counterterrorist mission? The board formed a subcommittee to work on that report. I was a member of that subcommittee and drafted the report. Other members of the subcommittee with me were, I remember Steve Friedman played an important role, I think Arnie Kanter worked with me on this. Steve Friedman would later chair the PFIAB in another incarnation in the second term.

We came to some conclusions that we thought the domestic-foreign divide had not been bridged effectively in the coordination of our intelligence capability and that there were a number of other problems. We wrote a report for the President that was ready by the end of '02. That report produced an initiative. At our recommendation, the President announced in his State of the Union message in January of '03 that created something then called the Terrorism Threat Integration Center, or TTIC. You may find in Tenet's accounts—Tenet is bewildered about where this initiative has come from; it didn't come from him. That's where it came from. That was designed to actually—

John Brennan, who now works for President Obama, was made the first Director of TTIC and found all kinds of turf battle problems with CIA over who was responsible for the counterterrorism intelligence mission. The TTIC was later re-created, expanded, and modified into what is now the National Counterterrorism Center [NCTC], which is an idea I developed in another report, the 9/11 Commission Report in 2004, and the NCTC is a fairly important institution in these matters today. It has actually done quite a lot.

One of the most important problems we singled out in '02 was the domestic-foreign divide, which is a traditional problem in American intelligence, in counterterrorism. Actually, though, there were still lots of controversies and difficulties. That problem has been substantially addressed to the point that people don't even talk about it as much anymore. The PFIAB, by the way, is no longer called the PFIAB, the word "foreign" has been dropped from the title. That's not an accident. It is now simply the President's Intelligence Advisory Board; it doesn't limit itself to foreign intelligence. The Director of National Intelligence has responsibility over both domestic and foreign intelligence and the NCTC transcends them both—by the way, very much on the model of MI5, though I never said so. Because if I said so people would misunderstand. That argument had all kinds of baggage of its own that there was no need to introduce.

Nelson: Philip, this board wasn't in any way trying to look at the question of whether rumored intelligence about, say, an al-Qaeda-Iraq connection or yellowcake or any of that stuff?

Zelikow: No.

Nelson: Disputed questions of intelligence were not—

Zelikow: The board after I left did look at this very narrowly defined specific question and worked on it, but I was not part of its work and don't know what it said.

Riley: Had you been approached at any time between 9/11 and the time that you took the directorship of the 9/11 Commission about another position in the administration? There were an awful lot of things churning.

Zelikow: A little bit, not really. At the end of '01 there was some talk; folks liked some of the work that I was doing on talking about a national security strategy even before I produced the initial draft. I had also done some work about different kinds of contingency scenarios, like here are five or six bad, really catastrophic things that might happen, and I wrote little analytical excursions on them to try to help them think a little more creatively about each of those. I'm doing all of this as a private citizen. I'm not on the government payroll. I'm just a professor at UVA who is being asked for advice. What I'm writing isn't classified; it's not being written on a classified machine. It is in my papers. People can read what I wrote.

Out of all this I was asked again, "Would you consider coming in, playing some kind of policy-planning role for the NSC?" I demurred again but said maybe if we could conjure up some arrangement where I do this part-time and I keep an office. But I didn't want to move into the administration full-time. I felt in wartime it would be wrong to just say blankly no, so I tried to conjure some kind of strange relationship where I would do this in some kind of part-time way so I could contribute regularly with greater facility. That idea was, I think, too much of a Rube Goldberg scheme to be very appealing to anyone.

Riley: The 9/11 Commission is created in November of '02. Mel, is there anything that we're omitting in '02 that we ought to talk about, or is it OK for us to move on?

Leffler: I think we can move forward—although I just have one question. Philip, on the National Security Strategy Statement, most people don't know it, but the vast majority of it, if you just count lines or sections, has nothing to do with preemption, prevention, deterrence, et cetera. It has really to do with open borders, a lot of democratization, economic growth, human dignity. There are all those sections.

Zelikow: Yes, that's right.

Leffler: Should historians pay attention to that? Was this important or was this just sort of abstract notions that were not a real policy agenda? How important was all that stuff?

Zelikow: It's somewhat important. It's mainly important as a snapshot of the thinking of a few people who were part of the—here's their notion about what America needed to stand for at this particular moment and time of history. Just to very quickly summarize the intellectual structure of the argument. You have a portrait of what this moment in world history is like. A lot of pluralism. All kinds of different local societies, local communities, in an increasingly globalized world. The main problems are transnational, which present themselves in situations that are domestic. We therefore have to care a little bit about what states are doing to order themselves because of the nature of these issues and this world.

Point two. How then does an outside country like the United States adequately relate to the local choices being made in all these places? Answer: You cannot dictate to them what all these choices should be, nor is there a single model, like if you do X, this works. But we need to stand for something. We need to stand for a set of principles and values that are different from the nihilistic principles and values that the terrorists exemplify. We need to have a positive notion. There are more or less constructive pathways of development, political and economic, and that America will encourage these pathways as best it can. Countries that make choices to go along certain paths will be encouraged and facilitated in those choices by the United States, and wish countries that make different choices we'll have to shrug our shoulders a bit.

So then the question would logically arise, Well, what is the notion of the United States as to what are these successful paths? A lot of the document then is about that, as we think that you need to have an open world economy. You need to have a political system that tolerates, that encourages human dignity and that has some kind of outlet for popular views. Partly because, not that we thought all the world should become Jeffersonian, but because we think that such political systems are more resilient. They are not as brittle; they tend not to be as inclined toward pathological development paths.

Frankly, as a recent illustration of what I mean, read Paul Collier's *The Bottom Billion* and you'll see what I mean by pathological development pathways, or the work of people like Amartya Sen, who makes the argument basically there are never famines in countries where people vote. Or where you have tax systems in which you rely on getting resources from the people so you have some reciprocal relationship with them on that basis.

So this document is basically offering a notion of what kind of world America wants to foster in which there are going to be all kinds of local choices made and there is no "one size fits all" answer. But we as an outsider won't just be neutral and say we don't care what you do. You're all just a bunch of billiard balls to us, and if you're bouncing—in other words, we're not taking the Chinese attitude on this, which is: We don't care how you run your countries as long as you do what we want you to, as long as you sell what we want or do what we want you to do in some particular place.

We actually support a healthier international system in which others are going to have to make all these local choices. But here are the systemwide norms that we think tend to facilitate, encourage, and reward better choices, which will give you a stronger and healthier system, and one that is less prey to these nihilistic ideologies that are going to be so tempting to so many people suffering from the alienation and pressure they're going to feel in a globalized world. So the document is about that.

So I'm portraying a mindset. Is it important to understand that mindset? Well, somewhat. Is the document itself concrete operational guidance? No, not directly. But, informed by that mindset, Bob Zoellick is out there negotiating trade treaties right and left and basically with a huge hunting license to be as activist as he wants to be and with a lot of room to maneuver, and he does a lot. People can argue about how important that was, but he's doing a lot. It's a notion of global finance. Problematical in some ways, because frankly their domestic decisions on the economy are having a huge international effect in which our foreign policy takes no cognizance at all that I can see and which wasn't part of this document at all.

But it is informing your attitudes toward—there is support for democratization generally, although the increasing emphasis on democratization is not in the original State of the Union address of January '02 and not originally quite as important to me. I tend to think that societies that respected the minimum requirements of human dignity and that were responsive were healthier societies. Democratization is one way of getting responsiveness and one way of securing human dignity; it is not the only way. But there are other people in the Bush administration who really see democratization as part of an international compassionate conservatism agenda and like to say that more. Frankly, Condi stresses that more than I do, though she doesn't do so very much earlier.

Leffler: Was the phrase “We seek a balance of power in favor of freedom” a Michael Gerson phrase or a Condi Rice phrase?

Zelikow: I don't remember, but I'm pretty sure it was not mine. I think it could have come from either one of them and I don't remember which one. I kind of shrug my shoulders at a phrase like that.

Leffler: It has dumbfounded me for years.

Zelikow: Yes, I didn't understand it very much at the time either, but it somehow sounds sonorous.

Riley: It sounds good. Must be Gerson's.

Leffler: What struck me, by the way, on rereading lots of stuff—just for your information, that appears in Bush's first inaugural address.

Zelikow: Yes, and they—

Leffler: That's why I—

Zelikow: There's something to it.

Leffler: That was probably Michael Gerson's phrase then.

Zelikow: Maybe, and you can ask him and them what they mean by it. But Bush—there is really something though, Bush does believe in freedom, and I'm not being cynical about freedom. I use different words that are more concrete to me, like human dignity. I liked the “nonnegotiable demands of human dignity,” because it unpacked what human dignity had to mean as a minimum in some very concrete statements, seven particular things that were concrete and meaningful. I think freedom is meant to be some kind of shorthand for all of that. It is also a shorthand for pluralism as opposed to monism, which they would associate with totalitarianism.

Riley: I have a question for the historian in you about this. In one section you're talking about the deadly challenges of terrorism. “None of these contemporary threats rival the sheer destructive power that was raised against us by the Soviet Union.” Then go on to say the changes “make today's security environment more complex and dangerous.” Is that actually true? Is it actually true that the post-9/11 environment is more dangerous?

Zelikow: Is more dangerous?

Riley: Is more complex and more dangerous.

Leffler: I believe it's more complex but not as dangerous.

Zelikow: I might be inclined to agree with Mel. I actually don't remember whether that was my language or not, but at the moment anyway I don't believe that it is more dangerous and I don't remember whether I thought—it may have felt more dangerous to me in the winter of '01-'02, but if I thought so then, I don't really think so now.

Leffler: If you're asking about historians, I really think in ten years when people think back and make comparisons, there's just no comparison.

Riley: In terms of—

Leffler: How dangerous the world was.

Zelikow: Because I think the high Cold War—

Leffler: It was far more dangerous during the high Cold War.

Riley: That's my inclination as an armchair historian. But I see these things and I think they have important rhetorical value at the moment but—

Zelikow: It's like when Obama says, "No President since Franklin Roosevelt has inherited a more difficult—" blah, blah, blah. Goodness me, that's a very short memory indeed.

Riley: Very good. We've got about a half an hour left on the clock today. Tell us how the 9/11 Commission experience came your way and talk us through a little bit what you were thinking about as you agreed to take this on and you got set up.

Nelson: Can I go back a little earlier? That is, when did you first become aware that there was a move underway to create such a commission, and did you support that effort? Were you asked about it? Did you start thinking about it?

Zelikow: I read about it in the papers like others. I supported it, actually. I had urged the Bush administration—I had urged my friends in the administration, actually—to get ahead of this and create such a commission very early on. I think that the President should have done this promptly. I understood why they didn't do it, but I didn't agree with their decision at the time.

Nelson: Why didn't they do it?

Zelikow: Their hands were full and this would just be a source of harassment, second-guessing. While we're in the midst of fighting the war we'll all be second-guessing each other and faultfinding and pointing fingers and we don't need that right now. It's that kind of attitude. That's not a silly argument, but I didn't agree with it.

Eventually Congress starts forcing their hand and then they find themselves in the position of fighting Congress on this. Again, I thought, a mistake. I don't know if I said anything about it, but I did think it was a mistake. Finally the Congress rams it down their throat. Then they have to accept it. They decide to try and get behind it. They appoint the first set of leadership to it. That then falls apart right away. Kissinger resigns, [George] Mitchell resigns. They scramble and appoint a new chair and vice chair.

It had crossed my mind that I might be considered. Maybe it was just vanity on my part, that someone might think of me for playing some role with this, but I had no hard evidence that I was being considered.

Nelson: You'd had a pretty good run with commission directorship; you knew how to do it well.

Zelikow: This is important. I don't know.

Riley: You had connections.

Zelikow: I did not try to get the job, I didn't ask for the job, and actually I wasn't sure—it was problematical in a lot of ways. I got called about it by Lee Hamilton first.

Riley: Whom you did not know.

Zelikow: I didn't know [Thomas] Kean or Hamilton. I got called about it by Lee Hamilton and I told Hamilton that I was skeptical but I would think about it. I then called Ernie May. I mused for a while about well, if you would do it, how would you do it. We reviewed the lessons learned from prior commissions, the Pearl Harbor stories and so on. I noodled about this a while and didn't really do anything about it that I can recall. I don't remember anybody else pushing me about this.

Leffler: So when Lee Hamilton called you, did he offer it the first time?

Zelikow: Yes.

Leffler: Without having interviewed you? You never had an interview with him?

Zelikow: No.

Leffler: He just called you up and asked you.

Zelikow: Yes.

Nelson: So it had already been decided?

Zelikow: I think so.

Nelson: So why were you skeptical?

Zelikow: It seemed like it would have a huge effect on my immediate life. I had responsibilities here at Virginia.

Riley: You had just been on leave.

Zelikow: I had family responsibilities. There was a lot going on. Also it was a pretty large and problematical enterprise. Actually, one of the people whom I asked for advice about this right at the start was my old mentor Brent Scowcroft. I asked Brent whether he thought I should do it and Brent told me very firmly, “You should not do it.”

Nelson: Really? Why?

Zelikow: He thought no matter what happens, you’ll lose. You cannot succeed at this job. You’ll be attacked. It is not likely to succeed. You won’t be able to satisfy people and you’ll be caught in the middle of a crossfire, so he thought it was a bad idea. His opinion counted for a lot with me, but I kind of noodled a while on how it could be done and the kind of exciting thing from my perspective is I developed this theory, well, if you did it in a certain way, maybe it could work. I sort of conjured up a theory. Then I said to myself: Wouldn’t it be neat to do this right?

Leffler: What constituted “right,” and what was the theory?

Zelikow: The theory was that you had to write it up as a history with complete access to the relevant sources. You had to include the al-Qaeda perspective as well as the U.S. side of it. If you were writing the Pearl Harbor Commission, you should have included the Japanese side as much as you could and tried to understand, sense a little better the interaction of the two. You had to write it and publish it in a way that would make it available to the American people and every bookstore in America, not just something that Washington insiders read and then they just read the 500-word summary.

The goal would be, suppose you wrote a really serious, thorough account and then you put what is in effect a foundational narrative for a tremendous national trauma in American history in the hands of the American people. That actually seemed like a real service. You could kind of get excited about trying to do something like that even though it would be a pretty difficult effort. So I kind of talked myself into that being a plausible theory. Then Kean called me while I was out in California—I was actually in San Francisco doing Markle Foundation work, which had me in Silicon valley a lot dealing with those people. I pitched my idea to Kean and Kean loved it.

By the way, I want to stress that I came to the conclusion later that it wasn’t so much that I talked Kean into it as I actually think I was just pushing on an open door. I didn’t understand Kean, I didn’t know much about him. Kean was actually trained as a historian. He studied history at Princeton with R.R. [Robert Roswell] Palmer and others in the good old days. I think Kean saw this the exact same way I did. Maybe I had articulated it a little bit more, but in fact I think our visions of this simply dovetailed and it was like a meeting of the minds.

Leffler: Would it be fair to say, and I don’t mean to put words in your mouth, nobody ever does—[laughter]

Nelson: He compliments and attacks you at the same time.

Leffler: —but that your theory then of how to do it was essentially, let the report explain, but do not assign blame.

Zelikow: Actually, no, we did not make that decision. I didn't have a view at that time on how or whether to assign blame. Just no opinion. Probably if you had asked me, I would have assumed naturally it will spell stuff out so the—

Leffler: If you had thought about that at all, the “blame”—I'm not suggesting that you should assign blame, but if you had thought about it, which is of course what a lot of Americans would have expected or liked. Somebody should be blamed. We had a terrible catastrophe. Who is to be blamed? How did the partisan nature of the Commission affect your thinking and approach?

Zelikow: Later it had a big effect on it, but at the time, in early '03, it did not. I would have just thought if we play it straight and we just write the account in detail, you just let the chips fall where they may. The notion is how would you write the paragraph that assigns blame? You're going to write the paragraph that ends, then you have in boldface type, “Please notice that Such-and-Such dropped the ball”? No. If you had written that Such-and-Such—you just write what happened. So do you write some kind of bullet point that calls people out even though you've already called them out in your text? I don't know. I didn't think about it.

The way this ended up working out in practice is we ended up writing drafts that were relatively interpretive. So we would then say things—here's what we think is going on. In general what would happen is, within the staff a lot of that stuff would then be pulled out because of the intense arguments going on inside the staff. Then the stuff we hadn't pulled out, commissioners would pull out. So the fence that I then drew to protect the report from this sort of thing is I fought like the dickens against anything that compromised the presentation of factual material. There were some pretty hard fights, but I think I was successful in every case. I don't think there's any case—sometimes people would want to take out facts they regarded as prejudicial that we did not take out.

Then I could say, “That is a relevant fact. Here is the evidence for this fact. How can we not include that sentence?” Someone might say, “Well, if you're going to say that about Tenet, then you have to include the sentence in which Tenet gives his side of the story.” Right. Then we always include a sentence like that. Some of the stuff like what happened in May 1999, where we effectively say we think Tenet partly canceled the strike on Kandahar to kill [Osama] Bin Laden because they had just had the Serbian Embassy blow up. They had just killed all these Chinese in Belgrade by mistake and that had an effect. That seemed obvious to us that that was the case. But then we include the sentence in which Tenet denied any relationship whatsoever. We made no interpretive comment on that. That was very typical of the way we ended up resolving those sorts of issues.

Riley: But that's at the end of the process.

Zelikow: Yes.

Nelson: This business of starting out with the idea of finding out who is to blame, my sense is that you started out with the idea of finding out what went wrong.

Zelikow: First of all, even the “what went wrong” is itself a misconception, in my view, of how to do this sort of thing. There is a pattern of doing these sorts of things that I think of as the model of the IG [inspector general] report. That is a “what went wrong” style of report. It is

usually written by lawyers. In it the lawyers basically are writing as if they're writing a brief for a tort case. "We can see the following breaches of duty." It is very hindsight driven.

Instead we tried—there is a passage in which we try to explain some of this. We actually try to write the report without letting the hindsight suffuse it too much. Here's what people understood; here are the choices they made. Then you can see what happened. Occasionally we'll just call attention, there were lost opportunities here. Like there is even a text box at one point on operational opportunities. There are some major policy choices that were really consequential. We comment later on in the report. But in general, if you do the "what went wrong," if you pose the question in that way, you'll answer the question in that way. Then that will really screw up the way you write the history. We were really focused on writing this as a historical narrative and therefore in part making it somewhat comprehensible why people would do things that in retrospect seem mistaken.

Actually, it turns out there's no way you're going to point fingers at Bush or Clinton per se. You can tell the story about what they did; it's a Rorschach blot. Then people will interpret it according to their lights. That's actually the way we thought it should work in a democracy. The harder part is whether you really call out, let's say, working-level people in the CIA whom we usually refer to with pseudonyms, not by their real names. Other people have now published books that use their real names, not that I think it makes much difference.

We thought very hard about that. Some of those people did some things that were just obviously, palpably mistaken in light of hindsight. There was IG work that was being done inside their agencies that was going to decide whether to go after them for misconduct or take administrative action against some of them. But in general I thought if you basically pick out some middle-level FBI guy or middle-level CIA gal and make it sound like you're pinning on them the burden of having killed 3,000 people, that you ought to pause and think about that for a minute because you're putting something in their lives, and you're putting something in the lives of their family and all their friends. I was actually reluctant to do that to those people. I didn't think you needed to do that in order for the report to do its job.

Actually, the kind of clear-cut cases of where people clearly wrote memos that they wish they could take back, it's people like that. The Bush and Clinton stuff is at higher levels of abstraction and the arguments are more interpretive.

Riley: OK, let's come back to the beginning. I do want to ask one question. Did you talk to Condi before you started this?

Zelikow: I did. After Kean called, this is actually kind of interesting. Kean calls. We talk. Exciting. I agree to come see him in Madison, New Jersey. We're going to have a real conversation about this. The night before I had actually worked out my conditions, and I had some conditions. Then I met with Tom about it. That was entirely successful. Tom had talked to Lee. They consistently would coordinate with each other about everything. Then Lee in turn wanted his old staffer to be my deputy, which was fine with me.

Leffler: Who was that?

Zelikow: That was Chris Kojm, who is now the Chairman of the National Intelligence Council in the Obama administration. Then there was a big argument over who the general counsel would be. That all unfolded after we started work. There has been other stuff written about this. That ended up being Dan Marcus, who had been the number three person in Janet Reno's Justice Department in the Clinton administration. Chris had also worked in the Clinton administration. But I was good with Dan Marcus as the general counsel. There were other people who were proposed, but partly this was a power play by some commissioners to try to basically reduce my role. I would do one thing and then there would be someone else who would be in charge of the investigation. That wasn't the model I wanted to go with.

Leffler: Philip, you said you laid down several conditions. What were your conditions?

Zelikow: I had a vision of the staff. This is a unitary staff and not a partisan staff. So it's not like the staffs that are hired on the Hill. The staff reports to me. Staffers don't work for the individual commissioners, they report to me, but I take my guidance from the commissioners, relayed through Tom and Lee. So the commissioners work together. They decide what guidance to give. Tom and Lee are the day-to-day conduit. They give me guidance on behalf of the commission, I relay that to the staff. Otherwise what you have is the commissioners have their own staffers, the commissioners have their pet staffers, and without going into a lot of examples in detail, I had concluded that down that road lies madness and a lot of bad things can happen. A lot of pathologies get introduced into running what will already be an extremely difficult enterprise. So unitary staff. Actually, we probably ended up hiring mostly Democrats for the staff because that's just the nature of the way the town works and who was available.

Riley: They were available.

Zelikow: Yes, that's actually right.

Riley: Every smart Republican was working in the administration.

Zelikow: But we didn't ask people their political affiliations. In some cases it was obvious because of where they were working on the Hill, but in general we didn't ask about that; we hired on merit and it was a unitary staff. Then it more or less worked along these lines. Also Tom, Lee, and I would make all hiring decisions and all firing decisions together. As a de facto matter that later included my deputy, Chris Kojm, who was an asset. Chris and I, that was a very good relationship, that worked well.

Leffler: Dan Marcus didn't play a role?

Zelikow: He did eventually, but frankly by the time he came on board a lot of the hiring decisions had already been made, the structure of the staff was already laid out. I was already doing a lot of the hiring, planning, and staff organization from very early on. I could go into a lot more detail about this, but there are two decent reliable sources on this; there are a couple of bad ones. Kean and Hamilton's memoir is reliable as far as it goes. On what it covers it's reliable. It is mainly ghosted by Ben Rhodes, who's now President Obama's lead speechwriter on foreign policy and is very competent. There was a [John F.] Kennedy School of Government case study on the 9/11 Commission that is actually pretty good.

Riley: Who did that?

Zelikow: I'm trying to remember her name. She is now teaching at the Columbia School of Journalism. [Ed. note: Kirsten Lundberg]

Riley: It's checkable. Go ahead, Philip.

Zelikow: But anyway there is a case study over there that has some more details about how the Commission worked. After this good work with Tom and Lee and understanding about conditions, I was invited to the White House to talk with—and went over there to see what they wanted to talk about. I go into Condi's office and lo and behold not only am I seeing Condi I'm also seeing Andy Card, which is unusual. Rice and Card basically said, "We know you're considering this and we hope you'll do it."

I asked them. I said one of the problems is the connection. I've had these past connections with you, Condi, and with Republicans. I think Tom and Lee know a lot about this. I should add that Lee did not call me out of the blue, I later learned. Lee had vetted me very thoroughly with lots of Democrats around town, several of whom contacted me later to tell me that they had praised me to Lee. Who knows what they said? It was obvious that he had checked me out with a lot of people who knew a lot about me before he made that call.

He didn't interview me but he interviewed a lot of people who had worked with me.

Leffler: I'm just curious; I find that surprising. Is that how things are done in Washington? I mean, that you would get appointed by two people who have responsibility without either of them really talking to you, getting to know you? I just find that a little surprising. Neither had known you at all before, right? Of course they spoke to other people, that's to my mind not a surprise that they checked you out—

Nelson: Carefully.

Leffler: I'm sure. Just on reflection, do you find that surprising?

Zelikow: It is not that unusual, but it is interesting.

Leffler: It speaks very well for you.

Zelikow: Maybe. Your point is a valid point and I can't offer any enlightenment. I know from Tom and others that actually the White House—and this is one of the curious things about the conversation with Condi and Andy, I did not know this at the time—I learned later that the White House had had other candidates that they preferred instead of me. They had recommended other people to Kean, but Kean and Hamilton concluded that they wanted me instead. But I just don't know—to this day I don't know exactly who they had recommended or why Kean and Hamilton turned down the people the White House suggested and wanted me instead.

Leffler: Was it in your mind from the onset that Ernie May would be your right hand?

Zelikow: Actually, he wasn't there as much as I wished he could be. If I could have hired him full-time I would have, but he was only there from time to time because he was still teaching at Harvard in the meantime. But I wanted his counsel and yes, from very early on I pleaded with him and he happily accepted. I gave him the best possible setup. I said you come anytime you want; you don't have any line responsibility in this. Your only job is to float around and talk to anyone you want and read anything you want and then tell me what you think.

Then later on he got involved—I would then consult him on things like the organization of the report. Then he actively worked on some of the drafting pieces with me, on a couple of particular chapters, a couple of particular rewrites of staff drafts. But yes, I wanted to take advantage of him as much as I possibly could from the start.

Riley: Did you have at the outset individual meetings with each of the commissioners or did you—

Zelikow: I did not. I didn't meet with any of the individual commissioners until the initial meeting of the commission in which Tom and Lee unveiled me to them as their choice. I then later learned that there was some gnashing of teeth among one or two of the commissioners about that—that then led to some other—the first of many interesting episodes involving the politics of the Commission and the management of all of this.

Nelson: What was the first of those interesting episodes?

Zelikow: This in itself is such an elaborate story, but one of the early episodes actually was over the issue of the appointment of the general counsel, who was recognized by some as a way of getting a counterweight to Zelikow, who will then—and someone who will be more responsive to the particular commissioners who were sponsoring this idea. These particular commissioners had nominees in mind whom they put forward to Lee, but then consistent with my agreement for coming on board Lee would tell me about this. I would do my vetting. We went through a variety of different candidates for the general counsel's job and about the role of the general counsel before we finally settled on Dan Marcus.

By the way, this was a case in which, because Lee was kind of caught in the middle, Lee ended up interviewing some of the candidates for this including interviewing Marcus in person before he decided to offer Marcus the job.

Nelson: What is the general counsel's role in a commission?

Zelikow: It can vary a lot. Sometimes the general counsel can be the investigative leader, or the general counsel can just be your person who handles the legal issues associated with the commission, which is the way we used Dan. But Dan and then his deputy, Steve Dunne, would write a lot of the document requests. They would manage a lot of the negotiations with the agencies over the documents that they would turn over. Because Dan himself wanted to do it and had some skill with it, Dan ended up doing a number of the interviews, especially like he did the interview with Bill Barr. I think he did [John] Ashcroft, the Republican Attorney General. I think I did Reno, whom Dan had worked for, so that wasn't—

Dan ended up doing the lead in the Condi Rice interview because I couldn't participate in the Condi Rice interview at all. Things like that. Dan I think also did the Steve Hadley interview for the same reason. So Dan ended up being a participant in some of the investigative work. He also actually got involved in some of the editorial work of the staff drafts and eventually he became really—what happened over time was that we developed a front office in the Commission, what people would call the front office. The front office consisted of me, Chris Kojm, Dan Marcus, and my special assistant, Stephanie Kaplan. In effect almost all issues of importance that came before us, and there were issues almost every day, we would deliberate on together and try to decide them as best we could collegially.

Frankly I was very fortunate to work with people like them. Everybody has their foibles, myself very much included. What you want to do sometimes as a boss is have people with you like your deputy and others who actually offset some of your weaknesses. I was fortunate because I actually have some fairly significant weaknesses—

Leffler: What are they?

Zelikow: We don't have enough time to actually—*[laughter]*

Riley: I'm going to intervene here and let you think about that. Unbelievably, we have burned through the day.

Zelikow: Before we finish this, because we have to tie off this discussion with Rice and Card—

Riley: Of course, please.

Zelikow: That's kind of important because it sets the stage for a lot of things that will happen later. The main issue with them is it was their view that the initiative to hire me didn't come from them, it came from Lee Hamilton. Hamilton is the choice of Tom Daschle; he's the Democratic Party's choice to colead this Commission. If they're happy with me it's not really their place to object.

Then I said OK because they thought that I could do a conscientious and professional job, which is interesting in light of the fact that, after the Commission's Report, Andy Card said some hard things about me to a journalist. That puzzled me, because I had never had problems with Andy before that. I think Andy took a hard view of the way that I handled my responsibilities of the Commission. That may have colored some of his later views.

At this time, in any case, the two of them made this pitch to me. I said maybe too they were also trying to kind of sound out what my approach to this was going to be. I was very clear with them. I actually set a condition with them. I said, "OK, if this means a lot to you, but here is what you need to tell me. I don't want to do this job if the White House is planning not to cooperate with the Commission. Because let me tell you the kind of information we're going to need." I went through it. "We're going to need a lot of stuff. We're going to need NSC records, we're going to need—" I previewed the kinds of things we were going to need. "If you're going to fight us on all of this and this is going to be an adversarial thing, then I shouldn't be in this job, because that will become awkward in a lot of ways."

They said, “The President wants to cooperate with the Commission. We are going to cooperate.” Then they agreed to set up a follow-up interview where I could get these assurances specifically from Al Gonzales. Then that meeting happened promptly. The meeting with Gonzales—I prepared for that meeting and kind of laid out to him—and the meeting with Gonzales was highly unsatisfactory to me. I was very blunt with him about what it is we were going to need and he was reticent and began immediately talking about the way they handled the joint inquiry. I stressed that, “If you’re planning on handling this commission the way you handled the congressional joint inquiry, I don’t want the job. If we don’t get any more than the joint inquiry got, we’re going to fail. It is in nobody’s interest that we fail.”

One point I made to them is at the end of the day Tom Kean and Lee Hamilton need to be able to stand before the American people and say, “We have examined every item of information in the government’s possession that we believe is relevant to this investigation.” I cited examples of the Warren Commission and Operation Mongoose and Pearl Harbor and this and that. I was not satisfied with the responses, so I contacted others in the White House who were talking to me now about the administrative details of setting all this up. I said, “I don’t think I’m going to be able to do this. I’m sorry.”

Nelson: Had you already been approved by the Commission?

Zelikow: No. I hadn’t met with the Commission yet. I’d already been approved by Tom and Lee.

I said, “I don’t think I’m going to be able to do this.” I told Tom about this problem because it was very serious. Tom then intervened with the White House and I got a call from Al Gonzales’s deputy. Actually, there were a couple of calls to basically patch this over and, “Yes, we’re going to cooperate.” He ended up giving me the assurances that I thought I needed in order to go forward.

Riley: He, Al?

Zelikow: No, Al’s deputy now following up in these phone calls. I mention all this as I actually did not foresee how hard all that stuff was going to be later. If I had foreseen all of this, I’m not sure I would have taken the job, because actually all the issues having to do with my knowing Condi and all of that were dramatically highlighted at the point the Commission is fighting the administration.

Riley: Right.

Zelikow: Frankly I ended up becoming a battering ram. This is one of the reasons why I made a lot of enemies in the administration and there were some hard feelings about me. It started right there with this one. I later found out from that moment on Al Gonzales said, “I am never going to meet with him again about anything having to do with this.” And he refused to meet with me; he would only have his meetings with Tom and Lee, which turned out to make things very hard. I ended up seeing him again in another context much, much later. But this gives you a little indication right off the bat.

Another thing—I look back on this in retrospect and I realize that Gonzales nominally was the authoritative actor in this, but in fact he was not—I did not know this at the time, but in fact I think Addington was mainly calling the shots behind the scenes in this.

Riley: Was he giving you executive privilege arguments or was he—

Zelikow: Yes, he was. Because he was equating the Commission to a congressional investigation. I was already making the arguments to him on why that was a false analogy both politically and legally, because we actually had been created by a special statute, because our chairman had been appointed by the President of the United States, and some other things. We are actually a very unusual creature that didn't fit neatly into either being an executive branch or congressional entity. We're really a unique statutory creation. Actually, the executive branch needed to armor itself with all the arguments to our uniqueness so that they would—because they were going to end up giving us what we needed anyway and they needed to be able to explain why that wasn't a precedent. This initial set of exchanges was important and I did end up agreeing, obviously, to take on the job of being the Executive Director of the Commission.

Riley: Got you.

Zelikow: That ushered in a year and a half of great challenge, stress, and ultimate satisfaction.

Riley: Which we very much look forward to exploring at a mutually convenient time. I think we have about another day ahead of us. Think we can find some time this fall?

Zelikow: I'm so flattered you're taking the time to do this.

Riley: You're willing to do another day?

Nelson: You don't know this, Russell, but Philip has already sentenced Josh Bolten to a 40-hour interview. [*laughter*] So asking him for another 6 or 7 hours—

Zelikow: I used to be a trial lawyer. I'd take depositions. But Bolten I commended to Mike as someone who has an incredible amount of foundational knowledge across the entire period, across a very wide swath.

Riley: He pleads a bad memory.

Zelikow: If *he* has a bad memory, then heaven forbid. Condi prides herself in having a pretty good memory. Frankly, Condi and Josh in a way are the two most important people you may interview in the whole project. I remember when we interviewed Brent for the 41 project, we interviewed him for 32 hours.

Nelson: Would you tell Russell what you told me about when to interview Bolten?

Zelikow: I would try to get Josh relatively soon. Ordinarily I know there's policy that you kind of build up to the Mafia kingpins after you've turned all the lesser Mafiosi—[*laughter*]

Riley: Did you spill the beans on our method?

Zelikow: I used to work for a prosecutor. But in this particular case, because Bolten can provide a lot of foundational knowledge and orientation—ordinarily you need that to armor yourself with a lot of information so that you can help them remember things they can't remember.

Riley: Exactly.

Zelikow: And also, frankly, to pull things out. It's a judgment call. Given Bolten's particular nature and character—I'm tending to be perhaps too comprehensive.

Riley: No. We're asking the questions, and I don't have any shyness about steering and dialing.

Zelikow: Once many years ago my law partner accused me, "Zelikow, every time I ask you the time, you tell me how to build a watch."