

The Surge – Collective Memory Project

Interviewee: Stephen Hadley

Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, 2005-2009

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[Begin Transcription]

FEAVER: [00:00] -- 2015, and we are here to interview --

HADLEY: Stephen J. Hadley, who at the time of these events was National Security Advisor to President George W. Bush.

FEAVER: And my name is Peter Feaver, and I'm a professor at Duke University.

O'SULLIVAN: And my name is Meghan O'Sullivan. I'm a professor at Harvard University.

SAYLE: And this is Tim Sayle from the Center for Presidential History at Southern Methodist University.

FEAVER: So, I'll begin, Steve, by asking you to talk about when you saw the need for a strategy review. Over the course of 2006, there was an evolutionary process, when would you begin the story of the Iraq Strategy Review? Obviously, much earlier than the fall. It would have been at some earlier point. When did you sort of say, this is when we began to realize we needed a review?

O'SULLIVAN: I'd just like to make a [01:00] distinction between a review and a new strategy.

FEAVER: Yes, I meant the new strategy --

O'SULLIVAN: The new strategy.

HADLEY: I would say that, you know, we were trying, during this period, from particularly more intensively in 2004, '05, and in 2006 to fix the strategy that we had. For example, in late 2005, 2006, we had a major effort to re-look at the



strategy, to talk about the strategy. We put out a document -- Meghan will remember the name of it.

O'SULLIVAN: The NSVI, National Security --

FEAVER: No, National Strategy for Victory --

O'SULLIVAN: -- for Victory in Iraq.

HADLEY: Right. Which was an effort both to improve our strategy, consolidate our strategy, explain our strategy, win support in the public and Congress for the strategy. In this period of time, it was not clearly working the [02:00] way we had hoped. And you two may remember, I carried around with me all the time and updated each month the chart that showed the incidents of violence in Iraq, from 2003, when the initial invasion occurred. And that line was steadily going up in this period. And I remember saying to members of the staff, "I'll believe our strategy working when that line starts going down." And this period all the way through the Surge announcement in January of 2007, that line continued to go up. So there was a sense that it had not turned yet. It was not working yet. The question about a radical new look at the strategy I think does not really begin to emerge until early in 2006. You have in February of 2006, the bombing of the [03:00] Golden Mosque in Samarra. And people think maybe this is the point where it's all going to start coming apart. And initially, it didn't. That is to say, the government was slow, but there was a response. We didn't see initially in that couple of weeks afterwards, that kind of falling away that we thought. And I was

quoted on a Sunday talk show saying, “the Iraqis have looked into the abyss and have decided to step back.”

That judgment was premature. I think in April and May, finally the new government, unity government is in place, but the violence continues to escalate in this period. And it’s in that time frame, in spring of 2006, that really two things happened. One is that I remember the President in the morning, when he’s looking through the blue sheets, which have the record of casualties and incidents in Iraq as well as other breaking news, [04:00] intelligence of the morning, there was again an up-tick in violence and casualties. And the President looked up and he said, “Hadley, this strategy is not working.” And I said, “You’re right, Mr. President, it is not.” And he said, “Well, we need to find a new one.” And that really, for my way of thinking, started the process.

I think another event, which I think came later, and that -- and Meghan can correct, is we were in the Oval Office to prepare the President for a conversation with Prime Minister Maliki. And the President said in his sort of jocular way, “So, Meghan how are your friends in Baghdad doing?” And Meghan says, “Mr. President, they’ve never been so frightened. I have never seen them or heard them this concerned about what’s happening in Iraq.” And that, I think, pushed the President even further down the [05:00] road that we need a new strategy, because here’s someone he knew was committed to the Iraq project and knew Iraqis, and she was saying to him, “Mr. President, it’s deteriorating. It’s not getting better.”



So I think it's in that spring time frame, April, May of 2006, when it becomes clear we need a new strategy. And that's what really begins the process, from my vantage point.

FEAVER: Around that time was also when we have a new Chief of Staff. Josh Bolten comes in, and he in his interview talked about his interest in taking sort of his first comprehensive, fresh look at it as well. Was that part of this -- the new look process you're describing?

HADLEY: I don't recall it actually. Josh was a wonderful Chief of Staff because [06:00] he would let you do your job as long as you kept him advised and informed. And if on occasion, he thought you weren't doing what you need to do, he would give us a shove. And I suspect that in that time period, he gave us a shove in terms of, we need to have a new look in Iraq. And I think it was, in some sense, in parallel to the shove we were getting from the President of the United States.

FEAVER: The other thing that happened at that time, just to nail -- this is in the sort of March, April, May before the Camp David, which we'll get to in a moment, but was -- and coincides with the arrival of the new Chief of Staff is the so-called "Revolt of the Generals." You know, the generals speaking out against Secretary -- actually retired generals speaking out against Rumsfeld. Did that play any role in the thinking? Or, how did that affect this process of re-thinking the --

HADLEY: Well, I think it had actually a [07:00] negative effect because there was some discussion during that period of time about whether Secretary Rumsfeld could

remain in office and we could still have a real re-look at our strategy in Iraq, because he was very committed to the existing strategy that we had. And I think that the “Revolt of the Generals” actually made it impossible for the President to think about getting rid of Secretary Rumsfeld, because the last thing he was going to do was establish the precedent that some retired military officers could go to the press and force out a Secretary of Defense. That was not the President’s view as to how he would manage senior leadership. So I think, while the “Revolt of the Generals” was an effort to provoke a re-look of the strategy, I think it actually had perversely the opposite effect, and actually delayed [08:00] the process.

O’SULLIVAN: You had mentioned around this time that there was the movement, the recognition of the need for a new strategy. What was your sense of -- what was your preferred method of getting to a new strategy? And to what extent did you or the President see Camp David as an opportunity to do that? Or, were you hoping it would -- before there was a decision to do a formal review much later, how were you intending to elicit the new strategy, or formulate it?

HADLEY: I thought that it had to be done within the system and had to be done in a way with all agencies participating. But I thought that it had to be -- the strategy review process had to be presidentially led. It had to be something that the President called for, that had his support. And the review had to be focused on him. It had to be [09:00] focused on getting him all the information and perspectives he needed so that he could get to the point that not only that we



needed a new strategy, but was comfortable making the decision about what that strategy would be. Because my view was we only had one more bite at this apple, given how long the war had gone on, how attrited the public support was for it. We only got one more chance to get it right. It was about the President's legacy. It was also one of the most important decisions he was going to make in the second term. And again, the American people -- the only person in this whole constellation that had been elected by the American people to make these decisions was the President.

So my view was it had to be a process within the system, not outside the system, and that was focused on the President and getting him in the position where he could make the decision he needed to make. It was going to be delicate. I had learned something, [10:00] and Meghan can refresh the record on this a little bit, but we had earlier tried to make some suggestions to Secretary Rumsfeld about how to re-look at some of his strategy in Afghanistan I think it was. And a very smart young military officer on staff working for Meghan had come up with some ideas about how we might restructure what we were doing in Afghanistan. And I thought on the theory that we're all one team -- I asked the President of the United States if I had his permission to go to Secretary Rumsfeld and present these ideas. And we did and I went into the Sec Def's conference room and it was the chilliest reception I've ever received in the Sec Def conference room, and I've been there a lot over my career. And we explained our ideas. And at the end, the

secretary said, “If you and the President have lost confidence in the ability of this building to do military planning, [11:00] then you should get yourself a new Secretary of Defense.”

So it occurred to me that that particular approach for getting new thinking was not going to work and that what we needed was an approach that would begin informally and try to catalyze and get the individual agencies to conclude that they needed their own policy reviews. And the process got a, I think, a big up-tick when, to his credit, Pete Pace went to Secretary Rumsfeld and suggested that DoD needed to do an internal look at Iraq strategy. And to his credit, Secretary Rumsfeld agreed. So we got a process going within DoD, within the State Department, and of course, within the NSC staff. And during this period from the spring really until November, what we were doing was encouraging those reviews to go on independently in sort of [12:00] parallel action, with a fair amount of communication among the leaders of each of those reviews so we knew what was going on. But it seemed to me, in order to get everyone to the point where they understood a change needed to be made, we needed to go through those individual, informal processes within the individual agencies.

FEAVER: We’ll get to those, the summer and fall ones, in a second. But I still want to get a little more detail, if possible, on where things were in May. So your sense was that your and the President’s view that maybe a new strategy was needed. What

were the views as you saw it in the rest of the interagency, MNF-I [Multi National Force – Iraq], etc., at that time? Did they share that sense?

HADLEY: I didn't see -- and others can comment -- but I did not see a sort of parallel demand for a strategy [13:00] review. And of course, one of the things we wanted to do with that meeting at Camp David in June of 2006, we had structured it -- as you both remember, since you were involved in it -- as a way to begin to kick off the discussion between the President and his principals about what were the assumptions of our existing strategy? Were those assumptions still valid? What kinds of alternatives should we begin to look at? We were really trying to kick off a presidential-led strategy review at that point, and we had a series of briefings that tried to ask and pose some of those questions.

The problem was that that meeting at Camp David really got hijacked by another idea, which was to have the President of the United States convene his meeting for a strategy review on day one at Camp David, and then fly overnight [14:00] and to appear and join Prime Minister Maliki and his cabinet in Baghdad on the second day, and have the two cabinets then have a video link and begin to talk to one another. It was a way of showing support for Maliki, support for this new government. It probably was a higher priority, but it had the effect that the President in day one was not really focused on, the kind of strategic thinking we wanted him to do, because he was kind of looking forward to his meeting in Baghdad. And of course, on day two, it was completely hijacked by a very different

agenda. So that was our effort to begin a interagency-wide discussion about a new strategy and it really was stillborn because it was kind of overcome by the need to connect with the new Maliki cabinet.

FEAVER: Can you talk a little bit more about the mechanisms [15:00] you had hoped that Camp David experience would take advantage of? You talked about some outside briefings. Can you just add flesh to that?

HADLEY: Well we did in and around that time begin a process of having the President get exposed to outside experts who would have a more strategic level conversation about how we were doing in Iraq and what we might do better. So that was a piece of it. And we had a series of those kinds of interchanges between the spring of '06 and the announcements of the strategy review. There were some briefings that attempted to be provocative and to get General Casey and Ambassador Khalilzad to respond to questions that would have hopefully provoked them to take a strategic re-look. Because it was my conviction that the best way to get this done would be for Casey and Khalilzad [16:00] to decide we needed to re-look the strategy. And for, of course, the senior leadership at the Pentagon to believe that they should initiate the process of doing a strategy review, so it would not have the “not invented here” reaction that Meghan and I got when we brought some constructive ideas over about Afghanistan. But that process was unfortunately not provoked by the Camp David meeting.

The second round was the so-called 50 questions exercise, where we took the kinds of questions that we had wanted to be discussed at Camp David and put them in terms of a list of questions that I was authorized by the President to put to Casey and Khalilzad in the presence of Secretary Rumsfeld. And I don't know whether Condi was on that call or not. I think not.

O'SULLIVAN: I don't think so.

HADLEY: And that was an effort, again, through some fairly hard-hitting questions to see if we could [17:00] provoke Khalilzad and Casey working with, of course, Secretary Rumsfeld, to initiate their own re-look at the strategy. And it probably helped in that process, but it was really a kind of second-best alternative. We got some interesting answers; we wrote them up; we circulated them to the principals; we provided them to the President; and I think it provided some grist for those informal strategy reviews that were going on in the summer both at State, at the NSC, and at the Pentagon.

FEAVER: How did the DoD and MNF-I respond to those questions. Did they sense that this was trying to stimulate a larger review?

HADLEY: I think that they were surprised by them. I think they were more pointed [18:00] than they expected. I think they were surprised to hear them from me; I don't have, exactly, that kind of *M.O.* or manner. But I was pushing them and they read it that way and whatever they might have thought privately, they responded as the professionals they were and provided as good answers as they could. So I

think it was a very useful process. But it was unusual, and I think it was noticed.

We were pushing them, and we needed to.

O'SULLIVAN: So around that time, there was --

HADLEY: And we were pushing them with the President's blessing. And they knew that.

And I had informed them that this was something that had been blessed by the President, and indeed that we had given the questions that we were going to ask to the President. I'm not sure he read them, but he had them. Again, this was all part of, this needed to be the President's review. This needed to be something *he* was calling for if it was ultimately really [19:00] going to be taken seriously by all the participants.

O'SULLIVAN: So around that time, the main argument that we were hearing from MNF-I in particular was that the escalating violence was in part due to American troops. And you'll remember in the summer of 2006 that we had a recommendation from MNF-I to actually bring some brigades home, so to start downsizing the American footprint in Iraq on the basis of the argument that our presence was creating violence. At what point did you and/or the President start to question that rationale, and what was it that made you look at that argument differently?

HADLEY: I'm not sure I ever really bought that rationale. I think my view was yes, the people who are shooting at us are terrorists; they're Al-Qaeda folks and they are insurgents. And [20:00] if they weren't shooting at us, they'd be shooting at somebody else. Because remember in this period, the accelerant -- and General



Casey was very clear on this at that Camp David meeting. He said "Yes, there is an insurgency, but the accelerant of the violence is Al-Qaeda. And Al-Qaeda's strategy was to kill innocent Shia in order to provoke the Shia to retaliate against innocent Sunnis, thereby plunging the country into a civil war, which Al-Qaeda would then seek to benefit from and bring order in the form of the Caliphate." That was his calculated strategy. Our troops were in the way of that strategy, and of course, they therefore got shot. But if you had eliminated our troops, it was not at all clear to me the violence would stop, given the strategies of Al-Qaeda and the insurgence. So that was an argument. It might have had some resonance in some places. It never had much resonance with me. [21:00]

The second thing I think that changed -- and Meghan can correct me in terms of timing -- but I remember very clearly a conversation I had with Meghan, because we believed that in order to control the sectarian violence, there needed to be a neutral law-enforcer, a neutral provider of security. And my view was of course, that's what we were doing in training and equipping the Iraqi army. It was to be a nonsectarian army loyal to the national government, trusted by the people in bringing order to the country regardless of the sectarian identity of the population in which it was deployed. That was our goal, and that's what I was focused on. And so when people talked about we need a neutral provider of security, my view was it actually wasn't going to be the US Army, it was going to be this Iraqi security force.



But Meghan convinced [22:00] me in the summer that while that was where we wanted to go, it was not where we were or could get in any short-term time frame. And in fact, the only force that was going to be accepted by the communities was actually an American force. And that's why the Surge in the end of the day had such a strong American component. One, it was what we needed in terms of military capability. Two, there was a major Iraqi component. But I became convinced that actually to bring down the sectarian violence, the United States Army didn't need to get out of the way. In fact, the US military needed to inter-position itself and of course provide security to all three communities. And that of course was the essence of the change of strategy that was associated with the Surge.

FEAVER: So, in terms --

HADLEY: You OK with that? [pointing to Meghan O'Sullivan]

O'SULLIVAN: No, I agree with that entirely.

HADLEY: Yep.

FEAVER: [23:00] In other interviews and other writings, people have offered various explanations for what delayed the more comprehensive review -- this is happening incrementally rather than in a big bang -- and you've identified some of the factors. But other factors that have been suggested -- and I just want you to react to them -- one was a desire to see if the Together Forward effort to retake Baghdad that General Casey outlined at Camp David, give that a chance to work. So part of

the delay was just allowing Together Forward to progress. And a second possible factor was just the crush of other events that are happening: Castro getting sick in August, and other big, big events on the agenda. And a third was the [24:00] election, the mid-term election, whether that made it difficult to come out with a public [inaudible]. And so, were any of those relevant over the summer?

HADLEY: My view is there wasn't a delay. That we were moving forward in the way we needed to move forward if we were going to successfully change the strategy. Remember, it is not easy to change strategy in the middle of a war. And you think it would be easiest to change strategy in the middle of a war that you think you're losing. I think in fact, it's in some sense the hardest to do that. And secondly --

FEAVER: Explain why. I don't disagree with you, but just amplify why.

HADLEY: People are very dug in to their positions, and they've been at it a long time. They obviously have confidence in the strategy with which they are very much associated. And the ability to say, "This strategy that I poured my heart [25:00] and soul into is not working," is a very hard thing to say. Which is why when we got a new strategy, one of the things that was important is that we got a new cast of characters who were committed to that strategy and who had had a hand in developing it and who would then be given the task of implementing it. So I would say to you, this is a difficult thing to do. I had said that if not handled right, a case where the President and his military are at odds in the middle of a war is a Constitutional crisis. And a situation where the military is split on the issue of

conduct of a war is a kind of political crisis that will make it very difficult to move forward in any strategy. Because for something as controversial as Iraq, those divisions within the military would be [26:00] used by critics of any engagement of Iraq to undermine the strategy and to force us out and to give up and basically come home.

So this was a very difficult process to manage, and I think the deliberate way we did it was not a question of delaying. It was exactly the process that needed to be gone through in order to bring us to point where we could get a pretty good consensus behind a very difficult strategy and to be confident the strategy we came up with was actually going to succeed. So the nice thing about that process was that in parallel to it, we could see whether Together Forward was going to work in either of its two incarnations. But it was pretty clear to I think all of us at the NSC after the first incarnation that it was not working. Because the metrics of success were buildings cleared, weapons seized, nothing about terrorists killed or captured. [27:00] It was pretty clear that it was an empty operation that was really not setting back the terrorists. And it was also clear that it was not permanent. That is to say, what we were clearing, we were not holding. And therefore, it was achieving none of our objectives. That was pretty clear.

So it was not that we delayed to see what the results. We proceeded with our review, in parallel those things went forward, and basically they confirmed our conviction that we needed a new strategy because what we were doing wasn't



working. And I think probably in some sense, they helped bring General Casey and Pete Pace in the military to the point that, yeah, we got to be doing something different. And probably Don Rumsfeld as well. Because to Don's credit, in the end of the day, he did agree that we needed a new strategy. And he and Bob Gates made the joint recommendation to [28:00] President Bush that Dave Petraeus should be the person who should lead our forces in that new strategy.

FEAVER: One more question along these lines and then we'll get into the September-October timeframe when the process heats up. It's also been described as --

HADLEY: I want to say one other thing. In terms of your third point about other distractions, I remember a meeting with Bob Blackwill right after I became National Security Advisor, who said to me, "Your number one job is to get Iraq right. We owe it to the men and women in uniform. It is important to our country and it's important to this President because this President's legacy is going to be about how he managed Iraq." So with that ringing in my ears for four years, whatever the other distractions, Iraq was always going to be [29:00] at the top of my agenda.

FEAVER: So another way this has been described is that this is a two-stage process. The first stage is deciding that the current strategy's not working. The second stage is figuring out what other thing we should do. And that it takes some time to make it through the first stage, but then you begin the second stage, which itself takes some time. Is that a fair description of it? And what are --

HADLEY: I would say --

FEAVER: Where were you in that --

HADLEY: I would say it was clear in April and May we needed a new strategy. And the President basically said, "Get me a new strategy." So we then started the process. And I would say the process of developing that strategy had two phases. There was this sort of informal phase that went from May through the Camp David meeting through the 50 questions and into the fall and that had these [30:00] parallel reviews in State, NSC, and Defense. And then beginning in the September time frame, we started bringing those threads together. You may remember we had a joint meeting with the State Department reps and the Vice President's staff and our NSC to talk about strategy options. I was getting reports from Pete Pace about what he was doing. Remember in October, I asked Bill Luti -- I asked J.D. Crouch to ask Bill Luti, because I wanted the one-off protection for reasons I'll explain -- to do a review of what a surge would look like. And he did a paper in October, which I then provided to Pete Pace informally so it could inform the DoD strategy review. So the first phase of developing a new strategy was the informal phase of these parallel agency reviews. We began to bring those together in the September and October timeframe. And then of course, in the first week in [31:00] November, the President says, "I now want to launch a formal interagency review." And at that point, I think we were ready to do it.

FEAVER: We're going to get to September and October. Did you have any questions?



SAYLE: Yes, I had a question about the summer period. Some other interviewees have suggested they hoped that over the summer, the unity government, after being seated in May, would have some capacity to help solve some of the problems in Iraq. Do you remember your assessment of that new unity government and whether you believed they had the capacity to improve the problem or to contribute to the problem in some way?

HADLEY: We might at some point talk about what are the keys to success of why we thought a surge strategy would succeed. But one of them, you needed to have a governmental partner. And so it was a cause of celebration when in May, we finally got a unity government so we could have a partner in designing and implementing a new strategy. But I don't think any of us thought they were [32:00] magically going to be able to solve the problem on their own. It was simply the fact that we had some confidence now, we would have a governmental partner that had some legitimacy when the time came to change the strategy.

FEAVER: So I want us to go into more detail if we could on the September-October timeframe when you said you're starting to pull these together. Before the President makes the formal announcement, before that meeting with the Secretary of State and Vice President's team, that's November 11, so that's just on the cusp of the launching of the formal. But in September-October, these are still very separate strands, but you start to direct the NSC staff to do more activities, slowly bringing them together. Can you talk about what was the thinking behind the

design and how you were proceeding there? And that'll also tee up your [33:00] story about the Luti brief.

HADLEY: I'm not sure I have a whole lot more to say about that. I had a lot of confidence in the review that was going on within the NSC staff. And we had conversations about what kind of force ratios do you need to deal with an insurgency. We talked about what was going to be the neutral force that could actually bring some security. And it was pretty clear that the NSC staff was moving towards a surge kind of option, which was fine. I didn't want to get captured by the staff and that option, which Meghan and her team were getting a lot of conviction in. It wasn't that I thought it was wrong; I wanted confidence that it was right, because [34:00] I thought we would have only one shot at getting this right.

Secondly, we weren't military planners. But Billy Luti, who was on the staff, had done military planning over in the Pentagon and had Don Rumsfeld's confidence. He was now heading the defense division at the NSC. So I asked J.D. Crouch to ask Bill to put on his force planner hat and use his informal contacts over at the Pentagon and design a surge. What would it look like? What forces would you need? How would you deploy the forces? And what would the surge look like? And could it succeed? And Bill went off. And I didn't want to do it through Meghan's shop and I didn't want Meghan actually to know about it, because it was really a check on the process. I wanted to be completely independent. And he came back with a piece of paper that he briefed J.D. and me



on, which basically said, [35:00] "Surge is a good option. Here's how you would do it. You need five brigades to do it." It was focused on Baghdad. And it really validated where Meghan and her team was going. And, as I say, I then shared it with Pete Pace because I had been meeting privately with him about what options they were looking at. I wanted to make sure he had the benefit of the work Bill Luti had done. He'd already been informally seeing what Meghan was doing. So I gave a copy of that to him and ultimately had Bill share it with Meghan and his team. But for me, it validated the work and the conviction that Meghan and her team had developed in the notion of a surge. But I thought it was very important, that we needed to have a formal process where this would all be brought together, that it was not going to work [36:00] if we were to end-around the process and try to jam the Surge down the throat of the military for the reasons I described.

FEAVER: So my memory of that process was that there were two questions. One was: what would we do if we wanted to do something different? And Meghan's team was moving towards the Surge as the option. But there was a totally separate question of, were there even troops available to do a surge? Because the official response we were getting was, we were fully committed. There were no more brigades available to do a surge even if you thought that was the right answer. And so that was the question that required military planning expertise, which we obviously didn't have in the Iraq shop. And so [37:00] what the Luti brief did was



establish that you could, if you were to tweak the rotation schedule, you could generate up to five brigades. Is that --

HADLEY: That's exactly correct, and that's what he did. It is interesting, if you search the record -- and I've seen it in some of the books that have been written -- the five brigade number surfaces actually before the Luti study in October. It is something Pete Pace, in my private conversations with him at one point says-- I said, you know, we don't have a lot of troops. So what would you have? What could you get? And Pete actually comes early on I think in the August-September timeframe, but you can check it, and says, "Well, five brigades is probably all we can do." And it's interesting that Bill Luti in a separate exercise, with I'm sure reach-back to the Pentagon, comes back with [38:00] the five brigade number as well.

FEAVER: The reach back is not quite as far, so the other part of the story that maybe you're hearing for the first time is that coming out of Meghan's operation was this question: how many troops could we get? And we couldn't ask JCS for a formal answer. So I asked Lisa Disbrow, who worked for you, and did this job in JCS. I said, "Do you know how to get that number?" And she says, "Yes, I know how to do that." So she did the study and generated five. So when you tasked Bill Luti, Bill Luti reached to Lisa Disbrow and asked Lisa, "How do you get this number?" And she says, "Here it is." She had already done the study.

HADLEY: This is all news to me. I saw it in the chronology. And I would say something about the NSC staff just as a parenthesis. This is one of the great things [39:00]



about the staff that we had, is that it was not stove-piped and there was sharing across the various groups. You had a different operation to run than did Meghan. Lisa had a different shop as well. And Bill Luti had a different unit as well. One of the things I liked about the collegiality of our staff is people were willing to share problems, share data, and share credit. And that's how staff's supposed to work. Exactly the kind of interaction you described is what you want out of your NSC staff, and we were blessed to have a staff that was ready, willing, and able to operate on that basis.

FEAVER: The other piece that I remember of the Luti brief was that the second part was focused not on what the troops would do, but on the need for a surge in intel. That there was a law about surging intelligence collection, so that whatever the five [40:00] brigades did would be with a much richer intelligence picture than was the case. Those were the two pieces of how many you could get. Answer, five. Need also to better resource it with intelligence resources. Is that your memory? Or --

HADLEY: I think that is right. I've not looked at the Luti study for a while. I think there's a third thing that needs to be said here. It was clear that we if we were going to do it, it was going to stress the force. And so I have a recollection of being with the President, and maybe one or both of you were with me at the same time, in the residence in that September-October timeframe. And I think it was in the context of if we were to do a surge. I said to the President that I thought, in order to make



it saleable to the military, he was going to have to couple it with an increase in end strengths of the force [41:00] so that we could ease the pressure. We had already gone to 15 months rotations from normal 12-month rotations for the army. And he needed to show the military that he was willing to give them some relief from a intensive rotation schedule. I said that to him at the time, and he said, "That's right. Good idea. We will keep that in our back pocket."

So fast forward, at the December meeting with the Joint Chiefs in the Tank, when the Chief of Staff of the Army says, "Well, we're breaking the force." And the President says, "You're rightly concerned about the force, but the best way to break an army is to have it lose and we're on the threshold of losing in Iraq." And the Chief of Staff of the Army comes back and then says, "Well I need more troops." And he's shortly joined thereafter by the Head of the [42:00] Marine Corps. The Commandant of the Marine Corps says, "Me too." And the President is spring-loaded to say, "Fine. We'll give you an increase in end strength and we'll announce it at the same time we announce the new policy."

FEAVER: That was also the other part of what Lisa did, is work the what it would take to relieve the pressure, how many more troops. That was a separate piece of that study.

O'SULLIVAN: But let's go back, kind of reverse from December and talk about that period. You got us to the point where the President announces a formal review.

FEAVER: We haven't done the trip. We have to get him to the --

O'SULLIVAN: Oh, OK. We can take it back to the trip.

FEAVER: Yes, yes. So you talked about the separate reviews. You brought in State to that, but not DoD. Can you talk about, you brought Satterfield into the NSC review, but not also bringing in DoD.

HADLEY: [43:00] Pete Pace was separately having his own conversation with Condi Rice. And he was separately having his own conversation with me. He would come over and we would sit down and talk about the reviews. And Pete was the guy that was going to have to bring the Pentagon along in this effort. And he was my principle partner and his view at that time was, "We're not done with our internal review. Let me keep going with what I'm doing. Don't force me too soon into an interagency process." And I took that advice.

FEAVER: But no OSD either.

HADLEY: It's interesting because Don -- it's my understanding, and you'll get it from Secretary Rumsfeld -- but Don gave the lead on that review to the Chiefs and to the Chairman. So I don't know what OSD's participation [44:00] was during that period, but the person I was dealing with, at Secretary Rumsfeld's direction, was Pete Pace. And Pete Pace had been authorized by the secretary to speak with me about this review. So we were following it in the way that Pete felt it needed to go in order to be successful.



FEAVER: And where was State then -- in the September-October timeframe? What was your understanding of their thinking about the need for a new strategy or what the shape of that new strategy might be, in the September-October?

HADLEY: In the September-October timeframe, when you go into November, what's clear is that for all the internal review within the Pentagon, they're going to come out with roughly, continue the same strategy. And the review within the State Department was going to come [45:00] out with an option of pulling back, preserving major institutions, not getting in between what was a sectarian war, and let it "burn out." And that in the end of the day, the Iraqis would have to solve this issue. And it was pretty clear to me that neither of those were going to work. So I think at that point in the October timeframe, and I think the meeting we had in November that you talked about, with State, clarified that pretty clearly. At that point, we needed a formal review because the informal reviews were not going to take us to where we needed to go. On the other hand, they had started the dialogue within their agencies, and it was accepted that we were going to have a new strategy. [46:00] And that's of course the first step in getting a new strategy.

FEAVER: So one of the places that we needed to go was Baghdad. Talk about the genesis of that trip. What led you to decide to go to Baghdad and what did you hope to get from that trip?

HADLEY: You use the word "you" and the way this actually works is it's a very dynamic process. I'm having conversations with the President. One of the things



– a record that needs to be corrected is at one point in an interview with Bob Woodward, the President said, “Well, I delegated the strategy review to Hadley.” And a lot of people said, “Well, he took himself out of it.” That of course, as you well know, President didn’t delegate things; he tasked you to do something. And it was not fire and forget. He would want, on something he cared about, ongoing reports. [47:00] So in this period of time, I’m having an ongoing and healthy debate with the President, with you and Meghan and others on our staff, with Pete Pace, with Secretary Rice. So it’s not a question of, did I decide? We came to a consensus that we needed to go to Baghdad and the purpose was to try to get a sense of Maliki.

There was a lot of reports that sectarian activity has stepped up significantly. And so, for example, there was clearly clearing going on in neighborhoods in Baghdad. At heterogeneous population was becoming more and more homogenous and separating by sectarian [48:00] communities. There were reports of failure to provide services in Sunni areas. So somebody had a sectarian agenda, and the question was, was it Maliki? And was this sectarianism that we were seeing a result of because he didn’t know what was going on? Was it something that he was a non-sectarian at heart, but didn’t have the means to prevent the sectarianism that we were seeing? Or was it in fact this his sectarian agenda that he was in fact implementing? And the question that we were sent with was to try to answer that question, because it was critical for the President to



know whether he was going to have a partner in Maliki for the Surge that was beginning to take shape in his mind, or whether Maliki was [49:00] going to be a barrier. And we went to try to get an answer to that question.

FEAVER: How did you assess the trip and what you learned --

HADLEY: Well, we ought to pull out the memo, which we wrote on the airplane going back and we were all a part of. But I think the view was, Maliki is not a sectarian. This is not being done with his active support, one way or another, he does not have the wherewithal to stop it, and is not stopping it. And therefore, the Baghdad and the Iraqis were not going to solve this problem themselves. And so it gave further grist, I think, for the kind of surge strategy, and we in that memo tried to set out what we thought the consequences were of what we found. And in some sense, they begin to lay the foundation [50:00] for the argument for the Surge, is my recollection of that memo.

SAYLE: I'd like to follow up with a question about the trip, itself, if I could. This gives us an opportunity I think to correct the journalistic accounts, many of which suggest this was an important trip for you personally in your view of Iraq. And there are a number of anonymous quotes suggesting that your views changed because of this trip. Now that doesn't fit with what you've said. You've identified and explained that you've been thinking about changes in Iraq far beyond this, but could you talk a little bit about where that trip fits in your own personal views of the need for a strategy review?



HADLEY: I think it confirmed a lot of things. It also confirmed a lot of things that I was hearing from Peter and Meghan and others. It also shows that there's a lot of cynicism, some people about overseas travel. I think I was quoted by somebody as saying, "I should have come earlier." And I think that's right, because [51:00] the kind of job you're in, there are a lot of constraints on your ability to travel. But it was an eye-opener and I think it helped, again, set up the process towards movement towards a new strategy.

FEAVER: During that trip --

HADLEY: I'm not sure Peter and Meghan learned a whole lot on it, but I learned a whole lot on it.

FEAVER: At that point in the process, did you have an idea of what, in broad outlines, the best way forward would be in terms of the Surge option? Or was it still, we know we have to make a change, but I'm not sure which of a range of changes is the right way. Where were you in that evolutionary process?

HADLEY: Again, I was wanting to make sure we had the kind of process that would be inclusive, that would be focused on the President, that would give him the right set of options and would put him in the position to make the right decision. I think [52:00] he and I were both moving towards the Surge as the way to go, but wanting to reach that decision through this process that we had described.

At one point in this process, when the formal strategy review is launched, it goes forward on two levels. It is focused on the President; it is going to have an

important component of the President talking to his National Security principals. And then it's going to be supported by the deputies process that J.D. Crouch is running, which is going to run the numbers, do the analysis, and respond to the questions and insights of the principals and inform the principals.

So that's really how we ran that process. It was kind of a three-tier process. [53:00] And I do remember at one point meeting with J.D. and the team, the deputies level team, that was doing that important analytical work and saying that, "You come up with a set of options for the President. It needs to reflect the full range of views, but it will contain a surge option. Because if it doesn't contain a surge option, we are not presenting the President all of the option and that's what we owe him." That was really the only pressure I put in terms of an outcome.

So the review goes forward. I think the first session we have with the principals is the Sunday after Thanksgiving. And I want to talk a little bit at the appropriate time about what the President is doing between the Sunday after Thanksgiving and the end of the first week in December.

FEAVER: We will, [54:00] we've got plenty of time, but I want to just nail down some of the previous stuff before we get to formal announcement. One last question about the informal phase: it was heavily compartmentalized and no leaks, kept very quiet, out of the press. And one of the explanations offered for that was that it would be destructive of morale for the military to hear about so much second



guessing of the White House's. Is that a fair description? Talk a little bit about that.

HADLEY: It's fair. It's a real dilemma for a President, because we're in the middle of active hostilities, and if you suddenly, it comes out that you're rethinking the strategy, it's an incentive to your enemies, who think that they're winning. And if the issue is [55:00] a review of strategy and one of the options was going to be withdrawal -- and if you looked at American public options, it was clear that one of those options would be withdrawal -- then you incentivize your enemy to step up, to start killing more and more of your men and women in uniform in order to strengthen the hands of those who say the war is lost; we ought to pull out. It also undermines the confidence of your friends and allies. It undermines the confidence of the wives and husbands and children of the men and women in uniform who serve.

On the other hand, it requires you to continue to reflect publically confidence in a strategy in which you have increasing discomfort and lack of confidence. And it is not a perfect solution. And so it leaves people to say, "Well, did the President mislead the American people by indicating he was committed [56:00] to our continuing the project in Iraq?" We talked about he should talk about that, to not give a hint of the strategy review, but also to not say something that would raise credibility problems after the fact. It's one of the dilemmas you have in these situations. I think we did the right thing in terms of how we handled

it, but we did want to keep it bottled up for those reasons and not have it become a public conversation.

FEAVER: So it becomes a public conversation with the President's announcement, which is on the heels of the election -- mid-term election. It's also coincident with the President announcing that Secretary Rumsfeld is stepping down. So can you talk about that part of the story and its link, if any, to the Iraq strategy review? [57:00]
Secretary Rumsfeld's stepping down.

HADLEY: At the time, Secretary Rumsfeld I think increasingly understood that the President wanted to have a re-look at strategy. And in fact, when Michael Gordon leaks the memorandum of -- that is the trip report on the Maliki visit, on the trip to Baghdad that we all took. He also leaks a -- at the same time -- a Rumsfeld memorandum, which is kind of potpourri of all different ideas about how you could think about a different strategy in Iraq. And one of the things the President -- Secretary Rumsfeld says in that memo is, he says two things if I recall correctly. One, he says, "We're not making enough progress fast enough," or something like that, which is kind of an admission that it's not working the way it needs to work. And secondly, he talks to the President about the need for [58:00], as he says, "fresh eyes on the target." So I think everybody recognizes that we're in a phase where we probably need to have some new people taking a look at this. And so that his stepping down is appropriate.

There are a lot of criticisms of the President, that he should have announced his intention to accept Rumsfeld's resignation before the election. I think the President rightly declined that counsel because he thought it would be viewed as playing politics with the Iraq War in order to enhance his prospects for re-election, because people would take that as a sign that maybe we were going to have a different policy in Iraq, and most people expected that that different policy would not be a surge, but would be a withdrawal. And the President didn't want to play politics, with as important a decision as [59:00] what our policy should be in Iraq, and I think he made the right judgment.

FEAVER: OK, and the President announces this strategy review, which you've already described in broad terms the outline. Can you go into a little more detail on how you -- the instructions you gave J.D. and what you hoped to see from this process, from the formal process?

HADLEY: We wanted a fundamental re-look and so one of the things we agreed we needed to do in our -- this collegial framework that I describe on how we came up with these things. It needed to be a fundamental look. We had to assess what the assumptions we had with our current strategy, how events have changed since we started that strategy, given the new situation, what were the new assumptions we needed to [01:00:00] premise our policy on. And then take those and say, so in light of the assumptions we'd been working under, what is our operational concept? Now that the world has changed and that we have a different set of



assumptions that are going to drive our policy, what are the new operational concepts that are going to work and be consistent with those assumptions? And then in light of that, what's a strategy that would sort of carry out and implement that.

That was the kind of process that we went through. And the briefings that were done and were prepared by J.D. and his team were used to drive and inform the conversations that the President was having with his national security principals. And during that period from the Sunday after Thanksgiving through the end of the first week in December, I think there are five or six meetings that the President has with his principals to talk about options for going forward in Iraq. [01:01:00]

FEAVER: We're going to get there. Two more questions before we get to the Solarium.

We're moving up to the meeting in Solarium, which is the end of November and tees off that week, but there's a couple key moments. One is the Saturday meeting with Secretary Rice and her team and also with the Vice President's team, John Hannah, and then your team. What's your recollection of that meeting? What was the role of that meeting and what was the outcome of that meeting? What was the purpose of that meeting?

HADLEY: Well we had been looking at this issue separately, and I thought it would be useful for us to look at it together. I think that's the best recollection. Also, the President was -- is very comfortable making decisions, but for the reasons we've



already discussed, in this case, he wanted his decision to be something that all his cabinet [01:02:00] secretaries would support. And it needed -- for the reasons I said -- to be something that as much as possible all the military would support, because it would not stick, it would not succeed if that were not the case for a whole series of reasons. So part of that reason was to figure out where Condi was and to start a process to try to bring her along.

And the results were not all that successful. They were wedded to this kind of stand back, don't get in the way of a sectarian battle, let it die out, preserve the democratic institutions, which I thought was not going to work. John Hannah -- and I'm not sure John was speaking for the Vice President, or whether he was speaking for himself -- but his view was, you got to go with the majority, the Shia, or the majority, we ought to be throwing in with the Shia. You can't ride all three [01:03:00] horses. And I think my view was, the only way you're going to keep this country together and the only way you're going to get it stable is if you had an inclusive process in which all three constituencies were able to participate and had a common stake in a common future for Iraq.

So it did not provoke a consensus by any means. I think it helped, personally, me sharpen my own thinking; it probably did yours as well. And I think it was start of a process of bringing Condi along to where it was pretty clear the President wanted to go.



FEAVER: OK, so we have a series of questions now from the J.D. meetings through to Solarium.

HADLEY: And I hope you think -- if I'm saying something that's wrong or incomplete, you will be free to volunteer and refresh recollections here.

O'SULLIVAN: Peter, you and I can go back and forth on this. [01:04:00] So the J.D.-led portion of the review, as I remember it, brought a lot of agencies to the table and it was an opportunity for them to really present the option that they had developed in their separate reviews. And so that was very constructive in that regard --

HADLEY: Correct.

O'SULLIVAN: -- it was airing of the views, but I also remember it really exposed how far apart we were. And there was a little bit of tension there in the sense of, I remember that there was a desire for a consensus to emerge out of that process. And at one point, I remember you asked me to write a memo called the Emerging Consensus, which is the hardest memo that I've ever written because I couldn't figure out how we could craft a consensus out of it. And it was that brief which J.D. briefed to the Solarium. And I'm wondering if you can talk a little bit about your impression of that meeting and really where everyone's thinking [01:05:00] was, where your thinking was and the President's. Because I recall very much --

FEAVER: At that point in time.

O'SULLIVAN: Yeah, at that point in time. So I recall very much people's positions as you described them. The State Department position of kind of, let it burn out, protect



key institutions, and John Hannah or the Vice President's office being, let's focus on the Shia. And the view that I -- of course I didn't know exactly what was in your mind, but this view, like, no, Iraq is only going to work if it's an inclusive government. It's only going to work if the institutions are protected and that they encompass all the communities. But my sense was that there was still scope for disagreement about what was required to maintain that option, right? Like, how much commitment on the American side was required to keep that option of that kind of Iraq [01:06:00] alive.

And in the Solarium, I remember having the feeling that kind of an enhanced Casey-Zal option was -- had some momentum in the room. So the idea was certainly that we shared the outcome that we wanted to see in Iraq, but there wasn't the same understanding about what resources would be required on the part of the United States to reach that outcome. But it might have just been my impression of the meeting, but I'm wondering if you could give us your sense of what the purpose of that meeting was and where you were in the thinking at the time.

HADLEY: I can't do it meeting by meeting; I'm going to talk about the whole series of meetings from the Sunday after Thanksgiving through that first week in December. What's going on is the President is asking questions [01:07:00] to get views and information to inform his decision. He's already pretty clearly leaning towards the Surge, but he has not decided on the Surge. But what's really going on



underneath that, is he is asking a series of questions that are going to put facts on the table because he's also trying to bring his other national security principals to where he thinks he's going to come out.

That's what's really going on. And it's been building over the two month period. And I'll give you some vignettes that indicate both the President's changing views, but also how he is pushing back and beginning to try to shape the views of his principals. So Don Rumsfeld, for a long time has been saying, "You know, we're teaching the Iraqis to ride a bicycle and at some point, you have to take your hand off the bicycle seat." And he's been saying that [01:08:00] for months. And finally in this time frame, he says it again and the President says, "Yeah, but Don, we can't afford to have the bicycle turn over. We can't start again. So if the bicycle starts to tip, we've got to be able to grab it." That's a very big break with this notion of handover.

Another thing the President's talking about, something he and I talked about, Don -- and he said this -- Don is basically right. Casey's basically right. Ultimately, Iraq is for the Iraqis and we are going to have to hand it over. But we - - we're not in a -- but we couldn't get there from where we were. There had been another assumption that there has to be a political solution, and once there is a political solution and a real unity government in which all three communities [01:09:00] participate, then the sectarian violence will die out. But of course, the problem was that the violence was so great that you weren't going to get that kind



of political solution because the sectarian groups were pulling back in their holes, waiting for all out warfare. It became clear that you had to improve the security situation before you could get the kind of political dialogue that ultimately would lead to a stable situation. It's not that Don and George were wrong, it was just that we could not get there from where we were. And the President started talking about the Surge as a bridge between where we are and where we wanted to be.

So that was kind of the pushing back he's doing on terms of the military. The pushing back on Condi is very much, you can't simply let Baghdad melt down. One, [01:10:00] it's not our tradition to stand back while people are slaughtering one another. We're either going to go in, or we're going to come home. That was not going to work. And second of all, the other thing he made was something that Casey used to say, that 80% of the sectarian violence is within 100 kilometers of Baghdad -- I've forgotten exactly the phrase. But what the President understood and what I -- and I can't differentiate what the President said or what I said because we're in a dynamic conversation of all of this -- but I can remember saying, "You know, the whole country is watching their capitol melt down in sectarian violence. And if Baghdad goes, the game is lost. So you can't just step out on the perimeter and let it burn out it, because it's not going to burn out; it's just going to consume the whole country." And at one point, Condi says to the President, "Well [01:11:00], I'm willing to increase the forces, but they can't just do what they're already doing." And the President comes back rightly and says,



“They’re not going to just do what they’re already doing. They’re going to have to be doing something else.”

So in those meetings, he’s bringing people along so that in the end of the day, when he makes the decision, I think he’s increasingly confident. He doesn’t have a split within his cabinet and he’s got cabinet officers who are going to be committed to implementing it. He’s also -- or we are also bringing in this strategy review process, we’re bringing the Pentagon along. Because in my conversation with Pete Pace, he’s coming in and I’m saying to him, “If the President is going to order a surge, what’s the reaction going to be? What do we need?” And there are a couple things that Pete in this run up, in this sort of November, December timeframe -- October, November, December. He says, “Well first of all, it can’t just be a surge in the military. Where is the civilians?” [01:12:00]

And that of course gets into the work that J.D. is doing and percolates up to the principals that there needs to be a civilian surge. There needs to be a whole of government effort to bring civilian expertise to contribute to the post-conflict stabilization reconstruction. So we structure and Condi and her team put together a civilian surge. Box checked for Pace.

Another piece, Pace says, “It can’t be just American forces. The Iraqis have to do it and the Iraqis have to be willing to cooperate with the Surge if it’s going to succeed.” So as you well know, the next box is we’ve got to get Maliki and the Iraqis on board. And that process starts in -- is it in --



FEAVER: Amman.

HADLEY: Is it Amman or is it Aqaba?

O'SULLIVAN: Amman.

HADLEY: Amman. It starts in the Amman meeting, where the President talks to Maliki.

[01:13:00] And I'm jumping over, but it's a very important meeting, because if you remember that meeting, Maliki says, "I have a strategy and I want to brief it." And it's a surge strategy of sorts, not perfect. And Maliki says, "This is the strategy and I'm going to do it. This is how we're going to bring down the violence." And at one point, the President turns to Casey and says, "George, will this work?" And George says -- publicly -- he says, "Well, we've had a hand and we've advised." And privately he says -- the President says, "Do the Iraqis have the juice to carry this off?" And Pace -- and George Casey says "no." So basically what the President says to Maliki is, "I agree with your strategy. Let us work with you on the fine points. But, you don't have the troops to do it. Let me lend you my troops."

And he is in a process then of doing two things with Maliki from that meeting going forward: getting Maliki comfortable [01:14:00] that there will be more troops moving into the country, that our end-strength, in-country is actually going to go up. And secondly, getting Maliki to agree to contribute troops, and I think they did five brigades and we did five brigades, something like that -- in terms of the core force.



And then three, get Maliki to agree that it would be done in a non-sectarian way. That it'll be a non-sectarian commander; that there will be no no-go areas like Sadr City; that this notion, if we pick up a Shia terrorist, we won't get a phone call from the prime minister's office to let him go; and that once we start, we're going to go to the end.

Maliki agrees to those things, and to lock him in, the President convinces him to give a speech publicly, articulating those conditions for Iraqi participation in the surge. He gives two speeches. The first one he doesn't give quite right; we have to send him back to give a second speech. The second speech he gets right.

So the story of the Surge is, I [01:15:00] think, a President who decides he needs a new strategy, a process which gradually brings people along both to the reality that we need a new strategy and a series of options, and finally a preferred option which is going to work. And then putting together the elements that are required to both bring people along and to ensure its success, which is: it's not just a military surge, it's State; it's also Iraqis are engaged; Iraqis make the kinds of commitments that we need for the Surge to succeed; and finally the President goes in and sells it to the Chiefs and the key to that is that the Surge announcement is coupled with the end strength increase. And it's presidential business. All of that is presidential business in terms of bringing those final actors around. It's presidential [01:16:00] business, but it also brings the President to the point where he's comfortable making the decision he's making. So it's a very reinforcing -- but



it emphasized the importance of keeping the President at the center of the kind of decision process on an issue of this import is the only way it's going to get done.

FEAVER: Two more questions about that --

HADLEY: It is a non-delegable responsibility by the President.

O'SULLIVAN: So you made an important but a kind of slightly nuanced decision about the President's leaning in this direction, hadn't decided in a way that he was ready to go ahead with it, but he was leaning in that direction. Do you remember what were the points that he wanted more validation on before taking his inclination and translating into a decision? Were there specific issues that were --

HADLEY: It's a good process because [01:17:00] -- the issues surface -- sometimes they surface in the way that Pete Pace says, Well I can't sell this to the Chiefs if it doesn't have the civilian-- The Chiefs feel that we're the only one engaged in Iraq. Where's the rest of the government? And we can't make this succeed if Maliki is going to continue to be a Sectarian. What are the assurances we need? So it's a good process because people raising their concerns about this particular option, or other options surface the problems that indeed need to be addressed in order to fill out and get a kind of full blown, effective strategy. Some people would say it was all bureaucratic politics, paying what you need to bring players along to where the President finally ended up. I would also say it was a very good process of surfacing issues that needed to be [01:18:00] addressed if the strategy was going to succeed.



O'SULLIVAN: Could I ask a slightly more historical question, in a sense? Were there any decision-making processes before this one that helped inform your thinking about, this very kind of delicate way of handling this issue, or the President. For instance, the 2003 decision to go to war, was that in people's mind as, we don't want to -- we want to create a different kind of process, more deliberative, more insuring that all people get to hear one another's views around a table, more of a collective element to it? Or was that not in your plan?

HADLEY: No. Because the situations of the decision to go to war in 2003 and the need to review and get a different strategy were completely different. And I don't know whether you want to take the time on that --

FEAVER: No --

HADLEY: -- but I think this was more [01:19:00] a function of how we were operating in the second term and how the President asked me to run -- the kind of process he asked me to run. And it goes to this vignette, which you've heard, but it's probably useful to get on tape: after I was nominated as a National Security Advisor, I had my first meeting with the National Security press and it was a very pleasant meeting. And somebody basically said, "Well, the problem with the first term is that Rice wasn't able to knock heads with Don Rumsfeld and the Vice President. And she's very close to the President. If she wasn't able to do it, how are you going to do it?" And I said, "I'm not going to try. Those are 600-pound gorillas, and you're suggesting I'm not one, but I may not be a 600-pound gorilla, but [01:20:00]



I've got a 1,200-pound gorilla down the hall who loves to make decisions. And if we have a disagreement among the 600-pound gorillas, we're all going to go down the hall; we're going to have a conversation with the President of the United States; everyone's going to explain their views; he's going to make a decision; and all of them, because they're professionals and because I know them and because they respect the President -- they're going to salute and we're going to move out. That's how we're going to do business. That's what it means to be an honest broker." And if you think about it, that's the outline of the process that we ran.

But the subtext I'm trying to describe is, it's also a process of the President and me and you all, but heavily the President and me working together gradually to bring people to where the President thought we needed to be and to bring the military, both our outgoing commanders and the incoming [01:21:00] commanders, where they needed to be so that we did not have in the middle of the war a split between the President and his military, or a split within his military, which is what we needed in order to succeed with the kind of bold strategy change he was going to make. And that's really what's going on.

So at the end of the day, when the President announces his decision, the country is shocked, speechless. It's not what they expected was coming. But I think we can say all of his cabinet secretaries supported it. Condi and Bob Gates went together to try to sell it to the Hill, very uphill battle. And the military leaders were all more or less in the same boat, thanks largely to Pete Pace. Some leaned



left; some leaned right. Casey thought we could do it with two brigades, maybe a third on call. The President [01:22:00] at the end of the day thought we were going to commit the full five brigades; that's what Petraeus clearly wanted. So there were some disagreements, but everybody was largely in the same boat, and that protected the Surge from being submerged or basically torpedoed by public disagreements among the military.

FEAVER: We want to follow up on just those points that you made with three probes.

The first one is, you had given clear instructions to the NSC overall that we were to be honest brokers and not advocates. That --

HADLEY: Correct.

FEAVER: -- the departments and agencies would present policy positions and we would be custodians of the process. But there was no department or agency advocating the Surge in the J.D. process. Was that a constraint? Did that require you to relax the NSC can't be an advocate? How --

HADLEY: We resolved that by saying, [01:23:00] there will be a surge option in this package that goes forward to the President. And because of your participation in J.D.'s process, we'd already done the work as to what that surge option would look like. So we in some sense provided what we were not getting out of the interagency. And I think that's fair, because the obligation is to give the President the full range of options, not just the set of options that some bureaucracy within



the administration supports. I want to say two things before I forget them. One, I want to talk about the five brigades, and I want to talk about Baker-Hamilton.

FEAVER: We're going to get to both of those, so don't --

HADLEY: OK, don't forget. Because --

FEAVER: We won't. No, no, no those are --

HADLEY: -- there are a couple things that are important there.

FEAVER: -- but still on the process. One critique of the process was that it was evolutionary and slow and it would have been, quote unquote, "faster" to have tasked the [01:24:00] NSC to sharply describe different options and then brief that to the President Solarium style. The 1950s Solarium decision where Eisenhower had three very different options presented to him, and then the President just decides. That would have been a faster process. And what's your reaction to that?

HADLEY: Yeah, it'd have been a faster process to get a decision, but it would have been a decision that did not have the full support of the agencies who were having to implement it and carry it out, and for which they did not have conviction. And remember, conviction is an important thing here. One of the things about putting the President at the center of this process is, when you're doing something very hard and trying to turn [01:25:00] a war around, a war that you're losing, everybody is watching you to see whether you really have conviction, Mr. President or Madame President, in the decision you have made. And if you show any absence of commitment, everybody's going to start hedging.

The President -- one of the reasons the President has to be in the center of this process is he's got to be so committed to it and so visibly committed to it -- and I have seen with my own eyes, in situations where it's very rough going, the President basically by his conviction and confidence holds the whole team together. So that process has to be one that produces in the President a real conviction. But also, this President in particular, he wants the whole team to be with him. He understands [01:26:00] that he gets to decide because he's President, but this is going to have to be implemented both politically -- sold to the American people, sold to the Congress -- and then implemented effectively on the ground. Otherwise it's not going to work. And there's no point having a good option where you check the right box, but because it isn't implemented, it doesn't produce the effects you need on the ground. And it does not work. That's the problem.

So you could have gotten a faster decision -- and I've seen meetings like that. And what happens when the NSC comes in and briefs the three options, which are supposedly the options of the agencies and the agencies or principals are there -- and they have to be there to witness it -- they spend all their time saying, No, no. The NSC didn't quite characterize my option the way I would have framed it. And they end up re-framing and re-framing the options, and you get mush. In the end of the day, I think the best process is to take these cabinet secretaries who the President has proposed and who the Senate has [01:27:00] confirmed and who the Congress has appropriated the money and the funds and allow them to speak



directly to the President to make their views known, and the President then to interact with them and bring them along to the decision that works for the country. And that's the process we described and we pursued. Takes a little time, but the goal of course is not to get a decision; the goal is to get success. And we got success out of this process in terms of the decision we reached and what happened on the ground in the implementation of that decision.

FEAVER: The other question along these lines was the JCS position in the J.D. Crouch meeting. We were briefed -- you were briefed on it at least twice. Once briefed by General Pace in your office about the early draft of what his "Council of Colonels" had produced. [01:28:00] And that presented a range of options: go long; go big; go home. So one of those options was the Surge. And that was before he went into the Tank.

HADLEY: Right. It just didn't happen to be the option that was picked by the Chiefs of Staff.

FEAVER: Right, so then the --

O'SULLIVAN: It wasn't the option that JCS presented in the interagency process.

FEAVER: Right, the second time we were briefed was in the J.D. Crouch meeting, JCS presented the results of the JCS study and there were no options. It was a single option. Can you talk about your reaction to that experience, and how were you working with Pace to overcome that?



HADLEY: Look, what Pace was struggling with was, he was delivering the JCS position, which was to sort of continue trying to pass responsibility to the Iraqis. But he was also, and his people were [01:29:00] also working in an interagency process at the principals level and the deputies level, that was developing other options. And he was in a running conversation with me. I would say to him, "So, if the President were to select the Surge option, what would it take to bring the Chiefs on board?" And he was telling me what it would take to bring the Chiefs on board. And I was then taking it to you guys and to J.D. and saying, we need to flesh out the strategy. We need to add the component for the US government non-military participation, for the Iraqis and all the rest. So he was bound to present the JCS position, but working in good faith in a process to develop other options including the option that was pretty clear that the President was leaning toward. You can't do much better than that.

But that's of course why the meeting in the Tank-- there are two things that happen at the end of the first week in December that probably help answer [01:30:00] that question. We're actually ready to go with a decision at the end of that first week in December and we, I think picked December 11th or something like that for the President to give a speech, and there's a draft of the speech. And on the weekend before - I think it was the Saturday or the Sunday - the President calls me. He says, "Hadley, I've decided I'm not going to give this speech." I said, "Oh, Mr. President, why not?" And he said, "I'm comfortable where we are. I'm



comfortable where we are, but I want to give Bob Gates an opportunity since he's new Secretary of Defense, and I want him to get an opportunity to assess the situation on the ground, come back, and give me a recommendation. This is such an important decision, he's going to have such a big role implementing it; I think I owe him that." So it's deferred. It also affords us to do the last piece we needed to do [01:31:00] in terms of the process, which is the President's meeting with the Chiefs, which I think comes after that.

O'SULLIVAN: December 13th.

HADLEY: December 13th. And that of course is a very important meeting, because it is the one where the President finally brings to closure the process that Pete Pace has been running. So the Chiefs are against the Surge. President's leaning clearly towards the Surge. The Surge is now an option that has been fixed in the sense that it addresses all the concerns that we have heard from Pete Pace except, You're going to break the force, Mr. President, which is the perspective of the Chiefs, not because they are the war fighters -- because they're not -- but they're the ones who raise and man and train the troops. And it's the right perspective and it needed to be addressed. It's the last piece. So the President goes in, he has his conversation, [01:32:00] he and the Vice President choreograph it in the car. The Vice President is going to be kind of the bad cop pushing the Chiefs initially. President engages in the conversation. We have this seminal moment where they say, Mr. President, you're going to break the force. He says, "If we lose the war, that's what breaks the



force. What do you need?" And they say, "We need, roughly, an increased end strength to give people hope that they're not going to be doing these kinds of long service, short rest deployment cycles forever."

At the end of that meeting, they know that he's going to pick the Surge. He knows he's going to pick the Surge. And he's really addressed through the conversation I'm running with Pete Pace and then finally face to face with the Chiefs, he's addressed all their objectives and he's brought them on. And the process is done. Gates comes back [01:33:00]; Casey sells him on a limited surge; Gates's book says he got a snow job after the last interagency processes; we have Gates now fully on board with the Surge; and the effect the President wanted to achieve has been achieved. He knows what he wants to do and he's got confidence in it. He's brought his national security team on board; he's brought his military on board; and he's got a strategy. And he's already thinking about and starting to staff out the people he's going to need to make that strategy succeed, which starts with Bob Gates and then goes to Petraeus and then goes to Crocker. And off we go.

FEAVER: Two other things happened that week of the Tank meeting and I want you to speak to both of them. Both of them have received a lot of attention in open source discussions. [01:34:00] One is, Jack Keane, General Keane's briefing in the West Wing. And what was the role of General Keane's effort, the AEI study? How did that inform or shape or influence the --



HADLEY: You know, it's a mystery. And I think Bob Woodward's book sort of publicizes Jack Keane's view of things. And I was not aware of all he was doing. I don't know how much he was spending time with you folks. For me, when I finally meet with Jack Keane, the decision has largely been made. We have a speech—a draft of the speech. The President would have given it on the 10th or the 11th or whenever it was, except he wanted to hold off until January so that Gates can have an opportunity to see things on the ground. And Keane comes in and gives us a speech, gives us his briefing. And for me it does two things: [01:35:00] one, it validates what we have come up with. It's not that it's the author of the Surge; we've already developed the Surge option at that point. But it's very much along the same line. So that's good. It's a validator. And we don't have a lot of people who were going to be external validators, and he's going to be one.

But there's a problem. His is a seven or an eight brigade surge. Ours is a five brigade Surge. We haven't talked about it; it's actually five brigades plus Marine Corps battalions to, because -- one digression. The President does a very smart thing. Because one of the last issues in the Surge discussion is, do you do Baghdad now and Anbar later? Do you do Anbar now and Baghdad later? Or do you do both together, which requires more troops: five brigades for Baghdad and some battalions of Marines for Anbar. And the President wisely [01:37:00] decides, again very strategic, he's going to address his biggest problem, which is Baghdad and the sectarian violence there, and take advantage of his biggest opportunity,



which is the Sunni uprising in Anbar. And he's going to do them both at the same time. That's the right decision. But it really stresses the force. And we sit down with Keane and Keane says, "No, you need seven or eight brigades." We don't have seven or eight brigades. So my problem is, if I'm going to make Keane a validator, I've got to walk him back down to the Surge option that we know the President is going to pick. And that's, in my recollection, that's what I'm trying to get to in that conversation. It's not that he's telling me about this great option that becomes the Surge; we've done all that. I'm trying to get him to the point where he will be a validator of what we're doing rather than coming out and saying, when everybody says [01:37:00] this is too much, Keane comes out there and says it's not enough and we have no supporters. That's how I recall that meeting. And it works out because in the end, Keane does come out. And we have this, in my recollection, we had this conversation. He basically in the end says, "Well, you could do it with five brigades. There's more risk, but, yeah, this would work with five brigades." And Mr. Kagan is --

FEAVER: Fred Kagan.

HADLEY: -- Fred Kagan is sitting there and he's a little reluctant but basically he comes around too. So we've got our validator. So that's terribly important role and behind the scenes, I'm sure Jack was doing a lot of things that helped encourage people who were promoters of the Surge. He's a real patriot. He took a lot of flak from the military for it, unfairly in my view. And it was a huge service to the



country. From where I sat, that's [01:38:00] the role he played and it was a very useful role.

FEAVER: In General Keane's meeting with the President was also Eliot Cohen and Steve Biddle and I believe one other general, perhaps two --

HADLEY: Wayne Downing.

SAYLE: And Barry McCaffrey.

FEAVER: And Barry McCaffrey. Much of that discussion was about how commanders in chief in wartime make decisions that maybe run against what generals are wanting, sort of the Lincoln to his generals, Roosevelt to his generals. Can you talk a little bit about the role of that discussion?

HADLEY: Yeah, I'll do it in shorthand. This is a conversation Peter and I have had at some length. The academic literature says there's -- as everything, there's a bipolar solution. Either the President decides and the military salutes, or the military decides and the President salutes, basically. This President had a different, hybrid [01:39:00] process. He was prepared to decide, but for reasons of politics and substance, he wanted to bring his military along. So he ran a process and I -- and we all -- supported him in running a process that allowed him to make the decision he believed was right for the country but brought his National Security principals and his military behind that decision. That was terribly important, for the reasons we discussed.



FEAVER: The other big event of that week is the release of the Baker-Hamilton report. So talk to us about its role in shaping or influencing the Iraq Surge decision.

HADLEY: Baker-Hamilton's -- the reason we got that was it was pretty clear when we set it up that we might need to have a new strategy, and that it would be controversial. And that it would be helpful if we could harness some [01:40:00] respected national leaders and national security Republicans and Democrats to sort of construct a landing pad out there in the public debate that we could go to when and if we decided to change the strategy. So that was the purpose of it. It was in some sense to clear the way and to begin clearing the space for the strategy where we would end up.

If you remember, we provided a lot of input to the Baker-Hamilton committee, which was a lot of the thinking that resulted in our changing strategy and going with the Surge. And a lot of it is reflected in their report. If you look at their recommendations, and one or the other of you did the rack-up, I ask you to show how many of their recommendations the Surge actually implemented. It was all but about [01:41:00] four, was my recollection. And they were things like, talk to the Iranians, talk to the Syrians, set a firm deadline for bringing out the troops, and one other, which we weren't going to do. But overwhelmingly, what the Baker-Hamilton-committee recommended was things that we did. So I was thinking and I, in some delicate conversations I had with Secretary Baker, we actually crafted language in there -- in the report -- that supported the Surge. And

he basically would run some things by me to make sure that they were supported by analysis within the government, which was a wholly appropriate thing for him to do. And he said, “We’re going to have a paragraph on the Surge, as which you’ll remember is a temporary increase in troops in order to calm [01:42:00] the sectarian violence if requested by the commanders.” So I was feeling pretty good that in fact, the Baker-Hamilton committee had done and set a document out there, which would provide a support when we announced the Surge, and therefore argued that we should embrace it.

The problem was twofold. One, it became characterized by both countries in the region and by conservatives in the United States as a cover for withdrawal. All they focused on really was a timetable and a firm date for withdrawing forces. And so it became not a safe harbor for an alternative strategy; it became the poster child for cut-and-run and give up. And that’s how it was viewed by the *Wall Street Journal* and conservatives in the United States. And that unfortunately was how [01:43:00] it was viewed in the region. Well, with that characterization, we could not embrace it. And therefore we had to distance ourselves from it. So as a matter of substance, it provided a bit of a landing pad for us and a support for what we were doing, but in terms of public perception, we could not use it as a validation of the Surge because it basically got characterized as cut-and-run, which is unfair to the report. But nonetheless, that’s how it was characterized. That’s my perception on the history of Baker-Hamilton. So it didn’t validate the strategy we were



pursuing; it in fact had a large number of the elements of the strategy to which we were moving, including the authorization and the blessing of the Surge. But we could not use it to support our strategy because of the way it got characterized [01:44:00] in the region and in the media.

FEAVER: So you asked us to remind you to talk about the five versus two brigades.

Secretary Gates goes into the region for a trip, comes back and initially recommends just a two brigade surge. And that issue is resolved at Crawford. Can you talk to us a little bit about the --

HADLEY: I don't think it's resolved in Crawford. I believe it get resolved in phone calls when we are doing the speech that the President finally gives --

FEAVER: After Crawford.

HADLEY: Yeah.

FEAVER: So, OK --

HADLEY: I believe it's after Crawford. And it's really the last thing that isn't worked in the speech. It's probably in two steps. We go from two to five brigades, and maybe that is Crawford. [01:45:00] And I don't have a clear recollection. But what's clear when we go to the speech, it's five brigades. But the last issue in connection with the speech is, is it five brigades -- two brigades now and three more if the commander needs it -- or do we commit upfront to five brigades and the commander can send them home if he doesn't need them? That's the difference. So it is an issue in terms of the order, and I'm talking to Pete Pace over



the phone about the Ex-Ord that the Secretary of Defense is going to sign, committing the troops. And it's an issue of what we say about it in the speech. Pentagon preference is five brigades available, only two committed, three more on call. Something like that. Or do you commit the five brigades now? [01:46:00]

I have a recollection of talking to Meghan, who I knew was having discreet conversations with General Petraeus and others, and that I was delighted that she was, but for a lot of reasons, I didn't want to know anything about them. And I said to Meghan, "How do you think General Petraeus -- what would be his druthers?" And she said, "I think he'd like all five brigades." Which was what I thought. So I went to see the President and said, "This is the issue." And I told him what I thought the incoming commanders wanted, which is what any incoming commander would want getting into a new situation where they hadn't been on the ground. Give me everything and I'll tell you if I need it all. But also the other argument I made to him was, you want to send a firm message that something is new, that it is different, and that we are committed to win. That's the question people are going to have. And the strongest statement you can make [01:47:00] of your intention is to say, five brigades committed from the start. And of course, given the President we served, he said, "That's exactly right. That's what we'll do. Tell Pace we want Ex-Ord to commit all five brigades." And that's what I conveyed back to him over the phone.

FEAVER: When did General Petraeus enter this process and what was his role?



HADLEY: I don't think he entered it in any formal way. I never talked to him. I didn't talk to him even after he became the commander out there, because I thought it did not help him if it became known that he was getting phone calls from the National Security Advisor in the White House. The Doug Lute arrangement was different. I think he was behind the scenes cheering on the advocates for the Surge. And he had relations with a lot of people and I think there was a lot of phone calls going on, as well they should. But he did not formally enter the scene [01:48:00] until he was designated as the commander.

Now, he had of course played a role because he had come to see the President about the work he had done at TRADOC -- Training and Doctrine Command, I think that's where he was to write the manual on counterinsurgency. So everybody knew where he stood and everybody knew that he was a leading candidate to implement the new strategy on the ground. But he did not -- my recollection -- he did not play in any formal way and he was smart. And it allowed him to be loyal. And so that he had the honor of in fact being both Don Rumsfeld and Bob Gates's candidate to lead our forces in the new strategy. And it was also very important to the President that the new strategy was not a rejection of the leaders who had pursued the old strategy. So he wanted this to be something that George Casey could support and not be [01:49:00] a critique of George Casey. And this was also Pete Pace's objective was well. And he said to me a number of times, "I want this end up being George Casey's surge." Well, in some sense it never was



going to be George Casey's surge, but the point was, he wanted Casey to embrace it, and that the change, not to be a repudiation of Casey. And the President was clear on that too, that whatever problems we had in Iraq, the President took responsibility for. And if you remember that speech he makes in January of '07, he says "Whatever mistakes are made, they are my responsibility." And he did not want to put that on the existing military leadership, who had been pursuing the prior strategy. And that of course is why, despite some who recommended against it, he nominated George Casey to be Chief of Staff of the Army.

FEAVER: We're running out of time. I'm going to ask you about three people who were critical in the crucial roles in the process, [01:50:00] one of whom you've mentioned, two you haven't. So the one you've mentioned, Secretary Rice. What did it take to bring her along to the Surge decision? What was crucial from your point of view --

HADLEY: It was her conversations with the President that first week in December and his commitment that it's not just going to be more troops; we're going to do something different. And she developed confidence over time that the something different would succeed.

FEAVER: The other two names you haven't mentioned are Dan Bartlett and Karl Rove, reflecting sort of the public messaging piece of this and the political calculation. What role, if any, did those two pieces -- how to explain this to the American

people, how to build the political support needed for this -- how were those factored in?

HADLEY: I didn't interact with them very directly. Remember, Karl had requested in 2005 I think, to sit in on NSC meetings, which I thought was fine. [01:51:00] And I took it to the President and the President said, "Not on your life." I said, "Why Mr. President?" He said, "Karl can come see me at any time and give me any advice on any topic; I'd be delighted to have it. But I will not have Karl in an NSC meeting because I do not want anybody to think that I'm making national security decisions for domestic political reasons, and he is my domestic political adviser." So any comments Karl had on the Surge, he delivered to the President. I think he was a supporter. I know from things that have been written subsequently that Dan Bartlett was a double down guy and he told the President when the President was having conversations with him that of the options available, that's where he came out. And I think that had an impact on the President.

One of the things about this process, by the way, is we did not try to discourage or funnel or control the flow [01:52:00] of information to the President. Because part of his getting comfortable with his decision is we wanted him to have information from as many different folks as he could. So we brought in members of Congress; we brought in experts to meet with him; he would talk to people about it on the rope lines. And my view was, that's all to the good. He ought to draw as much information as he can from as many sources as possible to get



comfortable with the decision. So these kinds of conversations he had I think were great. He was good about them because what he would do is he would let me know what he was learning. He was saying, "I had a conversation with Dan. He's a double down guy." So it was a very good process going both ways. As you can see, this was not that the President delegated this. The President tasked it and was at the center of both developing the strategy and setting the table [01:53:00] for its success in the ways that I've described.

FEAVER: Is there anything that we haven't asked you that we should have, or anything that you'd like to say that we haven't said?

HADLEY: If you could give me one minute, I'd like to pull up your chronology and just skim it for a minute and see if there's something that I wanted to say when I looked at it last night that I've forgotten to say this morning. Can I do that?

O'SULLIVAN: Sure.

HADLEY: Great. This'll just take one minute.

O'SULLIVAN: Just put it on pause. -- (background conversation) --

HADLEY: Now is there anything I've said that you think --

FEAVER: There's one more question that I just remembered, so I'll ask --

HADLEY: Is there anything I said that you think is wrong or incomplete that you want to ask me a question to try to see if you can clean up my record?

O'SULLIVAN: I have a general, overall impression. But no --

HADLEY: Yes.



FEAVER: Not a specific one --

HADLEY: Go ahead --

FEAVER: -- I have a specific question that I'll ask.

HADLEY: Well hold, let's do Meghan first. Go ahead Meghan.

FEAVER: Are we on or off?

O'SULLIVAN: No, I think it's for [01:54:00] --

HADLEY: The private session?

O'SULLIVAN: Yeah. But generally, factually --

SAYLE: I guess I would like to ask one question --

HADLEY: Please --

SAYLE: I'd like to know how regional politics played in this November, December period, how much attention you or the President or the strategy review group were giving regional politics. Both American allies in the region, what they thought of the possibilities of the Surge, and how the United States viewed the Surge in relation to Iran and Iran's activities in Iraq.

HADLEY: OK. Let me come back to that just for a minute. [01:55:00] The person you hadn't asked me about was -- and so should we go on camera again?

FEAVER: Yes, let's do that.

HADLEY: One thing you haven't asked me about is the role of the Vice President. And I think it'll be very important for you to interview him. My recollection is that in the meetings, he was not particularly vocal and was not in an advocate mode in



terms of the Surge. I think that was partly because he was a bit conflicted. Don Rumsfeld, his oldest and closest friend, was clearly not in the early days of this process on board with the Surge. He allowed his staff to participate in this process and to express their own views. My own take is that he thought the Surge was the right thing, [01:56:00] that he did not want to be the advocate of it because of his relationship with Don, that he kind of pushed things in that direction, pushing Jack Keane forward at various times in the process. And I also like to think that he liked the process that I was running and was probably providing his views privately to the President, one on one, which I think was wholly appropriate. So I think he was initially a closet supporter, but a supporter nonetheless. But the notion that somehow the Surge was brought to you by the Vice President, as some people say, is not right.

There's one other thing I want to say about the President, and it was a question about my own views. I'm interacting with the President all the time in this period as I'm shaping my views, shaping his. He's shaping [01:57:00] his views, helping to shape mine. It's a very constructive process. But there's one thing that needs to be recorded for history and that is right about the time he's clearly going to head and make the Surge decision. And one of you may well be there, and if so, you can add to the comments. He looks up and he says, "Hadley, is this going to work?" Were you there [pointing to Meghan O'Sullivan]?

O'SULLIVAN: Yeah.

HADLEY: In my recollections, I said, “Mr. President, I think it will work, but it’s the last chance we have to get this right.” And he says, “Well that’s good.” And he said, “But if you ever change your mind and think this can’t work, you need to come tell me because I can’t keep sending young men and women into harm’s way if we don’t have a strategy we think’s going to give us victory.” And I said, “Yes [01:58:00] sir.” I thought this spoke very well for the President as Commander in Chief. They always say to McNamara when he was alive, they said, “Well why didn’t you go to Johnson with your views?” And he said, “Well, you know, President Johnson was a difficult man to bring bad news to.” And here was the President of the United States soliciting from me what would have been, if I’d ever had to bring it, the worst news that he could have heard, which was, “Mr. President, we’ve failed in Iraq and there’s nothing we can do about it.” And basically, he was soliciting that bad news because of his commitment to the young men and women in uniform. I thought it spoke very well for him as a leader and very well for him as a Commander in Chief, which was willing to hug people who’d lost loved ones, to be with folks who were wounded, willing to make hard decisions to let people in harm’s way, but only if he thought the objective was [01:59:00] worthy and we had a strategy to succeed. And the moment that ceased to be the case, he was going to bring them home. None of this throwing people at it and sort of seeing what how well we could do, that was not his style. And it shouldn’t be the style of any Commander in Chief.



FEAVER: So two last questions. One is the question about --

HADLEY: We didn't spend a lot of time thinking about -- and I think it's largely -- and you folks may know better -- I think it's largely because we largely lost the region on the Iraq project. It was not going well. And there were a lot of reservations about the decision in the first place. Iran was viewed as a problem because they were doing things that killed our people. And one of the things that we did in the execution of the Surge was to push back on that and both expose it and also push back on it. And I think stop, [02:00:00] because we made it clear that we were prepared to hold Iran accountable, and we did that in a couple very symbolic ways to show that we could get to their people and we would if this didn't stop. And I think it helped.

FEAVER: The other question is, Britain and Tony Blair, haven't talked about that, our closest ally in the fight.

HADLEY: Well Blair was, I think of any world leader the closet confidant of the President. And Blair made his own decisions on Iraq based on his understanding and judgments about what was in the best interest of his country. His view happened to coincide heavily with the President's, and that was a source of enormous comfort and strength for the President. [02:01:00] And I remember in a Camp David meeting before the President made the decision to go into Iraq in 2003, he had had a one-on-one conversation with Tony Blair and he came back into the conference room at the Laurel Lodge at Camp David and he said, "Blair told me



that if the diplomacy fails and the end of the day we have to go to war to remove Saddam, he's with us. He's with us." And you could see the sense of relief that the President felt when he knew he would have Tony Blair at his side if we had to do this. And I think that kind of relationship continued throughout this period.

FEAVER: But not a factor in the Surge decision.

HADLEY: I don't remember his conversations with Blair about it. I'm sure we gave them a heads up. I'm sure we let them know that it was coming. But I don't remember [02:02:00] -- it's a good question for the President.

FEAVER: Thank you very much.

O'SULLIVAN: Thank you.

HADLEY: Anything you want to correct?

FEAVER: We're good.

CRAWFORD: Thank you.

[END OF AUDIO/VIDEO FILE]