



**The Surge – Collective Memory Project**

**Interviewee: David Satterfield**

Senior Advisor to the Secretary of State and Coordinator for Iraq, 2006-2009  
Deputy Chief of Mission at Embassy Baghdad, 2005-2006

**Interviewers:**

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**[Begin Transcription]**

O’SULLIVAN: So we just begin by introducing ourselves. I’m Meghan O’Sullivan from  
Harvard University.



SAYLE: Tim Sayle from Southern Methodist University.

SATTERFIELD: David Satterfield.

O'SULLIVAN: Great. David, thank you so much for joining us. We have considered you to be a real key voice in this conversation, in this debate. And we're thrilled to have the chance to interview you in person on one of your trips to Washington --

SATTERFIELD: Happy to be here.

O'SULLIVAN: -- from the region. So we'd like to begin -- and as you know, part of this conversation -- and we'll keep it a fluid conversation -- but, part of this conversation is not just for us who have been part of this process, but also for future historians and students. So we want to set some of the backdrop. Information that all of us in this room know, but is good to have on the record. And so I thought, given that you are one of these people who really played multiple roles in Iraq policy over time, if you could [00:01:00] begin by telling us what your positions were in 2006 in both the timing of your move from Baghdad back to Washington, a little bit about what your responsibilities were in those different positions.

SATTERFIELD: Certainly. Until July of 2006, I was alternately Deputy Chief of Mission, Charge d'Affaires, at the U.S. embassy in Baghdad. And in that role, I had direction of the management of the U.S. mission, with the important caveat that because at the time U.S. forces in Iraq were under a specified command, when I say charge of the U.S. mission, it was a charge in parallel with that exercise by the



commanding officer of the MNF-I, Multi-National Force - Iraq. They were separate lines. And indeed, one of the issues which merit discussion is how the separate lines of action between the embassy diplomatic civilian [00:02:00] effort in Iraq ultimately became coincided with the military lines of effort. That was not the case in 2006 as we approached the issue of the Surge, which we'll be discussing subsequently. In July of 2006, I came back to Washington, at Secretary Rice's request, as Coordinator for Iraq for the State Department, and Senior Advisor to the Secretary. While I was based in Washington, I spent much of that time, and indeed by 2007's end, most of my time, in Baghdad.

O'SULLIVAN: And can you say just about that role, the Senior Advisor to the Secretary, what was that? Because that was somewhat outside the normal bureaucratic structuring of the State Department.

SATTERFIELD: Certainly. I directly advised, directly communicated, to the Secretary on issues related to management questions relating to Iraq, which became quite prominent in terms [00:03:00] of greater emphasis on a more active and effective civilian role, which required State Department leadership, and indeed, State Department participation. But on a policy sense, the Secretary was keenly interested in assessing the efficacy of U.S. policy - military and civilian - in Iraq, looked to me, along with Phil Zelikow, initially, as the sources of recommendation, assessment, analysis; as coordinators for both the Department's operational engagement in Iraq, the Department's interagency participation in Iraq debate, as



well as direct assessment and recommendations to her on what her position should be in the interagency policy. And more broadly, whether there was a better, more effective direction of U.S. policy overall to achieve success in Iraq or mitigate damage in Iraq.

O'SULLIVAN: And you were also really the point person, at [00:04:00] a senior level, with Interagency.

SATTERFIELD: Exactly. Exactly.

O'SULLIVAN: So you're in this great position to talk to us about the conditions on the ground in Iraq in the first part of 2006, and then you can talk to us about what happened in Washington, and how things unfolded around the decision-making time. So let's start with the first bit. You were in Iraq for the first half of the 2006. Can you just give us a description of what was the situation like? And then we'll morph into the question of how did you perceive U.S. strategy? What did you perceive it to be at the time, and how successful? But let's just start just describing the situation.

SATTERFIELD: Certainly. Discussion of the situation at the beginning of 2006 requires discussion of the situation as it emerged in the middle and latter part of 2005. And the hallmark here was a series of negative directions in terms of the following: ability of the Iraqi security forces [00:05:00] to assume real responsibility for maintaining security and stability in the country, particularly in Anbar-Ninawa province and in Baghdad itself. Second principal problem, or negative trend line,



the emergence of distinct sectarian markers to the violence, the beginnings of what, in 2006, emerged full-bore as population cleansing or separation under force with considerable casualties. High lethality in Baghdad itself, but not only in Baghdad -- that is, Shia-Sunni fighting with a distinct sectarian edge; the emergence of both indigenous and Iranian-backed and directed Sharia militia, quite violent in their conduct, from the South, the Basra area, through to Baghdad and other regions where sectarian seam lines existed. And a moment to step apart on context, [00:06:00] Baghdad is not, as many argued, easily separable into sectarian communities. Nor is, or was, Iraq as whole. Kurdish communities, non-Kurdish Sunni Arab communities, Shia communities existed throughout the country, side by side, intermingled. It was never an easy picture to cleanly carve out, separate out. The emergence of Shia entities, Sunni entities were very hard to see on the map, short of violent expulsion of communities, cleansing of communities -- an assertion of the will and presence of only one sectarian group, the efficacy of U.S. efforts to address the two problems, ineffectiveness of Iraqi security force efforts on security and stability, emergence of sectarian trends in the violence. Emergence of violent criminal and militia sectarian-oriented [00:07:00] gangs in Baghdad in the south became a second major area to focus upon.

Now, the U.S. had been engaged for quite some time in a training effort to build up Iraqi Armed Forces, to build up Iraqi police forces, intelligence capabilities. This effort, led initially by the Dave Petraeus as head of what was



called MNSTC-I [Multi-National Security Transition] Command-Iraq, the security training operation in Iraq, and then by Marty Dempsey, had focused primarily on statistics. How many units had been trained to an ostensible, given level of proficiency, and then set out into the field? There was a high focus upon stoplight charts. X number of Iraqi battalions were on red, yellow, or green in terms of their standing in the training process and their ability to deploy to the field capable of independent, [00:08:00] quasi-independent, or not-independent action.

In late 2005, almost by coincidence, a question was raised in interagency discussion, as occurred throughout every week, with Marty Dempsey on the screen in Baghdad as to not how many units were being trained or how many units had graduated training and were now, ostensibly, in the field taking up their mission, but a different question. How many Iraqi forces could be accounted for in the field at a given moment? And the answer came back, only a relatively small percentage; somewhat higher than one-third were actually accountable in the field. With some consternation, the Washington interlocutors on the screen asked, "Well, where are the others?" Dempsey responded, "Well, some are simply [00:09:00] AWOL; reported and then disappeared; never reported. Others are routinely absent to collect their pay and their food basket," -- because in Iraq there was a subsidy provided in terms of commodities, and that could not be collected at the military deployment points. The individuals had to go to their homes to make that collected. And he said, "That's really not my responsibility. My responsibility is,"



as it were, “to send the rockets up. Where they come down is somebody else’s business.”

This opened a quite profound debate in Washington and in the field. You mean, we have been training and reporting as green X tens of thousands of Iraqi soldiers who cannot be accounted for? They don’t exist in the field? Well, yes. And this was never an issue of feedback or report back. [00:10:00] As I like to present it, you know the inputs, how many people have gone into training. You know the outputs, how many individuals, at what assessed level of proficiency have emerged from training. But what about the outcome? So how many units are actually in the field, effectively deployed? Great statistics on the first two. Very vague understanding or assessment of what really matters - the outcome of this whole costly, elaborate process. So, here you have in late ’05, the beginning of significant questioning as to the entire process of training up Iraqi security forces to be able to take the fight vice the U.S., which was planning, throughout ’05, on a progressive draw down of forces. Don Rumsfeld’s intent was to pull out U.S. forces at the fastest pace possible, consistent with the stand up of Iraqis. As Iraqis stand up, we will [00:11:00] stand back, and then we will stand down, was the rubric applied.

Beginning of ’06, all of the trend lines that I’ve just described -- emerging sectarian violence, serious questions about the Iraqi forces police and security to achieve effective actions on the ground to counter these trends -- began to



explode. February is the Golden, or Askari Mosque explosion. Why? Why target that mosque? That explosion was the most dramatic demonstration of what intelligence had been suggesting for some time before, which was that the leader of AQIM [al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb] was intent on provoking a Sunni-Shia civil war in Iraq. How to do that? The way to do that was to attack Sunni targets with the objective of [00:12:00] inflaming the Sunni community so that they would attack Shia.

Now, from an objective standpoint, this is absurd. The Shia outnumber the Sunni in Iraq. The Shia are at an advantageous governmental position, in an advantageous command position, within the security forces. Why would there be a belief that deliberately provoking the Sunnis to attack the Shia and then get a response back would help the Sunnis? Here we enter a room in the dream palace of the Arabs. The Sunni community of Iraq at that time did not accept that they were, in fact, a demographic minority within Iraq. Not just Iraqi Sunnis, but the broader Sunni community, most notably, the Saudi leadership. In their worldview, Iraq was a Sunni state, a fundamental part of the Sunni UMA, or motherland. It was [00:13:00] inconceivable to them that the Sunnis were not the majority community, and all demographic realities presented were dismissed as inconsistent with that fundamental view. The ouster of Saddam Hussein, the ouster of a Sunni leader -- vicious, threatening tyrant that he was, and threat to his neighbors that he was -- was trumped by the idea that the Shia had taken power in





a Sunni state. And from that stemmed a fundamental antipathy, by many Gulf Sunni Arab states, led by Saudi Arabia, towards the whole concept of the new post-2003 Iraq. That fed into the sectarian challenges, which we, the U.S., Iraq, faced as we looked at 2006 and beyond. As we sought for Sunni leadership and influence from outside [00:14:00] to counter Sunni violence and radicalism inside, both in the form of tribal violence against the government and against coalition forces, as well as a growing Al-Qaeda violence against the government and coalition forces, we found fewer Sunni takers than we would have hoped.

I could draw parallels to the situation today in the Middle East, when we seek Sunni intervention against Sunni Islamist extremists and find ourselves caught in the atavistic break between Persians and Arabs, Shia and Sunnis. It is directly apposite, today, with the situation we confronted in Iraq ten years ago. But it was quite real. And it was a negative enabler to efforts to confront the violence taking place after the Askari Mosque explosion, as very rapidly [00:15:00] we perceived clearly a civil war, or almost civil war spiral going down. Now, civil war is a term that should be used advisedly, and not a casual reference. What Iraq was experiencing was an ever-higher level -- particularly in Baghdad, but not exclusively in Baghdad level, of overtly sectarian violence, killing, sectarian movements, and cleansing, as neighborhoods which were previously mixed in Baghdad became entirely Shia or entirely Sunni. The complex mix of Baghdad's intertwined communities was quickly dissolving, but dissolving at the point of a



gun, at the blade of a knife. More and more of the counts we received each morning in Baghdad were of how many bodies had been found washed up in the water treatment center: dumped into canals, [00:16:00] dumped into the river, and caught as it entered the plant. This was extremely distressing, because if it continued, a true civil war was actually possible.

That is what Zarqawi, the leader of AQIM, was seeking could well have been potentially achievable. Now, Zawahiri, the functional head of core Al-Qaeda, was greatly concerned by all of this. He did not believe this was an appropriate tactic for Al-Qaeda to be engaging in, and could ultimately revert back in a negative fashion on Al-Qaeda. But Zarqawi broke away and would not follow the guidance from core Al-Qaeda - another indicator of the phenomenon we've seen in the decade since, where the actual ability of core Al-Qaeda -- so-called -- to direct the different franchises and affiliates gets less and less, and the affiliates take on a multi-headed existence. Much harder to confront, much harder to eliminate, [00:17:00] much harder to address from a CT standpoint. So, civil war is looming. The security forces are ineffective in confronting it, or are complicit to some extent, in the violence.

What does the U.S. do? The U.S. begins a Baghdad focused series of operations. The latest of which were the Ma'an ila Al-Amam, the Together Forward Operations. The operations built by the U.S. military -- its command in Iraq as well as the Pentagon -- as the necessary joint operations to both establish



confidence and effectiveness in the form of Iraqi forces, and stabilize the situation in Baghdad, fail. And I use fail in the clearest possible term. They fail disastrously.

One new operation after another, billed as, “This time, the [00:18:00] right formula,” fails to achieve any meaningful result. The death tolls continue to increase. The serious questions, or judgments, as to ineffectiveness of Iraqi forces mount throughout spring and summer of 2006. It is not going to be possible for the U.S. to be able to say we have achieved even the lowest denominator of success or stability in Iraq, or withdraw U.S. forces -- as remains very much the intent of the Secretary of Defense and, more broadly, the policy community -- if this raging and increasing violence cannot be addressed.

O’SULLIVAN: Thank you.

SAYLE: I just had one quick one if that’s OK?

O’SULLIVAN: Yeah, yeah. Please.

SAYLE: To consider the time when you were still in Iraq, I wanted to set up a straw man made out of the composite of some other interviews we’ve conducted. That is, the idea that in late 2005 [00:19:00] and in the first half of 2006, along with the negative trend lines you’ve pointed out, there are some positive trend lines that confuse the situation. I wanted to get your take on that. Those would be, the election itself in late 2005; the death of Zarqawi, for instance; the seating of the Maliki government just before. How did you assess those -- what some argued were positive trend lines -- versus the negative trends you’ve pointed out?



SATTERFIELD: I believe strongly that the drafting of the Iraqi constitution, the elections, indeed, Maliki's initial assumption of office were, in fact, positive developments. The Iraqi constitution is just that. It was an Iraqi constitution. While we provided recommendations, advice, while we emphasized certain points that we wanted included in the constitution, and in fact, had a separate, ostensibly U.S.-shaped constitution drafting process, to their credit, the Iraqis themselves had a [00:20:00] parallel constitution drafting process led by a very competent and capable Shia parliamentarian, Humam Hamoudi. That process yielded, on the Iraqi side, the ultimate document that emerged. It had significant input in terms of our recommendations on critical points of what we believe constitutes democratic society from the U.S., but it was an Iraqi document. And that was, without any question, a success. I still believe that constitution was the best Arab constitution to ever emerge in the Middle East. And frankly, with the exception of the new Egyptian constitution produced quite recently, I think it remains just about the best in the Arab world. So, a success.

The elections were a success. The elections were, in fact, conducted without the significant violence or challenge, which had been feared. And that was not a product [00:21:00] of U.S. force or deterrence. Iraqis wanted to vote. They wanted to conduct the elections. And whatever the countering violent threads may have been, they were submerged in an Iraqi consensus to move ahead. So, yes, another success, without question.



Finally, Maliki's election. Much has been written and spoken of as to how Nouri al-Maliki came to be prime minister. He came to be prime minister as the result of an Iraqi internal decision primarily, and initially, within the Shia Iraqi political community. He was not the product of an American decision, save only in the context that we did not believe that continuing with the previous prime minister, Jaafari, was likely to produce a success in terms of leadership of Iraq under increasingly challenging circumstances. [00:22:00]

There was a significant debate as to whether there was an alternative to Jaafari in the person of Adil Abdul-Mahdi. Adil Abdul-Mahdi was, and is, a gentleman, a scholar, and a true Iraqi patriot. But the question mark was not over his character or personality, but whether he would be able to take an independent position from Iran, from Iranian-backed militias, particularly the Badr Organization, which was, in fact, the militia arm of his own political structure. In the end, after considerable debate, the assessment was made that Adil, for all of his strengths, did not have the ability to take an independent command position, to seek an independent power base apart from Badr, and apart from Iran. And again, as 2005 moved on, it was quite clear that was going to have to be done by the next prime minister.

Maliki emerged as [00:23:00] the consequence of those two -- not Jaafari, not Adil -- decisions, but as the product of internal and, to us, somewhat surprising voting practices within the Shia block. But, successes. They didn't



confuse the security issue, though. Those successes stand on their own, but they were being countered and challenged by the fundamental deterioration of security and stability in Iraq. So I don't, in any way, undermine or understate how important those advances were. They didn't confuse the situation because the situation was always focused on security from latter part of 2005 on.

Q: Thank you for that. Those two assessments are in your head when you come to Washington. And you may remember that there was a mantra that politics need to be fixed before [00:24:00] security can be improved. So, although you're seeing these two things as being independent, a lot of people are linking them together. Give us a sense of what you came to Washington with, in the sense of, what is your objective here? What are the issues that you want to clarify for Secretary Rice? Your aspirations for whether or not policy needs to adapt to the situation? Or, as some people have told us in the interviews, the sense that this situation was going to right itself because the politics were coming together? I guess Maliki took office shortly, maybe six weeks before you left.

SATTERFIELD: That's right. I came to Washington with the following basic views -- not assumptions, but views based on the experience the preceding year, plus. The first: while successes had been made on the political side, and while I believed profoundly that unlike any [00:25:00] other states in the Middle East -- Lebanon most notably -- Iraqis self-identified, despite the apparent sectarian divisions, as Iraqis primarily, not as Shia or Sunnis. There was hope for a coherent Iraqi federal



whole to emerge. However, that would not happen if the security situation could not, as urgently as possible, be stabilized. In other words, despite successes on the political side and despite an underlying set that is the product of Iraq itself, not us, that tends to cohesiveness rather than dissolution and fragmentation, all of that wasn't going to stand if the continued sectarian violence -- Shia militia, Iranian-backed, and indigenous; Sunni militias, Anbar- Nineveh primarily, and their violence against the Iraqi state; [00:26:00] and Al-Qaeda, as both a force in its own right challenging the government, challenging Sunni tribal structures, challenging the coalitions, and as an enabler and inciter of all of the other violent trains -- could not be brought under control. Politics would not matter. Politics would be submerged in the flood of violence and division. That was assumption one.

Second assumption: we had not, as a military or a government, gotten it right. We had on the political side, but we hadn't on the security side. We had been so focused on getting out of Dodge, on producing the metrics -- the endless metrics which would demonstrate x number of Iraqis trained to y proficiency, thus allowing z numbers of U.S. forces to first pull back, and then depart -- that we had not, as I noted as early as latter part of [00:27:00] 2005, pulled our own lens back and taken a deep look at exactly what, in the real world of the Iraqi field, was going on. We were obsessed with the inputs and outputs.

I had a related assumption that I took with me -- or judgment -- to Washington. Which was that the U.S. military's own ability to self-critique and



self-assess the efficacy of their operations and actions was questionable. Too many proclamations of success in too many operations that really failed. Failed as they were being conducted, much less after they were over. I was not “suspicious”; that’s a wrong term. I had reservations as to the ability of the military to get this right, or to self-assess.

O’SULLIVAN: And that basically covers -- [00:28:00] unless you want to add something to it -- how you were seeing Washington’s viewpoint. Did you think that Washington had some bias that needed to be addressed? As well as Washington needed to be better apprised of the situation that you were experiencing on the ground?

SATTERFIELD: Yes, Meghan, I did. I believed in Washington there was too much inertia, too much of a sense of an ultimatic [*sic*] process in which milestone -- literal, event-milestone, constitution drafting, ratification, election, prime minister seated -- they were the focus, just like on the military side; numbers of forces trained were the entire focus. Not what they were actually doing or if they even existed. That needed to be broken, and a real look made at what is going on, and what can we do differently to mitigate what was now, quite clearly, a [00:29:00] downward and accelerating spiral. That getting out of town could not be the dominant policy engine, unless we wished to get out of town in the midst of a general collapse of the entire Iraq venture.

O’SULLIVAN: Right before you came back, Phil Zelikow and Jim Jeffrey wrote a memo advocating selective counterinsurgency. Again, this is from some of our earlier





interviews. Do you remember that memo? Did you have any visibility over it? Do you remember it differently? Or is this something that got lost in the -- [laughter] there were thousands of memos.

SATTERFIELD: I must confess, I really cannot recall the selective insurgency memo.

SAYLE: Related to one other meeting in June at Camp David -- where the President holds a war council and then leaves -- part of the setup for that meeting was [00:30:00] concern, I believe, in the NSC, that there were negative trends in Iraq that needed to be curtailed. Were you aware of that council he had?

SATTERFIELD: Of course I was. And I was very much aware, and in close touch with the NSC at the time. I don't wish to suggest that I come back to Washington in a Washington which is wholly ignorant or not focused on any of this. From late 2005 onward, all of these trends -- the question marks over military operations -- were increasingly the object of considerable discussion in Washington, between Washington and Baghdad.

O'SULLIVAN: Going to that period. You come back in the summer of 2006, and what's the conversation here in Washington? Are you aware of efforts to really try to look at this strategy from a ground up perspective? Do you still find resistance to the idea of a larger strategic review? What's the landscape?

SATTERFIELD: When I initially come back in July, [00:31:00] there is deep concern. Concern at State, in the person of the Secretary, herself; concern at the NSC; throughout the Iraq team and beyond, about where things are going. This does



not look like it is leading to a success by any definition, much less the President's own declared definitions of success, and that leaving Iraq under these circumstances is really not something that can be contemplated. The issue is, what do we do? Now, there are not, initially, in July and August, clear lines of thinking as to, there are four options, three options, five options. But one begins to hear the emergence of broad trends in the interagency senior level discussions.

The first big question is, is there anything at all that we can do, other than mitigate damage, to broader [00:32:00] issues in the Middle East? Try to mitigate damage within Iraq? Focus our efforts on the things that we might be able to do? Stop the worst potential disasters in Iraq? But not try to stage manage, intervene, or affect everything. Not because as a policy matter we should not, but because we may not have the capacity, despite the will, to effect that goal. Secretary Rice is deeply, personally concerned that, in fact, we are failing. We may not have the ability, literally may not have the ability to affect events by the selective application, or the different application, of military force. She, at this point -- which is now latter part of summer 2006, but not yet the fall -- is deeply skeptical of the military's ability to actually [00:33:00] address the emergent sectarian pre-civil war, proto-civil war situation in Iraq. And she is very keenly concerned with the impact of an exclusive focus on Iraq on other regional developments. Iraq is taking the air out of the room on every other policy issue the U.S. has in southwest Asia and the Middle East.



O'SULLIVAN: Can you say a little bit more about that, because this is the time of the Israeli war in Lebanon. That sense of, Iraq is a big distraction, because Iraq of course is your primary responsibility at the time.

SATTERFIELD: There was very much a sense that we, as a nation, were being viewed exclusively through an Iraq success or failure prism. And we ourselves had cast that prism and were keeping it in prominent position. With every speech, with every iteration of maximal [00:34:00] goals and achievements in Iraq as the measure of a success or failure, we were setting ourselves up for problems elsewhere in the Middle East.

And the Middle East had many problems. Not just the Lebanon development, but Iran-related issues. Other questions -- both CT and non-CT -- that Iraq was dominating. Not because Iraq itself was a factor in these other issues, but the ability, the bandwidth available to the U.S. government to manage other issues, and the consumption of our key partners in the Middle East by our own focus on Iraq, made dealing with those other pressing and significant for U.S. national security issues, more and more difficult. We could not pull back the policy lens, because we kept it almost exclusively focused on Iraq.

O'SULLIVAN: In light of that, what kind of instructions or requests or taskings did Secretary Rice give you around that time? Did she say, "Hey, help us come up [00:35:00] with an alternative strategy"? Or was it this idea of, let's open the aperture? Was there an explicit goal?



SATTERFIELD: The Secretary asked Phil and I to take a deep dive on what could be done, free-flowing. She did not prescribe or proscribe any potential outcomes to this. Let me know your assessment. I want a detailed look at all aspects of Iraq: civil, military, security, political. You tell me what you think is happening. Tell me where you think it is going to go. And tell me what you think are U.S. options, or U.S. plus allied, i.e. Arab state, broader coalition building efforts -- political coalition, military coalition building efforts -- to address these concerns. From inside, from outside. And so that is what we worked on.

O'SULLIVAN: And what time frame was this?

SATTERFIELD: This was latter part of summer 2006.

O'SULLIVAN: [00:36:00] So more or less around the same time is when you joined the NSC team for our thinking about the options.

SATTERFIELD: That's right.

O'SULLIVAN: Because, as we've been discussing in all of our interviews, and you will remember, there are all these nodes popping up all over --

SATTERFIELD: This I recall profoundly. Yes.

O'SULLIVAN: So I'm not going to ask you any leading questions, but can you tell us -- we'll come back to your endeavors with Phil, because those are very important -- but can you tell us, where did you perceive the NSC to be? And how did you see their efforts? Were they just floating out there in some untethered world or did you see there was a gathering momentum?



SATTERFIELD: What was happening in the NCS at Steve's direction was exactly the same thing that was happening within State. This is not going well. You have the President declaring a set of goals and objectives. What is being achieved on the ground [00:37:00] are nowhere close, right now, to meeting those goals. And indeed, the objectives that had been achieved in terms of political process are fundamentally threatened now by the deteriorating security environment. What do we do? But not driven by a DoD, "Everything tracks with getting U.S. forces out," but a zero-base look at what ought to be the U.S. force set in Iraq. Is there a relationship between U.S. force numbers, presence, activities, and stabilizing the situation? NSC was looking at precisely the same issues we were looking at—at Secretary Rice's direction at State. At least that was my perception throughout this period.

O'SULLIVAN: And on the DoD point, did you think -- I'm reading into what you're saying -- that both the NSC and State felt this had to be done without DoD for this moment, because of an overriding [00:38:00] policy lens that DoD had? Or was it just that it's important to start internally, get your thoughts together before everybody engages in the interagency debate?

SATTERFIELD: It was, frankly, both. It was the need to organize at a political policy level, as opposed to uniform service level, certain frames of reference, questions to ask. But it was also -- and again, I can't avoid this -- a clear perception that many of the critical interlocutors in DoD, from the chairman down, were constrained by



Secretary Rumsfeld from expressing a position which contrasted or contradicted Rumsfeld's doctrine of standing down in Iraq as rapidly as possible -- shedding missions, detainee, security, and others, as quickly as possible. That was real. And it had been building since the latter part of 2005, [00:39:00] that you could not get a frank appraisal, in a policy sense, from what ought to be the most responsible interlocutors, because of fear of contradiction of Secretary Rumsfeld.

SAYLE: How constrained are those policy and political level conversations without military advice or input? I know there are officers serving --

O'SULLIVAN: Can I just start --

SAYLE: Oh, sorry.

O'SULLIVAN: No, no. I just want to clarify one point just for the record. I know that Bob Woodward talked about there not being any military input into the NSC one, but Major General Berkner was on the NSC staff. And I don't think he had any policy direction from DoD, but he was a military voice in that. So, sorry. I just wanted to use the moment to --

SAYLE: No. It's extremely important to get on record that there are military officers working within NSC. But, I'll go back -- are there constraints for not having a JCS representative or a DoD civilian representative involved in those conversations?

SATTERFIELD: [00:40:00] It went in a different direction. There were always ways to obtain authentic assessments of what DoD was able to contribute. And as we go on, there are the separate silo discussions of validating a formal DoD presentation



on how many BCTs existed that could be deployed. And a reality check was this really -- the full-up DoD contribution -- possible, the Bill Luti channel. We always had access to military input into this process. What I mean to suggest is the kind of very senior level, chairman level open debate on this was somewhat awkward and constrained because of the very directive influence and presence of Secretary Rumsfeld.

SAYLE: This opens up a really fascinating issue, though. I'd like to just press on it a little bit further. We've had some interviewees note that the J-3 and J-5 [00:41:00] officers are suggesting that there are no more troops available. And the phrase that we keep hearing is, "We're out of Schlitz."

SATTERFIELD: That was a George Casey phrase.

SAYLE: It seems that some interviewees who heard that line took it as gospel, in a sense. Others did not.

SATTERFIELD: We did not. We certainly didn't at State, and in my absolute understanding, this was not taken as gospel at the NSC. This is the reason why. We probed through multiple channels. The President had to know -- we all had to know -- what was the availability of U.S. combat-ready forces, that is, forces who are not already deployed and could not be extended; forces who are in reset, preparing for a new deployment. Basically, to simplify this, if you had one BCT, Brigade Combat Team, on the ground, you had another Brigade Combat Team that has just come out. It has to go through a period of dwell, of reset. Now, that



period was getting shorter [00:42:00] and shorter and shorter, which was part of the problem with the forces overall. And then you had another unit already ready and slated to deploy in. So for every unit there, you had two other units that had to be counted out of action, who are already committed to the fight. What we had to know was how many combat-ready ground force Brigade Combat Teams were there exclusive of this already committed mix. And we did not, as a community, rely on only one individual assessment. We made sure we were confident in telling the President, Mr. President, you have x -- in the end it was five BCTs -- that could be made available. Korea couldn't be touched, there was a CONUS Reserve BCT that couldn't be touched. That was it. That was the global U.S. force. You couldn't tell the President, for example, "Mr. President you have no more units. This is a roll of the dice." "If you have" -- and I'm giving different phrases that were invoked over the course of the fall. [00:43:00] "Mr. President, if we have a crisis elsewhere in the world, there are no units we can send. They're gone. They're all in Iraq." We had to know with confidence that we would not discover, "Well, really, there were five, six, seven more BCTs being held back." We never had a moment when we did not have active channels, inquiries, to give us that assurance back. So, no, I don't care what assessments may have been about J-3, J-5, what they did or did not say. And I won't comment on that. We always had a sense of an objective determination of reality sufficient to inform the President.

O'SULLIVAN: Let's go back to the paper that you and Philip were working on for





Secretary Rice. Can you talk about what was in that paper? What was the outcome of your study?

SATTERFIELD: Yes. Bottom lines up front, the U.S. had achieved -- [00:44:00] had helped Iraqis achieve significant political advances. Those advances were now being fundamentally threatened by sectarian violence; by the inciting and inflaming effect of AQIM; by the AQIM terrorist presence itself in Ninawa, Anbar; by the real possibility of dramatic, and much increased sectarian cleansing, separation, in Baghdad itself. The possibility of a quote, Srebrenica-style massacre in Baghdad. What could we do? First bottom line.

Second bottom line, could U.S. forces in their current presence in Iraq, or augmented presence, achieve a different result than the results achieved previously? And now we come to what became the fundamental policy divide [00:45:00] that moves into the fall -- October and November -- which really is, U.S. forces have tried a variety of approaches, operationally, to dealing with sectarian violence now for over a year -- because we're talking about the latter part of the fall of 2006. Is there a reason to believe that if one added to their strength or somehow redeployed them, they could be more effective or would be capable of even accurate assessment of degrees of success? In the end, our position was no. We could not have such confidence. That is a combination of pace of accelerating sectarian violence, pace of accelerating Al-Qaeda incitement, presence of Iranian Shia accelerants of violence -- but there's more to be talked about on that score in



a moment -- ineffectiveness of U.S. military actions in the past, particularly the [00:46:00] disastrous Baghdad campaigns -- the Together Forwards one, two, three -- led us to believe we needed a different approach. And that approach is one in which we did not walk away from Iraq, but rather chose our fights. It was, if you will, containment and mitigation of profound damage, rather than an attempt to continue the exposure -- increase the exposure -- of U.S. forces to no likely prospect of success, coupled with an external policy which was a much more aggressive approach with Arab states to try to bring them to a position of influencing Al-Qaeda and Sunni tribal behaviors. Now, that had been underway already from the latter part of the summer on, but without great success, particularly with the Saudis. Considerably more success with the UAE and the Kuwaitis. Limited success with the Saudis.

SAYLE: Just to [00:47:00] date that paper, was that the paper you presented to the Secretary at the end of October?

SATTERFIELD: There's been a lot of focus on the October 31, I think --

SAYLE: Yeah. The unusually long paper.

SATTERFIELD: The unusually long paper. [laughter] I'm not sure where that phrase comes from. The unusually long paper. No, there were many other papers and discussions and analyses provided to the Secretary. And many, many hours of talking with her, with her questioning us, asking for specific things back that Phil and I -- or I independently -- did for her during this process. And that's important



for the purpose of this whole process to understand. There's a focus on this event, that paper. Papers and events are the product of near continuous verbal exchanges, email exchanges, policy exchanges and discussions -- some on paper, some not on paper -- that proceed and that follow all of this. And that was the case here as well. [00:48:00] We had continuous conversations with the Secretary in this process, as we had continuous conversations, independent of the formal review process, with the interagency. Especially with the NSC team.

SAYLE: I'm sorry. I have one question on that. You've opened up a really interesting question. In the journalistic accounts and in the interviews much of the State Department is absent from that record. I'm not suggesting it's absent from the process. I don't know. But can you talk about how, for instance, NEA or Country Desks and so on, are playing a role in the advice that you're passing to the Secretary or your assessments for the Secretary? How does the SI office relate to the rest of the department?

SATTERFIELD: In theory, I am an undersecretary equivalent, which means, able to command bureau level resources. I am also in charge of the Iraq office, which is at this point, the largest office in the Department of State. [00:49:00] In fact, for these discussions this was very much a small core of intelligence analysts -- the NSC team, key DoD interlocutors from the military services, as well as civilians from the DoD and a very small group of people at State -- pulling this together. And that has to be the way it's done. There are huge operational day-to-day



challenges going on in Iraq which are being managed and looked at. I have, others have, responsibility for those things as well. But this is a direct advice to the principal, to the Secretary of State, and through her to the President, on fundamental policy issues. And so two parallel things are happening. We're working that, but we're also working the operational requirements of this vast machine that is the U.S. civilian-military presence in Iraq, which is huge and hugely time consuming. [00:50:00] My deputy focused primarily on those operational issues, the management of the department. I was in and out of Washington, in and out of the U.S. constantly during this time, as was almost everyone else connected with this. But we worked directly for the Secretary. The fact that so much of this record is not accessible is the product of the fact that these records, whether on this issue or other policy issues, are often, and should not be, transparent. They're internal and they're protected.

O'SULLIVAN: Let's move to the more formal review, which is the one that began in November at the deputy's level. JD chaired it. And you'll remember how we had different agencies come together and present their proposals. And we debated them in locked up fashion with bad sandwiches coming in and out. [00:51:00] So what you were describing about the State proposal seems similar to the presentation of the position made by State there. Could you confirm that that was the case? And if so, talk a little about the elements of that. We've heard about the decentralizing power. Because there were many elements to the proposal beyond



just a containment, as you've described it.

SATTERFIELD: Yes. First, I would note, the informal discussions were hugely useful. The informal discussions -- which you, Meghan, directed -- were critical to forming the policy recommendation lines for the formal study. Had we jumped to the formal study minus those weeks of the informal meetings, it would have been a very difficult thing to have done. In fact, this entire process, relative to other interagency policy discussions at this level [00:52:00] of seriousness with the President, went amazingly rapidly. Not slowly. And I'm still impressed by the speed and efficiency with which the divisions, the agreements, the recommendations were formalized and presented for ultimate decision.

So you're quite right in the description of the State position. We did have other critical focuses. We believed an obsession with Baghdad was both inappropriate and set us up for potential failure. There was a need to look quite seriously at what could be done to strengthen the position of the Sunnis, to strengthen the positions of the Kurds, but also to more effectively counter Iran and Iranian-backed militias and forces. Now, some positive results on that front were already being achieved. Iran had suffered some setbacks in term of wrap-ups of its own operators, IRGC operators, within Iraq - enablers, facilitators. But they were [00:53:00] still a real problem. And that was part of what we had to deal with as well. So you're right. It was more than just stand aside or redirect the focus and the trigger points for the U.S. military role. It was to take another, deeper look at



other sources of stability and security within the Iraqi context, and try to avoid the endless fixation with Baghdad as a whole.

O'SULLIVAN: And how did that proposal play into the review? What were the criticisms? What were the points where you found resonance?

SATTERFIELD: Within the review -- both the informal and the formal process -- I think it's fair to say key points of policy difference emerged in the following way. First, the basic question. Was there more U.S. forces could do? Not in a different role -- that is, a stand back [00:54:00] role, limited goals, limited triggers for intervention -- but could the U.S. actually affect, with the present or with an increased, that is, a steady state or with an increased -- what came to be called a surge option -- presence of forces, could it achieve the absolute goals? Stop this violence? Stabilize, in an enduring fashion, the situation in Baghdad? Address the shift, the violence, in Anbar and Ninawa directed against the Iraqi government and coalition? That is, basically, could we succeed on a big level -- the President's big level -- by adding more military forces? Shifting the way those additional military forces acted, but not diminishing the goals? That was one key division.

Second division, Baghdad. Could you ignore Baghdad? Could you, in fact, have a coherent, politically stable, marginally stable, [00:55:00] Iraq if Baghdad wasn't stable? And what did it take to stabilize Baghdad? Which fed us back into the issue of U.S. forces. So there was a challenge there to whether decentralization was even possible without fragmentation and further violence emerging. It was a



fundamental challenge to the premise itself. So I think those, fairly said, were the key divisions here.

O'SULLIVAN: One other division that I remember acutely -- and I remember various points of view -- was on the question of sectarian violence and what the role of the U.S. was in sectarian violence. Did the United States need to take responsibility for quelling sectarian violence or not. Do you remember that as being critical? And what was your view, or the State Department's view on that at the time?

SATTERFIELD: The State Department position, the Secretary's ultimate position on that was, we could not be responsible for the phenomenon of sectarian violence. It was the product of historical processes unleashed by the ouster of Saddam Hussein in 2003. The U.S., at best, [00:56:00] could attempt to mitigate or to try to prevent the worst. And Srebrenica was always used as the trigger rubric here. If we saw a Srebrenica-style massacre emergent, then we would have to intervene. U.S. forces had a responsibility not to stand by across the river from Warsaw and watch the ghetto being destroyed -- that they would have to intervene under such circumstances -- but that the bar should be a very high one. Not because it was not right to stop sectarian violence, but that the generators of sectarian violence were so profound, so intrinsic to Iraq and its fabric, and then inflamed from outside -- Shia militias, Iran, Al-Qaeda -- that we simply didn't have the ability to do what otherwise we might, as an objective principle, want to do.

O'SULLIVAN: [00:57:00] What do you think of the criticism -- I don't know if Tim can tell



us exactly where this is from -- that the proposal of the State Department was a graceful defeat proposal?

SATTERFIELD: I don't know where the line, "graceful defeat," comes from. I can come up with many more pungent quotes, [laughter] --

O'SULLIVAN: I'm sure there's not shortage [laughter] --

SATTERFIELD:-- including from the President of the United States to Secretary Rice, that express a similar view. But not as nice as, "graceful defeat." The answer we would respond is, we are setting ourselves up for comprehensive defeat. And you are about to throw into that comprehensive defeat the last U.S. combat-ready ground forces in the world. Is this a wise action? Should hope triumph over experience? And I want to underscore here, rightly or wrongly -- and that should be another part of our discussion, the right or wrong, and why right or [00:58:00] wrong -- we did not have confidence that by themselves, or by itself, a surge in U.S. forces could have a decisive, determinative impact on the scope of sectarian violence, the scope of Ninawa-Anbar fighting, and Al-Qaeda presence. That was it. That was the fundamental assumption State made. And I would say, today, looking back in retrospect, taken as just that isolated statement -- that by itself the introduction of an additional five BCTs, however managed, could achieve the effect we were seeking -- I think that was an accurate judgment. By itself.

O'SULLIVAN: Can you expand on those two points? One, the, "by itself." What did you think needed to accompany this surge in forces if you thought it were possible to





achieve this [00:59:00] goal? And secondly, the “rightly or wrongly.” What exactly do you mean by “rightly or wrongly” --

SATTERFIELD: What would --

O’SULLIVAN: -- that your assessment was that U.S. forces couldn’t have that effect?

SATTERFIELD: The addition of U.S. forces, or indeed the efficacy of U.S. force structure that existed on the ground, in our assessment, could not in itself fundamentally affect the direction of violence in Iraq. Whether Ninawa-Anbar or in Baghdad. What was required to address that was a fundamental reset by the tribes in Ninawa and Anbar, a fundamental shift by the key Shia militia. Jaish al-Mahdi was the major actor here. Badr was not as significant an accelerant of violence at this stage, but the Jaish under Muqtada’s direction certainly was. That needed to stop. And we did not see -- and here I speak in a very advised sense -- we, the U.S. intelligence community, we, the U.S. military, [01:00:00] did not have significant indicators, at the time these discussions were taking place, of either of those resets taking place on the ground.

Now, much has been written in retrospect about the Surge. The reality is the Surge succeeded. And the introduction of the five additional BCTs became a critical element in making the Surge a success, without question. The President’s decision to go with the Surge -- and a lot more should be talked about as to what the President factored into the actual decision to go with the physical deployment of U.S. forces, because it’s important.



The Surge succeeded because of a reset taking place to the west of Baghdad in Anbar; by the tribes themselves ever more decisively moving [01:01:00] against Al-Qaeda, not because of the Surge decision, but outrage by Al-Qaeda progressively shutting down, destroying, their structures of life, ways of living, cultural traditions, decapitations, fingers cut off, blocking the smuggling trade upon which they had relied. And a second development, which was the Jaish al-Madi pulling itself out of the fight. Not because of the Surge, but because of already progressively more effective U.S. security actions and an increasing sense of insecurity on the part of Muqtada personally as to what his fate might be if he stayed in this fight. You had a perfect positive storm -- not negative -- building that came together post-Surge decision, which made the Surge a critical -- but not the essential -- element of success.

I wish it had been the other way around, [01:02:00] that, yes, we had seen all of these developments and figured, "Well, these five BCTs will make a success." It didn't happen, at least as I assess it that way. Would we have had success without those five BCTs and a reset of what U.S. force did? No. I don't think so. I think the ability to sustain, to project across the country these positive trend lines, could not have been done without the additional U.S. force elements. But had it not been for the happy accident of two Sunni-Shia critical developments which we did not know of occurring, the Surge would not have succeeded. So we were wrong in the recommendation against the Surge, but for the right analytical reasons. The



President, I would say, was right in his decision to go with the Surge, but for the wrong analytic reasons. And you all can sort out, [01:03:00] [laughter] historians that you are, which of the two it's better to be. I would say it's better to be right for the wrong reasons than wrong for the right reasons.

O'SULLIVAN: Probably, but I don't know. We won't try to sort that out right now. That's great. That's really interesting and helpful. Could you say just again, for the future historians, about the process itself? And you mentioned a little bit about the informal process and the formal process. Do you think that that was a good way to pursue this kind of discussion?

SATTERFIELD: I believe profoundly, and it has only been underscored by my experience in the decade since this took place, it is the only way to conduct this kind of dialogue. And I'll make a further point. I believe the interagency policy process, the functionality of the so-called DC-PC, Deputies and Principals Meetings, is entirely dependent upon two key [01:04:00] factors. The drive, the impetus, the scrutiny that the President himself or herself applies to the process. And the direct leadership which the National Security Advisor applies. If it is left to the systems, you'll have endless DCs and PCs, with no real resolution, which has tended to be the fate of the policy process. That was not the case here. Events couldn't allow a dilatory process to move forward. I think it was a highly successful structure. It is one of the last such truly effective meta-policy debates and resolutions certainly that I've participated in or been part of. And I've seen many others that have not



led to that kind of crisp decision. But I'll make another comment here before the question is posed. There has been speculation, which others in government at the time have raised, that the results of this process were cooked from [01:05:00] the very beginning, or almost the very beginning. That Steve Hadley had decided that there was going to be a surge, the President had decided there was going to be a surge. And all of this was, essentially, window dressing, or trimming, to provide a plausible corroboration for a decision already taken.

I can't speak to the President's own thoughts during this time or to Steve's, but nothing in the conduct of the process would bare out that assumption.

Whether it is right or not, I simply can't say. But I certainly cannot make that judgment based on any of the conversations. It is true, Steve insisted that there be a surge option. Of course. Every memo has to have options a, b, and c. Even if a and c are supposed to be rejected and b is the desired outcome, you have to pose the bracketing options here. And that's how this process went forward.

SAYLE: [01:06:00] Building on that, I'd like to ask a question about the role of the NSC as seen from someone in another department. The NSC is traditionally balancing a role as honest broker. At the same time NSC officials, of course, have preferences and champion certain policies. What role did you see the NSC playing in the strategy review?

SATTERFIELD: I saw the NSC playing a role that was directly shaped by the concern that a fundamental U.S. policy pillar, which the President was personally involved in



was being threatened. And the NSC, quite appropriately, took a significant lead in trying to provide a recommendation that would ideally be able to result in a strategy that would produce the effect, the outcomes which the President throughout all this time, would not waver from. And this is an important point. The President's language didn't alter in terms of victory, success. [01:07:00] Whatever our concerns may be that a toned down rhetoric was really more appropriate, he didn't. And of course, that is his prerogative. He's the President. And the policy process, I think, quite effectively presented to him different recommendations on where to go.

But I would say this. No one should ever underestimate the power of the President's own views to trump even the most senior level and profound interagency or principal level, debate or discussion. The President in this case -- and if there are other views on this, I hope you get them in the course of this interview process -- President Bush believed to his core that success was possible. He also believed to his core that it would be inexcusable and irresponsible, in a historical context -- for [01:08:00] him having invested this amount of treasure; this amount of American, Iraqi lives since 2003 -- to hold back one final push to see if success could be achieved. Or put differently, even if you are recommending against doing this, if there is any possibility that these additional force elements can produce success, I have an obligation to what has gone before -- and to history -- to try it. And I think that's a pretty fair assessment of what he thought. And in



the end, he got a fair presentation of his view and of differing views. He made his choice. Was he always set on that? That's something for others to determine. But it was very clear he believed there was an absolute obligation if the units existed -- and we were sure they did -- to put them into the fight.

O'SULLIVAN: [01:09:00] Let me ask just about two decision points in this process. One was, there was -- I don't know if it's a moment -- but there was time when, I think, President Bush indicated to Secretary Rice that he needed her to come onboard and view a few fundamentals through his lens. And I think both he and Secretary Rice have discussed that in their interviews. Do you remember how that affected your engagement and the proposals that you and Philip were reflecting on?

SATTERFIELD: Yes. We were well aware. And at this point, much of this is no longer Philip; it's me. I was directly aware, through participation in discussions between the President and the Secretary, of his very strongly held views. I was aware of the Secretary's views. Secretary Rice did not change -- through this [01:10:00] policy process until the very end -- the character, the recommendations she was making to the President. Those were, in the end, her judgments. They coincided with what I thought was the appropriate way to move forward. But they were her judgments. I can recall her telling the President, "I know you don't like me saying this," or, I know you are tired of me repeating this view. But I have to express my profound concern that, a, introduction of additional forces into this fight cannot predictably achieve the success we are seeking. But in the process of committing



them, you will have made a final roll of the dice. There's no way back from this. And the magnitude, or character, of failure and the implications for broader global issues and confrontations will be profound. Those [01:11:00] were her views until the moment of the President's decision.

Once the President made the decision, then a very different policy process, which we were all onboard with, flowed. But no, there was no change in her views up until the actual decision was taken by the President. And I can recall very shortly before that decision, some very direct conversations between the two.

O'SULLIVAN: And do you remember when you thought the Surge decision was inevitable, or unfolding? People are always looking for, "When's the moment that the President made the decision." And of course, as I think a lot of what you've said has demonstrated, this is a fluid process. But do you remember when you thought that this is the way he was going to move forward?

SATTERFIELD: Beginning of November.

O'SULLIVAN: Beginning of November? OK. So even before the --

SATTERFIELD: Yes. Beginning of November, the character of conversations related to me, or that I participated in, indicated [01:12:00] he was strongly inclined -- once we knew the BCTs existed, that his inclination was to move them forward.

O'SULLIVAN: OK, interesting. [To Sayle] I think we've covered some of these earlier in the conversation. Do you have anything before I ask David for final thoughts? Or other issues that we haven't touched upon?



SATTERFIELD: Could I add what is missing from your question set?

SAYLE: Please.

O'SULLIVAN: Yes.

SATTERFIELD: You focused on the process that led to the President's formal decision to go with the Surge. But you've left off the conditions that the President set after that decision, before he was willing to see any U.S. forces actually deployed to Iraq. And that's a very significant omission. The President was, himself, very skeptical about the ability of those forces to be efficacious [01:13:00] in their mission minus an absolute and demonstrated commitment by Nouri al-Maliki. That, a, the forces would be deployed against any element generating violence in Iraq, including Shia leaders. That was one explicit point. Secondly, the U.S. would have command over how those units were deployed and acted, and how the Iraqi units working with them would flow. No more Iraqi units being pulled out of the fight when the targets were Shia figures that couldn't be touched. The President didn't just want this as an assurance from Maliki. He wanted to see a demonstration before those new U.S. elements arrived, which couldn't be until the beginning of 2007, that there had been a shift in the way U.S. forces and associated Iraqi forces were conducting themselves. Now, in this, we no longer have policy divides. This is a uniform, absolutely, [01:14:00] need-to-do.

This gets us into the question of the President's famous trip to Sharm, to Aqaba, and then to Amman for the discussion with Maliki. Those were not easy





discussions. Here you have the President now coming in, in a way that he displayed later when the sofa negotiations were being conducted, as a direct interlocutor and policy advocate. This is not being done through intermediaries. This is the President of the United States telling Nouri al-Maliki, I am willing to commit the last U.S. combat-ready ground forces we have in the world, but only if I see you demonstrate the following.

Now, Maliki pulled back. He didn't say, "Well, sure Mr. President. Of course. We accept that." Maliki came forward with his own initiative. The famous bi-plan for Iraq, which would have U.S. forces essentially screen the Sunnis out of Iraq, out of Baghdad, while Iraqi Shia [01:15:00] forces fixed Baghdad. We all could predict where that would go, and we rejected it out of hand. And it was that act of, No, you're not going to get any forces. You're going to lose Baghdad and your country if we don't come in, but we won't come in unless we see a shift.

Maliki finally came to a yes. Now, the yes infuriated Muqtada, really, and the Iranians. And they brought everything they could bear to bring Maliki to a no, to reject this. Everything they could bear. It's to Maliki's credit -- often forgotten in the later Nouri al-Maliki and his behavior. Maliki, at this time, was an Iraqi patriot. He stood up to the Iranians. He despised the Iranians and he feared them. He had had a very bad personal historical experience with Iran and its clerical leaders. Very different from ISCI [Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq] and their experience. It's why he broke. It's why he went to [01:16:00] Damascus for



the life -- the miserable life -- that he lived there, in Dawa. He did what he needed to do. And we watched carefully through those weeks that followed Amman, Iraqi forces, U.S. forces able to conduct operations against previously off-limits Shia targets. And it was that that met the President's conditionality to actually implement the Surge. And I'm afraid in the historical record there has been a confusion that the decision to make the Surge meant, now U.S. forces are being sent willy-nilly. No. The President had absolute conditions, which he personally advocated with Maliki -- against pushback -- and got. And that is what made those deployments -- actually in the new year -- possible to achieve.

O'SULLIVAN: I think that's hugely important. We have raised that with President Bush and a few others. But I agree with you. It's actually part of the story that has not been told, and it's a very significant part of it. Are there other things -- I'm sure there are many [01:17:00] other things -- that we didn't ask you about that you think are critical either for understanding this episode or its lessons in decision making?

SATTERFIELD: I think the critical lesson in decision-making is, a policy process on an issue of this magnitude does need to, a, move in as crisp a fashion as possible. It cannot be dilated endlessly. B, it needs to have senior level, principal level attention throughout every step of the process. We were fortunate enough to have an IPC or a sub-DC level process that was quite tight, quite experienced, all of us in working with each other. And all of us had excellent relationships with our



principals. That is not always the case, where you have a principal you can access immediately who gives feedback, questions, and is open to recommendations and advice. Some of this is process, some of this is personality. [01:18:00] It's both mixed in. No process works if the personalities are wrong. No personalities can work if the process is broken. And I think we've been times in recent history when both have been defective, the personalities and the processes. But in this case, I think it worked despite the differences over who was right, who was wrong in the basic set of circumstances we thought made the Surge recommendable or not recommendable. The fact is, views were aired. Views were presented without constraint. And at the end, fortunately -- but I would say only fortunately -- it worked. It all worked.

O'SULLIVAN: I think that's a great point at the end. We did have a lot of disagreement, but I don't remember anything personal, vicious, back-biting. I don't remember any of that. Maybe I phased it out.

SATTERFIELD: Not at our level.

O'SULLIVAN: Yeah. Exactly.

SATTERFIELD: [01:19:00] No. This was conducted in a very collegial -- there were distinct views.

O'SULLIVAN: Definitely, definitely.

SATTERFIELD: Of course. And people disagreed distinctly over certain things. But it was a fair presentation. I think one of your questions that you haven't raised



related to the Office of the V.P. -- a paper on the Shia option. This was never a significant piece of the policy process. And perhaps, Meghan, in your own discussions for this project you can opine. But no, we never believed it was possible to simply shift the entire pillar we were relying upon for security and stability for the future of Iraq on one community only, particularly, a community as susceptible to Iranian and Iranian-backed militia and criminal gang pressure as the Shia were. And it's not an idea that suddenly came up as part of this process. The whole idea of the Shia as a fundamentally more reliable pillar than the Sunnis has [01:20:00] been with us since the whole beginning of this. And to some extent, not in an Iraq context, it's with us in the Middle East today. Do you cast your bets with the Shia as opposed to the Sunnis with all their defects and chaos and violence? But no, it wasn't a significant issue here, as I recall it.

O'SULLIVAN: Maybe, just on that point, even though it's taking us back a little bit, would you say that there was a significant difference between State and the embassy? And how was that managed? Was there more of a, "This is working," from the embassy? Or from the field? Not just the embassy, but the embassy and the Baghdad military. I recall that there was more of a sense of, "We can make this work. This strategy is not failing, it just needs a little bit of good fortune and a little bit of tinkering."

SATTERFIELD: Meghan, you're correct. The presentation from the embassy [01:21:00] in all of its dimensions -- which included the military -- was indeed, we thought, far



rosier. To the point that, speaking from my agency, the Secretary began to discount, simply to discount and dismiss what she was hearing. And whether or not that was true for the NSC? I think it was in many ways that we could no longer rely, because we didn't see any connectivity between these rosy projections of, We can make it work. Some of which were substantive, but most of which were personality-driven—I can make this work. They were no longer relevant. And this became much more of a Washington process than it was driven by the field. Yes, you're quite right.

SAYLE: One element dealing with cooperation between departments that's come up in your closing thoughts. [01:22:00] Earlier you mentioned the Department of Defense officials and certain directions that the Pentagon was taking under the secretaryship of Donald Rumsfeld. Is there a change, after his departure, in cooperation?

SATTERFIELD: Not relevant to this discussion, in the sense that the President took the decisions he took. Rumsfeld's departure came. The die was already cast as to what we were going to do. The departure of Don Rumsfeld allowed military figures to much more freely act, express their views, be critical in what was now going to be a much more enduring and higher level U.S. force presence. We had essentially overturned the Rumsfeld strategic intent of drawing down forces as rapidly as possible. So I don't pin the Surge debate or decision to Don Rumsfeld's departure. We had already found means through the interagency process -- primarily the NSC



had found means -- to get [01:23:00] accurate appraisals of forcibility, availability, even with the constraints applied by the Secretary on certain principles. It didn't matter. It certainly mattered for all that followed afterwards, sure. But not for the Surge decision.

O'SULLIVAN: Great. As always, you're sharp and your memory seems very clear. This has been very illuminating. Is there anything you want to say in closing?

SATTERFIELD: No. I think, all in all, everyone involved in this process, from whatever view they took, participated in a way that contributed to a critical decision for national security. And if that decision had proven wrong, I still believe the process of discussion was the right one. And it should be a model for the future. You have close, informal discussions. You then have formal discussions in which agencies and principals have to cast a [01:24:00] formal position, and have to stand up to that position. I think that's a much more efficient use of time. And it's a better service to all principals, cabinet level and above, than an endless proliferation of lower level meetings which never produces crisp recommendations to principals. And in which people feel muted in what they can say.

O'SULLIVAN: Thank you so much for joining us. And for sharing your thoughts. Thank you.

SATTERFIELD: Thank you.

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