

Center for American Progress



SPECIAL PRESENTATION:

**“WHAT ARE THE U.S. POLICY CHOICES
FOR IRAQ NOW?”**

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MR. JOHN PODESTA: Welcome to the Center for American Progress. I'm John Podesta and I want to thank you for joining us today for this important event. In a few minutes I'm going to introduce Center senior fellow Morton Halperin, who will moderate today's discussion with Lawrence Korb and Leslie Gelb. But before I turn the floor over to Mort, I'm going to take a few minutes to underscore the importance of today's topic: progressive policy choices for Iraq.

Recent events in Iraq, Afghanistan, and now in the Middle East have made clear that the Bush administration's stay-the-course strategy has failed to achieve progress and stability in Iraq or in the region. The Bush administration has lost control of events on several fronts and while the formation of a new government and the killing of al Qaeda terrorist leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi were important signs of progress, they resulted in few tangible improvements in the lives of ordinary Iraqis.

In fact, Iraq has edged closer to the brink of an all-out sectarian civil war. We've all seen in the news the daily strings of attacks resulting in thousands of Iraqi and American casualties. Just this week, the U.N. reported that 14,338 civilians have died violently in Iraq in the first six months of this year alone. And consider what has happened in the last ten days: last weekend a wave of violence saw Shiite militia kill over 36 Sunnis in a Baghdad neighborhood, as well as a pair of Sunni insurgent car bombs kill at least 19 and wound more than 60 outside a Shiite mosque. On Monday of this week, gunmen went on a rampage in a crowded market south of Baghdad killing 50 people and wounding more than 70. On Tuesday in the Shiite city of Kufa, a suicide bomber drove his van in to a busy market and then blew himself up killing 59 people in the process and inciting angry clashes between police and protesters.

This recent rash of violence is particularly troubling since it follows on the heels of the Iraqi government's and the Bush administration's announcement of Operation Together Forward, an operation to improve security in and around Baghdad. While the security crackdown added thousands of new troops and new checkpoints in the streets of the capital, insurgent attacks have actually increased, not decreased, since the operation's implementation. Today Baghdad remains one of the bloodiest, deadliest and most dangerous areas of the country.

In addition to these ongoing security problems, Iraq continues to face many problems in its reconstruction. Oil production is stuck below pre-war levels and massive corruption plagues the country's government-controlled oil industry. In testimony to Congress last week, U.S. Comptroller David Walker noted that about 10 percent of Iraq's refined fuels and 30 percent of its imported fuels are being stolen, hampering the country's ability to govern itself or fund the reconstruction effort.

In the midst of this chaos and lack of progress in Iraq, increasing regional conflict and tension from Iran to most recently in Lebanon are on the rise and require the United States' attention but to date, because of the administration's failure to plan a post engagement success strategy, our time, our energy, our manpower and our money – more than \$8 billion a month – have gotten America bogged down in Iraq.

With the growing crisis in the Middle East, it's time for the United States to take back control and the only way for us to do that is by sending a clear signal to the Iraqis that they must take responsibility for their own affairs. The transfer of military authority to Iraqi forces in Muthanna Province earlier this month was a step in the right direction. Such transfers of power must move forward so that we can dedicate our resources to other pressing, emerging threats. Failing to move forward will both foster a cultural dependency amongst the Iraqis and impede our ability to address other national security concerns in the coming months and years ahead.

Today it's clear that the Bush administration's mistakes in Iraq have served to strengthen our adversaries and have made America less safe. Three years of continuous American troop presence in Iraq has weakened U.S. ground forces and served as a rallying cry in recruitment tool for al Qaeda. Now we must take back control of the situation in Iraq by setting a plan to complete the military mission at a time of our choosing and in a manner that serves our interests. The administration has stayed glued to its failed stay-the-course strategy.

The press has made much of the unity of the president's allies on Capitol Hill who rubber-stamped that approach, but it's clear that being unified and uniformly wrong will not lead the country in a new direction. That's why we need new thinking and why progressives are leading the way with new ideas and alternative plans.

To that end, we're pleased to host this discussion today to talk about a few of those plans in particular. I'm proud that the Center offered one of the first proposals to adjust the situation in Iraq and begin shifting the debate in this country, the plan "Strategic Redeployment" was released last September and authored by Center senior fellows Lawrence Korb, who is on the panel today, and Brian Katulis, who I believe is in the audience. Strategic redeployment is a threat-based approach that calls for the responsible and gradual drawdown of our troops as part of a balanced global strategy to target terrorist networks, bring greater stability to Iraq and its neighborhood, and fundamentally make America safer.

Since its release, continuing violence and events in the region have only underscored the need for new strategies for success in Iraq. To that end, this spring the Center released "Strategic Redeployment 2.0," an updated and expanded version of the initial report. That report accounts for new developments on the ground and in the region while still adhering to three fundamental principles: one, an open-ended commitment of U.S. troops serves as a political crutch for the Iraqi government and is not sustainable; two, we must make a shift from nation-building to conflict resolution in Iraq; and three,

international and regional diplomacy are essential to creating sustainable peace and stability in the Gulf.

These three principles guide our policy work on this issue. We believe that they should guide our next steps in Iraq and it's important to note that they are found in many of the other progressive plans. In fact, many of the plans put forward by progressives on Iraq have more in common than they have in conflict. There are differences in some of the details, and that's the case for our discussion today. Dr. Gelb and Senator Biden's plan shares many elements in common with "Strategic Redeployment." Some of those elements include pushing for renewed international and regional diplomacy to resolve the conflict; drawing down the U.S. troop presence, but leaving a small residual force behind for training and security purposes; focusing on diplomatic and political solutions to Iraq rather than relying on military might alone; and sending a clear signal to Iraqis that there will be no prolonged U.S. military presence and thus they must take responsibility for their own affairs.

At the same time there are differences between the two strategies. There are different timetables for U.S. troop redeployment out of Iraq, and Dr. Gelb's strategy goes one step further by detailing what a final negotiated settlement might look like. He envisions one Iraq decentralized in to three regions giving Kurds, Shiites, and Sunnis the ability and room to run their own affairs while maintaining a viable but limited central government in Baghdad.

In the face of increasing sectarian violence in Iraq, I'm especially interested to hear Leslie's perspective on quelling that violence, particularly in Baghdad and perhaps preventing an all-out civil war. But today I want to point out that we're not here to vote on the two plans; rather, we're here to consider the various elements of each, the challenges we now face in Iraq, and to seriously talk about alternative strategies for success, which the administration seems unwilling or unable to do. Stay the course is a failed strategy and it's clear that it's up to us the progressives to change course in order to best protect the American people and best serve our core national security interests now and in the future.

Now I want to turn the floor over to my colleague Dr. Morton Halperin. Mort is currently a Senior Fellow here at the Center for American Progress and director of the Security and Peace Initiative, a joint national security program between the Center and the Century Foundation. He is also the executive director of the Open Society Policy Center and the director of U.S. Advocacy for the Open Society Institute.

Morton served in the federal government in the Clinton, Nixon, and Johnson administrations, most recently from December of 1998 to January of 2001 as director of the policy planning staff for the Department of State. He has authored, coauthored, and edited more than a dozen books and he's a frequent contributor to numerous magazines, journals, and newspapers. With that, it's my pleasure to turn the floor over to Mort to introduce our feature speakers and to moderate today's discussions.

Mort?

MR. MORTON HALPERIN: Thank you very much. It's a pleasure to be here to moderate this critical discussion. I have to say that my view is that things are even worse in Iraq than John suggested. I think we're on the verge of what I like to call the three catastrophes. The first is that we have an Iraqi government that supports Hezbollah and Hamas. The second is that we have chaos in the center of Iraq, which is a place for the training of al Qaeda terrorists. And the third is we have a war in the north which starts over Kirkuk and becomes an international conflict. I think we will be very lucky if we avoid those three and I think we're increasingly hearing less about success and more about avoiding a catastrophe.

It's a pleasure for me to introduce out two speakers. Dr. Leslie Gelb is the president emeritus of the Council on Foreign Relations. Leslie and I were colleagues together in the Pentagon during another ill-fated American war and I'm counting on him to get us out of that one as he got us out of Vietnam.

MR. LESLIE GELB: Let me come around in front here if you can hear me. Can you here me back there? (Off mike.) President Podesta, Drs. Halperin and Korb, ladies and gentlemen. John rightly stressed – and I mean this – rightly stressed the similarities on what Larry and I are going to be talking about. I'm going to be stressing the differences in this for purposes of sharpening what needs to be in my mind a very clear-cut strategic discussion.

We've reached the point in this discussion where even *The Washington Post* seems to have found two and a half Republicans yesterday who will come out against President Bush's policy on the war. It reached just that bad a state. But to me the most troubling thing is how our community – the community of foreign policy experts – really hasn't done the job we need to do in coming up with alternatives. And I think that's a problem not only in Iraq, but many other areas as well: that we've got to be able to say what we would do in order to have the real force of the attack against President Bush and he deserves the real force of an attack.

In effect there have been two proposals on the table, two broad strategic choices that have dominated the debate here in Washington. One is President Bush's and one is this redeployment withdrawal plan, whether it will be in six months or a year and a half or whatever. It's essentially a withdrawal plan. You can paint it however you like; that's its essence.

The Bush plan to me is a plan to lose slowly. The plan for withdrawals in a year, a year and a half is really a plan to lose fast and I think they're both are really unacceptable at this point. And I stress at this point because had I been a senator in the debate last month when the party started to tear at John Kerry for his withdrawal plan, I would've said rather – I disagree with them and I agree with Levin and (Reed ?), but John Kerry and Larry Korb and others who make us think in terms of very quick withdrawals

may be telling us what's lying down the future – that awful choice that may face us one day if we don't come up with a better strategy.

First make no doubt in your mind that President Bush's strategy is a strategy to lose slowly and in effect pass the problem on to his successor, the single worst thing a president of the United States could do; something Morton and I were very familiar with Lyndon Johnson. That is the essence of what he did. Why am I so convinced that's what he's doing? Why is it important for people to understand that's what Bush is doing? Look, he says he's pursuing a strategy for victory and success, but here is the reality. The reality is he's essentially taking our troops off the streets of Baghdad and other key cities and security in the streets is far worse than it was last year or three years ago. He has announced that he will terminate all future economic reconstruction at the end of this fiscal year. Just think about it, any notion of being able to prevail in Iraq without an economic reconstruction program is farcical.

Thirdly, he has cut sharply funding for NGOs who are trying to build democratic institutions in Iraq at the very time he is saying that democracy is the essence of his policy. This is a policy that can't win. It can only lose slowly. And he will lose it slowly because he is not going to take out the troops to a Washington timetable.

I know smart money here is always betting he's going to just take a big lump and tear them out of the country. It won't happen. He's not going to do anything that in any way increases the risk sharply that we might lose on his watch. So he's going to leave us with the worst possible situation: Iraq on the edge of total collapse and a new president of the United States whose administration will be totally dominated by the decision to lose. What greater catastrophe for our country? Because not only do we have the catastrophe of eight years of Bush, but he's ensuring four more years of trouble for whoever succeeds him.

The withdrawal option strikes me at this time as not much better. And we ought to face the reality that it is a withdrawal option. Even the way Lawrence has presented the plan in his paper here, there are trappings of other things – political conversations, regional diplomacy, and the like, but they're not developed at all because they all are very secondary to the withdrawal plan.

Now, I personally think it's very important for those of us involved in the outside debate to talk about withdrawal plans, but not to add any specificity to them. Think of it this way and then think of it substantively. Politically, almost everybody in this room I would think has spent of the last five years criticizing Bush and Rumsfeld and criticizing them correctly for ignoring military advice. They're the professionals. They didn't listen to them in going into Iraq; they're not listening to them now.

Well, what about the democrats, what about the liberals? Are they listening to them either? If we want a withdraw plan, I think our obligation is to set some guidelines for it but to put the burden of producing the plan on the professionals. We ought to begin showing the military that we would respect them and treat them as professionals. And I

think every time we get a plan from a Washington senior fellow, even one as knowledgeable as Larry Korb, we get ourselves in to trouble with the military and they have reason for questioning us as a result.

There is also the issue of the best way to do this, and I know Washington senior fellows know everything about military strategy. They even reinvented the oil (spot ?) theory from the Vietnam War and written reams and reams on this. Our military guys know how to fight these wars; they're looking at these things. They have terrible bureaucratic problems to overcome, but they understand all the stuff usually long before it's written here in Washington. Let's ask them by giving them guidelines to what we think they need to tend to in a withdrawal and redeployment plan; namely, providing continuing security as we're moving ahead with some kind of political settlement, and secondly, incentivizing the Iraqis more so than Bush's stand up and we'll all stand down – or whatever the hell he calls it – that really incentivizes and convinces them they've got to undertake the burden of defending themselves.

Let me take you back to 1975 because what I think we ought to be looking is another way of doing this. And the answer sits in an event in '75. And we ought to be looking at it another way because we owe it to ourselves, we owe it to the Iraqis to make one serious try at somewhat putting that humpty-dumpty country back together again before we leave it. We've torn it apart. Our reputation, our credibility, our power, our security now hinge on some sort of decent outcome. Let's try to do something that makes sense, even though I'm not sure anything will work at this point – the situation is so bad.

April in 1975, Marine helicopters lifted the last of Americans off the rooftops of the embassy in Saigon and within a few weeks a South Vietnamese army of a million and a half men, well trained, well armed – alas, Congress had cut off future arms aid to them, big mistake – but they were well trained and well armed: they surrendered. And the moral of the story, which is the moral of any story that deals with an insurgency, is that the answer is not in more arms, better training, standing up before you stand down. The answer is in a government that troops are willing to fight and die for. If a government doesn't have legitimacy, doesn't function effectively, people are not going to fight and die for it and they have to feel that strongly in order to beat insurgents. That's the moral of that story; that's the morale of every insurgency.

So to me, the starting point has to be some kind of political settlement, some political deal that gives us a chance to establish that legitimacy, that government that people are willing to fight and die for. And a political settlement always involves a power sharing arrangement. There are two ways of doing power sharing in Iraq. We can do it through the central government, which has been the Bush approach, or you can do it through decentralization. The plan I've been offering up and the plan I wrote about with Joe Biden says to keep Iraq unified and to make a deal, you've got to decentralize it and decentralize it a lot. So the essence of the plan is this: create a limited but viable central government, come back to its functions with power largely resting in three or four or five

regions to make most legislation can do administration and provide security – and provide security.

What would be the powers of this central government? Very simple. Foreign affairs, currency, border defense – not internal defense, border defense – and most importantly, oil and gas production and revenues. Let me come back to that. The regions – I talk about three regions – Kurdish, Sunni, Shi'a – but it could be more. The Shi'a may want to have two regions. The Sunnis may want to have two regions. I don't know. That's for them to work it out. But the regions in effect have to run things, including running their own security services because those militias will fight and die for those governments against the insurgents.

Now, the trick in all this is how do you get the Sunnis to buy into this deal? The Sunnis are the heart of this insurgency. If you can get them to buy in to a political settlement, you've made the single most important, biggest step toward creating a legitimate government. And I would do it in two ways: one, I would say to them, "Hey, you've got your regional government. You can run it as you wish. You want the Ba'athists back in power, that's your choice. You want to bring back jihadis you feel you can work with? That's your choice." This is now something that the Sunnis themselves are beginning to think about because they realize for the first time that they're no longer going to run Iraq the way they did the previous two hundred years and that in a centralized government in today's Iraq they will only be a permanent minority picking up the scraps. Here they could run their own affairs.

The key problem for them is money because there is hardly any oil and gas that has been developed in central Iraq. So the constitution, to me, has to be amended so that the central government, one, is given the authority to make decisions on oil production and revenues, not the provinces or regions as in the present constitution; and that the Sunnis be guaranteed 20 percent of the oil and gas revenues present and future. In this constitution, they're only talked about in terms of extracted oil and gas, not future. So you have to do it for the future as well to make the Sunni region economically viable.

Now, why would they want to do something like this? What's the incentive? First of all it's not as if this is thought about here in Washington or by Les Gelb or Joe Biden. The Iraqis themselves thought of what I'm telling you. In the present constitution – nobody has read a constitution. They're very boring things, but they're very revealing. In the present constitution there are provisions for a province to unite with other provinces or another province or provinces to form a regional government and there are prescribed procedures on exactly how to do it. So this isn't in the back of their heads; it's already there. And the oil revenues – the argument that you have to make and we have to be pretty tough in making this argument is that nobody is going to be able to enjoy the fruits of any of these oil revenues, the future of this country, if nobody can provide a good life for people unless they make a deal to give the Sunnis some guaranteed portion of it.

Now, there are many other trappings to my proposal, including asking the military for a plan, including regional diplomacy – the commonalities that John Podesta cited. But the key is the political settlement. To me, Iraq is going to end up either partitioned or decentralized by war – by awful civil war or by virtue of negotiations. I want to give it a try by negotiations. There are horrible problems rooted in my approach: how you deal with ethnic cleansing, the partitioning of cities in a way, how you decide what a region is made up of, how you carve it out. But I submit to you with regard to partition, ethnic cleansing – these things are happening now. They are happening now and everybody's strategic alternative has to explain how they would handle it any better than I do in my proposal. But the key is this is either going to happen by bloodshed or by compromise. We owe it ourselves, we owe it to the Iraqis to figure out the compromise.

Thank you.

(Applause.)

MR. HALPERIN: Now it's my pleasure to introduce Larry Korb, who is a senior fellow here at the Center who served in an administration that came after the Johnson administration and who was the director of studies at the Council on Foreign Relations.

Larry?

MR. LAWRENCE KORB: Thank you. Do you want me to stand up or sit down?

MR. HALPERIN: Your choice.

MR. KORB: What do you prefer, the audience? All right, okay. Leslie set a new standard here. It's a great pleasure to be here with my former boss Leslie Gelb and here with John. Let me say before I begin – and John was a little bit too modest in the beginning in talking about the (Center report?) because he was the one who pushed it and told us to get it out at the time we did and I think it's important to go back and take a look at when we put that plan out.

We put that plan out in late September because Abizaid and Casey, et. al., were coming over here to show up on the Sunday morning talk shows and tell us how good things were going. And if you go back and you take a look at those tapes, they kept saying, "In six months it's going to turn around." Well, ladies and gentlemen, it's ten months later and if anything as everybody agrees it's getting worse.

Now, Les made the point here do we want to lose slowly, which is the Bush plan and the Korb-Katulis plan here is to lose quickly. The real question is what are you trying to win? We are trying to win what Bush calls the war on terrorism. I think that's an incorrect word, but nonetheless everybody uses it. Okay, that's what we've got to win. Staying in Iraq is going to make it clearer that you're going to lose and if you lose slowly there, you're also going to handicap your ability to win the global war on terror.

Now, it's not often in a place like this that we quote Bill Buckley. But Bill Buckley I think put it very well. He said, had we stayed in Vietnam, we'd have lost the Cold War. And I would argue the longer you stay in Iraq, the more difficult it's going to be to win this war against what we call here in our integrated power national security strategy to win the war against these radical jihadists.

Now, why? Well, ask yourself what's happening to your ground forces while you're over there. Let me give you some statistics that I think will tell you what's happening our army, very much what happened to our army as we dragged it out in Vietnam. Last year, 98 percent of the captains made major. Why? Because a lot of your good captains got out. Majors to colonels was almost 90 percent. Okay? Those are going to be the people that are going to be running future operations. And I know we've got a lot of great people in the service, but if you keep promoting like that, they're going to be your future leadership.

If you think our army is going well, look at this poor unfortunate Private Green who is alleged to have committed this horrible act over in Iraq. I was looking at him. He was arrested three times before he tried to join. He was a high school dropout. Why are we taking people in like that? Because there's tremendous pressure on the recruiters to meet their quotas during an unpopular war.

The next thing to keep in mind is, if we continue to lose slowly or we don't take charge of events, you risk the outbreak of isolationism in this country. There was a poll on CNN this morning. Bill Schneider, our former colleague from AEI. (He's now with the *Post*?) was talking about it. The majority of Americans say just stay out; it's none of our business. It is our business because what happens there is going to impact on our security.

So with those things in mind, what are we saying? Well, we're saying get out by the end of 2007. Why did we say that? Because, as Leslie pointed out, I think we do have a moral obligation. John Murtha wants to get out more quickly; I think the end of 2007 would be almost five years we'll be there. That's longer than World War II. And for whatever moral obligation we may have, I think that that would satisfy it. In fact, as I go around the country and talk about our plan, some people say why even wait until then? And that's the reason why we would do it.

As you begin to take these troops out, you will be able to do other things to enhance your security. In case you haven't noticed, Afghanistan is not going well and that is critical to the global war on terror and I think we need to send more troops there, but you can't send them because you don't have them to be able to do that.

Next, do you think Iran doesn't know how bogged down we are in Iraq as they try and take advantage of the situation in the Middle East to make a bad situation worse? They know that. There's no way in which we can send more ground troops unless we want to go back to a draft, and nobody seems to want to do that. So we're bogged down there.

The next thing, the longer we stay, the more recruits we're going to get for al Qaeda. The British ambassador to Italy in what he thought was an off-the-record session – which if you've ever been in government you've learned there's no such thing as off the record – basically he said, our going in to Iraq was the best recruiting tool that al Qaeda ever had.

The longer we stay there in the insurgency, the more of these events you're going to have. I don't blame these kids. I remember when I went to Vietnam, 23, 24 years old and I'm thinking, my gosh, these people at that age and this is more difficult, I would say, in deciding what to do. All you have to do is look at the movie, *The War Tapes*, something we sponsored for a couple of showings here. They gave the camcorders to the members of the New Hampshire National Guard over there and see how horrible it is. And by the way, that was censored by the Army, so I can imagine what was on the tapes that they didn't have. So the longer you have an insurgency, the more these events are going to occur, and as they do it will broadcast in the Arab and Muslim world about how horrible we are and that will basically undermine our ability to fight the war on terror.

The other thing, and I think we all agree on this, we've got to give the Iraqis an incentive to do what they need to do. Now, if they want to have the arrangement that Leslie has and they want to come to that, fine. But I don't think we ought to tell them because the last thing you want is us to be seen as telling them what form of government they should have. I don't think that's going to work. If you look at the opinion polls, the Iraqis don't want it and I worry about what – you know, when somebody was asking Senator Biden about it, he talked about sectarian cleansing, he said that's already going on. Well, I think you might have ethnic cleansing in the big cities as you try and move people around. But if they want to do that, that's fine. It's got to be their decision.

Les is right: we need to motivate these troops. I keep hearing, well, you know, we need to train them more. What are we training them? We're not training them to fight the Red Army; we're training them to fight a group of insurgents. And if 300,000 or how many troops we're supposed to have can't beat roughly 20,000, then we've got a big problem. And Les is right: it's motivation. What will get them motivated? The government doing what they need to do to create some sort of Iraq that they can be loyal to, so it is a question of motivation and the question is how do we do it?

Now, we're going to have to leave sometime. Even those who want to stay – the question is will they do what is necessary to create Iraq? And I think if you tell them, "Look, by the end of 2007 we're out of here," that will get them off the dime. To me, it's unconscionable that it took them five months after the election to form a government. Do you realize that in that time you're counting killed and wounded, we lost five battalions? Five battalions while these guys were trying to figure out what to do. So as long as they know that we'll stand down when they stand up, they're not going to stand up unless we give them an incentive and that's why I think you need to make it clear.

Now, the other thing is, when you set a timetable to get out and put them on notice and you say, and this is important and another part of our plan, no permanent bases. That will defuse part of the insurgency. This is not like Vietnam where you had the North Vietnamese Army and the Vietcong trying to establish a unified state. A lot of people are fighting there because they simply don't believe we're going to go. That's very critical. And that's why if you saw Tony Cordesman's excellent article in the *Washington Post* the other day, he was talking about amnesty for people who are fighting, basically see themselves as combatants trying to get rid of the Westerners. He thought (about giving them?) amnesty. But he also mentioned that if you have a permanent presence there and you have permanent bases, you will not defuse that. But if you say you're getting out – no permanent bases – that will defuse part of the insurgency and it will also prevent or keep people from giving aid and comfort to these foreigners. And remember that these foreign jihadists or al Qaeda and (unintelligible) are less than 10 percent of the force there. A lot of it is home grown.

Now, is this a perfect plan? Heck no. I can't guarantee anything is going to happen, but if you look at it from the point of view, what's best for the United States, our security, our role in the world, I think it's something you have to do.

Let me conclude by telling a story some of you I know have heard before that Brent Scowcroft told me – a person to whom they should have listened before they got us in to this mess. And he talked about this very religious man who before he died went out to the Grand Canyon and he wanted to see the canyon before he died. So he got on a donkey to take him down to the bottom. On the way down, the donkey lost its footing, the poor man began to fall head over heels toward the bottom of the canyon. Fortunately, he reached out and grabbed on to a branch and as you might expect began to pray. And pretty soon a voice came down from on high and it said, "Son, do you have faith?" He said, "Oh yes, I have faith." And the voice said, "Let go of the branch." And he thought for a second and he said, "Is there anybody else up there I can talk to?"

Thank you. (Laughter, applause.)

MR. HALPERIN: Let me engage the panelists for a minute or two and then we'll throw it out to the audience. Leslie, I take it you agree that we can't impose this – that we have to try to get the Iraqis to agree to this, but unless we set a deadline what is the leverage that we have particularly to get the Shiites to agree to share the revenue, which is a key point of your plan.

MR. GELB: When I came back from Iraq a year ago – I was there for 10 days and traveled most of the country – what was very plain was, (a), we couldn't shove anything down their throats and, (b), they were looking to us for leadership because they haven't got a country. When I came back and talked to most of the senior people in the Bush administration, I suggested that they send Bob Zoellick there with a senior team for as long as necessary to sit and work with the Iraqi leadership, (who were?) very good, and actually hammer out these things with them because they do look for us. And it's not as if we don't have interests there that we've got to protect, too.

So there's this very careful balancing act we have to play between not shoving things down their throats, which would be idiotic and wouldn't work, and exercising real leadership. When we blocked what's his name – Jaafari, from serving again as prime minister, we did it openly. And in fact it broke the deadlock there for Maliki, who is a much better leader than Jaafari by almost everybody's estimation. So is that in terms of handling the issue of how you get it done. But I would sit down and work it through with them. They're quite capable of it. We're the ones who are not capable of doing it that way.

But, Mort, if I may, I wanted to address what Larry said. I think what Larry said confirmed what I said in two ways. One, that the essence of what he's talking about is a withdrawal plan and you should have no doubts about that being what Larry is advocating; in effect, let's get out of there. And the viability of that really turns on what do you think is going to happen in Iraq and Afghanistan and elsewhere as a result of our picking up and moving out within a year or a year and a half or whatever Larry's timetable would be.

Now, forget the fact that I don't believe that any Democrat sitting in the White House would implement that plan. It'd be absolute political suicide. Doing it for the Iraqis and for our foreign policy in the region I think would be a disaster, too. Vietnam is not the right analogy. Look, in Vietnam three years after we got out of there and lost, our position began to be stronger in the Far East than any time since the end of World War II. That's true. But Vietnam is not Iraq. It is not Iraq. Most of our friends and allies in the area had been urging us to get out. We had been fighting there for ten years and they are telling us this area is not going to collapse. You will do better by getting out and you've been there for ten years. You put 500,000 troops in there. And finally when we left and the South Vietnamese lost, there was no civil war. In Iraq there will be an all-out civil war and it will be on our heads. And I think we have got to make a serious effort before we come to what Larry is talking about to try for a political settlement to head that off. That's the essence of what I'm saying.

What Larry is talking about short circuits that whole process of giving ourselves a chance to have a viable strategy for a political deal.

MR. HALPERIN: Larry, let me give you a chance to respond to that, but also ask you to address just one of my catastrophes, and that's Kirkuk. You talk about a strategic redeployment and keeping troops in the region. If when we pull out, as many people would predict, the Kurds try to move into Kirkuk, the Iraqis resist, and a war breaks out which then the Turks and Syrians threaten to come into, is that an occasion for us to re-deploy the troops into Iraq or do we just sit in the region and watch this war happen?

MR. KORB: I'm glad that you mentioned that. I assumed that when John had talked about redeploying the troops – we're not leaving the region. Unlike Vietnam, we're staying there to protect our interests. And our interest is an Iraq that's not a threat to its neighbors and doesn't become another Afghanistan as a haven for terrorists. And

so I would use military power to deal with that. If the situation you think is going to lead to regional war, then I think we ought to intervene to protect our interests. And that's the thing I think you've got to keep talking about here is what is in the best long-term interest of the United States. Les says a civil war would break out. Duh! There's one now with us there. And as Les pointed out, we're not using our troops to do it and they're blaming us for what's happening.

And at some point we have got to leave. And when we leave, if they have a civil war, as long as it doesn't threaten – as I said, Iran tries to intervene or some outside power tries to intervene and it can be contained and it doesn't become another Afghanistan, I think that we don't need to get involved, and that's a key thing. But can I guarantee anything? You know it's interesting, as I mentioned here, when we put our plan out ten months ago and we talked about the beginning of a civil war, everyone said no. Now, they don't like to like to use the term and unless we're honest – sectarian violence – 6,000 people have been killed in two months and it's not a civil war? It's a civil war.

And one of the problems we have here ever since September 11th is this misuse of terms. We're not in a war with terrorism. Terrorism is a tactic. We're at war with a group of radical jihadists, many of them are controlled by al Qaeda. And what you do? This has been a sideline for that. In fact, it's made that worse, and that's why I say you've got to do that because the longer you wait, the more difficult it's going to be for us to win the misnamed global war on terror.

MR. GELB: I don't want to get in to an argument of what is a civil war and what is not. When I wrote my first piece on this two and a half years ago in the *New York Times* and said there would be civil war, there was not a single Middle East expert in this city who agreed with it – not a single one. They said, "You don't understand Iraq." What's going on now is the beginning of the civil war focused essentially in the center of the country. And there is ethnic cleansing going on in the cities right now. Not might go on, as Larry said; it's going on right now. Neighborhoods are being cleaned out.

I wish they could live together. You ask them, "Do you want to live together?" They say yes, but then they kill each other, and it's going to get far worse absent an American presence to prevent the jihadis from taking over strategic territory. Then you'll see a real civil war. You'll see Kirkuk going up in flames and Basrah as Mosul as well, and it will be far, far worse than what we have now and it will be on our heads unless we make an all-out effort to help them through this.

MR. HALPERIN: I want to now open –

MR. GELB: That's the way you fight terrorism.

MR. HALPERIN: I want to open now to questions. I want to ask first for questions from the press. I ask the rest of you to withhold until we get some press questions. So if there's a member of the press that has a question.

MR. KORB: There's one over there, Mort.

MR. HALPERIN: Is there? Sorry. In the back. Can you identify your name and your affiliation please? And please wait for the microphone.

Q: I'm Gareth Porter. I write for Inter-Press Service. I would like to ask about a subject which has not really been discussed explicitly at least, and that is the question of making peace with the Sunnis – of the United States making peace with the Sunnis. It seems to me that that would be really central to the process of withdrawal without making matters worse.

MR. HALPERIN: You're talking about Iraqi Sunnis?

Q: Iraqi Sunnis – the Sunni insurgence; not the legal political figures, but the people who have been making war against the coalition forces. And this is in the context of the administration obviously exploring a diplomatic political settlement with Sunni insurgents. How far they're going to go is not clear, but I'm just wondering why the Democrats really haven't been zeroing in on the problem of a ceasefire and a political settlement with the Sunnis saying the administration is not going far enough with this.

MR. KORB: When Mr. Maliki first talked about amnesty, a lot of members of the Congress, including a lot of Democrats, said, no you can't have it. Look, you're going to have to have some form of amnesty if you ever want this country to work together and I think that you need to recognize that. We've done that after a lot of other wars we've been involved in. And that I think would help, but if you don't give anybody amnesty among the Sunnis, many of whom are fighting just because they don't want our occupation there, you're not going to be able to make peace at all with them.

MR. HALPERIN: Other questions from the press. Yes, sir?

Q: Thanks. Garret Mitchell from *The Mitchell Report*. I want to phrase a question if I can and begin by saying –

MR. HALPERIN: I'd ask you to do it briefly.

MR. MITCHELL: – and begin by saying that I think both of these plans are interesting. The larger question to me is whether they are any longer relevant. And the question behind that is, it seems to me that there is a strong case to be made that we no longer have the latitude to make plans for Iraq and Iraq only – that if we agree that the real enemy here is, call it whatever name you want, Islamofascism, global jihadism, et cetera, and we look at what's happening realistically in the Middle East, from a practical political point of view is it relevant and is it realistic anymore to have a plan no matter what you call it; that is, Iraq 2.0 or Gelb-Biden, et cetera.

Doesn't it by definition have to take a look at the broader sweep and get at some of the tactical questions of, for example, if we withdraw troops where do they go? And while it's fine to say Afghanistan is in trouble, but does that mean we're going back in? So I'd like kind of a broader cut if you could?

MR. GELB: I think those are all legitimate questions to raise and I think both Larry and I agree that we're at the point where almost anything you do in Iraq is going to be a long shot.

MR. KORB: And I do think you raise a good point here about using your forces in other places because you do have other concerns. We have a whole list of places in our plan where you go. I just happened to mention Afghanistan. You've got to get your National Guard home here; homeland defense is a critical area. We would leave the Marines and a Navy carrier battle group in what we call offshore balancing in that particular area to be able to deploy your power where you need. But you're quite right: it's not just Iraq. I think when the history of this is written, Iraq will be seen as a diversion against the battle of the primary enemy.

MR. HALPERIN: Let me put another question to both of you. There have been some on the progressive side who have argued that we should not put forward an alternative plan for Iraq precisely because any plan that you put forward – it's easy to show why it would fail and that, therefore, opposition should be that President Bush got us into this and it's his responsibility to get us out. You've both put forward plans and I wonder how you would respond to that?

MR. GELB: I've heard it many times. If there are going to be failures, let be the Arab failure, let it be the Bush failure, and so forth. That isn't how I'm constructed. We undertook the single most important act any state can do by going ahead and invading Iraq. And we must deal with the consequences of it. It will affect our credibility, our power, and our security. Sure, terrorism increased because we went in to Iraq, and it could also increase by the way we get out of Iraq. And you have to think of that possibility as well. I think it would only encourage them, in much the same way that Hezbollah is now encouraged by the fact that they see there's a new strategic balance between themselves and Israel. And I think the same thing would happen in Iraq.

MR. HALPERIN: Larry?

MR. KORB: Well, I think one of the goals of think-tanks – places like this – is to speak truth to power to take on these tough issues. I've never run for political office, so it's easy for me to say, but I do think anybody in a position in this country needs to take a stand and say what's right. Now, if they get elected, that's another question. But if your whole goal in life is to get reelected, it seems to me you shouldn't be in the process.

When I first started teaching at the University of Dayton, one of the people I invited out there was Wayne Morse, who you may remember voted against the Gulf of Tonkin resolution, as did Ernest Gruening. Both of them lost the next election. I asked

him why he voted against it and he said because somebody in the Navy Department who he knew had called him the night before and said, don't believe what you're going to hear the next day at the hearings, ask for a tape. And when he did, they wouldn't do it. He said, well, I vote against it. He voted his conscience. And today I'd much rather be Wayne Morse than I don't even know the names of all the other people who voted for it.

MR. GELB: Just one other point on this, if I remember what I wanted to say.

MR. HALPERIN: We can just come back to it. Is there another reporter with a question? Yes, sir?

Q: Thank you very much. My name is Chris Renneki (ph). I'm a German journalist working here in D.C. And I wonder – I have to phrase the question in a way that it fits to the Iraq topic of course. Is there no concern on the panel that what we observe at the moment, this kind of complicit American latitude for the ongoing fighting in Lebanon (unintelligible) that that's going to have repercussions also to the situation in Iraq? You mentioned that al-Maliki already outted himself now as a true supporter or as having sympathy for Hezbollah here, but if this goes on in the Middle East, will the U.S. have – what kind of repercussions do you expect in Iraq? Thank you.

MR. HALPERIN: I do want to keep us from getting into debate about the current

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MR. GELB: I give a two-sentence response to it. I think what you see there is just a continuation of the fundamental spread in that world between the Sunnis and the Shiites. Maliki is supporting his fellow Shi'a, Hezbollah, and if you look at what the governments in Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt are doing, they're pretty openly critical of it. So I think there's that split to deal with as well. And it, again, only makes things more dangerous in Iraq.

MR. KORB: You know, what must the people who fought and died in Iraq think when al-Maliki denounces Israel today? I think that that's a very, very critical issue.

MR. GELB: I know what I wanted to say before. This is on the election point. We're only a few months away from this election and the Democrats haven't really geared themselves for the counterattack by Republicans. And Republicans are not going to say what that piece in the *Washington Post* said today: "Oh, Bush made a mistake." They're going to say he's pursuing the right and necessary course. (Unintelligible) and stay the course as long as possible. And they're going to say, "What do the Democrats have to offer? They're just saying get out of there."

And I tell you this: the polls are done in a quirky way. They say, do you want to get out? If you ask the Americans if they want to get out of this horrible situation, they say, yes, we want to get out. But if you ask them, do you want to lose? They say no by even larger numbers. And you have to keep that in mind when the fall and the

counterattack comes, because part of being able to put a better strategy in place is to win elections.

MR. HALPERIN: Is there another press question? Yes, sir? And then we'll go to the general audience.

Q: I'm Carl Leubsdorf of the *Dallas Morning News*. I think what you just said was that the American people want to get out, but don't want to cut and run probably. My question, though, is about troop withdrawals. We've had this sort of dance going on where we keep hearing out of General Casey and out of generals there that they have plans for troop withdrawals. And we hear the White House saying that they're not going to withdraw any troops until the Iraqi government is ready for us to withdraw the troops. How do you anticipate that's going to unfold in the next few months? Surely there are going to be some troop withdrawals before the elections, aren't there?

MR. GELB: Casey and Abizaid are really serious guys. They're top-flight professionals, and of course they have these plans. I told many of our Senate Democratic friends at the time of the debate a month ago to say it because I know for a fact that they have these plans. They're very worried about just the kind of stuff Larry was talking about before. Are they going to fight Rumsfeld and Bush on this? So far they have not. There will be some withdrawals, but I think it will be well within the ambit of reassuring Bush that he's not going to risk any serious takeover by jihadis of territory while he's president.

MR. KORB: I think when the history of this is written, the professional military top will not come out well in terms of getting themselves brow beat by browbeat by Rumsfeld in the way that the war was done – no plans for phase four at all. If you read *Cobra 2*, you see they were going to fire General Wallace when he said we've got Fedayeen attacking here. And I also think in terms of the way that a lot of them – General Pace and stuff – have shown up on this Sunday morning talk shows is abominable – the things that they've said in terms of how well we're doing there.

Which leads me to my point: when the president says, "We'll stand down when they stand up," or "I'm going to listen to the generals," generals don't make policy, okay? In other words, you've got to have a strategy here and you shouldn't allow the generals to make the policy, whether their worried about, say, the future of the Army or whatever. You could obviously listen to them, but the way we were trained is the generals give you advice and then you decide whether to go. You don't give them a veto on it.

MR. HALPERIN: I'm going to open it up now to question from the audience.

MR. GELB: I think it's absolutely essential that between now and November, now and November 2008 that Democrats engage in serious and respectful conversations with our military. There are almost no relationships there and we've got to rebuild them because with all their unhappiness with Bush and Rumsfeld, they're even more unhappy with Democrats.

MR. HALPERIN: Yes, up here.

Q: Yes, (unintelligible) from Washington Kurdish Institute. I'd just like to make a brief comment. I think, Mr. Gelb, I'd liked your original article actually about the three-state solution, but still I believe what you say makes sense. And if you talk to politicians in Iraq, if you talk to the people in Iraq, that's really what they want: they want decentralization. There is support for this in the country and I think the obstacle to that is heavy-handed U.S. – you know, the embassy interference in bringing people who don't represent the Sunnis as representative of the Sunnis, and that has not worked.

And the other thing as far as the issue of Kirkuk is concerned, Mr. Halperin, I'm from Kirkuk originally, the Kurds are in Kirkuk. They're not going to come into Kirkuk; they are in Kirkuk. And actually the article 140 – if it is followed and implemented, the majority of the people in Kirkuk who are originally inhabitants of the city would be happy with that, including the Turkomens and the original Arabs who had been there. The ones who are against it are the Muqtada al Sadr people who are being brought there and the Saddam settlers who have been brought in to the city. Thank you.

MR. HALPERIN: Yes, Bill?

Q: Bill Niskanen, the Cato Institute. Advice to Les: it is most counterproductive to make a partisan issue of this situation because the one group that has to be convinced to make a U.S. policy change is the Bush administration, so don't make a partisan issue of this. The only way we're going to get discussion across the parties is to go in by saying we Democrats made a mistake when we controlled the Senate in 2001 and 2002 about not having a debate on this issue. We Democrats made a mistake when in October, 2002, we voted for the war resolution.

Third, and then you have to broaden it to say we Republicans and the Democrats should have learned important lessons in the meantime. It's four or five years later and we've learned a lot of important lessons, and let's us Republicans and Democrats sort out the issue. That's the only way you're going to get a debate on this issue that will affect U.S. policy in 2009.

MR. GELB: I think your advice is misdirected. You might direct it to the White House and to the Republicans because they are the ones who politicized it.

Q: That doesn't help.

MR. GELB: It doesn't help but in order to get your voice heard, sweet reason doesn't seem to have worked either. (Laughter.)

MR. HALPERIN: In the front row here.

Q: Ann Kolker (ph), Center for American Progress. I wanted to ask the panel, one of my concerns with the various strategies that have been coming out, especially on the progressive side, but also of course from the Bush administration strategies to get out of Iraq or stay in Iraq as the case may be is that Iraq is treated as a very isolated situation, and I personally don't see that as happening; for example, as the question right over there a bit earlier – what are the impacts for the Israeli-Palestinian or Israeli-Lebanese, Israeli-Syrian, Syria and the United States conflict because it's now turning in to a civil war along sectarian lines. So I was wondering if the panel could address how policy options have been limited given that Iraq is not an isolated situation?

MR. KORB: According to the Bush administration, it's the central front on the war on terror, and I don't believe that but I do think once you're there then obviously you can't ignore the ramifications. If you read al Qaeda website, which is amazing, they thought they could bog us down in Afghanistan. It didn't work because of the way that we fought it. And then of course they're happy that we're bogged down in Iraq. So I think you have to understand that when you say, okay, what do I do now? Do I continue to keep myself bogged down there and continue to weaken myself, undermine our standing not only in the Arab and Muslim world, but around the world? We haven't even brought up – the U.S. standing all around the world has declined because of what has happened. So I think, yes, you can view it that way and my argument is that getting out in the timeframe I (taught?) will help give you a chance to give the Iraqis the chance as well as you to protect the rest of your interest.

MR. HALPERIN: Yes, sir?

Q: Will Amatruda, Catholic University. Would any or all of you care to comment on the policy prescriptions of William Odom, the former head of NSA and of military and Army intelligence, and of Phoebe Marr, the principle historian of modern Iraq?

MR. HALPERIN: Do you want to tell us in one sentence what that is?

MR. KORB: I think I know Bill's, but I don't know Phoebe's.

Q: As I understand them, Odom's views are laid out mainly laid out on the website Neiman Watch in four separate articles. Basically, he wants a quick withdrawal and he also thinks we have a lot of common interest with Iran and should make some kind of a grand bargain. Phoebe Marr, I know what she's opposed to, which is she's opposed to a quick withdrawal, but I'm not aware of positive recommendations that she's made.

MR. HALPERIN: I don't think you can (agree then?) them with both of them.

MR. KORB: Well, Bill makes a terrific point – General Odom. He says what's happened is we thought we'd go in to Iraq and you'd have this democratic tsunami, it would spread throughout the region – sort of a domino effect. And he says it's a domino

affect, but it's in the other way because us going in there has undermined our ability to do lots of things including dealing with the Iranians. And the other group, according to him, that's happy that we're there in addition to al Qaeda is Iran. We're bogged down in this war. And he has argued that it's the greatest strategic disaster in U.S. history. He thinks it's even worse than Vietnam and the sooner we get out, the better it will be for us. And I think I'm sympathetic to that. I would, again, because of our moral obligation, think we ought to stay until the end of 2007.

MR. HALPERIN: Yes. Down here and then over there.

Q: Diane Perlman, I'm a member of TRANSCEND Network of Conflict Transformation and I'm also organizing an institute of bringing in knowledge from experts in the field, and the last few weeks I've been collaborating interdisciplinary with colleagues in the field and looking at certain principles and looking at the different plans and strategies. The idea that if we pull out there will be a civil war may be the case within a certain, say, military paradigm, but there are certain processes that have been well studied, observed, researched that can be employed which involves bringing all the parties the conflict to the table, having a third-party impartial work on this doing some kind of reconciliation process. Even the most extreme parties have to be brought in to the table and have the time and the space and create conditions. And also under the condition of occupation there are certain dynamics in which everything gets cast a certain way. So I'd just like your thoughts on it. Say there is a way to do it and there are certain kinds of processes that can be –

MR. HALPERIN: (Off mike) the panel.

MR. GELB: We're the third party: we have the money and the guns.

MR. HALPERIN: John?

Q: I actually think this is actually something of a follow-up on this question; I think it didn't get the treatment it deserved. Les said at the beginning that he wanted to try to sharpen up the differences and I think that at some level the characterization that he's put between the two things has actually blurred the similarity, which is, if I remember reading the *New York Times* article writing and listening to Senator Biden that, Les, that your ideas are that the U.S. force in fact would be reduced to a training force by 2008. So there's something of a difference in the timetable and the end state and certainly a difference in whether there's a hard or soft back step on that question.

So it seems to me that ultimately there may be a very hard political difference between the two ideas, but in terms on substance the question is whether telling the Iraqis that there's a sharp date or telling them that there's a soft date will get you more cooperation one way or the other. And I think that with respect to your characterization of the diplomacy that would lead to a more viable end state, I think we endorse that and I think that Larry's plan is has put that on the table.

I want to ask you a question, though, which is the role of the Iranians – you can comment on that if you want to. I'm not trying to cut you off. I think you characterized your views and our views in a certain way –

MR. GELB: Let me answer you. I heard you.

MR. GELB: Look, I think I did sharpen the differences. I said my approach is essentially political backed up by a withdrawal plan I would ask the military to put together and regional diplomacy and some other things in my *Foreign Affairs* article where I elaborated on it more than I have in other places. So that's one major point of difference: the focus is fundamentally different, political as opposed to military.

Secondly, on the military side as I said in that article and then in a number of other pieces I've written over the last year and a half, because I've written about this eight or nine times, and you know what? I've changed positions in a number of these articles because people made valid criticisms and I adopted it. I know that's unfair, you're just supposed to just stay with dumb positions even if they're (crap?). (Laughter.) But when I heard something smart, I adopted it.

The second point is on the withdrawal plan. Joe and I had a difference, an honest difference. He was in favor of 2008; as I said in my *Foreign Affairs* article, I would do 2009. I would tack another year on to it. What's more, I would ask the military to define a residual force that I would keep in Iraq in Kurdistan in order to deter any possibility of war in Kurdistan from Turkey or Iran and to provide strategic support if the jihadis were to take over cities. But I'd let the military figure out what that residual force in Kurdistan would be.

Q: Let me ask a question about the politics, which is that – the politics in Iraq, not the politics in the U.S. – which is the role of Iran. I think in fact we don't disagree very much about the fact that there needs to be a political track. When I reference back to the last question, it was really how do you begin a reconciliation process in Iraq that might actually lead you to an end state that you, I think, want?

But what's the role of Iran in that context? Does it need to be a supporting actor in that arrangement and if it does, should we stiff them? Should we try to bring them in? And if we did bring them in, do you need to broaden the aperture and take a look at the entire region and our relationship with Iran in the region?

MR. GELB: Right, absolutely, and it's an important piece for this diplomacy for Iraq's sake and for the region's sake. We're the only major power in history that doesn't talk to our adversaries. It's really one strange thing – a practice we started after World War II – and the way you apply your power is through these conversations.

Now, for five years the Bush administration refrained from any real contact on the grounds that to talk to them would legitimize them when the real objective should be regime change – get rid of them. Now they say they will talk to them. They said they

will talk to them over Iraq and they said they would talk to them over the nuclear issue in Iran. If that is their view and they're prepared for unconditional negotiations, I think that would be a terrific thing.

I don't know what would come out of it. It would take a long time, but I think that is the way to use our power. It's not just to be goody two shoes and talk to an adversary' it's the way to begin to let them feel that we can do for them and what we can do to hurt them without making public challenges to their manhood that force all Iranians to back a government they don't even like.

MR. KORB: Well, I think history will record when the Iranians wanted to talk to us in 2003, open up a dialogue, because remember they had been helpful in Afghanistan and the Bush administration said no because they thought that the regime was going to fall. I think that that will go down as a great strategic mistake.

MR. HALPERIN: Can we take the last question in the back?

Q: Hi my name is Wallace Hayes. I'm an independent consultant. And thank you both for laying out interesting arguments together.

I wanted to ask a question about a possible – is there some room in between some of these positions? For example, the Iraqis tell me that they were promised a status of forces agreement before the war began. Could we negotiate a status of forces agreement that included provisions like no torture, no taking Iraqi nationals?

MR. GELB: (Unintelligible) – by the Iraqis?

Q: I'm sorry?

MR. GELB: I said no torture by us or by the Iraqis?

Q: By U.S. forces – the United States not taking Iraqi nationals out of the country and putting in to a status of forces agreements some of the human rights provisions that have been lacking in the current policy and have contributed to the insurgency.

And what I hear from Iraqis is this issue that arguably the U.S. authority to be in Iraq is as an occupying power. If we negotiate a status of forces agreement, we take away that incentive to be part of the insurgency. I guess my question to you is, at this point in time do you think that's a viable option or has time passed that option by and is it now too late? Thank you.

MR. KORB: Well, I think you should do it. I don't think their time has passed. The sooner you do it, I think the better off it will be. And, again, I can go back, and as Leslie said, you hear ideas from other people and you incorporate them – I thought Tony Cordesman, if you saw this article in the *Washington Post* earlier this week where he talked about an agreement and then in having joint investigations of these alleged crimes

and therefore you would also dispel some of these wild rumors, because if the U.S. investigates and they say, "Gee, we found nothing," your people will say you're covering it up.

And I think to go on from that, until somebody high level is held accountable for some of these things like Abu Ghraib, I don't think you're ever going to be able to convince people in that part of the world that we're really serious about dealing with these lapses, which while maybe understandable are inevitable when you're fighting an insurgency.

MR. HALPERIN: Larry, I want to give you a minute for a final word if you want one.

MR. KORB: I think the point I tried to make here, and I think Les did a terrific job of sharpening the debate, is that really the question is what's best for U.S. security in the long term, because if you gamble that by staying longer you may get this thing to come out – you can't even assure that. If you could assure me that two years, five years, ten years it would come out right, I'd say, okay, well maybe we ought to do that, but you can't. And I think the longer you prolong this, the weaker our position is going to be to protect our national security interest.

And recently Jack Murtha mentioned about Reagan and Lebanon and everybody got all over him. You know, when Reagan had to make the decision about getting out of Lebanon, the Soviets had to make a decision about Afghanistan at the same time. We left, they stayed. And certainly (there were?) the short term impacts, but the Soviets stayed in Afghanistan until the end of the decade and it weakened them, so sometimes ever cutting and run is a sensible policy if it enhances your security in the long term.

MR. HALPERIN: Les, you get the last word.

MR. GELB: My eye is on the booby prize and the booby prize is January, 2009, when the next president of the United States takes office and is faced with the kind of situation we're talking about today. And I think it is in the overwhelming interest of Democrats and Republicans, above all in our country, that we figure out how to deal with this problem before that next president takes office; otherwise we're not facing two and a half more years of this, we're facing six and a half more years of this and another failed administration.

MR. HALPERIN: Well, let me thank both of the panelists and thank you all for coming.

(Applause.)

(END)