GEORGE W. BUSH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

FINAL EDITED TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW WITH DOUGLAS J. FEITH

March 22–23, 2012
Washington, D.C.

Participants

University of Virginia
Russell Riley, chair
Barbara Perry

Rhodes College
Michael Nelson

Naval War College
Stephen Knott

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UNIVERSITY of VIRGINIA

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Riley: This is the Douglas Feith interview as a part of the George W. Bush Oral History Project. Thank you very much for your time. We've had a discussion before the recorder was on mostly about the ground rules, but I'll repeat for the record that it is being done under a veil of confidentiality. You are the only person who is allowed to report out of the room what we talk about today.

We do need to aid the transcriptionist of the interview by doing a voice identification. I'm going to go around the room and ask everybody to say just a few words, to say who they are. I'm Russell Riley, the chair of the program.

Feith: I'm Doug Feith, the interviewee.

Nelson: Mike Nelson, Rhodes College.

Perry: I'm Barbara Perry, Senior Fellow at the Miller Center.

Knott: I'm Steve Knott from the Naval War College.

Riley: The first thing that I want to do as we get started is make a mention of your book for the reader of the transcript. This is really an extraordinary piece of research. Anybody who is looking for the history of this administration needs to go to this book. The transcription will be important, but you've done so much work here and have been so meticulous in terms of documentation, particularly with the website. It just is an essential piece of reading that we need to use as a point of departure.

It is always interesting for us in doing interviews to talk to people who have written extensively. Inevitably there are going to be things that we'll talk about that you've made reference to here. If you want to give us a shorthand answer and say, "I've dealt with this extensively in this book," or if there are other things that you've written, other documents that you'd like to refer the reader to, then do that. There is no way that we'll entirely avoid overlap, but we'll try to use this as a point of departure and pick up things to add to it.

We usually begin with some autobiography. I want to ask you about your own intellectual journey. You said that you were, as a young man, a political liberal, somebody who was

interested in politics from a fairly early age. I wonder if you would tell us a little bit about the journey that you were making from a liberal position, not as a child but maybe as a teenager. What was happening to you? What was the process of going from there to somebody who is, by your own accounts, much more conservative today?

Feith: I did grow up in a liberal home. As I did in my book, I should start any discussion of my politics with what was clearly the most important piece of biography in the house that I grew up in: my father's background as a Holocaust survivor. He was born, interestingly enough, in July 1914, just as the world was entering into war and the modern era, in what was Austria-Hungary at the time—It is now southern Poland—in a Jewish family. He was one of nine children.

He became a sailor. Without getting into elaborate detail, he was sailing with a British merchant vessel when World War II broke out. In the Holocaust he lost both of his parents, four of his sisters, and all three of his brothers. About a month after Pearl Harbor he came to the United States. He had been on a British ship that went to Canada. Then he got onto an Estonian ship that came to Newport News and he decided to stay in America now that America was in the war.

For unclear reasons he wound up in Philadelphia, went to the authorities and said, "I speak numerous languages, I've been a sailor, I know various ports in Europe and here I am, ready to join the war effort." After some months in the Philadelphia Navy Yard, he moved into the U.S. Merchant Marine, stayed in the Merchant Marine until '46, and lost three ships during the war. His experience as a Jew, as a Holocaust survivor, as an immigrant, and as a sailor in the war was a major reality in our family as I was growing up.

My mother was American-born, although her parents came from Europe and were also Jews from what later became Poland. Her family came from the Russian part of Poland.

As I later learned by reading Philip Roth and other authors, we had a very typical Jewish home. I sometimes thought that Roth was bugging our kitchen. As I related in the book, when we were growing up my mother thought that Alger Hiss was innocent. She thought that the [Julius and Ethel] Rosenbergs were probably innocent. She always told us how she cried when Franklin Roosevelt died. They voted for [Adlai] Stevenson twice; they voted for [John F.] Kennedy; they voted for [Lyndon B.] Johnson.

Just last week, in fact, I gave a talk at the Citadel on the development of neoconservative thought, in which I recounted some of this personal history because I think that I'm a typical case of a neoconservative, in the proper and now completely defunct use of the word; that is, somebody who started his political life left of center, and over the course of the late '60s and '70s became more conservative, and then ultimately became a [Ronald] Reaganite. I pointed out in this talk that when I grew up—as I said in the book—we got the *New York Times* every day, and not only read it but believed it. I still get it but I read it differently.

I recounted that I remember sitting on the edge of my father's bed one night with him and we just happened to be looking through papers in his night table, and he pulled out his cards showing either membership or contributor status to the American Civil Liberties Union [ACLU], the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People [NAACP], various Democratic Party organizations—It made an impression on me that he had all these cards, especially since

one hears about "card-carrying members" of this and that, and my father was a card-carrying member of so many liberal organizations.

Perry: Did he maintain that for the course of his life—and your mother as well?

Faith: It was interesting. Neither of my parents went to college. My father was a really brilliant businessman, a really brilliant guy in his way. He had a kind of amused and condescending tolerance for intellectuals and academics because he was really the quintessential man of action. He wasn't a big reader and he wasn't a philosophical thinker, but he had strong ideas. It became interesting that as I changed my views, so did he. We sort of went together. Neither I, nor my two siblings, ever rebelled against my parents. We had a lot of admiration for my parents. We all kind of made the same intellectual shift, political shift, over time.

Riley: The siblings, too?

Feith: Yes, the siblings too.

Perry: And your mother?

Feith: And my mother. I mean, we never held sessions where people had to recant—

Perry: You never did interventions?

Feith: No, it wasn't like that. No, just in the course of conversations, you could tell—We all tended to react similarly to political developments. Now, I pointed out in this lecture that the neoconservative "current of thought," as Irving Kristol likes to put it, largely got going by people who were focused on domestic policy. To tell you the truth, I was oblivious to all of that.

My interest from high school forward was in international affairs and world history, not domestic policy, and I don't think that I even heard of the journal, the *Public Interest* before I left college. But I was interested in international affairs. The thing that made a big impression on me, which was the gigantic issue of the day when I was in high school from '67 to '71, and then in college from '71 to '75, was the Vietnam War. My general views on the Vietnam War were basically straight out of the editorial page of the *New York Times.* I remember actually consciously thinking at one point that I'd never read anything on the editorial page that I disagreed with. I don't think I knew a Republican, growing up.

Nelson: Where did you grow up?

Feith: I grew up in suburban Philadelphia, in a place called Elkins Park, Cheltenham Township. The local high school was Cheltenham High School, but my brother and I actually paid tuition to go to Central High School in Philadelphia, which is a great school. It is the second oldest public high school in America, an interesting place, an early magnet school.

Perry: Even your history teacher, of whom you speak so highly in the book?

Feith: Actually, he was a Republican. He may have been the first Republican I met, that I know of. Maybe if I dredged my memory, I could come up with a different answer, but I don't even

recall any of my parents' friends being Republicans. So my views on the Vietnam War were the general views of liberals.

What happened, of course, was that as the antiwar movement became larger and much more intense, you started to see the incorporation into the movement—Obviously this didn't apply to everybody in the movement—of increasingly strident rhetoric that went from just a disagreement about policy to denunciation of the United States as a fascist, imperialist country— the spelling of Amerika with a 'k' to suggest the fascist nature of the country, and the very harsh rhetoric against the President: "Hey, hey, LBJ [Lyndon B. Johnson]! How many boys did you kill today?"

Then when I got to college what made a particular impression on me was the pacifist strain in the antiwar argumentation: "War is not the answer." That kind of argument suggested that the problem was not that this war was somehow being badly fought or was ill-conceived, but that there was a way to deal with the world that didn't ever require war or military power. The more I heard that pacifist line in particular, the more I saw how important that was to so much of the logic of the antiwar movement. Again, I want to make it clear that not everybody in the antiwar movement subscribed to pacifism. I understand that. There were other policy-type arguments made against the Vietnam War. But I'm talking generally about the pacifist line of argument.

When I would hear various people talk about the war, and then discuss it with them and probe, I found that a substantial part of the logic of many antiwar activists was rooted in these pacifist ideas. I remember not feeling enormously confident that I knew a lot of history, or knew a lot about war and politics and how the world works. But one thing I knew, a kind of *cogito ergo sum* of my intellectual life at the moment, was that there were some problems that you couldn't deal with through diplomacy or blandishments or nonmilitary means. War was sometimes forced on you and it sometimes solved a problem. Hitler was a problem that was solved by war.

My father's history helped launch my intense interest in history, partly because my father was very closed-mouthed about his personal history. Attempts to extract from him his biography were only occasionally successful in a very limited way. He'd remember something, and then he would say, "To hell with that," and then you couldn't get him to talk anymore.

One way that I put myself into a position to understand more about his background and also to be a more effective interrogator is I read an enormous amount about World War II and about the period before World War II. I had read a lot about the appeasement policies that were pursued for years by the British and the French and failed. As I said, the one thing that I felt I knew well enough to have a well-grounded opinion on was that pacifism didn't make sense as a general matter. When I came to that conclusion, and I believe it was when I was in college, it was like hearing the clock strike 13, the chime that brings into doubt the previous 12 chimes.

I began to question the whole worldview of the people who were making these arguments that depended so significantly on something that I thought was wrong. That really opened me up to other things. I started reading more than the *New York Times.* I started reading *Commentary* regularly, which was my intellectual entry into neoconservative thought. I remained, and actually remain to this day, attached to key liberal positions from the 1960s, positions that are now subscribed to almost exclusively by conservatives, but they were the liberal positions of the

1960s.

My father's contribution to the ACLU was a sign of our general view on free speech. I'm still in favor of free speech, which I find in talking to my liberal friends is a position that is not widely shared anymore among liberals, who tend to favor speech codes, for example, and hate crimes laws. Evidently a 1960s-style commitment to the libertarian view on free speech is not a liberal principle anymore. But it still is with me. I care a lot about those civil liberties ideas that I first learned about and supported in the '60s, thinking that they were positions that distinguished liberals from conservatives.

Color-blind government is another principle that we were very proud of, and believed distinguished us as enlightened liberals from the conservatives of the day in the 1960s. I retain that view. That makes me nowadays a conservative.

When much of the Democratic Party supported Eugene McCarthy in 1968 and then George McGovern in 1972, I had the feeling not that I had left the party, but that the party had left me. I later became much more conservative because I started reading much more; I started thinking more critically; I started expanding my circle of friends, so I ended up meeting people who actually had conservative views.

Riley: Republicans.

Feith: Republicans, right. The last point I'll make—This interests me more than it does anybody else because it is just what was going on in my head.

Riley: This is fascinating.

Feith: There are some archetypal or prototypical aspects of this. It's funny how one remembers certain thoughts that one has. I remember in college thinking to myself, *I don't quite understand why people who are liberal tend to have the same views in many different areas: domestic policy, foreign policy, different aspects of foreign policy, religion. One could look at those various things as distinct issues.* I remember noticing the phenomenon that conservatives tended to be grouped and liberals tended to be grouped. But why is it that if you take a hawkish line on Vietnam, or on détente, that that should give you a free enterprise line on some domestic economic issue?

I remember noticing that and not understanding it and yet having a sense that it couldn't just be a coincidence. There was something more there. It was only after doing an enormous amount of reading and thinking over many years that I came to understand that if one thinks seriously about these issues, and about the political philosophy that underlies them, whether [Thomas] Hobbes or [John] Locke or others, the starting point is a certain conception of human beings. Where do they come from? Are they created divinely or otherwise? How do they relate to each other? What is your view of their rationality? What is your view of their acquisitiveness? What is your view of how violent they are? What is the nature of human nature?

From a basic view of human nature one can systematically develop a view on how people relate to each other and to society more broadly, and to God or not to God. Those ideas bring one logically to a set of ideas that can be described as liberal or conservative or something else. That

set of ideas is what connects the various public policy issues that on the surface appear unconnected to one another.

That summarizes the process that made me much more systematic and conservative.

Riley: Let me ask a couple of questions about specifics here. Everybody feel free to jump in. Did your parents speak only English at home?

Feith: Yes, we spoke English at home. My mother's first language was Yiddish. My father always made the point as a matter of pride that his first language was German, not Yiddish, but he spoke Yiddish. He also spoke Spanish and French and Hebrew, and a little bit of Russian and Polish and Greek, because he sailed. He spoke Spanish well enough that he would speak Spanish to his employees who were Spanish-speaking.

Riley: Were you bilingual growing up?

Feith: No. I studied French in high school, and when I got to college I took Hebrew for a year and then German for two and a half years. It put me in a position where I could begin to understand some of the Yiddish that my parents would speak.

Riley: You were talking about the worldview and ideas of human nature. Were your parents observant Jews?

Feith: No. In fact, one of the interesting and typical aspects of our liberal, suburban Jewish home was that my mother grew up in an Orthodox home, my father grew up in an Orthodox home, and they both more or less ran away from that. My father's first break from it was when he became a Zionist at a very early age. He became an admirer of a guy named Vladimir [Ze'ev] Jabotinsky. He was the leading nonsocialist Zionist thinker and leader, a fascinating man who was the intellectual father of what became Likud in Israel—in other words, the nonsocialist political parties in Israel—the liberals. Of course, he was called by the socialists a fascist, but you can understand that.

Perry: It's relative.

Feith: He was not a fascist. He was distinctly a classic European liberal. Interestingly enough—I think this is relevant—my father, for all his liberal views, was never a socialist. He had zero sympathy with the communists. Once upon a time, of course, the liberals in the United States were generally passionately anticommunist. That was true of the AFL-CIO [American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations] institutionally, and other groups, and of John Kennedy—think of his inaugural address. By the late '60s and early '70s anticommunism ceased to be their theme because it was associated with pro–Vietnam War thinking. The people who remained liberal but passionately anticommunist found that they lost their political party. That was, I think, a major element in the development of neoconservative thinking in politics.

Knott: Did the Reagan effort have any influence on you?

Riley: We haven't quite gotten there yet.

Feith: Let me make the connection.

Knott: Sure.

Feith: I explained how I started rethinking my liberal views in the area that was of most interest to me, which was foreign policy, because of the Vietnam War and what I just discussed. As the Vietnam War wound down in ’72 and ’73—The U.S. involvement was cut very substantially by then—the dominant issue was the Cold War. I was very interested in the Cold War.

As I said, even though I still had liberal views and thought of myself as a Democrat, I had done a lot of reading about the Soviet Union and about communism also. That teacher who assigned [Aleksandr] Solzhenitsyn to us in high school—That was terrific. It was clear to me that the Communist regime in the Soviet Union was a very bad actor and was inhumane—a mass-murdering regime. I had no sympathy for it at all and believed that the United States needed to take a strong position to defend ourselves against the Soviet Union, which I felt was a serious threat.

In ’73, with the Arab-Israeli war—Even in ’72 with some of the early U.S.-Soviet arms control agreements—I remember thinking that talk about pursuing stability through accommodation of the Soviet Union was misguided. There was an agreement in ’72, if I’m not mistaken, that was called something like “An Agreement to Renounce the Pursuit of Marginal Advantages One Over the Other.” I remember reading that and thinking, *That does not make any sense at all.* It vaguely reminded me of diplomatic misconceptions of the ’30s.

I then remember reading critiques in *Commentary* magazine about détente, and I developed skepticism about the policy toward the Soviet Union of the [Richard M.] Nixon administration. That became a major focus of my interest. I took courses on the Soviet Union and on political philosophy. I read extensively in the area.

Riley: This was at Harvard?

Feith: At Harvard, and when I left Harvard. I wrote various things about it. There is one crucial story here. I developed enough thinking along these lines—I mentioned that my entry intellectually into neoconservative thinking was in starting to read *Commentary.* My entry into the actual physical network of neoconservative people was when I was a senior in college, and [Leslie H.] Les Gelb, who was the diplomatic correspondent of the *New York Times*, was giving a talk at Wellesley. A woman professor at Wellesley who frequently came to the Harvard Center for European Studies and Center for International Affairs events, and with whom I became friendly, invited me to come. She said, “Les Gelb is coming.”

I still read the *New York Times.* It was very interesting to meet the diplomatic correspondent of the *New York Times.* He was giving a talk about détente at Wellesley. She said, “If you come, we’ll also go out to dinner with Gelb afterward.” I was always happy to go to Wellesley. That was a nice occasion always. I went there to attend the lecture and we went out for Chinese food afterward. In the course of the conversation, I was asking Gelb some antidétente questions.

He was staying in Cambridge, so I drove him back. I don’t remember if it was at the dinner or in the car that he said to me, “With your views, you should be working for [Henry M.] Scoop

Jackson." I said, "Wow, I would love to work for Scoop Jackson." Scoop Jackson was at the time my idea of a leader with the right approach to the Soviet Union.

Nelson: He said this in a friendly way?

Feith: A completely friendly way. He didn't share the views, but—

Perry: Could you say a few words about Scoop Jackson for the record and for history? Because I think even now most people don't know who Scoop Jackson was.

Feith: Scoop Jackson was a Senator from Washington State. He was, on a number of issues that I cared a lot about, the leading voice in the Senate on those issues. When he would address an issue, he would bring a lot of work to his address and he made himself a respected and prominent voice on the several things that he tended to concentrate on, and he concentrated on things that were of great interest to me.

He was very prodefense. He was very anticommunist, philosophically. He was the most trenchant critic out there of arms control and the Nixon détente policy. He was strongly pro-Israel. He was strongly in favor of using the Soviets' vulnerability on human rights issues, and in particular the Soviet Jewry issue, as a way of both undermining the Soviet leadership's standing within their own country and around the world and in America. He could embarrass them and expose their hypocrisies and show them to be enemies of human rights by using the Soviet Jewry issue, and he could also galvanize American support for a tough policy through this issue, because the Soviet Jewry issue became a politically important issue, not just among Jews in the United States, but as an element of the general effort to get support for a tough policy in dealing with Soviet threats.

Jackson also had views on domestic affairs that got him something like a 90-plus rating from the Americans for Democratic Action. He was strongly pro-Labor and kind of a down-the-line liberal on domestic policy issues. I later came to the view that I didn't agree with him on a lot of that domestic policy, but that wasn't the stuff at the forefront of my mind anyway. I thought that Scoop Jackson was absolutely terrific; I still do, in retrospect. He was a great Senator and it was a great misfortune for the country that his element of the Democratic Party has largely become extinct. Almost everybody who was a Jacksonite became a Reaganite and left the Democratic Party. There are a few who remain, but not many.

What Les Gelb said to me was, "With your views you should be working for Scoop Jackson." I said, "I would love that." He said, "I'm friendly with Jackson's national security guy, Richard Perle. If you send me your résumé, I'll pass it along to Perle." He later told me—I also talked about this with Richard Perle—that he called Perle and said something like, "I'm sorry to report that the liveliest kid that I met," or the smartest kid—He made some kind remark about me—"is a Jackson supporter. I feel duty bound to pass his résumé along to you." He made a nice mockery of the whole thing, but he was very nice and friendly. He passed my résumé to Perle and Perle hired me for a summer internship for the year after I graduated from college.

Perry: That was the summer of '75?

Feith: Yes, '75.

Perry: I think I remember correctly that Jackson—His given name was Henry, right?

Feith: Yes.

Perry: He was thinking of tossing his hat into the ring for the ’76 Democratic nomination. Did you think about that, that this might be someone you could follow?

Feith: When I came to work for him I was starting law school in the fall. I was not thinking about going off on a Presidential campaign or going into an administration; that didn’t even register with me. I would have been perfectly happy at the time to say I would have supported his Presidential campaign, but it wasn’t as if I said, “Aha, there’s a star I could hitch my wagon to.” It wasn’t like that. I really admired him and was happy to get a chance to work in the government. To work for him was a great privilege.

Anyway, I worked there for the summer. The number of people that I met that summer and the quality of the people was extraordinary. I look back with astonishment at my good fortune to have met people like Albert Wohlstetter and Bernard Lewis and other people who came by as friends of Richard Perle and advisors to Senator Jackson. I worked in the office with Richard Perle, with Dorothy Fosdick, who was the senior national security person for Senator Jackson, with Elliott Abrams. It was quite a good group.

The next summer, I worked for Admiral [Elmo R., Jr.] Zumwalt when he ran for the Senate in Virginia. The way I got connected to him is also a story of some general interest. I meet with lots of young people today who ask, “How do you get into that business?” Lots of people are interested in a career in foreign affairs. One of the things I say is, “Write.” Writing is a really good way to do it. I also point out that almost nobody can write well on complex subjects for a general audience. So if you actually can write something that can be published, you’re in the 99th percentile. It is the rarest talent. Even kids who go to superb schools and do extremely well at those schools, by and large, can’t write a lucid sentence. So clear writing for a general audience turns out to be a terrific talent. I learned that. I didn’t understand at the time how valuable that was, but I quickly got the point.

Admiral Zumwalt was running for the Senate in Virginia in 1976. He had been Chief of Naval Operations from more or less 1970 to ’74. He was a close friend of Scoop Jackson and an outspoken critic of the Nixon-[Henry] Kissinger détente policy. A friend of a friend said to me that he was connected to the Zumwalt campaign and asked if I’d be interested in working on it. I knew of Admiral Zumwalt. Admiral Zumwalt was a very rare member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in that he was nationally famous. Most people couldn’t name a single member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, not even the Chairman most times. He had been on the cover of *Time* magazine. He had been interviewed in *Playboy* magazine. He was a national figure.

He got all this attention despite his being very promilitary, very prodefense generally, and very anti-Soviet and skeptical on arms control. But he was also very liberal on civil rights, and did some pathbreaking things as Chief of Naval Operations to promote better race relations within the Navy, which antagonized the old guard in the Navy. That is part of the reason he lost disastrously when he ran for the U.S. Senate in Virginia. Actually, some of the old Navy people organized against him.

He also had a classic neocon profile, including the connection to Senator Jackson, so when the opportunity arose to work for him I said, "Fine." I was put in contact with his issues person. I called this woman and said, "I'd like to work for the Senator." She said, "What can you do?" I said, "I'd like to work in the foreign and defense area." I remember she laughed rather scornfully and said, "If there's one thing he doesn't need, it is help in the foreign and defense area; he is one of the country's leading experts on foreign and defense issues. He needs everything else." I said, "Sorry, that's all I have to offer."

She said, "All right." I remember the tone. This was around June or so. She said, "He is going to address the platform committee at the Democratic National Convention in August. He is going to talk about foreign and defense policy and he needs an opening statement. Why don't you take a stab at drafting it?" She told me later that she expected never to hear from me again.

I wrote a substantial piece—15 or 20 pages—essentially a critique of détente. I submitted it. This lady, with whom I later became very good friends, called me and said, "The Admiral would like to meet you." It turns out he liked it. We instantly became great friends on the grounds that I could write things for him.

I then wound up writing things for him on all kinds of subjects, including forestry and other things about which I knew nothing. We became very good friends. He more or less adopted me. We remained friends for years. Whenever an opportunity arose to do anything nice for a young person, he would do it for me. He nominated me for the Council on Foreign Relations. He got invited to the Chinese Embassy once for dinner and he got to take a few guests, so he called me and took me along. He was so nice and so paternal in his solicitude. It was extremely gratifying for me to have a guy as accomplished and as thoroughly *menschlich* to be a friend of mine. I was really happy about that. He introduced me to everybody that he could.

Richard Perle was similar: a major networker, a guy who knows everybody and was very happy to introduce me to his friends. Between the two of them I wound up meeting a whole group of people who in the late '70s were carrying forward the criticism of the détente policy and the [Jimmy] Carter administration's national security policies, and who believed that in many ways the Carter administration had taken a lot of the détente ideas and made them even worse.

Nixon and Kissinger were generally viewed as pursuing détente without illusion, but wrongheadedly, nevertheless. [Norman] Podhoretz spelled out very nicely their errors about the nature of the Soviet Union and the nature of the American people. They tended to have a very pessimistic—It was a kind of declinism that motivated the détente policies.

We viewed President Carter as not only wrongheaded about the Soviet Union but also naïve in a lot of respects. After the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, he said something like, "I learned more from the news last night than I learned in my whole life previously about the nature of the Soviet Union." I thought, *Gee, I wish we had a President who had a deeper understanding of the major issues of the day*.

Leading critics of détente, many of them Democrats—Jeane Kirkpatrick, Eugene Rostow, Admiral Zumwalt, and others—formed an organization called the Committee on the Present Danger. It was a significant voice in national security debates at the time.

Nelson: This is ’79?

Feith: I don’t remember exactly when. Before they actually formed the organization, they were working together. I remember talking with them, meeting with them, reading their stuff, and hearing about their meetings from Admiral Zumwalt or from Richard Perle or others.

Another thing I did that put me into this network: In the middle of the summer of 1976, I became an intern at the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, which was at the time headed by Fred Iklé. He was not a neocon; he was simply a traditional conservative, but he was an important thinker and later became important in my life. He was the director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency. His deputy was John Lehman, another traditional conservative, later Secretary of the Navy in the Reagan administration.

Other people who were there that summer when I was interning at the Arms Control Agency were Paul Wolfowitz, whom I met for the first time there and did a project for; Cary [Carnes] Lord; and a guy not in conservative circles but who later became significant in various ways, including my life, Bob Gallucci. It was an interesting summer. At the Arms Control Agency there were a lot of people that I wound up dealing with again, in government and out, in the decades following.

Many of those people became part of the Reagan campaign. One day in 1980 I got a call from Admiral Zumwalt. I had just begun practicing law as an associate at a law firm in Washington. Admiral Zumwalt said he was forming an independent expenditures committee for Reagan. He asked, “Would you be the general counsel of this?”

When Ronald Reagan got elected and started doing political appointments, his Office of Presidential Personnel gave credit to me as having helped the President get elected.

I was doing a lot of writing at the time. While all this was going on, one of the ways I worked with all these people whom I mentioned is that I would write articles and then would sometimes work with them. If I published an article on a subject, I would get invited to be on a panel sometimes with these much more distinguished grownups. I was in my 20s at the time. That’s how I thought of them.

In the course of that work, getting invited after writing an article to be on a think tank panel on something, I met Richard Allen. Richard Allen became the main foreign policy advisor to Reagan in his campaign and then became National Security Advisor. I served on the transition team for Reagan after Reagan got elected and wrote papers for the State Department transition book. While I was on the transition team, Richard Allen asked me, “What do you want to do in the administration?” I said, “I’d like to work for you.” He had already been named as National Security Advisor. He picked up a sheaf of papers that he had. “So I gathered.” He had in his hand letters about me from Richard Perle, Eugene Rostow, Admiral Zumwalt, and others. That’s the way Washington works. This has nothing to do with conservatives versus liberals. This is the way everybody works. That’s why I think it is an interesting story.

I got promoted by my friends, who were all friends of his. He had actually heard me give talks about energy security. I did a lot of work in the ’70s on the question of whether or not there is a Saudi oil weapon. I analyzed it essentially from a free market point of view. Richard Allen liked

that. I had published on it and gave a lot of interviews about it and he liked what I had to say about it. He wound up hiring me as a Middle East specialist on the NSC [National Security Council] staff, and my responsibilities were the Middle East and energy security.

Many people who had been liberals and Democrats, who had been Scoop Jackson advisors and supporters, or who had worked for [Daniel Patrick] Moynihan or for [Hubert H.] Humphrey became an important, if small, element of the Reagan administration.

That's when, in my recollection, the term "neocon" first got wide use and was highly useful. The sociology of the people who were the neocons was really distinct from the people who were the lifelong Republicans who supported Reagan. The neocons were disproportionately Jewish, but not exclusively Jewish. They included William Bennett, Father John Newhaus, and Jeane Kirkpatrick. These were people who read, and in some cases wrote for, *Commentary* magazine; whereas, a lot of the lifelong conservatives grew up on the *National Review.*

These neocons were people who retained a lot of liberal ideas about social policy, domestic policy, and also people who had zero connection with the isolationist and anti–civil rights elements of the traditional conservative community. Not that all traditional conservatives were either isolationists or racists, but there were those strains in the party and we were proud to have had nothing to do with them.

One of the neocons' main points was the importance of the moral dimension of public policy issues. They broke with the libertarians on emphasizing morality. They did not talk only about the utilitarian principle; they would talk right and wrong. Libertarians will tend to say things either work or they don't work. Even when you say things like, "What about prohibiting murder? Isn't that a moral issue?" they'll say, "No. No society can function if it doesn't prohibit murder. It has nothing to do with morality; it has to do with utility." Anyway, that approach wasn't the approach that the neocons took.

In foreign policy the neocons, as I have always understood it and explained it, stood for two major propositions that became major propositions of the Reagan administration. "Peace through strength," even though it was just a short slogan, had a lot of baggage. It represented not only a statement about the importance of military power but also skepticism about what diplomacy can accomplish. It is not antidiplomacy. You'd have to be a moron to be antidiplomacy. I'm not suggesting that anybody was against diplomacy.

But the argument that every international problem could be managed by diplomacy struck us as an overstatement. The people who tended to emphasize the limits of what you can accomplish with diplomacy when you're dealing with, for example, highly ideological, highly fanatical enemies, were applying the slogan of "peace through strength." In other words, you can't have peace with the Hitlers or even the Soviets or other highly ideological, revolutionary-type powers simply through diplomacy. The emphasis that diplomacy's effectiveness hinges on military capability was part of what was being reached by the idea of peace through strength.

The other main idea was that ideas matter. This was one of the major distinctions between the neoconservatives in the Reagan administration and the realpolitikers of the Nixon-Kissinger school. The so-called realist school tended to view the Cold War as a clash of great powers. They

would frequently refer to the Soviet Union as Russia, as a way of deemphasizing the ideological nature of the Soviet regime.

The neocons tended to see the Cold War as the clash of totalitarian communism with liberal democracy. The neocons believed that this moral component—democracy, human rights—is important in numerous ways, and Ronald Reagan understood all of the numerous ways in which it is important. It is important because for domestic purposes it helps explain to Americans why it is worth making an effort to defend the country. We're defending the country against something that is not as good as what we have. Liberal democracy is superior to totalitarian communism. We can feel proud of that and it is worth defending, it is worth investing in, it is worth risking for. That was an important element.

It was also important because it could be used to undermine our enemies. Reagan made that clear over and over again with very important statements about the coercive nature of the Soviet government, the fact that that coercion is unsustainable, that communism is going to wind up on "the ash heap of history." Reagan was terrific in using these Communist phrases. He would talk about their internal contradictions. He would talk about "the ash heap of history." These were all terrific coinages of the communists themselves. He would turn these things around on them. He understood.

Part of the reason that the neocons loved him and considered him a neocon was because he also had started his life as a political liberal and a union leader. He was absolutely in line with Senator Jackson on this, for example, in saying that we're not going to grant most-favored-nation trade status to the Soviet Union unless they let Soviet Jews emigrate. He understood what Jackson understood. Ronald Reagan put together a Cold War policy that was an explicit repudiation of the Nixon policy. He said we are not aiming at peaceful coexistence. We are not aiming at a relaxation of tension.

He was asked, "What's your strategy?" And he, in a rather famous remark, said, "Our strategy is very simple: We win, they lose." Of course, this was dismissed by all the geniuses as shallow and flip. It was flip. It wasn't his most elaborated statement, but it was not shallow. It was truly profound. He understood that he was breaking with past policy by saying that our strategy is victory, because as he made clear over and over again, even though all the leading experts of the day said it was foolish and unrealistic, he actually understood that there was a possibility of defeating the Soviet Union. He really believed that the Soviet Union was based on a concept of human nature that was false, that it could survive only through coercion, that the coercion was really unsustainable, and that the dynamism, creativity, prosperity that we had in the West would give us advantages that couldn't possibly be matched by the Soviet Union, given the nature of their system.

He actually believed that through pressuring them in every way possible—opposing the Soviet gas pipeline to Western Europe, limiting technology exports, tightening up on export controls, squeezing them on trade privileges, arming the mujahideen in Afghanistan against them, taking a tough line on them in arms control, refusing to give up missile defense, going forward with missile defense to negate their offensive strategic capabilities, developing the technology of missile defense, which would have been a very big burden for them to match—we could put their system under stress. And, very importantly, by hitting them politically in the world,

attacking them diplomatically, embarrassing them overshooting down the Korean airliner, and publicizing their arms control treaty violations, and publishing Soviet military power at the Pentagon year after year—We could embarrass them. We could expose them as hypocrites. We could undermine international support for them, pushing for the Europeans to deploy intermediate-range missiles. We could fight their nuclear freeze initiative. Hit them diplomatically, morally, economically, militarily in every way possible. He believed that could bring them down. He didn't believe that that was going to serve the interests of peaceful coexistence and relaxation of tensions; he believed exactly what he said: "We win, they lose."

He pursued a strategy based on the idea that winning was possible and that it was worth trying for and that he could manage the instability. That is the reason that history is even now beginning to look back on Ronald Reagan as having accomplished this astonishing strategic feat of utterly defeating one of the two most powerful countries in the history of the world, without war. You can't do better than that. That's like Sun Tzu times a thousand. This was a hell of a thing. It owed a lot to the contributions of various neoconservative thinkers, because Reagan's whole approach was absolutely in line with theirs. One could argue about chicken-and-egg issues: Did he get his ideas from them? Did they get their ideas from him? I don't think it matters. The point is they came together.

A final thought on this—There was a merging of neoconservative thought and other conservative thought in the Reagan administration. That, to a large extent, ended neoconservative thought as a separate phenomenon. The term neocon got revived at the beginning of the [George W.] Bush administration largely because people were interested in knowing whether George W. Bush was going to be drawing on Reaganite national security people for his administration or whether he was going to be drawing on the so-called "realist" school, people like his father [George H. W. Bush], Brent Scowcroft, James Baker, and others.

That was a major issue. Everybody wanted to know what kind of team George W. Bush was going to put together. People started using the term neocon initially to refer to the Reagan school as opposed to the Baker-Scowcroft school, but I believe the term rather quickly went through some transformations and basically got destroyed, especially after 9/11. One transformation—George W. Bush was very pro-Israel. The neocons, as I said, were disproportionately Jewish and tended to be very pro-Israel. The term started to be used accusatorily, in a bigoted way, to mean Jews who are supposedly supporting Israel at the expense of the United States, or who are interested in Israeli interests rather than American interests. So the term became nasty.

David Brooks was very funny in mocking that kind of bigotry in an article that he wrote early on when the term was beginning to be used that way. He said, "'Con' is short for 'conservative'; 'neo' is short for 'Jewish.'" That was one problem with the term.

Then the term started to be used just as a nasty epithet. In my view, it started to be used the way "fascist" is used. When people say So-and-So is a fascist, they're not saying that the person actually adheres to National Socialist ideology or belongs to the Nazi party; they're saying, "I don't like him, I'm going to smear him, I'm going to say he is a bad guy." Neocon got used that way. It started to be used in a way that was completely detached from either the philosophy behind it or the sociology behind it.

It started to be applied to people that the critics of the Bush administration didn't like. They started to use it about people for whom it was a preposterous term. They started to call Dick Cheney or Donald Rumsfeld neocons when there is nothing "neo" about them. If they're neocons, then who are the conservatives? My general advice, when I have talked about this at universities, is that the term neocon is worth understanding. It has its place in history. But it was totally ruined in the George W. Bush years, and basically shouldn't be used anymore in normal political discourse. It is not a useful label anymore because it means so many different things to different people, and it has this bigoted element to it. But if one is studying intellectual or political history, it is worth understanding where the term came from and what the phenomenon was. I think it was an important phenomenon in American history.

Nelson: Let me ask you a couple of specific questions: One is about the positive view that you developed of Ronald Reagan. Had you developed it by 1976, when he ran for the Republican nomination?

Feith: No.

Nelson: When did you become a Reagan admirer, and when did you become a Republican?

Feith: Probably in the course of the Reagan campaign.

Nelson: In '80?

Feith: I guess I admired Ronald Reagan because I had read things by him that were critical of the détente policy. I admired Ronald Reagan in '76. I certainly didn't like the [Gerald] Ford-Kissinger team. When Reagan led his insurgency in the Republican Party, to the extent I thought about it, my heart was with Reagan. But I think I still considered myself a Democrat in '76.

Perry: A Scoop Jackson Democrat.

Feith: Yes, a Scoop Jackson Democrat, a Bud Zumwalt Democrat. Admiral Zumwalt's nickname was Bud. After all, the testimony that I prepared for the platform committee was for the Democratic platform committee. There was still a substantial, if diminishing, group of people within the Democratic Party who were Jacksonites and skeptics on détente, and in favor of a strong defense. Seventy-six was in some ways their last hurrah. Then many of them went over to the Republican Party.

By the way, some of the people who supported Reagan didn't even go over to the Republican Party. They just supported Reagan and remained Democrats for a while. Finally, Reagan actually tweaked them. At one point he said, "I'd like you people to all register as Republicans," and I think many of them did at that point.

Nelson: What about you?

Feith: I don't recall, but I probably registered as a Republican in 1980.

Perry: Back in Philadelphia? Or were you living in Virginia?

Feith: That's what it was. That's why it is so vague in my mind, because I was living in Virginia and you don't register by party in Virginia.

Perry: Right.

Feith: I was thinking to myself, *How can I not remember that?* The answer is, I didn't have to register until I moved to Maryland in 1984 and then I registered as a Republican. I was for sure a registered Republican by 1984.

Nelson: Along the way—You describe yourself as growing up in a family and with peers who were basically all liberal Democrats. Then you go to college at Harvard and I'm guessing that liberal Democrat was kind of the right end of the spectrum for most of your peers there. When do your views change to the point where you're no longer agreeing on matters that are important to you with most of the people?

Feith: In college.

Nelson: So that would be about '72. The first year you were eligible to vote would have been in '72.

Feith: My relative conservatism became significant for me when I was a senior in college because I was a government major. My specialty was international relations. I was urged by many of my colleagues and teaching fellows and others to go on for a PhD in international relations. I was weighing, *Do I want to go to law school, or do I want to go for a PhD?*

A major element of my decision was, If I go for a PhD, I'm going to be dependent for my career on people who don't like my politics. I worked for Senator Jackson in the summer of '75. The summer before that I worked at the Foreign Policy Research Institute in Philadelphia, which had been founded at Penn [University of Pennsylvania] and then became independent. It was founded by Robert Strausz-Hupé. It was a relatively conservative organization. Strausz-Hupé was for sure a conservative.

When I told some faculty people at Harvard that I was going to work there, and then later when I told others that I was going to work for Senator Jackson, they used the term fascist to describe both FPRI [Foreign Policy Research Institute] and Senator Jackson. Now, Senator Jackson, as I said, had a 90 or 95 percent rating from the Americans for Democratic Action. Yet, there were people at Harvard who called him a fascist. In other words, the conservative wing of the Democratic Party was for them off the scale. I was really impressed by how closed-minded they were. I remember thinking to myself, *If these are the people who are going to be judging whether I get a job, I'm in trouble.*

Perry: Did you write a thesis?

Feith: Yes.

Perry: What was the topic?

Feith: The thesis was U.S.–West German relations. I had studied German.

Perry: Yes.

Feith: I got to the point where I could read periodicals in German. I did three case studies in the use of threats and pressure between allies in U.S.–West German relations.

Perry: Was Richard Pipes your thesis advisor?

Feith: I'm glad you raised that. Somehow, Wikipedia has connected me to Richard Pipes inaccurately. I think the world of Pipes, but I didn't actually take a course with him at Harvard. I did audit a course of his. I met him for the first time when we were both on the NSC staff. Somebody has said that he got me the job, but I didn't know him before that job.

What happened was just the wages of courtesy: When I went to Harvard to give a talk once and I wanted to say something nice about Harvard, I paid a tribute to Richard Pipes. Somebody seized on that and put into my Wikipedia page—I've heard it over and over again that Pipes was somehow—

Perry: He's viewed as your mentor, right?

Feith: He was not my mentor. As I said, I met him first when we were both on the NSC staff. He was very kind toward me. He has a son who is more or less my age who was also a Middle East guy, Daniel Pipes. He introduced me to his son, also.

Riley: Who did you write with?

Feith: Stanley Hoffman.

Riley: Interesting.

Feith: He did not like my views.

Riley: Why don't we take a break?

[BREAK]

Riley: OK, we're rolling here. We're going to pose a two-part question to you. Steve has the first part of it and I've got the second part. Steve?

Knott: You mentioned that you had served on the National Security Council and you dealt with Middle Eastern and energy-related issues. I'm curious, in light of later events—The whole Iran-Iraq War is occurring during this time.

Feith: Yes, it was right at the beginning. I only did Middle East and energy security on the NSC staff and then within a year I moved over to the Pentagon and there I was doing Cold War stuff, U.S.-Soviet issues, and multilateral arms control, and other miscellaneous things. Since I was the

only lawyer who was a Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense under Richard Perle, when legal issues would come up—UN [United Nations]-related, law of war, and the like—they fell to me.

Knott: So no particular recollections or dealings with any issues related to Iran or Iraq?

Feith: The one Iraq issue that I did work on was when the Israelis in June of '81 bombed the Osirak nuclear reactor in Iraq. I remember getting the cable that came in from Ambassador Sam Lewis, our Ambassador in Israel, explaining the background. He said, "This is a brand-new administration, so there is no reason that anybody at the top of the administration is going to know that this did not come out of the blue, that we actually spent several years working with the Israelis on this problem of the Europeans assisting the Iraqis with their nuclear capabilities. The Israelis were asking for assistance, assistance, assistance, from us to deal with this. It was only after years of fruitless activity by us that the Israelis finally decided to strike the reactor."

Sam Lewis gave this background, specifically saying, "I know that you guys have no reason to know this, because you weren't in the government. Yet it is an important part of the background." So when he sent that cable, I did the summary memo for the President on that attack. I don't recall doing much on Iran-Iraq issues in the relatively short time I was on the NSC staff.

Knott: Thank you.

Riley: One of the things that we've already talked about is something that has been very helpful, and that is the evolution of neoconservatism, which is the piece that you said you'd included in your book. That's a very important piece of the puzzle.

I want to ask you another very big-picture question. It bridges from what you were talking about with respect to Reagan's ability to see ahead and to project, to contemplate the end of the Soviet Union when many people did not. I guess I have a two-part question: First, can you talk a bit about the dissent within the conservative community, whether neocon or not, about Reagan's moving ahead with [Mikhail] Gorbachev at a time—This tends to be a little bit forgotten now. Sure, Reagan deserves credit, maybe even more credit than some people would be willing to give him, because there was some foot-dragging, at least intellectual foot-dragging, on the part of some conservatives.

The second part is a much broader question: Can you help us understand what it was like once the Cold War ended, and how this industry of people who devoted their lives to thinking about—

Feith: They were "missing their enemy"?

Riley: Exactly. What is the identity crisis that comes after that, and how is it resolved? These same networks of people, are they sort of wandering around shell-shocked over this? What is the next enemy? How do things coalesce after this?

Feith: Those are terrific questions and I'm very happy that you raised the first one. When I sent my oldest son the lecture I gave on neoconservatism, he said, "You haven't talked about the fact that Ronald Reagan did these détentist things in negotiating with the Soviets." He got the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty. The idea that he completely repudiated the Nixon

policy can be countered by noting that he took these elements and incorporated them. Some people would even argue that the arms control process was somehow an important part of bringing down the Soviet Union. But I don't think that's correct.

One of the main lessons that anybody who studies government should absorb is that there is a difference between philosophy and statesmanship. There is nothing pure about statesmanship. There is not that much pure about philosophy, either, but at least theoretically philosophy can be pure. Nothing is pure when you're a practical politician in a democracy.

I have described part of the thinking of the Reagan administration that was instrumental in the success against the Soviet Union, but I didn't comprehensively describe what Ronald Reagan had to do as President. It was not always in line with these ideas that I talked about. Politics, especially in a democracy, is not about purity. It is about a lot of practical considerations, including considerations that compel political leaders to do things that they don't necessarily have their hearts in but are, for one reason or another, required to do. Or they allow them to happen because it takes too much energy to stop them.

I think I fairly represented Ronald Reagan's key thoughts on the Soviet Union when I talked about his view that they had a policy based on wrong ideas and coercion, and the coercion was unsustainable, and they were vulnerable, and all the rest of that. All of that is accurate. Now, at the same time, Ronald Reagan was a practical politician. He lived within the art of the possible. Another very important point that applies throughout American history is that the President doesn't actually control the whole government. There are all kinds of wheels turning, not as an expression of the will of the President, but because the government is a big bureaucracy and wheels turn. In many cases it takes an enormous effort to stop the wheels from turning, and from the President's point of view, it may be worthwhile to let them spin even if the President doesn't consider them enormously important.

The momentum of the arms control "industry" in America was such that there was no such thing as not doing arms control with the Soviet Union during the Cold War. But people like myself were very skeptical about the arms control process and believed that at best it did very little good, and in many cases it did harm. In any event, it was far less important than the champions of arms control thought it was. The whole thing was a sideshow, in my view, that could do harm, and every once in a while, as in the case of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, could do some good—maybe even a lot of good in that one particular case.

Though in general arms control was not an enormously important or positive exercise, it had enormous support in the country, even among conservatives. There were a lot of people who believed that arms control was enormously important. There were many people who said things like, "The fate of the earth hinges on arms control." Given that, even if Ronald Reagan basically shared the view that it is not that big a deal, the political costs of opposing negotiations would have been not worth it. So he had negotiations.

Arms control was what I worked on when I was at the Pentagon in the Reagan administration. The main thing that I worked on were various multilateral arms control efforts. One of the main things that we tried to do was to make sure that the negotiations didn't do harm. We used to jokingly refer to it as "arms control control."

Nelson: You're doing this in the midst of the nuclear freeze movement?

Feith: Right.

Nelson: Which was more than a street movement. It was a serious movement in Congress.

Feith: Absolutely. And the nuclear freeze movement could have done a lot of harm. Heading it off required doing various negotiations. Interestingly enough, the negotiation that basically knocked the pins out from under the nuclear freeze movement did some good. That was the intermediate-range nuclear forces negotiations. It did good partly because Reagan did something extremely radical that flew in the face of the advice of almost all the arms control experts, who ridiculed him like crazy for this.

He didn't do the typical arms control exercise of trying to get levels of U.S. and Soviet weaponry roughly in balance. It struck us as ridiculous to think of great-power military balances as something that you could stabilize by freezing in place. Intellectually it makes very little sense at all. In this particular case, Reagan said, instead of a freeze, we will eliminate the entire class of weapons. We'll go to zero. This is on intermediate-range nuclear forces.

The Soviets had already deployed these weapons in Europe. The United States and its NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] allies were talking about countering that. The Soviets brilliantly called for a freeze, which would have frozen in place their advantage. We got the NATO allies to say we would do a counterdeployment. Some people then proposed renouncing the counterdeployment to achieve an agreement to limit the size of the Soviet intermediate-range missile force.

Ronald Reagan, largely on the basis of work by Richard Perle and Fred Iklé promoted by Secretary [Caspar] Weinberger, came up with the idea of the zero option, a genius slogan and concept. Basically it was like an intellectual jujitsu move against the arms control community, because how do you argue against zero? It took the pro–arms control frame of mind and turned it around.

As soon as Reagan proposed it, almost everybody who considered himself a friend of arms control attacked the zero option on the grounds that it was so confrontational or disadvantageous for the Soviets that it would never be accepted. Critics said it was put forward as a poison pill. But it wasn't.

The thinking behind it was, *If we're going to constrain intermediate-range missiles, let's at least do it in a way that makes some sense*. Let's zero them out on both sides. That at least produces the benefit of making the deployed Soviet weapons go away. And—this was a crucial part of it—no limit on intermediate-range nuclear forces could confidently be verified by the United States, because you couldn't know exactly what the numbers were. But if you went to zero, that was relatively verifiable.

So it not only benefited the United States by getting rid of their missiles but it actually was something that you could have reasonable confidence would be implemented. It was brilliant. Ronald Reagan put it forward. As I said, almost every expert who considered himself or herself pro–arms control said that it was as stupid and unrealistic and ignorant as Reagan's

characterization of the Soviet Union as an evil empire. Lo and behold, however, the Soviet government agreed to the zero option. That was a good result.

Does that mean that Reagan really believed that arms control was of great importance? I don't think so. Arms control was part and parcel of the détente approach: relaxation of tension, peaceful coexistence, stabilize the relationship. It was not a key element of what I think was the essence of Reagan's strategy, which aimed at victory not stability. One of the main Soviet offensives was to try to break up NATO by putting a wedge between the United States and its European allies over this intermediate-range nuclear forces issue. That's why the nuclear freeze movement was so significant. It was a serious threat to the alliance. People forget now, but something like half a million people showed up in Central Park in a nuclear freeze demonstration. This was a really big deal. The Catholic bishops came out in favor of the nuclear freeze. This was a serious political problem for the Reagan administration on the philosophical level. It needed to be countered.

One of the ways the administration responded was doing this arms control work. It wasn't that the arms control work was done cynically; it *wasn't*. We didn't consider it enormously important, but our view was if you had to do it, at least do it in a way that makes some sense.

But I do not believe that any of that was of the essence in Reagan's strategy for dealing with the Soviet Union, because the essence was the pressure on all fronts: military, diplomatic, economic, and philosophical. What ultimately brought the Soviet Union down was that pressure, the undermining of the confidence of the Soviet leadership that it could compete, all the emphasis on freedom, and Ronald Reagan's emphasis on how freedom relates to our prosperity—that our political liberty relates to our innovativeness and our science and our prosperity. Ultimately Gorbachev was persuaded of that. I'm not saying that he was persuaded by Reagan, but Reagan said it and Gorbachev wound up believing it, for whatever reason.

That was a crucial element, according to Gorbachev's own testimony, of Gorbachev's adopting the *glasnost* and *perestroika* policies, the openness and reconstruction policies, that wound up bringing the Soviet Union down and causing the collapse of the leadership. Part of the reason he went to that experiment was he believed he was under such pressure on all these fronts that the only way to compete technologically and economically was to liberalize.

Riley: Let me press you just a little bit on this to refine the question. Reagan was, by my reading, ahead of the curve in terms of his sense about whether Gorbachev was for real, and whether *perestroika* and *glasnost* and other things were for real. There was a sense that, at least from my reading, and I may be wrong—That's why I'm posing the question to you. There were some American conservatives who thought the old man was getting dotty and was being taken in, that this really wasn't—

Feith: I understand your point. What I would say is this: When the Reagan administration was doing arms control, there were intense debates and interagency quarrels over what to do. If I were to list the two or three major themes of everything that I'm saying to you and everything that I learned in my experience in the government, I would say that one of them is this point that, contrary to widespread view, the President doesn't control much in the government. There are very few people in the government who actually work for the President in any meaningful sense.

There are major bureaucracies of the government who have their own views on what to do, and they will indulge those views no matter who the President is. You had that with Ronald Reagan. You have had that with all Presidents since, and we'll get to that in the George W. Bush administration. As you know, that is one of the major themes of my book. It is extremely important for people to understand, because otherwise you can't understand American policy.

The people who carried out the détente policy for President Nixon included professionals in the State Department, the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency], and in the military and civilian parts of the Pentagon; many of those people were there when Ronald Reagan was President. Many did that work because they believed in it, and they ascribed much more importance to it than Reagan did, or than we Reagan political appointees did.

There were people in the government very skeptical of things Reagan wanted to do. It was a bloody battle within the administration to get the zero option adopted. The Pentagon had to fight the State Department tooth and nail to get the zero option adopted. That was true in other arms controls areas, also, so part of what you see in the Reagan years that looks inconsistent with Reagan's views *is* inconsistent with Reagan's views. It is basically the bureaucracy indulging its own views, at odds with the President, and the President deciding for one reason or another that he is not going to insist on doing things a hundred percent his way.

The political judgments that Presidents make about how much they compromise and what kinds of bones they toss to different parts of the bureaucracy to get them to quiet down: those are crucial political decisions that Presidents make. Often when they toss these bones it causes problems because they're creating inconsistencies. Sometimes the inconsistencies don't matter and sometimes they do. There were people in the American government who really believed that you could do business with Gorbachev in the sense that you're talking about, that Gorbachev was a sincere guy and that we could somehow do a deal with him. I don't believe that that was a significant thought for Ronald Reagan.

I'm not saying he didn't have that thought at all. Gorbachev was clearly a new type of Soviet leader and you could do things with him that you couldn't do with other Soviet leaders, and he was open to things that other Soviet leaders weren't open to. All of that I grant. But I don't think any of that caused Reagan to abandon his strategic idea that our goal is not to do business with these people; it is to defeat them. Reagan still favored doing everything that we could do to defeat them.

Along the way, we might want to do business with them if we can. That's fine too. You're not necessarily looking to antagonize them and cause war. If you need to manage the relationship on the way to victory—fine. But I don't think it was Reagan's view that what was really important was that we finally had a guy who led the totalitarian Communist government of the Soviet Union with whom we could do business.

Riley: Sure.

Feith: That's not in any way to diminish how significant it was that we had a new type of Soviet leader. I think the emphasis is important. There are books out there that basically describe Ronald Reagan almost as a détentist, for example, George Shultz's memoirs, which kind of make

Reagan out to be a Shultzite. I had a different view at the time and I have a different view in retrospect. I just don't think that is the case. I think Reagan had a strategic concept that he retained, even though Gorbachev was clearly an extraordinary character. I don't think Reagan ever lost the basic view that our goal should be that they go away, that we can bring the regime down.

Nelson: What, if anything, happened during your time in the Reagan administration that sort of laid a predicate for your becoming part of the George W. Bush administration? People you developed relationships with, or whatever it may be.

Feith: In a word, *everything*. Everything I did taught me things and put me in touch with people. That's the way Washington works, in the Reagan administration and in the [Barack H.] Obama administration. The people who are senior people in the Obama administration were somewhat less senior people in the [William J.] Clinton administration, and some of them were less senior people in the Carter administration. That's Washington.

It turns out that the pool of people that you can draw on for senior positions is fairly small, because in general you want to have people in senior positions who have been in previous administrations and have had some government experience, and have had some management experience. Even though there are different schools of thought within each party, once a Democratic or Republican administration comes in, those schools of thought become somewhat less important.

The new President comes in and brings some of his own people in, but the bureaucracy is vast and you've got to fill a lot of political appointee positions. You wind up having to tap the former officials. Even though those people may not be completely aligned with the President politically, they're the only people in his party who have the experience that would justify giving them an Assistant Secretary–level job or an Under Secretary–level job.

Nelson: Anything in particular? That you got to know this one, and developed a respectful relationship, or developed expertise in particular?

Feith: I didn't have a lot of contact with Paul Wolfowitz in the Reagan administration. In fact, I had had more contact with him when I worked as a summer student in 1976 at the Arms Control Agency. But that connection became important. When Paul became Deputy Secretary of Defense in the Bush administration—I think he was one of the important voices in favor of my becoming Under Secretary.

The work that I did for Richard Perle and Fred Iklé at the Pentagon was, they said, very highly valued by them, and they became champions for me with Rumsfeld. I did not know Rumsfeld before I interviewed with him for the job in 2001. The people who promoted me were people who had worked with me in the Reagan administration who knew Rumsfeld quite well, and who said that I am a good guy and he should give me a look. That turned out to be especially important when I had that first interview with Rumsfeld, which I recount in my book, that went so poorly.

I immediately told my friends, "The interview went terribly." They rallied and sent notes and made phone calls to Rumsfeld and said, "We heard that the interview went terribly, but you've

got to give this guy another look." He said OK, and gave me a second interview that went swimmingly and he said he wanted to hire me after that.

Before the bad first interview, I had gotten some bad advice about the importance of very short answers. I was so short in my answers that Rumsfeld actually came away from the interview saying, "He doesn't seem to be forceful enough to be able to represent us in interagency deliberations." I generally don't come across as being meek and quiet. Anyway, I gave a complete misimpression of myself the first time around, but when I relaxed for the second interview, Rumsfeld said, "That's fine."

Riley: I want to drag you back to that second global question that I posed. Was there a conservative foreign policy community identity crisis when the Cold War ended?

Feith: I would argue that that's when the term détente really became apt. There was a relaxation of tension. [*laughter*] As I understand it, the literal meaning of détente is when, with a bow and arrow, the bowstring is pulled and released to shoot the arrow. The release is called détente. In a certain sense, when the Cold War ended, that's what happened. You got that relaxation of tension because we won and it was terrific to realize that, without war, the Soviet Union no longer existed. There was a great sense of gratification for those of us who had said this could be done and had worked to make it happen. We were not among the numerous people who said it was naïve to call the Soviet Union an evil empire or to confront it. We hadn't believed that the key to world peace was arms control rather than victory. We were on the right side of that debate; our opponents were on the wrong side. We felt a lot of gratification.

The notion that we were then looking around for an enemy is really not serious. We were not involved in this debate because we were spoiling for a fight and were happy that we found somebody to fight with. We believed in fighting the Cold War because we valued a decent society that can provide fairness and prosperity and good treatment and freedom of conscience to people. The reason we opposed the Soviet Union was not that we were looking for an enemy; it was because they were the enemy of all that kind of decent society.

The West had lived through the 20th century as a civilization knowing there are enemies of our civilization and you have to take them seriously because they will ruin a lot of people's lives if you let them grow unchecked. When the Cold War was over we were deeply gratified. This was a big victory. We understood its significance. We were actually quite frustrated that the President who presided over the ultimate collapse of the Soviet Union, President George H. W. Bush, never gave the speech that we all knew Ronald Reagan would have given, explaining the significance of what had happened when the Soviet Union brought the curtain down on itself. It was a great frustration for us that the bully pulpit was not used to explain to the American people and the world what the triumph of liberal democracy over totalitarian communism really meant, and what lessons should be drawn from it.

Knott: You never bought the argument that it was the better part of valor not to rub it in? Baker and Bush argued that these people are on the ropes now and—

Feith: A speech that "rubbed it in" could have done harm. But that wasn't the only way to talk about the West's victory in the Cold War. You could have done it in an elegant proper way that

paid proper tribute to the Russian people and talked about the flaws of the Soviet system. One could have done it correctly without being boorish, arrogant, and ridiculously self-congratulatory. It would have required statesmanship. And also a strategic view. If you give a speech like that, you have a lot of audiences. You're not just doing an end-zone dance. You're doing something of real significance that a lot of people are going to be watching, and it should serve the broader purposes that the whole Cold War was designed to serve. It could have been done right and it wasn't done. That was a frustration.

In general, the Reagan national security team was not of the view that there was going to be an enormous peace dividend. One of the things we worried about was the problem of letting down one's guard after a victory. One view of American history that some of us had was that we had dropped our guard after other victories and it caused problems and helped bring on additional wars. We didn't like all the enthusiastic talk about peace dividends. But I don't know anybody who was saying, "Well, now that we've lost that enemy, we've got to go find another enemy."

Riley: I appreciate your saying that, because it is important for that kind of direct comment to be made. I used to joke that you could tell who were the Soviet scholars on a college campus in 1989 and '90; they were the ones wandering around with this harried look on their faces because they had just lost 25 years of research and notes.

Feith: Yes.

Riley: Because the world was different. I guess the question for you is the corollary of that within the policy-making communities. What kind of readjustment or reassessment is going on at the time among people who have devoted lifetimes to minute components of this, when you get to nuclear arms? And in other instances very broad strategy questions that don't seem to be relevant anymore.

Feith: It's a good question, in part because it helps explain the persistent attachment to various arms control ideas, long after they ceased to be relevant. Some of us didn't think they were enormously important even during the Cold War, but boy, did they become unimportant afterward. Yet you had people who were fanatically attached to some of these ideas, including the opposition to missile defense, which was in many ways a vestige of the Cold War.

Riley: But missile defense itself was not a vestige of the Cold War.

Feith: Opposition to missile defense was the reason we gave up missile defense and signed the ABM [Anti-Ballistic Missile] Treaty, because of Cold War concepts about the architecture of the relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union, and the need for "mutual assured destruction." After the Soviet Union went away, many of the leading opponents of missile defense retained their opposition, even though the entire foundation for their argument had gone away.

People who are intensely invested in certain ideas will frequently find ways to carry those ideas forward even when circumstances change. In some ways, that's almost the definition of an ideologue, somebody who sticks to his preconceptions and his theories even when the world unfolds in ways inconsistent with those theories. Instead of taking the scholarly or scientific approach of changing your preconception or changing your hypothesis to suit the world as it

actually unfolds, you simply ignore the facts that run against your thinking and you hold on to your preconceptions. That kind of thing happens all across the political spectrum.

Riley: Sure.

Feith: Speaking for myself and for the more thoughtful people that I worked with in the Reagan administration, when the Cold War ended we were not looking for enemies; we didn't carry forward Cold War thinking. I had invested a large amount of time in the arms control field, but I was perfectly happy to say, "That's historical."

Riley: That's obsolete.

Feith: Now it turns out it is still around. It is still a phenomenon and people still are passionately attached to it. So it remains part of our life. In part it is because people were so invested in it that they wanted to preserve the industry. It is a little bit like people championing the buggy whip industry well after the automobile comes onto the roads.

This idea that the so-called hardliners in the Cold War were itching for a fight and therefore looking for new enemies when the Soviet Union went away: it appeals to people who don't like the Cold Warriors, but I don't think it's valid. I don't think there is historical support for it. It is certainly not my experience and it certainly wasn't the way *I* thought.

Riley: Just one quick follow-up. It is more about the intellectual adjustment for people for whom the main career focus has been U.S.-Soviet relations. Is there a process of retooling? Or are the broad concepts you were using in the earlier era still applicable in a world that has dramatically changed? Some of this is the old question about area studies. Can you generalize from that?

Feith: The answer is: there's some. There are some things that can be generalized. Others were quite particular to the U.S.-Soviet relationship. Certainly some of the arcana in the arms control field have very little application to a world where you don't have the balance of terror that existed during the Cold War. But even in that area, the whole question of limiting arms as a way of stabilizing relationships remains popular in some circles.

Consider peace negotiations—How does one achieve peace? There is a school of thought that says peace between life-and-death entities is achieved through negotiation, even though there are very few examples in history to support that idea. If you went to the average, reasonably educated person, he would tell you that that peace is achieved through negotiation. That idea was at the core of people's minds during the Cold War.

Some ideas about how to deal with a major power like the Soviet Union influence thinking about China. But when thoughtful people look at U.S. relations with China, what jumps at them are the distinctions rather than the similarities with the Soviet Union. That's certainly true in my case. When I look at China and see the issue of how one cultivates a relationship with China, versus how we dealt with our relationship with the Soviet Union, the main thing that strikes me is how different the problem is. That doesn't mean you wouldn't try to learn from the Soviet-U.S. experience.

When you talk about area studies, there is no question that the smartest people with linguistic

talents in the ’50s were studying Russian and now they’re not. People who invested deeply in Russian history and Soviet studies did find that the field shrank when the Cold War ended. That’s true. Those people have to retool. There are always going to be some people who are area experts interested in Russian and Soviet history and that’s fine. But it is not going to be the kind of growth field that it was in the 1950s. It doesn’t have a black-and-white answer. There is some relevance, some generalization you can do, but some of the stuff is outmoded.

Nelson: Given what you said earlier about the talent pool for a new administration being smaller than one might think, I’ll ask this in a blunt way: Why weren’t you part of the first Bush administration?

Feith: Having just gotten out in ’86, I started a law firm. I knew President George H. W. Bush a little bit, having worked with him in the Reagan administration. I was responsible for the chemical weapons negotiations and he was very interested in that.

Riley: He cast the tie-breaking vote.

Feith: He had to vote in the Senate as Vice President on the modernization of the U.S. chemical arsenal. He rather remarkably gave some kind of press interview where he said that his mother called him and berated him for that vote and that, in part to satisfy her, he was committing himself to chemical weapons arms control.

We wound up having a debate within the administration on chemical weapons arms control. The State Department generally argued that the way to make progress in an arms control negotiation in the view of some people is to find out what the other guy wants and give it to him. That was not the way we analyzed these things at the Pentagon. Yet we knew that, as the saying goes, “You can’t beat something with nothing.” So when the State Department came in with what they called an initiative, which was basically a retreat on the issue of verification, we needed to say more than “no.” We came up with an alternate initiative.

It was a bold, “anywhere, anytime” inspection regime. One of the biggest problems with the chemical weapon ban is that it is not verifiable in any meaningful sense. So we tried to at least tackle this by saying we would do inspection anywhere, anytime. This was controversial within the U.S. government because some of our own military and intelligence people were unwilling to accept anywhere, anytime inspections of U.S. facilities. We said to the President, “If we’re not willing to tolerate it, then don’t ask for it. But if you’re not going to ask for it, then don’t fool yourself into thinking that you can have a verifiable chemical weapons ban. Then you have to ask yourself, do you want a chemical weapons ban that the United States will adhere to, and the Soviets can cheat without detection? Mr. President, over to you.”

When we were dealing with Ronald Reagan, we found that time after time he came to what we considered to be the right answer on questions of that kind. He did so after debates that lasted months. Anyway, in the course of the chemical weapons arms control debate, I got to know President Bush.

When the Defense Department prevailed in this debate, I was the one who accompanied Vice President Bush to Geneva to present this. I got to know him somewhat. I later decided I wasn’t interested in working for him. I had also just started my law firm, so I was perfectly happy to

stay out of the Bush-Senior administration.

Nelson: Because you thought his—?

Feith: He got rid of virtually everybody in the national security field who worked for Ronald Reagan. Among people who worked for President Reagan, it was commonly said that there was a more thorough purge from Reagan to Bush than there was from Carter to Reagan.

Riley: It would help me in something I'm writing if you would let me go on the record with that observation.

Feith: Go right ahead. I can only think of one or two people at the Assistant Secretary level or higher in the national security field who kept their jobs from the Reagan to the Bush administration.

Riley: We've actually heard that, as Steve will confirm.

Knott: It was actually pretty ugly. It's open now. We had some Reagan folks say that even in the handling of the inauguration they were dissed, given poor seats if any seats, and not even told—

Feith: This turns out to have some significance for the George W. Bush period also, and we can get to this, obviously in greater detail, whenever you want to.

The Reagan administration in the national security area was characterized by very intense debates on virtually every issue between the State Department and the Pentagon. We used to say that George Shultz and Caspar Weinberger did not agree on the time of day. I think highly of George Shultz in a lot of respects, but I have to tell you that when I read his book I didn't recognize a lot of what he was talking about. It is just a completely different perception, a different angle on the Reagan administration. So be it. The point is that there were intense debates about everything.

The Reagan administration managed the debates by using the NSC staff. The National Security Advisor changed often, but in the area that I worked in, you had very strong staffers. Sven Kraemer used to put together excellent memos for the President if we had a policy fight that couldn't be resolved at the Assistant Secretary level or even at the Under Secretary level. There was no Principals Committee in the Reagan administration. I never heard of a Principals Committee until the Clinton administration, I don't believe. In other words, if the principals met, they met with the President, and then it was an NSC meeting. The Cabinet officials didn't meet without the President.

Nelson: We should talk about that this afternoon.

Feith: Dean Acheson warned [Harry S.] Truman against ever having his Cabinet officers meet without him. Now we consider it a regular thing to have these principals meetings, but it was very controversial. With Reagan there were NSC meetings, and the main body of interagency debate was the IG, the interagency group. Then there was a thing called the SIG, the senior interagency group, which was Under Secretaries, which I didn't hear that much about. I assume they met every once in a while, but a lot of the policy work was done at the Assistant Secretary

level. There were bitter debates very often on these arms control issues.

The NSC staff would do a memo for the President if a question didn't get resolved at the IG [Interdepartmental Group] or SIG level. It would say, "Mr. President, the State Department position is this. The Defense Department position is that." It might say that there is another way to think about it, or that some other agency has a view. Then it would say, "How do you want to decide?" It would be, "You can go with A, you can go with B, or you could go with 'other.'" Then we'd get a memo back, the President having signed it, saying B or A. That's it. It would be decided. That wasn't the practice in the Bush administration. It was a completely different approach, which we could talk about later.

Riley: That's 43?

Feith: Bush 43. You never got resolution. The reason I raise this is I understand that George H. W. Bush as Vice President was disapproving of this constant bickering as he saw it between the departments. That's part of the reason for the purge. He was intent on getting rid of all these disputatious people. Now it happens to be that the people that you're getting rid of from the Pentagon are political appointees. You can't get rid of the people in the State Department who are career people. So the people who got purged were the Reaganites. George H. W. Bush, in putting his administration together, was intent on not having those types of quarrels about everything.

He wound up having a Secretary of State, James Baker, who was dominant in a way that nobody was in the Reagan administration, other than the President. Baker's way of looking at things harmonized very nicely with the National Security Advisor. Scowcroft and Baker were in tune with each other. The Pentagon did not have the kind of role in national security policy making in general in the Bush-Senior administration that it had in the Reagan administration or later in the George W. Bush administration.

Nelson: Let me ask you this before we break for lunch: When you left government in 1986, did you leave with any thought of, *If I ever come back, I want to make sure of this, that, or the other*? Were there things you learned about how government worked from your first spell that caused you to think, *It's going to be different next time, because I've learned from experience*?

Feith: There were two things that I can think of that I would put in the category that you just labeled: One is—and I talk about this in my book—I came into the Reagan administration with an extremely combative frame of mind and operated at first in a way that was combative and not effective. I had a bad attitude toward the people that I didn't agree with. I saw it rather quickly because it hurt me immediately. I quickly saw that people about whom I had had a bad attitude were outmaneuvering me, were excluding me from meetings, were making me ineffective. I said to myself, *How vain is it to feel superior to people who are besting me time and time and time again?* It's like you get the slap and you say, "Thanks, I needed that."

I concluded that I was focused on the wrong thing. You can focus on the fact that you disagree with these people; that's one thing. Or you can focus on how experienced, how skillful, how determined, how otherwise impressive these people are despite the fact that you disagree with them. I said to myself, *You need an attitude adjustment,* and I did in fact adjust my attitude. I still

feel very strongly about the substance of these things. I'm perfectly happy to debate them. I remain combative in a certain way, but I became much more respectful of colleagues and came to appreciate that they were besting me because they had skills that deserved respect. One thing I learned was that.

I had a second thought I wanted to use to answer your question—a thought coming out of my Pentagon experience. I was dealing with arms control as Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense. The arena for the work was largely the interagency debates about the conventional force reduction talks, the chemical weapons talks, biological weapons talks, the confidence-building measure talks in Stockholm that we had. I worked on all this multilateral arms control.

We would go to interagency meetings and it frequently was the case that the State Department would propose some initiative to move things forward, which was basically giving up some U.S. demand. We would argue against, and say that giving it up creates dangers. The representatives from the OJCS [Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff], which later came to be called the Joint Staff, would often align with the State Department. The military often sided with the State Department on arms control issues.

Why was that? A number of us thought that the military leadership was mainly focused on budget issues and its relations with Capitol Hill. Arms control was popular on Capitol Hill. It was much more important to them to maintain their political base on Capitol Hill for their own service-related, budget-related reasons than it was to fight these rather arcane debates about arms control. If they had aligned with us on arms control, then when they went to the Hill, instead of having a love-fest and talking about their budgets, they'd be asked, "Why are you enemies of peace, or enemies of diplomacy?" It was that kind of thing.

In any event, we found ourselves at odds with the OJCS representatives at these interagency meetings. I said, "This is really hurting us." State officials would say, "For diplomatic reasons, we need to do this." We would say, "For defense-related reasons, you shouldn't do this." The military would then say, "From our point of view, it's fine." Then other people around the table would say, "If it is fine with the military and it is fine with the diplomats, what interests are you representing?" It really undercut us.

This was not a good thing, so I befriended and made a major effort to work with my counterpart in the Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. There was a one-star general and a two-star general who were responsible for the relevant arms control issues. I went out of my way to meet with them and talk with them and try to harmonize our positions.

A Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense has the protocol rank of a two-star general. I was 30 or 31 at the time and these guys were probably close to 50. That was a problem. The protocol rank thing made me feel odd because I knew that these were much more experienced people. Anyway, you had to do what you had to do.

I would meet with them, and say, "We're going into this talk, or that arms control negotiation, and our view of what we should do is X." Initially they would say, "Well, we're working up a view." I would say, "What is it?" They would say, "We have to draft it, put it through channels, and get the Chiefs to approve it." When the Chiefs approve a position, they red-stripe it. That

means it's blessed.

Riley: Does it get a literal red stripe?

Feith: I assume. So the Chiefs would red-stripe the position. The members of their staff said, "When it is red-striped, we can share it with you." But when it got red-striped and shared with us, we would say, "Look, we could go along with that if you only tweaked it this way"; they'd say, "We can't touch it; it's red-striped."

Then we would do a memo for the Secretary of Defense, who is, after all, the father of us all in the Pentagon. We would say, "OSD [Office of the Secretary of Defense] wants to do this, but the Chiefs want to do something else." You would have train wrecks on issue after issue, right in the Secretary's office. I thought, *Boy, this is not a good way to do business.* Weinberger was generally in favor of what the Iklé-Perle team was doing. But on every issue you'd get a train wreck, OSD memos and OJCS memos crashing into each other in the Secretary's office.

Intra-DoD [Department of Defense] fights hurt our effectiveness in interagency meetings. Ultimately my office tended to win with the President, but it still was bad to have this phenomenon of DoD at odds with itself in meeting after meeting. So I talked with my OJCS counterparts and found out that they thought the whole OSD process was opaque. I started coming to these counterparts and saying, "Here is a draft of the memo we're going to send up to the Secretary on this subject." The general's eyes would get wide because this was valuable information for the Chiefs. He could take this memo to his superior and say, "I know what OSD is going to be proposing to the Secretary." I said, "Fine, we should make this whole thing transparent. We're all representing the same department." So I did that, over and over again until I started to get drafts in return, before they got red-striped.

Nelson: Which meant you had to do your homework early.

Feith: Yes, sure. That was not a problem. We were much more nimble. The civilians can do things really fast. We just didn't have as many procedures.

Nelson: Right.

Feith: It got to the point where I developed really good relations with my counterparts. We worked together, we shared drafts, and when I left the Pentagon in '86 I was really happy with how, over several years, we were able to influence the thinking of the OJCS people before it got carved in marble with a red stripe.

When I left the Reagan administration, I remember thinking, *If I ever come back to the Pentagon, I'm going to remember how to bridge the gap between OSD and OJCS.* And that became one of my major projects as Under Secretary. I worked closely with General [Peter] Pace. I met with him and shared drafts. We never had a train crash.

Nelson: Within the Pentagon.

Feith: Within the Pentagon. There were times, rarely, when we disagreed, but it wasn't a train crash. We would agree on how to formulate the issue. We agreed on how to present it to the

Secretary. We'd go in in the friendliest way and say, "We have a different view on this thing. How do you want to handle it?" But there was never a train crash, never a surprise, and we were almost always aligned. It wasn't because we were compromising the independence of either the civilian or the military side. We worked together.

Every piece of paper we produced, we shared instantaneously. We made a point of showing everybody up and down the chain how to share papers. I stressed to my staff: The military is not *them*.

Nelson: You were open source before open source.

Feith: That was a really big deal. It resulted from my Reagan administration experience.

Riley: Let's stop and have some lunch. We're making good headway. I think we're right where we need to be.

[BREAK]

Riley: I want to ask one additional question about the 41st Presidency as a bridge in. You make reference in your book—I can't find the direct citation. It's in my notes here someplace. You referred to a government study that indicated that Saddam[Hussein]'s reading of the way the First Gulf War had ended had been an influential piece of how he responded to U.S. pressure thereafter. Do you recall having any reaction? I guess the more direct way of phrasing is, were you opposed to the administration's decision not to go into Iraq in 1991?

Feith: I guess I don't have the clearest recollection. I had a sense after Desert Storm that we hadn't solved the problem and we were going to be hearing from Saddam Hussein again. I don't know that I really had thought through the question of whether we could have or should have tried to march to Baghdad and replace the regime. I just remember the reports that said General [Colin L.] Powell had opposed it on the grounds that it would be a "turkey shoot." He didn't think it was gentlemanly to attack the retreating Iraqi army.

I remember Bush 41 officials talking about how we put the coalition together on the basis of a narrow mandate and there just wasn't an option to use that coalition for broader purposes. It would have been impossible to renegotiate the mandate with all the coalition partners. When you're not in the government, you may think, *Maybe I would have done it differently,* but it is not quite the same thing as really thinking it through to the point where you have a conviction that something should have been done differently.

Perry: Could I ask a follow-up to the lengthy discussion that we had about the end of the Cold War and the speech that you would like to have heard? At one point you said you would like to have heard something about strategy in the post–Cold War world. I was wondering if you could elaborate on what that strategy would have been. That may link us then to Bush 43 ultimately. If you could have stated what that strategy was, and for those of you who had this view about the

Cold War and certainly obliterating the USSR [Union of Soviet Socialist Republics], what were your thoughts about the forces that would or could be unleashed in a postbipolar world?

Feith: I don't think I ever thought through a strategy to the point where I can say, "Here is what the strategy should have been." Again, I wasn't in the government. I didn't have the responsibility, but I do remember having a thought that kind of goes to your question. When first the Soviet empire and then the Soviet Union itself disintegrated, additional democratic countries arose in the world, in Eastern Europe and from the former Soviet republics.

During the 1990s I remember thinking that lots of people use the term "international community," but there really is not an international community. It is unfortunate that there is not.

What is a community? A community is not just a conglomeration of people or things. It suggests shared ideas or shared principles. What struck me was, especially with the addition of all these countries coming on from the former Soviet empire, plus other places in the world that were becoming democratic, that among the democracies you might actually have something that approaches community, where important principles were actually shared among countries. Then you could get a better-functioning world, more orderliness in the world, more of a role for law.

I was always skeptical about arms control, and a lot of international law talk struck me as overstated. But if we could get law to play a role in the world, more like the role that it plays in domestic affairs, that would be good, if it were not at the expense of American sovereignty, not at the expense of our Constitution, but consistent with our Constitution. There is always the policing problem, but that's the beauty of agreements among democracies. International law, to the extent that it works at all, works in large part with democracies because they have *internal* mechanisms that ensure or at least promote compliance.

That is part of the reason that I've always been skeptical of democracies negotiating agreements with nondemocracies—There is no enforcement mechanism. If and when the nondemocracy, as is frequently the case, violates the agreement, the democracy has few options. But the U.S. tends not to violate our international agreements, partly because even if you had a President who wanted to do something inconsistent with an international obligation, Congress wouldn't approve it. Our mechanisms have been quite good and effective.

If we're making agreements with the Canadians about maritime boundaries for fishing or something, or deals with democratic countries in Europe, there is a reasonable chance that those agreements will actually be complied with and may mitigate international problems. They're probably not going to have much to do with war and peace, because you're not likely to be going to war with another democracy. But they can do other things that are useful and help make a more orderly world with greater respect for property rights, and facilitating commerce, and greater respect for human rights, and enforcement of judicial decisions. There are all kinds of things that, if you had a more law-respecting world, could make life better.

The essence of community is not that we're all in the UN, so we're all part of the international community. The UN General Assembly works on the principle of one tyranny–one vote. A real honest-to-goodness community is based on shared ideas—I was thinking that would be a nice project for the '90s after the Cold War goes away.

Riley: Did you have any engagement in the Presidential campaign in ’96?

Feith: Yes. I was recruited by a friend of mine, who was doing the foreign policy issues, to be the Middle East guy on the [Robert J.] Dole campaign.

Nelson: I was just thinking about the extent of the education that George W. Bush began getting in foreign policy issues when he decided to run for President. Were you part of that? Were you part of the faculty, so to speak?

Feith: No, I wasn’t.

Nelson: What was your first point of contact with Bush or the Bush campaign?

Feith: I had no contact with the Bush campaign, none. Did I contribute to it? I don’t remember. I may have contributed to it.

Riley: What kind of law were you practicing at the time?

Feith: I was practicing business law, basically. I didn’t know anything about George W. Bush. As I mentioned, I wasn’t a big fan of the policies of his father. I was curious when he got elected. You remember it took a while to get him elected.

Nelson: I remember something about that.

Feith: I was curious about what kind of team he was going to put together. One of the large questions was whether he was going to be drawing more on the Reaganites or on whatever you want to call the non-Reaganites: the realist school, or whatever. What transpired, of course, was that he was drawing pretty heavily on the Reaganites. I started seeing lots of people I knew and admired signing up for the Bush 43 administration.

I was working in my law firm and was quite happy where I was. It was a small law firm that I had started in 1986. There was a question of whether the firm could survive if I went into the government.

The first call I got was from Zal [Zalmay M.] Khalilzad, who was on the DoD transition team, asking if I would be interested in coming in. At first I was asked about the general counsel job at the Pentagon, which is an Assistant Secretary–level job. I assumed that my next job in the government would be at the Assistant Secretary level, because I had been a Deputy Assistant Secretary. I said, “I’m not interested in practicing law in the government.”

Next I was sounded out on the position of Assistant Secretary of Defense for international security policy. That was the job that Richard Perle had had in the Reagan administration. When Reagan wanted to recruit Perle, what they did was carve out some responsibilities from the International Security Affairs office. We used to joke that in ISP [International Security Policy] the P stood for Perle.

While I was considering the ISP job, the man who was expected to be the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy decided that for his own reasons he would not go into the administration.

Nelson: Who was that?

Feith: William Schneider. He had been an Under Secretary of State in the Reagan administration. He had also been an OMB [Office of Management and Budget] official in the Reagan administration in charge of national security. Very experienced, extremely smart, terrific guy. Part of the attraction of working as Assistant Secretary for ISP was the idea that I would be working with him because I had a lot of regard for him.

He had worked with Rumsfeld on the missile threat commission. Rumsfeld in the '90s did this missile threat commission and worked closely with Wolfowitz and Bill Schneider and some other people on that commission. All of a sudden, when Schneider decided not to go in, this terrific job opened up. If I recall correctly, it was Fred Iklé, who had served as Under Secretary of Defense for Policy in the Reagan administration and was Perle's boss when I worked for Perle, who told me that the position was now open.

Iklé was a no-nonsense person, kind of brusque. He said, "You should take that job if you can get it." I said, "Wow, that's a hell of a thing to think about. To tell you the truth, I'm not sure that I'm qualified. There are parts of the world I know something about, but there are parts of the world I know very little about, and that's a job that covers the whole globe. It is all national security issues and all geographic areas." Fred, who was no flatterer, said, "Nobody knows everything."

I replied, "Fred, to tell you the truth there is nobody who understands the job better than you. You had it for almost eight years. If you think I'm qualified, that to me is one of the most persuasive arguments."

He said, "Look, we can't have any nonsense about this. If we're going to put your name forward, we can't have what happened with Bill Schneider, which is that you get considered and then you withdraw. If we're going to put your name forward, you have to decide that you want this."

Nelson: Who is the "we"? The foreign policy group?

Feith: Fred was referring to his circle of friends and colleagues.

Riley: It's everybody we've been talking about before lunch.

Feith: It was no organization. Even calling it a network is giving it a little more organization than it had. It was people who were friendly because they worked together in the past and they respected each other and they shared views.

A day or two later I called him back and I said, "I'd be very happy to have the job if Secretary Rumsfeld wants me." As I said, I had never met Rumsfeld before.

Nelson: What did you spend that day or two doing? What made you decide to let your name go forward?

Feith: One of the things I did was I consulted with my colleagues in my law firm, including the ones who had been particularly reluctant to approve my going in for the Assistant Secretary–

level job. They said, "You can't turn down the Under Secretary–level job. You just can't. If you're asked to do that, you go with our blessing."

I had a strong inclination to do it because of the opportunity to serve. It is thrilling to have the opportunity to serve your country.

Nelson: Let me ask you this too: In the 15 years that had gone by since you were in government, the kinds of demands placed on people being considered for positions in the executive branch, the political demands, the disclosure demands, have really grown. On top of that, obviously something that hadn't changed was it's a change in your life situation, a change in your income. Were those impediments in any way to your deciding to say yes?

Feith: In a certain sense they were, but I had lived my life with the idea that I might someday go back into the government, so I paid a lot of attention to the kinds of problems that people got into. I just made sure that I had nothing that I would have to apologize for. I paid all my taxes. I paid all my nanny taxes. I felt confident that I had nothing to fear. But I must say I had given a lot of thought to that. I knew that lots of people would have a lot of heartburn if they had to all of a sudden go through the scrutiny. It really is a serious disincentive.

The idea of serving the country at that level was compelling to me. One of the main countervailing considerations was that it could end my law firm. My law firm did hang around for almost a year after I left, but then it did break up.

As for my family, that actually became a big issue later. My wife became extremely ill. That was an important reason why I eventually left the government when I did. But my family situation was fine when I first decided to enter the administration.

When I told Fred Iklé that I was happy to become Under Secretary if asked, I soon got a call from the transition team again and I went over and did the interview. I was advised that Secretary Rumsfeld doesn't like volubility and I should be very succinct in my answers. As you've noticed, I'm generally not that succinct. So I was really not myself and it didn't go well, but as I told you before, I got a second chance and it went fine. We had a really terrific conversation the second time around because I basically had decided not to worry. *Here's what I am, and if you like me, I'm happy to serve, and if not, move on to the next guy.*

Perry: You got a second chance to make a good first impression.

Feith: Exactly. It was rare good fortune.

Knott: Any problems with the confirmation process? Anything that stands out in your mind?

Feith: One is the story that I tell in the book that I was doing these courtesy calls and I went in to Senator [Carl M.] Levin, who was the Ranking Minority Member on the Senate Armed Services Committee. He sat me down and in a rather unfriendly fashion said something like, "My staff tells me that you have extremist views." I said, "Oh? About what?" He said, "About two things: about arms control and about Arab-Israeli peace." Now for 25 years I had published quite a bit on both subjects. As part of the confirmation process I had pulled together my writings and speeches and whatever I had that was anywhere on the record on any public policy issues. I had

already given it to his staff.

I said to him, "I don't believe I have any extremist views. On the contrary, I think my views are very rational and moderate. I bring arguments forward in favor of my views. I try to marshal facts. Let me put it this way, Senator. You have everything that I've written and said on these subjects; I've already submitted it. If you can find so much as one sentence in anything that I've ever said or written that you consider to be extremist, I would understand your voting against me." He wound up not voting against me, but he held me up for quite a while.

Perry: What was his response to your response?

Feith: He said, "I don't know about it. My staff told me." He did a "humma-humma-humma." He couldn't back up his charge, though he was very aggressive and very unfriendly. It was a foreshadowing of political attacks to come, including many from him.

Neoconservatism, after the term got distorted and ruined in recent years, came to connote an extremist view. Yet on the political spectrum, neoconservatives were generally between the Republican and Democratic parties. We had a moderate point of view. It was to the left of the traditional conservatives and to the right of the increasingly progressive liberals.

Actual neoconservatives were not even close to extremist. The frame of mind of the neocons is antiextremist and I include myself when I say that. I knew that my views were often not popular and they were not the predominant views, but they were never extreme views. If there is one thing that characterized neoconservative thinking, it was the rationality of it, the idea that it not only had to be rational, but also had to be explicable to a general audience. The neoconservatives tended to be public intellectuals and they wrote for publications of general interest. They weren't even writing in the hothouses of academia, where you do occasionally get really weird ideas, where the air is all recirculating inside the hothouse. We aired our thinking in the great outdoors, as it were.

Senator Levin said, "You opposed the INF [Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces] Treaty that even Ronald Reagan supported." I said, "That's not true; I didn't oppose it." He said, "Oh?" I said, "I was part of a group that did an article-by-article analysis of the INF Treaty and it had some criticisms of the INF Treaty, but we didn't oppose the treaty. We simply said, 'Here's what the treaty does. Here's what it might have done if it had been negotiated differently. It could have done this better.'" Our treaty analysis had been done by people who had played a role in the negotiation and development of the thinking behind the treaty. So we were able to say that we wound up compromising on this, we got our way on that, and we could have done better on this. It was a critical analysis, but nowhere did we ever urge the Senate to oppose the treaty. He took the fact that we didn't just embrace it unqualifiedly as opposition, which he called extremism.

On the Arab-Israeli issue, what he was talking about was I was skeptical of the Oslo process, and wrote on the subject throughout the '90s. You could say I was prematurely anti-[Yasser] Arafat. I didn't trust Arafat. I saw him violating the agreements and I thought he was a bad actor. Those views became American government policy under George W. Bush, who kept his distance from Arafat accordingly. In Senator Levin's view, however, the fact that I wrote skeptically about Oslo, though I was later vindicated by the facts that developed, was interpreted as extremism. I

said, “It’s not extremist at all, if you read my stuff”

Anyway, Senator Levin ultimately was not able to find a single extremist sentence in anything that I wrote, so while he held me up for months and I didn’t get into my job until mid-July—I think our interview was in April—he ultimately went along with a unanimous confirmation on me.

Nelson: So he placed a hold on the nomination?

Feith: What happened was an interesting bit of bad fortune. The day of my hearing—

Nelson: I know what you’re going to say.

Feith: Senator [James M.] Jeffords switched parties. That day.

Riley: Not good for you.

Feith: The hearing was chaired by Republican Senator [John W.] Warner and by the evening Democratic Senator Levin was the Chairman. As soon as the Democrats took control of the Senate, they put a hold on my nomination and probably all the other nominations. The hearing, if I recall correctly, was in May and then it took two months after that for my nomination to reach the Senate floor. The Secretary of Defense had a deputy at that point but no Under Secretary, no Assistant Secretaries, and no Deputy Assistant Secretaries.

The world did not stop spinning, so Rumsfeld had to deal with all of the national security issues and he had nobody in the policy office to support him. The memos that were being sent to him up from the lower levels of the policy office—He considered them unsatisfactory. He was dissatisfied because he had very particular requirements. There was nobody to convey those requirements down to the office. There were some people who filled in as Acting Under Secretary. They did as good a job as they could, but they were not in a position to give orders. It was a really serious problem.

The whole nominating process, as has widely been observed, is broken. It is really quite harmful. There were major things going on in the world and the Secretary was doing national security work with the deputy and winging it. Now it happens to be that if you need somebody to wing it, Rumsfeld is good, but it is still not a healthy situation.

Nelson: During that period when you’re awaiting confirmation, are you able to do anything?

Feith: Rumsfeld put my name forward to the White House and the White House said fine, which itself took six or eight weeks. He put my name forward, if I recall correctly, in early February. The White House, I believe, nominated me in early April. Once the President nominated me, Rumsfeld said, “Here’s my schedule. You can come to any meeting that is relevant to you.”

I was enjoined, “Keep your mouth shut.” There was this famous case in the Clinton years where somebody came in—It was an Assistant Secretary nominee—and started participating in meetings, and when he started saying things and urging action as if he were the Assistant Secretary, Senators said the person was presuming confirmation. Boy, talk about a capital

offense. The one thing the Senate, on a bipartisan basis, has no tolerance for is somebody presuming nomination by the Senate. So we were all strongly urged to do nothing that would presume confirmation.

We were told, "If you go to a meeting, don't talk." So I went to meetings, but I didn't talk, and I didn't write memos.

Nelson: Were you in the paper flow? Were you able to read? What I'm wondering is how much use you were at this time.

Feith: I got some paper. I don't remember how much paper I got.

Perry: And you didn't have office space, I presume.

Feith: I was given office space, but not in the Under Secretary's office. For a while I sat in what was the general counsel's office, because he was also waiting. At one point I got moved out of there into an Assistant Secretary's office in the policy area and that's where I was until I got confirmed, and then I got to move into my own office.

Riley: What are you finding out about Donald Rumsfeld on a daily basis? You must have done some intelligence work after your failed first attempt. Surely you're trying to find out what this guy is like and what is his operating style.

Feith: I got to see him quite a bit because I got to sit in on these meetings. I barely exchanged a word with him because I wasn't talking in the meetings, and I didn't know him well enough to chat him up before or after the meetings. To tell the truth, even if you knew him well, when he was doing his business he wasn't chatty. I've become friends with him, so now I can have a nice relaxed conversation.

Riley: Sure.

Feith: As Secretary he was rigorous about his calendar. He was astonishingly punctual, as was the President. It was really remarkable. Meetings started within 30 seconds of the time called for them and they ended on time. He would have lunches with foreign dignitaries, Prime Ministers, Defense Ministers, and the lunches went an hour and they ended on the stroke. It was really amazing how he was able to maintain his calendar. He spent a lot of time on his calendar. He looked at it all the time; he revised it all the time. When things had to get moved around, he supervised it. He was really impressive on time management.

The other thing was, I was in on larger staff meetings that he had early on, in which he intensely trained his staff. I remember the kinds of things he would train them about. He was very didactic. Once fairly early on he came to one of his staff meetings, which included all the service Chiefs, all the service Secretaries. There would be maybe 40 people in the room, something like that, various Assistant Secretary–level people and his front office people, his special assistant, his military assistant.

He came in with an article about the Mexican President, Vincente Fox. The article was about the fact that Fox had ordered $100,000 of towels for a Presidential retreat or mansion or something.

He held this up and he said, “How does something like this happen? Let me tell you how it happens. It doesn’t happen because Fox said, ‘I’d like $100,000 worth of towels.’ Fox is a smart guy and no smart guy would ever say that. It happened because somebody working for Fox said, ‘Fox is a great man and he’s the President of our country and he deserves honor and he deserves the best.’ So they went out and out of respect for him did something that made him the laughingstock of the world. Now he is being ridiculed in every newspaper around the world because somebody who worked for him admired him and wanted to honor him.” He said, “Don’t let this happen. It is a matter of telling your people that this is not the way you do business; this is not the way you show respect; it is not the way you honor anybody. Don’t let it happen.”

He also actually said, “Nobody is allowed to paint his office.” That was the rule. He said, “Everybody comes in and the first thing they do is they paint their offices and in many cases they get new carpet because there is a coffee stain. Every time you do it, it costs $20,000, $30,000.” People do it unthinkingly. In many cases it’s not even done by the person who is getting the office; it’s done by the assistant to the person who is getting the office, because the assumption is: you’ve got a new boss, you get a new carpet, you get new paint—$30,000 like that. Times 50? Times 60? Then in many cases it’s not just the carpet, it’s furniture and a new chair. You’re talking unbelievable sums of money that are completely unnecessary and in many cases it is not even asked for. He said, “It’s like the story of the general who takes over a base. He’s walking down the base and he happens to mention he likes tulips and the next day there are 30,000 tulips planted on the base. You have to understand, that is not the way we’re going to run things here.”

He absolutely prohibited anybody from painting his office. It got to the point where if you needed to paint your office—and you actually had flaking—you had to go to his special assistant and get it approved, and boy, did you get argued with along the way. That was one type of training.

By the way, when he talked about money and spending, he would always say, “Every single dollar that you spend is essentially coming out of the paycheck of some woman in Iowa who is working two jobs in order to cover the expenses of her sick mother. There is a real person who is killing himself or herself to make ends meet and you’re taking money out of that person’s paycheck to do what you’re doing.” I remember these stories. He didn’t do this once. He was training. It’s like beer commercials; it’s repetition that gets it through. He would do this, and he would revisit it. He talked repeatedly about money and husbanding the resources of the taxpayers.

He also talked about classified information and about confidentiality. In all cases he told stories and gave examples from history of disasters that happened when people didn’t obey the right procedures. What came through consistently was that he was an Eagle Scout. He remained an Eagle Scout. He was the straightest guy you ever met. Honesty, loyalty—

Riley: “Helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, loyal, and reverent.”

Feith: Excellent, right. You were a Boy Scout.

Riley: I think I’m a Tenderfoot.

Feith: But you got enough to know that. That was Rumsfeld. He was the very embodiment of bourgeois morality, and to me that's an extremely high compliment.

I consider myself an admirer of Rumsfeld, but I am not an uncritical admirer. I have critical things to say about him, but I am unqualified in my admiration for his basic character. He is a sterling person when it comes to morality and decency and honesty and the Boy Scout virtues.

I remember we were early on having a meeting in the Situation Room. It must have been an NSC meeting: the President was there. After the meeting there was a little bit of discussion with people standing up—There was a question of certifying something to Congress. In order to keep a certain program going, you had to make a certification to Congress that other countries were doing what they were supposed to do, fulfilling some obligation. Congress had said they were not going to provide money for this program unless the recipients had behaved according to a certain standard.

Secretary Powell was saying, "This is an enormously important program." The problem was that the recipient was not obeying the standards, and we all knew that, including Powell. Powell made some comment about how we just don't have the option to not do this program; it is extremely important; it is very popular on the Hill; we have to go forward with this. Somebody said, "But you have to certify X." And Rumsfeld said, "We can't do that. It's not true."

That was the end. That was it. There was simply no argument beyond that. As far as he was concerned, you can't do that, because it's not true. I remember being struck by how decisive, categorical, end-of-argument that was for him. This was not a balancing of anything. Powell was trying to figure out how to make the certification so the program could go forward even though it was clear that you couldn't certify it honestly. With Rumsfeld, the issue was over. If you can't certify it honestly, you can't certify it, period. The law is the law, and honesty is honesty.

The whole idea that you sit at a meeting at the highest level of government and somebody says you can't do it because it's not true—I remember being struck by that. Boy, that is the way you hope your government works. I was really impressed by that.

Riley: You mentioned confidentiality. Any specific examples, or was there just an emphasis on making sure—?

Feith: Here's where I didn't agree with him and I think he made a mistake. I'm speaking about his attitude toward confidentiality. This is different from the issues of protecting classified information. By confidentiality, I mean preventing leaks of government information that is not classified: preventing leaks from government policy deliberations.

One way that Rumsfeld dealt with this problem was to strictly limit attendance at meetings. I'm not denying that there is a good empirical basis for that approach. Lots of leaks come from the people sitting around in the meetings who don't necessarily have to be invited. But I had a different view and I took a completely different approach.

My view was that it is extremely important to try to educate people about a frame of mind. What's the purpose of strategy? In a large organization it is to try to get the multiple parts of the organization to be involved in a common effort, all pulling in more or less the same direction. If

you lack a strategy, then everybody will go by his own lights, and even if everybody is operating in perfect good faith they'll get crosswise with each other. The solution is guidance from above, "This is the strategy and you should apply it." Then when issues arise about how to implement the strategy, you can resolve them within the strategic framework. Unless you do that, you're going to wind up with the government undercutting itself in numerous areas. So there really is a value in a strategy.

To be effective across a large organization, strategy has to be short. Real strategic guidance can never be more than three or four or five sentences. At the highest level, strategy is a handful of thoughts that everyone in the organization can understand, assimilate, and apply.

Implementation of strategy has an intellectual component; people have to assimilate the guidance so that it becomes the basis for their own decisions in their own work. I think that, when you're thinking through the strategy, when you're having meetings to develop policy approaches on things, it's useful to bring as many people as possible into the process. Let them watch the development of the thinking, because if they see it, if they see the ideas put forward, how they get rejected, or accepted but refined, they can more easily assimilate the ideas and apply them.

When I had meetings, if I was being briefed for a deputies meeting by my team, I would tell my Assistant Secretary or Deputy Assistant Secretary, "Come to brief me, but bring anybody in your organization who worked on it." As we're discussing the matter I wanted people to see it. I figured that's part of the process of communicating strategic thought through the organization.

But Rumsfeld took a completely different approach. He was highly restrictive about who could come to meetings, based on this idea of how to protect confidentiality. He excluded people from meetings, in many cases, people who felt they should have been there, that it was important for their jobs that they be there.

He expected me to attend all his policy-related meetings. He and I would often spend four, five, six, or seven hours a day together. It was unbelievable how much time I spent with him. If he had a day full of meetings, then between the prebrief and traveling to the meeting, then the meeting itself, then afterward, and then follow-up, and then other things that would arise, sometimes I would spend hours and hours and hours with him in the course of a day.

Frequently the key people who had worked on a matter in my organization would be an Assistant Secretary, a Deputy Assistant Secretary, and maybe an office director. Sometimes he would say, "Only you, Doug, can attend," or he would say, "Only you and the Assistant Secretary." If he knew others and he liked them, he would allow them in, but he didn't like to have people in there *ex officio*—simply because they had the responsibility. If he didn't know them and hadn't talked to them and didn't trust them personally, he viewed their attendance as a leak danger.

I used to debate this with him, but almost always lost. He did it his way. He would say things like, "You're increasing the chances of leaking if you add these people." I used to say, "Our biggest leak problems in the administration are coming from the top of other departments. They're not coming from the absolutely loyal guys in my organization. The things that are being leaked are coming from deputies, principals at NSC meetings, and we know who is leaking them."

He had another interesting trait. It was a kind of gentlemanliness. He would deny that his colleagues were leaking even when he knew or should have known that they were. It was just a very interesting thing that he took this position. It is the way you think of English gentlemen in the 19th century defending each other on matters of honor, even when it wasn't justified.

There are a lot of interesting things about Rumsfeld's memo writing as a style of operating within the government. He used to send memos frequently. He used to think by writing down his thoughts. He would send them frequently to the principals, not just to the President. He would often send a memo not to the President but to all the other principals. Some of these memos got leaked to the newspapers. And comments about them got leaked to the newspapers, angry comments about how "We're being buried in all these damn memos from Rumsfeld," and things like that, which made him very unhappy. He always insisted that they were being leaked by underlings.

How did he deal with it? It is actually kind of clever. He stopped sending memos to Secretary Powell and would instead hand them to Secretary Powell. He knew that the leaks were coming from the State Department and the addressee was Powell. As a way of saying, "I don't believe it's you; I believe it is your underlings," he would not send the memos through normal channels, but would hand-carry them and give at a meeting directly to Powell. Whether that actually meant he didn't believe it was Powell is questionable. You could look at this a lot of different ways.

Perry: Presumably the leaks continued even after he hand-carried the memo?

Feith: Yes and no.

Perry: Did he think he had succeeded by that change?

Feith: I don't know. I never actually asked him. At some point he stopped doing it that way. One way to look at it is as just a shot across the bow. Another way of interpreting it is as: *We all know what is going on here, but I'm going to pretend it was not you and I'm going to handle it this way.*

Riley: With a wink of the eye when you give it.

Feith: There are a lot of ways of interpreting all this. I wouldn't accuse Rumsfeld of being naïve, so I'm not suggesting that it never occurred to him that it might be Powell who was talking to the press. It is just interesting that, in talking even to his inner circle, he would never accuse Powell of leaking, even when it seemed quite clear that the leak was either done by the Secretary of State or authorized by the Secretary of State. There were things that got leaked that could only have come from the Secretary of State because they were about what was in the mind of the Secretary of State. Secretary Rumsfeld's position on this, even with his inner circle, was never to say anything ill about the Secretary of State.

Knott: Would any of you push back against that?

Feith: Sure.

Knott: And how would he react to your pushing back?

Feith: He would just say, "We don't know that for sure." That's another thing that was interesting about him. He did not have a façade of loyalty or a façade of collegiality that he would then set aside in a relaxed moment with his own staff. If he was loyal, if he was collegial, it was thoroughgoing.

Nelson: What did he think of—There were four Bob Woodward books that came out about the Bush 43 Presidency, and at least three of them were coextensive with his tenure as Secretary of Defense. I'm always interested in how accurate in general the Bob Woodward books are, but for Rumsfeld there would have been an additional level of interest, which is: *Is there stuff here that I didn't mean to be between two covers, sold to anybody who wants to buy and read it?*

Feith: Secretary Rumsfeld was very unhappy when the first Woodward book came out. He was, I think, unhappy with the decision the President made to cooperate with Woodward on the book. The President specifically told his National Security Council, "Cooperate with Woodward. Grant him interviews." I believe that Secretary Rumsfeld thought that was an error, but he did tell us that the President said to meet with Woodward.

I met with Woodward and he started asking me about specific meetings: Principals meetings, NSC meetings, and some deputies meetings. He would say, "What about the meeting on this date, on this subject?" I would say something about it. He would say, "You put forward a paper or briefing in that meeting. Can you give it to me?" I said to him, "It's classified." He looked at me like I was a babe, like, *What does that have to do with it?* I said, "It's classified." My attitude toward that was like the attitude Rumsfeld had about it: If it is classified, you don't give it to a journalist. He would say, "Can I see your notes from the meeting?" I would say, "No, it was a classified discussion." He would say, "But I got notes from other people in the administration." I would say, "I'm unhappy to hear that."

What Woodward did as a result was to write in his book, "Doug Feith has an annoying voice." Honest to goodness. Journalism as a protection racket. A journalist comes to you and says, "You need protection. People are going to say bad things about you if you don't pay." If you don't pay, he puts a brick through your window.

When that book came out, in which he did reveal lots of detailed discussions from different people, the book had inaccuracies, partly because it is in the nature of things and partly because the people who were giving him their protection payments, as it were, in the form of information, were grinding axes; they were not giving the straight story. In many cases they were purposefully not giving the straight story.

When the first Woodward book came out, Rumsfeld was distressed that the debates in various meetings were presented, and naturally always to his disadvantage, because he didn't give a report on the meetings, and his colleagues did. As the saying goes, "No man ever lost a debate in his own memorandum of conversation," so they're not going to be reporting favorably on him when they disagreed with him. He was really unhappy about that.

The meetings he went to, the NSC and principals meetings, were almost always what were called "principals-plus-one." The plus-one was either Paul Wolfowitz or me. Initially it was more Wolfowitz, because for the first six months it was only Wolfowitz. Then I came into my job and

over time got closer to him and built up trust and a better relationship, and the plus-one started to be me, until by the end of my time, it was virtually always me.

He said to Wolfowitz and me, after the first Woodward book came out, "From now on, I want detailed notes. The reason you're there is to take detailed notes of every meeting. I want them typed up immediately when you get back and I want you to give them to me, along with your handwritten notes. Do not retain a copy." I guess he had some thought that he might correct the record someday, and he wanted to have notes of the meetings that would be able to contradict the self-serving stories that people were telling Woodward.

Nelson: Did you read his memoirs as having made use of that advice?

Feith: Sure, I used them and he used them.

Nelson: You kept a copy?

Feith: No, I didn't. I did just what he asked, but he later allowed me access to some of my notes when I was doing my book.

Perry: Had he done any changes on them?

Feith: No, I don't believe so. I'm not sure he even looked at them. They went into his papers. I take very careful notes. They're almost word-for-word. I don't use shorthand, so I didn't get everything that was discussed. But virtually anything that I wrote down was a quote. If you understand my notes, you understand that when I wrote down phrases, they were quotes. That's the reason that in my book when I have quotes from meetings, it is because there is a contemporaneous note showing that that is what was actually said. I have various ways of marking things with ellipses, or if there is a break between a remark and the next remark I would generally put in ellipsis dots so people, myself included, would not connect the two statements as one following on the other, because you can get a completely different meaning if this seems to immediately follow that. My notes were pretty detailed for somebody who doesn't use shorthand.

Riley: This is really interesting because it bears on the core purpose of what we're doing. Rumsfeld was quoted, and I can't remember if this is in Woodward or one of the other secondary books, as being very unhappy on some occasions when people would be taking notes.

Feith: Yes.

Riley: He would say, "Everybody needs to put their pencils down."

Feith: He once blasted me for that. Again, I didn't have a relationship with him until I was Under Secretary and in the job for some time. Early on, I remember I was in a meeting and was taking copious notes and afterward he handed me my head. He said, "You can't take notes like that. When the President is talking—It just gives the impression that you're writing a book or something." The interesting thing is, I had no thought of writing a book at that time. If you think about it, most Under Secretaries are completely anonymous characters and nobody would be interested in a book. I assumed that was true of me, too. It played out differently, so I decided to

write a book. But I did not organize my life as Under Secretary with the thought that I was going to be writing a book, and especially early on, having been smacked down for that kind of note-taking.

After the Woodward book came out, I had a completely trusting relationship with Rumsfeld. Early on, however, he worried that my note-taking might make his colleagues uncomfortable. That was early, when I was a stranger to the President and to others around the table.

Riley: I want to be clear about this: Particularly in the inner sanctum of the White House, was the culture that you did not keep notes, or was the culture that you did keep notes?

Feith: It's a very interesting point. I would focus not so much on notes as on minutes. This was an ongoing problem, in my view. We had these very important meetings of the NSC and the Principals and the Deputies Committees. There would be SOCs, summaries of conclusions, issued after the meetings. They were, by and large, uninformative. They would say things like, "Talked about Iraq." That was the joke, but not much of a joke. They were really uninformative.

Riley: Right.

Feith: Now this couldn't have been by accident. The decision was made early on by presumably Condi [Condoleezza] Rice, Steve Hadley, or whoever was making the decisions for these interagency meetings, maybe the President himself: *We're not going to create the kind of record of our decision making that is going to allow people to come in and investigate us.*

I had recently written the largest thing I ever wrote before I wrote my book, a chapter on Winston Churchill in a book called *Churchill as Peacemaker*.

Riley: I don't think that showed up in here, did it? [*gesturing at briefing book*]

Feith: I'll be happy to give you a copy. The idea was that Churchill got looked at as a war leader in many books, but he was also a peacemaker in South Africa and Ireland, Russia, India. I was asked to do the chapter on Palestine. So I wrote this chapter on Churchill, Zionism, and Palestine, 1904 to 1922.

I remember reading the minutes of British Cabinet meetings. The minutes are sometimes tantalizing, because they don't say who said what, or they don't say what the conclusion is. I remember reading that and thinking, *Damn, some absolutely crucial question could have been answered if somebody had taken more detailed notes and we would know more about crucial questions of intention and reasoning.*

My view when I got into this job was that we were doing important work and people should, in the interest of democracy, have the opportunity at the appropriate time to read the record of our deliberations. They should have visibility into the decision making. If you're proud of the decision making, what's the problem? That was Rumsfeld's attitude. That's why he wrote so much down. Rumsfeld had this attitude that he's proud of what he's thinking. He's not afraid that at some point in the future somebody is going to look at some thought that he had and embarrass him about it. It is a kind of confidence, and it is very admirable in my view.

Rumsfeld was happy to write current thoughts down and send them around and he was happy to have them become part of the historical record. There's a price to be paid for that, which is you can't after the fact claim that you had a different position. That's a big problem for some people. It was not a problem for Rumsfeld, because, Boy Scout–like, he wasn't interested in misrepresenting his positions.

Colin Powell wrote virtually nothing down. He rarely sent memos. He almost never responded to Rumsfeld's memos. It was part of the reason why Rumsfeld was much more influential than Powell in his debates with the President. Powell, to give him his due, is much more successful in being able to claim that he was on the right side of every issue, after the fact, because there is no record to say to the contrary and he is perfectly happy to have Bob Woodward tell the world that he was prescient about everything.

Knott: Can I follow up on this? You have your footnote in here about the Gestapo office quote from Powell that Woodward cites. I wonder if you want to elaborate at all about that. It's clear that you were not at all pleased with his response when he was put on the spot. What did that say to you about Colin Powell's character in comparison to, let's say, Don Rumsfeld?

Feith: Powell wasn't straightforward. What he did wasn't gentlemanly. It wasn't decent. When he said my office was a Gestapo office, I would assume that he did not want that published, or maybe he did. I still find it hard to believe that he would actually have wanted to publish that; it's such a nasty thing to say. I knew Colin in the Reagan administration when he was a two-star and he was Caspar Weinberger's military assistant. I was a Deputy Assistant Secretary at that time. I used to deal with him. We had perfectly friendly relations.

He knew my father was a Holocaust survivor, so using the term Gestapo—It's tasteless. On the day that the *Washington Post* came out with the story—in advance of Woodward's book—Powell called me. I remember I was in a meeting in the Tank, the conference room of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. That's not the kind of place where you get interrupted for a phone call. I was in there briefing and somebody came in and said, "Secretary Powell is on the phone for you." So I said, "Excuse me," and went into another room to take the call. Powell said, "I assume you saw the story in the *Washington Post* with that remark about the Gestapo office." I took careful notes while Powell was talking to me. I took almost verbatim notes of almost everything he said. He said something like, "I just want you to know I don't remember having said that."

I said OK. Then he said, "I will do whatever I can to remove this despicable remark," or to contradict this—He used the word "despicable." Did he say it? Did he not say it? Is he admitting it? Is he apologizing? He was vague. But he said, "I will do whatever I can to remove the despicable remark." Sure enough, a journalist asked him about it either that day or the next day and he had an opportunity to say, "I've known Doug Feith for 20 years. We have our disagreements, but he is a fine guy and I'm certainly unhappy to have that statement out there," or something like that. Or, "I didn't say it." He could have said something positive to make it clear that we have our policy differences but we get along. Having told me he would do "whatever he could to erase the despicable remark," when he got asked the question, all he said was, "I don't remember having said that." And that was it. Anyway, I thought it was not gentlemanly.

Knott: Did you have dealings with him after this?

Feith: Sure, I had constant dealings with him.

Knott: Did it affect your relationship with him?

Feith: I don't think so. It wasn't like it was a gigantic revelation about him. It wasn't like he seemed to be a person of extremely high character and then all of a sudden I discovered that he was capable of doing something not nice.

Perry: Could we go back to the note-taking again in the principals meeting? You said it was principals-plus-one and that either you or Wolfowitz would be the plus-one. Does that mean that Secretary Rumsfeld was the only person bringing a plus-one?

Feith: Oh, no, all of the principals could bring a plus-one.

Perry: Did they take notes?

Feith: Presumably. Whatever they were ordered to do.

Perry: In other words, they couldn't just point to Secretary Rumsfeld and say, "Why is your person taking notes?"

Feith: Oh, no, absolutely not. Everybody was there. You know the military guy is taking notes. Military guys always take notes.

Riley: So your sense about meetings that you would have been involved with is that there probably is buried in some archive somewhere, a fairly comprehensive set of—

Feith: It would be a real contribution to history if somebody could gather the notes from the plus-ones.

Riley: From the plus-ones, right.

Feith: This terminology is very confusing. I would go to deputies meetings as the Principal for the Defense Department. The deputies meetings were also designated principals-plus-one. My plus-one was usually my Assistant Secretary or Deputy Assistant Secretary. There's not a lot about deputies meetings in my book because as the Principal at the deputies meetings, I wasn't taking notes.

Riley: You were just involved.

Feith: I would need to know who was my plus-one at these meetings and where is he now and where are those notes and what did he do with them? When I was writing my book it was too hard to find that, so I don't have as rich a record. But when I was the plus-one, my main job was note-taking. Every once in a while it was also sliding a note up to the Secretary and giving him some background. I mean, as the debate would occur and someone would throw a curveball at him and I'd realize that we didn't brief him on this, I'd be able to write a note and give it to him

and say, “That was considered and rejected.” So he could have something and use it at the meeting.

Riley: The purpose of the question is the sense that we’ve gotten from previous interview projects that there was much less of this going on.

Feith: Less of this where?

Riley: In either the first Bush administration or the Clinton administration.

Feith: People were not taking notes?

Riley: People were not, because of the fear of leaks.

Knott: Also special prosecutors.

Nelson: Or litigation.

Feith: That’s why the summaries of conclusions were so spare and banal. I assumed that they were concerned about Congressional investigations, special prosecutors, this or that. I must say, even though I’m a lawyer, I didn’t buy that. I looked at it differently. I said, “What we’re doing here is really historically significant.”

I would argue that, in retrospect, I was right and they were wrong. The proof is that the United States has been severely harmed by misrepresentations about the basis for decisions that President Bush made that were of great international importance—The war in Iraq as the leading point, but there were other things also. People who didn’t like the President and didn’t like the policies put out all kinds of stories that were very negative, very damaging, and very false.

If we had had a proper record, we could have refuted that. It would have taken more than having a proper record. It also would have taken an attitude on the part of the administration that it wanted to refute it. That was another problem, but it was a related problem: This whole idea that what is really important in government is creating no record—The more you think about that, the less appealing it is.

You were asking before about how the nomination process discourages people from going into the government. Well, a related point is that all of the nastiness of investigations and special prosecutors and everything has led to a situation where people are disinclined to keep records of things that it would be healthy for the country to have records on.

Riley: But it sounds like, based on your description, maybe the tide had turned a little bit in this administration.

Feith: The Summary of Conclusions tended to be really spare. But one of the most important turned out to be a highly detailed—It related to the plan for political transition in Iraq. I’m so grateful that there was a very detailed Summary of Conclusions on that, because it was important. But in general those Summaries of Conclusion were lacking in detail. I think it was a problem.

Riley: OK.

Feith: You do have notes like mine, which is worth something, but you can always challenge one notetaker's approach. It would have been better if there was something more like a proper record, but we don't have it.

Riley: Let me come back and change gears here. What did you think you were going to be spending all your time on when you came into office?

Nelson: That's a good question.

Riley: Because it changes on September 11th, I would guess.

Feith: It absolutely changed. The first thing that we focused on as a major project in my area was the relationship with Russia.

Riley: OK.

Feith: When the Soviet Union was collapsing, there had been worry about nuclear weapons and where they are going to wind up. There was concern about stability. But there was so much concern about stability that many Cold War institutions were just kept in place without much thought given to how we could change the U.S.-Russian relationship in ways that would be beneficial.

How do you make sure you don't get a revival of the problems that would revive the Cold War? Are there things we could do that would move the relationship substantially beyond Cold War thinking and Cold War institutions? We said that if at the end of four years we had a completely transformed relationship with Russia, and Russia was integrating into the world economy the way the Germans and the Japanese did after World War II, that would be a major accomplishment and a really worthy project.

We talked about that a lot. This was when [Vladimir V.] Putin was brand-new. There was a question about which direction he was going to take. There was the thought that economic pressures could move the Russians in the direction of cooperation and integration with the world to increase trade and investment. This speculation was based on assumptions that turned out to be false. The enormous increase in oil prices allowed the Russian government to get really fat with revenues without having to attract international trade and investment, except regarding its extraction of oil and natural gas.

After 9/11, because he was raking in higher oil revenues, Putin was able to have his cake and eat it too. He didn't feel the pressure that we thought he would feel for reform.

I still think that what we did and what we thought was the correct approach. One didn't know what Putin would do, and we might as well try to improve the relationship. It turned out to be unsuccessful. Russia was a major focus of attention before 9/11. That's the reason I was in Moscow on 9/11.

Nelson: War and crisis—It sounds as though coming into the administration you thought: *This is*

a time when, free of those things, we can focus on building some positive structures.

Feith: Yes.

Nelson: You mentioned something this morning that I didn't want us to neglect this afternoon. When you came back into the government, there was this thing called the Principals Committee and the Deputies Committee and these were structures that had not been around before, and you had some concerns about those. Do you want to elaborate on that on the basis of the experience you were having?

Feith: I would not say that I had concerns about them. It wasn't my job to evaluate that. I fitted into the process as it existed. In a typical week I would spend 15 to 20 hours in interagency meetings, probably, estimating off the top of my head. So I gave the interagency process a lot of thought. As I was researching my book, I researched how past administrations made policy. I read my colleague Peter Rodman's book and he discussed it. I started researching things like Dean Acheson's memoirs and those of others.

I remember being struck by Dean Acheson's point that when Woodrow Wilson became disabled, his Cabinet members would meet and make decisions. When Wilson found out about it—Who was Wilson's Secretary of State? [Robert] Lansing?

Nelson: Robert Lansing.

Feith: I think he fired Lansing over that.

Nelson: We can go into that later, but the basic point you're getting is right.

Feith: It wasn't my story; it was Dean Acheson's story. Acheson related that story to Truman as a way of saying to Truman, "You should not allow your Cabinet members to meet without the President."

Nelson: So this wasn't something that you thought—

Feith: No, I thought about it more after the fact.

Nelson: Were there things that you noticed, though, coming back into the government? Of course it is a different administration, but it is also 15 years. The way things were working was different in ways that you either thought were better or worse.

Feith: One of the main things that I came to think about, over time, was the contrast between the way interagency disputes got resolved in the Reagan administration and the way they were not resolved but papered over in the George W. Bush administration.

We had the kind of constant debates over virtually every issue between the State Department and the Pentagon in the George W. Bush administration that we had had in the Reagan administration. President George W. Bush in his outlook philosophically was essentially a Reaganite. His views were, by and large, not viewed sympathetically by the State Department bureaucracy generally or the intelligence community generally.

The President had many political appointees in the national security field in the Pentagon. In the Pentagon you had political appointees as Secretary, Deputy, all the Under Secretaries, all or almost all of the Assistant Secretaries, and initially virtually all of the Deputy Assistant Secretaries. Over time, when a Deputy Assistant Secretary would leave, we would sometimes promote a career person. But initially, when the administration first came in, we were encouraged by the White House, "Don't give those positions to career people; give them to the people that we want to bring into the administration." The Secretary, Deputy, Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, Deputy Assistant Secretaries—that's five levels of political appointees.

At the State Department, things were different. The Under Secretary for Political Affairs at the State Department, my main counterpart, was a career official. Assistant Secretaries were a mix of career and political people. I don't know exactly what the numbers were, but I don't think we had a single career Assistant Secretary in the Pentagon. I would guess maybe 50 percent of the Assistant Secretaries of State were career officials. I don't know. You'd have to look at it.

Nelson: Is this by statute?

Feith: No, it's by practice. Franklin Roosevelt complained that the State Department did not work for him. Harry Truman complained that the State Department did not work for him. [Dwight D.] Eisenhower did not think it was as responsive as it should be to him. Kennedy certainly thought that the State Department was on its own. Nixon ran his foreign policy out of Kissinger's office, and didn't even treat his Secretary of State respectfully. Then of course Reagan had—We considered it practically an insurgency from certain quarters of the State Department when he would make statements that they would have to apologize for, like calling the Soviet Union an evil empire. That caused real misery in the Foreign Service.

In the George W. Bush case, the State Department and the CIA were more or less openly in conflict with the President. If you go through the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post,* you'll find—day after day, week after week—articles citing senior intelligence community officials, senior State Department officials attacking the President.

One of the more egregious examples is the man who was in charge of the al-Qaeda unit, the [Osama] bin Laden unit at the CIA, Michael Scheuer, who wrote a book called *Imperial Hubris,* which was a blast at the Bush administration. He was an active-duty CIA official. He published the book with CIA approval in the summer of 2004. It was a best-seller; it may even have been number one on the best-seller list. It was an outright political attack on the President. It was published by "Anonymous," and the CIA approved his giving interviews as long as his face was covered in the interview. In other words, he was not anonymous to the press; he was just anonymous to the public, but he was described as a CIA official.

As Scheuer himself tells the story, after a number of weeks the CIA's leadership understood that he was criticizing not just the President but also the CIA, so they started prohibiting him from doing interviews, at which point he resigned and went public. That's why everybody knows his name. It is really impressive to have such open disloyalty and warfare within an administration. It was very unhealthy.

Knott: But the White House, ultimately the President, tolerated this. He keeps George Tenet in

place.

Feith: Yes. I think it caused a lot of harm.

Knott: We tend to hear, or at least I used to hear when I did the Bush 41 oral histories, this notion of how important loyalty is to the Bush family—loyalty up, loyalty down. Yet here is a clear case of outright insubordination, for lack of a better term, and it is tolerated.

Feith: Yes.

Knott: How would you explain that?

Feith: It struck me as peculiar. You could say it wasn't tolerated. They just didn't move on it as quickly as they should have. After all, George Tenet did leave, and after all, as soon as the President was reelected, he changed the Secretary of State. So you could say that he did take action. But part of the problem was addressed in one of the quotations that Rumsfeld collected in "Rumsfeld's Rules": "Never hire somebody you can't fire."

Nelson: Like Colin Powell. Let the record show—

Riley: Was this open conflict so open before 9/11? Was it obvious as early as the first year?

Feith: Well, I'm not sure that you would call it open warfare in the first year, but you did have incidents. The one that jumps to mind is North Korea. I don't remember exactly when it happened. I seem to remember it was sometime in the first six months. The Secretary of State said something that reflected the State Department bureaucracy's general view that we should be trying to revive the Agreed Framework talks with the North Koreans that the Clinton administration had done.

There's a pattern: The State Department invests heavily in a diplomatic process. That process becomes politically controversial and is criticized. One of the critics is elected President. State Department officials associated with the process burn to get it reinstated, to be able to say that even this guy who criticized us understands that we have to have that process.

Recall your question about the State Department and Ronald Reagan. Reagan came in criticizing the arms control process and the bureaucracy was relentless in pushing him to conduct and revive the very process that he criticized, so that they could say, "You see, even Ronald Reagan understood the value of control."

You have a similar thing with North Korea. North Korea did the Agreed Framework. George W. Bush in the Presidential campaign criticized our diplomacy with North Korea, the famous business of Secretary [Madeleine K.] Albright having the toast where she was smiling with Kim Jong-il.

Knott: She danced with him.

Feith: She danced with him? I didn't remember that.

Riley: There's a picture.

Feith: So that became part of the campaign. And as soon as George W. Bush became President, the State Department wanted to push for the revival of the very talks that President Bush had criticized. Secretary Powell early on said something along the lines of, "We need to get these talks going."

People throughout the administration were stunned. Secretary Powell then apologized, using the expression, "I'm sorry I got out in front of my headlights," which is a standard military expression. He apologized at a meeting with the President. That was an early sign that, right out of the gate, the State Department was going to push the President to do something that the President had specifically repudiated.

Another example related to the Arab-Israeli peace process. The President criticized the Oslo process and the State Department pushed over and over again for a revival of that process. You couldn't have a meeting on any Middle Eastern subject without their coming forward and saying, "We really need an Arab-Israeli peace initiative." Powell continually argued, "Mr. President, you really have to meet with Arafat."

After 9/11 the President was reluctant. Then in December of '01, or January of '02, Israel intercepted the Iranian arms ship, the *Karine A*, off of Gaza, full of weaponry for terrorists. It was a few months after 9/11. The President was saying we're going to fight a principled global effort against the terrorists. Vice President [Richard B.] Cheney took a really strong stand and kept rebuffing Powell, saying that under no circumstances, with Arafat's having conspired with the Iranians to bring the *Karine A* to Gaza, in violation of the Oslo agreements, could the President maintain a principled opposition to terrorism and meet with Arafat, who remains a terrorist and liar and anti-American. To hell with him. But the State Department did not let up. There wasn't a meeting on the Middle East where they didn't push the President to meet with Arafat and revive the Oslo process.

Finally, in April of '02, they got the President to make what was considered an "evenhanded" speech about the Arab-Israeli conflict. There had been one in the fall, in which he talked about a two-state solution. Then there was this one in April. As the Iraq issue heated up, the State Department leadership came in and said, "You can't do anything with Iraq if you don't have an Arab-Israeli peace initiative."

The President agreed to give another speech on the Arab-Israeli conflict, more major than the earlier speeches from the fall and April. This new speech—the most important he gave on the subject—was delivered on June 24, 2002. It went through 30 drafts. Again, the State Department pushed to get the President to endorse the Oslo process, which he had criticized in his election campaign.

Normally speechwriting was done outside of the NSC process. In general, I didn't see the speechwriters. I never worked with them directly. I thought it was a problem that there were policy deliberations with serious, comprehensive, intelligent discussions and debates about policy, and then the President would make a decision and announce it in a speech written by somebody who wasn't in the room when the policy was deliberated. The speechwriter would

come up with his own rationale for the policy. Sometimes it bore little relationship to the actual policy deliberations. That created problems, because you couldn't justify it. You couldn't explain it. It wasn't rigorous. It was one speechwriter's idea of a good argument. Officials in interagency meetings may have spent months working this policy out. But their thinking wasn't in the speech. The separation of the speechwriting from the policy making is not desirable.

Riley: I guess "axis of evil" gets started that way, right? As speechwriter's gloss?

Feith: Actually, that one happens to be consistent with thinking developed in the NSC process.

Nelson: Speeches on foreign policy and security policy weren't circulated as a matter of course?

Feith: Yes, but they were circulated—We used to comment on them, sometimes extensively, but often nobody cared about the comments unless you found a factual error. In other words, if you said, "You're using the wrong argumentation," the speechwriter would dismissively say, "Thanks for sharing."

The last chapter in my book talks about how this became a major problem on Iraq. In the spring of '04 the President started giving a series of speeches on Iraq that looked exclusively at the question of building democracy in Iraq and completely dropped any discussion of why we went to war. That harmed public support for the war. NSC staff said we don't want to relitigate the old issues, the rationale for the war. Was the war justified? Prewar intelligence, and all the rest of it? They said, "The President is only going to talk about the future."

I said, "If you talk only about the future, then you're telling the American public that the war is about building democracy for Iraqis. Why should so much blood and treasure be devoted to that? We didn't go to war to build democracy for Iraqis; we went to war to protect the United States from threats. The fact that we didn't find WMD [weapons of mass destruction] stockpiles doesn't mean there weren't serious threats. There were."

Karl Rove, in his book and in the later op-ed that he wrote in the *Wall Street Journal*, said, "I, Karl Rove, was crucial to the decision to handle communications on the Iraq War this way. It was the single biggest mistake I made in my time in the administration."

Riley: We should take a break.

[BREAK]

Riley: We were talking off the recording about the importance of these process questions. One of the things that is sometimes frustrating to our colleagues in the history profession who know about our work, who use some of our work, is that these aren't traditional issue histories. We're interested in the issues and we go into them, but we're very much institutional historians. So these questions of process—That's really where a lot of the strength of our work is.

You were talking about a very important question, which was the way that Condoleezza Rice saw her job as the National Security Advisor and, from your perception, how that differed from that of her predecessors. Why don't I stop there and let you take off?

Feith: In the Reagan administration, disputes between the agencies got summarized and teed up for Presidential decision and the President would literally pick an option. Sometimes he'd go straight out for the State Department option, or the Defense Department option, or specify some other way. He'd resolve it. You won some, you lost some, you moved on, and you knew what the President's view was.

In the Bush administration, when there were different approaches presented by Powell and Rumsfeld, Condi Rice would try to get what she would call either a blended or a bridging solution to the disagreement. She would take a piece of the Rumsfeld position and a piece of the Powell position, giving something to everybody, and put that together and say, "This is what we're going to do."

The President would say fine, and Condi was pleased she had resolved the problem at the principals level. At one point she made a comment that if she brought an outright irreconcilable disagreement between Cabinet officers to the President, then she believed she had failed to do her job. It was not the way the National Security Advisors had resolved debates in the Reagan administration.

My understanding is that Condi's approach was not usual. Maybe it was the same as Scowcroft's in the George H. W. Bush administration. After all, Condi Rice's first major experience in government was in the Bush-Senior administration. President Bush Senior reportedly disapproved of the quarreling between the departments in the Reagan administration and set up his own administration in such a way that it suppressed that kind of interagency debate, partly by empowering the Secretary of State and diminishing the role of the Defense Department in national security policy.

When an important subject came up that required Presidential guidance, Rumsfeld and Cheney both tended to look at some major new issue from a high altitude. They would start by asking, what is the U.S. national interest relating to this subject? They would work on formulating a set of strategic goals for the United States with regard to this issue.

In contrast, Secretary Powell would typically come in and say, "Tomorrow I'm going to be meeting with representatives of the EU [European Union]." Or, "I'm going to be visiting New York and going to the UN and I need to know what I'm going to say to them." He would be looking in an operational or tactical way: "What do I do tomorrow?" Rumsfeld and Cheney would be saying things like, "What's the national interest here?" "What are we trying to accomplish?"

Rumsfeld had a standard line. When some issue would arise and it required his decision, people would come to him and say, "We suggest you take this or that course of action." He'd say, "If you don't know where you're going, any road will get you there. Don't come to me with 'courses of action.' First we have to agree about what we are trying to accomplish." It's a stunning remark.

When I was teaching, I passed this idea on to my students, "This will put you in the 99th percentile of any group that you're together with. Something happens, people sit around the table, and the first thing they say is, 'Well, this has happened. What do we do?' After ten minutes, if you're the person who raises his hand and says, 'Before we talk further about what do we do, can we get agreement on what we're trying to accomplish?' there will be a sucking sound, and people will say, 'Oh, wow, that is really wise.'"

It is so obviously wise, but it is almost never done. Powell had no patience for it. His attitude was: *We all know what we're trying to do*. Yet if you ask, What are our national goals here? you'll find that no two people, no matter how smart they are, no matter how much they generally agree with each other, will formulate the goals the same way. It is enormously valuable to get people to agree on carefully formulated goals: This is what we're trying to accomplish; this is what we're trying to avoid. If there are more than three or four of them, you're not at the strategic level. If there are ten goals, you're too far down in the weeds. There should be three or four major goals that explain, What are we trying to accomplish?

That was the Rumsfeld approach—always. Cheney was similar. The President was similar. The President had a clear understanding of what was an appropriate Presidential level at which to operate. He had a CEO's sense that there were things that were Presidential level and there were things that were below Presidential level. What he was interested in were the questions at Presidential level.

For that reason, when Rumsfeld would come in with some new major subject to be debated and we were looking for Presidential guidance, he was talking to the President at the level at which the President wanted to be addressed. So Rumsfeld started off with a major advantage. In the meantime, Secretary Powell would come in and he'd be talking about whether it is better to raise the issue with the EU or the UN, which didn't address any question that the President had. It wasn't interesting, it wasn't strategic, it wasn't Presidential.

Perry: What would the President say when Secretary Powell would say such a thing?

Feith: What you would see is that it just didn't address the President at the level at which he wanted to hear discussion. Often, even though what Secretary Powell was talking about was tactical, his words showed that he was making certain strategic assumptions.

For example, when Powell said, "Let's go meet with Arafat," there is baggage that goes along with that suggestion. He was in effect arguing, "We need to revive the Oslo process," but he would be saying, "Let's go talk to Arafat."

Nelson: Which meant?

Feith: Which meant, "Let's go revive the Oslo process." He would be addressing it purely tactically. In the meantime, Cheney/Rumsfeld would be saying things like, "We're conducting a War on Terrorism and the President has said, 'People are with us or against us. It's a matter of principle. It's a moral issue. Terrorism is inherently evil.'" What we're trying to do at the strategic level is delegitimate terrorism and impose costs on countries that support terrorism. We want to oppose it in principle and we want to delegitimate it comprehensively. If that's your goal, then President Bush should not meet with Arafat and appear to reward Arafat for launching

the Second Intifada.

Let's just go back to my general points about how Condi Rice would deal with things. What would happen is you'd get, on a particular matter, Secretary Powell saying, "Let's have a certain meeting," and he is worried about the talking points for the meeting for the next day. Then you'd get Rumsfeld, often supported by Cheney, saying, "Let's formulate our national goals this way." The NSC staff would come up with a bridging proposal that would give the strategy to Rumsfeld, and the action to Powell, and then everybody was supposed to be happy.

What you've done is you've taken a disagreement and papered it over. The tactics that Powell was proposing were going to pull you strategically in a direction that is oblique to what Rumsfeld was advocating.

Nelson: You describe Bush as having a good sense of what is Presidential. Why didn't he see this?

Feith: When the discussions occurred, he wanted to keep them at the Presidential level. You could see it. When briefers would come in and start talking about things that were below the Presidential level, you saw that the President had no patience for that and he would cut the person off. But your question is a good one. Why didn't he resolve this? I don't know the answer. If you get to interview the President, you can ask him. One of the things that I said in my book is that this approach that Condi took to what she called blending or bridging proposals, taking a little piece out of each agency's idea so everybody could say they were a winner, which we found very unsatisfying—

Knott: Good for their self-esteem.

Feith: On the rare occasion that you actually got to present the President with a clear-cut choice, the President showed willingness to make a clear-cut choice. I saw on a few occasions, when for one reason or another something did get teed up for a Presidential decision, the President would decide. So that raised the question, where does this bridging and blending approach come from?

All I can say is that while the President was clearly willing to make decisions, I don't think that it is fair to say that it was just Condi, because when Condi moved over to the State Department and Steve Hadley became National Security Advisor, the practice basically continued. So it seems to me the only reasonable inference from that is that is the way the President wanted it.

Nelson: Exactly. His memoir is called *Decision Points.*

Feith: Right, "I'm the decider."

Nelson: It has 14 chapters. That makes it sound like for him every decision he made was a big deal, but he didn't want to be making any more decisions than were put in his in-box.

Riley: No, but one might imagine that he could easily tell Condi, "Your job is to get agreement as often as you can, and when you fail—"

Feith: "When you fail, bring it to me." But then she views it as a failure. She made the statement

that she believes it was a failure when she had to bring him a decision. But I don't believe that anybody in the Reagan administration believed it was a failure when they had to bring a decision to the President.

Riley: Right.

Feith: This became significant regarding Iraq. There were significant differences of view between the State Department and the Pentagon, with State often aligning with the intelligence community. There were enormous differences of view on how to deal with the political transition in Iraq after Saddam.

Riley: Postwar planning.

Feith: You can call it postwar planning but it is also the actions that you take before the war. It's not just planning. There were actions like holding a political conference of the Iraqi external groups—that is, the exiles and the Kurds.

Riley: Let me pose this question to you, and we might as well deal with this since it's on the table and we can jump back in time if we want to later. Was there ever a clear decision taken at the Presidential level about who was going to have the action on this cluster of questions, or was it presumed that there would be an interagency process apart from a Presidential decision to deal with who was going to be leading the effort to deal with the entire cluster of both pre- and postwar support?

Feith: It's a very large question and I think you have to break it up into pieces to answer it. There was a lot of war and postwar planning going on throughout the government. It was being done under the general supervision of Steve Hadley and the Deputies Committee. The Deputies Committee, beginning around January of '02, had secret deputies lunches. I say secret because this is really an unusual thing. Almost all meetings were secret in the sense that the substance of the meeting is classified. But these lunches were secret in that the participants were not supposed to tell any of their colleagues back in the agencies that they were even occurring at all.

There was so much attention to, "Are we going to do Iraq after Afghanistan?" "Are we going to go to war or not?" And no decision had been made. There were lots of meetings to talk about, "What do we do? What should our approach be?" It was far short of deciding to go to war. Hadley chaired these weekly lunches. The fact that there were weekly meetings on Iraq was a secret within the administration.

Nelson: Did the principals know you were meeting?

Feith: Oh, yes. The first several meetings were just one person per agency, and Wolfowitz represented DoD. After a few weeks it clearly didn't make any sense because so much of the work was being done by my office. It was expanded so that I was invited, and Marc Grossman from the State Department was invited, so it wasn't just [Richard L.] Armitage from State. These deputies lunches were very important.

A lot of the work that got going relating to war planning, relating to things like food distribution and economic sanctions, and humanitarian-type relief was planned in these lunches.

There were other issues. If the oil fields got blown up the way Saddam had blown up his own oil fields in connection with Desert Storm back in ’91, what plans did we have in place for getting contractors in to do the firefighting? It is a highly specialized thing how you fight oil fires. All of that kind of planning was going on here and there. Some of it was civilian, some of it was military, some of it was chaired by NSC and OMB people. Some of it was chaired by State. There was the Future of Iraq project chaired by the State Department, which was basically outreach to various Iraqi external groups to discuss political questions.

Over time the secrecy of the meetings ended. By the summer of ’02 the meetings pretty much stopped being secret. It was known that we were thinking about Iraq.

There was fear that people would wrongly think the decision has been made that we’re going to war in Iraq, and the President didn’t want that.

All of that interagency planning, with multiple interagency groups chaired by different agencies, depending on the issue, was being done by the Deputies Committee under Steve Hadley. Many articles and books said that I, Doug Feith, was in charge of postwar planning, but that’s not accurate.

The military planning was done at CENTCOM [United States Central Command], in Florida. Strategic planning for many civilian issues was being done by multiple groups under the general umbrella of the Deputies Committee. I participated in that. It was an NSC staff-run operation and Hadley was in charge.

I know you sent me some questions about Frank Miller’s operation. Frank Miller was the Defense guy on the NSC staff. Maybe you sent me that excerpt from Condi’s book about this.

Nelson: Yes.

Feith: The Joint Staff was uneasy that the war planning in Tampa seemed to be disconnected from the discussions going on at the deputies level. Pete Pace, as the Vice Chairman, was coming to the deputies meetings, but the Vice is not the right person to connect the White House and the interagency process to Tampa.

So on their own initiative, the J-5 people—It was General Casey, at the time when he was a three-star—George Casey and his J-5 staff said, “We need to put together a group that will connect the interagency policy making in the Sit [Situation] Room with the war planners down in Tampa.” It was an excellent initiative. I said, “Hallelujah, that’s a good thing to do.”

When we informed the Deputies Committee that the J-5 was going to serve as the connection between Washington and Tampa, Frank Miller, who is a former OSD official, expressed a reservation. I think he may have been an Assistant Secretary in the Clinton administration. In any event, he was a highly experienced OSD official, very bureaucratically savvy. He said, “Wait a second. If there is going to be something connecting the interagency process with the war planners, I don’t want it to be the Joint Staff; I want it to be me. I’m the NSC Defense guy.” So he formed a group—I describe this in some detail in my book. He formed a group that would be a policy layer on top of the new J-5 cell. I liked what Miller did. We started seeing the mechanisms being put in place that made sense.

Condi, in her book, said I had made it clear that DoD was not interested in having anybody involved in Miller's process. I don't know where that came from. It's not true. Our attitude, on the contrary, was that we were happy that the Joint Staff took this initiative and that Frank Miller took his initiative.

This process was put in place in July, I believe, of '02. So by July of '02 you not only had all of these interagency groups under Hadley's general umbrella, and the war planning down in Tampa, but you now had this Joint Staff cell, which involved interagency representatives, and that cell was more or less at the colonel level, the O-6 level. Then you had this policy group that Frank Miller ran—It was called something like the Executive Support Group—which was the policy level that was supposed to be served by this Joint Staff group. So you begin to have a mechanism for interagency planning for all this.

The next major thing that happened was in October. The main focus of my organization was not war planning. We had a role in that, but Secretary Rumsfeld generally wanted the military guys to be off on their own doing war planning once he gave them his strategic guidance. My office's main focus was on the political transition after Saddam, in phase four of the war plan, as it was called.

As I was doing the research for my book, I obtained a copy of a historian's product that was done for the Joint Staff. The Joint Staff got a historian to come in and pull together all of their Iraq War planning documents and put them on a DVD [digital video disc]. This is a terrific resource. I had never seen it before. I found on it documents that I had not seen when they were first written.

Riley: Is that unclassified?

Feith: No, it is highly classified. It is war plan–related stuff. I didn't quote anything classified, but I used it to educate myself.

One of the things that I learned was that there was unease on the part of the Joint Staff, going back at least to August-September of '02, that CENTCOM was not paying attention to phase four. When they did various drills and discussions and exercises, testing logistics to see if things were going to work, they realized that the CENTCOM leadership was not focused on phase four. They started pushing CENTCOM about that.

In the meantime, I was pushing Secretary Rumsfeld, saying that we had political transition issues to address. When we ultimately overthrow Saddam, there are these questions: What are we going to do? What are we going to put in place? There was a problem about how far do you go with the planning. We knew the President did not want a lot of discussion, work, or anything that could be leaked before September '02, when he gave his first major speech about Iraq at the UN. That's when he first said, "We are going to do something about Iraq." Something, not necessarily war; the status quo is unsustainable; Saddam can't defy the world forever; he is going to have to come into line or else.

The "or else" was not necessarily war. The hope was that if we built up a credible threat of imminent war, we might be able to persuade Saddam, who is a survivor, that he should be pragmatic and change course.

Nelson: Change course or leave the government?

Feith: Initially it was change course, which some of us did not consider a satisfactory result. There were debates about defining the strategic goal. Is it regime change, or is it compliance with the UN? Defining the goal is what determines which policies are required.

Nelson: Right.

Feith: The State Department view was that we were aiming at compliance with the UN. Colin Powell went to the President in August of 2002 and said, "I'm uneasy." The President discussed this with Bob Woodward in an on-the-record interview. The uneasiness that he expressed about Iraq was, "If we're going to do this, you have to do it through the UN." Woodward then talked to Powell and asked if he told the President that he's uneasy about going to war. Powell said he didn't say that to the President. Powell never expressed unease about going to war; he just said if you're going to do this, you have to lay the foundation at the UN.

We at Defense were concerned about that, because we believed that the UN could suck the President into a course of action that would have no end, indefinite inspections with no clear results and no clear compliance, but no clear defiance. You'd just wind up with mush.

Defining our goal was absolutely crucial. If the goal is compliance with the UN, then UN diplomacy may be terrific. But if the goal is to remove the problem represented by Saddam Hussein, then the UN route might not be terrific. It may be a danger, like quicksand.

Anyway, the President passed word to us that he didn't want any publicly visible planning for war that would undercut his call to the UN for diplomatic support to put pressure on Saddam. If it looks like the decision is already made to go to war and the diplomatic support is just a veneer, then we won't get the support. If you read the President's speech to the UN, the question of whether he wants compliance with the UN resolutions or regime change is exquisitely ambiguous. It is so carefully ambiguous that it obviously took many drafts to get it that vague.

I don't know what was in the President's mind. We heard the speech with amazement that it was so meticulously unclear. Once the President gave that speech and our diplomacy was launched, that became the first opportunity to focus on what we were going to do if we went to war and there was regime change. We'd need to have some kind of political process planned. Who in the U.S. government would be responsible?

I talked to Secretary Rumsfeld about this and he was emphatic. He said that there were several models, each a cautionary tale. In Bosnia, he said, security reconstruction was separated from civil reconstruction. The security reconstruction was done. What the military was supposed to do, it did. But the civil reconstruction was not done. When we tried to reduce our military presence in Bosnia, we were told that if we do it, everything will collapse because the civil reconstruction was not done. So we're locked in forever and the civilian reconstruction people who are not doing their job have no incentive to do their task. You remember President Clinton had said we'd be gone within a year, and that was in 1995. Here we were in 2003 with no end in sight. Rumsfeld said we can't separate civilian reconstruction from security reconstruction in Iraq.

Next was the case of Afghanistan. In Afghanistan we took what was called the "lead nation approach" to reconstruction. This was an idea promoted by the UN. It was supported by the U.S. government. Major sectors in reconstruction were assigned to different countries. Police training was assigned to the Germans. Security forces were assigned to the United States. Disarmament and reintegration of militias were assigned to Japan. The judiciary was assigned to Italy—go figure. Counternarcotics was assigned to the British. This was called the lead nation approach.

The idea was that these were all supposed to be multilateral efforts, but for each there was a lead country. It didn't work. What happened was the United States put substantial resources into its area of responsibility and did a reasonably good job. The British put some resources, but not enough, into the counternarcotics efforts.

The Germans accepted the police training, which in Afghanistan required starting at square one, including officers, interior ministry people, forensics people. You needed everything. The Germans came in and said, "We're going to fulfill our responsibility by building an academy to train police officers. Not the patrol guys, but the officers. We're going to build the academy. It's going to take a few years." What's supposed to happen in the meantime? The Germans basically redefined their responsibility to being a thin slice of what needed to be done, and then they didn't do much even to do the thin slice.

I don't want to be overly harsh on the allies. These were at least people who were willing to do something. There were allies who didn't want to do anything. I'm not saying this to mock or knock the allies, but it tells us about the pitfalls of multilateralism. This is a lot harder to do than is understood by people who say that the United States is just stupidly arrogant when we assert that if there is no U.S. leadership, nothing gets done. This was an example of leaving important tasks to the "international community" and not a lot happened.

As for the Italians, who were responsible for the judiciary, after something like *two years*, they had not even assigned a single person full time to the job. I personally went over and spoke to their National Security Advisor and said, "One person, full time, would be an improvement." It was unbelievable, the negligence on these various projects.

Rumsfeld said something like, "You see how we did it in Afghanistan? We can't do it that way. If you're not going to do it on the lead nation concept and the United States is clearly going to be responsible, and you're not going to separate civilian and security reconstruction, so the same person has to be responsible for the military efforts and the nonmilitary efforts. Statutorily there are only two people in the whole U.S. government who are allowed to give orders to the military, and those are the President and the Secretary of Defense. By a rather easy logical process, the person who has to be responsible is me." "Me" being Rumsfeld.

That was a schematic of the analysis. We wrote this up. I remember the Secretary had me brief this to a principals meeting or an NSC meeting. When I said, "There is going to be a reconstruction effort," I never said, "It is going to be DoD and we don't want other agencies to participate." Condi suggests in her book that that was the DoD attitude, but that's ridiculous.

It is a very common but shabby technique to take patently foolish ideas and ascribe them to your political rivals. You falsely ascribe this foolish idea to them and then you say, "How foolish."

Advice to historians: Don't take *ex post facto* testimony at face value from people who want to settle political scores or score political points or make themselves look good compared to somebody else, or appeal to popular prejudices or serve other purposes besides truth. Actually, one shouldn't take testimony at face value from anyone. People don't always testify in good faith and even when they do, they make mistakes. Even if somebody who seems to have been in a position to know asserts that somebody else in the government was foolish, a proper historian should say, *What proof is there of this, other than the fact that somebody wants to make somebody else look foolish?* As somebody who had many foolish ideas ascribed to him, I can tell you, I'm willing to confess to any foolish thing I've actually said, but I have views ascribed to me that I just never held.

On this issue of Rumsfeld being in charge of Iraqi reconstruction, we in the Defense Department were not looking to do it by ourselves within the U.S. government, and we were not looking to have America do it unilaterally, without foreign help. I always believed you'd have to be a moron to be a unilateralist. The idea that the United States would want to do everything by itself without help—it's moronic. Nobody supported that view. And yet, it was often alleged that we in the Bush administration were unilateralists and wanted to do everything ourselves. It's not true. We spent an enormous amount of time begging other people to join our efforts and contribute to our efforts.

Our frustration was not that there were other countries involved in Iraqi reconstruction. It was that there wasn't a bigger foreign contribution. Yet we were described as unilateralists. Unilateralism is patently ridiculous, so you make people look ridiculous by accusing them of it. If a historian thinks a person believed a foolish proposition, the question should be asked: "What document do you have? What speech do you have? What contemporaneous record do you have that suggests that the person actually believed that?"

Nelson: Let me ask you this, because just five or ten minutes ago you were talking about the failed multilateral project in Afghanistan. Now you're talking about the virtues of multilateralism. What do you mean by multilateral?

Feith: What I was saying is that multilateralism is extremely hard to do. When we organized reconstruction as a multilateral project without America being in charge, we wound up with sad results. But that doesn't mean that our preference was that we do everything ourselves. The charge made against the administration is that we had no interest in other people's contributions, that we didn't want to deal with them, that we didn't want to coax them. That's not true. We spent an enormous amount of time trying to get other countries to contribute in valuable ways.

Nelson: Just so I understand it: Your notion of positive multilateralism assumes a chain of command in which the United States is at the top.

Feith: No, I'd be happy if other people are at the top. We just want something to work.

Nelson: OK.

Feith: What we have found is, on reconstruction projects especially, is that if the United States has a major role, people say, "America is in charge." They tend to say, "If America is in charge, America is so rich it should do it itself." So if the United States has a substantial role, it's hard to

get other people to contribute. It's not impossible; it's just hard and it takes a lot of work.

One can hope to work on a democratic basis: We'll do it, and you'll do it, and we'll all be equal, but the world generally doesn't work that way. Look at the writings of Susan Rice and Ann-Marie Slaughter. They faulted the Bush administration. They said our attitude was that if we get involved we have to lead, because we're arrogant.

The fact is, if we get involved and don't lead, nothing happens. Foreign officials commonly say, "If America is involved, if it wants something done, it will do it." It would be nice if the world didn't work that way, but it generally does. One option is for the U.S. not to get involved at all, then maybe somebody else will do something. That's a possibility.

The other possibility is to actually run the operation in a way that we *do* take the lead but we're effective, successful, and persuasive in getting other countries to contribute and play a role. That's what we were hoping for. The more democratic approach was tried in Afghanistan, and as I said it was a clear failure. The American leadership role was tried in Iraq, where it worked a little bit better. We did have a coalition. But attitudes of State Department officials handicapped us. The State Department relationship with the Pentagon was problematic. The State Department leadership didn't really have its heart in the work to support the war.

One of our top generals said at a meeting—I can visualize it—"State's attitude is this: 'It's your war. You handle it.'" And he had his arms crossed on his chest as a sign of this attitude of unwillingness to make an effort. The leadership of the State Department never opposed the war, but they wanted to put the word out that they weren't terribly comfortable with it.

Nelson: Just to follow up here: You also described the reasoning that Rumsfeld used as to why security and civil administration had to be in the same hands and those had to be his hands. I wonder, wouldn't it be logical to expect Condi Rice and the State Department to feel like they want us on their terms?

Feith: Except for the fact that you are major officials in the U.S. government. This is not kindergarten. You do have responsibilities to the country. The President of the United States is deciding to go to war and this is a serious enterprise and you have your role to play. You either play it wholeheartedly or, in my view, you should resign. If you're resentful and you're in a snit, then resign and go out and criticize the President on the record. But to stay in the administration, be in a snit, and criticize the President on background is not, in my view, a proper way to operate.

Knott: I was going to ask this question earlier and then I thought it was too off-the-wall but I'm going to go ahead and ask it: Do you think there were people within the CIA and the State Department who simply wanted the war in Iraq to fail? Wanted the American effort there to fail? Would you go that far?

Feith: No, I don't know that to be the case, though there were people who absolutely did not like the President, didn't like his whole approach, didn't like the war. I understood that the war was a judgment call. Lots of things look inevitable in retrospect; almost nothing looks inevitable prospectively.

Nelson: True.

Feith: Especially when you're in a policy position and you know you could do this option, or you could do that option. This option involves these possible problems. This other option involves these other possible problems. And then there are all the problems that you can't even anticipate. None of the options looked good, and that's policy making. Things don't look inevitable.

The thing that struck me as so unhealthy about the debates leading up to the war was that you had all these press stories about people being uncomfortable with the movement toward war and yet you had scores, perhaps even hundreds, of interagency meetings at the deputies, principals, and NSC levels, not to mention lower levels, and at none of them did the Secretary of State ever come in and say, "Mr. President, here are the things we're trying to accomplish in Iraq. Let me show you that you can actually accomplish them without war. There is a reasonable chance that you can accomplish them without war. Therefore, Mr. President, I don't think you should go to war because we have not exhausted all the means short of war to try to achieve what we need to achieve regarding Saddam Hussein." I would have respected that completely even if I disagreed with it.

If top State officials had proposed an alternative policy, they would have required judgment calls. The President must weigh the risks of action and the risks of inaction. There is no algorithm that gives you the proper way to resolve the risks of action and inaction; it is always a judgment call.

Riley: But the calculus had been shifted dramatically after 9/11, right?

Feith: It had been affected by 9/11. For example, our willingness to take risks of certain kinds diminished. After 9/11 we became much more risk-averse for certain kinds of security threats. If somebody said in the '90s, "Saddam might use terrorist groups to attack the United States," people in the '90s, when the homeland had not been touched by terrorists, would have said, "What? Remote risk." Nobody would say after 9/11 that a terrorist threat was remote.

Riley: Of course.

Feith: After 9/11, people were raw. You could evaluate the risks similarly, but the coefficients that you would assign to the different risks would change because of circumstances.

Knott: Would it be your opinion that people like Joe Wilson and Valerie Plame [Wilson] and Michael Scheuer, whom you mentioned earlier, were somewhat representative of their particular agencies, or were they sort of aberrations?

Feith: I'm talking in generalities, and as I talk in generalities I realize how much of a problem it is to talk in generalities. It's hard to talk about these things without generalities, but I know I'm talking about large institutions; they involve a lot of people. There's a range of opinions among the people. You don't want to be unfair. I don't think I'm unfair in general when I'm talking about the institutions, but if you start to apply those generalities to specific individuals, it can be unfair.

What I can say is the State Department leadership never came to a meeting and said, "We are against the war." Both Powell and Armitage have given interviews saying that they never said that. I was there and I never heard them make the argument. When Armitage says, for example, that his only problem was timing—He said he thought we should have moved against Saddam later, in January of '05—I found that amazing. If war is justified, it means that it is reasonably urgent. I don't know how you can say, "War is necessary two years from now." What you can say is, "At this point, if nothing changes, we may have to go to war," but you can't say that war is necessary two years from now. It is illogical.

I don't see how Armitage could say that the threat is large enough and imminent enough that we have to go to war, but then say we shouldn't launch it until after the next Presidential election. The President may not get reelected, and his opponent may oppose going to war. Arguing for delay means you haven't actually decided that war is necessary. Anyway, I simply don't understand what Armitage was saying. Yet that is his position on the record. He wasn't against the war; he just thought we should have done it two years later.

Secretary Powell had this important August 2002 meeting with the President without Rumsfeld or Cheney around, as he explained to Woodward. He told Woodward he didn't oppose the war. He told the President that he should "use the UN as the vehicle for his diplomacy."

The whole time this was going on, high-ranking State Department officials were telling journalists, "We're deeply troubled." State's leadership was putting itself in a position such that if the war went well, they were part of the winning team, and if the war didn't go well, then their reluctance and concerns and skepticism were prescient.

They were saying one thing to journalists and they were saying something else to the President. I just don't think that is a proper way for high-ranking officials to conduct themselves.

Riley: I want to ask one question again about this postwar effort. This may be a naïve question. It is based on, as best I can recall, material I was reading contemporaneously or shortly thereafter. We're getting close on time so I'm mindful of that, too. There were, allegedly, significant postwar/reconstruction exercises going on in the State Department at one point. The external impression is that those were sort of dismissed by the Defense Department.

Feith: When I mentioned before that different groups were responsible for different efforts relating to the planning, the State Department had what was called the Future of Iraq project. It was a series of studies, the most significant of which dealt with political transition, the same thing that my office was saying was front and center and should be a major subject.

The Future of Iraq project included some excellent work. It is often described as a plan, but it wasn't a plan. Ambassador Ryan Crocker, who later became our Ambassador to Iraq and is now our Ambassador to Afghanistan, said the Future of Iraq project is not even close to a plan. These were concept papers.

It's been said that this so-called "plan" was rejected by the Pentagon. The irony is that we thought the political part of the Future of Iraq project was terrific. But it was rejected by the Secretary of State and the Deputy Secretary of State, who didn't like it at all because it was inconsistent with their view that the United States should run a multiyear transitional civil

authority in Iraq. We in the Defense Department opposed that idea, saying, "We don't want an occupation. We want to put the Iraqis in charge of their own affairs as early as possible."

This became a gigantic fight between the Pentagon and the State Department. It is a major subject of the last several chapters of my book. In a nutshell, we won that fight in the Situation Room in March 2003. We got the President to endorse our plan, the Iraqi Interim Authority Plan for Political Transition after Saddam. But the point we had won in the Situation Room we lost in Baghdad when Ambassador [L. Paul, III] Bremer took over the Coalition Provisional Authority. He essentially set aside the Iraqi Interim Authority Plan, dismissed it as unrealistic, though it was the plan that the President had approved.

Ambassador Bremer knew about the IIA [Iraqi Interim Authority] plan, because we had briefed him on it, but he believed that the President had said to him, "Start from scratch and decide what's best." There was ambiguity in his instructions. It's a big problem that he went off to Iraq with that kind of ambiguity. I am not accusing Ambassador Bremer of insubordination. I think he interpreted from his own point of view his unclear instructions, to give himself a license to do whatever he wanted and to set aside what had been decided before.

What had been decided before was our plan for political transition in Iraq. It would not have produced a protracted occupation. The State Department favored a protracted occupation, and when Bremer came in, he gave the State Department a victory in Baghdad that they had not even tried to achieve in the Situation Room. He undid the basic concept that the President had approved and we wound up with a protracted occupation for 14 months. At the beginning of that occupation we had problems. At the end of that 14-month period we had a full-blown insurgency.

I'm not saying that the insurgency was all the result of setting aside the IIA plan, but I think that every major problem we had in Iraq was aggravated by the fact that we forfeited the chance to be liberators, and set ourselves up as occupiers for the crucial initial period. The approach the CPA [Coalition Provisional Authority] took persuaded millions of Iraqis who were not otherwise inclined to be hostile to us that we were there to dominate their country and control their lives. It was a really terrible mistake.

Riley: Why don't we close off today? You've been very generous with your time and with your recollections. It has been fascinating for us. We're learning a lot.

March 23, 2012

Riley: This is day two of the Doug Feith interview. Two things to get started with: You said you had made some notes and also you were about to recount for us your sense of Don Rumsfeld, how his mind worked—I think that was the way you put it—which would be great for us to have on tape. Let's start with these two things.

Feith: Some criticism of Pentagon operations, of my office's operations in particular, sometimes

results from lack of appreciation of how Rumsfeld insisted on working. Some critics didn't understand why there was so much emphasis on the way memos are formatted or drafted. They just didn't understand why Rumsfeld had very particular requirements.

First of all, I'll talk about his standard analytical approach, which is something that he trained us to understand. It became my responsibility to take the policy organization, which had more or less 1,500 people, and train it to produce memos that had the right substance and form so they would be useful for the Secretary.

His basic approach was as follows. This became the standard approach for new issues. The first thing is: Don't immediately plunge into courses of action; ask: What are our strategic—which is to say national-level— goals? What does strategic mean? This is the way I defined it and it seemed to work for him.

I emphasize to my staff that strategic thinking had two major dimensions. One was what I thought of as the horizontal dimension: the way that if you do something in a particular area, it can have nonobvious effects on other areas. A strategic thinker considers far more than the obvious consequences of action or inaction. The hallmark of the strategic thinker is saying, "Ah, that can ripple way over to there." That I think of as the horizontal dimension of the analysis.

The other dimension is temporal: that what you do now not only in some way relates to what preceded, but is going to affect things way down the road. That is what Rumsfeld meant by saying, "You have to look around corners." Play this thing out several steps ahead, including around corners, and think of what the implications are going to be.

With both dimensions in mind, you try to formulate your national goals. Strategic goals tend to be conceptual and high altitude and also succinctly formulated. An enterprise shouldn't have more than four or five strategic goals. That's too many to guide the work of a large organization. Let's say you can lay out ten goals. You should reformulate them as four or five strategic goals.

The idea of the short list is to provide guidance effectively to multiple offices. If you write your strategy as a book, there is no way in the world that a guy working at his desk, facing decisions within his area, is going to be able to stop his work multiple times every day and go to a book for guidance. It's just not practical. A book is not strategy.

If you have a team and you've given them four or five main goals, then they can know, "Is this serving our strategic interests?" Consider the War on Terrorism. The President's strategic guidance goes to the Attorney General; it goes to the Director of Central Intelligence; it goes to the Secretary of State; it goes to the Secretary of Defense. They are all presumably developing strategies for their departments that will also have goals. Those goals should nest in under the goals that the President has set. It's not that the entire strategy for the whole government is four sentences; it is that the strategic guidance for each level should be no more than four or five things.

If you're really running a strategic operation for an institution as large as the U.S. government, you will find that there are multiple goals being set by different operations all the way down the chain of command. What looks tactical from the President's point of view is strategic from the perspective of a lower-level official. Goals for lower-level layers of the government should be

nesting under the goals that come down from the highest levels.

For the Secretary, when we'd talk about what national security policy is, we'd start with the national goals. The next things we would present to him would be key assumptions and key considerations. He believed that the really serious intellectual work is in the formulation of goals and key assumptions. What is an assumption?

You may have ten, you may even have 15, but you don't have a hundred key assumptions. The first thing to say about a key assumption is that it may not be true. It is a thought that is important for your decision about what you're going to do, what course of action you're going to take. A key assumption is so important that one's plan of action hinges on it, and if it is wrong you have to substantially change your plan.

The reason you call it call it an assumption is precisely to make it clear that it may be wrong. So when you put your assumptions down in writing, you are bringing to the surface the recognition that they may not be correct. You are admitting that you may be wrong in your view of the future.

Then you set out "key considerations." I use the term to refer to facts, as opposed to assumptions. For example, when we had the issue of Liberia in June-July of '03, there was a breakdown of order, a rebellion in Liberia, and the possibility of a catastrophic humanitarian situation developing. The French and the British came to us and said, "You've got to help Liberia."

They were arguing that we're responsible for the Liberian intervention. This was going on, of course, while the Iraq War was going on. It's just an example of how the world doesn't stop to allow you to focus on one thing.

At the highest levels of our government, knowledge about West Africa was limited, or to use Rumsfeld's word, "imperfect." All of a sudden top officials were being told, "You've got to do a military deployment to Liberia."

In my office, we asked, "What does the President need to know about Liberia?" We consulted with our Africanists. We had some really terrific people. My Deputy Assistant Secretary, Theresa Whelan, is an enormously impressive, well-informed person. She was invaluable to this whole process. We asked, What does the President need to know? You need to know basic things about the geography and who is bordering it, and what the population is, and the nature of the insurgency. What are the insurgents concerned about? How many clashing insurgent groups are there?

One needs to keep the information at the Presidential level. You don't need to get into detail that is going to cause everybody's eyes to glaze over. You've got to think carefully about this key considerations chart.

The main impetus for the whole effort was fear that something awful was going to happen in Liberia: a breakdown of government or a humanitarian disaster. That's a key assumption. How should the NSC formulate its goals? One could easily formulate goals of things like *create stability*. But was the place stable before? If you formulate a grand goal like that early on, you've bought a problem that you're going to own for decades.

Another possible goal: *Lay the foundation for democratic government or prosperity*. That's also very ambitious. The President had made statements over the years like, "What happened in Rwanda and Burundi in the Clinton administration is not going to happen on my watch." The President had this strong commitment that he was not going to ignore major humanitarian problems. So in formulating the goals for Liberia, we focused on the humanitarian issue, saying that the purpose of our intervention is to prevent a major humanitarian disaster.

When you formulate goals, there are things you want to achieve and things you want to avoid. One of the things we wanted to avoid was a substantial indefinite commitment of American resources. Our goal was to do those things that only we can do—such as send a force in quickly. Very few countries in the world have the ability to put 5,000 people anywhere within 30 days. Our idea was to turn over responsibility to ECOWAS, the Economic Community of West African States, as soon as possible.

OK, going back to the basic strategic process—You've set goals. And you've identified key assumptions and key considerations. Then you can begin to lay out proposed courses of action. The next step is a cost-benefit analysis, though what is being valued is not easily quantifiable. The main costs in many cases are risks. It's cost in the form of risk.

I don't want to pretend that this is something you can do mathematically, but you try to do it as rigorously as you can. When you do the cost-benefit analysis, it has to reflect the goals and the key assumptions. When you talk about costs and benefits, you're talking about resources, priorities, the opportunity costs.

One thing that Secretary Rumsfeld always stressed is that every dollar is coming out of somebody's pocket. One thing that you could do with those dollars is leave them in the pockets of the American people, which is not a bad national goal in and of itself.

Riley: The President thought that that was important.

Feith: Right. Also, when you're talking about a commitment of people to a project, Rumsfeld had a pet peeve. It was thinking about military manpower as a free good, thinking that sending troops off to a peacekeeping mission or having them do environmental cleanup was cost-free because they're in the military anyway.

There were a number of cases that got talked about during the Bush-Gore election campaign: breast cancer research being done from the DoD budget, and environmental cleanup being done from the DoD budget. There was even an abbreviation for this: MOOTW, Military Operations Other Than War. That was something that Rumsfeld generally frowned on. He thought it was bad government.

For each course of action, we worked to develop metrics of success. That's difficult. A lot of the things you want to do or to avoid are not quantifiable, it's difficult to identify good metrics for gauging how well you're progressing.

On the other hand, there is no question about the value of metrics. Whatever you measure gets better. If you pick the wrong metric, you can distort your operations. The key example was in Vietnam; it was body count. If you tell the military that you're going to judge their performance

by body count, they're going to kill a lot of people. It's not necessarily serving your strategic purposes and in fact it can be undermining your strategic purposes.

Rumsfeld himself did not encourage body count reports from Afghanistan and Iraq. Eventually the press wears you down on this stuff, but for a long time he was fighting hard not to report body counts. He didn't want that to become a metric imposed on the military.

And even after you set metrics, you have to track your progress. Sometimes people set metrics and then ignore the metrics.

Finally, in a strategic analysis, there has to be constant communication between the results of what you're doing, and your goals and assumptions. Often you will find that some of your assumptions are wrong.

When your assumptions are wrong, you have to revisit both your goals and your courses of action. Your goals are based on the assumptions, as are your courses of actions. You've got to see what your results are. Some of your assumptions relate to resources and it may turn out that you don't have the right resources. The willingness to challenge yourself and question yourself and admit that your own goals or assumptions are wrong is built into this process.

One of the things that I tried to do in my office was help combatant commanders, scheduled to brief the Secretary on war plans, to understand how to present those plans to him. They would not get the Secretary to approve their plan if it were not more or less in the form I've just outlined: Goals, key assumptions, key considerations, courses of action with pros and cons, and metrics.

Sometimes, early on, a combatant commander would come in and present slides, and the goals were formulated in a way that was not useful. They would say things like the goal is, in a war plan, "defeat the enemy." That's not helpful. It doesn't provide operational guidance. You've got to do better than that. Then there would be a big discussion about the goals.

Sometimes the briefing would plunge right into a course of action. The Secretary would say, "Stop. Where are the assumptions?" The general would say, "We'll get to them." Rumsfeld would say, "No, I want to get to them now." He wasn't interested in a plan based on assumptions that he hadn't reviewed. He would say, "No, if the assumptions are slide 37, we're going to go from slide two, which is goals, to slide 37."

The general would have to reshuffle his deck. OK, we'll go to the assumptions. There would be a two-hour session with the general on the war plan. The entire two hours would be spent on the assumptions. The general was not happy. Sometimes he would have to fly in from very far away. If he's from PACOM [United States Pacific Command], it's from Hawaii. He came there with the intention of getting a two-hour block of time with the Secretary and getting his plan approved. He got through two of the total of 40 or 50 slides. He gets through two in two hours and he is sent back, as General Pace used to put it, to do more pushups. He has now got a meticulously worked out slide of assumptions that the Secretary has crafted with him.

They schedule another two-hour block of time to complete this work. It might be two weeks later, or six weeks later. The general flies back, sits down with Rumsfeld, and says, "Mr.

Secretary, here are the goals that we worked out last time. I'll show you the assumptions. We don't need to spend any time on these. We've worked them very hard." At that point Secretary Rumsfeld says, "Stop. What do you mean, 'We don't have to go over the assumptions?'" "Well, Mr. Secretary, we worked them out with you. This is exactly what you dictated last time." The Secretary would say, "But I might have been wrong."

What he was trying to do was to get across the point that there is no holy text. There is nothing that is red-striped, approved for all time, don't revisit this issue. Everything gets revisited. He was making an important intellectual point: *Everything gets revisited*. The mere fact that it came out of my mouth doesn't mean it's right. Nobody should think it's right simply because we, six weeks ago, thought it looked good. What's happened over the past six weeks?

When he was reviewing war plans at the beginning of the administration, in some cases they were years old and the strategic guidance on which they were based was one or two years older than that. There were plans relating to Korea that were done before the North Koreans had a nuclear bomb. He would throw his hands up. How can we have plans like that? Nobody chose to revisit the plans when something as major as the Korean bomb came onto the scene? His view was, everything needs to be reexamined all the time.

One of the key purposes of strategy is stability for the bureaucracy. If you have a strategy, you do not have to wake up every morning and ask yourself, What do we do today? Strategy sets a framework that allows people to say, "We've got our marching orders. Now we can think through what we need to do."

But you have to balance preserving your strategy for the sake of stability and revisiting it if things don't play out according to your assumptions. You've got to be willing to change it at some point. Striking that balance correctly is crucial. You don't want to not have a strategy, but sticking to a strategy that is not working is pigheadedness and you don't want to be pigheaded.

That really is the dilemma. That's the way Rumsfeld approached these things.

Nelson: How does this play out, though, after September 11th, when there is a big meeting at Camp David three days later to talk about, what do we do? What you're talking about here is a leisurely process.

Feith: Oh, no, it's not. Sometimes you're doing it literally in hours.

Nelson: How do you do all that in hours?

Feith: You do it fast. You do it as best you can. You asked me yesterday what thoughts I had at the end of my time in the Reagan administration. I'll tell you one of them. I realized that in the government, policy making is making important decisions on the basis of grossly inadequate information. That's what policy making is.

I had been practicing law and then I went into the government and people would ask, "What's the difference between your government work and practicing law?" One of the differences is, when you are a lawyer and you're working on a case, you strive to know absolutely everything possible about the case. There is no such thing as a good litigator going up in front of a judge,

and there being a relevant precedent that the lawyer doesn't know. It would be a horrific embarrassment if a judge asked, "What about that case in Arkansas that seems relevant here?" And you say, "I don't know the case." If you're a good lawyer, you know everything. You've researched it, you've read it, you've got it all.

Policy making is not like that. You're operating in real time. You may need a decision in two hours. What I've described, you compress that process into two hours. I give an example of that in my book. In Afghanistan there was enormous frustration in the first days. We had no war plan on the shelf for Afghanistan. Nobody anticipated that we were going to go to war in a landlocked country in the middle of central Asia. We got hit on 9/11 and we started the war on October 7th, less than a month later. The whole war plan got worked out in that period. This is a process that in many cases takes years under normal circumstances. It was done. It was planned and implementation began in three weeks.

We started with an air campaign. Then there was a frustrating effort to get some U.S. forces on the ground in Afghanistan. The Secretary was pressing General [Tommy R.] Franks on this day after day after day, to the point where—Franks talks about it in his book—Franks said, "I'm going to resign." The Secretary at that point backed off a little bit and went on a charm offensive with General Franks to repair that relationship. It worked. They actually became good friends. But there was enormous frustration about getting some U.S. troops in on the ground.

We were then hoping that we could then get the Northern Alliance guys to start moving and conquering ground from the Taliban, and they weren't moving. This was late October. Around three weeks after the war started, the *New York Times* and others started running stories about "quagmire" and "Nothing is happening," and "Failure in Afghanistan."

Rumsfeld said our assumption was that we were going to use a small U.S. force in Afghanistan because we wanted to avoid the big footprint that the Soviets had had. We didn't want to trigger a xenophobic reaction by the Afghans. The Soviets put 300,000 guys there and failed. We didn't want to re-create that error. So we had a light footprint strategy, but the assumption was that the Northern Alliance guys were going to fight.

At one point Rumsfeld turned to me and Pete Pace and said, "We need to rethink our strategy in Afghanistan. Are we doing the right thing? I want you to do a new strategic analysis," essentially a new strategy. It was something like 11 o'clock in the morning. He said, "We'll meet again at 3:00."

Riley: This is when you're running down the hall, right?

Feith: Yes. So General Pace and I went to my office. His J-5, John Abizaid, was out of town at that time, so he took Abizaid's deputy J-5, General [Michael M.] Dunn, an Air Force Major General. The three of us went into my office and closed the door. We had four hours, more or less. I sat down at my computer and the Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, this four-star Marine General, is over one shoulder and this two-star Air Force General is on the other shoulder and the three of us are banging out a term paper.

In the course of this, I turned around to Pace and I said something like, "This is a little strange, isn't it?" Normally you have staff work, but it was clear that in four hours you couldn't staff it

out. Also, we needed to reflect the Secretary's thinking. The amount of time it would have taken us to impart the Secretary's thinking to somebody else and then get an inadequate draft and turn it into something was more than we could afford. It was clear we had to do it ourselves. I said, "This is like doing an all-nighter in college." I asked, "When you became a Marine four-star, did you ever think you were going to be doing something like this?" Pace is an extremely funny guy and he made some remark like, "Marines can do anything."

In fact, we did a significant paper: Where are we? What are our goals? What are our assumptions? What can we do? If the Northern Alliance is not moving, what are the things we can do to make them move? What is plan B, in case they don't move? Should we be bringing in extra forces? Should we be thinking about this differently? This was an example of how we took this entire process and squeezed it into a few hours. Obviously it is not the same product you would have had if you had a month or a year to do it, but there it was. It was, in mini form, a proper strategic analysis from Rumsfeld's point of view. If there's urgency, you can't study a thing to death.

Riley: I wonder if I could ask to pick up two pieces of this, which sort of takes us back to where we left off yesterday on Iraq. I'll pull out two aspects of the process that you're talking about and ask specific questions. The first one is on Iraq: Looking back, what assumptions did you make about postwar planning that proved to be wrong?

Feith: The main one is we *planned* to not set up an occupation government. Our thought and plan was to do a variation of the Afghanistan model. In Afghanistan we overthrew the Taliban government. We then worked with the UN in what was called the Bonn Process, where we brought a bunch of Afghan elders together. They have a *loya jirga* process of council deliberations. The UN in Bonn, Germany, had brought together Afghan elders, chieftains, and got an agreement for setting up an interim government chaired by someone who was from the tribe that had produced the Afghan kings. That was [Hamid] Karzai, a Pashtun. Since the war had been won by the ethnically Tajik and Uzbek Afghans, there was concern about whether their victory would produce a north-south civil war. We wanted to reduce the chances of that, and one way to do it was to give the south the leadership of the interim government. So a Pashtun was selected.

Karzai became head of the interim government of Afghanistan. No occupation government was set up. The Afghans were sovereign from Day One. U.S. forces continued to operate, but with the permission of the Afghan government. We were not there as occupiers; we were there as liberators helping the new Afghan government function.

We said, "That's a very important model and we should use something like that in Iraq." We couldn't apply that model in Iraq, in Rumsfeld's view and the view of others in the administration, for two main reasons. As opposed to Afghanistan, Iraq had two major types of resources that were very important: One was oil revenues and the other was the military. Once the Taliban was overthrown in Afghanistan, they didn't have revenues and they didn't have a military, to speak of.

Riley: Was there also in Iraq the existence of a state structure?

Feith: That's a different point. That's relevant, but it's not the main point that drove this issue. What drove this issue was, Rumsfeld said, if you made a mistake in Afghanistan, appointing the wrong guy to head the interim government, maybe the world can get together and help change him, but he's not going to have an enormous military, or an enormous set of financial resources to screw up, causing gigantic problems.

In Iraq, if you empower the wrong people, they immediately get ahold of the revenues and the military; it could cause a gigantic problem. Simply turning the keys to the car over to the new Iraqi leadership on Day One was not considered a responsible option. This came up in particular around January of '03, before the war started, when we started talking in a very serious way about a provisional government. Did we want to have the externals establish a provisional government that we could then recognize? They could invite us in. Our military operation could be at the invitation of a group of Iraqi leaders who considered themselves the provisional government, were recognized by us, and we would go in that way.

These externals were authentic Iraqi leaders, after all. These were not people that we had appointed. The Kurdish leadership was running northern Iraq. If they're in consensus with Shiite, Sunni, and other groups of externals, who have been around for years and were not appointed by us, they would have some standing. There was, however, a debate within the U.S. government about how much standing they would have. There was intense, antiexternal sentiment in both the CIA and the State Department.

When we were debating the provisional government idea, Rumsfeld said, "I'm nervous about a provisional government." I think he was affected by the intense opposition of the State and CIA people. He had three worries: "If these people turn out to be corrupt, or incompetent, or lacking political support within the country—any of those three, let alone all three—it would be a disaster to have overthrown Saddam and put Iraq's oil revenues and military capability in their hands." So Rumsfeld opposed the provisional government idea. The State Department and CIA were against the provisional government because they disdained the externals altogether.

By the way, State and CIA were wrong about the potential of the externals. They argued that the externals would have no legitimacy in the country, would have no following. But ever since the first interim government was created, through all the elections, the whole leadership of Iraq to this day remains externals.

Riley: It was an assumption.

Feith: It was one of many large intelligence errors about Iraq, but this one had especially large consequences. The CPA's policy for political transition was shaped by this hostility toward the externals. It was based on an analysis that turned out to be wrong. The assumptions about the externals' political support was wrong.

Rumsfeld wanted a political transition plan that was not a provisional government and not an instantaneous turning over of "the keys to the car." We knew that the State Department view was the United States, maybe by itself or maybe in cooperation with the UN, should run what was called a TCA, Transitional Civil Authority, for a multiyear period, to cultivate a new Iraqi leadership before we would turn responsibility over to them.

We said to the people at State, "That's a terrible mistake." We had all agreed that if we pursued a strategy of occupation rather than liberation, we would trigger an *intifada*. We would have terrorism, political violence, insurgency.

We said the only way to avoid that is don't set up an occupation government. Lay the foundation for an Iraqi government that can have real power from Day One, similar to what we did in Afghanistan. We planned the Iraqi Interim Authority Plan. The idea was to assign certain responsibilities from Day One to Iraqis, not including the interior ministry, the defense ministry, or the oil ministry—the so-called power ministries.

The Iraqis would immediately have full authority over other ministries, including the foreign ministry, so that the face of Iraq to the world would not be American. The face of Iraq to the world would be the Iraqi Foreign Minister. The idea was a power-sharing arrangement in which they would have real sovereign authority. What we meant by "sovereign" is they wouldn't have to report to us in a number of ministries. But they would have to report to us in some others.

In a very short time frame—months not years—as the new Iraqi leaders established themselves and showed honesty, competence, and a degree of political support, the IIA plan called for transferring the remaining ministries to them. This was a way of navigating between the idea of a provincial government and an instantaneous turnover of all responsibility. It would avoid a U.S.-led occupation government. We came up with this power-sharing arrangement to navigate between the hazards.

Perry: Do I remember correctly that you briefed the President on that, on the IIA?

Feith: Oh, yes.

Perry: Can you talk a little bit about that?

Feith: The details are in my book. That is a focus of the last chapters. I quote in there the key elements of the IIA. One was that it should not be overly detailed because we didn't want a full-fledged American plan imposed on Iraq. We wanted Iraqi participation in fledging out the plan.

I briefed the general features of the plan to the NSC on March 10th, I think it was, which was a week or so before the war started. Then I gave a more detailed briefing at the end of March to the President. That's the version that General [Jay M.] Garner was working on implementing in the Nasiriyah and Baghdad conferences, which were the first political conferences in Iraq. He was working toward the creation of an IIA.

Then in May you had the appointment of Ambassador Bremer as the new leading American civilian official in Iraq. For a few months it looked like he was implementing the IIA plan. His memos read to us as if he were trying to implement it, but couldn't quite do it. Then it became clear in September of '03 that he wasn't implementing it at all and he actually had a completely different concept. We learned this when he published an op-ed in the *Washington Post* that caused Secretary Rumsfeld to come into his morning roundtable meeting with steam coming out of his ears, asking, "Who cleared this?" He's looking at each one of us. We each gave him what is referred to as the "Pentagon salute," shrugged shoulders with your palms pointing up to heaven. Nobody had seen it. It was a complete surprise to all of us.

Bremer's op-ed said that the United States should preserve the Coalition Provisional Authority as the institution running Iraq until the Iraqis had a constitution and national elections thereunder. We all immediately understood that we couldn't control that timeline. If the Iraqis fight about a constitution and don't get one for another two or three years, then are we committed to running Iraq as the occupying power for an indefinite period. That was so *not* our plan. But it was consistent with the State Department idea of the Transitional Civil Authority, which State officials had floated.

The State Department had floated that plan in various interagency meetings, but the President said, in October of 2002, that Rumsfeld was going to be in charge of reconstruction in Iraq after the overthrow of Saddam. We talked at that time about "postwar work." The assumption was that the reconstruction was going to be done postwar. It was not generally assumed that reconstruction was going to be done while we had a war underway called the insurgency. The intelligence community did not foresee the war's continuing after Saddam's overthrow and it certainly didn't envision an enemy that was led by a coalition of Saddam Hussein and foreign jihadists.

One of the big debates within the government before the war was over the question of whether Saddam might cooperate with al-Qaeda. The CIA took a theoretical approach, saying it can't happen because the secular Ba'athists would never cooperate with the religious extremists of al-Qaeda. Defense officials said, "But there are numerous cases in history where people who were ideological enemies cooperated for strategic purposes, the obvious example being the Nazi-Soviet pact." The CIA said, "Couldn't happen." They fought us bitterly. Much of the fight about prewar intelligence had to do with that issue.

The CIA was asked, "What are all the things that Saddam might do to screw us up?" The CIA was asked to red-team this; play Saddam; figure out all the things that Saddam could do to create trouble for us. The CIA wrote a paper. A lot of these things were published in the course of the Senate Intelligence Committee investigations of all the prewar intelligence. I think this paper is one of them that was published.

The CIA paper talked about numerous scenarios where Saddam cleverly could do this or that to us to screw us up. But all of the scenarios ended with the overthrow of the Saddam Hussein regime. The CIA didn't even imagine that Saddam could be overthrown and operate from underground. They certainly didn't anticipate what we actually wound up with, which was a combined Ba'athist-jihadist insurgency. Part of the reason that was not anticipated was it went against an ideological preconception at the CIA: that secular Ba'athists wouldn't cooperate with jihadist religious extremists.

Rumsfeld's team believed in questioning assumptions—strongly. The essence of the fight that we had with the intelligence community was not an attempt at politicization of intelligence. We were arguing that the CIA's work was not professional: it wasn't properly skeptical; it was overly ideological; and its key assumption, on the impossibility of Ba'athist-jihadist cooperation, on its face didn't make any sense because it assumed that you could not have strategic cooperation among people who were ideological opponents.

The intelligence community got this wrong in a really profound and harmful way.

Riley: I want to come back, because there is a strain of this that you left sort of unfinished, which is how we get from the plan that you presented to the President, that you felt was authorized with the Interim Iraqi Authority—

Feith: Right.

Riley: You have Bremer then doing a reversal of that. You said that the State Department had never wholly abandoned the idea that there needed to be some kind of occupation. I'm trying to connect—

Feith: How did all that happen?

Riley: Yes, how did it happen?

Feith: I lived this, and then lived it for years after, explaining, talking about each one of these things. I could do a lecture on each element of this. So I apologize; it's hard to pare down the story.

Riley: No, you're doing what you're supposed to be doing.

Feith: It would be easy for somebody to infer from what I said that the U.S. government actually made a decision not to do the Transitional Civil Authority and to do the Iraqi Interim Authority. It would have been good had that been decided, but that's not how the interagency process developed.

The State Department floated these Transitional Civil Authority ideas in numerous papers. I think the first time I saw it when I was doing the research for my book was something like July of 2002, which is very early. So this Transitional Civil Authority idea was out there in various State Department memos when, in October, the President decides Rumsfeld should be responsible for reconstruction.

Riley: Right.

Feith: Then we start to develop ideas for post-Saddam political transition. Of all the postwar planning that was done, the planning for political transition was the most significant strategically. That's where I concentrated my attention. The U.S. government helped organize an Iraqi political conference in December. The externals met in London in December. They should have met much earlier. The original thought was that they'd meet in March or April 2002, but State officials delayed and delayed and delayed, reflecting their dislike of the externals and of Ahmed Chalabi. Pushing the political conference from March or April to December was unbelievably costly. You could have more effectively cleared away a lot of the political underbrush and established constitutional principles and resolved leadership issues if you had started ten months earlier. That was our idea.

To implement a liberation strategy rather than an occupation strategy, it would help to put some of the political foundation stones in place. As I said, you don't want a fully formed structure; you don't want to impose a complete prefabricated political structure on Iraq from the outside. We always had that in mind. But still there was important political preparation that could have been

done before the war.

This Iraqi conference took place in London in December 2002. They agreed to have a follow-up conference. It wound up being in February in Sulaymaniyah, in northern Iraq. That's good symbolism, going from London to northern Iraq. That makes the externals a little less external. You understand the reason we use the term "external" is because it covers the exiles and the Kurds. The Kurds were not exiles, so we used the term externals to mean exiles and Kurds together.

It was in the run-up to that meeting in northern Iraq of the external leadership that we asked the NSC, does the U.S. government want to recognize that leadership as a provincial government? They wanted that recognition. Zal Khalilzad was the key American representative at that meeting. When he informed them that we were not going to recognize them as a provisional government, there was a lot of unhappiness and public complaining. The newspapers were full of stories about how the Iraqi externals were unhappy with us. It was a problem.

If the U.S. government doesn't want to run a protracted occupation of Iraq but also doesn't want to recognize a provisional government, then what is the middle position between those two things? That's when we developed the Iraqi Interim Authority Plan.

I brought it to the Deputies Committee. The normal way these things would get up to the President is you'd bring it to the Deputies Committee, have a discussion; bring it to the Principals Committee, have a discussion; then you would bring it to the National Security Council. I assume everybody knows, but I'll say it for the tape recorder: the NSC is the Principals Committee plus the President. In other words, if the President is there it is an NSC meeting; if he's not there it is a Principals Committee meeting. Principals Committee meetings are chaired by the National Security Advisor; at least, they were in the Bush administration.

When we brought the Iraqi Interim Authority idea up to the President—I think it was on March 10th—it was part of a series of briefings for the President about post-Saddam Iraq. When we brought the IIA plan to the President on March 10th, there was no competing plan.

The State Department leadership did not like our plan. But they did not propose a different plan. They didn't outright oppose our plan; they simply didn't like it. They would give background interviews to journalists, saying that they did not like it, but they didn't say to the President, "There's a better way to do this." They remained wedded to their own Transitional Civil Authority idea. It would have been helpful if they had presented an alternative to the President and he had made a decision between their plan and the IIA plan. It might have persuaded Ambassador Bremer not to try to implement the TCA.

Riley: So there was no Presidential decision taken at the meeting where it was presented?

Feith: There was a Presidential decision taken. The President approved the Iraqi Interim Authority Plan. But it was the only plan presented to him. We presented it with pros and cons. The State Department and the CIA participated in these meetings. They remained aloof but they didn't debate. Some officials later complained that there was no debate.

Perry: So the pattern that you mentioned yesterday of the Defense Department having an idea,

the State Department having an idea, and Condi Rice trying to pull elements of them together and present those to the President—that wasn't even the pattern here except to the extent that you're describing—

Feith: It was and it wasn't. It wasn't the pattern here in the sense that this was not a case where each department proposed its own course of action. A bridging or a blending option—picking something from each of two incompatible plans and allowing the incoherence to continue—wasn't produced here because the State Department didn't say, "There is another way to handle the post-Saddam political transition."

When the IIA was presented to the President, State made comments. You could see that they had reservations about the plan, but they didn't suggest there was any other way to go.

The President approved it. There was an unusually detailed Summary of Conclusions issued from the meeting. It went on for two or three pages on exactly what the President approved. I was happy to find that there was an official Summary of Conclusion endorsing all the details of the IIA.

The key element of the IIA was that we were going to be working with the leaders of the externals, explaining to them the way it would unfold and how we would share authority. As soon as we removed Saddam, there would be an effort to expand the leadership group to include internals, so you did not have a situation in which it was just the externals running the country. We understood it might not be good to look like we were bringing in only outsiders, though we thought State and CIA officials overemphasized the distinction between externals and internals. One could have called Charles de Gaulle an external, after all.

Some very interesting memos were written by Peter Rodman. In the clipping that you sent me from Rumsfeld's book, he talks about this very brilliant memo that his Assistant Secretary for ISA [International Security Affairs], Peter Rodman, wrote about the proper historical analogy for what we should be doing in Iraq. He said it is not Germany or Japan; it is France, where the United States and Britain contemplated for a while setting up an occupation government. American and British officials could ask, "Who the hell is de Gaulle?" Rodman said that if we had done that, we would have had an occupation government sitting in Paris thinking they were running the country when in fact the real authority would have been elsewhere. Rodman warned, "Let's not make that mistake in Iraq," but that's the kind of mistake we made.

Anyway, we presented the IIA plan and the President approved it. We had Jay Garner, retired general, as the leading American civilian, leading the civilian effort. Now, there is a lot of confusion about who Garner was and what his relationship to Bremer was. Let me see if I can give you a little—

Riley: Because I'm confused.

Feith: Even Garner and Bremer, in what they've said and written on the subject, are confused about this.

Riley: Please clarify.

Feith: I think what I'm about to tell you is rigorous and straight and true. But I would urge any historians who are reading this transcript: Be skeptical. All this first-person testimony should be taken with a grain of salt, including mine. Go to the documents. Try to find real evidence for this stuff. What people say years after the fact, based on their highly politicized, self-serving recollections, is evidence, but it is not enormously probative evidence. The much more probative stuff is what is actually in the record of the time.

Riley: I'm feeling inadequate all of a sudden.

Feith: So here is the story about Garner and Bremer. Garner was put in charge of a brand-new organization called ORHA, the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance, that was created based on a National Security Presidential Directive that I drafted with Steve Hadley. I had been pushing for many months, going back to the summer of 2002, for some kind of organization like ORHA to be created to give more structure to the postwar planning.

Steve Hadley later explained to me that the White House—the President and the National Security Council staff leadership—did not approve the creation of such an organization for a long time. The President was saying that he was looking for a diplomatic solution to the Iraq problem, and he wanted support at the UN. He feared his credibility would be undermined if, while he is saying we want to find a solution short of war, his administration was creating an office to run Iraq after Saddam.

But there was no actual inconsistency. We aimed to make a war threat credible in the hope that we wouldn't have to go to war. To make the threat credible, we had to do war and postwar planning. Several times I asked Rumsfeld, "Can't we put an office together to pull all this reconstruction planning together?"

Steve Hadley was running the Deputies Committee with different efforts being chaired by State, by the NSC staff, by OMB on humanitarian assistance, by the Pentagon on putting out oil fires. All this was going on and it didn't have a proper organization to pull it all together to finish the planning, to integrate all the aspects. The planning underway was based on strategic, general, conceptual thoughts, but those are different from an actual operational plan. How many people do you need? What kind of transportation do you need? Other questions of logistics.

I don't know what the President was saying to Rumsfeld, but Rumsfeld wouldn't approve the creation of a postwar reconstruction office in late 2002. Later I checked with Steve Hadley and he said, "We didn't want it to happen because we were just concerned about undercutting our diplomacy."

Nelson: How it would look.

Feith: Yes, how it would look. Finally, a crucial part of this whole story was the United States getting the UN resolution—I think it was 1441—that gave a "last chance" to Saddam. It was adopted by the Security Council in November and it called for Saddam to give a report on his WMD capabilities by early December 2002. Saddam's reaction to resolution 1441 was going to determine whether all this pressure, all the threats of military action, had actually affected Saddam's policies.

In answering the resolution, Saddam gave the UN like a 12,000-page package, almost all of it just documents that he had already given to the UN in the '90s. He was thumbing of his nose at the UN. Hans Blix immediately said this was inadequate. And Blix was no warmonger. That was a major rebuff by Saddam.

A few days after that, around December 18, the President was talking to Secretary Powell at an NSC meeting about the significance of Saddam's disclosure, its obvious inadequacy, its rejection by Blix, and its rejection by us. Powell said, "It is clearly inadequate," and the President said something like, "Then I guess war is inevitable." I wrote that down in my notes. I remember thinking, *Boy, that is a significant statement*. We in the Defense Department did not believe that war was inevitable. We were approaching all of this from the point of view that maybe all of this back-and-forth between Saddam and the UN would produce some result other than war. It was the first time I had heard the President say, "War is inevitable."

I would make the point, though, that even then war wasn't actually inevitable. There were things that Saddam could have done to prevent the war, including at the end, leave, when two days before the war started, the President said that if Saddam and his sons left the country, they'll spare the world a war. If Saddam had done that, there wouldn't have been a war.

Perry: Could I just quickly interject? Tying around the circle from where we started yesterday morning, did you feel comfortable in the sense of your philosophy of dictators and how we deal with dictators? This is the kind of failure of diplomacy, not the failure of diplomacy, but diplomacy not leading to the outcome we would have wanted, which was to get rid of Saddam. Did you say, "Here we go again"? He's not going to leave; he's not responding the way we need him to respond, so probably war will be—

Feith: Rumsfeld, in particular, discussed this a lot. He said, "Saddam is a survivor." A lot of people found it very hard to believe that if Saddam really believed that we were going to go in and that we were going to go all the way to Baghdad and we were going to overthrow him and he was going to wind up captured or killed—If he really believed that, that he would fight. He might decide that retirement somewhere was a better option.

Nelson: Was the United States government indicating to Saddam in any way that retirement would actually be a good option?

Feith: We developed an asylum option. There was quite a bit of discussion of that. It's complicated. This is an interesting example of public policy—the desire to achieve justice through courts—tending toward the opposite of its intended result. In order to avoid a war, you might have to give asylum to a mass murderer like Saddam, whom one would really like to prosecute.

The only people who mattered as decision makers here were the President and the National Security Council. The lower-level people were not decision makers. Nobody cared about the opinion of anybody other than the President and the several people that he cared about, which was the National Security Council itself and not the lower-level people.

There had been a fair amount of thinking about the moral issues. Wouldn't it be terrible to let Saddam off the hook, given that he was such a criminal and he had so much blood on his hands?

He had the million casualties from the Iran-Iraq War, the Kurdish women whom he had gassed to death, the use of chemicals against the Iranians, and he had massacred the Shiites in the south. He was so horrible, not to mention what his sons did with their rape and torture and all the rest. It was a horrible regime and it really did give one a pang to think that Saddam could head off to a comfortable retirement somewhere.

As awful as that thought was, there was a sense that if all of our military and diplomatic pressure persuaded Saddam that he should leave, it would be better to have him leave and get asylum somewhere than to have a war. There were discussions about which countries would receive him, but obviously it didn't happen.

Let me go back to the Garner-Bremer story. This WMD declaration by Saddam to the UN in early December was a major moment, and this discussion at an NSC meeting about war being inevitable was obviously a major moment. It was at that point that the White House became comfortable that we could put together an office that would be able to do the postwar planning. Steve Hadley and I together sat down and wrote the NSPD to create ORHA. The NSPD is the National Security Presidential Directive. It is the most formal form of foreign policy.

We didn't want the new office doing postwar planning to reinvent all the work that had been done for the past six or eight or ten months. The NSPD was written to say that this new office should pull together the existing work, pull together the existing teams, coordinate them, and integrate them. We described it as an expeditionary office. It was supposed to pull together the planners and prepare to send teams to Iraq.

As is the case with military planning, you don't want to separate the people who do the planning from the people who do the implementation. If you separate them, whenever anything goes wrong, the implementers point their fingers at the planners and the planners point their fingers at the implementers. You don't want that. You want someone to have responsibility. That's why war plans are done by the combatant commands who actually fight the wars. War plans are not done by the Department of the Army and then the combatant command goes off and fights the war.

So the idea of ORHA was to bring the civilians together who have contributed to the reconstruction plans. They would be the very people who would deploy into theater and implement the plans. Rumsfeld came up with the idea of General Garner heading the new reconstruction office. He had worked with General Garner on a commission.

Garner had a background in Iraq in helping to organize reconstruction of northern Iraq, and the creation of the autonomous Kurdish area in northern Iraq after the '91 war. So he had specific experience.

It is extraordinarily difficult to get different offices of the government to work together. Never underestimate that. It is unbelievably difficult, even within the same department, let alone interagency. People have different bosses, they have different incentives, they have different concepts, different political interests, different relations with Congress and the press.

Putting teams together is hard, even within the military, which is why you have the famous focus on military jointness, the effort to get the different military services to work together as a team. It

took about 50 years after World War II to get a substantial degree of jointness from the military.

Never underestimate how difficult it is to get different military services working together, let alone the military with the Defense civilians, let alone anybody from Defense with the State Department. Whatever the personalities are, these are problems, especially when you're talking about implementing something in the field. People from different organizations can have different cultures.

We understood that creating a reconstruction team would be a problem. What was the purpose of ORHA? It was to pull together all these people who had been doing civilian aspects of planning relating to food and political development and the like, and integrate them with CENTCOM, which was going to be fighting the war. The challenge was to take a group of civilians and make them into an organization that can somehow plug into CENTCOM. We would need an interface between that civilian organization and CENTCOM. A retired general officer seemed to be a smart choice to serve as the interface.

Rumsfeld asked me to call Garner. I didn't know Garner. I called him and I said, "Secretary Rumsfeld would like you to do this." Garner was running a business. It was a big imposition to ask him to drop everything, drop your business, and come and do this.

Riley: Go to a war zone.

Feith: It wasn't even just the war zone. It was asking him to change his whole life. You have a family; you have a business. It is not a small thing to ask somebody to disrupt all that. I said to him, "Secretary Rumsfeld wants you to get this organization together, create it, and integrate it with CENTCOM. You'll deploy, but we hope and expect that soon after the military does its work, the main responsibilities of the civilians in Iraq will be of a political and diplomatic nature. At that point, you'll be able to go home and we will bring in—"

Then he interrupted me and said, "A person of stature." He was being humorous and self-deprecating. I said, "No, General, obviously that's not what we're talking about at all. We would bring in somebody with a political and diplomatic background rather than a military background. At this stage now, however, we need somebody with a military background, and the Secretary would like you to do it." We recruited him with the idea that he would go home soon, which I considered to be a positive thing, the inducement to get him to accept the responsibility to begin with. I didn't ask him to commit to a multiyear process.

Garner put ORHA together. He is a very experienced, talented guy, but politics and diplomacy were not his field. He stepped into a lot of controversies about Iraq that had been raging in Washington between the Democrats and Republicans, within the administration, between the Pentagon and the State Department and CIA. He stepped in without knowing a lot about this and he wound up absorbing some of the prejudices of some of the other actors.

In interviews, Garner has ascribed views to Wolfowitz and me that we didn't hold. His belief that we did hold those views came from the newspapers or came from his conversations with other people in the government. He said, for example, that we wanted to make Chalabi the leader in Iraq. Because Garner was in the government, his saying that sounds like first-person testimony when in fact it is just the echo of something that was said that wasn't true to begin with but

appeared in a newspaper. Notably, when Garner was asked in a news interview if Wolfowitz or I ever told him to promote Chalabi, Garner said, "No. Never."

General Garner was around when we developed the IIA idea. He understood that was the policy and the President approved it. The Secretary was always nervous to have anybody talk to the President for him. He eventually became very comfortable with my talking to the President, and presenting proposals to him.

The Secretary understood that he needed to expose General Garner to the President, to make them comfortable with each other. There were some plans that General Garner prepared—for example, what we were going to do with the Iraqi army. It was his plan. It was based on work started in my office, but it was General Garner's plan. But when the time came to brief it to the President, Rumsfeld said, "Doug, you're briefing it."

Garner organized ORHA, pulled the people together, and deployed. There were serious integration problems from Day One. Even though Secretary Rumsfeld had this smart idea of making generals the interface, the antibodies between ORHA and CENTCOM, the antibodies in CENTCOM against working with civilians from the outside, were strong. And CENTCOM wasn't particularly interested in phase four, anyway. I told you yesterday, the Joint Staff was nervous about this. Finally, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff got the Joint Forces Command, not CENTCOM, to put together a cell to do postwar planning. JFCOM then transferred that cell to CENTCOM. I think it was called JTF4, Joint Task Force 4. CENTCOM was resistant. They really did not do the postwar planning they were supposed to do.

The Joint Staff is very protective of the combatant commands, as the State Department is protective of the country teams. So the Joint Staff didn't want to bring to Rumsfeld a bad report about CENTCOM. The Secretary eventually learned that there was a problem with Franks's neglect of Phase IV planning because when this joint task force was created to do it, it was obvious that something was not being done in CENTCOM that needed to be done. But it was quite late in the day when that became clear. I don't know what, exactly, General Franks had in mind—maybe that once he overthrew Saddam he was just going to turn the country over to some other U.S. organization.

When in October the President was briefed about reconstruction and said that Rumsfeld would be in charge, it was clear that CENTCOM was going to be running whatever we needed to be done in Iraq. Even if we had a civilian there, CENTCOM forces would be playing a crucial role. So there was really no excuse for CENTCOM's not planning properly for Phase IV. And the Joint Staff kept pushing CENTCOM to do more in the postwar planning area.

Garner now comes in. He has trouble integrating and getting support from CENTCOM. He then organizes the first political conference in Iraq, in Nasiriya. John Abizaid was the CENTCOM deputy commander who was forward deployed.

Ten days or so after the war started, by the end of March, General Abizaid said, "You know, we really need to have an Iraqi face for our war effort." Those of us in my office were all slapping our foreheads. We had been saying that for a year. Abizaid said, "We have a problem here. Our forces are coming through and in some places they're being greeted well, but in some places

they're being fought. We really need an Iraqi face."

My office had long championed training Iraqis for work with the U.S. military. The CIA opposed this idea, as George Tenet explains in his book. He said it was a stupid idea and he persuaded CENTCOM that it was a stupid idea. Instead of training three to five thousand Iraqis, which my office wanted to do, the U.S. military wound up training—I think the number was 72. General [David] Barno ran a training center in Hungary for this purpose. The idea was to have thousands.

It would have been a terrific thing if we had had a few thousand Iraqis, trained by us for several months, people whose leadership skills we knew, people with a sense of loyalty and philosophy we knew, people who could have helped us on the ground. They could have helped us pick which mayor is a good guy to leave in place and which mayor has blood on his hands and should be removed. It would have been enormously valuable. But State, CIA, and CENTCOM opposed training the Iraqis, partly because of the general disregard for the Iraqi externals.

But now in late March 2003, General Abizaid was saying, "We really need to put an Iraqi face forward." One consequence was Garner's organization of the Nasariyah political conference, which was the kind of conference my office was proposing since early 2002, first for the externals and then eventually for externals and internals together in Iraq. Finally, now we have CENTCOM supporting the idea. Abizaid was saying there is real operational significance to it. The conference got underway in Nasiriya and that was quite a success. The Iraqis participated. Interestingly enough, at the insistence of the State Department and then CENTCOM, the main external leadership was not allowed to attend. That reflected the ongoing prejudice against the externals. When it was proposed—"Let's do the conference without the leadership of the externals."—my office said, "Let's just get it going."

So we had the Nasiriya Conference, which Garner presided over. Everybody praised his role in it. The follow-up a few weeks later was the Baghdad Conference. That was in the middle of April, a week or two after I briefed to President Bush the fleshed-out version of the IIA. The subject matter of the Baghdad Conference was creating the IIA. That is the middle of April.

Then Garner announced on the radio in early May that he thought he could have an IIA in place by the end of May. That struck even those of us who were champions of the IIA as kind of optimistic. It was surprising but it would have been fine if he could do it.

Now we were at the point where the main civilian job in Iraq was political and diplomatic. This was what we had anticipated in January when I called Garner for the first time. Now, Jerry Bremer came into the picture. Somebody came up with the idea of Jerry Bremer as the top U.S. civilian official in Iraq. Part of what attracted Rumsfeld to him was the idea that Brewer, as a former Foreign Service officer, could help facilitate cooperation between the civilians and the CENTCOM people, including cooperation with the State Department.

Despite all the bad blood, or *because* of all the bad blood between the State Department and the Pentagon, some of us in the Pentagon wanted somebody who was a career State Department Foreign Service guy, because he could help bridge problems between State and Defense. Anyway, Rumsfeld embraced the idea of Ambassador Bremer. Ambassador Bremer in early May was recruited. He spent a few weeks getting briefed up. My office prepared the main briefing for

him.

Garner was in charge of ORHA. ORHA was an office of civilians that was supposed to plug into CENTCOM, because we understood that when Saddam was removed, General Franks was going to be responsible for governmental functions in Iraq. It was going to be General Franks. If you overthrow the government, you're the government. He needed some civilians to help him govern, and ORHA would provide the civilians to work for General Franks.

The initial draft of "Proclamation Number One," or "Military Declaration Number One," was done at CENTCOM. It said, in essence, "Saddam Hussein has been removed and I'm in charge." When my office saw the draft, I pointed out to General Franks that Arab specialists on my staff had said that after every coup in the Arab world there is "Proclamation Number One" or "Military Declaration Number One." It is a running joke. The last thing you want to do is issue this "Military Declaration Number One." The tone of it was all wrong. It was imperious.

Our strategy was liberation, not occupation, so telling everybody what to do was a bad way to introduce the U.S. into Iraq. We redrafted the declaration and called it something like the "Freedom Declaration." Language matters, and the messages that you're sending the Iraqis matter because their thoughts matter. One question was what to call the organization in charge of post-Saddam Iraq. Do you want to call it the "occupation government"? No. Do you want to call it "provisional government"? No. We called it the "Coalition Provisional Authority." Every word made a point.

We wanted to emphasize coalition, not U.S. We wanted to emphasize provisional because we wanted to make it clear we're not hanging around. We called it an authority rather than a government because even though legally it had the powers of government, we were trying to deemphasize the idea that we're running their government.

The head of the Coalition Provisional Authority was General Franks. It was not General Garner. General Garner ran ORHA and he was supposed to help Franks fulfill Franks's functions as the head of the Coalition Provisional Authority.

Nelson: Was Franks still in Tampa?

Feith: Yes, he was still in Tampa.

Nelson: So he is going to be head of the CPA from Tampa?

Feith: He was going back and forth. He was running CENTCOM.

This declaration came out April 15th or 16th. We overthrew Saddam on the 9th and about a week later is the Freedom Declaration creating the CPA. In the meantime, ORHA still exists and Garner is running it. Then Bremer gets brought in, in early May. Bremer said he didn't want to be the head of ORHA because ORHA is subordinate to Franks.

Riley: Right.

Feith: As a guy who had been Chief of Mission in one or two countries, Bremer understood

these issues of who reports to whom and the relationship of the State Department to the military. Bremer wasn't there to replace Garner as head of ORHA; he was there to replace Franks as the head of the Coalition Provisional Authority. You would now have a new situation. You would have a U.S. civilian heading the organization responsible for running Iraq. We in Defense didn't want that organization to serve for a long time as an occupation government. It was supposed to be a provisional authority for the purpose of implementing the IIA plan. In the meantime, you would have a military chain of command. Both the head of CENTCOM, Franks, and the head of the CPA, Bremer, would report directly to the Secretary of Defense.

Riley: OK.

Feith: That was essentially what the NSC worked out in October, when the President said that Rumsfeld would be in charge of civilian and military aspects of reconstruction. Bremer gets this wrong in his book and Garner has gotten it wrong in interviews. It is technical. Journalists generally thought that Bremer replaced Garner. He did in a sense: Bremer became the top U.S. civilian in Iraq. But ORHA was ORHA; CPA was CPA, and Bremer came in not as head of ORHA but as the head of CPA.

Bremer says that in early May when he was first asked to do this job and he started his first discussions within the U.S. government, he was driving on the [George Washington] GW Parkway and he heard Garner on the radio say that he thought that we could have the core of an Iraqi government in place by the end of May. Bremer says in his book, "I almost drove off the parkway in shocked amazement at this statement. I believed that the early transfer of authority to the Iraqis was—" He used some colorful expression like, "delusional fantasy" or "fantastic delusion." He used some very uncomplimentary phrase to describe it.

Bremer disdained not just the idea that the IIA would be created by the end of May but the whole idea of early transfer of authority to the Iraqis. He had never been to Iraq. But he says that even before he ever went to Iraq for the first time, he was already persuaded that the essence of the IIA plan was a "reckless fantasy." I think that was the term he used in his book.

We had briefed him on the IIA. He had the copy of the briefing my office wrote for him. He had a copy of the NSC Summary of Conclusions on the IIA. He knew what the policy was. He never said anything along the lines of, "This is a reckless fantasy." On the contrary. But he then went to a number of NSC meetings and private meetings. There, the President said things to him like, "Go over to Iraq and give us your best thoughts." Bremer chose to interpret that as "You have a blank slate." Rumsfeld and I didn't interpret it that way. It wouldn't have occurred to us that the President would simply throw aside the IIA plan he had just approved. The IIA was policy. Furthermore, it was being implemented on the ground by Garner, in both the Nasiriya and the Baghdad Conferences.

Bremer hadn't been involved in the development of the IIA plan. He just went to a few meetings with the President, who spoke a few generalities about how "We want to hear what you think. You go over there and tell us the best thing to do." Bremer was inclined to run his own show with full autonomy. In his book, Bremer said, "I didn't think of myself as Powell's man or Rumsfeld's man; I thought of myself as the President's man." He got himself appointed not only as the head of the CPA, reporting to Rumsfeld, but also as Presidential Envoy or Special

Presidential Envoy, or something like that.

Even though the letter appointing him as a Presidential Envoy said something like, "You will report to me under the guidance and direction of the Secretary of Defense," which is the technical language for, "You work for the Secretary of Defense," Bremer insisted that he didn't work for the Secretary of Defense; he worked for the President. Bremer wanted as much autonomy as possible. He wanted to hear, "You've got a blank slate." Had any of this been written down in a proper rigorous way with proper records, we would have immediately said, *Wait a second. Bremer doesn't have a blank slate. We have a policy*. But the key guidance wasn't what Bremer thought was written down in this case.

Knott: To Bremer's defense, couldn't you argue that the President never really intervened? The President clearly—

Feith: Given what he was told, Bremer had a basis for interpreting things the way he wanted to interpret them. Bremer used the word "clear" numerous times in his book: "I got *clear* guidance that I was to do whatever I wanted to do." The most charitable interpretation is that he got *unclear* guidance that he could do whatever he wanted to do. To be fair to him, he did not get clear guidance to the contrary.

Knott: There does seem to be a pattern here. You talked yesterday about George Tenet; you talked about Colin Powell at State; and now Bremer here at the CPA. There seems to be a pattern here of a kind of lack of clarity.

Feith: Yes, that is for sure a pattern. I'm trying to make this point.

Knott: This ultimately rests with the President, would you say?

Feith: It ultimately rests, I would say, with all of us. Many people failed in giving Bremer precise instructions and proper supervision. Even this ambiguity about whether he worked for Rumsfeld or the President—it was not really ambiguous. Properly read, it was unambiguous. He worked for Rumsfeld. As I told you, there was no thought that the reconstruction of Iraq was going to be put operationally in the hands of somebody who reported directly to the President. Inconceivable.

From his Foreign Service experience, Bremer understood the power of being a Special Presidential Envoy. Every Ambassador has a relationship to the President, but they all report through the Secretary of State. They are all the President's representatives in the country, but they report through the Secretary of State. He was told to report through Rumsfeld. Anyway, there's a lot of blame to go around here. I hope that I'm not being unfair to Bremer.

Knott: The question is where the President is in all of this? Not so much blame, but—

Feith: The President was doing things like meeting with Bremer without Rumsfeld. I think that was a mistake; it sends a signal.

Riley: He is probably doing that because he is getting advice from somebody close to him like the National Security Advisor, that at a minimum this is acceptable behavior.

Feith: I don't know. But it definitely cast a fog over the chain of command.

Riley: Sure.

Feith: He starts off in his book saying, "I was going to be the most powerful person that any Iraqi had ever known, other than Saddam Hussein." I was going to be the supreme ruler. He said, "I understood that this was a very important thing. I made sure that I met directly with the President. He and I had lunch and we were then supposed to go into an NSC meeting. But after the lunch, the President said, 'We don't even have to have this NSC meeting; I just had my talk with Jerry.'" Bremer tells this very proudly. We don't need the NSC. It's just me and George Bush.

Then he says in his book, "I didn't consider myself Powell or the State Department's man, or Rumsfeld or the Pentagon's man. I was the President's man." His own concept was, "I work for the President. I have a blank slate. I'm supposed to do what I think is right."

When he goes to Iraq at the end of May, he is reporting to Rumsfeld. Rumsfeld dealt with Bremer more or less the way he dealt with the combatant commanders.

Before Bush 43, people from the White House staff would sometimes call somebody on the Joint Staff or in a combatant command and say, "You know, the President would really be happy if there were a ship moved over to there." The military would say, "Well, it's the President." Rumsfeld, who had been Chief of Staff in the [Gerald R.] Ford administration, knew that White House staffers often improperly invoke the President's name. Rumsfeld viewed that as horrible: That's not authority. He'd say, If the President wants something done, he'll tell the Secretary of Defense to move the ship. You can't have some NSC staffer calling over to somebody in the J-3 and telling them to move a ship.

Neither did the Secretary want anybody in OSD calling people at CENTCOM and telling them to do things. Once the Secretary made it clear, "I talk to the combatant commander. I can give him orders. There is no civilian other than the President who can give him orders, and the President doesn't give him orders because he gives the military orders through me. So the only way CENTCOM gets civilian orders is from me." He made it clear to Franks; he made it clear to me; he made it clear to the whole bureaucracy and that's part of the reason we had all kinds of thoughts that we hoped CENTCOM would respect and implement, but CENTCOM officers knew that if they didn't hear it from Rumsfeld, it was not real.

I said to the Secretary, "There are several ways you could relate to Ambassador Bremer. You might want to use the combatant commander model." I suspected he favored that model. I argued, "The line of communication between you and Ambassador Bremer is a thin pipe. It won't convey a lot of information to you about everything that CPA is doing. Obviously you're not going to go around Bremer and talk to his subordinates, but if you're only talking to Bremer, then you're not getting a lot of insight into what others are doing in the CPA; you're only learning what he is reporting to you. And, you will have limited influence, because how many hours a week can you spend talking to Bremer?"

I said, "Another model, which will get you more information, but also runs the risk that somebody is going to make a suggestion that doesn't come from you, is you can tell Bremer that

in addition to talking to you, he should have a conference call twice a week for an hour each time with Pete Pace and me."

Nelson: With you?

Feith: Yes, me. I proposed that Pete Pace and I, with our staffers present, do a secure video conference call with Bremer twice a week, and he'll have his staffers there. We could have seen more details. What's going on with this? What's the logjam there? Why is this not happening? Things the Secretary wouldn't know to ask about. We'll learn a lot more. We'll be talking to more people than just Bremer.

I said to the Secretary, "You would actually achieve greater insight and more influence, but you would not have exclusive communication links to Bremer." The Secretary chose to continue to communicate with Bremer in combatant commander style. Rumsfeld said, "Bremer is too busy to be talking to you. He has his work to do." The Secretary's basic attitude about Bremer was, Bremer is going to be really busy, working under extremely difficult circumstances, on an enormously difficult project, and he should have a great deal of autonomy.

Rumsfeld was famous for micromanaging his team—He got accused of that all the time. He became notorious for micromanaging. In certain areas there is some truth to the charge. But when it came to commanders in the field, he gave them enormous autonomy. This was true of Bremer and it was also true of his generals. He put his war-planning generals through the mill, which is why he got attacked for micromanaging. It is really not micromanagement. He grilled them at the strategic level. It was not micromanaging, but he did manage them. He managed them much more rigorously than predecessors had.

In other words, people accused him of micromanagement when he was actually just engaged in management. But working with a general on a war plan is different from having a general deployed forward doing operations. There, Rumsfeld strongly believed one should defer to the judgment of the person in the field, on the scene, in the thick of the action. He is seeing the situation on the ground, and we don't see all that. He has to be able to make executive decisions. He can't be second-guessed all the time.

Rumsfeld's general reputation is completely at odds with the way he handled Bremer, but the way he handled Bremer was completely consistent with the way he handled other military commanders in the field. So when Bremer went over there, he wound up having a lot of autonomy and he considered the IIA plan as a suggestion rather than a decided policy.

While in Iraq—and perhaps beforehand—Bremer developed a negative view of the Iraqis. He speaks about them with a lack of respect in his book, using very insulting language about them. "They're lazy. They weren't paying attention." The situation reminded me of *My Little Chickadee*, the movie with Mae West and W. C. Fields. There is this scene in a courtroom where the judge says to Mae West something like, "Madam, are you trying to show contempt for this court?" She says, "Your Honor, I'm trying to conceal it." He had contempt for the Iraqis. He may have thought that he could successfully conceal it, but they knew it. They didn't come to meetings with him, didn't want to cooperate with him. He cited this lack of cooperation, which I think to a large extent resulted from his contempt, to justify his contempt.

This is a crucial part of the answer to your question: How did we lose the IIA plan? Ambassador Bremer tells the story in his book, that when he got to Iraq, as soon as he arrived, General Garner said to him, "I have a meeting scheduled for you with the Iraqi leadership tomorrow." Garner was rolling, he had had the Baghdad Conference, we want to try and put the IIA together. Ambassador Bremer says in his book, proudly, "I immediately canceled the meeting." This was before he even met with the Iraqi leaders for the first time. Bremer explained he canceled for three reasons. Number one, he said, "I wanted to have more time to be briefed." OK, that makes sense. But the second reason was something like, "I didn't want the Iraqis to think that they were such a big deal." Third, Bremer said, "I wanted the Iraqis to know that I, and not Jay Garner, was in charge." That's quite a revealing story.

Bremer didn't create the IIA. As for implementing the Baghdad Conference resolutions to create the IIA, he said, "We can't do that." It wasn't until mid-July that Bremer created what was called the Iraqi Governing Council. We did not understand that by calling it the Iraqi Governing Council he was making a point of not calling it the IIA.

He started complaining, from the first moment he got into the country, that the Iraqis weren't cooperating, were lazy, didn't show up at meetings, didn't pay attention, weren't giving him the cooperation and respect that he wanted. He said, "The Iraqis couldn't organize a two-car parade." He used language like that. He also referred to people in the Pentagon as gerbils, or squirrels in a cage. He had that way of talking about people. It turns out the Iraqis picked up on this instantly. First of all, they're not stupid, and secondly they have pride and dignity. The problem becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Once you say you have no respect for them, they stop cooperating with you. You then cite their lack of cooperation as the basis for your contempt.

In the meantime, his reports home didn't say that he was against the IIA or that he was not trying to implement it. Rather he said he was not able to implement it, because the Iraqis weren't fulfilling their role. Rumsfeld considered that credible. He had doubts about the competence of the Iraqis from the beginning. Also, Rumsfeld wanted to be supportive of his man in the field.

It wasn't until September when Bremer's op-ed appeared that several things became clear. Number one, that Bremer didn't think he worked for Rumsfeld. Number two, Bremer wanted the CPA to remain in existence for the indefinite future, until there was a constitution and elections. That was absolutely at odds with Rumsfeld's view that we should be turning responsibility over to the Iraqis early, and not setting ourselves up as occupiers.

Riley: There was an intervening reality and that was that after the war there was a substantial deterioration or evaporation—

Feith: Of security.

Riley: Of security and of state structures.

Feith: We didn't talk about de-Ba'athification and the dissolution of the army, which I discuss at length in the book. I think that's covered in my book.

Riley: I think so as well, but I guess what I'm trying to sound you out about is—You talked a lot about setting a strategy and being willing to revise the strategy based on realities that appear. My

perception is that the reality, once the ground war was at an end, was that a lot of what might have been expected to exist in Iraq just disintegrated. There were no social structures or state structures.

Feith: That sounds a bit like an overstatement. I think that that eventually became the case, but I don't think that was the case in the summer of '03.

Riley: OK.

Feith: I fault myself for not having picked up on what was going on with Ambassador Bremer until this op-ed appeared in September. He came in in May, and I was working on the assumption that he was energetically, loyally trying to implement the IIA plan. I don't think he was ever disloyal, but his book says that he had views that we certainly didn't understand he had, that were really at odds with the IIA plan. He was basically adhering to the old State Department Transitional Civil Authority concept.

Riley: That is irrespective of anything that is happening on the ground that might have caused even you to revisit—?

Feith: He would say that it was caused by things happening on the ground. But the key question was whether the Iraqis were willing to play the role that we wanted to assign to them.

A problem with this discussion, of course, is I'm addressing a mere slice of what was going on in Iraq. There are aspects of the picture that I'm not addressing at all.

When we understood there was this problem with Bremer and that he had a different plan—not the IIA plan—Rumsfeld asked the J-5 General [Walter] Sharp and me to do a strategic review. Where are we? What can we do now, given where we are? We did a major project along the lines of the strategic analysis model that I described before. We worked the analysis with Rumsfeld. He worked it over and over again. We went through all the slides. He would change them and send us back to do more. We had multiple meetings. He finally had a strategic review with which he was comfortable.

What were our goals now? What were our key assumptions now? What is the way forward? Once he got comfortable with that, he called back General Abizaid, who at that point had become the replacement for Franks as CENTCOM commander, and Bremer. He called them back for something like three whole days of meetings at the Pentagon. This was *very* unusual. Rumsfeld generally would have a meeting for an hour, sometimes two hours. Now he cleared his calendar for two or three days for a single subject—I don't remember any other case of that. It was very unusual. Anyway, he spent three days, and the upshot of these meetings was a set of ideas that he carried over to the NSC, which endorsed them. What resulted was the decision that we were going to shut the CPA down by the end of June 2004.

Had we gone with the original IIA plan, the idea was it would have been only a month or two before the CPA could have been shut down, but by the time we got to September, when we understood that we had this problem with Bremer, nobody felt that we had an option to instantaneously shut the CPA down. You couldn't at that point create the IIA. Given what Bremer had done throughout the summer, the Iraqis were not willing to jump into cooperation

with the U.S. government.

The Iraqi leaders were thinking, *At some point the Americans will leave. The more I'm associated with the Americans now, working with them and cooperating with them, the worse it is going to be for me in the politics of post-America Iraq.* So we created the bow wave that we were then sailing into. It is so sad to think about this because we had actually anticipated these problems and tried to head them off with the IIA plan. It is very frustrating for me to look back and see that U.S. officials created the very problem that we knew we would have if we didn't do the political transition right.

In October 2003, Wolfowitz and I suggested shutting the CPA down by April 9th, the first anniversary of the overthrow of Saddam. Bremer was arguing for December of '04. Wolfowitz and I said, "Let's get it shut down by early April of '04." Bremer was saying the end of December, at the earliest, of '04, more than 14 months later. We had already been in Iraq for six months and Bremer was saying another 14 months. Rumsfeld finally said, "Realistically, let's say the end of June. It may slip to the right, so if we're going to slip to the right, let's at least slip to the right from the end of June, not from September." He was willing to allow Wolfowitz and me to push for April, because he figured if we pushed for April then June would be the compromise, which is where he wanted to end up.

We all debated whether the CPA could be shut down before Iraq had a constitution. Bremer strongly argued that the constitution had to be adopted first. He got crosswise with Ayatollah [Ali al] Sistani over this, whether we had to have a constitution and elections first. Anyway it got worked out, but along the way we wound up antagonizing the most important Shiite figure in the country.

As I said, at the beginning of the CPA we had problems; at the end of the CPA 14 months later, we had a full-blown insurgency. It is not all the fault of the CPA, and I'm not saying we wouldn't have had an insurgency if we had done the IIA plan, but I do believe that every major problem we had was made worse by our failure to set up an Iraqi government more quickly. One of the questions we faced was, Should you train an army for external purposes or should you train them to fight an insurgency? The CPA initially planned to train them for external purposes, which was fine when you didn't have an insurgency, but the CPA stuck with that idea and CENTCOM wound up saying, "We're going to train a bunch of Iraqis who can actually work with us on our immediate problems." There was a disconnect between CENTCOM and the CPA on training security forces.

Perry: Could I ask for a point of clarification on that? You made that clear before, and then said he didn't want to report to Secretary Rumsfeld; he wanted to report to the President. Was he indeed reporting to the President?

Feith: Yes. As he says in his book, he started talking to Condi Rice, I think daily.

Perry: Even on the *Washington Post, New York Times* editorial?

Feith: That's unclear. I have never found out who in Washington cleared it. Bremer is a smart guy and a very experienced and talented guy. It is inconceivable to me that he put an op-ed in the *Washington Post* without getting it cleared by somebody in Washington, so I assume it was

somebody on the NSC, Condi or Hadley or somebody. But I don't know that. I do know that he didn't send it to anybody in the Pentagon.

Perry: Can we presume then that the President was approving what he did?

Feith: Well, yes, in a way. Bremer did not have to do what he did, but I don't think he was violating any clear-cut rules when he was doing it. He could have done it in a more cooperative, congenial way. He could have done things differently. I think he made some errors. We made some errors also. I have policy and bureaucratic differences with him, but I am not saying he was insubordinate or ill-motivated.

Knott: So this wasn't part of any attempt to link up with Powell and Armitage to sort of undermine—

Feith: Maybe it was, but I don't think that was the result of ill motive. He obviously saw things more the way they had seen things. He created multiple reporting chains. And if you report to multiple bosses you have no boss, as a practical matter.

Knott: Many of us are familiar with that.

Feith: I have to tell you there are a few things I just want to at least get out on the table. If you ever want to follow up on any of this, we can follow up.

Riley: OK.

Feith: I mentioned the work I did with General Pace. As I said, we wanted to avoid the train wrecks of memos clashing in the Secretary's office. Something that I created with General Pace was, I think, important institutionally. Pace became Vice Chairman on October 1st after 9/11. Soon after that we created an institution called the CAPCOM, the Campaign Planning Committee. For quite a while it was a daily meeting that General Pace and I had. We invited lots of people. There were often 20 people in the room when he and I would meet, because I thought that the more people who see us working together and watch us develop ideas together, and the more people who participate with us and add thoughts and questions, the better.

As far as I know, the CAPCOM meetings never leaked. Despite the fact that we were very open about who attended, that's not where the leaks came from.

Pace and I met for quite a while every day and then it became every several days. The Pentagon normally didn't work this way. We created almost a merger of the national security civilian [OSD—Office of the Secretary of Defense] and Joint Staff teams at the Pentagon. You sent me an excerpt from something that Tom Ricks wrote about how the military hated me and my office. Ricks asserts that. I don't doubt that there must have been some military officers who talked to him and said that, but that's not really the picture. We created an unprecedented degree of close, friendly, trusting cooperation that didn't exist before.

The CAPCOM brought the Joint Staff and OSD together on a daily basis at a high level down to a lower level, with the room full of colonels and office directors and everybody in between them and the Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs. It was a valuable operation. We harmonized thinking.

When we had disagreements, they were framed to be resolved by the Secretary. It was so valuable that I made a point of trying to institutionalize it when I left, through a DoD directive. It is hard to direct people to meet every day. But I would advise anybody who has important responsibilities in the Pentagon to try to do that with your civilian or military counterparts. It is extremely useful.

Another topic: Secretary Rumsfeld and his attitude toward memos. Some policy officials became frustrated. They would do a memo, and the memo would get bumped and they would have to rework it. Or it didn't get bumped, I would simply rewrite it. There was a fair amount of grousing about that. They would see that some of the editorial work had to do with diction and punctuation and formatting.

I had to explain to them: You who are writing this memo may be in charge of nonproliferation policy. The Secretary is responsible for every issue of national security policy in the world, including nonproliferation policy, and for the defense budget and for personnel and for intelligence. He has all of those responsibilities. He is going to meetings all the time. He has only so many hours in the day. He will frequently have to prepare for a major meeting at the last minute.

Something may have been worked in the bureaucracy for months, maybe even for years. The issue is now coming up finally for the first time to the NSC. The decision is going to be made after years of work by the bureaucracy, and he is introduced to it for the first time just before the NSC meeting.

He is going to this meeting and he is pulling out the briefing book in his car on the way to the NSC meeting. I've seen it in many cases, because I often rode over with him. He has seven minutes. If that memo does not have a lot of white space, Rumsfeld wouldn't be able to read it quickly. People absorb information differently, but it happens that Rumsfeld and I were similar in this respect and different from Wolfowitz. When Wolfowitz wanted a briefing he wanted it in memo form, block paragraphs. If you gave a block paragraph to me, it would take me much more time to read it than if each sentence were a separate bullet with some white space between. It's just how one's brain works. Somebody once said that in music even the pauses are music. When it comes to a memo, the white space is part of what allows you to absorb the message.

If you didn't give Rumsfeld the information in the form that he needs, with proper grammar, with the right and precise words, with the right flow of ideas, with answers to questions that one should anticipate that he'll ask, he will get angry and toss away the briefing book. An office may have worked on this thing for a year or two, but you won't get through to the Secretary when he is going to the meeting.

You may think formatting and grammar are Mickey Mouse; you may think it's crazy to worry about that when important questions are at issue. You may think that officials concerned about such trivialities don't know what's important. But *you* don't know what's important if that's what you think. We're here to serve the Secretary. If we write memos that don't serve him, we might as well not write them. I tried to convey this to my staff in the kindest, most persuasive, useful way.

Kuhn: As you just did?

Feith: I was sometimes, early on, on the receiving end of some of the Secretary's unhappiness when he would get memos that weren't properly formatted or written for him. He would literally toss it back and say, "This is not useful." If it happened to you once, you didn't want it a second time.

Kuhn: So you will work with us on the briefing book for Secretary Rumsfeld?

Riley: I wish I'd consulted with you before the invitation letter went out.

Feith: I volunteered to help combatant commanders edit their briefings for the Secretary. We used to joke, and I'd say, "I've become a Rumsfeld-ologist. I can help you with your briefing." I didn't try to insert myself as a layer between a combatant commander and the Secretary. If I had, they both would have killed me. I simply told the various combatant commanders, "We're happy to help you." Some of them took us up on it and had smooth sailing, and others didn't take us up on it and they rolled the dice.

The joke about him and me was that we were the kind of people who would edit a stop sign. Whenever I gave him any paper, he would edit it. He would always try to extract from me the comment that he had improved it.

You work for your boss. Not all bosses are the same, so I'm not saying there is only one way to do a memo, but there is a right way to do a memo for your boss. Anybody who thinks that that is just nonsense and formality and Mickey Mouse rather than the real substance of work doesn't understand that the substance of your work is to give your boss a useful product.

Next point: I had a high-ranking job at the Pentagon, but I never thought of myself as a policy maker. I always thought of myself as staff. It wasn't modesty; it was just the fact. This is not necessarily true with all Under Secretaries and all Secretaries of Defense. The way Rumsfeld ran things in the national security field, he was the only policy maker. In general, we did not make decisions in the policy office; we simply supported the Secretary.

I was so closely connected to Secretary Rumsfeld and spent so many hours with him and met with him every morning and went with him to meetings and went with him to the prebriefings for the meetings and all the rest of that, so there was never an excuse to say, "I needed to make that decision because I didn't have time to bring it to you." I always had time to bring it to him. We were together constantly.

I viewed myself as staff. As I said, not every Under Secretary is in that position because Secretaries can delegate a lot of work if they chose to. In the national security field, Rumsfeld didn't delegate. He believed that every significant national security decision should be made by him and the NSC, and that's the way you keep things strategically coherent throughout the government.

Perry: You knew that going in?

Feith: No, I didn't know it going in. I learned it. That's the way Rumsfeld worked. It became

obvious early on. If at an NSC meeting Colin Powell said something like, “Somebody from OSD suggested X as a way to handle a matter of importance,” Rumsfeld would come to me and say, “Why is anyone suggesting that kind of stuff? I didn’t approve that.” He made it clear very early on that you don’t suggest anything or make proposals in interagency meetings that he hadn’t approved. Other Secretaries have worked completely differently, however.

I’m not even saying that this is an ideal way to work. I think there are actually problems with working this way, but there are certain advantages too. In any event, this was the way Rumsfeld wanted to work. His view was if you’re going to put an idea into the interagency process, even at a low level, bring it to him first. That didn’t delay ideas a lot, because I was with him all the time.

So I could say to him, “We’re going to put forward a strategy for Latin America and the essence of it is A, B, and C.” He would say, “Sounds good, that’s OK.” Or he would say, “I’m not so sure about that. Bring it to me.” Then we would bring it to him and discuss it.

It was a big point of management for him, that it is always easier to have influence at the early stages of some initiative. He wanted to have influence early. He wasn’t interested in people taking initiative at lower levels, working things all the way up, and then, only when it reached the NSC level, giving him a chance to have input. At that point the initiative was largely completed and his influence would be marginal. He wanted to influence things fundamentally.

The main argument about the Pentagon in the interagency process was not that we were delaying things; it was that we were flooding the interagency process with ideas. In one of the later Woodward books, Woodward quotes Steve Hadley saying something like, “The intellectual engine for the whole administration was Doug Feith’s policy shop.” When it came to ideas, it would sometimes antagonize people that we were coming up with ideas that were not squarely within DoD’s domain.

Rumsfeld conceived of his job as not merely being the person who runs the Defense Department. As Secretary of Defense he was also a National Security Council advisor to the President. What he said was, “If you give advice to the President in a narrow, bureaucratic fashion, respecting everybody else’s lane so you give him only the Defense Department perspective on a subject, and the Secretary of State gives him only the State Department diplomatic perspective, and all the other agencies do likewise, how does the President get it pulled together so that he gets a Presidential perspective? You’re not serving the President’s purposes if, as an NSC advisor, you are giving him advice only in your lane. I want to advise the President from the President’s perspective.”

It is not the only way to do things and you can argue whether it is the best way to do things, but it was Rumsfeld’s way of doing things. The result was we were constantly analyzing things from the national perspective, the President’s perspective. We became influential, far beyond the way the Defense Department normally is. There were numerous interagency meetings on DoD initiatives. It was standard for OSD policy officials and for Rumsfeld to show up at an interagency meeting with a paper setting out our definition of goals or our proposal for an initiative.

Frequently the meetings then focused our papers. We dominated the process by thinking things through in advance, writing them down, being rigorous about them. Even to the point where people who didn't often agree with us, like Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Marc Grossman, a very talented guy, would sometimes say to me, "I'd give anything to have people who can write bulleted memos, lucid, to the point, no-words-wasted memos, the way you OSD policy guys do."

It was that process of rigorous thinking, severe editing, getting aims boiled down to three or four main points, structuring our strategic analyses—all that made us effective. That was not Mickey Mouse. That was intellectually powerful and bureaucratically useful. It really worked. This is part of the reason that our office became so controversial and the object of so much focus. We actually influenced interagency policy making more than DoD usually does. That's not to say we didn't make errors and couldn't have done things better. But the training that Rumsfeld gave us, which we took to heart, was translated into bureaucratic effectiveness.

Of course the Rumsfeld approach put us in a situation where virtually everything we did is heavily documented, so we're vulnerable. Others can go through the record and say, "You wrote this memo and you didn't even mention this gigantic problem that later arose. You people are fools. You didn't anticipate this or that." Or, "You said this and it is wrong." We understood we were subject to that kind of criticism. Other officials, like Colin Powell, tended not to write many memos and not to show up at meetings with papers to distribute. They made sure that the record of what they thought and said would largely be based on what they said or wrote about events years after those events occurred. That allows them to make themselves seem prescient. By writing less at the time, they often sacrificed influence, but they gave themselves more control over how history sees them.

You asked about Woodward the other day. As he is such a widely cited reporter, there is something I want to note about his technique. He interviewed me a few times. He puts lots of words in his book in quotation marks. I'll now make up an example to illustrate his technique. Let's say he's interviewing me in 2006. He'll say to me, "There was an NSC meeting on October 7th, 2002, and the topic was X. Do you remember what you said to Rumsfeld about that topic?" I might say to him, "Yes, I remember warning him, "If the U.S. proposes that action, the Germans will oppose us."

Nelson: Are these on-the-record interviews?

Feith: Yes, they're on-the-record interviews. You say, "The Germans will oppose us." He will then write that down as a quote. When he tells the story he'll say, "In October 2002, Rumsfeld was going to the meeting with Feith, and Feith said to him, *quote*, 'The Germans will oppose us.'" Now notice, he is taking something that I said four years later and he is putting it into a quote. I'm telling him what I recollected of a conversation. I know already how all this played out. I know that the Germans did in fact oppose us. Woodward is putting it as an actual quote and placing it in October 2002.

I assume I don't have to tell scholars that that is a manufactured quote. Woodward weaves it into his narrative and presents it as if it was uttered in 2002. If someone says, "What's your source for that?" he can: "So-and-So told me." But nobody remembers precisely what he said at a meeting

four years back. The proper way to do that would be to say, "As Feith told me in 2006, he warned Rumsfeld in 2002 that the Germans would oppose us." Then it is completely accurate.

Nelson: By the time he writes one of his later books, he has written and published his earlier books, which I'm guessing you have read, and participated in some of them. So when you do an interview with him, why aren't you setting ground rules like, "Don't quote me unless you confirm the quote"?

Feith: You can try to micromanage a best-selling author and giant of the journalistic world that way, but then you're effectively telling him, "I'm talking to you off the record." If you do that, then he'll quote somebody saying that you were a jerk.

Nelson: So you really do feel like you're being—

Feith: It's a kind of extortion, but Woodward is not by any means the only journalist who works that way. "Extortion" is a bit strong. Journalism is often practiced as a kind of protection racket.

If an official doesn't cooperate with a journalist, there are certain things the journalist can always say to hurt the official for the refusal. "He's a bad manager." There is almost nobody that you can't say that about. It's damaging to have it said, but it is an absolutely standard thing that you can say about anybody, because who the hell knows?

Sometimes a person calls a senior official a bad manager because the senior official didn't hire or promote that person. It's the kind of thing a journalist can always allege, including against someone like Rumsfeld, who is in many ways a brilliant manager.

I've seen cases in which a journalist calls an official and the official doesn't take the call or give the requested interview. So the journalist runs a story saying he's a bad manager. The official then calls the journalist to complain and the journalist says, "Well, if you had talked to me I would have had a different angle on this." From that point forward the official may decide to answer that journalist's calls—to buy "protection."

Nelson: How should we read Woodward's books?

Feith: First of all, you understand that everyone who is giving him information is paying him off. That's true with journalists in general. The coin of the realm is information. Officials talk to journalists in order to purchase a good report. You have to read it from that point of view.

Woodward is mainly interested in telling an exciting or interesting story. He aims to craft a good story.

Nelson: Drama, conflict.

Feith: Drama, conflict, and a sufficiently simple story line that people can follow it. There is such a thing as complex drama, as we know. You can read [William] Shakespeare. And there is soap opera. Many more people watch soap operas than subscribe to the Shakespeare Theatre, right? Woodward goes for the soap opera numbers, not the Shakespeare Theatre numbers. His plots are simple. They're easy to follow. People have black hats or white hats. By and large, in

his books you know early on that there are the villainous characters and there are the noble characters. The noble characters amazingly enough are his sources. There is simplification. It doesn't mean that the story is not good. It doesn't even mean that everything he is saying is wrong.

Context is crucial. Let's say that somebody came into an NSC meeting and berated a colleague about something. You tell that story as a way of saying the berater was a really antagonistic guy. But the berating may have been justified. The person doing the berating may not be antagonistic by nature. If you don't have the context, the story may be true but it is in the nature of a half-truth. A half-truth is something that is true but is in the nature of a lie because—

Nelson: It's a distortion.

Feith: It's a distortion. What I found in reading Woodward's books is not that stuff is necessarily made up out of whole cloth, but there is no effort to round out the picture, to give context. There is a simple story line, a soap opera: white hats and black hats. Then there is the terrible problem of made-up quotes. If a student in made-up quotes, he would flunk. Yet this is the stuff of enormously successful book writing.

Nelson: Given many roughly contemporaneous accounts of what went on in the Bush administration, dealing with the war in Iraq, and the War on Terrorism generally, are there any of them that you've read with profit? The books by Tom Ricks, for example? Who's good?

Feith: [Michael] Gordon and [Bernard] Trainor wrote one of the early books about the Iraq War [*Cobra II: The Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq*]. I don't agree with them about a lot of things, but it is a meticulous book. It reflects a seriousness of purpose that Ricks's books don't have. Ricks specializes in going out and finding some major or lieutenant colonel who says, "All those guys back in Washington have their heads up their butts." He presents that as evidence that the people in Washington have their heads up their butts. It is a really unbelievably silly approach to dealing with serious questions. He considers it documented because he has the email from the guy saying that, as if there were deep significance to a grumbling soldier out in the field saying everybody is an idiot.

In the introduction to my book, I say, "I have no regard for books that are in the 'I was surrounded by idiots' school of memoir writing." If a book has the tone that "they're all a bunch of idiots," it's not serious. As you see, I have strong views about many policy issues and I had sharp disagreements with people in the government. But I didn't generally think that the other officials were idiots.

Sometimes other officials did things that I considered questionable. Sometimes I thought they weren't completely in good faith. But by and large I assumed good faith and I didn't think that other senior officials were idiots. Some got things really wrong, but they were not idiots.

I hope that you noticed that I went out of my way in my book to try to be fair. For example: When I talked about a meeting and I have notes from that meeting, I put what I consider to be all the relevant remarks from the meeting, including remarks from people that I didn't particularly like or didn't agree with.

If people are in a book and every time they're introduced they're being antagonistic, stupid, missing the point, or whatever, I ask, *Didn't they ever say anything right?* If other people in a book are only saying intelligent things and being kind and helping old women across the street, then you know you're reading a soap opera, not real literature. In real literature, even smart people do stupid things and stupid people occasionally say smart things; they're rounded human beings. I went out of my way to try to round the people in my book by giving them credit where due.

I was critical of Rich Armitage in my book. I didn't care for the way he operated. I didn't care for the way he thought, the way he dealt with people. But every once in a while there would be a meeting and he would say something perfectly reasonable and it was important to the report of the meeting and I put it in my book, showing him saying something sensible. My goal was to create a historical record of what actually was said and done; my goal was not to create a character with a black hat.

I would suggest to anybody who wants to gauge which history books are valuable, one way to do it is ask, *Are the people depicted consistently as good or bad, smart or stupid?* This is not to say that senior people don't occasionally do stupid things, but if senior officials are depicted as stupid people, that probably tells you it is not a good book. By and large, at the senior levels of government people aren't stupid.

Riley: That's what we discover from our interviews.

Feith: That's an important standard.

Perry: I have to run. I just wanted to thank you so much for taking the time. It is an honor. Thank you for your service.

Feith: I just want to tell you what I have on my agenda. We've talked about Iraq, but you're doing a broader administration history.

Riley: Right.

Feith: There are a few institutions and relationships that we created that are not directly related to Iraq and Afghanistan that I would like to mention.

Riley: Please do.

Feith: Things that we worked on other than the War on Terrorism, Afghanistan, and Iraq: We did a major reform of NATO headquarters. We did the Global Peace Operations Initiative, which continues to train countries to have capable peacekeeping forces that can do the more high-end peacekeeping tasks, not just peacekeeping, peace enforcement. There was a shortage in the world of peacekeeping and peace-enforcement capabilities, which is part of the reason why a lot of these responsibilities fell on us. We said we should be investing in training other countries to have these capabilities. That continues.

We in my office were major champions, together with the NSC staff, of the creation of the Office of Reconstruction and Stabilization in the State Department, which we actually had to

create over resistance from the leadership of the State Department. It is now being converted into a bureau. It is an important function.

My office was instrumental in the Global Defense Posture Realignment. This was an enormous project that Secretary Rumsfeld ran, looking at how U.S. forces are deployed globally. Nobody had ever, all at once, looked at how the United States is positioned globally. Our defense posture in most parts of the world was simply a legacy of where we were at the end of World War II, or at the end of the Korean War. With Rumsfeld, we considered the whole world at once and asked, thinking about the next 20 to 50 years, *Where do we want to be positioned with bases, with relationships, with activities, with legal arrangements, with surge capability?* "Posture" is not just a matter of bases. We put in train changes that are still being implemented now, years after our plan was crafted.

Recently President Obama went to Australia and announced that we're putting a brigade of Marines in Darwin in northern Australia. That was part of our defense realignment plan. I visited Darwin to lay the foundation four or five years ago. The gestation period for these things is very long. With my office, I helped Rumsfeld write the defense posture realignment plan and briefed it all around the world. It is something I'm very proud of.

Also my office helped create the new U.S. strategic relationship with India that remains a major feature of U.S. national security policy. It wouldn't surprise me if 50 years from now when people look back on the George W. Bush administration they'll ask, "What are the several things that were most important?" and one of the top three or four or five things will be the important strategic relationship with India. In the George W. Bush administration's first term, my office played a leading role in creating that relationship.

Another matter: We resolved differences about export controls with Israel. We supported [Álvaro] Uribe in Colombia in his stunning turnaround of his country. Uribe did it in close cooperation with the U.S. government, and in particular with the Defense Department.

I mention these matters so you don't think we worked only on Iraq and Afghanistan.

Riley: I'm delighted that you brought those. The top question in my mind to get started today before we moved off in a different direction was precisely that. Your book focuses very much on the two wars. I knew, because there were occasions where you would break in and say, "Let me tell you what I was doing on a typical day just so you don't see this in isolation." One of the great virtues of oral history interviews is the fact that you come to understand, as you've talked about repeatedly, that there are multiple things going on at any given time, and it does violence to the historical record really to isolate something.

So I'm glad that you've done this, because I was aware that there were deficiencies in what we had covered and it is a good signpost for anybody who comes to the interview to know to look at those things.

Feith: If there is somebody who is researching the George W. Bush administration and wants to look at the national security policy or the defense policy, it is important that they know there are important areas that deserve more attention than they have received.

Riley: We've done really yeoman's work here in the last day and a half. We started with a splendid piece of careful work. There is not much like this book out there, of any administration where somebody has taken the time to do the documentation you did. What I hoped to do was to provide a sort of verbal gloss on that. We bored down into a few things here and there. We can look at what the interview provides us overall and we may be able to come back at some point later, at your suggestion, and deal with some of these things.

The one difference of this project that hasn't been true of others is that we have a kind of cap on our activity level. The foundation wanted us to do basically a hundred interviews.

Feith: Which foundation?

Riley: The Bush Foundation. I have to consider, particularly given the fact that we've got the book, whether it makes sense for us to come back and try again, but Mike and I will certainly keep it in mind. It is a possibility we may be back in Washington doing another interview at some point and can take two or three hours.

Feith: If you think it's useful I'm happy to do it. As you see, I spent my whole life reading history books. I think history books are important. When I decided to write my memoir, I decided to make it a history book. I think history matters, so I'm willing to spend the time.

Riley: I appreciate it. As I said, from my perspective, if we come back and do another one—We could talk for a year and not cover what you covered here. What you covered here in the last three or four minutes gives me pause and makes me think there is an important part of the story that we're missing, for which you could be very useful. Those elements are not covered in the book, as I read it.

Feith: No. I purposely decided that my book was only going to deal with the War on Terrorism and the campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq. But we did an enormous amount of work on NATO, North Korea, China, Arab-Israeli issues, Colombia, and on this Global Defense Posture Realignment.

Nelson: And if 50 years from now it turns out that you're right about the enduring significance of some of these things, people will read these interviews and say, "These questioners didn't even bring them up. Feith had to bring them up on the way out the door."

Riley: I worry about this constantly. I never leave an interview feeling I did a perfect job because there are always deficiencies, but in particular in this case because there is a cluster of readily identifiable things we can come back to. Why don't we just in principle agree we'll take maybe a three-hour segment at some point when we can get back to Washington? It may just be me and Mike or Barbara to come back and deal with these things that you've identified, because they merit fleshing out.

You genuinely have done us a real service by allowing us to come and talk with you. We hope that one of the other things you'll do, since Secretary Rumsfeld was mentioned earlier—He does now have an invitation to participate. But, with colleagues who would be at the senior levels, if you're in conversation with them let them know that this is not a painful experience.

Feith: Are you asking to talk to Dick Myers and Pete Pace?

Riley: I think so. Somebody will. There will be a companion project at SMU [Southern Methodist University]. We're tasked with doing the slice of the top one hundred, which is kind of consistent with what we've done. Anybody who doesn't get caught in our slice will get picked up by the companion project. The reason I'm a little vague about whether they're there is I can't remember where the lines were drawn. In fact, I'm working with an advisory board of people that the President has some appointees on, Andy Card and Josh Bolten and some others. I'm sort of in consultation with them trying to figure out where the line is drawn between what we do and they do.

It is just helpful—The most valuable thing that we find in all these projects is to get a favorable buzz generated from within the networks about what it is that we're doing. You're all busy. You're receptive to an invitation because you're historically-minded. Some people aren't, and some people have been burned by interviews; some people are put off. They don't recognize that we're scholars—It is not uncritical but it certainly is a friendly exercise. It just helps to the extent that that buzz can be generated to have it out there.

I'll let you know if there are people like Secretary Rumsfeld, for example, that we're talking with. [Irve Lewis] Scooter Libby I think works with you?

Feith: Yes, Scooter works with me at Hudson [the Hudson Institute].

Riley: He either has just gotten an invitation or has one out. I would understand given his experience that there may be some anxiety about something like this.

Feith: I'll talk with him; I'll explain it to him.

Riley: Please let him know that we would very much like to have him.

Feith: I'll talk to him. I have no problem if when you're writing to them, whether it is Scooter or Rumsfeld or others, you want to say, "Doug Feith has said that he would be happy to talk with you about his experience with us."

Riley: We may do that, or at a minimum Katrina will know to talk with the schedulers and let

them know that you'll—

Feith: I'm perfectly happy to tell them how it went.

Riley: Thank you so much. That is the most important thing.

Nelson: Just related to what you were saying, I think what I told you yesterday is borne out. We're interested in talking with people to get their witness, their understanding of what they saw and what it meant. That might be different from the kind of interviews people are used to participating in, where it is a sort of, "When did you screw this up?"

Riley: OK, thank you.