



## **The Surge – Collective Memory Project**

### **Interviewee: J.D. Crouch**

Deputy Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, 2005-2007

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**[Begin Transcription]**

FEAVER: It is June 25<sup>th</sup>, and we are going to be interviewing Dr. J.D. Crouch, who was Deputy National Security Advisor. I am Peter Feaver, Professor of Political Science at Duke.

O'SULLIVAN: I'm Meghan O'Sullivan, Professor at Harvard University.

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

CROUCH: And I'm J.D. Crouch, the former deputy national security advisor.

O'SULLIVAN: That's fine. Welcome, J.D. Thanks for joining us in this project. And what we would like to do is just ask you a series of questions, but the intention is really to instigate a conversation, so we're not going by a script, per se.

CROUCH: Got it.

O'SULLIVAN: But we'd like to just begin, if you could give the viewers a general overview of what your roles and responsibilities were around the time of this decision in government.

CROUCH: As Deputy National Security Advisor, I had played sort of three basic roles: [00:01:00] one was as an assistant to the President, so I was involved in a lot of discussions with the President, not only about Iraq, but about all national security issues, including the morning briefings and things like that. And I traveled with the President when he traveled in the United States. I tended not to travel with him when he traveled overseas; the National Security Advisor, Steve Hadley, did



that. The second thing that I was obviously very involved in was helping Steve manage the National Security Council staff, and working with you, Meghan, and Peter and others to get product and get the President prepared for things, and those sort of things.

And then the third big task was really chairing the deputies level committee meetings on a wide range of issues. Some of those were formal DC-type meetings, some of them were ad hoc activities. When we finally got into the fall of the [00:02:00] sort of -- that I would kind of put that in the more ad hoc group, because it was not deputies, per se, it was hand-picked people who were picked by their department leads to represent their departments. And so I chaired that activity, as well as well as general deputies committee type of activities.

O'SULLIVAN: Great, thank you. So moving to the whole question of the Surge, when you think about this episode in history, or time in government, when does it really start for you? How would you really describe what the strategy was in Iraq before the Surge? And what were your general impressions of it, and when did you start to get a sense that this was something that needed to change or needed to be refreshed?

CROUCH: It's important to say, just so you recognize, I started in the position on the 1<sup>st</sup> of March in '05. [00:03:00]And prior to that, I had been US Ambassador to Romania, and prior to that, an Assistant Secretary of Defense, without responsibilities for Iraq. So I think that's a good contextual point to say: I parachute in on the 1<sup>st</sup> of



March as Steve's Deputy. I think it was 1<sup>st</sup> of March, end of February, something like that. And so, to some degree, there was some time there where I was getting up to speed. But generally, what I talk about when I think about Iraq, I think about the period of '05 really, to some degree, as one of quite a bit of hope and optimism. There were a lot of sort of positive things that occurred in that timeframe. I don't have them all in my head, but I know we managed to get the constitution through, we had some elections. There was kind of a general sense, amidst problems as well, that things were heading politically in a positive direction.

There were also counter sides, and [00:04:00] one of the things that I think is difficult, to sort of read the distinction between those two things. We're also getting, I think, fairly positive views from the leadership team that was forward deployed, Ambassador Khalilzad and the commanding general, who I think was George Casey at the time, right?

So I think, obviously, a turning point, if you want to think about it, was really the Golden Mosque bombing, to some degree. I think that was a huge wake-up call. And of course, the initial reaction of the administration was to say, "Oh boy, we stared into the abyss and we survived." And I guess that's sort of true, but I think that really began, in my mind, and in a lot of people's minds around me -- and Meghan, to some degree, I was a student of what you were seeing as well at the time -- an [00:05:00] accelerated decline in our ability to have an influence on



what was going on there, and an enormous increase in the internecine and interethnic violence. And so it was really that period from early '06, where I think we began to see things change substantially.

O'SULLIVAN: You probably remember around that time in the spring of '06 there wasn't a government in Iraq, and so the real emphasis was after those elections forming a --

CROUCH: Right. There had been an election --

O'SULLIVAN: There had been an election. Jaafari had been nominally chosen by the Shiite bloc as being the next PM, and there was a lot of back and forth. He didn't have the confidence of the other communities, and so there was just a very long process before Prime Minister Maliki was named in the May-June period. So some people suggested that the focus was really, Well the deterioration is because there isn't a government, there isn't a leadership, [00:06:00] rather than, The strategy isn't working. Do you remember how you felt around that time? Were you thinking our strategy is fundamentally flawed? -- So we're talking about the May-June, right before the summer really kicks in in 2006.

CROUCH: Yeah. I certainly would have. My recollection of that would certainly be I didn't think the strategy was working. I think the question you're asking, though, is why. Was it not being executed well, and therefore it was a poorly-executed strategy? Or was it actually fundamentally flawed, that what we were trying to do was not working? And obviously, the lack of a government, and the lack of a



partner, effectively, to work with was both a tangible symbol of that, but also an excuse in a way. And I remember, [00:07:00] I think we had a meeting up at Camp David in June, I believe? You'll probably get to that.

O'SULLIVAN: Yeah. We'll get to that in a second, yeah.

CROUCH: And of course, that meeting ended up being, to some degree, an interrupted meeting because the President went off and flew to Iraq and met with Maliki, believing that the political symbolism of that and cementing some kind of relationship with Maliki was, in a sense, more important, if I may put it, than finishing the meeting that we started. And I think that was a judgment call. And I wouldn't second-guess it today, because I think it was really important that that relationship get -- To lay the foundation for what subsequently came, it was important that that relationship begin on the first start. But that meeting by that June timeframe was clearly a symbol that the seniors in the administration [00:08:00] did not believe the strategy was working.

O'SULLIVAN: Can I just take you back a little bit before the Camp David? I don't want to dwell on the 2005 period, but do you remember other agencies in government coming forward with suggestions or memos being sent to Steve's office about --

CROUCH: Well, the clear one was the "clear, hold and build," which I think the genesis of that was a Philip Zelikow memo, I think, about a trip that he'd taken to Iraq. The politics inside the government of how that kind of got spilled out into the public, I think was, to some degree, made it challenging for it to get much traction.



[00:09:00] Let's put it that way. But obviously, the Secretary of State, then Secretary of State, echoed that in some public remarks, and as you recall, there was a little squabble in the press about -- between the Defense Department and the State Department, and that [inaudible]. My recollection of "clear, hold and build" though, however, is that it was certainly not a call for something like what was executed in early January of 2007. In other words, it was not the Surge strategy ahead of time. But it was a recognition, I think, that there were deficiencies in the security environment in Iraq, and it was a recognition that the current strategy had weaknesses.

So I guess I would characterize it that way. But I don't remember it as a punch in the face, that everybody went, "Oh wow, the scales have fallen from our eyes." Now, maybe it was meant to [00:10:00] be that, but A, it didn't get the traction for a variety of reasons; but also B, I don't remember it being quite that sharp and focused. But it was, and to some degrees it was prescient.

O'SULLIVAN: And obviously, Tim and Peter, jump in at any point. So going back to Camp David, do you remember the preparations for that meeting, and did people have different ideas of what might be achieved from that meeting before the plan to solidify that relationship with Maliki evolved? Did that have the potential to be a critical turning point, or was it more pro forma? And why was it held, right? Why was the President going to do this Camp David meeting in the first place?

CROUCH: Well, I think like anything, there were several layers to it. I think earlier in the prep for the meeting, I think there [00:11:00] was a hope that some of the fundamental issues that seemed to be being not really out in front of the President would get out in front of the President; that it would force his commanders, his senior diplomats and his cabinet, the National Security Council, to sort of get their assumptions on the table, really begin to challenge some of maybe questionable assumptions that we were operating under. But I think as we got closer to it, particularly those of us who knew that it was going to turn into a flight to Iraq, probably had lower expectations for the outcome of the meeting.

But I still think it was an important meeting, because in addition to that, it was the beginning of the public statement that effectively, the President was looking at a fundamental re-evaluation of the strategy. [00:12:00] So as a private interior meeting, my sense is that it didn't have as much impact as I would have liked, and I think others maybe around at the time would have liked. But publicly, it did kick off this notion that we have to look at a new strategy.

O'SULLIVAN: Do you, and Peter, maybe you can help me here -- so it was your impression that it was that public that early on, that the administration needed a new strategy? Because I think about the summer and what happened over the course of the summer. I just want to make sure that I'm getting your point correctly; that you feel that Camp David --





CROUCH: Well, remember what happens in the late summer. You've got the execution of Operation Together Forward -- I think that's what it was called --

O'SULLIVAN: Right.

CROUCH: OK. And then Operation Together Forward II, right [laughs]. [00:13:00] -- This is the way I would put it. If there had not been doubts about whether those actions were on the right track, there would not have been that kind of meeting. There were plenty of ways to get briefed on what was going on. There was weekly interaction between the President -- or almost weekly interaction between the President and the senior military leadership and down range, and all of that. So I think the fact that this was done at Camp David, with the cast of characters who were there was an indication that fundamental assumptions needed to be re-examined. I guess it was probably maybe a bridge too far to say [00:14:00] a decision had been made at that point; we needed a new strategy. I think that is a bridge too far. But the idea that there were doubts about the current strategy, I think that was well-formulated by them.

FEAVER: And was that J.D. Crouch's view, or was that the White House view, or was that --

CROUCH: Well, the White House is a building. I mean --

FEAVER: -- the National Security Team?

CROUCH: OK, so the real question is, was it the President's view?

FEAVER: Yes.



CROUCH: And I think you probably should rely more on Steve to answer that question.

FEAVER: OK. What about the other departments and agencies? Do you think State and Defense had a similar view as you just described, at that time?

CROUCH: I would say probably Defense did not. I think Defense still at that point believed that there was a good chance that the current strategy was going to work. And again, to fast forward, there's a [00:15:00] couple of different ways of looking at that problem as well. One argument you could make is that there needed to be -- that the strategy that they were executing might have worked, but that the timeline on which it would have taken to work was politically not viable; that there was no way that the President had enough time at home, given everything else that was going on, and jumping into the sort of the season of the Baker commission, and all that; that the politics, the storm clouds, were not just forming, they were violent at that point. The counter narrative to that is that no, that there were some fundamental changes in the way we executed the Surge, and we should get into that as we jump forward.

O'SULLIVAN: Yeah. Just --

FEAVER: Before we go there, though, there's another dog that doesn't bark in the spring -

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CROUCH: I certainly don't think the State Department by the time of that meeting believed the strategy was working. [00:16:00] But I don't remember there being



kind of a coherent alternative put forward at that meeting; I guess that's the way I would put it.

FEAVER: The narrative at the time was the Defense Department's fully in the fight, the State Department is not yet. So the conflict between Rumsfeld and Rice about where are the State reps for the PRTs [provincial reconstruction teams], and things. So that was one of the other disputes at that time.

O'SULLIVAN: But the big State Department effort had been to get a government, right? That had been really where the energies of our ambassador, our team, people who went out from the White House were all sort of focused on that at that particular meeting.

CROUCH: Right.

FEAVER: So the other dog from that spring is the change in Chief of Staff from Andy Card to Josh Bolten, [00:17:00] and the possibility that sort of a fresh eyes on Iraq, and also his consideration of possibly a change of leadership at Defense at that time, which gets public attention in the form of the revolt of the generals. So do you remember either the internal White House discussions about change in Defense, fresh look, or the revolt of the generals, and just what was your experience on those two things?

CROUCH: Yeah. I don't have much to say on the first one, to be honest with you. And this may simply have been the fact that, obviously, I worked for Secretary Rumsfeld. Maybe there were lots of conversations that went on behind the scenes



that I was not privy to, and I can completely understand why that would be the case. Folks may have thought out of respect [00:18:00] or deference to me, actually, that I wouldn't be involved in those discussions. But I do think they probably were operating more at a political level, but Steve may have some insights into that, or may have given you some insights into that that I don't have.

The so-called revolt of the generals, I think, was obviously the substance of it was a sense that I think it was encapsulated by the phrase we heard many times later on, is "We're out of Schlitz," that we're breaking the force, that this can't go on this way, there's no more capability that we can bring to bear here. And therefore, there has to be a two-pronged effort: one is a political exit strategy, if you will, but also a political effort on the part of State and other elements of [00:19:00] the government to get in the fight and help support them. And the mantra, the sort of the sub-theme of that was, you're never going to get rid of the violence until you have a political settlement, right? And so, of course, the flip side argument to that is, you're never going to have a political settlement until you bring the violence down to a particular level, right? And so, without any effort at humor, I sort of thought of this as the "Tastes great, less filling" debate. I mean, it really came down to where did you put some weight in sequence? Nobody disagreed that you didn't have to have a political settlement, right? Nobody disagreed with that. Where we disagreed was what the sort of a sequencing of it.



O'SULLIVAN: Let me take you back to we're coming out of the Camp David session, and so it's end of June, 2006. [00:20:00] And let's take a look at that summary. You mentioned Operation Together Forward I and II. Do you remember what was going on within the NSC staff? What were the currents within your own staff? And do you remember when internal efforts at review began?

CROUCH: OK, yeah --

O'SULLIVAN: And how they --

CROUCH: -- and this is where sequencing gets a little fuzzy. But coming out of that meeting, I sort of remember the general call that everybody needed to go back in their corner and review Iraq. And there were sort of these independent -- so Condi was going to take a look from the State Department perspective, and Pete Pace was going to take a look, and I think it was, I think, in this time frame that the Council of Colonels began to start looking at --

O'SULLIVAN: It was a little bit later, actually.

CROUCH: OK, well then [00:21:00] maybe I've got it wrong.

O'SULLIVAN: It's sort of in the fall. Yeah.

CROUCH: But I thought it was in late summer that -- when that --

FEAVER: It was late summer, yeah.

O'SULLIVAN: Yeah, late summer. Yeah.

CROUCH: Oh, OK. Well, I --

FEAVER: But not June. June-July.

O'SULLIVAN: Yeah.

FEAVER: I think she's asking about July --

O'SULLIVAN: June, July, August, when the NSC internal group started their own work on reviews. But we can move to this point where you remember it is --

CROUCH: Well, I mean, I remember there were all kinds of discussions. And again, I'm not exactly certain when this was either, but we talked earlier about the napkin, right? The napkin was in the fall, right?

O'SULLIVAN: Yeah.

CROUCH: All right, so that's still not in that June-July timeframe. My recollection's pretty vague about that. The other thing I'm trying to remember was, when did we produce the strategy document on Iraq?

FEAVER: [00:22:00] NSVI? Or the National Strategy for Victory in Iraq, the public version?

CROUCH: The public version of it.

FEAVER: That was fall of '05.

O'SULLIVAN: Five. That's the previous year.

CROUCH: Right. OK. That's right.

O'SULLIVAN: -- the outcome of the "clear, hold and build."

FEAVER: That's the "clear, hold and build."

CROUCH: Right. Exactly, OK. So that's out of sequence. So the answer is, I don't have much to tell you, other than the people you're talking about are you and your



team. And I know that you guys were beginning to look at a lot of the problems.

And my recollection, if I can just say it to you directly, is that you were very disappointed by the June meeting. That was my recollection of your reaction to it.

But maybe you feel differently about it now, I don't know.

O'SULLIVAN: No, I'm still disappointed. [laughs]

CROUCH: Yeah, yeah, exactly. And I think this gets to the question, an interesting question that I've had journalists ask me before, which is, why did it take so long? And I've always said that I thought we could have done this about [00:23:00] three to four months earlier than we did. Some people would say, oh, you should have seen it two years ahead of time. Well actually, I think there were a lot of countervailing arguments to that. But I think certainly three to four months earlier, it could have been done. But it required a lot of interagency alignment.

O'SULLIVAN: Yeah.

CROUCH: And re-alignment.

O'SULLIVAN: Maybe unless Tim and Peter disagree, maybe we should move to that period. So, as you said, kind of in the early fall, there are multiple efforts going on in everybody's various corners, different agencies taking a look at the strategies from their own perspective. The NSC had been doing that for a few months at that point.

CROUCH: Right.

O'SULLIVAN: And at some point, there was a decision that we're going to translate these informal reviews, then formal review going on into the NSC, into a more formal process. Do you remember what the impetus for that decision was, [00:24:00] the timing of it? Do you remember Steve maybe sitting you down and saying we're going to ask you to take the lead in bringing together this ad hoc group of deputies that you referenced earlier?

CROUCH: No, I actually remember it being in the Oval Office.

O'SULLIVAN: OK, yeah.

CROUCH: And I remember the President -- what?

O'SULLIVAN: Yeah. Yeah, I remember this.

CROUCH: Oh, OK. And I remember the President turning to Steve and saying, "We're going to do a review of this," and Steve looking at me and saying, "You're going to do this." And that's how I remember it.

CROUCH: Now you're going to ask me the date.

FEAVER: When that was, ballpark it?

CROUCH: Yeah. And I'm trying to remember, and it's really hard. Was this around one of the outside group meetings?

O'SULLIVAN: No, this -- do you remember --

CROUCH: Do you remember the date?

O'SULLIVAN: It's actually quite late.

CROUCH: Oh, it is late. Absolutely.



O'SULLIVAN: Yeah. So we have all these internal things going on --

CROUCH: I think it's in November, isn't it?

O'SULLIVAN: -- but do you remember the November 8<sup>th</sup> meeting [00:25:00] that you were at?

FEAVER: With Secretary Rice in Steve's office?

O'SULLIVAN: With Secretary Rice and Steve, it was Saturday morning, and Brett [McGurk] and John Hannah, talking about the strategy, really. It was about the strategy. My memory, and again, this isn't my interview, is that the real decision to formalize things comes out --

FEAVER: Of that.

O'SULLIVAN: Of that. The decision to -- not to formalize, to make it public.

SAYLE: That's the November 11<sup>th</sup> meeting, would that make sense -- that Saturday?

FEAVER: Yeah.

O'SULLIVAN: OK, you're right. That's to make it public, which may be different than the meeting in which --

CROUCH: In which I'm thinking of.

O'SULLIVAN: -- it's formalized. Right. Yeah.

CROUCH: I don't think you were in the meeting where the President had the conversation with Steve and Steve looked at me --

O'SULLIVAN: Yeah. I don't remember that exchange. I don't remember that exchange.

CROUCH: -- and said, "You're the guy."



FEAVER: Do you remember if there's --

CROUCH: And I'll tell you something that's -- this is -- I don't think I've ever said this to anybody before. It's a very personal thing -- is that I had pretty much made up my mind in the summer that I was going to leave the administration by December. [00:26:00] And as a result of that decision, I didn't leave the administration until June. So I left the administration just after the last brigade closed in Iraq. And that timing was not an accident, all right? I wanted to be there, I was part of that decision, I wanted to be there through the implementation -- not the implementation of the whole thing, but at least through --

O'SULLIVAN: The locus moved back to Baghdad. Yeah.

CROUCH: Exactly. And then I ended up leaving, of course, in July of '07. So that extra six or seven months was a direct result of this decision.

O'SULLIVAN: Right.

FEAVER: Do you remember if that meeting, when you get tasked with it, was that before or after your trip to Iraq? Where you visited Stan McChrystal's folks.

CROUCH: I think it was after. But I --

FEAVER: OK. That would make sense --

CROUCH: But I'm not 100% certain. I will say I'm not certain about that.

FEAVER: So then before we get to that stage, because [00:27:00] that's in the November timeframe. There's a lot of activity in the September-October timeframe that you were involved in; this was the phase when the reviews are very



compartmentalized. They're compartmentalized by agencies, State's doing their own thing, JCS [Joint Chiefs of Staff] is doing their own thing, and not a lot of cross-visibility across branches. But then even within the NSC, compartmentalized within the NSC structure itself, so can you talk about that? What was the reason for the design of it that way? Were you confident you had visibility in all of it? Who had visibility in all of it? Can you speak to that period? This is the August-September-October timeframe.

CROUCH: Right. Because it wasn't being done as an interagency project and it was being done internal, I don't think any of us had complete visibility [00:28:00] into what was going on. And we certainly didn't have, in some degrees, the ability to kind of interrogate -- if I may put it that way -- those who were doing it. Which you could in a normal interagency process.

Having said that, I think there were various levels -- my impression was that the Deputy National Security Advisor for Iraq, Meghan O'Sullivan, was plugged into some of the stuff that was going on in the Pentagon, but not all of it. I think Pete Pace was reporting -- we had informal meetings in Steve's office where the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of State, myself, the Vice President often, and Steve, and the Chairman would meet, and so Pete would give updates on where they were, where the thinking was going, and that sort of thing. Some slides were passed around, and things like that. But it was [00:29:00] pretty informal at that point, in my impression. I mean, that was generally my impression. State

Department, again, I think we all knew that the Secretary had turned to Philip Zelikow to sort of take a look at this, but my recollection there was there was not much that was clearly coming out of State in terms of what an alternative path might be, until a little bit later when we got into the more formal review.

FEAVER: Right.

CROUCH: That's my recollection of it.

FEAVER: That's right.

CROUCH: In addition to that, though, you had two different lines of action going on, I think, in the NSC at that point. And again, the sequence on when they started, again, I think Meghan was focused really on what I think, in a way, I have to say the essential question, which was, is the strategy right? [00:30:00] Again, the notion of what we were doing there was, we are building Iraqi security forces. By building Iraqi security forces, we lay the foundation for Iraq to deal with the problems in Iraq by themselves, and we lay the foundation for us to be able to exit the region, or the country, and to some degree the region, and therefore lessen the impetus for anti-American violence, and that sort of thing. That was the general strategy that I think people thought we were on. She was looking at that question, and questioning the assumptions around it. The same time, in some respects as a result of -- this is the napkin story -- do you remember the -- we were sitting in the Roosevelt room.

O'SULLIVAN: Roosevelt room, yeah.



CROUCH: And we were -- and I'm trying to remember, I think -- I can't remember who said, "We're kind of out of Schlitz."

O'SULLIVAN: I think the napkin was you, me and Eric Edelman?

CROUCH: And Satterfield. Satterfield [00:31:00] was there.

O'SULLIVAN: And Satterfield. Yeah.

CROUCH: Satterfield was there as well. Philip was not there.

O'SULLIVAN: No.

CROUCH: The napkin was after the meeting.

O'SULLIVAN: Yeah.

CROUCH: What generated the napkin was a discussion around the table as to whether or not there really was any more force available. I see those as distinct questions. Is the strategy right? Is there more force available? But they come together later in the Surge. And so we set down on the napkin and said, "Surely there must be a way to stage some additional forces here, understanding that they can't surge forever." You can't build up and never have any kind of build-down. On the basis of that discussion was when, after talking to Steve, we went back and asked Bill Luti to sort of begin to work that question, thinking that he could [00:32:00] get some traction inside the building with the --

FEAVER: Inside which building?

CROUCH: Their Department.

FEAVER: Of Defense, yeah.

CROUCH: Because we had to get the Department involved in that. At the end of the day, I'm not saying that -- we had a Major General or a Brigadier General on our staff, what was Kevin then?

FEAVER: Brigadier.

CROUCH: A Brigadier General, you know, who had been in Iraq --

O'SULLIVAN: He was promoted to Major while he was on the staff.

CROUCH: He was -- OK, yeah. So both.

O'SULLIVAN: Yeah.

CROUCH: On our staff, we had even a guy like Bill had a lot of experience and could put those kinds of materials together with credibility, right? And of course we all know civilians could do that, because we were seeing what was coming out of Kagan and others on the subject. But I think there was a sense that this had to get worked with the Department. And so Bill was kind of chosen to sort of work that side of it. But it was very much a question of -- I think the question that was posed was not, "is this the right strategy?" Because Meghan was working that. [00:33:00] I think the proposal was, "what force would be available over what time to implement that strategy?"

O'SULLIVAN: "Are the resources there?"

CROUCH: "Are the resources there? How long can we have them?" Those kinds of questions. That's how I remember the questions being separately formulated.

FEAVER: And so a question that future historians might ask is, "Why didn't --

CROUCH: Or historians right now.

FEAVER: -- yes. Why didn't we just task DoD to answer that question, or task the JCS to tell us that answer? Why did that question get handled within the NSC staff?

CROUCH: Because I think there was a belief that -- look, in any interagency context, you have different ways of getting the information that you need. And sometimes you do it through formal taskings, and you do it at DC meetings, or principals' meetings, or assistant secretary level meetings, or whatever. And [00:34:00] it's done in a very formal way. And other times, it's a judgment call. Is that the best way to work? Is that the best way to get the answers that you're looking for? Because those can be much more public; they're much more likely to leak. Those kinds of things. There's a question of, what's the best way to get the information, but also since when you asked the question, you didn't really know what you were going to do with it when you got it. How do you get that information so you can make it part of your evaluation, and you can also kind of control where it goes?

So I think the sense was there that -- look, the idea that President Bush at that time was potentially looking at putting more force in Iraq - that was front page news. That was *The Washington Post* all over again. So I think there was a sense that we would get a [00:35:00] more cooperative response from the Department by doing it that way, that it was a better way to sort of control the information. And it gave us the ability to decide how we wanted to use that

information, because -- and I don't know whether you're going to get to this, but one of the questions I think is out there is, was the fix in early on on this?

FEAVER: We'll get to that, yeah.

CROUCH: Right. Or, was there doubt going through? And I can give you my impression on that. So I think that's what I would say to a future historian as to the reasons why it was done that way.

FEAVER: And did you know Lisa Disbrow's role in that study?

CROUCH: I was aware of it, but I didn't [00:36:00] interact with Lisa on it. There were some personnel reasons for that, I think, and we can talk about those after, off-camera.

FEAVER: The other thing that's being worked at this time related to that is, what would be done to alleviate the pressure of surging troops in terms of raising the top line of end strength of Army and Marine Corps? Do you recall when that piece of it was worked, or did that come out of the formal review? Or was that done separately?

CROUCH: No, it did not come out of the formal review. I think this was clearly a response to where the Chiefs were. And it came out very clearly in the meeting that the President and Vice President had with the Chiefs over in the Pentagon. It came out directly, I should say. But it was understood [00:37:00] that this pressure needed to be alleviated in some way. So I can't give you a date, but it was well-





understood before that meeting, because I think the President was teed up by that meeting to make a call on that. So in terms of timing, I'm not exactly sure.

FEAVER: So then in terms of timing sequence, we're about to get to the start of your formal review. The two other things that happened before that that we want you to talk to is: one, Steve and your trips to Iraq, and the other is Secretary Rumsfeld stepping down. So can you speak to both of those issues --

CROUCH: Sure.

FEAVER: What was the genesis of it? What was your role in it? What did you find?

CROUCH: My recollection is that Steve and Meghan went to Iraq, I could be wrong about that, and that Kevin Bergner and I went to Iraq. And we went to Iraq -- [00:38:00]

FEAVER: So afterwards, yeah.

CROUCH: -- within a very short period of time, and I'm not 100% certain who went first, but I think Steve went first. That's my recollection. I'm not sure it makes that much of a difference, obviously. And my recollection of the sort of the emphasis is that Steve spent a lot of time in the green zone, a lot of time at the political level making an assessment of the Iraqi political structure and where they were, and that sort of thing. My task was to sort of go out and talk to some of the military commanders, and find out what were people thinking. And so I had meetings -- I'm trying to remember, I had meetings with Chiarelli, and I think Casey.

I had meetings in Anbar with J.D. Thurman, and [00:39:00] then I actually went out to -- actually, he wasn't in Anbar, he was just outside. I think he was, was



it fourth ID or first ID? I think it was fourth ID that was out there. So I met with his senior, his entire team. I did go out to Anbar. I met with the Marines out there, went north up to Kirkuk, and then south into where the U.K. was. I met with the U.K. The U.K. was still there at that point, and they were down in --

FEAVER: Basra.

CROUCH: In the Basra area, yeah. Impressions. A couple of impressions: one that Iraq was very much of a mosaic war. Depending upon where you were in the country, it was a very different set of circumstances. [00:40:00] Probably the place that gave me the most hope was up in the north, interestingly, where I met with some fairly squared-away Iraqi security forces up there. I think a lot of those guys ended up getting killed later on, but it was a fairly positive meeting. The situation in the south did not look good, from my standpoint. And then the one out in Anbar was probably, in some ways, the most interesting. Do you remember, Al Qaeda in Iraq had announced that they'd created their state. And I got there just after I believe it was a Marine J-2 had testified in front of the Senate Armed Services Committee that Anbar was [00:41:00] lost.

O'SULLIVAN: Yeah.

CROUCH: So I went out and I sat down, I was in a very small room. I had some Colonels and people all the way down to enlisted in the room. And I said, "Look, we're being told that Anbar is lost." And it was very interesting. I kind of got this sort of eye roll look from everybody, and they said, "Look sir" -- and I'm not sure whether



they said “cur” or “sir” actually, but -- [laughter] they were very respectful; don’t take that in any way, I’m just making it a little funny there. But they said, “Look, sir,” and they threw out a map, and they said, “Look, Anbar is a very big place, but if you control the river that runs through it, you control the road that runs down the river, you control the place. We’ve got about enough force right now to control two thirds of the road and two thirds of the river. The bad guys are where we are not. And as a result of that, [00:42:00] we can’t get to the final step in turning the Sunni population here to our side. If we had enough force to do that, we would be able to do that.”

So hold that thought, because that thought was in my mind as we go forward. And they actually said something like half a brigade or a brigade was what would be needed, although we didn’t get into a lot of detail on things like that. They did talk about the Awakening in all the places I was at there, that things were turning, and that actually, it was complicating them a little bit, because when they saw Sunnis with weapons now -- I mean, if you think about it, six months or even a year earlier, a Sunni with a weapon was a problem. Now, they weren’t sure whose side they were on, because there [00:43:00] were people turning against Al Qaeda in Iraq.

So that was the general impression that came out of that interchange. So all of that was brought home, and it was relayed to Meghan and Steve and fed into the President, with all the other stuff that was going on. So again, my focus was really on what’s



the military situation look like? And Kevin, by the way, he was the note taker, so he's probably got better recollections of this stuff than I do, but he would be a good person to talk to at some point.

FEAVER: And Rumsfeld's departure?

CROUCH: You know, this is going to sound -- when was Rumsfeld's departure? It was right after the election, right?

FEAVER: Right after the election, yeah.

O'SULLIVAN: Right.

CROUCH: Could you ask a question about it?

FEAVER: Was that a crucial turning [00:44:00] point in the Surge story? Was it somewhat separate and part of the political part of the story, but not part of the strategy development part of the story? Were you involved in that decision in any way? Those things.

CROUCH: Yeah. I was not involved in the decision. It was a political decision. And it obviously was, I think, rightly, very closely held. The only thing I would say is that obviously by the time I'm getting into the serious discussions in this interagency meeting, it did have the effect of unsettling the people at the table. Steve Cambone, for example, was originally part of the group, Steve left shortly after Rumsfeld did. Eric Edelman replaced [00:45:00] him, so that became a new face. Although the two -- and I'm happy to talk a little bit more specifically about these things off-camera for you -- the two, I didn't find them all that different in the



meetings, although I think Eric felt freer, to some degree, to say what he was thinking.

The general view that I think I got from the Department in those meetings, in the trans-Secretary change-over, was, one, still a belief and confidence that over time, the strategy would work, respectful of the fact that the President needed to have options and needed to get options in front of him, but at the same time wanted to make sure [00:46:00] that there wasn't just a single point solution that was being developed by the NSC, or somebody else. And that's very consistent, I think, with the way Secretary Rumsfeld always looked at issues. He wanted to make sure that all the assumptions got surfaced up. And there was still a very strong feeling, and this was not just on the political side, but on the uniform side as well, that the rest of the government had not shown up to this fight, yet.

Rightly or wrongly, that was the view.

O'SULLIVAN: Can you go just a little bit more into, we're in that room, whatever it is, 206 in the NSC building, and you're chairing this review that later got morphed into the principals' review for the President. So, you've got the different agencies presenting their different viewpoints. What do you remember about that period of time? Do you have a particular approach that you [00:47:00] were trying to get out of it? Was there a desire to shape a consensus out of the views of all the different agencies? Or was it very much a sense, we're going to get a series of options and put it forward to the President? Do you feel like you had a specific mission?

CROUCH: Well, yeah. I think I had a very specific mission. I recall the President saying to me, “If we can win, I want to win. If we can’t, we have to find a way to get out. And I don’t want to spend any more blood and treasure on this.” That was the strategic level guidance. And so I think what that meeting was trying to do, or those meetings were trying to do, was actually suss out that question. And was I looking for a consensus per se? No. And I think in the end, we didn’t get a consensus. [00:48:00] I said to Peter as I came in, the document that we generated for the solarium meeting was called, “Iraq the Emerging Consensus” -- no greater oxymoron had ever been created in government than that document [laughter].

O’SULLIVAN: Yes. I remember that, being drafter of that document.

CROUCH: Exactly. Exactly. But again, like is often true in government, sometimes, we had other things going on at the time, right? There were other lines of operation that were being discussed outside that room, that would have been very difficult to discuss inside that room. And there were discussions going back and forth. You recall the paper that came out of the Bill Luti brief was then handed by Steve to Pete Pace, I handed it to Doug Lute as well, in the same timeframe, and said, “All right, you guys go back and take a look at this.” Rumsfeld knew this stuff was going on. He wasn’t deeply immersed in the detail of it, I don’t think. [00:49:00] But he was certainly aware of it. You recall early on, I think we went over and had a meeting with Rumsfeld and kind of got the blessing to take a look at these issues.



And [to O'Sullivan] I don't think you were in that meeting, and my recollection is you weren't, but I could be wrong. Do you remember being in the meeting?

O'SULLIVAN: Not on Iraq, no. If you're describing an Iraq meeting with Rumsfeld, no.

CROUCH: Yes. So we went over there to do that.

O'SULLIVAN: Yeah.

CROUCH: And we should have a little conversation about that when the camera goes off.

O'SULLIVAN: OK. I'm watching for your [inaudible] --

CROUCH: I understand. I'm sorry that I'm rambling.

O'SULLIVAN: No, no, no, no.

CROUCH: But I'm trying to both recall and be articulate --

FEAVER: You said something that historians would want to pick up on. You said there were lines of action or operations outside the room that couldn't be inside the room. Why couldn't they be inside the room?

CROUCH: Because there was no consensus. Look, I think [00:50:00] there was a fundamental division in that room. And you can argue --

FEAVER: Can you speak to that?

CROUCH: You can argue there was more than one. On the Defense Department side, there was the view that in this question of tastes great, less filling, is it politics first? Or is it security first, right? They believe that you had to have the politics first. Now, you can argue whether that was a tactical perspective, or they really believed it or not. I tend to take people on face value, that they really believed it.



The State Department view that was articulated at the time was much more of, Things had descended so badly that we were now in a civil war. And so the debate was really over the question of, is this a classic counter-insurgency problem, or is this civil war problem? Doctrine [00:51:00] would tell you counter-insurgency, suppress the violence, control -- secure the population. The internecine conflict will go down, confidence will be built in the local population, that you're here to help. They'll start helping you, blah blah blah blah -- that's classic counter-insurgency doctrine. Civil war -- that doesn't work. I mean, you can suppress and you can suppress and you can suppress, and I remember at least somebody articulating the idea that this had to burn itself out. And what we needed to do -- we, America, needed to do -- was step back, let it burn itself out and only intervene to keep a really horrible thing from happening.

O'SULLIVAN: Or focus on Al Qaeda.

CROUCH: Right. Focus on Al Qaeda, but stay out of this internecine struggle. And [00:52:00] the truth of the matter is, nobody in that room really knew who was right, right? You had a view, you formed a view, and to some degree, my view was formed a little bit by that trip to Iraq, where I came away thinking, this feels more like a counter-insurgency effort, a counter-insurgency problem that's being fueled by Iraq, so a lot of pressure on Al Qaeda needed to be -- so I agreed with the State Department, from that perspective. The notion of pulling back, however, I think -- and I articulated this, I know, at the table, which was, I think would have been a



disaster, because America at home, and the Americans particularly on the ground who were executing that strategy could not have sustained that. It would have morally undercut the purpose for which they believed that they were there. So that was a debate that got surfaced in all of this.

O'SULLIVAN: Oh, OK. I'd like to just maybe here come back to what J.D. was saying earlier about his impressions over whether or not there was a strong inclination towards a particular option or outcome, the Surge, or if this review process at this time -- and I'll try with an appreciation for the difficulty in remembering exactly the timeframe. But we're moving out of the period where you have elicited a lot of different options from the different agencies. We've discussed them. Maybe we should talk first about "The Emerging Consensus." That document we put together, what do you remember about it? And particularly the solarium meeting? You briefed that document to that group. Do you remember how that meeting went?

CROUCH: Oh, [00:54:00] yes. [laughs] I remember walking away from that meeting with you [Meghan O'Sullivan] and having a conversation with you about it.

O'SULLIVAN: Yes.

CROUCH: I think this can happen often at times when you can set an expectation for a meeting -- and by the way, June is the same way -- where you set an expectation for a crisp outcome, and you don't get a crisp outcome. What that meeting did not do was create an emerging consensus. What that meeting did not do was tell the

President exactly what he needed to do. And I think there was a sense of disappointment on my part, and I don't want to put words in your mouth [to O'Sullivan], but my sense is that you had a sense of disappointment as well.

However, on reflection, and I don't mean like today's reflection, but you know, in fairly [00:55:00] recent time, what had occurred to me was, is that it really, in fact, did give the President quite a bit of what he needed, because it gave an airing, and it aired in front of him the different points of view that the various people had. And it made it clear to him that he had a big strategic decision he had to make, and that his senior advisors were not of one mind, and to some degree, it freed him -- and I know you think the President's free to do whatever he wants to do -- but politically freed him, I think, to be able to say, "All right," turning to the NSC staff and others, "What do you guys think? What do you think that the right thing to do is?" And I think going into the meeting he already knew that the Surge option was on the table.

It was to some degree in that meeting, I have to say, Meghan, it was a little bit like the serpent [00:56:00] sort of coiled around the table. It was there in the meeting. But it didn't surface itself up in a big way, but it was in the President's mind. And to some degree, the discussion was dancing around it. But I think the meeting actually helped crystalize in his mind that he had a big decision to make, and he was always prepared to make a big decision. And so that's my big takeaway, if you will, from the solarium meeting. If you just looked at the slides,



and you just listened to the words that were spoken in there, you probably would have come away with more disappointment than optimism, but as time went on, it became very clear that I think that helped to crystalize his thinking.

FEAVER: One of the issues that --

CROUCH: And Steve was very good about being able to do that and being able to then, afterwards, sit with the President and say, All right, what do you make of this? I don't know what he said to you guys, but I suspect he had those conversations.

FEAVER: Well, picking up on -- one of the things he said was, [00:57:00] Steve [Hadley] talked about the difficulty of maintaining an honest broker role, which is the classic role for the NSC, when one of the options that the President wanted to see, or the staff wanted to see, the Surge, was not advocated by any of the departments or agencies. So if the NSC was not advocating for it, it wasn't going to show up. But the NSC wasn't supposed to advocate, because it was supposed to be an honest broker. So that tension -- did you get specific guidance in sharing in the meetings about that?

CROUCH: Well, don't take this wrong; I think it's a bit of a straw man argument. The NSC has more than one role. The honest broker role is absolutely critical. It needs to play that honest broker role. I was Steve's Deputy over in the Pentagon, I was his Deputy there. I think [00:58:00] Steve was fabulous at playing that role. But at the same time, Steve was also fabulous at making sure that the President saw all the options that needed to get in front of him.

And so the NSC is also the President's policy entrepreneur. The National Security Council staff is his policy entrepreneur. He's making sure that if the deal can get done, there's a way to get the deal done. Because sometimes, the bureaucracy, or even the cabinet, gets stuck. And it's not acceptable that the President not have the options in front of him. I know Steve was making sure the President was aware of those options, what they were. And so that's why I said when he went into that meeting, he had those things in his mind, even though [00:59:00] there was not a sort of transparent discussion about them.

So I think the NSC plays more than one role, and sometimes that role has to shift. The other one that reminds of me of -- there was the SDI [Strategic Defense Initiative]. The bureaucracy would never have come up with the strategic defense initiative. That had to come from the policy entrepreneurship, I think, of the National Security Council staff of 1983. So fast forward, I think there was some policy entrepreneurship on our side in all this. But the other thing to remember is, it was not without having contacts back into the Department, people, senior military leadership and others, who said yes, this not only can be done, but this is the right thing to do. [01:00:00]

So there was policy, and that's what I mean about lines of operation outside the room. There were discussions going on with folks who had differing views. And it's not a bad thing that our military has differing views on things, do you know what I mean? It's not like we want it to be a monolithic entity. And I don't



think we were just looking for people who had the same views that we might have had, because again, going back to your prior question, I've always said that we knew the current strategy was not working, certainly by the fall. But I don't think we knew that this new strategy would work; we didn't know it for certain. We did believe that of all the options that were put forward, it was the best option.

FEAVER: When you say "we," who are --

CROUCH: I'll speak for me. [01:01:00]

FEAVER: Yeah.

CROUCH: I thought it was the best of those options.

FEAVER: In the critiques that were offered of this, of the Surge strategy, from Defense and from State and others, were there critiques that the President or you found most persuasive? What were the arguments against this that had the most traction and kept --

CROUCH: It's interesting --

FEAVER: -- and were the last ones to fall?

CROUCH: -- I don't remember there being a lot of arguments against this. I remember there being arguments for something else. And again, part of the Defense Department, and Meghan may have heard more directly some of the arguments against -- but the Defense Department narrative was, what we're doing is right, it will take some time, and we need the political support to get it done. And then that morphed later on to, well, maybe we could [01:02:00] use a little bit more



force to do this. That was the general sense, and I'm being very, very shorthand when I say those things. State Department had a fundamentally different view, that as I said, things had descended, now you did have to wait. I think maybe the NSC staff, Meghan, myself, Steve, probably felt the political pressure and the clock ticking more than people elsewhere, and sensed that if we were going to do something, we needed to make sure that we did it soon and did it fast.

FEAVER: Well, one of the State Department arguments at the time, you may recall, was a political one that the public had just voted on this issue in the midterm elections, and it voted against. And so there wasn't a political space to do the Surge. Do you remember that argument [01:03:00] coming out? It was presented forcefully by Secretary Rice in the November 11<sup>th</sup> Saturday meeting in Steve's office, but also it would come up in this -- in the Surge.

CROUCH: I don't remember that being a very forceful argument. And the reason I don't is it's very -- One of the things that my dad, who grew up on a farm (or near a farm I should say, his grandpa had a farm) used to say is, "Don't teach a dog how to suck eggs."

FEAVER: [laughs] You're going to have to explain that!

CROUCH: Well, you don't have to. They know how.

FEAVER: Oh, OK.

CROUCH: In other words, don't tell a President that you haven't gotten the politics right, sir. In other words, to some degree, his reaction both to the people at the

Pentagon and the State Department is, look, figure out what the [01:04:00] right thing to do is, and I'll figure out the politics. Or, subtext -- and this is not a quote from President Bush; he never said that to me, but that's my sense. Or, I'll go down swinging, trying to figure out the politics. And I remember, we go fast forward to the announcement, and it was a tough announcement. People were surprised. People thought they had seen the tea leaves and everything was going in the other direction. And in some respects, that was one of, I think, one of the cleverer aspects of the Surge, was that a lot of people didn't expect it.

O'SULLIVAN: We've got a lot of this area to cover --

FEAVER: Right.

O'SULLIVAN: -- and I am worried about time.

CROUCH: OK, why don't we take a break --

O'SULLIVAN: OK.

O'SULLIVAN: OK. So J.D., if we could go back to this question about [01:05:00] how much do you think the President had really focused on the Surge strategy at the beginning of this review, and how much do you think the review generated the Surge strategy, or something in between? What's your impression of that overall question that we referenced earlier?

CROUCH: Right. As I said, I think there were several prongs of action going on at the same time. If you talk about what actually happened in 2006, if you recall, there was not much talk about a surge strategy in that. There was more discussion

about what are the fundamental problems, and what are the overarching strategies to deal with it? And I think you and I had talked about this before, which is that the Surge is actually not about more force.

O'SULLIVAN: Right.

CROUCH: [01:06:00] The Surge to me was about what were the objectives, political military objectives that you were trying to achieve, and then you looked at it and you said, I needed more force to do that.

O'SULLIVAN: Right. It was the double-down strategy.

CROUCH: If you could have achieved those political military objectives without more force, you would have done that. But nobody believed you could. In fact, we weren't even sure that we had enough force to do it, we thought it might even take more than the five and two thirds, or whatever it was, that ended up being deployed. I think the strategy review helped to suss out some of those questions about what were the things that were critical from a regional perspective inside Iraq, [01:07:00] on this question of counter-insurgency versus civil war. Those kinds of questions were sussed out in that room. Those, I think, helped to inform the lines of operation that were going on, and that you [to O'Sullivan] were principally working on the strategy side, and that eventually, Bill kind of fell away from this. But Bill's contribution to this was yeah, there is Schlitz there [laughs], and then how do you then bring those two together in a way that makes sense? So





I don't know if that answers your question really, but that's sort of the way I think about it.

O'SULLIVAN: And when you're saying "those meetings," are you referring to the meetings that the President chaired? They were the NSC meetings of the President and his principals, because there was your review, and that generated options and papers that were [01:08:00] then taken to the principals. And then there was a very intense, I think, about two-week period where President Bush was sitting with his principals and a small number of us staffing it, where these issues were discussed in a lot of detail.

CROUCH: Right. Right. And I think the work that had occurred in the 206 meetings helped to inform that stuff. But again, my recollection of solarium was it was the last full vetting of the "pull-back and let it burn out" strategy. And it frankly didn't get that much of a vetting there, if you recall. It seemed a little half-hearted to me, but I wasn't quite sure. And then it was the kind of the last full vetting of the "take the hand off the bicycle seat—"

O'SULLIVAN: Status quo, yeah. [01:09:00]

CROUCH: You see what I'm saying – there's two counterpodes to this. So in a sense, I think the options that emerged from that were fairly clear. One is, you either double down and do something like the Surge, or you announced, a-la Baker commission, a phased withdrawal, and you move in that direction.

O'SULLIVAN: And do you remember the period, it was kind of mid-December, the Baker report comes out, and there had been the hope and expectation the President would be able to announce his revised strategy shortly thereafter?

CROUCH: Right.

O'SULLIVAN: But that didn't happen. Do you remember the conversations around those times, what the delay was?

CROUCH: Well, I think the delay was really over some of the questions of: if we're going to put more force into Iraq, what's it for? There were a whole series of questions [01:10:00] around that. How much? How's it going to be sequenced? Those kinds of questions. And I'm trying to remember, when was the meeting in the tank?

O'SULLIVAN: December 13<sup>th</sup>.

CROUCH: Yeah, it was in that time frame, right? So that was also kind of a critical question to whether or not the support would be there. And I remember, there was some fairly blunt questions asked in that meeting, I think mostly by the Vice President about are you with this or not? Can you support this or not? And there were some fairly blunt answers about concern about the force? Yes, we can do this, yes, we need some relief on the top line.

O'SULLIVAN: Do you remember that there were other -- I think as momentum was building towards this option, there were concerns raised: one about the stress on the force, also about the reliability of the Iraqis, and is [01:11:00] this a sectarian



regime, is Maliki reliable? There were also concerns about is the civilian component actually going to step up alongside the military component.

CROUCH: There were all those concerns.

O'SULLIVAN: Yeah.

CROUCH: Absolutely. And so we spent a lot of time, for example, figuring out how are we going to staff these provincial reconstruction teams. My recollection of that is, we ended up staffing a lot of it with reserve military personnel. In other words, they were civilians in the sense that they -- but they could be called up. The President had a cabinet meeting -- and I don't mean an NSC meeting, a cabinet meeting -- in which he had people from cross-cabinet basically pointing to him and saying, hey, we're going to need veterinarians. At that cabinet level there was support, obviously, but actually making [01:12:00] that happen was very difficult, because the government didn't have the authorities in place to do it. It was a very difficult thing. You sort of say, "Why is it the President orders it, so it doesn't happen?" Well, it really gets down to the Department of Agriculture does not have an expeditionary capability, except maybe to Iowa, right? And so we, as I remember as a staff, we were dealing with all those questions of, how do you get those people there in a meaningful way. Senior State Department people were tasked to do this, and there were some really good people, I think, who were on the ground eventually, who led those PRTs [Provincial Reconstruction Teams]. There was also -- remember the security question. Who's going to provide for the

security for the PRTs in Iraq? And we had to figure out that whole question of, can we really embed, in effect, the PRTs into the BCTs, Brigade Combat Teams, [01:13:00] provincial reconstruction teams, all --

O'SULLIVAN: All those issues were discussed in a context of the strategy review.

CROUCH: Exactly.

O'SULLIVAN: Are you saying that those issues were implementation issues that needed to be worked out before everybody would be on board? Or, how do you remember the actual decision being made in the sense of, was there a moment when the President made the decision? Or was this something that people gradually came to appreciate was the direction he was moving in?

CROUCH: I don't remember being in a room when the President said, "I am today deciding." I think Steve may have been in that room, but I don't know. And to be honest with you, it all happened so incrementally, and part of the things that led to that incremental -- it probably was not incremental in his mind. But the things that led to that [01:14:00] were this whole subsequent discussion about, well, do we authorize five and a half, or do we say we're going to put one? At one point there was an option of one, and if you need another one, you'll get another one. And then it was an option of two, and if you need more, you'll get more. And I remember that decision very clearly being made at Crawford. Very clearly.

SAYLE: Can you tell us about that meeting?

CROUCH: Yeah. Who was there? See, I'm trying to think. I think Gates was there, Pace was there, I was there, Steve was there. The President was there, obviously. I can't remember anybody else, there may have been other people there as well. By that time, we were well along with the idea that we were announcing the Surge. Yeah, there was a debate that was sort of put out there of how do we characterize this? And there were sort of two questions. The first question was, how much do you do? And [01:15:00] so there were people who said, "Might be better to do it incrementally." And the President listened to those arguments and came down very forcefully on the side of, I'm only going to make this decision once. I'm going to authorize the whole thing. And then if the commander wants to decide that at some point in the sequence he doesn't need the force, that's a different question. But I'm not going to make this decision five times. That looks like incrementalism.

I think there was also -- an argument was made that making the full commitment actually had more of a shock value in the region, remember? We were trying to get our Sunni allies outside Iraq to sort of say they're serious. We were trying to leave the impression with the Iranians we were serious. We were trying to make sure the Sunni allies inside Iraq [01:16:00] thought, OK, they really are going to do something here. We were trying to convince the Shiites, who were influencing Maliki, that this was a big commitment. And so there was some, as I recall, significant push-back from the Shiites over that question, that had to be dealt with. And the President --



O'SULLIVAN: Yeah. There was a big question about Muqtada al-Sadr, and was Maliki going to take on Muqtada al-Sadr in the context of this.

CROUCH: Right. Right. So I think those are elements of the decision and the execution of the strategy that are less appreciated than they should be. The decision to go into the Sadr neighborhoods and suppress there was not only important militarily, but it was really important politically. The decision to put pressure on the Iranians who were operating in the country was part of that strategy that had lots of benefits, [01:17:00] that probably we didn't really fully understand at the time. But it could have gone the other way.

The other interesting thing that happened at Crawford was, there was a question about, well, isn't Baghdad the weight, the center weight, if you will, and the make weight of Iraqi politics? So whatever force we put in there ought to focus on Baghdad and not on Anbar. And again, there were debates back and forth on that question, and I think the decision was made there to include Anbar. And Anbar, I think that was, in retrospect, a very wise decision because the Al Qaeda in Iraq, which had stood up -- what was their name for it back then? What did they call Anbar province? They had a name for it. ISIS has changed the name, but I can't remember what it -- but anyway [01:18:00] --

FEAVER: The two rivers --

CROUCH: They had a name, they stood up a country, remember? FEAVER: The two rivers, yeah.



CROUCH: They created a country. And so this was politically a very important thing to say: this is part of Iraq, and we're paying attention to this. It was also critical with respect to the Sunnis who were in the region. And it turned out it was also critical to the belt strategy that ended up being executed, because a lot of that stuff was coming in from not just Anbar, but -- what's the province --

O'SULLIVAN: Saladin?

CROUCH: -- up north? It starts with a D.

O'SULLIVAN: Diyala?

CROUCH: Diyala, yeah.

FEAVER: What was the argument against sending all five in, authorizing all five? You explained the President's thinking for why he decided the way he did. But what was the argument on the other side, and who was making it?

CROUCH: Well, the argument on the other side was, [01:19:00] in a sense, somewhat of a replay of the stress on the force argument - Why do it if you don't have to do it? In other words, make the decision that you're going to have five available, but why stress the force if you don't have to stress the force? We may be able to get this done with less. That's how I remember it. And we can talk into individuals -- let's do some of that off-camera.

FEAVER: Another thing that's happening at this time you alluded to briefly, but we didn't get to cover, was the Baker-Hamilton report. What was the function of that? How did that intersect with the Surge strategy, the President's decision?

CROUCH: I think there were a couple aspects to that. One was I think the administration -- I [01:20:00] think we all met with them. We all tried to sort of give them as rich a flavor for what was going on on the ground as we could. My sense is that there was actually quite a bit of sympathy for the position that the administration was in, and coming out of that. I really felt that not only Secretary Baker but subsequently Secretary Panetta and others really were trying to find a way forward to do the right thing. The consensus, if you will, was that there was probably an effective way to get out, but there wasn't really an effective way to win. That was the general consensus. Now obviously, we [01:21:00] all know that former Senator Robb proposed this notion that maybe some kind of short-term surge might have some value. And obviously that was something I think he'd probably gotten from external discussions and things they'd had not only with NSC people but also with some of the outside people who were talking about this, so that you had the Keane-Kagan business, and all that sort of thing.

I think -- I'm just trying to give you general impressions -- I think that our reaction to it was a very respectful reaction to it, obviously. To some degree we weren't in a position to do anything other than that, and didn't -- but it was genuine. I don't think there was a sense that people inside were scoffing at this report. But I think there was a sense that there were opportunities there that maybe the report didn't quite [01:22:00] see, and that a lot of progress had been made from the time that we'd originally met with them, frankly, and the time



when the report actually came out, and sort of developing what those options would be, and ultimately the President's announcement in January.

The other thing I remember was just a feeling of, in effect, sort of a tortuous period where we really did feel like we wanted to get out and react to this, but that we weren't ready, because some of those details had not been worked out. I think we actually delayed the speech date, right? We really had a target date, and it ended up --

O'SULLIVAN: To January 10<sup>th</sup>.

CROUCH: And it ended up going on January 10<sup>th</sup>.

SAYLE: The ISG [Iraq Study Group] report put a lot of emphasis on a diplomatic offensive in the region, and particularly in speaking with Iran and Syria. Do you remember what you made of that argument at the time?

CROUCH: Personally?

SAYLE: Personally, yes.

CROUCH: Yeah. Personally, I felt that you [01:23:00] weren't going to have an effective diplomatic offensive with Iran and Syria, unless you had reset the military political calculation in the region. I didn't see much alignment between Iranian and Syrian interests with us. I remember the Syrians had been the major pipeline of foreign fighters going into Iraq, suicide bombers, and all that sort of thing. The Iranians certainly, in my view, didn't take a position that an unstable Iraq was not in their interest, let's put it that way. I remember arguing at the time, that they sort of



viewed Iraq the way the French viewed Germany for about 400 years, which was, the more Germanys the better. And so the more Iraq could be kind [01:24:00] of carved up -- they didn't want it to be out of control, but they also felt that their interests were served by having a weakened Iraq. So that doesn't mean you can't have a diplomatic offensive. But you've got to set the conditions for a successful diplomatic offensive. And that was demonstrating to the region, inside Iraq, to them, that you were here to stay.

O'SULLIVAN: Maybe because we want to leave a few minutes before J.D. goes to see if there's anything off-camera that you referenced you want to discuss, do you [to Peter Feaver] have any more questions?

FEAVER: We should get him to speak about the Kagan effort, the Kagan-Keane effort, which you have referenced. What role did that play in your thinking and in the strategy review?

CROUCH: I sense it was enormously helpful that they were out having these discussions for a couple reasons. One is [01:25:00] leaving aside who invented the Surge, I believe that all good ideas have a thousand fathers, and they were certainly among them. But the fact that they were out talking about it publicly meant that there was a -- but it wasn't coming out of the administration -- meant that the conversation was out there. And you had people like Senator McCain and others who were standing up and saying, well, somebody ought to look at this. Somebody ought to consider this. You had advocates and detractors and all those



sorts of things, but at least it surfaced the argument so that it wasn't maybe quite as much of a shock when it came forward.

And it also gave people on the outside, particularly in the military, an opportunity to sort of, in a sense, vote on it, if you will. There was an opportunity there. As I said, there was dissension within our own military on, [01:26:00] did we need to do it? Should we do it? Would it work? So that's my sense of it. And we had internal meetings with them. My recollection of this -- Meghan, you tell me -- is we were well along to the answer that we could do this, so that Kagan's argument that the forces were there was a validation, but it wasn't a surprise to us. That's my recollection of it. But it was a good validation. You had somebody on the outside, particularly somebody who had been a four-star, who knew what he was talking about.

O'SULLIVAN: I don't know if Tim has anything. Is there anything you want to mention in wrapping up? Anything that we haven't touched on? [01:27:00] If not, I feel like we've probed the --

CROUCH: Yeah, I guess I would say for historians' sake, I think there's obviously a very interesting whole line of sort of bureaucratic questions about how decisions get made here. So I think that's an interesting line to plumb. I typically tend not to be a process-oriented person, so those aren't as interesting to me, but I do think they're interesting.



And then the second line is really coming down to this question about, what was the character of the conflict? And understanding the character of the conflict was necessary to figuring out whether the strategy would work or not. And you can't really know it up front. In other words, you can be as certain as you can be, but you can't tell a President, "I know this is an insurgency and I know with [01:28:00] the application of this force, it will do what we say it's going to do." In retrospect, I believed it would. I also thought it was the best option that was available. I was surprised how quickly it saw results. Remember, by the fall, you've got Petraeus and --

O'SULLIVAN: Crocker.

FEAVER: Crocker.

CROUCH: -- Crocker able to testify without being laughed out of court at all, with numbers, that there was real progress. And that just kept improving over time. So I think that's an interesting analytical question, and it's the strategist in me that asks that question, because ultimately, maybe the historian is not that interested in that question. But the strategist should be interested in that question. So anyway, that's just a final comment.

O'SULLIVAN: Great.

FEAVER: [01:29:00] Petraeus, and where he came from when that decision -- were you involved in that decision?

CROUCH: Oh, gosh. The timing: I'm remembering early December, but there were discussions with him beforehand. And I don't know, maybe we ought to -- let's ask that one first when the camera's off, how about that?

FEAVER: OK.

O'SULLIVAN: Great.

CROUCH: OK?

O'SULLIVAN: OK --

SAYLE: That's great, thanks very much.

O'SULLIVAN: Thank you so much! We'll have a little chat --

CROUCH: I hope that was helpful, and I'm sorry it's so vague.

O'SULLIVAN: No, it's super helpful. Super helpful.

CROUCH: OK.

[END OF AUDIO/VIDEO FILE]