



The Surge – Collective Memory Project

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Date of Interview

August 18, 2015

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Citation

John M. “Jack” Keane, interview by Aaron Crawford and Timothy Sayle, 18 August 2015. “The Surge” Collective Memory Project, Center for Presidential History, Southern Methodist University.



[Begin Transcription]

SAYLE: Just a general question to get us started. When and why did you first develop concerns about conditions in Iraq and deficiencies in the US strategy there?

KEANE: My first visit to Iraq was in 2003 as the acting Chief of Staff of the Army. It was in late June of 2003. I was the first senior person from the Army to visit. I visited virtually every division commander we had and certainly Sanchez's headquarters and Special Envoy Bremer.

My conclusion at the time was that we were involved in a low-level insurgency. The command did not think so. They didn't think the effort was being directed or controlled by anybody in a coordinated -- [00:02:00] quite frankly, they did not have a grasp as to what was taking place, and I told them as much. I said, "If we have multiple attacks that have already fallen into a pattern on Americans, that requires planning, preparation. It requires intelligence. It requires logistical support, and by definition, that's a military operation, and it is obviously coordinated. And that means we are in a low-level insurgency which will probably grow."

I took that back to the Joint Chiefs when I returned and I told them as much. The chairman pushed back. He said, "You'd better be careful how you use that language around here." I said, "Listen, if we don't define the war we're in, we're never going to have a chance to deal with it properly," and I said, "You have to understand that my institution, the United States Army, is ill-prepared to deal



with this reality.” I said, “We’re trained to [00:03:00] fight big, conventional wars. We just did, rather handily, and we purged ourselves from the lexicon of everything that dealt with insurgency as a result of the outcome of the Vietnam War.”

The senior leaders at the time were going through a bad time in the Army. We were losing our people. We were downsizing. Morale was low as a result of the outcome of that war, a war that was relatively easy to win, frankly, and we had defeated the insurgency by '71, but we lost political support, and the Army contributed to that. We had the wrong strategy for three years. The irony of Vietnam and what took place in Iraq -- the contrast is so stark it's extraordinary. So, what I knew and I explained to them is that, as a result of that, no [00:04:00] training has been done on counterinsurgency warfare, despite the fact that we were preeminent at it by the '70s. We had acquired the skillsets. A European-based army transitioned to a counterinsurgency army and under Creighton Abrams, we were able to cope with and deal effectively with unconventional warfare. Under Westmoreland, we were using conventional tactics to fight an unconventional war and we were losing. So, as a result of that, the Army -- I told them -- that's on the battlefield today, trained and educated in conventional military operations and in contingency operations, which I was a part of in the XVIII Airborne Corps; go someplace rapidly, parachute or helicopter in, seize something, and then take a regime down very quickly. I said, “This kind of warfare



is not in any of our doctrines, not in any of our training.” The only officers that have been educated at it is going through the Joint Readiness Training [00:05:00] Center, which I happened to put together and command for a couple of years, received some training that was very similar, but that’s very different than being educated on it and understanding the sophistication of it and understanding the tools that we normally don’t use to combat this kind of warfare.

All that said, it raised its head again when General Abizaid mentioned that we were involved in counter-guerrilla operations and he was wire-brushed for that statement by the Secretary of Defense. The Defense Department, because I was still there, did not really come to the realization and accept that we were not fighting dead-enders and criminals and that this was a coordinated effort until the early fall. [00:06:00] I left the Army in October, but I was immediately on the policy board. The White House, I don’t think, came to grips with it until around December. It was in the wintertime that they accepted the fact that there was actually a different war taking place in Iraq after the successful invasion and liberation. So, that was my initial contact with it, and obviously I had some concerns because I knew we would eventually make the adjustment, because the Army is very -- it’s intellectually flexible and operationally adaptable, and it was -- it would be a quick learn and people would pick it up. But, the -- we would struggle before we would get there, because we didn’t have the foundation for it.



The only general officer that I dealt with who understood what was happening was Petraeus. He was [00:07:00] commanding 101st up in Mosul. I know him very well. He was a battalion commander for me. He was my S3 when I was a division commander. When I was a corps commander at Fort Bragg, he commanded a brigade in the 82nd at Fort Bragg. I dealt with him in Washington, DC, when he was working for the chairman. He got shot standing next to me and I helped save his life, so we were sort of joined at the hip after that, anyway. But, he clearly understood and that had more to do with his own personal attributes than it actually had to do with his training and education that the Army gave. That was very similar to Creighton Abrams, who took over from General Westmoreland. He was a closet intellectual, outwardly cigar-smoking, armored, very tough armor commander, led Patton's army across Europe. He was a lead battalion commander, and that's the outward image. The other image of him is a contemplative thinker, introspective, [00:08:00] likes classical music, ballet, and all this other thing that he didn't talk too much about. But, anyway, I think it gave him the skillsets to kind of recognize what he was dealing with and use his imagination to solve a complex problem, which he did, and that was very similar to what happened to us here. But, that was my first contact with it.

Then I went back in 2004 and 2005 because the generals there asked me to come take a look and see what was going on and help them in terms of what they were doing, which I did. In 2004, I did it at the request of Secretary Wolfowitz



with General Casey's, I think, probably reluctant support, and did an assessment. I told Secretary Wolfowitz I would only do it if this report is being [00:09:00] given to Casey. I'm not doing it to give this report to you or to anybody else, and if Casey doesn't want the information to go forward of him, then that's OK with me. That's the contract I'll have with you or else I'm not going to do it, because I'm not going to go over there and do a report for you at the expense of the chain of command. If I can't be of assistance to them, then I don't want to do it. So, that's what I did and gave them some feedback. And then I came back at the request of the operational commander, who was now XVIII Airborne Corps Commander. He was my chief of staff. Now, he's a three-star general. When I was the XVIII Airborne Corps commander at Fort Bragg, this officer was my chief of staff, and he was also a brigade commander for me in the 101st. So, he asked me to come down during his training phase and take a look at the training they were doing in preparation of going over and speak to his [00:10:00] commanders, which I did. And then, he asked me to come over after he was there for a period of time and kind of take a look and do an assessment for him, which I was delighted to do. His name is General Vines. And so, he was Casey's three-star operational commander. I did not return in 2006.

Our method of operation on the Defense Policy Board was Secretary Rumsfeld and the chairman of the board would pick out the subjects that they were interested in. We would study and bring subject matter experts in; the CIA,



Department of State, academia, think tanks, or whatever on the rest of those subjects for a day or two, and then bring the secretary in and we would tell him what our viewpoints on that and we would have a conversation. That would be the essence of what we did. We never wrote reports. This was feedback by prominent [00:11:00] people who were interested in national security; Henry Kissinger on there, Speaker Foley, Speaker Gingrich, Adelman from the Reagan Administration, some business people, and a couple of guys like me who used to wear uniforms. But I insisted, after I realized that the war in Iraq was becoming considerably more complicated and we were struggling, I thought, in 2004, so I insisted that Iraq be on the agenda every time with the chairperson, and they were able to get that done. So, every time we met, Iraq was the only thing that was consistently studied, and we'd be arm wrestling: cyber warfare, what's going on in China, or you can imagine all the things that you're going to deal with. And then the things were deteriorating in 2004 and we were getting pablum from the Joint Staff. [00:12:00] Newt Gingrich and I --- he could see my frustration and he said, "Jack, is any of that stuff true?" "Yeah," I said, "Some of it's true but some of it's just not right. I think we're getting fed some pablum here." And this was from the J2 and the J3 and their people.

So, we went in search of someone that could tell us what was actually happening, what ground truth was, and we found Colonel Derek Harvey, who you should talk to if you haven't spoken to him. Colonel Harvey headed up an Iraq



section inside the J2. He's an intelligence officer, an Arab linguist, and he had about 20-something people there, all Arab linguists, who focused on the enemy. So, we sat him down and it was absolutely a revelation. And we said: Well, we're going to bring him before the policy board. So I had to get the Director of the [00:13:00] Joint Staff, Skip Sharp, and tell him that we wanted to bring this colonel in, and I said, "His boss, two-star General Burgess, who was giving us the pabulum, is going to fight this, so I need you to intercede." And he said, "I'll take care of it."

On the day of this briefing, in comes Burgess with Harvey. I said, "Oh, no." So Burgess starts out with his normal BS that we were getting from him, and I stopped him after, because I didn't want to waste a minute here. I didn't let him get past two sentences. I said, "General, in all due respect, you're welcome to stay here but what we're doing today is Colonel Harvey, and he is going to speak, and he's going to speak now. Thank you, General. Colonel Harvey." So, Harvey said this. I'll never forget it. I never wrote it down but I've never forgotten it. He said, [00:14:00] "Just so you understand who my team is," -- he explained who they are and the composition of it and what they'd been doing -- and he said, "The insurgents in Iraq believe that they are winning this war. All of their information campaign indicates that," and he said, "We have been studying this earnestly for almost a year," and he said, "We're of the mind that they are correct. They are, in fact, winning this war." So that, in itself -- you could hear a pin drop.



He said, “The reason for that is simply this.” He said, “This is the most formidable insurgency the west has ever faced in its history,” and he said “most insurgencies, the ones that we’re most familiar with -- Maoist-type insurgencies, a charismatic leader trying to deal with a grievance inside his country against a host government -- [00:15:00] that leader starves for human capital, financial capital, arms, weapon, and ammunition. He usually has to get some external support to do it.” He said, “This insurgency was initiated and is being led and directed by a regime that used to be in power, and they starve for no human capital. If you analyze what protected the regime to keep it in power, the Fedayeen, the Special Republican Guard, the Ba’ath Party leadership, the -- al-Douri’s intelligence service -- that’s 130,000 people.” He said, “I’m not suggesting they are -- that all of those are in the insurgency, but I am suggesting that’s a pretty good place to start. Secondly, the amount of financial capital they have is in the billions, not in the hundreds of millions of dollars, so they don’t need money and they don’t need arms or ammunition. All the things, all the [00:16:00] resources that a normal insurgency has -- that a normal insurgency is reaching out for and starving for -- they have them in plenty. Not only that, they have the confidence of having run a country for 35 years and now they’re attempting to regain control of that country. That, in and of itself, is quite unique. Given the fact that the Al-Qaeda has now joined them to assist them and they have created exponential capability, the



momentum is clearly on the side of the insurgents. What my briefing is about today is to provide to you the evidence to support that premise.”

After that was over, Henry Kissinger [claps hands] hit the table and said, “This briefing must go to Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld and must go to the President of the United States.” [00:17:00] Then, he looked to me and he said, “General Keane, when the secretary comes in tomorrow and we talk about this, you have to make the point because he’ll listen to you.” So, we thanked Colonel Harvey. We knew what was coming because Gingrich and I had a preliminary brief on this, so our jaws were not as dropped as everybody else’s in the room and we obviously had a discussion. That was a pretty important data point for us, just by virtue of what happened to this. Rumsfeld did take the briefing in November. This was September 2004. So, he took the briefing in November.

It did go to the President in December, I believe it was the Oval Office. You’d have to check with Harvey. But all the National Security team were properly assembled. And for people who are listening to this, this is extraordinary. This is a [00:18:00] colonel in the Army, buried in the bowels of the Pentagon, who’s going in to brief the President of the United States by himself and sitting there is Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, Secretary of State Powell, National Security Advisor Rice, CIA Chief Tenet, etc. I’ve received briefers all my life and, as you get pretty senior in rank, there is an intimidation factor to location and to the rank of the person that’s being briefed. So, one of the things you try to do is put that



person at ease as best you can, so you can get at who that person is and what they have to offer for you. The first thing the President said to Harvey -- now, this is after Harvey and I discussed this because I took a little ownership of Harvey, trying to help him through what he was facing, [00:19:00] about to brief the President of the United States and his entire national security team -- the first thing the President said to him is, "Colonel, why should I believe anything you're about to tell me?" Can you imagine that? So, what that told me when Harvey debriefed me, Harvey did his briefing, got very few questions. They thanked him for what he did and Harvey never, ever briefed the President or Rumsfeld again; quite extraordinary.

So, what I'm trying to tell you, in November of 2004 and in December of 2004, the Secretary of Defense and the President of the United States had information in front of them that accurately depicted what was happening and also predicted what would happen and that our strategy was incapable of dealing with this reality; that our strategy, in fact, was failing.

Now, I think [00:20:00] what Harvey -- to understand and understand to a degree Rumsfeld and the President's reaction -- Harvey was pushing against the entire intelligence community "group thinkers," I call it, where they feed on one another. It's circular thinking. It's here in Washington, and they were of the mind that this was low-level and something the United States could easily cope with, given the prowess of the United State Military. This is something certainly within



our kitbag. We just had a very successful invasion and intoxication still a residue of that, and that we could easily deal with people who are using rifles, RPGs [rocket-propelled grenade], and explosive devices to deal with the power of the United States Military. I think that's essentially what it was, and they discounted, therefore, that Harvey was, in a sense, an outrider here. Nobody in town agreed with him; not the CIA, not the DIA, not [00:21:00] the Joint Staff. Everybody was against that viewpoint. But, as it turns out, Harvey was the only one that was right. It's really quite extraordinary.

To understand that, why is Harvey right and they're all wrong? It's an interesting perspective. My viewpoint is this -- Harvey -- my analogy is a homicide detective. Just think of what they do. You've got a murder. You have some evidence, and you don't have a lot of clues. They do all this detailed homicide work. There's nothing glorious about it. It's checking records. It's checking this. It's checking that. It's systematically and methodically going through what you have and then using your imagination to get you to different, more complicated levels. And the good ones are masterful at it. So, Harvey does homicide detective work. [00:22:00] What is that? He reads and his people read the tactical field reports by the brigade and division commanders. They read them. There's nobody in town reading those, and nobody in the Pentagon reading those, and probably not too many in Central Command Headquarters reading them. So, he reads that. They read thousands of interrogation reports, getting a grasp on who is



the enemy and what is their thinking. They use document exploitation of the enemy's documents and other literature, all obviously in Arabic that they can do, and Harvey also talked to some of the insurgents themselves in safe houses arranged by the CIA in Baghdad or outside of Baghdad to -- he'd bring some bottle of scotch or something and talk to these guys, kind of get a sense, where are you, what are you trying to achieve, what's going on here. So, [00:23:00] that is incredible. I call that solid homicide work that no one else in town is really doing and he comes to totally different assumptions and totally different conclusions from what everybody else does. At some point, the evidence is so overwhelming that everybody else comes to the conclusion that the strategy is not working. But, that takes all -- that takes two more years. We don't come to that conclusion until the bloodbath that takes place in 2006. So, that was a key data point for me.

The next key data point for me was in the summer of 2006-- I had not been in-country. I knew that the war was going terribly. We had the Samarra mosque bombing, the death squads, and it was obvious that the Al-Qaeda and the Sunni-based insurgency were finally able to [00:24:00] achieve what they had tried for a couple of years and were not able to achieve, and that is bring the Shia Militia, who were on defense and bring them out on offense. They used blowing up a Shia mosque to do that and killing Shia women and children in Shia neighborhoods with death squads to finally force that offensive action, which was not taken, by the way, against Al-Qaeda hardliners or Sunni insurgents. What they wanted is



what they got, and that was that the Shia-based militia killed Sunnis, innocent people, because they were easy targets. They were soft targets. They lived in a neighborhood nearby and they would go into those neighborhoods and kill them and force their eviction from their homes and take over their homes. That's exactly what they wanted.

The bloodbath in Baghdad was on, and what was the reason for that? The reason for that is 2005 was an interesting year [00:25:00] because it was the year of the purple fingers; the elections, and the writing of the constitution that took place towards the end of the year. Then, the new government was coming into power in 2006 with their new constitution. I don't think they got actually seated until April. But, what the Sunni insurgency and the Al-Qaeda are trying to do is undermine that government's effectiveness before it even gets connected to the people. They wanted the people to have no confidence in this new democratic government that they just elected. They wanted to sever that relationship before it actually got started, and that was a brilliant strategy in my judgement and a strategic one and one that they were able to achieve.

The United States responded with Together Forward I, which failed, and I was talking to General Chiarelli about it, who I have a relationship [00:26:00] with. He worked for me in the Pentagon and I would talk to him about it, and I told him the operation was just to drive the insurgents out of the different areas. I said, "Unless you stay in those areas, the operation will fail. They will come right back



in on your heels.” That failed, and then they tried Together Forward II later in the year. I think it was in the late summer, fall of the year, and that failed as well. I talked to him about that on the phone, and I said, “It is predictable,” and I said, “We have fundamentally the wrong strategy here, and until we change that strategy, we’re going to lose.”

That summer, the catalyst for me actually taking direct action in this was that I was watching testimony late at night. You know how they replay it on C-SPAN. I had just come back from travel and I think it was a [00:27:00] Friday. I was seeing it at night. I couldn’t sleep and I saw Abizaid and Rumsfeld providing testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, and they were acknowledging that there were problems. Certainly, you couldn’t walk away from the facts in terms of what was taking place in Baghdad and the environs around it, and how we were not able to cope with it. But they both defended the strategy, that it was working, and figuratively, the senators looked like they were going to come across the table. They were so intense about it, certainly led by Senator McCain. I looked at that and I was really upset. I said, “Oh, my God, they’re going to let us fail. They’re unwilling to change. They are going to let us fail.” So, the next morning, I woke up, got a long, yellow pad and started writing some notes about -- in my living room -- [00:28:00] about what is wrong with our strategy and what should we do about it. What can we realistically do about this and what kind of strategy should we put in place? So, I put that together and polished it up a



little bit. I called Wolfowitz and Gingrich that weekend and the feedback was that Gingrich said, "You have to take this to the President." I said, "Well, I'm a policy board member and I will take it to the secretary of defense. That's my chain of command." Wolfowitz said, "This should go to the secretary or the President." So, I gathered that and I asked to have an appointment with the Secretary, which I knew I would get if [00:29:00] I was asking for it. Of course, they asked why.

I sat with him for an hour-plus and I took him through what was wrong, why it was wrong, and what we needed to do about it, and I told him that, the thing that got his attention -- I told him from the outset, "We have never had a strategy to defeat the insurgency." He said, "What do you mean by that?" I said, "Well, our strategy has two major pillars," trying to simplify what it is. "One is political, to stand up a democratic form of government that will represent all the people and connect the people to this government in a way that they've never been connected to their previous governments." I said, "It's an extraordinarily ambitious project, trying to impose a democracy on a people that don't have the maturation for something like that; [00:30:00] that may, indeed, take generations to actually get to something that we had the patience in dealing with it in Korea but here we didn't have the patience. Number two, from a military perspective, our strategy is to train the Iraqi Security Forces as the priority military mission so that they can defeat the insurgency." I said, "That is our strategy. So, by definition, we do not have a strategy to defeat the insurgency. We have a strategy



from a military perspective to train the Iraqis so they can defeat the insurgency.” I said, “That’s fundamentally flawed and here’s the reason. One, the Iraqis do not have the capability to protect the people and we have chosen not to protect the people.

He said, “What do you mean, ‘protect the people?’” I said, “Well, largely, if you look at [00:31:00] Iraq, what we’re really dealing with is major cities in Iraq along two great biblical rivers, major towns and cities that have insurgents in and around them. So, by definition, this is more of an urban insurgency than it is a rural insurgency or something that’s taken place up in the mountains or in the vast desert lands because they need the people as their resource and support. If you’re going to defeat an urban insurgency, by definition you have to protect the people, and we have chosen not to do that. Our operations are one priority, train the Iraqis and two, conduct presence patrols every single day outside our forward operating bases, which are bastions of security, towers, walls. We come out of there in vehicle patrols and we patrol around these [00:32:00] towns and cities and villages and at a time and convenience to the enemy, they blow those vehicles up. It intimidates the population. I’ve seen this. I’ve been on these patrols numbers of times and I’ve seen -- the population, every time they see one of our patrols coming by, they -- all their cars get out of the way because they know they don’t want to be in the beaten zone of an explosion that’s about to take place. So, what is being accomplished by that patrol in my mind is absolutely next to nothing, and



it's a sort of sad commentary, to be frank about it. Then, if we have actual intelligence where we know where the enemy is and we have -- then we will conduct an operation to go at that. That happens more frequently in the Special Operations community where they're going after leaders, but also, for our conventional tactical men, it does happen.

So, I said, "That strategy is fundamentally flawed," and then I took him through [00:33:00] what we'd need to do to fix it. We'd have to put in play a counterinsurgency strategy where the principle task and the priority task would be to protect the people. I wanted to operationalize it for him so he would get a grasp on it, and I said, "So, let's take a typical neighborhood in Baghdad, and that would be the main effort. That's the center of gravity. The enemy has chosen that wisely as their center of gravity. So, we pick a neighborhood in Baghdad and we would go in there and live in a neighborhood." He said, "What do you mean, 'live in a neighborhood?'" I said, "We would take -- we would occupy a building, an empty building, a warehouse, some facility that's not being used. If we can't find anything, then we'll pay somebody rather generously to move out so we can move in and find another place for them to live." I said, "That probably will be, at a minimum, that will happen in terms of that kind of disruption, but I think we've got to be prepared to do it." [00:34:00] I said, "We're in here at probably -- at platoon level and the soldiers would then begin to patrol during the day at squad level and at night at squad level, and they would, if it's necessary, based on the



enemy threat, then they'll do it at platoon level but not higher than that and most of the time not in vehicles, because you're not going to make contact with the people in vehicles. The only time you want to use vehicles is in your more rural community where villages are spaced out and the villages are small. Then, you have to use vehicles to transit around them. But, with the main effort, it's Baghdad. So, that's what that would look like. So, we would sleep there, eat there.

He said, "What's going to happen? They're going to go in and blow them up." I said, "We'll protect ourselves with barriers the best we can, but you have to understand the protection for the soldiers -- the main protection for the soldiers is not going to be their weapons and their skill and the barriers that we emplace. The [00:35:00] main protection for the soldiers will be the people themselves. They will provide them information because they will recognize early on something that we've never done; that we're staying in the neighborhood where the principle objective is to protect the people, and they will see that. They will watch us get hurt. They will watch us die, and they will see that we're protecting their way of life. We're protecting their kids. We're protecting their ability to go to the marketplace, their kids to go to school, and their husbands to be able to go to employment. That -- once that kernel is established there, then we will leverage that to significant gain. That will -- in a totally invested Al-Qaeda neighborhood, that's where they have great roots. This may take weeks or months to achieve that end. In another neighborhood that has Al-Qaeda or Sunni in it, but they don't



have that [00:36:00] same kind of stranglehold on the people, then we can turn it around almost immediately.”

So, I said, “What we need to do is change the strategy, and if we’re going to change -- if we accept changing the strategy, then you have to remove George -- General Casey, I’m sorry -- and also John -- General Abizaid, both officers I knew very well, and bring in a new team. We absolutely need to do that.” I said, “To be able to accomplish a counter-insurgency strategy requires more troops, and I think it’s 8 to 10 brigades is about what we need. It’s just back of the envelope. I haven’t done any troop-to-task analysis. I’m just using my judgement about what we have and I think what we would need to decentralize to that kind of ability where we’re down at platoon level and we’re doing squad patrols and [00:37:00] saturate Baghdad at doing something like that. That’s what it would take.”

His reaction to that -- that whole thing -- was nonverbal because I know him pretty well. It was a general resignation. I think he knew that things were obviously going bad. He had heard. I’m not the only person he’s talking to, I’m sure, obviously, as secretary of defense. But I know that he respected me, and I think, while he never said it, I just, looking at his body language, there was a general resignation that I was probably right about a lot of this, but not said.

Then, he did say that he would not remove General Abizaid and General Casey, and I would have been surprised if he said that he’d consider it. What happens, [00:38:00] quite frankly, so people would understand, is Casey, Abizaid,



and Rumsfeld are running the war at the senior leadership level. To do that, you have to deal with your own fears. You have to deal with literally death every day. You're constantly signing letters to family members about soldiers being killed. You feel an enormous burden in the sense of responsibility about what you're doing. These are all very good people who are trying very hard to do the right thing, and they're in this crucible of a collaborative, cooperative relationship where they talk every day, and they need one another. They need each other to support each other emotionally to deal with the challenges of what they're dealing with on a human level and also to challenge each other. I'm sure Rumsfeld would challenge Casey and Abizaid at times, to be sure. So, I really didn't expect him to [00:39:00] say, "I agree with you and we've got to move on," or "I'm going to take that under strong consideration." But, it needed to be said so that he would understand. And I told him that you have to understand that sending more troops without changing the strategy dooms us to failure, and that's why you -- George and John are not capable of changing the strategy. They're too committed to it, and giving them more troops will just give them more troops to execute a flawed strategy. So, we still fail with more troops. I said, "There's a lot of people on the public air wanting more troops, what I would agree with, but what they don't understand is why the strategy is failing and what should replace it if we're going to succeed. More troops doesn't get you success. Changing strategy with



[00:40:00] more troops has the opportunity to succeed.” So, my second meeting after that was with Peter Pace.

SAYLE: Just before the Pace meeting, may I ask you one question? Through that summer, watching Operation Together Forward and speaking with Secretary Rumsfeld, what was your assessment of the Iraqi Security Forces by that point? Did you believe they could ever play a role in supporting either the current US strategy or a new US strategy?

KEANE: Yeah, I saw the Iraqis a number of times. After all, when I was there doing assessments, the Iraqis, being the center of our strategy, I obviously spent a fair amount of time with them. I chose not to get all these godforsaken briefings that people want to give you. I spent time literally down at the fighting level, going on patrols [00:41:00] so I could understand walking with guys into villages or riding in there, seeing how they dealt with chiefs, sitting in the back of the room while some company commander is running a meeting in some town, village, or neighborhood, or lieutenant colonel, depending on what’s happening but going on patrol with them so I could understand what they’re dealing with and what they’re up against and also understand the Iraqis themselves. So, I spent a fair amount of time in those assessments with them. I had mixed views on them. They were a mixed group. When they had good leadership coupled with the training we gave them, they were effective, and when they had poor leadership, they were not. They were receiving good training, and when they had it -- and leadership in my



mind was the key to it. So, they were uneven but I [00:42:00] knew they had the wherewithal to deal with this in my own view.

Then, the next meeting was with Peter Pace, and he did attend the Rumsfeld meeting, but he never said a word. So, I met with him. That was controversial because he -- we started out the meeting. He said, "I've been in the job as chairman for a year and I was wondering if you would give me a grade." I laughed and I said, "I'd give you an F." He was upset with me. He said, "What do you mean, an F? Why are you giving me an F?" I said, "Because, Pete, we're fighting a war but losing a war, and you're not even involved in it. You should be driving it from the Pentagon." He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "Listen, I'm a part-time guy on the Defense Policy Board. I know more about this war, what's going on, what's right about it, what's wrong with it than you do, and you're the chairman. I understand the [00:43:00] briefings you get because I talk to the intel guys that brief me on the policy board and you're getting the pablum that we used to get. You get trend analysis and campaign plans going fine despite the fact we've got hundreds of bodies on the street in Baghdad and neighborhoods are in flames. We've got sectarian conflict that's grown into a civil war but strategy is OK. We're doing fine." I said, "You've got to get your head in the war. It's easy to be distracted here. Your predecessors during the Vietnam War -- the same thing happened to them. The process of running these huge military bureaucracies eats you alive, and you can let that process pull you away every single day, sapping your



energy if you let it, versus focusing your efforts on one thing and one thing only as a top priority: winning the war we're fighting, and trying to prevent future wars by building the right kind of capability [00:44:00] and forces. And that should be job one. That's not job one so that's why you get an F."

He said, "What should I do?" I said, "Well, start on Monday morning." This was Friday or Thursday. I said, "Start on Monday morning and take a deep dive into the enemy." I said, "Don't ask Burgess to do that for you." He said, "Who do I do that with?" "Colonel Derek Harvey. It's going to take you a few hours." He said, "I'm going to South America this weekend." So, he cancelled the trip right in front of me, and that's six months in the planning, believe me. You don't do that. You don't just don't go and see chief of defense, ministers of defense, all the other visits they want you to have and just cancel that over a weekend. He did that. I said, "Listen, you heard what I told Secretary Rumsfeld and I'm not going to repeat it to you, but if you believe there's *anything*, anything valid about what I said, if any of your instincts [00:45:00] kicked in and said to you, 'Keane may be right here,' if that's true, then don't take my word for it. Put together a study group. Get some smart guys in here and have them take a deep dive into -- here's what we're trying to achieve. Print it out. Here's what our campaign plan is trying to achieve. Here's what our strategy is trying to achieve. Have them take a deep dive, and are we accomplishing that or not? Then, if we're not, which I'm comfortable they're going to find that, then what should we do about it? Just do



that.” He said, “Do you have anybody you’d recommend be on that?” I said, “I have one recommendation that I can think of.” I didn’t want to put Harvey on it because he’s too busy doing what he’s doing. I didn’t want to pull him away for weeks from what he’s doing. So, I said, “H.R. McMasters [sic].” [00:46:00] “We heard about him, right?” I said, “Yeah, he’s a -- he ran Tal Afar, and he was -- became kind of a golden boy on how to do counterinsurgency operations. The problem is that his training command wire-brushed him for doing it, because he really wasn’t executing the military strategy that the command was doing. But, he was very successful at what he did, and he understands what the problems are.”

So, he agreed to do that and then I got a call from Petraeus that weekend. I was out at Leavenworth and he said, “Have you been in the Pentagon recently?” I said, “Yeah.” He said, “We’re putting together a study group and H.R. McMaster is already on it. You had something to do with this.” I said, “Well, I had a conversation with the chairman.” He said, “I just got a request to provide some people,” and he told me who he was thinking about. He knew some of those people better than I did, so [00:47:00] I trust his judgement implicitly. So, I’m sure he’s going to put the right guys on there. So, that was interesting. So, Pace did that. The sad thing about that was McMaster would show me where they were, what was taking place, and so they defined the problem. They were able to get at the problem more comprehensively than I did in our discussion with the secretary. Then, when they got around to what to do about it, they couldn’t agree what to do



about it. Then, when they took it to the Joint Chiefs, the Joint Chiefs essentially decided to stick with the status quo. Even though the problem was defined that we were failing, they didn't come up with a thing in terms of their willingness to do anything about it, which was pretty frustrating.

SAYLE: Why did the Council of Colonels get so little play with the Joint Chiefs?

What is your take on that? [00:48:00]

KEANE: I don't know. I wasn't sitting in the room. I can only speculate and that's always dangerous, but my speculation is they were bringing in things -- this is late in the war -- that were difficult to deal with. They're getting briefings like I was getting on the Defense Policy Board that were positive in nature; how the campaign was going well, Abizaid with his command giving them a briefing. Casey when he would be back in town would give them a briefing. Things are moving in the right direction; 2004, 2005, 2006. Not necessarily all the Joint Chiefs were there for all of that; we're changing them out every four years. Different players in the room but nonetheless, by and large, they have received one briefing after another that admits the challenges but nonetheless: "The strategy is right. We're moving in the right direction. [00:49:00]Here are all the positive things we're doing despite those challenges." Essentially, that's what they're getting.

Then, these guys come in and said, "Stop. We're failing, and here's why, and here's what we should do about it." I think there was a lack of stomach to deal with the reality of that, in terms of their willingness to commit to do something



about it and what that would take. When you're losing a war, we want to win a war. I have sort of a basic issue with this myself. The United States Military doesn't declare war. National leadership does, and once that war is declared, what we should be about is winning that war, period. It's going to take casualties. It will, as the Joint Chiefs were saying and as they tried to say to the President, and this is -- we're going ahead of ourselves here -- that [00:50:00] the force is tired and this has had some impact on the force. My answer to that is, of course, that's what war is. After all, what are we doing?

We have people that we provide extraordinary training and an unbelievable amount of resources and capabilities who are part of the population of America, and they are willing to, and we support them, to go off and fight wars for us because, one, they have the willingness and also they have the makeup to do that, and not everybody in American society can do that kind of work. So, we want them to succeed, and they will suffer as a result of that, of course, and that is something you have to totally understand, of course.

Our World War II generals understood that you may actually have to expend these organizations to achieve victory, and I would tell my generals, "You don't wear that rank unless you truly understand that, when the nation asks us [00:51:00] to protect its treasures and its interests and to win a war for them, then that is the mission, and that by definition will be done at the expense of our people. And if you can't do that, then you shouldn't be wearing that rank. This is



not about helicopters and cars and staff and officers. This is about the moral commitment you make to the Constitution of the United States and what this profession of arms is truly all about, and you have to have the moral courage to deal with that. George Marshall, Dwight Eisenhower, and many of our other World War II generals understood that. Marshall sent hundreds of thousands of poorly trained soldiers into the fight, knowing full well that many of them would be killed, and not solely because they were improperly trained, but partially because they were improperly trained, and he knew that. He believed he didn't have a choice. They were running out of time [00:52:00] and they understood that. My division, the 101st, suffered enormous casualties in just one year of fighting, from June of '44 to June of '45, an extraordinary amount of casualties and other divisions were almost totally expended. So, anyway, the fact that the force was tired and it's impacted by protracted wars, I understand, but that's the price we pay, and you have to have some tough-minded leadership to deal with that reality.

SAYLE: Around the time you were suggesting what became the Council of Colonels, the NSC starts its own informal, secret review. The State Department is doing something similar, but all these things are secret. They're not publicly announced. We've heard from some people in the White House that there was worry if word leaked, especially to troops in the field, that the strategy they were operating under was under review it would damage their morale. What do you make of that?



KEANE: That's rubbish. That's absolute rubbish. [00:53:00] First of all, I was a platoon leader and company commander in the war in Vietnam, and I'm executing a flawed strategy on behalf of General Westmoreland. Now, fortunately, my brigade commander, who was a general officer because we were a separate brigade of the 101st, had enough sense to take that overall guidance and apply it differently and decentralize us down to platoon level. But, I -- and know that's where the enemy was and you could also have some impact on village people and the rest of it as opposed to conducting these large-scale, conventional air mobile assaults and other things, and I watched what other units were doing. I knew there was something wrong with the strategy. I didn't know what it was because I'm down at this execution level and I'm just trying to get through a 24-hour period with me and my guys and do what we need to do. When I got home and started to think about it and read about it, then I realized that the [00:54:00] strategy was wrong.

If somebody unburdened the soldiers who were executing the flawed strategy, and believe me, having sat in many of those vehicle convoys with those guys going through those towns and going through those cities in that vehicle, that is a very intimidating experience because you feel so vulnerable. You know you only have passive protection with you; in other words, the protection the vehicle affords and whatever you can possibly see or detect, which isn't much from a Humvee, and you're doing that every single day. You don't think those soldiers say to themselves, "There's something not right about this. Whose idea is this,



anyway?" Of course, they do. These are thinking people and if you changed that and said, "Guys, we're not doing that. We're going to give you a winning hand, and here's what the winning hand is," and you explain to them what-- and you're going to come from behind those walls and you're going to move into those towns and cities [00:55:00] and it's going to look more dangerous to do it but here's why we're doing it, they would get that. These are smart, dedicated, good people, and they would totally understand that. I think their reaction would be, "Finally, somebody understands this is all effed up." Because that's what they're saying-- "This is all effed up and somebody's actually thinking about maybe fixing this. Great!" People who say that -- they don't even understand who our people are and what is going on in their lives every single damn day, and I have seen it. Look, I don't want to make out myself to be something I'm not. I've seen some of it in 2004 and 2005 for two to three weeks at a time. So, I got to understand and look it in the eye, but also I spent my whole life doing -- in the United States Military, so I think I know the character of our people and what -- and I've been an infantry soldier all my life, so I think I know what's going on in their heads.

SAYLE: That's another quick question before I'll let you get back to the chronology because you're moving us [00:56:00] along beautifully. But, some officials who were hoping that there could be a troop increase in Iraq fairly early in the fall were receiving messages from the Joint Staff that there were no more troops. "We're out of Schlitz," was the phrase. There were studies done in the NSC that suggest



otherwise. Obviously, you believe that brigades can be found. What do you make of the Joint Staff argument there are no more troops available for Iraq at this point?

KEANE: Can you imagine President Roosevelt saying to George Marshall, "I think we're going to need some more troops," and George Marshall coming back and saying, "Mr. President, there are no more troops?" What an absurdity that is. We've got the whole Army. It sits at five hundred and something thousand at this point, and we've got the entire National Guard and Reserves, and we've got the whole Marine Corps sitting at around 200,000. [00:57:00] Add all that up and we've got over 1,000,000 people under arms who are a ground force alone, so we've got plenty of troops, plenty.

The issue -- this is about will. This isn't about capacity. It's about will. So, we had the troops. We had more than what people think in terms of the five brigades. What that was about is the Army said finally when Bush -- well, let's just say there were plenty of troops available, to answer your question. I'm going to get ahead of myself if I get into the actual numbers and why those numbers, etc., but what the civilian leadership should have said is just what I said. "Well, listen, when I count up all the troops we have, it's under 1,000,000 people under arms just even with ground troops alone. So, why are you telling me there's no more troops? Obviously, this comes down to will and [00:58:00] your decision not to do



everything that we've been doing." In other words, change tour lengths, change who's doing the fighting. There are plenty of troops available.

SAYLE: So, I'll let you get back. The last data point you had for us was the meeting with Peter Pace. It was in September. What happens in October or November?

KEANE: I just monitor. I thought I did everything I could do. I spoke to my chain of command in the sense of Secretary Rumsfeld, Chairman Pace. I really thought something would come of what Pace was doing, because I sensed Rumsfeld was not going to do anything. But I also recognized that General Pace wasn't the strongest chairman we've ever had, to say that, and so I did have some [00:59:00] concerns about where it would go forward. Would he embrace it and with his leadership carry it forward? I think the right chairman getting that information could have organized those Joint Chiefs and led them, as opposed to sort of submitting and becoming one of them. I wasn't there. I'm just speculating what happened.

So, I was pretty disappointed when I realized what had happened and I wasn't doing anything publicly because I didn't think that was my place. So, nothing happened in terms of my involvement other than the fact that we continued to talk about it on the policy board, and our arguments really -- we became strained with the secretary because Iraq, when I go back to 2003 and now it's 2006, and Iraq looms [01:00:00] large in that room. Every six months it gets to be a larger presence. So we would have discussions about what's wrong with the



war and give him that information, and he would take it and then fill that glass back up over the next 45 minutes and then leave. And people quit over Iraq; Eliot Cohen is an example. He was on the board and he resigned. Ken Adelman, who was from the Reagan Administration and a close friend of Secretary Rumsfeld -- Rumsfeld fired him because of his outspokenness against the war. So, anyway, while I was still very current on what was happening as a result of the policy board and certainly Derek Harvey, as was the board, we knew what was [01:01:00] happening.

We were disillusioned and then until I received a call from Chris DeMuth over at AEI. I think it was November. He asked me -- he said, "I've got some guys looking at the war in Iraq and I was wondering if you'd come over and take a look." He said, "They're finishing up their work." He said, "I've got this guy, Fred Kagan. You know him." I said, "No, but I've read his stuff." I said, "He makes a lot of sense to me." He said, "Well, why don't you come on over and see it?" I would go to the AEI -- just full disclosure, I would go to AEI World Forums. I was invited there. I think I was invited to speak when I was on active duty and then they invited me back to the World Forum. It's their annual event that they have. I would normally speak at it. So, that was my association with Chris DeMuth, [01:02:00] who ran AEI, and I had no official association with them. I wasn't on their board or an advisor or anything like that.



So, I went over there and I gave them a dime store on what I thought and I listened to what they thought for a number of hours. I was very impressed because their grasp on the enemy situation using open sources was nothing short of staggering. I was dealing with top-secret information, and they didn't have that, but they had a very detailed resolution, which was surprising. Then, they had better resolution on US force's availability than I had, because I told Rumsfeld we needed 8 to 10 brigades. I reasoned that was about right. I think what [01:03:00] took place -- actually, I think I was pretty close. They said there was only five brigades available and they told me what brigades they were and where they were. I said, "Where the hell do you get all that information?" They said, "Well, you get it off the internet." I said, "What do you mean, on the internet?" He said, "Yeah, the Army's whole," what do they call it, 'Force Generation Model' or something. He said, "It's on the internet." He said, "So, we know what units are coming home, how long they rest, recuperate, when they start to get back, they start to get equipment again, when they start to build the organization, all the different phases that they go through leading up to deployment, which ones are going to be deployed are all earmarked on the internet. I said, "Really? In my day, most of that was classified, but now it's on the internet." He said, "Yeah, it's called the Force Generation Model. I think I've got it right but that was amazing. And he knew about the Marine Corps availability but not -- the Marine Corps stuff wasn't on the [01:04:00] internet so they had their stuff anecdotally.



But, mainly what resonated between the Kagan team and myself was understanding how serious the problem was, the nature of the enemy, that this was very formidable, what we were truly up against. Our strategy was failing and it was doomed to fail. There was no way they could succeed and that we had to put in play a counterinsurgency strategy for the first time to protect the people. So we both independently came to that same conclusion with each other. I wanted the 8 to 10 brigades and they said, "Well, they're not available. There's only 5." That's how we had that humorous discussion. So, I resonated with those guys. I gave them a huge thumbs-up. I told Chris DeMuth -- "Those guys knocked it out of the ballpark. [01:05:00] They really are on it and it's a credit to them, the kind of work that they've done." And they were publishing a report. And Kagan called me and he said, "We're about to publish a report. I think we should put your name on it." And "No, no, no, you don't want to have to do that" I said, "What did I do? I didn't write a word in the report. All I did was listen to you guys and give you affirmation. You would have done it anyway without me if I never showed up." So, I said, "No, I don't want my name on it. I'm not taking credit for something I didn't do, for crying out loud."

SAYLE: Get you some more water as well, sorry.

KEANE: Yeah, OK. So, you want me to still talk?

SAYLE: Yeah, if you don't mind.

KEANE: Yeah, and I've got to stop at 10:30, guys.



SAYLE: Yeah.

KEANE: Yeah. So, they published a report and then all around the same time as this, I got a call from [01:06:00] the White House -- I think it was Hadley himself, but I'm not sure. My memory escapes me, but I remember them saying that they were putting together some people to come over and brief the President who have alternative -- who they think may have alternative strategies on what to do in Iraq and we'd like you to be one of them. I said, "Who else is coming?" They said, "Well, we've invited Barry McCaffrey and Wayne Downing, and we're working on a couple of other guys." I said, "OK. Of course," I said, "Yes, absolutely." [aside] Thank you.

SAYLE: You're welcome.

KEANE: So, I was off to do that. I think it was on a Monday. Later on in that week, I got a call from the Vice President's office, and they said, [01:07:00] "We'd like you to come in on Monday and -- you and Fred Kagan -- and brief the Vice President." So, I told that person who was calling me -- I think it was John Hannah, actually -- and I said, "Well, listen, I'm going to brief the President at some meeting," and I knew the time, at that time, "on Monday as well." So, he didn't know about that meeting and he said, "Well, we just haven't been told about it but the Vice President will attend that. So, the best thing to do then is you do that and then you and the Vice McCaffrey President just leave the meeting and come back and you and Fred can take the Vice President through what he's going to do." So, I said, "OK."



So, all of a sudden, we have two meetings. I'm going to brief the President, based on, as I find out later, Hadley had asked Pace, "Are you aware of some military guys that [01:08:00] would have some impact on the President who's thinking about maybe doing something different in Iraq? I want these guys to be current on what's happening. Do you have some names for me?" So, Pace gave him McCaffrey, Downing, Keane, and then Hadley went out and got the other two guys. I'm not sure what sources -- Eliot Cohen and Steve Biddle. I go to the briefing with the Vice President, largely, I believe, because of the Kagan Report, and I don't know how that happened. I mean, I don't know if Hannah talked to Fred or talked to Chris or whatever. But, the Kagan Report had come out. They had seen it, and all of this was new news. All of this has happened within a few days; the report being published, phone calls to come to a meeting in the Oval Office, phone call to go meet with the Vice President, all within days of one another.

So, at that meeting I attended [01:09:00] with the President, it was funny. We're in the west wing waiting room. Hadley comes out to see us. He says, "OK, guys, here's what we're doing," and he says, "Now, do we have your report?" So, right away, I'm saying, "Oh, my God. What's going on here?" So, McCaffrey says, "Yeah, I sent you 25 or 30 copies. You guys have got it." Then, Downing had something, too, and he handed him something. He looks at me. I said, "Was that a homework assignment?" I said, "What I've got is in my head." "That's fine.



Don't worry about it." Anyway, they all had whatever they were going to say, they had it all written out.

Then, the second thing he said, "OK, after this, what are we going to do here? What are you doing with the press?" Now, I [01:10:00] work with ABC. McCaffrey worked with NBC, and I don't know what Downing did. I don't know if he did any TV association stuff but he looks at -- "What are you doing with the press after this?" and McCaffrey said, "Well, I'm already committed to an interview right after this." And Downing said, "Yeah, so am I." He looked at me. I said, "I've said 'no' to ABC, who asked me about it." I said, "This is the President's meeting. It's not my meeting, and I'm not talking about it, regardless of what happens with other people." So, anyway, we go into the meeting and the whole staff is there.

The Chief of Staff, National Security Advisor, national security team - that's part of all that and the names you're probably familiar with. Meghan O'Sullivan and a whole bunch of folks there, Tony Snow, [01:11:00] communications director, political adviser Karl Rove, all sitting in front of the President's desk in a long row, all taking notes, dutiful notes, and we're sitting on the sofas, the President and Vice President. So, Hadley established the order. I think it was Cohen first, McCaffrey second, me third, Downing fourth, and Biddle last. I may not have the right order, but anyway, we got into Cohen's thing about command and there was consensus that Casey wasn't doing well. The President said, "Who should replace him?" It was consensus in the room that David Petraeus was the likely candidate.



[01:12:00] You probably know from talking to the others what they recommended, so I'm not going to get into that. I'll just talk about what I did.

I called Gingrich before I went over there and I said, "Listen, this is what's finally happening. What you wanted to have happen two or three months ago is happening." He said, "How much time have you got?" I said, "Realistically, probably 15 minutes, maybe, 10 to 15 without questions." He said, "OK. When you walk out of that room, you have to have one feeling and one feeling only -- that you gave them everything that you had. You held nothing back." He said, "Most people in the Oval Office, even people that work around a President, at times leave -- don't give him everything for whatever the reason. It has to do with the power, the position, the location, everything about it." He said, "When you walk out of there, you make up your mind that you're going to give him everything." [01:13:00] I said, "That's good advice."

So, I did. I did a truncated version of what's wrong, why the strategy is failing, what realistically can we do about it, and I gave him -- he was told not to interrupt us, I think, by Hadley, so we could all get this stuff down. He was not asking questions. But, when I got to the point where I said early on, "We do not have a strategy to defeat the insurgency," I could just see his body language. He sparked at that. I said, "We never had." Then, I went on to explain what our strategy was real quick and what we needed to do about it, and I said, "Mr. President, what's facing you here is -- I'm going to tell you straight out there are no



other options that are left realistically to turn this around and achieve victory.

There are none, no more. Advisors aren't going to solve the problem. Increasing troops [01:14:00] by themselves and giving Casey and Abizaid more troops to execute a flawed strategy is not going to solve the problem. It will make you feel good that you're doing something. It's not going to happen. There is only one thing left, and I'm going to show you what it is, and I don't know if it will succeed. I know it has the best chance to succeed. I'm not going to tell you I can guarantee it. Nobody could do that for you."

And then I thought what I must do for him is not just to talk about the principles of urban counterinsurgency and protect the people. I felt I had to operationalize it and go right down to it, make it a living thing for him so he would see it. I told him we would accept the responsibility to protect the people. We've never done that before as a matter of decision. The Iraqis cannot. We should do this together with them. [01:15:00] We should start with Sunni/Shia neighborhoods and simultaneously so that they both see, they both realize that we're treating them equally, that we're willing to die to protect their families and their way of life, their ability to work, their ability to go to market. And I operationalized it for him like I did previously: way down at platoon level, what was happening with the soldiers so he could visualize what the policy decision is, which I thought would be very important for a chief executive to understand why this is so different,



dramatically different from what we were doing. I told him what we were doing, also, real quick, like presence patrols, huge castle-like, forward operating bases.

And then I told him a couple of other things. I said, [01:16:00] “What you have to understand is that this will require additional troops to do and there are five” -- now I had definition from Kagan -- “five brigades available. We’re going to need some Marines as well. What we’ll do by doing this is we’re going to elevate the level of violence, which means more casualties for U.S., so you have to understand that. Your decision will increase U.S. casualties. Now, if the strategy works, I’m absolutely convinced the net result will be war termination much more rapidly and, in the long run, we’re saving casualties by continuing with the status quo, which is executing a flawed strategy. However, if it doesn’t work,” and I straight out said it, getting it all out there. [01:17:00] I said, “If it doesn’t work, then we will have squandered those lives by escalating the war.” I told him, “It’s absolutely essential that you get the right people to execute this strategy and then you hold them accountable in a way that they have not been held accountable these last three years. What I mean by that is: this is what we’re trying to achieve, and these are realistic milestones that we believe we can achieve them, and you hold them accountable to that.” I think that was about it. Then I left there. I did not accompany the Vice President out of the room. I think he stayed behind. We were escorted out.



We got taken back to the west wing reception hall, and Fred Kagan was there. Then, Hannah came [01:18:00] and got us and took us in to brief the Vice President, sat down with the Vice President on the sofa here. I'm sitting on the end, the Vice President there, Kagan here. So, I started and he said, "Well, Jack, before you get into it, what did you mean when you said, 'We don't have any plans to defeat the insurgents?' What did you mean by that?" That was the first question on his mind. I took him through details of why we didn't have a plan to defeat the insurgency. I said, "Fred has got a great briefing put together here. He's going to do the talking. I'm going to jump in when I think I can make a contribution, and let's just get into it."

He was very involved in the details of that briefing. He asked detailed questions on just about everything we were putting in front of him. He walked out of there. His level of knowledge was exponentially greater than after that briefing in understanding what was taking place. It was obvious to me that he was going to be a proponent for the strategy. [01:19:00]

Hannah called me that night, who was the Vice President's Chief of Staff. I never forgot the conversation. First of all, he said, "I think they're of a mind to do what you were suggesting." I said, "Boy, that's great. How wonderful is that? We may finally get ourselves on the right path." He said, "Two things happened in there for me." He said, "One is you had vision, and that happens less in the White House Oval Office than you think." And he said, "The second thing -- and I've



never seen it before.” He said, “You took their fear away from them.” I said, “Well, I appreciate that.” Leadership does that. I didn’t conclude that [01:20:00] at the time but I’ve known that all my life. Good leadership takes people’s fear away. So, anyway, then Hadley called me the next night and was war-gaming with me what was going on. He said, “Listen, my number one and my number two -- you’re going to get a phone call from them.” I said, “OK.” He said, “I think they’re going to ask you to come out of retirement and go fight this war.” I said, “Really?” I said, “I can’t do that.”

So at 9:30, 10:30 the next night, the Vice President calls and, he talked about the briefing, made small talk and the rest of it. Then, he said, “General Keane, I’ve spoken to the President.” He said, “We’d [01:21:00] like you to come out of retirement and take this job on in Iraq.” I said to him, “Mr. Vice President,” I said, “You don’t have to do that.” And I said, “I understand what’s happening. I operationalized that war for you, and you gained some confidence in who I am as a result of the briefing that we provided, and I understand that. But, there are people who are current and more capable to deal with this than me, and one is who we discussed early on in the session with the President, and that’s David Petraeus.” I said, “He’s had multiple tours. He understands counterinsurgency, he understands everything I’m saying, that I said to you, and he would be a better choice.” I said, [01:22:00] “Secondly, for personal reasons, the situation I left the Army back in 2003 has worsened with my wife’s illness, so I can’t do that.”



He said, “OK. Would you come into the White House and would you oversee both wars?” This was the hardest conversation I’ve ever had other than dealing with family deaths and all the rest of it. I said to him, “Mr. Vice President, this is the hardest conversation I can remember having in some time. I came in with a recommendation to help you win a war. Now, you’re asking me to help you do that, and I’m stiffing you.” Exact words. I said, “This is very painful for me but I have to say ‘no’ to you because of my personal condition at home. [01:23:00] I can’t do it.” But, I said, “Here’s what I’m willing to do. I’m willing to help you part-time, to get the decision made and the policy implemented, and then if you select Petraeus, and he wants me to, I will help him in Iraq on the ground, and I will do this more than part-time. I will put some other things in my life aside and do that, and I can still maintain what I must maintain overseeing my wife’s illness.” He said, “OK. Would you come in and see Hadley tomorrow?” I said, “Yeah, I will.”

So, that’s what we agreed to do. I met with Steve Hadley the next morning, and Steve is a great guy, smart as hell, but I got a sense of what some of their problems were. [01:24:00] One, they were never getting full information, I think, out of the Pentagon. So, they were handcuffed by that.

Two, they never did, I think, what you really should have done, and as I got to spend more time around them -- I’m fast-forwarding now all through 2007 -- they never really did what I think they should do. In other words, you’ve got a major task. This is winning a war and you’ve got objectives. OK. Hold periodic



meetings of assessment on how well you're doing. The chief executive is present for those meetings because this is a war. This isn't how to get a transportation bill across or how to reform Social Security. You're fighting a war. You've got objectives. You've got a strategy. Bring the people together and let's do assessments every six months. Never done, so that initial discussion with him, he totally misread what we were trying to achieve because he came back and he said to me, "All right, so we've got five brigades available. We start bringing them in, [01:25:00] one at a time, because Casey and Abizaid don't want to do that." I said, "I understand that, but they have the wrong strategy." He said, "So, but why don't we do what Casey's recommending? It sort of makes some sense." He says, "We'll put a brigade in play in Iraq. We'll have another one in Kuwait and then the rest of them will be on alert in the United States." So this is two days after the briefing. And he said, "Then, we'll just use them as needed."

I said -- [laughs] I had the reaction you just had, I laughed at it. I said -- because it was so sophomoric -- I said, "Steve, what we should be doing is putting all five brigades in there within 30 days, and what we really need is closer to 8 to 10, but we don't have them, and because of the Force Generation Model that the Army has, and their level of equipment [01:26:00] marrying up with units, they're on a time schedule that they really cannot accelerate, more driven by equipment than by people. We can take some risks with the people's training but we don't have the equipment, so be it." I said, "So, that's why we're five brigades, five



months. So, that's number one. But, what we really do, given the emergency of the situation, we need more men this month. That's what George Marshall would have done. That's who was force-generating for a different kind of war or what we did in Korea after the Task Force Smith, almost getting pushed off the Pusan Perimeter.

But what you're suggesting militarily makes no sense whatsoever, and what I'm surprised with politically, here's what you're willing to do? So, you're going to submit one brigade into combat. George Bush has made a decision to escalate, and he's committing one brigade with [01:27:00] others all in reserve. The one brigade doesn't make a difference, so then you're going to commit another brigade -- then, everybody is going to write about that -- then, you're going to commit another brigade, and that doesn't make a difference. And you've got Tom Ricks and all the guys in *The New York Times* writing another story about it. So, you're willing to bite this apple five times as opposed to biting it once, escalate the war one time, make a decision - this is the force level, this is the commitment. The American people and even the journalists writing the article -- the difference between 25,000 and 40,000 -- not an issue. Escalating the war and putting more American lives at issue *is* the issue, and you're willing to do that five times because of failure four times, which I guarantee you will take place." So, that got taken off the table.



Then, the second thing that came across which was also a stunner for me was the -- well, after we get 'em in there, then by maybe summer, we'll start to have [01:28:00] some success so we can keep our Republican critics -- give them some comfort that we're going to be OK, and to demonstrate to that, we'll start pulling them back out. I said, "We're not going to get the last one in there until June, all right? And now you want to start pulling them out in July." This is what I was dealing with. Then, this is what the President was dealing with. So, I understood a lot more about what was happening there, and I know there's great people over there and great thoughts, but that's what I was dealing with, and-- none of that made any sense.

The other thing that came up was they were heading to Crawford -- and I've got to go and I'll say what I got involved in. One of the generals who was working for the G3 told me that they were going to Crawford and -- he worked for the J3 -- and he told me that [01:29:00] Pace told him that they were going to go to Crawford with Casey and Abizaid's recommendation of two brigades and two in reserve; that we don't need all those brigades, and also, I think, he didn't know for sure, but hanging onto the old strategy. So almost back at the starting point with an inconsequential commitment of escalation of forces. I said, "Well, didn't you guys tell them?" He said, "Sir," he said, "I went through all of the specifics in the level of detail," and I had talked to him before. He said, "I knew exactly where you were coming from. We totally agree with your recommendation 100% here. We



agree with the Kagan Report.” He said, “I gave him in spades.” He said, “No, I’m not doing that. I’m going in there with Casey and Abizaid’s recommendation.”

[01:30:00] This is his unwillingness to take out and lead, I think. So, I said, “OK, I got it.”

So, I called Hannah, and I told him, I felt obligated to tell him that, and I said, “Listen, either have the Vice President or the President ask just one important question, and ask Pete. Say, ‘Pete, is that going to be a decisive force that will get us the end state that we want?’ and just have him ask that question because he’s not going to be able to say yes and he won’t say yes. He’ll mealy-mouth around it.”

So anyway, out of that, I don’t know when the final decision was. You guys probably are in that process, closer than me, when they made that decision. I know that a staff -- one of the staff, when they decided to go with [01:31:00] Petraeus, somebody in the White House did call him, because he and I were talking, and somebody asked him, “Where are you on these brigades? Do you want all of them?” He said, “All of them as quickly as you can get them there, all in as soon as possible.” So, I think there were a number of things that were influencing that final decision to make the commitment, which the President, thank God, finally did. I’ve got to go do a TV interview. I could probably give you five more minutes if you want to ask another question or something.



SAYLE: Well, I guess, one question we've heard a little about is the center of gravity in Baghdad. There is the war in Iraq, but other people have described the center of gravity as the American public. I wonder if you have sort of a general view on where the American public was in the fall of 2006, and if that affected your thinking on whether there would be public support for a surge.

KEANE: Well, my own study of protracted wars, and having fought one myself as a young officer [01:32:00] and spent a lot of time thinking about it, and also becoming a student of other protracted wars, not just the ones that we fought. Protracted wars, these unconventional wars which our adversaries throughout the history of time have selected more than any other kind of form of war, and actually the governments win these wars more than the insurgents win them. There's a great book out on all of that written by Max -- the great Max Boot. But, the reality is that they do test the political and moral will of people because the wars go on for so long. And it's not so much the casualties, because the American people has a great constitution for casualties, an enormous constitution for them if the purpose and objective makes sense to them. What protracted wars do -- they do test their will, not so much because [01:33:00] of the continuous casualties. They are a factor but it's not determinant. What is determinant for them is the lack of progress. They don't see progress taking place. They don't see that it's worthwhile because we don't seem to be getting anywhere, and that's where the frustration in the sense of futility comes, which actually was in General Casey's headquarters, in the



military headquarters, understandably so. So, I always felt that if we started to turn it around, I think initially it would be significant push-back to a President, not only from his political opponents but even from his -- in general, his political supporters to escalate a war, and from the American people at large.

But, I always believed this: if you're dead-honest about it, about what's happening and why we're failing, and what we intend to do about it, they're going to give you the benefit of the doubt on that decision. [01:34:00] They're not going to totally commit to you until they see that this is really starting to show some progress and there's some worthiness in that decision. But, they would appreciate your honestly admitting to failure and, too, that you're willing to do something about it, and this is the only course of action that I believe will still get us what we need, which is a stable, secure Iraq, capable of defending itself internally as well as externally, and being a country of consequence in the region. I believed all of that was still attainable, and I'm convinced of that. But it would take time to do that, and that proved to be the case. I think what surprised all of us is how -- it certainly surprised me, I know it surprised General Petraeus -- is how rapidly the insurgency did turn around because we -- I went in there right with him early on.

I went into -- the [01:35:00] first unit we put in Baghdad, I went in with the company commander down there and watched what he was doing. I was in there to see proof of theory, and it was funny because the kid had -- he had been there a couple of days doing all the patrolling that we had discussed before, and he said,



“Sir, the hot tips here are unbelievable.” What he meant by that is he’s getting these tips from the people and all of them are real. All of them are solid. There’s caches here. There are bad guys here. He said, “I can’t handle it, and my battalion commander can’t handle it.” He said -- now, not all of these neighborhoods were as easily transferable as that one, and there were others where we had to spend weeks and months getting the people to turn because they were -- the enemy had such a stranglehold on them. But, as a proof of principle, it was there.

On my second visit, that was [01:36:00] -- he went in there in January or February, something like that, so I was there with him then. I did speak at his commander’s conference for him, which he asked me to do when he gathered all the generals together. What I did is I could talk about what was wrong here in a way that he didn’t. We didn’t ever check notes but we know each other well. He was going to talk about what he was going to do and I talked about why this thing is screwed up, and I think they needed that kind of blunt, honest, honesty. And then I went back a couple of months later, and every time I visited Iraq over 2007 and 2008-- this was normally about two to three weeks at a time every few months for those two years -- half of the places would stay the same. So, I selected half the places that would always stay the same, and then I would visit new places. So, I went back the second time and I actually saw anecdotally some improvement. They didn’t want to go too far down their throat. I said, “This is going to work. I’m telling you [01:37:00] this is going to work.” So, this was April, May. I said, “It’s



going to take time, but this thing is going to work. I'm absolutely convinced of it."

I provided testimony to that effect in the Congress, I had some congressmen screaming at me, actually getting emotional with me when I made that pronouncement. But, by the summer, the statistical evidence was there, that it was working now. [looks at watch] I do have to go.

It was not just a surge of troops that made this work. It was not just the capacity, the fortunate capacity of General Petraeus being there and the extraordinary leadership of General Odierno, who actually put the operational plan together, and he deserves enormous credit. We don't succeed in Iraq without Odierno and his staff putting together the plan that Dave Petraeus approved, which everybody executed. It was absolutely classic.

But, [01:38:00] in addition to that, during that year, General Dubik, who was in charge of training the Iraqi Security Forces, trained 100,000-plus Iraqi Security Forces that he put on the street from January of 2007 to December. We don't get there without that, and we don't get there without the Petraeus decision that says: We're not just going to have advisors with them. We're going to go into all of these operations with a US platoon and an Iraqi platoon, side by side. They will fight better when they see what right looks like, when they see how that sergeant and how that officer behaves, how that soldier behaves. Their capabilities will go up demonstratively faster. That happened.

So, the Iraqi Security Forces are part of this, obviously the US Military, and the US Military -- give them huge credit for being able to transition from a strategy which was largely defensive, to a strategy that got out and was decentralized, operating in among the people. The ones that were coming to the fight from the United States [01:39:00] -- they could train on it and prepare for it and the ones that were there could not. They had to switch like that, and that is America's military. I'll tell you what -- that operational, intellectual flexibility and operational adaptability to be able to do something like that is extraordinary and a lot tougher than what people realize, and they did it very quickly.

And then you had the Sunni Awakening, and that was nothing short of extraordinary, what took place. Once -- I remember talking to a lead sheikh out in Anbar Province, and I said -- this is in the middle of 2007 -- "Why are you willing to come in and participate in a political process?" He said simply this. "Bush is taking Baghdad, and he will take Baghdad back. Once I understood that, I'm going to have more influence over this Shia government, given Bush's influence over this Shia government, [01:40:00] so now is the time to do that. If I wait a year or two, I don't know where Bush will be then." He said, "I'm coming in now to get as much political influence in this government, in this process, because Bush has that kind of influence over this government as well." Pretty smart thinking, pretty smart. So, we don't get there without all of that.



Then, you've got to give some credit to the Iraqi people. They had the moral courage to step up and help us, given the horrific things that were happening to them. That took women a lot -- we made more contact with women than we do with men, and it took a lot of women to -- and also men -- to be willing to protect their kids and their way of life, and give us the enemy because if they didn't give us the enemy, we never would have made that kind of progress. So, I've got to go.

SAYLE: Thanks for your time.

CRAWFORD: Thank you. [01:40:56]

[END OF AUDIO/VIDEO FILE]