



The Surge – Collective Memory Project

Interviewee: Condoleezza Rice

Secretary of State, 2005-2009

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[Begin Transcription]

FEAVER: This is Peter Feaver, and it is July the 20th, and we're here to interview former Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice.

O'SULLIVAN: This is Meghan O'Sullivan from Harvard University.

SAYLE: And this is Timothy Sayle from Southern Methodist University.

RICE: This is Condoleezza Rice, here at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University.

FEAVER: So, let's begin with an open-ended question. When you tell the story of the shift in strategy, when do you begin it? What's the beginning point for the shift in strategy, from your perspective?

RICE: I think it's fair to say that no one had been very satisfied with what was going on in Iraq for a very, very long time; probably dating all the way back to 2004. Certainly, by the time we transferred sovereignty to the Iraqis in the end of June in 2004, and the security situation was not improving, I think there were a number of people who started to worry about the track we were on. [00:01:00] It's not that we were ready to review, at that point, strategy, but the kind of discontent with where we were was growing. I think we'd all expected that once we transferred sovereignty and the political situation had begun to change, we would be leading up to elections in 2005, and yet, the security situation really wasn't getting better.

As national security advisor, it's one reason that I started the Iraq Strategy Group. That was supposed to give the White House, give the National Security Council, on behalf of the President, a little bit better insight into what was going



on in Baghdad. That had, not really a security element - I didn't want to cross the Pentagon - but it did have a significant element of getting people onto the ground, people like Bob Blackwill, people like Meghan [O'Sullivan], who were frequently there, to really get a better understanding of what was going on there.

By the time I got to the State Department in 2005, I thought we really had [00:02:00] two problems. Not only was the strategy not working, but we couldn't explain to anybody what it was we were trying to do. In a now fairly infamous testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations--I think it was Senate Foreign Relations--I tried to describe what it was we were doing. I had the advantage of having Ray Odierno as my liaison, from the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He had of course been in Iraq at the time of the invasion. And together with Phil Zelikow and some others, we came up with the idea of "clear, hold and build," which we thought described what we were doing. I think at that time, we were really trying to clarify precisely what we were trying to do. Were we trying to just get deaths down, from a point of view of American forces? The security situation wasn't improving, not just in terms of the population, but we couldn't get reconstruction projects going, [00:03:00] because they were under constant fire from what was becoming a significant insurgency. So I would say that this was a rather gradual process, of beginning to reevaluate the strategy, and by 2005, the efforts had really started to accelerate to do so.

FEAVER: Let me just press you on the fall 2005 period. Some have viewed that as an effort to better explain to the American people what we were doing, so that we had a strategy that we had some confidence in, but we needed to better explain it.

RICE: Right.

FEAVER: Others have described that effort, which resulted in the "National Strategy for Victory in Iraq" white paper, others have described that as really, an effort to either rethink or to better resource or shift the strategy. Where on that spectrum did you see it?

RICE: Well, I don't think you can explain something that doesn't exist. I think our problem was that we were sort of [00:04:00] stuck in a situation in which there were those in the Pentagon, and particularly some of the younger officers in the Pentagon, who were recognizing that we had to move closer to a counterinsurgency strategy, which is how I could describe "clear, hold and build;" it's really counterinsurgency strategy. But it was neither adequately resourced, nor did it seem to me, particularly supported in some of the higher echelons of the Pentagon. I call them the counterinsurgency generals, but really, they were the ones who had gone, in effect failed, and had come back. Odierno, Petraeus, Chiarelli, all of whom had been associated with the heavier initial invasion footprint, you know the effort to pacify by out and out force, Fallujah and places like that. That strategy had clearly not worked, and there was [00:05:00] a lot of



churning in the Pentagon. We were more than aware of that churning at the State Department, because Ray was my liaison.

And so I would describe it as an effort to explain to the American people and to the Congress, what it is we ought to be doing, some elements of which were in place and many of the elements were not really in place. We weren't trying to "clear, hold and build," although if you listened very carefully, to especially the generals who were trying to carry this out, that's what they thought they were trying to do. But they were under-resourced to come even close to - holding means you have to leave people behind, and we would essentially clear, go home, and the next day we were clearing again because in the interval, when we went back to bases, the insurgents had gotten the upper hand overnight again.

O'SULLIVAN: [00:06:00] And that's actually a very accurate way of describing what happened throughout 2005 and into 2006. At what point did you ask Philip Zelikow and Jim Jeffrey, to start, I think as you put it, to "think outside the box"? What was the motivation for pushing them in that direction and can you describe what they produced and how you received it.

RICE: Well, I have to go back a little bit, into 2005, because I went home for a long weekend in 2005. I think it was--and my memory is a little fuzzy now--but I think it was in a holiday period and most likely over Labor Day, and I had gotten, actually, an email -- or not an email. I'd gotten, from a friend, an email from his son, who was serving in Anbar. John Taylor, who had been undersecretary, he had



a son serving in Anbar. That email said, [00:07:00] because we'd gotten those terrible intelligence assessments that said this is lost, we're losing, the circumstances are terrible. And these continued really, through 2006. But this email said, I'm starting to see things a little bit differently.

O'SULLIVAN: Do you think just on a time check, there was that Marine intelligence report that made the headlines.

RICE: [nods] Right—

O'SULLIVAN: That was in 2006, August, 2006.

FEAVER: August, 2006. So would this have been that, because of that?

O'SULLIVAN: And that is when we saw a little bit of the Awakening, begin to rise, but you're thinking this is a year before the event?

RICE: Well, no, not a year before, just shortly before, so around Labor Day.

O'SULLIVAN: OK, so around Labor Day sounds right.

RICE: Maybe even Christmas.

O'SULLIVAN: '06, '06?

RICE: No, no, no. The email from John's son comes at the end of 2005. So, already, people were starting to say, well maybe something is starting to happen here, [00:08:00] if they were on the ground. He was actually serving in Anbar.

O'SULLIVAN: There were actually three efforts at the Awakening, before the Awakening actually happens, so it's very well he could have been seeing some of that.

RICE: Yeah, he could have been seeing some of that. And so anyway, when I asked Philip and others to take this on, I really just wanted as out of the box, broad a look, at what was possible. And I have to admit, that maybe a little bit of it was as national security advisor, feeling that perhaps I'd not really done the kind of red-teaming that we perhaps should have done. And this time I was determined, from a different perch, that we were going to be able to red-team. Red-teaming means that you think about everything that's possible.

Philip had a conversation with Doug Lute, because I think, in my way of thinking about it, and I think I communicated this to those who were going to do the out-of-the-box look, we really had three options by this time. [00:09:00] One was to just keep churning along and hoping for the best. The Pentagon kept saying, from 2004 onward, "Well, when the politics straighten out then the security will straighten out." The politics were getting somewhat better, but the security situation wasn't straightening out. But that was an option, just stay the course. The second option was if you could get more forces, then you could really institute "clear, hold and build." The third was, if you couldn't get more forces, it made no sense to keep going with what you were doing, and then you ought to think, perhaps, about other kinds of strategies, including other political strategies. I think that's sort of the guidance that I gave to the think out of the box people, but beyond that, they were free to think about anything from doubling down, tripling down, to complete and total pullout.



FEAVER: And what timeframe was this, and can you remember the trigger for it, the sort of geopolitical trigger for it?

RICE: We had [00:10:00] that mosque, the bombing of the mosque, and we all held our breath, because it looked like for a short period of time, they had avoided the worst disaster. I remember when it happened, I was actually on an airplane, on my way back from the Middle East, and I got Zal [Khalilzad] on the phone and he said, “Well the good thing is, they’ve all decided to visit the mosque together, they want to show unity.” Sunni, Shia, Kurds, and all. And for a short period of time, it looked like it was going to hold together, but then after that. So, the bombing of the mosque was, I think April, is that right? Or February.

O’SULLIVAN: It’s February.

RICE: February, yeah, February. So, a few months later, April, May, June, it’s starting to spiral downward again, and so that was really for me, the trigger, that it wasn’t holding. But also, just the sense that the situation just wasn’t getting better. You would read the blue sheet that we read every morning, [00:11:00] and both from the point of view of American deaths and suicide bombings and bombings against the population, it was just clear the security situation wasn’t getting better, and I just thought we had to start thinking about what else we might do.

FEAVER: What was your sense of what the other principals were thinking about this at that time? So let’s take the May timeframe.



RICE: I think everybody was distressed. The President was distressed. I know Steve was distressed. I had a conversation with Steve at one point, and I mentioned to him that every morning, when I was national security advisor, I'd go in to see the President and he would say -- he looked very down and he would say, another hundred people, another fifteen soldiers, you know this is just going on and on and on. And I said, I dreaded walking into the Oval and seeing the blue sheet in front of him, because I knew that it was always bad news. [00:12:00] And Steve said, "Well, you should be here now, it's that times ten." So I knew Steve was very worried. I knew that Pete Pace was very concerned, and the Chiefs were very concerned by what they were seeing. I couldn't read Don. On the one hand, Don kept expressing confidence that what we were doing was working. Casey, George Casey, seemed to be expressing confidence that what we were doing was working. I knew that Zal was not at all confident about what we were doing. So, I had a sense that nobody was really satisfied, but the Pentagon was hardest to read.

I should fill one other thing in. I was going to say earlier, when Phil Zelikow started kind of looking around, talking to people, I think it was that conversation with Doug Lute, where Doug said, [00:13:00] "There aren't any more troops," sort of pushing aside the let's add more forces and actually really do "clear, hold, and build." And I do remember Philip coming back and saying, you know, "I don't think the Pentagon will support more forces." So, that piece of the information I remember.



One thing that is relevant here is that I was really seized with this until, in July, Lebanon broke out, and for six or seven weeks it was all Lebanon all the time for me, because I was trying to negotiate an end to the conflict there. It wasn't that I was not concerned about what was going on in Iraq, but I had one problem on my desk every morning. I was in the region twice, I was in Europe twice, to try to end the Lebanon war. So, I didn't check back in to the issue until mid-August, when we achieved the ceasefire [00:14:00] in Lebanon.

O'SULLIVAN: Before we get to that August time period, so you're describing how people were feeling in that kind of April, May, June time period, and you remember the Herculean efforts of Zal and yourself, to form a government—

RICE: To form a government [nods], right.

O'SULLIVAN: There was no government at that time. How much did that play into your understanding of the situation, like how big a factor was that? And can you relate it to the Camp David meeting in June, 2006? There were some efforts to try to use that as a place to really look at the strategy hard. Where was your head around the Camp David period?

RICE: Around the Camp David period, again, I was just, I was very, very concerned. I thought that the fact that we'd not been able to form a government didn't bode well for the politics, but I wasn't overly disturbed by the to-ing and fro-ing to form a government. I was always [00:15:00] one of the more patient with the Iraqis, because I would always say it took the Americans three years to come up -- Adams,



Jefferson, and Franklin -- to come to agreement on what the great seal should look like. So, I was actually probably more tolerant of the to-ing and fro-ing, and I had the advantage of being on the phone with Zal every day. They'd get real close and then somebody would say no, he won't suffice, and so and so, Hakim won't support him. So, I almost considered it a more normal process for a new government, so I wasn't unnerved by it, although I did think it contributed to our difficulties.

O'SULLIVAN: And did you expect that the situation might get better once the government was formed in May and June, and then we had the Camp David at that time.

RICE: I did think it would get better once we had the government, but I also thought [00:16:00] it was going to take a little time for the government to get its footing, and so I didn't expect immediate results. I think I was more disappointed in the period between '04 and '05, when I thought the elections had a real chance, those first elections in '05, and all of the sense of triumph around those elections and the purple fingers, and the whole -- I really thought that had a chance to sort of change the whole context in Iraq, because it was connecting to the democratic process. I didn't expect that the government was going to immediately be able to do something about the violence, but I thought having a government was going to be key to eventually being able to do something about the violence.

FEAVER: So, zeroing in on the Camp David meetings, some viewed that as an opportunity to catalyze a zero-based review of the strategy.

RICE: Yeah.

FEAVER: That this would be an opportunity to red-team our own, [00:17:00] but have the national security leadership red-team it. Did you go into the meeting thinking that that's what it was about, and can you speak to the impact of bringing those four outsiders; Eliot Cohen, Fred Kagan, Mike Vickers.

RICE: I think the main thing that they did was they sort of opened the aperture. It's very easy, when you're doing this every day, to get stuck in a particular place, and you're just trying to grind through and make it work. I don't know how many times I've said plan B is to make plan A work. You get into kind of that mindset, and so opening the aperture was really very important.

I don't really remember if I thought going into Camp David, we might open a chance for red-teaming. I certainly didn't come out of Camp David thinking that we had, and it seemed to me if anything, Camp David, rather kind of affirmed that we were probably going to stay the course. [00:18:00] As I said, shortly after that, Lebanon consumed me and I still wanted Philip and others to keep red-teaming, keep thinking. Meghan will remember exactly when we had that meeting in Steve's office, it was a Saturday. I think it's in the fall.

O'SULLIVAN: It was November 11th.

RICE: Yeah, it's in the fall, right. And so maybe that was the next time when we all thought we really have to try to push this forward again, but initially, after Camp David, as I said, I got lost in Lebanon.

FEAVER: The other thing that happened that summer was Fidel Castro getting sick. Did that have much of a -- there was a brief flurry of activity around that.

RICE: Yeah. You can go ahead and release this at the time, but it's one of the things that I'm not proudest of. I remember thinking, I don't have time, you know? Heck, Cuba is on its own. No, actually, we put together this whole kind of Cuba transition team, the future of Cuba project. I can't remember what it was called, it had an actual name. [00:19:00] I tried -- the Latin Americanists got very involved, and thank goodness for Tom Shannon, who was just really kind of on top of it. But Carlos Gutierrez, who was commerce secretary, had a great interest, feel for Cuba, and I remember he came to see me and he said, "I'd really like to be involved in this progress." I think he was going to say, "This is State Department." I said: "Over to you, so I'll be there to support you." But with Iraq, and Afghanistan was starting to come unstuck, and I still had to try to get troops to stabilize in Lebanon, and the Israeli-Palestinian process was also coming unstuck. We had problems in the space around Russia. It was not high on my list.

O'SULLIVAN: There's a journalistic account saying that in August, 2006, you [00:20:00] spent a long weekend doing a deep dive on Iraq.

RICE: Yeah [nods].



O'SULLIVAN: This was maybe consistent with what you were saying.

RICE: The second one, right, yes.

O'SULLIVAN: That you were able to resurface a little bit at a time.

RICE: Yes, yes.

O'SULLIVAN: So, is that accurate? Do you remember when you returned, the full focus, right?

RICE: Mentally, yeah, right.

O'SULLIVAN: You were able to. Was it your sense that things had changed, that we had moved from the second option to the third option? What did things look like to you at that juncture?

RICE: They looked as if, unfortunately, nothing had changed, and that was bad news, because no change meant continually spiraling down.

O'SULLIVAN: Right, because we had had Operation Together Forward I and II.

RICE: I was going to mention that Operation Together Forward I, I remember following relatively closely, but Operation Together Forward II, as I said, I was consumed with what was going on in Lebanon. And I came out of that period and thought my goodness, not only things hadn't changed. And in this circumstance, hadn't changed [00:21:00] meant they were getting worse. And so by August or September, I was pretty worried that we -- well, I thought we were losing, flat out thought we were losing. And if you go back to the sort of three options that I had thought about, upon launching people to think about it, you would have the



option of more troops, you have -- and I'll come back to that -- you have the option of continuing to do what you're doing, but that means you're essentially going to lose, and the third is you start to think about some strategy that puts more pressure on the Iraqis to take control of their own fate, and that pulls the United States back from it and says to them, "OK, you really got to have" -- because by this time, we were also -- the new government had been in place now for several months and didn't seem to be any more interested in actually doing things in a logical way [00:22:00] than the old government had been. But the one thing that I'd really become convinced of was more troops doing the same thing was just going to get more Americans killed, and that that was the one thing I couldn't support. This was a hard period for me, sort of September, October, November. The President and I had been together -- as he said, he used to tell foreign leaders, "She's like my sister, we came into this together." I'd been with him since effectively, the end of '98, and we had rarely had differing views of anything. I can remember being a little bit more forward-leaning on the Middle East than he was, but not -- the Middle East peace process -- but not terribly much. I thought that our Kyoto policy was a little off kilter, but not [00:23:00] terribly much, and certainly nothing of the importance of Iraq. And yet, I worried that in an effort to save this, he was going to throw, as I told him, his last card on the table, and if it was more forces to do the same thing, it wasn't going to work, and that would have been the greatest tragedy. So this was a hard period of time for us.



FEAVER: And during this time, so the August, September time, we now know that there were other parts of the government reaching similar conclusions, that we need to fundamentally rethink this.

RICE: Yeah.

FEAVER: Pete Pace starts his --

RICE: Pete Pace came to see me and I can get the date for your project, but it probably was around September, because I think it was shortly after we came back.

FEAVER: And Steve [Hadley] started -- there was a similar effort inside the NSC.

RICE: Right, yeah, but Pete said to me, I don't get it. [00:24:00] We keep adding, we keep -- these metrics that the Pentagon had. We keep blowing up caches, we keep capturing people, and the security situation just keeps getting worse. I don't understand what's going on here. He said, "I've deputized some colonels to take a look at it," and I said, "Funny, I've deputized some people to take a look at it, let's keep in touch."

FEAVER: So, one of the journalistic critiques of that -- those efforts were that they were all separated and siloed and not integrated at this stage. Do you feel that, well first of all, was that fair and why was that? Did you feel you had visibility into the -- you had visibility evidently, into Pace's. Did you have visibility into the NSC efforts?

RICE: I didn't think there was any harm in having everybody look at this separately for a little while. You didn't want to come to a too soon [00:25:00] conclusion about

what was possible or what you ought to do. I had complete visibility in what the NSC was doing, because Steve Hadley was my closest colleague and one of my best friends.

O'SULLIVAN: And David Satterfield was the only outside person on our review team.

RICE: [Nods] I was going to say, and as a result, David Satterfield, he asked me, "Do you want someone to sit in this effort?" And so David, sort of quietly, without I think anybody at the State Department knowing, except probably Brian Gunderson, that he was a part of that effort, because we didn't want to provoke -- well, the Pentagon should be part of that effort and the Chief should be part of that effort. So I had completely visibility in what the NSC was doing. I didn't really ask for visibility into what Pete was doing. That seemed to me, the military should look at that on their own, but I just said let's, from time to time, talk about what we're finding.

FEAVER: Was there anything, to the best of your knowledge, going on inside OSD [Office of the Secretary of Defense], similar to this? [00:26:00]

RICE: similar to this? Not that I know of. I know Doug Feith, was it Doug Feith, was doing...?

FEAVER: By this point, it would have been Eric Edelman.

O'SULLIVAN: Eric Edelman.



RICE: Eric Edelman. Eric Edelman, maybe, was doing some sort of review, but I didn't have visibility into what the Pentagon was doing, at least not in September and October, until, in November, we actually started to get together.

O'SULLIVAN: Shall we move to that November period?

FEAVER: Sure.

SAYLE: If I could ask.

O'SULLIVAN: Tim, were you going to say something?

RICE: Sure.

SAYLE: I wanted to ask about your trip to Iraq in October.

RICE: Yeah.

SAYLE: If you can describe the trip.

RICE: It was the worst trip I had. I went and Zal had had a group of Sunnis there first, and they all brought horrible pictures of severed heads of children, and this is what the Shia are doing to us. And then the Shia showed up, and they had [00:27:00] severed heads of Shia children, and this is what the Sunnis are doing to us. I remember saying to Zal, "Are the Kurds next?" He said, [laughs] "No, they're not coming." I was so furious at them, because they couldn't focus, and this is all of the leaders. This was the [Mahmoud al-]Mashhadani and the Shia leaders and the Sunni tribe, tribal leaders, and all kinds of people. I finally said to each of them, and I said to Zal, "I hope I didn't embarrass you," because after they'd gone through these horrible soliloquies of what everybody was doing to them. I said, we



have a saying in the United States, “You can hang separately or you can hang together,” I said, “And as far as I can tell, you’re all going to be swinging from lampposts the next time I come.” I was really unnerved by it, furious about it. [00:28:00] I talked to Maliki, had a kind of similar conversation there about hanging separately and hanging together and swinging from lampposts, and I came back and I remember being very tired.

I’m pretty hardy and I was never terribly exhausted when I came back from these trips, but I mean, I was really tired and I hadn’t slept very well. I think I met with the President. I got home maybe nine or ten o’clock the night before and I got into the Oval shortly after he got in, so probably seven o’clock in the morning, and I said to him, “It’s coming apart. It’s not going to hold together.” And I felt bad, because I think it was the only time in our time together that I expressed that kind of dismay and distress, [00:29:00] and didn’t have an answer about what to do about it. I remember he said, “So what should we do?” And I said, “I’ve got to go away and think about that.”

O’SULLIVAN: Before we get to November, there’s one thing I wanted to --

FEAVER: Yes, and I have something too.

O’SULLIVAN: I think you’re sort of reliving these moments, but if I could just take you a little bit back to the spring, just a pretty isolated question about getting more civilians, particularly State Department, to Iraq.

RICE: Yeah, yeah.



O'SULLIVAN: And I remember that you really were heroic in your efforts, to try to change the culture, so to speak.

RICE: [Nods] Right, right.

O'SULLIVAN: I think, if I recall, you even talked about making mandatory assignments there.

RICE: Yes, yes.

O'SULLIVAN: And it was, I remember, very contentious. How did that shape your view of the situation and your view of what might be possible in terms of strategic shifts?

RICE: Well, I was tired of the Pentagon going around town saying the State Department [00:30:00] is not in the fight, going to Congress and effectively saying the State Department is not in the fight. Actually, I think it was in the spring, George [Casey] and I kind of had a little bit of a confrontation before the President about it, because George said something about, send me more civilians, and I said, "When you can protect them, I'll send them." In that sense, I also realized that State didn't have as many people as we needed. It turns out that when I said we're going to make an all-out effort -- and there were two of these, the next one comes after Ryan Crocker is there. But we really have to make an all-out effort to get more senior Arabists and more experienced people. We were getting plenty of young, second, three-term foreign service officers to go, and we actually were doing pretty well with some retired people, or people who were nearing



retirement. It was that sort of whole [00:31:00] middle band of people that we couldn't get, and I did basically threaten the service that if I couldn't get the volunteers I needed, I would direct people to go. And it hadn't been done since Vietnam, and it set off shockwaves and I remember sitting with the Director General of the Service -- the Foreign Service, the Foreign Service is a union -- and he said, "I don't know if you can pull this off." I said, "I'm prepared to go down swinging and if I have to, I'll go to the *Washington Post* and I'll tell them the Foreign Service doesn't want to serve alongside our men and women who are dying and we'll see how well that goes over."

So it was a very tough time inside the department, but I got great support from David Welch, who, by the way, had been part of what we started to dub, "the Hellhole Gang," people who had been in really -- Anne Patterson -- they'd been in these really hard places. And so for them, the idea that you had to mobilize [00:32:00] to go was not a problem, so we made pretty big efforts.

We did learn that one of the reasons we were having problems getting people though, were there were these little crazy rules, like if you wanted to send an officer who was serving in, let's say Kuwait, he had to bring his family back to the United States. So, it's not surprisingly that people who are 35 or 40 and have kids in school, are the ones who don't want to go, so we made it possible for those people to go to Iraq, leave their families in Kuwait or Cairo or wherever, and that



helped too. But some of it was coercion, some of it was removing problems for getting people there.

The later event -- I know you'd like to go chronologically, but just on this subject -- The later was that I wanted to make sure Ryan had the absolute A-team with him, and so we sent out to work for him, people who had been at an ambassadorial level, [00:33:00] as DCM [Deputy Chief of Mission] and political officer and economic officer. So I thought that was what State could do.

O'SULLIVAN: And did that first episode affect your perceptions of what would be doable when we start looking at strategic shifts?

RICE: No. I thought we could manage it. State couldn't have done it for a long time.

One of the things that I had to keep explaining to people was that as Bob Gates said, he had more people in military bands than we had in the entire Foreign Service. So it wasn't as if we had a lot of spare Arabists around. Our spare people, with Middle East experience, and -- of course we did have to keep staffing Beijing and Moscow and Brazil and other places, but I wasn't concerned that we couldn't do it.

FEAVER: So, one of the questions, big questions about this time period is why did it take until late [00:34:00] October, November, for a zero-base review of the strategies take hold? Particularly, that's a question we often get from outsiders, who felt that they had reached the conclusion the strategy was failing many, many months, maybe even years earlier. And so looking at this time period, there were moments



that could have triggered such a review but didn't. Bringing in a new chief of staff when Josh Bolten took over. He did his own sort of look and that could have triggered one.

RICE: Right.

FEAVER: The "Revolt of the Generals" could have triggered one, the Camp David accord.

What's your answer to that question, why did it take until the end of October, November, for all of these things to come together?

RICE: Well, it's a good question. I think in part, people kept expecting that there would be some event that would trigger a better result. [00:35:00] We had the elections in January, then we had the formation of the government. Then we have the --

O'SULLIVAN: Constitution.

RICE: -- constitution. And so every time you had one of these events -- because to a certain extent, I guess we all bought in a little bit, to the idea that the politics would improve the security situation. So with each one -- oh, then we killed Zarqawi, all right, so we sort of thought that would have the effect. And so probably, because it's so hard to turn an aircraft carrier like this around, the tendency is to stay with a strategy and to expect the next event to improve the situation.

But I think I've been describing for you that underneath, people were starting to think about a different approach. You'll have to ask Steve, but as national security advisor, you also have a very delicate situation, because the



Pentagon was supposed to be in charge of this operation. The President had been very clear that the Secretary of Defense was first on [00:36:00] when it came to issues of reconstruction, issues of security, and so if the Secretary of Defense doesn't want to change strategy, it's going to take some work to change. I think that's why -- and when Steve told me his little gambit, of "I'm going to ask them," whatever it was, "50 questions," I thought well that's kind of a clever way to get the Pentagon to rethink this. But I do think it's hard, when you're sailing in a particular direction, the captain of that ship doesn't particularly want to turn it in a different direction, and you keep hoping that those icebergs that you see ahead are really -- you're going to be able to steer around them each time.

FEAVER: So, two other possible explanations just for you to comment on. One is the midterm election. Do you think that froze out or delayed?

RICE: No, I don't think so, because the President was never really [00:37:00] influenced by politics on things like this. I just don't think he -- no, he would not have let the midterm elections get in the way of doing something. No, I don't think so.

FEAVER: The other possibility, and this may have been another way of saying the explanation you gave, is the difficulty of reconsidering plan A, while you're still asking the military to risk their lives on plan A, if word gets out that you have doubts about plan A, that could collapse morale for plan A. Is that—?

RICE: I don't think it's that most of the time this is that -- that people are that clear in their own minds about it. I don't think you sit around and say, "Oh boy, if we start



to reevaluate, we might have a leak, or if we start to evaluate.” And clearly, those would be considerations, but I really think this was more, [00:38:00] each time we had some political event, or we killed Zarqawi, or we have a constitution, or we do this. Each time we thought it might change the circumstances. Now we have a new Iraqi government, we have to give them time to get organized. So each time, there’s something that might deliver on plan A, but I think nobody, certainly not I, and maybe others, nobody was really convinced that plan A was ever going to fully work, but you also weren’t so sure that it was going to fail, that you would just simply pull the plug and start over, if there was still some possibility that it was going to work. I think you had to get to the place where it was just really clear that it wasn’t going to happen.

FEAVER: The next pivot is the election and the departure of Secretary Rumsfeld, and the President announcing publicly, that there will be this review. [00:39:00]

RICE: Right.

FEAVER: What was the linkage between those, if any? You know, the departure of Secretary Rumsfeld and the new review.

RICE: It was time for a fresh start, and I do think it freed the Pentagon now, to be part of the effort -- avowedly to be a part of the effort -- of reassessing where we were. You had Pete Pace sort of in the shadows doing this. I’m sure there was lots going on in the Pentagon around this, and of course we had the little effort going on out in Baghdad, where people were trying to look at it. But now, with the change as



SecDef, it was entirely possible for the Pentagon to be a full partner in that, because now Gates had every reason; a new secretary of defense comes in. Of course, a new secretary of defense is going to take a new look at the country's most urgent issue.

FEAVER: What did you understand the mandate of the J.D. Crouch review [00:40:00] process. What were the instructions and what were the instructions you gave to the State Department reps?

RICE: My understanding was that it was really, almost as much as you can get to a zero-based review at this point, it was a zero-based review. You always have sunk costs, you always have restrictions based on what you've already done. It's not really a clean sheet of paper, but this was supposed to be as close to a clean sheet of paper as possible, and that's what I told our guys they should do. This should be as close to a clean sheet of paper and nothing should be off the table. We owed the President to look at every possibility.

O'SULLIVAN: Before we go into the State Department position there, could we talk about that meeting you referenced, the November 11th meeting, it was that Saturday meeting in Steve's office. Was that a particularly important meeting from your perspective, and if so why.

FEAVER: Let's just set the context. It's after [00:41:00] the President has announced the review, but before the first day of the J.D. Crouch thing. So it's in that interval, between those two.



RICE: Right. I can't remember whether it was Steve, or which of us decided we needed to do the meeting, but it was precisely because it was before, because I really valued NSC and State having open communications on this, and being as close as we possibly could to understanding what everybody was doing, and so we agreed to meet that Saturday morning. We met for several hours. Do you remember how long it was?

O'SULLIVAN: I think it was like three hours or something.

RICE: Yeah, it was like three hours.

O'SULLIVAN: It was the morning, kind of eight to eleven or something.

RICE: Right. And just reviewing everybody's concerns, reviewing what we thought were going on, kind of re-walk back through the history. We looked again, back at how to "clear, hold and build," and why the Operation Together [00:42:00] had not worked, and then really just a mandate from Steve and from me to really now go work. I remember saying nothing should be off the table; we should really make sure we've looked at every possible option for the President.

FEAVER: One of the issues in dispute at that meeting was that interpretation of the midterm elections. Did we even have a chance to do a surge any more or had the midterm elections sort of closed that door because the American public wouldn't go for it.

RICE: Yeah, that's funny, I don't remember that conversation. [to O'Sullivan] Do you remember that?



O'SULLIVAN: I remember that it was as you described, it was a little bit more about fundamentals.

RICE: Yeah.

O'SULLIVAN: I remember one particularly prolonged exchange about what's the relationship between American forces and the violence.

RICE: Are we an issue, or have we become part of the problem, right.

O'SULLIVAN: Right. So, I remember it being more -- but then again, my memory [00:43:00] is not perfect.

RICE: No, I don't -- but I don't remember anybody bringing up the --

FEAVER: Well, I remember, because you and I had an argument about the polls.

RICE: Oh, and whether or not they -- you mean whether or not it limited the President's options?

FEAVER: Yes. That's why, --

RICE: Oh, I see, where we --

FEAVER: It figures in my memory.

RICE: No, no, no. No, I know what you mean. But did you consider that a dispute? I thought we were just sort of raising a possible issue.

O'SULLIVAN: He's very combative.

RICE: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

FEAVER: I'm very sensitive.



SAYLE: Well, I wasn't in the meeting, so I'd like to hear. Let me follow-up. Do you recall your views on that, on what the polls indicated to you?

RICE: I think my view was, the polls be damned. I mean, just that this was not our writ, to worry about domestic politics. Now, I do remember thinking that the Congress might be a problem as a result, because -- I've always thought, even as a social scientist, that kind of polls about what the American people [00:44:00] think about something as complicated as war and peace is not a very good bogie for what's really going on.

But you did have a complete wipeout of Republicans in 2006, a new Congress. Even Republicans were starting to look over their shoulder, because in testimony, in 2006, I just remember being confronted as much by Republicans as by Democrats, and having a sense now that -- that I do remember - that the Congress, I thought might be a real constraint. Maybe that's, Peter, the way to think about that. It wasn't so much just, in just a general sense the American people wouldn't support, but I do remember thinking in 2006 had made a sea change on the Hill.

FEAVER: Right.

O'SULLIVAN: If I could go to the review and the State Department option.

FEAVER: Before we get there.

RICE: Yeah, yeah.



FEAVER: Two more questions about the [00:45:00] November 11th meeting. It came on the heels of Steve Hadley's trip to Iraq, and his first trip to Iraq. Did he speak to you after that trip and what his takeaways, and how did that shape the review process and maybe even his position in the November meeting.

RICE: Well, I think he had come away appalled as well, by what he saw. It was hard for me, as secretary of state, to do much more than go say hello to the troops. I think Steve had gotten a little bit better sense of how dysfunctional the circumstances were in terms of the actual command out there, and what we were actually doing. The thing I remember most about just before that November 11th meeting, that we had a National Security Council meeting that week, just before it, and the metrics were surreal. [00:46:00] I just remember that they were surreal.

FEAVER: You mean they were positive?

RICE: Well, we had broken up this many caches, we'd killed that many terrorists, we've arrested this many people. The one that really always got me was we had all these Iraqi security forces, right? The numbers of Iraqi security forces just kept growing and growing and growing, but weirdly, they would never actually seem to be there, because they'd forget to come back after going home on leave or whatever. But the numbers were almost as if they were being created out of thin air. I remember going to Congress to testify, and it was a real turning point for me in 2006. I don't actually remember which of the testimonies it was, but I remember being asked something about the numbers of security forces [00:47:00] in Iraq and refusing to



answer, dancing around it, because I no longer had any confidence in the numbers the Pentagon was putting out. And so Steve had had that experience and probably could get a little bit more inside it than I could, as secretary.

FEAVER: The second question is, did you detect that there were positions represented in the room, that some folks had already reached their conclusion about what was the best way forward?

RICE: I think some of the people who worked for me, having been doing that work from before the time of the Lebanon war, were -- and the fact that Doug had said basically there were no more forces available, had begun to think that we had to go to some other strategy. Let me very clear -- well, maybe this is a transition to Meghan's point. The strategy wasn't just pull back. The strategy was pull back, say to the Kurds, the Sunni and the Shia, "You're going to have to take the head [00:48:00] of this fight, and so organize yourselves to do this, and if the tribes want to take care of Sunni areas and the Shia want to take care of Shia areas..." And I remember saying to the people who were talking about this, David and others: this begins to sound like partition, because if you're effectively saying the national forces of Iraq can't do this anymore; and you're going to have to say to [Massoud] Barzani and [Jalal] Talabani, OK you're now responsible for this; and to Maliki, you're going to tear apart the notion of a unified government, but beginning to think that maybe that was our only option, if the unified government and its security forces weren't going to perform.



O'SULLIVAN: On this point, could you say -- and I think you've indicated so much, but your views about sectarian violence and who was going to assume responsibility for that. I remember that being a debate around this time.

RICE: Yes. The question was, if they were going to tear themselves [00:49:00] apart as sectarians, could we do anything about it.

O'SULLIVAN: Right.

RICE: This is where really, that October meeting, where I had started to wonder if there really was an Iraqi unifying spirit, or were we really in the middle of something that couldn't be unified.

I remember saying, we can't referee somebody else's civil war, because again, I'm a social scientist, I'm a political scientist, and there's a very important view that if you're going to be involved in a civil war, choose a side. It felt like we weren't choosing a side; we were trying to referee it, and we certainly weren't going to be able to referee it with the strategy that we had. And so my [00:50:00] views, reflecting on what I think some of the State Department people were saying, really was about, could you get the politics in place and was Maliki prepared to make the decisions he had to make, in order for us to actually be able to do something about the sectarian violence? Or were they going to keep splitting apart, blaming each other? And if they were going to be swinging from lampposts, I didn't see any point for us being there while they did it.



FEAVER: And so then, did the State Department paper which Phil Zelikow presented, did that reflect a State Department position, your position as secretary, or was it sort of a think piece?

O'SULLIVAN: And Zal had a different view.

RICE: Right.

O'SULLIVAN: Is what you were suggesting.

RICE: Yes.

O'SULLIVAN: He thought this isn't coming apart.

RICE: Yeah, he did, and so I, at this point, had reserved my view. Right? I had the work that I'd asked people to do, as a red-team. I was talking to Zal all the time about this and I was talking to Ray [00:51:00] Odierno about whether or not more forces, given that the Anbar Awakening was actually really now starting to awake, might turn the tide. And so my biggest concern was that the President would double down with the same strategy, and I thought that would be a disaster.

FEAVER: But just to clarify, the Philip paper was not the Secretary Rice paper.

RICE: No, I don't want -- look, I'm not disowning it, I'm not disavowing it. He did it on my behalf, and I wanted him to go debate those views. I was sympathetic to the idea that we weren't going to stay in the middle of the Iraqi's civil war, unless they were prepared to actually end their own civil conflict. But as to whether or not I would support [00:52:00] a different strategy -- now that Bob Gates was there -- I had dinner with Petraeus at one point, whether or not what would become the

surge was the appropriate strategy. I was skeptical, but I wasn't going to make a call and say to the President, do this or do that, until I knew he was going to change course at the Pentagon.

FEAVER: And at this stage -- so we're really in the opening weeks of the J.D. Crouch-led review -- did you have a sense that there was an advocate for the Surge? Was someone advocating a surge, one; and two, where was the President's head at this point?

RICE: I thought Steve [Hadley] wanted to surge forces. I know him well enough. I think the idea of changing strategy and properly resourcing it [00:53:00] appealed to him. Now, I think the problem was, he wasn't quite sure whether he could get it properly resourced, and I wasn't sure he could get it properly resourced either, because I remember the initial Pentagon discussions where they made it sound as if we wouldn't be able to confront North Korea if we surged forces in Iraq. There was a lot of politics going on around this.

FEAVER: Right.

RICE: The worst thing -- and I'd watched the Pentagon in 2003, inadequately resource the invasion. Now, part of that was not their fault, because the 4th [Infantry Division] got stuck, couldn't get through Turkey. I remember, I'd gone through this horrible fight about what we called rear action, rear area support. So, once our [00:54:00] forces pushed through, who was going to stay back to maintain order. Steve and I had essentially lost that fight, and it was always a different answer: "the Iraqis will,



or the British will, or somebody else will.” I’d seen this movie before, and a surge with too few forces was going to get a bunch of Americans killed, particularly if it was at a time when the Iraqis were stupidly still fighting among themselves. And so absolutely, I was a skeptic of whether we could pull this off, and I told the President as much, but I told him privately. Yeah, you won’t see that in the State Department papers and you won’t see that in the NSC notes. That was a conversation that we first had at Crawford, and that we had several times in the Oval.

SAYLE: Would that have been [00:55:00] Crawford in August of 2006?

RICE: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

FEAVER: You said that you thought Steve wanted the surge.

RICE: I thought Steve wanted it. He wanted a new strategy, and I think he believed in adequately resourced -- Let’s go back to adequately resourced counterinsurgency strategy: “clear, hold, and build,” that was actually adequately resourced, had a chance.

FEAVER: So, one of the challenges for someone in Steve’s position is the NSC, the national security advisor, is supposed to be an honest broker and not an advocate.

RICE: Right, right.

FEAVER: Do you believe that that was part of the challenge that he was facing?

RICE: Yeah, absolutely it was part of the challenge, but he managed it very wisely. He effectively got the Pentagon, with those 50 questions, to admit they didn’t have a



strategy for getting there. And then when Bob Gates got there, it became much less of a problem, because Gates was -- in our first conversation, you know he was looking for another way to do it too, [00:56:00] but he wasn't sure he could adequately resource it, because he was getting really strange readings from the Service Chiefs and others, about -- and we were also, by this time we were starting to face the multiple deployments which was starting to have an effect on the population. There were stories every other day in the *Times* or the *Post*, about this soldier was on his fourth deployment to Iraq. There were questions that people had about whether we could adequately resource Afghanistan and do a surge in Iraq. American soldiers were dying in huge numbers, because the Iranians had really stepped up the improvised --

FEAVER: The enhanced.

RICE: The enhanced, right, enhanced IED. [00:57:00]

O'SULLIVAN: IED, improvised explosive device.

RICE: IEDs, right, right.

FEAVER: Just talking about resources question. Steve Hadley had commissioned a study from Bill Luti, on staff.

RICE: Right.

FEAVER: That looked at, were there resources available if we wanted, if the President chose. Were you aware of that study and the results of that?

RICE: I was aware of it, but I thought that Steve had to use that just to check his own thinking. That would have been death for a national security advisor, to say “I’ve got an answer as to where our troops are coming from.”

FEAVER: And why?

RICE: Would have crossed all kinds of lines.

FEAVER: Explain that for the historical record. Why would that be so hard?

RICE: Because the president has a secretary of defense and he has a chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and in a properly functioning national security system, questions about why you go to war, where you go to war, against whom you go to war, are questions for the [00:58:00] civilian leadership, led by the president. Questions about how you go to war are questions that you ask the military, and what the national security advisor can do is to push and prod. I mentioned the trouble we had before the invasion, getting them to really look at how they were going to backfill.

So, in a properly functioning system, those answers really come from the Pentagon. The president can ask hard questions and check, but for the president to substitute, through his national security advisor, his judgment about issues like deployment schedules and where you would take troops from, it’s not appropriate. President Bush, probably as much as any, didn’t believe in doing that sort of thing. I remember when we were doing Afghanistan he said, “I’m not going to be Lyndon

Johnson, choosing targets from the basement of the White House.” [00:59:00]

Having read about what Johnson did during Vietnam.

So, it was a real constraint, this question of the resourcing, but fortunately, Bob Gates was prepared to kind of push and prod as to how to get that done. And Pete Pace did a great job too, of kind of smoothing the waters with the Service Chiefs, who really are the ones who have to answer those questions about resources, and with the combatant commanders, who were -- the combatant commander was in favor, particularly once Petraeus got there, but the Service Chiefs were very reticent to start kind of altering deployment patterns and the like.

FEAVER: One last question about the initial phase. You described where your thinking was, where [01:00:00] Steve Hadley’s thinking and Secretary Rumsfeld and Gates’s thinking. Where was the president’s thinking at this stage, at the initial stage? Was he leaning in one direction or the other, or was it still a white paper thing?

RICE: Well, I don’t think the President ever was -- he wanted something different, he wanted to do something different. But, quite unlike his reputation, he really isn’t someone who’s given to snap judgments, and I think he was rolling it over in his head, he was thinking. He knew that if he did something dramatic, it was a doubling down on -- but he didn’t want to lose the Iraq War. I think he felt his greatest obligation was not to create Vietnam, not to lose. But I think he was trying very hard to find out what the best [01:01:00] possible answer was, and one of the reasons that I wanted to push so hard, was that I wanted to make sure that



he was prepared to deal with the possibility that a more dramatic move would not work.

FEAVER: Take us to the Solarium?

O'SULLIVAN: We're getting to the point where we move the decision-making process, [inaudible] review to the secretary level and to the president's level.

RICE: Right, right.

O'SULLIVAN: But sort of right before that, you'll remember those intense meetings in December.

RICE: Yeah, right.

O'SULLIVAN: There was a meeting in the Solarium.

RICE: Right.

O'SULLIVAN: It was November 23rd.

RICE: It was -- right. Right after Thanksgiving or just before Thanksgiving?

O'SULLIVAN: Yeah. I can't remember exactly, but it was a Sunday, I think.

RICE: Right, Sunday.

O'SULLIVAN: And the idea of that meeting was to -- J.D. and I were asked to kind of come up with the consensus that was hopefully emerging from this early review.

Do you remember that meeting and do you remember where you thought

[01:02:00] the process was going at that time.

RICE: Oh, I knew we were in the midst of really trying to figure out how to change course.

I remember that Hank Paulson came to that meeting, and Steve and I talked about



it and we said, he's treasury secretary and generally, the treasury secretary attended NSC meetings. The treasury secretary is not a statutory member of the NSC but he was attending because we'd written it that way in our first presidential directorate, that the treasury secretary should attend. But we really wanted him at this meeting, because we just thought somebody with an outside look. He'd not gotten there for very long, been there for very long, and he's a smart guy and he wasn't steeped in the details of this and that deployment and this and that military option, but could he bring a kind of fresh look to it. It was a very good meeting in the Solarium. It was a good presentation about kind of where we were and what the options were, and I just considered it [01:03:00] yet another opportunity for the President to hear from people, but to start to really get to some answers about where he wanted to go.

O'SULLIVAN: And then from there, the next stage is --

FEAVER: What do you think was the takeaway from that meeting? Was there a decision?

RICE: I didn't feel that we came to a conclusion, except that we had to do something different, and maybe that was a conclusion in and of itself, that we were no longer in the, Well this might work one day mode. Now that I think about it, I think maybe that was everybody in the room, for the first time, sort of saying that to each other. I don't remember was Gates -- was or was not confirmed by that time?

FEAVER: He was not.

RICE: No, he was not confirmed.



O'SULLIVAN: He wasn't confirmed until December.

RICE: Yeah, December.

O'SULLIVAN: Kind of late in the -- but he began to sit in on these meetings. Should I --
are you --

FEAVER: Yes.

O'SULLIVAN: Then we go to December and that series of NSC meetings.

RICE: Yes.

O'SULLIVAN: Those discussions were kind of teed up around specific issues, [01:04:00]
some of which you've touched on, about what's our responsibility with sectarian
violence. So it wasn't all a big, grand conversation about strategy, but it was about
specific elements.

RICE: Right.

O'SULLIVAN: How do you remember that kind of interaction? Was that really a "roll up
your sleeves and debate the options," or by that point did you feel that it was
moving in a certain direction?

RICE: Oh, no it was a, "let's debate the options," but I could sense that the President
wanted to surge forces. I could sense it. He didn't say it, but I think he was
becoming attracted to the idea that he was going to make one last play, and he was
not going to lose this war and this was his best option. Before he did that, I
wanted to really be sure that he understood [01:05:00] that that could fail. By this
time, I was pretty comfortable. Gates was there, I liked Petraeus.

O'SULLIVAN: But he wasn't selected until much later.

RICE: Yeah, but I knew what Gates was going to do. I knew -- I mean, Bob had hinted as to what he thought he might do. He wasn't confirmed yet so he had to be careful, but he had hinted at what he was going to do, and I had a pretty good sense of what he was going to do. It was going to be a new team, it was going to be a new team not just in Washington but in Baghdad, and so, I was feeling more comfortable about that piece of it.

I had, by that time, very little faith in the Iraqis, and could they carry out their part of the bargain. So my concerns had shifted really, from the Pentagon and the military side, [01:06:00] which I actually really thought they would get it right now, to could the Iraqis play their role.

I remember, in one particularly tense meeting, saying to the President, "You know it may just well be they're determined to kill each other, we just have to let them do it." And really, he was really furious. I think it was the only time he was really angry at me and he said, "So your view is you're just going to let them go at each other and they're just going to kill each other and we're just going to stand by and watch?" I sort of backed off, but I followed him into the Oval Office afterwards and I said, in a voice that was almost kind of how dare you say that to me but not quite, because he was the President, I sort of said, "Nobody's had more involvement in, more emotional involvement in this war than I, except maybe you, and how could you think that's what I'm saying?" He said, "Yeah, I know, I know."



[01:07:00] And I thought at that moment, he's just -- this is just horrible, this is just horrible.

O'SULLIVAN: Testimony to what a difficult time it was.

RICE: Yeah, yeah.

FEAVER: In your memoirs, you described these scenes quite vividly, but the impression I get from reading those memoirs is that the President's mind still wasn't made up yet, and that he may have been attracted to this sort of idea, but he hadn't, in his mind, --

RICE: Oh, I think that's right. I think he was not -- he hadn't made a decision. I do think, with Gates there, if Gates had shared with me that he was going to change the leadership in Baghdad, he'd undoubtedly told the President he was going to change the leadership in Baghdad, and I think the president was ready to see that. He had enormous respect, by the way, for George Casey. We all did. But Casey was operating with a pretty limited strategy, and if you were going to go to a broader strategy, you were going to have to change personnel. [01:08:00] And so, I think he was feeling better about that. That probably gave him some confidence that he could surge forces, but I don't think he made a final decision, no.

FEAVER: What was keeping him from it? What was the final shoe that had to drop?

RICE: The Pentagon had to tell him he could do it, first of all. They were still sending over numbers that didn't make sense, right? He had to -- Meghan's smiling, but you remember this, some of the numbers were... [throws hands up]. And still



dealing with the fact that if he surged in Iraq, he might have to allow South Korea to be overrun by the North Koreans. There was a lot going on there, but I think he maybe understood that he would get there eventually, and this is where Pete Pace just did magnificent work in sort of smoothing the ground to get realistic resourcing before the President, rather than what I think “the system” [air quotes] would have produced.

O’SULLIVAN: You remember that originally, [01:09:00] the hope was to make an announcement on the new strategy in mid-December, around the time of the Baker-Hamilton Report, before the holidays.

RICE: Right, right.

O’SULLIVAN: And that was delayed. Is it your impression that it was delayed around the resourcing question, or do you think the President was still -- just still unanswered questions.

RICE: I think it was the resourcing question. I think the president had met with Maliki, in -- where were we?

O’SULLIVAN: November, in Amman.

RICE: Yeah, right, right, and he had become pretty convinced that Maliki might be OK in being a partner in this, because at one point in that meeting, what had impressed him -- it’s a funny thing, what impresses you. Maliki actually brought his own plan, and he put it on the table and he said, “Here’s my surge plan.” Because they knew this conversation was going on, you know they’d read it in the papers. He



said, "Here's my surge plan." The President said, "Oh, that's interesting," and Maliki said, "Well, the only problem is it won't work without you, but I've got a plan at least." [01:10:00] And I think the President found that Maliki was more committed. He'd given him a list of things that had to be done, and I think he got the sense he was maybe more committed than he had been six weeks before or two months before.

So the pieces were falling into place, but I think he wasn't just quite ready to pull the trigger. I think he wanted to give Gates a little time inside the Pentagon, to actually -- and I really think that was more it than anything. He wanted Gates to have a chance to bring the Pentagon along. He said to me -- we were together, it was not too long before Christmas. I can't remember the exact date.

O'SULLIVAN: In Crawford? There's a December 22nd meeting.

RICE: Yeah, in Crawford. We were going to meet. We had people on the video, it was going to be a pretty big meeting. [01:11:00] I always stayed at the governor's house, which is the ranch house at the end of the property. And I drove up early that morning and the President was out, walking around, and we walked down to one of his lakes, and I said, "I know you want to do this, don't you? You want to surge forces." He started saying something like "well, you know, I'm not..." and I said, "No, you want to do this, don't you?" He said, "Are you OK with it?" And I said it was always about whether or not you were just going to do the same thing with

more troops, and if you're not going to do the same thing with more troops, if you're going to do something different with more troops, maybe this will work, I said. But it's your last card; it's your last card.

FEAVER: You're a civil-military relations expert in your private life.

RICE: Yeah.

FEAVER: Help the people [01:12:00] studying this issue understand why the President couldn't just order the Pentagon to give him the better numbers. You've described Pete Pace working the system, but some would read, the President is Commander in Chief, he could just order it and make it happen.

RICE: The President can always just order, but it's not always the prudent thing to do or the right thing to do. You want your military really on board with something. You want them to really give you their best professional judgment. You don't want to have them kind of half in, half out. You don't want any passive-aggressive behavior by some who might feel defeated. Any really good leader, you put the CEO of a company or president of a university, rarely just says, Just do it my way. It's just not a very effective way to lead people. And when you have [01:13:00] professionals in the Pentagon who are taking the brunt of what's going on, you want to make sure that you're really on the same page and that they've really come to the right conclusion, and you want to give that time.

I didn't really feel -- when you decided you wanted to delay, I didn't really feel that there was any particular cost to that. Yeah, the Baker-Hamilton thing had



come out and there was a little bit a sense of, we were meeting something with nothing, and we couldn't say "well we have a plan too," right? But I think he also owed it to Gates, to get the secretary of defense off to the right footing. If he, Gates, goes in, and his first job is to shove down the throats of the professional military, something the President has told him to do, that's not a great way to start as secretary of defense. Bob is a strong-willed person, and Bob wanted to have a chance to really know that he was [01:14:00] giving the President the best advice. So I had no problem with the delay.

FEAVER: And part of it, some have suggested, was a desire to confront Congress with a united administration, expecting congressional opposition. If the military were opposed and had been ordered into it, that's a different political...

RICE: There would have been -- there might have been whispers, yes.

FEAVER: Let's talk about two other strands from this time period that have a lot of purchase in the public accounts, one of them being the Baker-Hamilton Commission report. How did you understand that report and what was its role in this surge review?

RICE: Well, I had convinced the President -- been one of the people to convince the President -- to go along with supporting it, because he was immediately suspicious, not of Jim Baker, who he liked tremendously, not of Lee Hamilton, who he liked tremendously. But it was a sort of "Oh right, so the Congress is going to appoint somebody to tell me how to do my job." [01:15:00] Steve and I had both



said to him, this is a real opportunity to kind of reset, these are wise heads, they're not going to come up with anything crazy and it will give us a chance to put the Iraq -- by this time we knew that, and so Baker-Hamilton, I think is, they start in...?

FEAVER: The year before.

RICE: The year before, right.

FEAVER: So the fall of '05.

RICE: Yeah. But it was a chance to reset, to give Iraq another look, to give fresh air, I guess. Then when it was about to come out and they came to brief us about it, the President was put off by some of the elements of it. But actually, it sort of supported the Surge in a kind of roundabout way, and so it helped a little bit, [01:16:00] I think, with the Surge. It helped to be able to say, "it's part of a broader strategy, we're actually doing all these things that are in the Baker-Hamilton Report, except we're not going to go talk to the Iranians, but other than that, we're pretty much doing everything that's here." And so I found it mildly helpful, I think the President found it mildly annoying, and everybody went on.

FEAVER: The other one that came out around this time was the AEI report that Jack Keane, John Keane, and Fred Kagan. What role did that play, if any?

RICE: I can't really answer that. I knew of it. I'd read it, I knew what it said. I actually don't know what role. I know that Jack had been in to talk to the President, so he probably -- maybe it had some effect, but I really don't know.

O'SULLIVAN: I'd like to move [01:17:00] to after the decision has been made. Are you OK with that? Is there anything else you want to touch on?

FEAVER: Well, are you going to get to Crawford? Let's do Crawford.

RICE: Crawford, yeah, OK.

O'SULLIVAN: OK, so we've touched on Crawford, but yeah.

FEAVER: One of the issues at that time was yes, we'll surge, but how many will we surge. Is it five, two, one-one-one.

RICE: Right, right.

FEAVER: What was the debate there and what was your position on that?

RICE: My view was that I didn't have a view. At that point, my mind turned to how am I going to do the civilian surge, how am I going to -- I've already pushed the department pretty hard and pretty far. How am I going to provide civilians for this effort. The PRTs, which we'd started back in 2005, how to expand those. So I really turned my attention to how to support the civilian side of it. I thought it was up to the President and Bob Gates and the Chiefs to figure out the numbers.

O'SULLIVAN: Do you want to say just a little bit more about [01:18:00] the big political effort that accompanied the Surge. So often it's conceived as adding more troops, but a big part of this effort was to change the way we interact with the Iraqi government.

RICE: Absolutely, yeah.

O'SULLIVAN: Would you say a little bit more about that.

RICE: Well, we got very active at several levels. The first was, I think the expansion of the PRTs was really very important, and we sent really pretty senior people out to run those PRTs, and it became an article of faith that the State Department was going to go out into the fields, we were going to be expeditionary. We weren't going to sit at the Embassy either; we were going to be out there. I remember having a little bit of a fight with the Ambassador, because I said the diplomatic personnel would report to the brigade commander, and the Ambassador said, "My people will report to me." And I said, "No, actually they're my people and they will report to the brigade commander, unless you want them to carry guns to protect themselves."

So, we were [01:19:00] really pushing the envelope. We made a major effort, as I said, -- well, shortly after that, Ryan Crocker would go out to Baghdad, and I chose Ryan Crocker, or suggested to the President, Ryan Crocker, because I wanted somebody who was experienced in working with the military, and Ryan had been in Pakistan. By the way, I sent Anne Patterson to Pakistan, because she'd been in Colombia. So, when you have these sort of very complicated civil-military relationships in the field, it's really important that you have an ambassador who is a partner with the military, and so that's why I thought Ryan would do a really, really good job, because I'd watched him in Pakistan. He'd worked really effective with -- now, in these conflict zones, what you have is the CIA person -- the intelligence person -- the U.S. Ambassador, and the commander, [01:20:00] and

they'd better be just like this [Rice intertwines her fingers on both hands]. So Ryan Crocker was the person to do that, and then we sent him very, very experienced people to be deputy chief of mission, to be political officer, to be economics officer. These were all people who'd been ambassadors themselves.

I got really busy just going to Baghdad all the time and staying on top of the Iraqi government. I went to see Maliki and it was very interesting, because this is in now, 2007, and the Surge has begun. Maliki was fighting, as always, with his friends, with Talabani and with Hashimi and so forth. And Bob Gates had gone out there and Hashimi and Talabani and all of them wanted to kind of have a little silent coup against Maliki. And when Gates came back he said, "I'm not sure I really shot that down in a way that I should have shot it down. [01:21:00] They might think we would allow that to happen." So I went back out and I said to Maliki, "we don't want to change prime ministers, but you're a terrible prime minister, you're just doing a lousy job." He was actually very receptive to the message, [laughs] much to my surprise, but then I was on the phone probably, with Maliki, three or four times a week. The President was --

O'SULLIVAN: So it was that long list of political agenda items that accompanied the Surge: the de-Ba'athification --

RICE: De-Ba'athification, getting Sunnis into the constitutional process, dealing with the oil law and the budget. And the President was on video with Maliki all the time, and I think he found a very nice way of working with Maliki that was kind of like,



“we democratic leaders, we all have to do it and it’s hard isn’t it, and parliaments are hard.” Maliki really responded to that, but it was a daily [01:22:00] job with the Iraqis.

FEAVER: Part of the documents describing the change in strategy emphasized that in ’06, we had been pushing on all of these same efforts, but from a top-down point of view; believing that they would come first.

RICE: Right, right.

FEAVER: And then you would see the fruits at the local level, and that with the Surge, we’re going to invert that. We would still ask for those things, but we’d go bottom-up, that it would be the local accommodation would build to political reconciliation, rather than political reconciliation leading to --

RICE: I think that’s fair.

FEAVER: But then at the very end -- that seemed to run counter to the way the ambassador in Iraq, Zal [Khalilzad], had been approaching it. So, was there some effort to bring that shift?

RICE: I think I would say, it was always [01:23:00] top-down and bottom-up. You had to do both. But I think the bottom-up piece of this was that we began to change the security situation, and they began to actually see that it was possible that they might actually govern the country. Now it’s a lot easier to fuss with them about the budget or the oil law, or go see Barzani and say would you please go to Baghdad once in a while; sitting up here in Kurdistan sends the wrong message.



But, when they were all running for their lives and dealing with suicide bombings every day, that was not the environment in which you could -- but we had doubled down. They now had a lot of confidence in us. Their security forces started to perform better. They started to see themselves a real country, with real leadership and real problems that any of us who have been in government could understand.

Hoshyar Zebari was really now starting to take on the problem of engagement with the Sunni states, [01:24:00] which was a pretty thankless task actually, because most of the Sunni states, particularly Saudi Arabia, couldn't see past the fact that Maliki was Shia. So from their point of view, if he was Shia, he must be an Iranian agent. And you would say no, wait a minute, he's Shiite Arab, and oh by the way, he spent his exile in Damascus because he hated Tehran. But, Zebari was really acting like a foreign minister.

We put together -- to Meghan's point about the political side -- we put together the Friends of Iraq, to start to try to deal with the regional dynamics, and the Iranians showed up at those meetings. They were terrified to say anything but they showed up at those meetings, and by the last of them, Maliki was feeling actually really pretty confident. So, I don't think you can underestimate the degree to which change in the security situation on the ground actually started to -- you had to first have Iraqi buy-in, [01:25:00] for the surge to have any effect, but once you had Iraqi buy-in, through Maliki's meetings with the president in November, and then you get the Surge and the Surge starts to have an effect, it empowers the



Anbari tribes, who now don't have to worry that their heads are going to be cut off, because you're not actually leaving at night. And then you create an environment into which the politics can actually start to work. And so I think that's the sequence.

FEAVER: Let me ask you about an actor that's been kind of a silent partner in this story so far; the British.

RICE: Yeah, they were great.

FEAVER: They're there, the President is very close to Prime Minister Blair, they're talking a lot, but they don't seem to be playing much of a role in the Surge decision.

RICE: Well, not so much in the Surge decision, because they knew that this was going to be American forces, but they were very active in this political strategy. Jack Straw and I went to Iraq together. We had to get Jaafari to [01:26:00] step down. Jack had a nice little talk with him as a politician, about when it's time to go, and it was really quite clever. Finally, when that had failed, I said, "Nobody wants you here, why don't you leave." So Jack Straw was a part of that. Tony Blair was very active. He would talk with Maliki, he worked through it, and the British were active. They got out of their bases, went out into the PRTs. So, just because they weren't able to surge forces in the same way that we did, I would consider them a real partner in all this.

FEAVER: But what was their role in the strategy review? Was there a British position that was being --

RICE: No, there wasn't a British position, but people talked to them. The president talked to Blair. I know Steve was in constant contact with Nigel Sheinwald, and I certainly was in constant contact with [01:27:00] Jack Straw, and then later on David Miliband. They were very much a part of what was going on, but it was an American decision to surge and they understood that.

O'SULLIVAN: Just on this point about others. As secretary of state, you would have been hearing from other countries in the region, other Arab states.

RICE: Yes.

O'SULLIVAN: Do you remember if they had a sense of what was cooking in Washington?

RICE: There was enough kind of leaking in --

O'SULLIVAN: Bread crumbs.

RICE: Yeah, a little bit in the newspapers and so forth. They sort of knew what was cooking.

O'SULLIVAN: And was that something that affected your view that you think that this would make an important...

RICE: Yeah, it actually was. You know, I've already described my own concerns and skepticism, but ultimately, I was going to support the President in this, because I could see a way forward that made sense, but a part of that calculation was a meeting that I had with the GCC [Gulf Cooperation Council], [01:28:00] plus Jordan and Egypt. Some time, it was not too long after the Lebanon war, because we were getting together to actually talk about the Lebanon situation, and I went

to Saudi Arabia, and I was on the dais with Prince Saud, and a journalist asked a question about Iraq, that implied that it was over, that Iraq had been destroyed, and Saud said, “I am certain that a great country like Iraq will not commit suicide.” And I remember thinking wow, that was really quite an important statement from the Saudis. Later on, at the GCC meeting, which I think was maybe in the UAE or maybe Kuwait, we started talking about it, and they so wanted the United States to double down. They did not [01:29:00] want to be left with an Iraq that was coming unstuck. In some ways, a kind of harbinger of what we’ve got here in 2015, where parts of Iraq are occupied by extremists, and that they did not want to see that. They knew that that would not be in their interests, and so they were 100 percent behind the idea that the United States would surge forces. Something, by the way, they would never say publicly, but they were.

FEAVER: Stepping back now and looking just at the evolution of your own thinking on this, in your memoir you talk about your discussions with Odierno as pivotal.

RICE: Yes.

FEAVER: And you haven’t mentioned that yet, so if you could speak to that. Journalistic accounts have drawn attention to, this was an area where you and the President were disagreeing [01:30:00] pretty late in the process, and that that may have also contributed to his hesitation that first time, to really cross a close, close advisor. So, could you speak to those two issues?

RICE: Let me speak to the first. He knew that I had concerns about deploying more forces. He knew that those concerns were largely abated by the appointment of Gates, and then Petraeus. He knew that I didn't really trust the Iraqis and that once -- and I was in that meeting with Maliki -- that once he felt that he'd gotten good answers from the Iraqis. And by the time that I talked to him in Crawford, I'd decided "OK, this is the right thing to do," and he knew that.

It's not as if the President has to say "Well, until the secretary of state [01:31:00] is there, I'm going to feel a problem." But we've been very close, and I think he recognized that my concerns were not knee-jerk, that my concerns were not "Gee, I think Iraq is falling apart, we just ought to get out of here." But I think he respected that I didn't want to jump to an early conclusion about the Surge. But by that December timeframe, he knew he had me fully and completely on board, and when I defended the surge in those congressional hearings in January and February, I remember saying, as I was getting all these hostile questions from everybody from -- I guess Chuck Hagel was the most hostile of the Republicans, but there wasn't a friendly question around the whole panel, nobody. I remember being able to say look, I started out [01:32:00] skeptical about whether we could pull this off. I'm now convinced, the following things have happened.

And so actually, I think this was a good thing, that somebody who was so close to the President, had not been an easy mark on this, just kind of going along. And I felt really good standing before Congress and saying "look, this is the right



thing to do. I've been through every argument about why we ought to do something else. I've searched my own soul about this and this is the right thing to do." I don't think it was why he delayed, but I think he did ask Steve once. Steve later told me, "I can get Condi there, right? I mean she's not really opposed to this." He knew that I would have supported him, whatever, but that I could support him fully after having really been through the thought process and really thinking, was there some other way to do this, [01:33:00] and if we couldn't resource it, what could we actually do. I think he felt OK about that.

FEAVER: And the Odierno piece.

RICE: Ray turned out to be extraordinarily important to me in so many ways on this.

First of all, because as I said, he was my liaison when I first got there. I'd come from the White House, knowing that the Iraq strategy was unclear and even harder to explain because it was unclear. Going through it with Ray, and Ray went out with Philip [Zelikow] fairly early after I became secretary. He came back; that's where the PRTs came from. We used it in Afghanistan, but the PRTs in Iraq were different than the PRTs in Afghanistan. The PRTs in Afghanistan, first of all it was a nightmare because every PRT was run by some other country, some different country, and so they didn't have any consistency whatsoever, and they were largely to expand the writ of the Afghans [01:34:00] into the far reaches of Afghanistan. These PRTs were really to try and marry security, reconstruction, and governance, and visiting those PRTs, first in November of 2005, the first one was being set up,



and then going into these places, Ray was enormously helpful in setting up that whole strategy. Then, when he went back out, I called him, and I didn't cross those lines. It was a breach of my own sense of civil-military decorum, to call Ray in the field and say to him, "I'm trying to get my head around this idea of surging forces, will it matter?" And when he said, "Yes it would matter, particularly in Anbar," that was a big piece of the puzzle for me. [01:35:00]

FEAVER: I have two last questions.

RICE: Sure.

FEAVER: One is the Iran piece. Some of the journalistic accounts of the evolution of your views emphasized your emphasis on Iran, and that we had to be able to confront Iran more vigorously than we had, and that perhaps we were bogged down in Iraq, and that was tying us from confronting Iran. [Rice shakes her head in disagreement.] You're shaking your head, so was that a misreading of it?

RICE: Yeah, I didn't. I wanted to confront Iran more vigorously on two fronts: on their nuclear program, but I thought we could do that by getting on the right side of the diplomatic table on that. We were pretty isolated in 2005. I remember going to Great Britain -- my first stop was London -- on my first trip as secretary, and I'm standing there at the press conference and I'm expecting all the questions to be about Iraq, and they're all about Iran. [01:36:00] Partly, the elections had just taken place in Iraq, and so people were feeling somewhat better about Iraq, but it also felt like the Europeans were trying to mediate between us and the Iranians.



And I came back and told the President, “This is a terrible place to be.” And so getting us on the right side of the diplomatic table and creating the P5+1, and all of that, and starting the two-track approach; negotiate, but go to the Security Council, get the Security Council resolutions.

So that was the piece that I felt was important on the nuclear issue, and then I thought we had to confront Iran more vigorously about Iraq. And then we got lucky, when we picked up the deputy Quds Force commander, and we had a certain reputation and we told them that he was singing like a little bird up in Erbil. They really started to pull back their horns, because they thought he’d exposed their operations. So that was the issue. But no, I didn’t think we were bogged down in Iraq, no.

FEAVER: So the last question then is [01:37:00] what have we not asked you about this decision, that we should have, or is there any other last statements you want to make?

RICE: No. I think you’ve done a really thorough job. I’m very proud of the way that the Surge decision unfolded. I know there will be those historically who will say it should have happened earlier, but it almost never does happen earlier than it has to, because there are so many costs to changing course, and the President owed it to his Secretary of Defense, to give him a chance to deliver on what he was doing. When the President decided he could no longer tolerate what was happening, I think a process unfolded that gave him every possible option. As I’ve said, I’m very



glad that I withheld judgment on this until I could honestly say I was fourscore [01:38:00] behind it. I'm glad the president waited until the military could be fourscore behind it, and I think because a process is not always as expeditious as people might like it to be, it sometimes is more effective, and I think this was a process that was immensely effective.

The other thing I would say is George W. Bush was a different President in 2006 than he was in 2003.

FEAVER: In what ways?

RICE: In 2006, he had a lot more experience dealing with the military. He'd sat through those meetings where -- there's a joke that when the State Department gives an option, it says option A is bomb them into the Ice Age, option C is capitulate, option B is do what the State Department wants to do. The Pentagon is that way too and you have to learn how to read the, [01:39:00] "Oh my goodness we're not going to be able to defend against North Korea." And I think in 2003, he was less willing to really push and press and prod on questions like how were they going to backfill when our forces went through. That's experience.

Sometimes wartime presidents have to go through difficult experiences. We know how many generals Lincoln went through before he finally got it right. In this case, it wasn't going through generals as much as it was, I think, going through a lot of very bad outcomes, a lot of false starts that those outcomes were about to turn around, and then eventually deciding that he had to make what I

consider to be one of the bravest decisions that an American president has ever taken, which was to double down on a war that a lot of people thought was lost. So, we can talk about civil-military relations, [01:40:00] we can talk about the role of the NSC, we can talk about the secretary of state or whatever, but it ultimately comes down to the president, and whether the president is willing to take tough choices.

FEAVER: Well, we'll leave it there, thank you very much.

RICE: Good, all right, great.

O'SULLIVAN: Thank you so much.

RICE: Super.

[END OF AUDIO/VIDEO FILE]