

## The Surge – Collective Memory Project

**Interviewee: Karl Rove**

White House Deputy Chief of Staff, 2004-2007  
Senior Advisor to the President, 2001-2007

**Interviewers:**

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[Begin Transcription]

FEAVER: It's February 2, 2016, and we're going to be interviewing Karl Rove. My name is Peter Feaver. I'm a professor at Duke University.

MCCORMICK: Evan McCormick with the Center for Presidential History at SMU.

ROVE: And Karl Rove.

FEAVER: So, Karl, when does the Surge story begin for you? When you tell the story of the President's decision, when would you begin that story?

ROVE: Well, sometime in '05. And I wish I had paid more attention to when it exactly was, but the President mentioned sort of general unhappiness with the state of the war, and mentioned some materials that he'd gotten about thoughts of David Petraeus. And there was some document -- I wish I could remember what it was -- that Petraeus had generated, who I think was at that point out in Leavenworth. And the President gave me a copy of it to read. [00:01:00] But it was the first inkling, looking back, that he was sensing that the strategy was not working, and that he was becoming unhappy with it, and looking for other directions. The second one was in the fall of '05. The President was concerned about Rumsfeld, and asking a question of, is it time for a change. And he had me reach out to Gates, whom I had a relationship with, through --

FEAVER: In '05 this is?

ROVE: '05, '05. I believe it's '05 -- and Gates says no. I remember this because I call Gates while I'm on my son's college tour. And I can't remember, I'm in Denison, Texas or Georgetown, Texas, either it's a little college called Southwestern, or at Austin College north of Dallas. And Gates returns my phone call and [00:02:00] basically I say, "Would you be open to this if the President were to explore this option? Is

this really an option?” And he said, basically: I’m in the middle of some things at A&M, and it’s not possible for me to contemplate a quick departure.

FEAVER: Well, this tees up my next question. What was your role in the government at that time, and how did it connect to the Iraq War?

ROVE: Well, look, I was Deputy White House Chief of Staff for Policy in ’05. But I didn’t have much involvement, frankly. I had only an informal -- I was not part of the war cabinet. I was not on the National Security Council. This was not a subject that I attended regular meetings on. So it was informal. It was in the Oval, he would say something, he would talk about it, he would sort of vent, and I had only a tangential, informal role. We did end up at some point having -- resurrecting the [00:03:00] Iraq Working Group, which was an attempt to consider what needed to be done to open up the channels of communication from Baghdad to the United States so the American people had a clear, more robust, more accurate picture of what was going on.

FEAVER: But the sort of --

ROVE: But I’m not sitting in NSC meetings. I’m not sitting in regular briefings. I’m basically, whether it’s we’re traveling someplace, or I’m in the Oval, but he would ventilate about it, and there clearly by ’05 a growing concern on his part that the strategy was insufficient for victory.

FEAVER: And the outreach to Gates would’ve been part of the --

ROVE: Well, I think part of that was that he’d, I think -- it’s --

FEAVER: No, but why you is what I'm saying.

ROVE: Well, because I had a relationship with Gates, and also he wanted to keep this low-key. So he knew I knew Gates. I'd helped in the process of recruiting Gates for A&M. Anne Armstrong had been the board chairman, close friend, and mentor of mine, [00:04:00] and so he knew I had a relationship with him, and had me call him.

FEAVER: OK. In the fall of '05, the big Iraq-related news was in Baghdad, the elections, the culmination of the political process; and in DC the production of this white paper called the "National Strategy for Victory in Iraq," which played off the elections. What was your role, if any, in the production of that white paper?

ROVE: Oh, none. I think I may have seen a draft of some parts of it as part of the regular staffing process, and we obviously had to make adjustments in the schedule of other things connected with domestic policies so that there could be more robust discussions of whatever was going on in Iraq, but nothing.

FEAVER: After the White House [00:05:00] released that document there was a series of major speeches that were linked together.

ROVE: Right, right.

FEAVER: I think this came out of the White House Iraq Group, the what --

ROVE: Right, well, it came out of two places. It came out of the strategy [*sic*] group, and I can't -- looking back, I can't tell you what specifically emerged from the White House strategy group. This was the meeting of White House principals

that occurred in -- held in the Old EOB, in the Secretary of State's office, where literally the senior White House staff got away from the things of the moment and discussed sort of broader messaging and travel and strategic goals, and how much it would [inaudible] --

FEAVER: With the President, or without the President?

ROVE: No, President was never there, Vice President was never there. But it was principals only, no substitutes. And we had snacks, so everybody came. [laughter]  
But --

FEAVER: And you chaired that meeting?

ROVE: Well, the Chief of Staff chaired it; I staffed it. [00:06:00] This was the only place in the White House where we ever had polling information, and it was never about decisional information; it was always a lookback. How are people perceiving what we're doing? And of the things that we are saying or doing, what might be the most powerful? But this is the only place in the White House that we were allowed on a regular basis to discuss polling. So if you have polling, snacks, and an opportunity to step back and say, what are we trying to do over the next three or six months? Let's raise our sights from the thing that's here and now. And they gave people a chance -- and I think there was some discussion about the necessity of drawing attention to this. I think there was a general belief, both inside that group of the senior White House staff, and also in the Iraq working group, that the more often, in appropriate venues, in appropriate ways, that the President talked

about Iraq, the more likely people would grasp the importance of what we were doing, and understand what we were doing. And it had to be unvarnished. It had to be successes and failures. It couldn't simply be [00:07:00] whenever we had a success let's go out and herald it. It was, we needed to have people understand the difficulty of this, and so if you look at those speeches my recollection is they're pretty straightforward and brutal in explaining the challenges that the country faced.

MCCORMICK: Can you talk a little bit about how the political mood in the United States at that time was factoring into decision making on Iraq, or at least those discussions going on in those working groups?

ROVE: I don't want to sound Pollyannaish about it, but we have a deteriorating political situation, because the war is not going well in '05 and '06, but the President really - his attitude was keep the politics aside. He was aware of the currents. He was aware of the deteriorating support for the war, and the support for the administration. But look, he's not -- there was never a moment where we'd walk in and say, Mr. President, this poll says the following, and therefore we must do X. That's about the worst way to go about getting something achieved is to suggest [00:08:00] that it ought to be done because something planted in the poll. So the President -- it was a symbolic measure, but the President had the Office of Political Affairs literally put at the furthest corner of the Old EOB from the White House,



and that was his mindset when it came to the war: let's pay attention to the policy,  
and the politics we'll work out.

FEAVER: The --

ROVE: Or it won't, as in this case. [laughter]

FEAVER: Related to that was in the domestic political around that time was Jack Murtha.

And --

ROVE: Right.

FEAVER: -- do you recall what --

ROVE: Oh, yeah.

FEAVER: -- and how that was received, and what effect --

ROVE: Well, Murtha having -- combat veteran, seen as a hawk, seen a pro-military, when  
he said "Bring 'em home," this was a damaging moment, because now the  
Democrats -- the face was no longer somebody who was anti-intervention and had  
been a critic right from the beginning. Now it was somebody who had strong bona  
fides. [00:09:00] So it was damaging.

FEAVER: And his proposal, as you recall, was "Bring 'em home right away," basically.

ROVE: Yeah, right, right.

FEAVER: A dramatic shift.

ROVE: Right, right, right.

FEAVER: Did that shake confidence in the White House, or --

ROVE: No, I think it showed that we had a serious problem, and it gave Democrats a chance. Murtha was essentially -- Look, I can't speak to Jack Murtha's intentions, but I look at Jack Murtha and see -- he's got to, having seen Vietnam, he had to understand that a precipitous withdrawal would've plunged the country into chaos and given us a moral setback and a defeatist setback that would be as bad or worse than Vietnam. So I think this was politics, at the end of it.

Look, we had, starting in July of 2003, suffered -- started by Ted Kennedy -- remember, Kennedy is the first one who says Bush lied about WMD in Iraq. Now, he knew [00:10:00] that was a lie, because he himself had studied the same intelligence that Bush had looked at, and come to the same conclusion. Saddam had WMD, the possession of these systems represented a threat to the stability of the region, the peace of the region, and US interests, and could not be tolerated. His answer, however, delivered in a speech, I think at Georgetown, was, we must use diplomacy, not force, to end this threat. So he had come to the same conclusion. So this line of attack was clearly set up to defeat Bush in the 2004 election. When that failed, Democrats simply doubled down. It was, OK, we're irritated. He defeated Kerry. We failed in this mission. So turn up the screed.

I view the Murtha decision and the Murtha announcement as essentially political in nature. I don't know why he ended up there, but he had to know the consequences of that, both for the region and the United States, would be disastrous. It took us 20 years to work our way out of the aftermath of Vietnam.



[00:11:00] It would've taken us longer to work out of the aftermath of a precipitous withdrawal. It's bad enough that even today, if you look at it, the American people today recognize that it is a problem that we withdrew after we'd achieved the victory. I mean, there's a substantial number of Americans today that are willing to tolerate a presence of several tens of thousands of US troops in the region that was not there four or five years ago. The American people respond to the reality of the world as they perceive it, and Murtha's thing would've been an utter disaster.

FEAVER: So, just to clarify, though, the views as you saw them in 2005, because in interviewing, we've heard different takes, and I just want to see which one best captures yours. One take we've heard is that in '05, what with the political progress and the successful election, and with the white paper on the strategy, [00:12:00] the White House felt that they -- we finally had a handle on this, and we could relaunch the war. We had struggled for a couple years, the White House view was, but then now, in the fall of '05, we're there, and with a big push, and helping the new government, and a big push to rebuild the political base at home, we could turn this war around. That's one view. The other view would be that even in '05 it was signs that things were not going well. And then these two views coincide with the spring of '06 when the security spiral goes down.

ROVE: Yeah.

FEAVER: So across those two views, where would you be?

ROVE: I'd be sort of more towards the second than the first. My sense was things were going badly, and while we had the opportunity by the elections, that was the political process. The other part of the picture was security. And the question was -- and I think this was weighing in the President's mind -- [00:13:00] will the success on the political side, the organization of the government, the holding of the elections, which was a powerful moment -- and the expression of the Iraqi people was just jaw-droppingly awesome. This was something they clearly wanted the right to participate in the formation of their own nation. But was that political success, that political advance, I should say, or progress, was that at risk because of some underlying problems with security?

So the question was, would the political success take care of the security problem, or did we have to have security before we would see permanence in that political process? And my sense was -- and, again, I'm seeing this not from the position of participating in regular meetings on this. So this is episodic contact with the President in an informal way, either in the Oval or when we're traveling -- but my sense was that even then there was something [00:14:00] stirring in him that said I think we've got something. Our strategy is not going to be sufficient. Great for political process, great for meeting these so-called metrics, but there was something that was eating at him that caused him to get the document from -- somehow sent to him -- from Petraeus. He didn't contact Petraeus directly, but he got the document, and it was helping form an opinion in his mind that we needed

to do better. Obviously, it led to him -- something led to him in 2005 saying, OK, if I wanted to make a change at DoD, do I even really have an option? And the option is Gates, so go find out if Gates is available.

FEAVER: Got it. Now, part of the big push -- there was the President's big speeches -- part of that also was bringing in all living former Secretaries of State and Defense. Were you involved in that in --

ROVE: [shakes head no] Other than [00:15:00] discussions about it.

FEAVER: Do you remember who had that bright idea?

ROVE: No. Did you have that bright idea? [laughter]

FEAVER: Yes.

ROVE: There we go, there we go.

FEAVER: That was my chance to get you to say it on --

ROVE: Yeah, there we go. Peter Feaver came up with that brilliant idea.

FEAVER: What were the results?

ROVE: Look, I think -- I can't remember the specifics, but I thought, look, that whole period of outreach was, I thought, useful because --

FEAVER: January -- this is January of 2006.

ROVE: January of 2006, yeah, January. Well, in fact, there are other things that go on over those next several months, and I don't have a clear recollection of which step followed which, but I thought this was -- first of all, it was interesting the president was so open to this, because this was clearly inviting people in to say, I want to be

critical of what you're doing. In fact, he was very -- I think his only concern about the former Secretaries of State, so forth --

FEAVER: Defense, yeah.

ROVE: -- defense, excuse me -- was --

FEAVER: And both, we had both, yeah.

ROVE: -- yeah -- was constantly, what can we do to make sure that I get the real advantage of what they have to say? [00:16:00] As you know, having worked in the place, one of the great things that he did was make it possible for people to walk in and say, You're not looking so pretty, and that's really difficult in that place. And my recollection of these things was it was great as long as, how do we make certain that this is not just sort of formality and PR. I really want to have the advantage of their insights.

FEAVER: OK, the other thing that starts with gusto in January 2006 is the midterm election season.

ROVE: Right, right.

FEAVER: So what was your view of how Iraq would play? In January of 2006, what was your view? You gave a speech sort of encouraging the troops to double down on victory. Tell us your thinking on how it --

ROVE: Well, look, it wasn't going to be a good election year. The second midterm election is almost inevitably bad. By then, already we were starting to see some [00:17:00] sort of efforts inside the Republican caucus on Capitol Hill to sort of

divorce themselves from the war, and to try and find some way out of association with it. And some of that was basically, Let me be critical of how the war's being conducted. Others were, Let's literally begin to bring people home. And the object was to keep them focused on victory, because if we allowed in the early part of the year that effort to divorce the Republican Party from the war, public support would've dropped even more. If they had cut and run on the President earlier than they ultimately did, then we would've had even bigger problems in sustaining public support.

FEAVER: Explain the logic. Why is that?

ROVE: Well, because if the narrative is, Republicans are breaking from the President on the war, and Republicans are running away from the Iraq War, that would bring back [00:18:00] in the consciousness of Americans that we weren't committed to victory, and the American people, more than anything else, they're willing to sustain military action if the goal is victory. But if the goal is maintenance, and to get through the next election, and the president's own political supporters is saying this is a political loser, they want to walk away from it. They don't want politics injected into war.

It's a weird thing. It's sort of like, OK, I'm for the war as long as it's not political, and as long as you're seemingly willing to fight it out. But if you appear to be weak on this, if you appear to be wavering, if your attitude seems to be, we're trying to manage this, not get victory, then they'll say: throw in the towel and get

the hell out of there. It's not worth American lives and American treasure if the goal is something less than victory. The problem is in this kind of a situation it's hard to define what victory is. But we had to hold -- we didn't want to wake up to a steady stream in [00:19:00] February and March and April and May of stories about how Republicans were walking away from the President, because we were going to get those stories in September and October almost no matter what, so minimize it by stiffening the spine. So we went all out to do everything we could to raise lots of money for candidates and to give them whatever support and assistance they needed through the Republican National Committee or the NRCC or the NRSC, knowing that at the end of the day we're going to have bad losses, but that we wanted them to know that in the political foxhole we were there with them.

MCCORMICK: In your own mind, and maybe in your discussions with the President -- this is in January and February, as you're looking forward to the midterms -- did you think that a strategy review, or a potential change in strategy, was going to be part of that renewed commitment to victory, or was this on your radar screen at that time?

ROVE: Well, my sense -- and again, I can't pin down -- it was pretty clear by some point, given that he was talking, he was in his own mind sort of looking at what are the other options; and [00:20:00] open to things like these discussions; and open in '05 to, if I wanted to make a change do I have somebody to whom I can change? This

said to me that he was looking for a significant alteration of the policy. He was unhappy with the reports that he was getting.

And part of the unhappiness was the results, but also part of it was that it seemed -- I remember at one point he came back from a meeting, and he was talking about how objections had been raised in the meeting to the outcomes, and why were these things happening, and the attitude of Rumsfeld and the Defense Department seemed to be, we just need to keep doing what we're doing. And the President's attitude is, we've been doing this and it's not proving to be productive by their own measures, so why are we continuing to do the same thing? And again, that grew through '05. [00:21:00] And it was pretty clear -- and you know from Hadley when he makes the outreach to Gates -- but it was pretty clear by that point to the President -- I mean, it was clear well before that point -- I need a change, we need to go back at Gates. Hadley goes back at Gates, gets a signal that it might be possible, but the President does not want to act until after the election.

Now, part of it -- I didn't want him to act until after the election because you have a major change like that, and that's the right thing to do, perhaps, but politically it's damaging, because you have a major change that gives the other side the chance to be intensely critical of the policy. But he had a more important reason for not doing it, which was he didn't want the next Secretary of Defense to have to go through a confirmation hearing that would be colored by the politics of an election season. He wanted to make a change, but he didn't want Gates to



come in having been [00:22:00] tarnished and ripped up one side and torn down the other in the middle of an unnecessarily contentious hearing. His feeling was if it happened after the election, A, Gates would have a less difficult time in the confirmation hearing, and as a result be able to be a more successful Secretary of Defense, which was absolutely right. His instinct on this was absolutely right. You take a look at the hearing, and as tough as it was -- there's that one moment where he is asked, is it working, and he says no it's not, which signaled to the country we're going to make a change. But that hearing was about as successful a hearing as it could possibly be, and the fact of the matter is that he then becomes the only Secretary of State in history, that I'm aware of, to have worked under a Republican president and been kept on by his Democrat successor. That says something about Bush's instinct, the President's instinct, about how to do this in a proper fashion.

FEAVER: So we were going to get to this later, but we might as well nail this thought down now. [00:23:00] How did members of Congress respond?

ROVE: When this all happened after the election, of course they're going to blame -- they're going to turn back and say, How dare you do this now and not earlier? If you'd done it earlier it would've saved us. No, it wouldn't have. The Democrats would've felt compelled to turn this into a circus that would've dominated the media in a way that it didn't dominate it during the campaign, and made it worse, not better. But --



FEAVER: The --

ROVE: -- particularly if you lost your seat in '06, you were bitter afterwards.

FEAVER: Some of the people we've interviewed talked about an effort in the earlier part of '06 to maybe catalyze the change at Defense, maybe picking up on some of the things you were hearing in the fall of '05, another push in '06 for a change. So we're now going back, in other words, in time. [00:24:00] And then that stops with the so-called revolt of the retired generals. Do you remember that episode, and how that --

ROVE: I just only vaguely remember it, but look, here was the difficulty: the pressure for change at DoD was stymied by the lack of an option. Who was there to do that job? Whom would the country have confidence in? And my sense was the President was looking around for options and not finding anything good until -- and again, I can't remember the exact, how this all happens, but I think it's Hadley saying, well, let me go back at Gates. And it just so happened -- and look, I don't know Gates' thinking. Gates' thinking may have been in the fall of '05: I can't do this because of A&M. I can't do this because I don't want to get drawn back in. I can't do this because it can't be done. Or some combination of those. But by '06 -- and maybe it was we had a more [00:25:00] persuasive salesman in the form of Steve Hadley -- but by '06 he's changed his mind, and my sense was that's summer of '06, but Hadley knows better than I. But my sense is that now the President has an option.

FEAVER: So, going back to the beginning of '06 again, and you told how the midterm elections went. But with the outreach to the former Secretaries of State, Secretaries of Defense. And you said the other things that were going on: that was bringing in members of Congress regularly on almost a weekly or biweekly basis to be briefed by General Casey and Ambassador Khalilzad, both Democrats and Republicans, an effort to reach out across the aisle. Talk about that, and why it did or didn't work.

ROVE: Well, I think that you can say none of this worked, but I'd make the argument that it worked [00:26:00] and it would've been worse if we hadn't done it. You talk about the policy outreach. If you take a look and look at the President's schedule outside of the policy side, you will see an enormous number of members of Congress coming down on a social basis. You'll see us making certain that we had these people traveling with us when we're going around the country.

FEAVER: Republicans, or Republicans and Democrats?

ROVE: Well, Republicans primarily traveling with us, but Republicans and Democrats alike on the social side, but a very heavy emphasis on the Republicans from a social angle because we wanted to keep them close, and the way to do that was to rely upon the personal relationship that the President had built up over the years with them, and sustain it by making him available to them.

We would have people down for cigars on the Truman Balcony, and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. There was just a lot of it. But it was primarily Republican,

but also Democrat. And [00:27:00] the object was, particularly with the Republicans, to keep them close so that the president's own party didn't fragment against him. And on the Democratic side, whether it was Ike Skelton, or whether it was --

FEAVER: Jane Harman?

ROVE:-- Jane Harman -- I was thinking Sidney [laughter from Feaver] -- and Jane Harman, there was an attempt to sort of keep open lines of communication, because the last thing we wanted was for them to feel -- for reasonable Democrats who were trying to be constructive -- the last thing we wanted them to feel was that they didn't have the ability to be constructive by talking and being with him.

FEAVER: A number of the people we've interviewed have identified the Samarra mosque bombing, the Golden Mosque, as a psychological turning point. Was that prominent in your memory?

ROVE: Well, yeah. This was a very strategic strike, clearly designed [00:28:00] to increase sectarian discord inside Iraq, and guess what? It succeeded. I mean, Shia versus Sunni, and a very smart move on the part of al-Qaeda, and a grave setback for us, because it increased the Shia versus Sunni, but it also was a demonstration of the inability of the government to protect -- I mean, this is one of the most important symbols, one of the most important shrines in the entire Middle East, and the central government could not protect even this hallowed place. A lot of people paid attention to the Shia versus Sunni, but my suspicion is that as equally

dangerous, or even more damaging, was the belief that our Iraqi government cannot protect us, the average Iraqi citizen.

FEAVER: [00:29:00] In the wake of that, there was another big push on the public outreach from the White House. The president gave three more big speeches. Do you recall that, and the impact of that?

ROVE: I don't. What I remember was, our response in aftermath of these things was, try and explain them and put them in context, and to show a way forward, but I don't remember the specifics of the three speeches.

FEAVER: One of the folks that we interviewed said they moved the needle in December with this outreach, and there was no movement of the needle into March, April --

ROVE: Right, right.

FEAVER: -- and that was taken as a sign that we're in a much worse place even four months later.

ROVE: Yeah, at some point in 2006 -- 2005, 2006; I think it's the early part of 2006 -- people began to just sort of shut down, and they sort of said, you know what?

FEAVER: "People" meaning the American public?

ROVE: Ordinary people, American public. It was sort of like [00:30:00] we've now completely soured. We were down on it, and now we've crossed over that invisible line, and don't talk to us anymore.

FEAVER: Around this time --

ROVE: Only events, only events are going to influence them. Speeches had lost their ability. They no longer had any purchase. He would go out and say things, but it couldn't change opinion. Only events would.

FEAVER: Now, in the wake of this, sort of the April-May-June timeframe, a number of the other interviewees have talked about how various elements of the White House and NSC staff were questioning the trajectory of the strategy, wanting to maybe gin up a --

ROVE: Right.

FEAVER: Were you aware of any of that?

ROVE: Oh, yeah, yeah.

FEAVER: And how did you connect to the NSC operations on Iraq during this particular -

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ROVE: Well, again, I'm more an observer, but there's clearly a growing feeling we need to have a change, and the strategy's not working, that the impetus for change [00:31:00] needs to come from within the White House and State, not from Defense. Defense was not going to -- Rumsfeld was basically intractable. The answer from every meeting was, we've just got to keep doing what we're doing. And the President was getting increasingly dissatisfied with the fact that we were not having results, and that rather than saying, Here's what we've got to do to re-gear this, that it was "We've got to keep doing what we're doing."

FEAVER: And you mentioned State. Some people talked of tensions between Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense. Did that play a role?

ROVE: I took that as defensiveness on Rumsfeld's part. My sense was Rumsfeld just -- he was stuck. I don't know whether it was because he'd been there for six years and had sort of run out, or whether it was that he actually believed that merely keeping doing what we were doing would somehow or another [00:32:00] at one point begin to click and work, or whether there were -- I don't put much stock in personal antagonisms. I think Rumsfeld fully -- every human being's capable of personal antagonisms, but I don't think that drove his policy view.

FEAVER: The critique from this time period from Defense was that they were showing up for the war but the rest of the government was not showing up. In particular, State wasn't deploying, and --

ROVE: Yeah, well, there was this constant argument that we needed to have more of the provincial reconstruction teams, and we needed to be bringing in more elements of the government, and so forth and so on. And look, everybody was trying to be responsive to that, in order, I think, more to remove the opportunity for Defense to complain, rather than to really believe that the ultimate answer to security was that we would have more crops and better water delivery systems and more schools.

Again, the question came first: could you provide [00:33:00] that kind of civil reconstruction effort, and that would thereby bring about security? Or did

you need to have security before you could have the success of those things? And look, my sense was that the government, throughout the rest of the government, was making a very substantial effort to be responsive to DoD's request with the PRTs, and recruiting a lot of very able people. A lot of very able people stepped forward to say, We want to be part of this effort.

FEAVER: So another event that's been singled out is the June meeting at Camp David where the national security team went to Camp David. Were you involved in that?

ROVE: No.

FEAVER: The President on day one is at Camp David, on day two beams in from the video from Baghdad.

ROVE: Right.

FEAVER: Do you remember that?

ROVE: Right.

FEAVER: OK. But that you didn't have any --

ROVE: No.

FEAVER: -- any role in that. During this time period, we're hearing from our interviewees that it's growing, questioning of the strategy [00:34:00] at various levels. There's White House, of course, State, Defense.

ROVE: Right, right.

FEAVER: But they're kept separate. They're siloed, in some cases compartmented, not allowed to talk to each other.

ROVE: Not aware of that.

FEAVER: OK. And is that a typical way the Bush administration would work?

ROVE: No, it's not. I'd be surprised if they were compartmentalized and told not to talk to each other. That's not the normal method of resolving policy disagreements, or arriving at policy formulations.

FEAVER: Well, one of the hypotheses that folks who told us about this said was that maybe it was a fear that it would leak and get mixed into the midterm election, that if it became known outside that the administration was losing confidence in the strategy, that would undermine [00:35:00] all our supporters out there who were --

ROVE: Yeah, I get that, and that's probably realistic, but my sense is if you wanted to talk about a reason for compartmentalization, it might've been that the President was not willing to move until -- He was having a sufficient enough conversation at one level that before he went to broader levels with larger numbers of people involved. He was comfortable with whom he was talking, and looking for clarity of his own thinking before it went to a broader review. I wouldn't have direct knowledge of those. I'm not aware of any decision that said let's not discuss this because it has to do with politics. He may have had that instinct, but I think it may have also more likely been, I want to have clarity in my own thinking, and I've got a sufficient range of people right now that we're discussing this change among [00:36:00] without broadening it.





FEAVER: Do you think the election delayed the launch of the official review, which was announced after the election? So that if the election happened in July, we would've gotten there faster? Or catalyzed it?

ROVE: Yeah, I don't know. Maybe. But I do think this: these things had to move in tandem. Do you recall when Hadley makes the approach to Gates?

FEAVER: It's in September.

ROVE: OK. So, look, you can talk about this strategy, but it's clear, Rumsfeld is going to be obstinate about a change, so these things would have to move together. So the President is thinking about a change in strategy, and thinking about a change in leadership, and then Hadley approaches Gates, Gates signals that it's possible. But rather than moving in September, October, the President does not want to -- now that there's a chance to get Gates -- damage his chances for [00:37:00] Gates to operate effectively by bringing this up in the final nine, ten weeks of the election.

FEAVER: Another question that's been raised is that -- we've been reminded that the President's dealing with many other issues, and not just Iraq.

ROVE: Right.

FEAVER: What were the other issues at that time that were competing for his attention, or in the mix?

ROVE: Yeah. Well, 2005 is Social Security. And by the end of 2005 basically the Congressional Republicans have signaled, led primarily by Tom DeLay, they've said: we're not going to deal with it. In fact, DeLay had spent most of the year sort

of convincing members, we don't want to ever have to deal with this, so don't take it up. But by the end of 2005, Social Security, my recollection, is largely done. 2006, we began on the effort on immigration reform. Actually, we'd begun on that already, but 2006 we're making a run at immigration [00:38:00] reform.

FEAVER: And is this siphoning off political capital, or POTUS concentration time?

ROVE: No. It's a very complicated process, so all the discussions among all the elements of the government that have to do with formulating this are Homeland Security, and Commerce, and you name it. They're all having a role at this. But look, this was separate and apart from it. And frankly, think about it: at this moment, who are we dealing with on immigration reform? Who are we working with hand in glove on this? John McCain and Ted Kennedy. Now, you could have no two people with more different views on the Iraq War than these two guys.

FEAVER: So the midterm election: how did you interpret the midterm election and what it said about the Iraq War and prospects for --

ROVE: Well, our losses were the average losses, and so what it said to me was that [00:39:00] we had the average reaction, largely driven by the war, not by the economy. The economy was in pretty good shape.

FEAVER: Scandals?

ROVE: Some, in the House in particular. In fact, if you look at it, in the internal polling we are coming back until the revelations about Foley in I think it's late September, early October. What's interesting about that is the chairman of the Democratic

Congressional Campaign Committee is a young hot dog from Chicago named Rahm Emanuel, and it turns out in retrospect that they were in possession of the emails from Tom Foley -- or, excuse me, not from Tom Foley --

MCCORMICK: Mark Foley.

FEAVER: Mark Foley.

ROVE: Mark Foley. They were in the possession of the emails from Mark Foley in early 2005. So rather than taking Bill Burton, who was then Rahm Emanuel's press secretary, somehow gets a hold of them. And Emanuel and Burton and others, rather than turning these over [00:40:00] to the House Committee on Pages, which is charged with protecting pages from exactly this kind of abuse, they hold onto them and then wait until the fall of '06, and when just -- if you take a look at the polling, we're on our way back, we're digging out of the earlier difficulties, we're coming back, we've got DeLay is seemingly behind us, blah, blah, blah. And then they drop these, and bam, the bottom drops out.

So, economy OK, scandals bad, war terrible, but I think the driver in this was equal parts, sort of the natural tendency in the third term to say there are Democratic seats that have a Republican in them, let's take them back, and let's express our dissatisfaction (the natural dissatisfaction); and then exaggerated by the scandals, and hurt by the war, no ifs, ands, or buts about it. But the people who blame it all on the war generally do so [00:41:00] in order to avoid responsibility for the kind of tolerance of the kind of behavior that they had. Mark

Foley was apparently known within the conference for this. I admire Rahm Emanuel, he's a good man, but this was wrong, to take this and hold onto this information. This guy Foley was preying on pages for over a year, almost a year and a half, while those emails sat there waiting to be deployed for a political purpose at the right moment, and they had a moral obligation to say this guy is preying upon pages, we ought to turn it over to the Commission on Pages, which would've, in my opinion, looked at those and said only one thing, which is, time for you to go. I mean, Hastert called him in and said, "You're going." And that would've happened before had it not been.

FEAVER: So the President announces that there's going to be [00:42:00] a big review chaired by J.D. Crouch, the Deputy National Security Advisor. At this point, did you have a sense of where that review would end up? There's been a debate of, well, it was already known at that time, and this was just Kabuki Theater, or was genuine, open-ended --

ROVE: I think it was genuinely open-ended, but I think there was a predilection for a preference for the Surge. I think the President's mind, by the summer of '06, is already that the answer to this is that security must come first. That would require surging additional troops to reestablish security, that the security had to be in Sunni and Shia areas, and that all of the rest of this economic and political and cultural progress was at risk unless and until security was obtained, and that would only require putting Americans back into the fight, and with sufficient force to

bring about the achievement of strict -- like the [00:43:00] Anbar Awakening and so forth.

FEAVER: Did your office have any connection to the Iraq Strategy Review that the President launched?

ROVE: No. No, no. But at some point I have a minor role in that the President has arrived at this surge before the Surge is formally declared, but there are people out there who are talking about doing exactly what Bush wants to do, and one of them was Jack Keane. But the President and I met with him, so I said, "Mr. President, we need to bring people like that in here so that if your idea is similar to their idea, you need to bring them in here so that they can tell you about their idea, so that when you do your idea, it's their idea and they defend it." And so we brought -- I can't remember who we brought. I know we brought Jack Keane in, and others. And it was helpful, because it helped refine the President's thinking, helped give him a greater sense of the strengths and weaknesses of this approach, [00:44:00] the challenges and the opportunities, but it also helped create a corps of people who felt sort of in essence we've got to go defend this, because you know what? I played a role in helping formulate this.

Now, the President was well along this path, so they were helping burnish it, rather than develop it, but that didn't matter. All we wanted was to get people who had been talking about directionally the same thing, we wanted to pick their

brain, to help refine the concept, but we also wanted to have more voices to be out there defending and advocating this, and explaining this.

MCCORMICK: When did you begin thinking about or advising the President on the political ramifications specifically of a surge, increasing the number of troops and reorienting strategy? Do you recall?

ROVE: Well, look, you don't advise him on the political consequences of something. He may have an idea about what it is, but he didn't really care about the political consequences of this, if you mean Republican/Democrat partisanship. He did know that [00:45:00] by saying that we need a change, that that would cause some pause on the part of the American people, but he felt confident that explaining what it is that he wanted to do -- in essence, surge troops in in order to achieve a military victory, to stabilize the security of the country, and defeat and kill bad guys -- that the American people, he felt confident the American people would say: You know what? If you're serious about it, then I'll support you, but if you're not serious about it I'm not going to support you.

MCCORMICK: As we hone in on when the decision is actually made then, I guess leaving out the advising, when did you begin kind of working through what the ramifications would be specifically of surging troops? Do you recall --

ROVE: I can't remember, but sometime before the 2006 election, because he wants the change in policy, he wants the change in personnel. Directionally, we have a notion of where -- of what -- where it's going to go. It's not withdrawing, it's

adding. [00:46:00] It's not enclaves, it's expansion. It's not back them up, it's lead them in. And again, the political consequences of that are -- the question is not, well, what's the political consequence of that going to be? The political question is how best can you sell this, and what do you need in order to have as much support as possible within the political system for this?

FEAVER: So just drilling down on that, the -- there's a journalist account of a meeting at the White House on November 11, 2006. So this is after the midterms, and it's before the J.D. Crouch-led review, and it's Steve Hadley's office, or Secretary of State Condi Rice and staff. And they're assessing whether State and [00:47:00] the White House are on the same page on what to do, and the outcome of that meeting is they're not on the same page, that the White House is leaning towards the Surge, State Department seems to be leaning towards a different approach that involved concentrating on FOBs. Are you familiar with the State position?

ROVE: Yes, is this Woodward?

FEAVER: It's reported in Woodward and elsewhere, yes.

ROVE: Right, right. Yeah, I'm not familiar with it.

FEAVER: OK.

ROVE: Other than the book.

FEAVER: OK, in that meeting, according to one of the accounts, Secretary Rice says one of the arguments against a surge is that the midterm elections have made it impossible. The American people have spoken; they voted against the war. We

can't respond to a rebuke like that with doing the opposite of what the public seemed to be saying. Were you aware of that view [00:48:00] inside the administration? Did people advocate that view?

ROVE: I may have been at the time, but it wasn't a principal thing. Look, two things: one is the 2006 election was not exclusively, or even substantially, all about Iraq. It was about the natural tendency -- I mean, we had over-performed in 2004. We held seats that shouldn't have been ours.

You talk about surge. In political science, there's a surge and -- I'll come up with a name in a minute, but it's surge and something. Surge and decline. Surge and decline. A party will surge in a presidential election year, win seats it shouldn't win, and then it will decline in a midterm election, particularly the second midterm election. Well, we had had the 2002 election, where we gravely over-performed, then the 2004 election, so we had two surge elections in a row, and so we were due for some flashback.

But if you take a look at the seats that we lost in 2006, [00:49:00] there were a significant number of them that were involved with scandal. We had the Foley situation. We had a seat in California. We had four or five seats around the country where there was a highly visible Republican scandal involved in the loss of the seat. So the President also is given by the American people a wide latitude in foreign affairs, as long as they understand what the goal is and they accept the goal. They may not applaud the means, they will certainly be unhappy with the



circumstances, but they will support a policy, or at least the Congress is going to be limited in its ability to deny the President that policy if the President has clarity about the goals and the average American says: Well, I'm not happy about the circumstances or the situation, but you know what -- and I may even say I'm mildly opposed to your policy -- but [00:50:00] if it starts to work, and I start showing support for it, then the political system will accept it and applaud it. The question was if we began the Surge, how soon would the American people perceive what it was doing, and would that cause them to change their attitudes? And the fact of the matter is they did change their attitudes.

FEAVER: So just to clarify that discussion, did the President ask you, do we have the political support to pull off the Surge. And if he had asked you, what would have been your answer?

ROVE: Well I remember we had esoteric discussions about, would the American people accept this, and the point was they'll accept it: A, if it works, and B, if the goal is victory.

FEAVER: And this was what you were telling him.

ROVE: Right. Right, right. If the goal of this is to merely stabilize the circumstances and figure out what we're going to do next, the support is not going to be there, is not going to be durable. But if you change the policy, and the policy goal [00:51:00] is victory, you will at least cause a pause in our decline, and then if the policy begins to work then the American people will respond to that. But it has to visibly work.

We have to kill bad guys, we have to win back territory, we have to have neutral observers, or impartial observers, or even people who are biased against us, begin to acknowledge in the public narrative this is working.

FEAVER: And that alternative you described of just staying there to manage, and then figure out -- that's one way --

ROVE: The worst of all possible worlds.

FEAVER: That's one way of describing the State Department proposal was that, to stay there, to maintain our leverage for the long haul.

ROVE: Well, and that was what DoD was -- they had a different description of how you do it. It wasn't forward operating bases. It was train whatever, whatever. They had a little litany for it.

FEAVER: Stand up, stand down, yeah.

ROVE: Stand up, stand down. As they stand up, we stand down. But both of them [00:52:00] were, in essence -- Both of them had a lack of clarity of what it was we were trying to do. It was hard to explain what those were to the American people, and if you did explain them to the American people, what they basically said is, we're willing to accept the horror of what's going on over there and hope that something good works out.

FEAVER: Would you present this view just to the President, or in a strategy session? And did you get pushback from the other principals?

ROVE: You know what? I can't remember. I mean, I'm confident there were -- I don't remember any climactic moment in the strategy where Condi Rice and I -- she wasn't in the meetings at that point, she was there the first four years -- where Steve Hadley and I would've gone after this. But, I mean, there were discussions about this throughout the White House.

FEAVER: So the other thing that happens at this time is the release of the Baker-Hamilton report. That story begins much earlier, a year earlier. Were you involved in that at all, and [00:53:00] can you just tell the story of, from your perspective, of Frank Wolf's efforts to get the bigger answer?

ROVE: Yeah. Well, Wolf is pressing us, and we're trying to deflect it, but it ultimately -- this becomes one way to relieve some of the pressure.

FEAVER: Why were you trying to deflect it?

ROVE: Because, look, first of all, it was a Congressional interference with foreign policy. I mean, it's one thing for the House Foreign Relations Committee to say, We're going to conduct hearings. It's another thing for the House Foreign Relations Committee -- not even the chairman, but a significant member, but not the chairman -- to say, "We want to force --" This is almost as bad as the Committee -- this is worse, in fact, than the Committee on the Conduct of the War during the Civil War. At least that was a Congressional committee trying to interfere with presidential prerogatives. Here's a Congressional committee saying, You must

establish a committee which then on our behalf will interfere with your conduct of the war.

And fortunately we had two men in the form of Baker and Hamilton that while they both had [00:54:00] deep skepticism about the war in Iraq, nonetheless had an appropriate view of presidential prerogatives, and, as a result, had a report that -- I mean, there are parts of that report that you could read this way, and the other reports that you could read diametrically opposed, which is why, at the end, my attitude was, embrace the report, because the report has within it the fundamental premise for the Surge. You either ought to win, and if you are put the resources in to do it, and, if not, get out. Well, great, embrace it. Thank you for the good advice.

FEAVER: Mm-hmm. Were you involved in the interactions with the Commission at all?

ROVE: No. But when the Commission was coming to a close, the question was, how do we approach this? What do we do with this? And I can't -- I used to carry around a copy, and I'd highlight it. I remember a little blue paperclip on the side, because it literally has the basis for the Surge in it. And so the question was, [00:55:00] do you really want to pick a fight with Jim Baker and Hamilton, or do you want to embrace the idea that they've given you good advice and you're going to act upon it? And I was of the latter school.

FEAVER: And did that view prevail in the White House?

ROVE: I think it probably -- I think it largely did.

FEAVER: The other thing that happened --

ROVE: My sense, also, was DoD was very, I mean, very upset about the committee. But by the time it comes out, Rumsfeld is gone. But there was a lot of chatter.

FEAVER: Around this time, in early December, the President goes with the Vice President to the Pentagon to meet with the Chiefs, and this has been reported on in various settings, and confirmed in our interviews. One of the things he takes with him over there is a commitment to increase [00:56:00] the size of the ground forces, and thereby release the strain on the rotations. Were you involved in that?

ROVE: I was aware of it, but not involved in it.

FEAVER: And would that not be staffed through the Chief of Staff's office? Because there's significant budget implications.

ROVE: It would go to OMB and NSC. It wouldn't go through the general staffing process.

FEAVER: Were you involved at all with the change in personnel that accompanied the Surge decision? So there's a change at CENTCOM. There's a change of MNF-I, a change --

ROVE: [shakes head no]

FEAVER: The --

ROVE: No.

FEAVER: Controversially, the President promotes General Casey. What's your view of that, or were you involved in that process?

ROVE: No, I wasn't. I observed that, and I think we were on an airplane [00:57:00] where he was talking about it. And look, you can't take the entire structure and blow it up. You have to send signals that we're not scapegoating. I think his attitude was Casey had -- say what you will about his performance -- he was capable of doing the next job, and it signaled that it wasn't blowing everything up. I think he felt this was necessary in order to have internal peace.

FEAVER: I say "controversially." Do you hear from supporters of the President, advocates of the Surge, for instance, say, Jack Keane you had mentioned, but others from that wing -- McCain -- they were strong supporters of, advocates of the Surge? Did you hear from them dismay?

ROVE: I remember hearing something, but I can't even tell you who it was from. But again, the point was Casey was [00:58:00] capable of following orders, and a course had been set, and there was no necessity to sort of engage in past recriminations. In fact, it was better that we have everybody aboard rather than saying, OK, we're going to settle some old scores here, and you did this wrong, and you did this wrong, and blah, blah, and you had a different idea, and you weren't enthusiastic about this, blah, blah, and you're out of here. Instead, it was to say, who's the right person to do this job, and who will help the chain of command, and who will help continuity, and how can we keep a unified front. But I don't remember the specific details, and can't even -- I remember members of Congress talking about it. It



wasn't McCain. It might've been Lindsey. But there was some upsetness about Casey.

FEAVER: The sequencing, as we've been able to uncover it, is the President and his advisors agree on a Surge of up to five [00:59:00] brigades, but then the debate was do we announce five all at once, or one, and as we need them? Were you involved in that discussion?

ROVE: I remember those discussions, and my view was -- as I recall, there was difficulty in getting a commitment from DoD that there were five brigades available. I had two views. One is if there was difficulty in getting five brigades, they may pull them back. Better to commit to the five brigades at the beginning. And the second thing was, if you're going to say to the American people we're going to surge, then surge. And maybe it's easier to explain, well, you know what, we decided that we were succeeding so well we didn't need the fifth brigade, than it was to say, Ladies and gentlemen, we need another brigade.

So I was in favor of, if we have gone through all the effort to get the commitment to the five brigades, then say five brigades, and if you wanted to say "up to," fine, but say five brigades. And [01:00:00] I thought it would show determination. The enemy would hear it, and that's important. Will matters. And if we had been wishy-washy about it, I think it would've had an effect on their mindset, and if we showed we're coming strong, that would similarly have an effect on them.

And on the Iraqis. Are we in for a penny or are we in for a pound? And I think one of the things that the Iraqis were wondering at that point was, can the President of the United States sustain his support here, given the political pressures at home? Now they had political pressures of their own. They had the Shiite militias, they had Shiite paramilitary/political organizations growing. So they had a keen awareness of political pressures, and it colored their view. Are these guys going to be able to stay with us and [01:01:00] how does that affect our internal politics as well?

FEAVER: There wasn't a sense that it would be easier to sell one brigade than five brigades to the American people?

ROVE: Sure, that was the counterargument. The counterargument is, say that we're a little at a time. But we'd already gone through that. We'd gone through that in the 1960s when we kept stepping up the number of troops over the period of time, and the American people had some sort of memory of that. Better to say bam, than to say little bit, little bit, little bit, little bit, little bit.

And look, here's the deal: what did the Surge say? The Surge said that a certain number of troops were necessary in order to achieve critical mass. And everybody seemed to agree -- I'm not the military expert -- but everybody seemed to agree five brigades was what was needed, was likely what was going to be needed. So why not explain to the American people that it's going to be five brigades?



FEAVER: The other political calculation we've heard on this might -- we've heard from some [01:02:00] interviewees -- was the President will only get one swing at this plate, and so you've got to take the maximum swing.

ROVE: Right. I agree.

FEAVER: So that leads to one of the other arguments that was made about keeping Casey on the team, was to keep everybody on the team, in anticipation for opposition from the newly Democratically-controlled Senate and House. Can you speak to that at all?

ROVE: Well, we were worried about what they would do, and whether they would take efforts to block funding, and so forth, but you just had to manage it. And again, fortunately the Constitution does give the President relatively wide latitude on foreign affairs, and the conduct of military operations, and it would require them to do something that they were not willing to do, [01:03:00] which was basically defund the war. I think their attitude seemed to be, when the Surge began, is, all right, we'll give them one last chance, and if this fails then we're set up for 2008, and we're set up for congressional and presidential, and if we need to we've always got time to stop him. If it goes really, really south, then we can defund him and force him to come home. But they were a little bit back on their heels.

FEAVER: Some advisors thought that they might see this as a chance to -- that they might actually tacitly support it, in the sense of, make the President pay the political price for stabilizing the situation, and then we'll inherit in 2009, a better Iraq. And

so expecting that presidential candidates might actually mute their criticism, so as to give it a chance to succeed. Did you hold that view?

ROVE: No, I didn't. [01:04:00] I did think there were people like Jane Harman and others who thought that the Surge might succeed, and that a Democratic president -- because, again, it's hard to get a third term -- that a Democratic president would inherit a more stable Iraq than a less stable Iraq. But I don't think that was a big -- I don't think the Democrats sat over there and said, Well, let them have a go at it, because we'll end up --, I don't think that was their dominant opinion. I think the dominant opinion was, Well, let them have a go at it, because we've got plenty of time to take advantage of this if it doesn't work.

FEAVER: General Keane was also consulting with Democratic senators and making his case to them. Did he tell you at all about whether he was making the sale across the aisle?

ROVE: I don't remember. By that point he was talking more to -- I had very little interaction with him. I knew about his work, because I followed what he was doing at the American Enterprise Institute, and I had had a meeting with him [01:05:00] about it before he went to see the President. But I wasn't being briefed by him on his activities. That was more likely to be in the Vice President's office.

FEAVER: So our focus is mostly on the decision making, but can you speak just briefly to how difficult it was to maintain the political support for the Surge, post-decision-

making in the '07 time period, and also how anything that in the decision making might've affected the doability of the politics in '07?

ROVE: Say that last thing again?

FEAVER: Did the way the Surge review happened help or make harder maintaining political support in '07?

ROVE: I think it helped, because one of the things that had happened is that we had implicitly credentialed and deputized a series of explainers, like Keane and others, who made their way around Capitol Hill and were constantly [01:06:00] reinforcing us. If you will, we had our own force multiplier, by having the Jack Keanes of the world and others out there explaining it.

And obviously it helped enormously to have some strong advocates, particularly McCain in the Senate, out there talking about the necessity of this, and a constant flow of people to the region. There was almost an immediate sense that things were getting better after the Surge. Within a matter of months people were saying, this is having an effect, or this has the potential to have an effect. So congressional support on the Republican side -- my sense was we were going like this, and the Surge sort of held it like this, and maybe even brought it up a little bit.

FEAVER: Some said that the success of the Surge was coming too slow in '07, and that there was danger of losing the Republican Senators, that they would take the long,

lonely walk up Pennsylvania Avenue, [01:07:00] and tell the President it's time to pull this. Was that your concern in '07?

ROVE: No. I knew that was a concern, and I worried about it, but look, it was what it was. It either was going to work or not work, and we needed to hold that off as long as possible, those kind of meetings, and do what we could. I think Cheney played a role in this, because Cheney had relationships up on the Hill. We did have McConnell, who was upset that they'd lost, and we had others who sort of basically said, I would've been a committee chair were it not for Iraq. And so you had to deal with that. But on the other hand, the fact is we didn't get to a point where we had the long, lonely walk down Pennsylvania Avenue of a half a dozen or a dozen Senators to say that to the President.

FEAVER: How close run a thing was it, do you think, politically?

ROVE: I don't know, because --and again, remember, we had done an extraordinary amount to [01:08:00] help the caucuses, House and Senate, from the moment he came in, an enormous amount. We raised money. We provided fundraisers. We provided surrogates. We provided assistance through the National Committee. We transferred large sums to the Senate Committee and the Congressional Committee. So from the normal political thing, they were never in a place where they could say, "Those guys have forgotten us."

In 2006, for example, we had Charlie Bass, who was really -- he was a New Hampshire Congressman, deeply concerned about the war, and agonized, in agony

over the war. And rather than sort of say, if you're agonizing about the war, I'm sorry, we can't be with you, we moved heaven and earth to try and get him reelected in the fall of '06, and he knew it, and his colleagues knew it. That was the thing: if we were out there busting our gut to try and get somebody reelected in a difficult circumstance, their colleagues knew it, even those in the Senate who were not up for election. Then the President had, [01:09:00] from almost day one, done an extraordinary job in developing personal relationships with members of Congress.

I had a Democrat tell me recently, said, "If you'd told me that I would've been to the White House more when Bush was in office than when Obama was in office, I would've laughed at you," but he said that's exactly what happened. And it was bipartisan. But the Republicans got attention that they had not gotten in eight years, and they got a lot of it. And a lot of them felt a personal friendship and kinship with Bush. Even Wolf, who had come from a relatively safe district -- though it was trending away from him, and who was sort of a solitary figure -- I think he felt he had a good personal relationship with the President. And the way the President treated him on the Iraq Study Group, I think, he didn't walk away from that experience saying, He fought me and he was against me. He may have said, They disagreed with some of what I did, [01:10:00] they may not have liked the idea, but you know what? They worked with me on it.

And so those personal relationships helped a lot. And look, he just had good skills. It's easier to distance yourself from somebody that you don't feel you have a relationship with. And a lot of them felt not only did they have a relationship with him, but it was personal, and went both ways, and that he and his team had done everything they could to help him or her and their colleagues.

FEAVER: So is there anything more you want to say about the President's decision, or anything we haven't asked you about?

ROVE: Well, no. Look --

FEAVER: Or the announcement in January, anything?

ROVE: No, no. People will look back, and my hope is that historians look back and say this was a critical, a gutsy, courageous call that worked. Even President Obama acknowledged that it had worked in 2012. And then history will make [01:11:00] other judgments about what followed after.

FEAVER: And if it had not worked, what do you think?

ROVE: That it would've been brutal. Not that they're exactly analogous, but this would've been the bloody fall of 1864 without Atlanta and without advances. The American people would've said, OK, we gave you a shot, and we're going to turn on you viciously, because we gave you that one last shot and it didn't work out like you had hoped.

FEAVER: Well, thank you for coming.

ROVE: Great, thank you.

MCCORMICK: Yeah, thank you so much.

ROVE: You bet. Absolutely.

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