The Surge – Collective Memory Project

Interviewee: Frank Wolf

Member of the House of Representatives, Virginia's 10th District, 1981-2015

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[Begin Transcription]

MCCORMICK: Great.

WOLF: Let me turn my cell phone off so it doesn't go off, and you end up --

CRAWFORD: It's January 20th, and we're here today to interview former Congressman Frank Wolf. My name is Aaron Crawford with the Southern Methodist University Center for Presidential History.

FEAVER: And my name is Peter Feaver from Duke University.

MCCORMICK: My name is Evan McCormick, also from Southern Methodist University.

CRAWFORD: Congressman, can you tell us what exactly -- give us a little bit of a history of your relationship with the issue of Iraq, say, in August of 2005, when you took your third trip there.

WOLF: Well, I led the first delegation to Afghanistan when the war broke out, and when I voted for the war, for the Iraq War, I felt an obligation to go. They're going to send men or women into combat, you won't go -- I once worked for a Republican Congressman [01:00] during the Vietnam War, and I said, "You gotta go, you gotta see it." And the administration wouldn't let me go. White House wouldn't let me go, DOD wouldn't let me go, so I flew off by myself, my aide, Dan Scandling, and we met with a group in Kuwait, we went in, we went to Nasiriyah -- Nasiriyah is Ur, if you're Southern Methodist, Abraham, Ur. I went up to the concertina wire, and I said, "I'm a Congressman." They brought me in. They said, "This is Ur," and we went through, we went in the hospital, where Jessica Lynch had been in there, and down in the basement of the hospital, where Chemical Ali

was moving the troops, and making plans. What I saw was pretty amazing. We were doing well, and yet, the administration didn't want anybody in Congress -- in Congress, there's this stupid rule that they have, and the State Department, that any codel who went in, you had to kind of be in after sunrise, [02:00] and go out by sunset. Well, things happen at night, things happen, so I went in, and we spent a number of days.

FEAVER: What year was that? Do you remember?

WOLF: Right after the war broke out. Right after the war broke out. We just quickly -- just, I could not, for my conscience, I could not have voted for that, and not have -- I just felt almost a moral obligation. And so, right after it broke out, they wouldn't let me go to Afghanistan. And we jumped on a World Food Programme, Tony Hall[1] --

CRAWFORD: What were the reasons?

WOLF: Well, I think you have to talk to the administration. They just wanted the Congress -- you have the junkets to Paris, and Rome, and they just don't push it, and the administration does not encourage it. Neither administration -- when Kosovo, I was one of the few Republicans supporting the activity in Kosovo. They wouldn't let me go, I went on my own. But I don't know, you'd have to ask them. [03:00] Then we went back again a second time, Chris Shays and I, and one of his staff, and one of mine -- we flew in, never talked to the Embassy. In fact, the

[1] Tony P. Hall served as the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Agencies for Food and Agriculture from 2002 until 2006. He served in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1979 to 2002.

Embassy said they wouldn't meet with us. Bremer actually said he wouldn't meet with us. I said if I got to the embassy, I was going to throw a stone at his window. We went through Iraq. We went to Iraqi weddings, and we didn't tell them who we were. We just said, we were businessmen, we were looking for investment, and things, and things were going relatively well then. We traveled throughout the area, and then, on the last day of the trip, we drove up to Baghdad. And we went into the American embassy, and in fact, Rumsfeld was there at that time, and Rumsfeld, I met Rumsfeld, he was very cordial, and very friendly, and -- so things seemed to be going well.

FEAVER: That would have been '04 timeframe, possibly, if Bremer was still there.

WOLF: I don't know the exact -- yeah, yeah -- [04:00] I tried to go in again, and then, I went in this last time, before the Iraq study group, and there, we did connect. The military took us in. We went with General Petraeus, we took it -- went to the country -- the changing, kind of, the moment that struck me when were in Tikrit -- and we had soldiers guarding us in the front, and in the back, and then we had a State Department, or DOD, had arranged for a private security guard. I think they were out of England. I forget the name of the group, and we went in a palace, one of Saddam's palace, and I wanted to go to a hospital. I always go to a hospital when I go to a place, and there are guards running in before we went into a room, they were going like this, and -- and they were putting guns in the faces of women and children, and I said, "This is crazy, [05:00] let's go." And I came back, and I

said, "We need fresh eyes." because many of the people who are making these decisions are not really there. We spent night after night with sheiks, and in people's homes, and we listened to them, and so I said, "Something's wrong."

And I've always been supportive. I like President Bush, I've been a big fan of President Bush, and I really admired his dad. And, so I said, "We just gotta change this thing." I don't know that I know the answer, but I think we need fresh eyes. We need people who, one, are not going to be politically involved, they're not going to make this a issue in the presidential race, or in the congressional race, and so, I came back, and there was really pushback from the administration. They didn't want to do it. There was not any particular great interest in the Congress, either, and then I put the bill in, I was the Chairman of the Subcommittee, and I just didn't check with anyone, and we put it in. Steve Hadley, I think, was very good [06:00] on helping the Bush administration to come around. Initially, Rumsfeld, I went over to see Rumsfeld, and then I met with Rumsfeld at my committee. He was very much for it, and then a Marine Corps general, General, who is chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff --

FEAVER: Pete Pace.

WOLF: Pace, he was for it. But the political people, and the congressional, wasn't really excited about it. But Hadley I kept calling, and to Steve Hadley's credit, I don't think there would have been a Iraq Study Group, had it not been for Steve Hadley, I knew State wasn't excited about it, I know the White House wasn't

excited about it, but so, I think -- and eventually, we sort of moved this process. It was a 1.3, I just put it in, as Chairman of the [inaudible] committee[2], we didn't check with anyone, it was a 1.3 million dollar, basically, it was an earmark. It didn't help any company or anything, or it -- [07:00] but it helped the issue, and the concept was to bring -- I'm a conservative Republican. My best friend in Congress is a Democrat, Congressman Tony Hall. We've traveled the world together, we do things together. I have a great relationship across the aisle, and so I felt it had to be bipartisan.

And I think you also needed people who were not ever going to run for office. You needed people who were of such caliber that they would not exploit this. They would not run to the media, too, and so, that was sort of the test. And of course, Jim Baker, who I've had the greatest respect for over the years, I'm a Jim Baker fan, and also, Lee Hamilton, I served with Lee for a number of years in the Congress, and those two sort of embodied -- obviously, Lee Hamilton was never going to run for office again, and obviously, Jim Baker wasn't going to run for Congress, and I think that sort of, they were the type of people that I felt could really -- fresh eyes, [08:00] weren't going to run to the press, and I think hurt the administration, or leak it to help anybody else, and I think the fact that Baker was there must have raised the comfort level at the White House somewhat. And I

[2] Wolf chaired the Subcommittee on Foreign Operations, Export Financing, and Related Programs, a standing committee within the House Appropriations Committee. It is unclear in this instance whether Mr. Wolf is referring to a specific committee like this one, or if he speaks a false-start when speaking the word "committee."

think that Lee Hamilton was there, it must have raised the comfort level of the Democratic establishment, and the Democrats in Congress, and that was the concept, to have fresh eyes looking at it, and coming back, and it's like if I'm -- I have a lot of kids and grandkids, and I set up trains at Christmastime, and I'm trying to kind of do something, and I can't quite get it. Sometimes, one of my grandkids come along, or my -- one of my son, I'll say, "Hey, I missed one, how about that?" They see things that I don't see, and that was the concept of fresh eyes to look at it, because I think that would have been helpful. It's always helpful. It's always, it's like, if you have a sickness, or an illness, you go to a doctor, you get a second opinion.

MCCORMICK: To drill down on the timeline a little bit, when you come back from Iraq, and, it would have been late summer or fall of 2005?

WOLF: I don't have the dates. I didn't really look at [09:00] that.

MCCORMICK: How did you go about building support for this idea of fresh eyes?

WOLF: I didn't really build the support for it.

MCCORMICK: So, when you met with the adminis--

WOLF: I just did it. I met with various people, and frankly, I'm not here to criticize anybody, so I'm not going to put any names connecting. If I say a name, it's going to be a good thing. Steve Hadley helped me work it through, I can still remember I was taking my kids, my grandkids, we have 16 grandkids, and we're taking them downtown, it was a governmental holiday. And I got a call from Hadley, I was in

the car, trying not to talk on the cellphone, because obviously, I have kids in the car, and-- and he said, "I think we're working this thing through," and so, I now have to sign off with the State Department, and so, he was the -- that was the only one. And Congress, I just didn't feel I had an obligation to -- it was my conscience, I saw this, [10:00] I experienced it, I believe it was right, I was not trying to hurt anybody, we were -- and every time, I'll tell you, if you ever go out to Walter Reed, and during those days, periodically, I would go out to Walter Reed, and you see people who lost their legs, and I just think -- so, I think Hadley was the key of getting the administration on board, and once he did, then you had CSIS, and you had Ambassador Djerejian, who runs the Baker Center, and you had Ambassador Solomon, and they all came together to kind of put everything together.

FEAVER: Can I just ask about the rationale? I remember you buttonholing me --

WOLF: Yeah, I called you a couple of times, yeah --

FEAVER: Yeah, and I can still see it. We're in the West Wing lobby, and you were lobbying me on this issue, to try to help, because I think at that point, Steve was still not a hundred -- hadn't committed to it. [11:00] And the administration had to make a calculation, do we want this, or can we block it? And if we can't block it, then, of course, how best to work with you? But the rationale that you were -- one of the benefits of it that you mentioned to me was that when people went to Iraq, they saw more than what they saw on TV. This was the time -- do you remember, the war protester camping outside Crawford, this was August --

WOLF: Yes, I, yeah --

FEAVER: -- and the media narrative was unrelentingly negative, and you said you've gone there, you see more of the story, you talk to the soldiers, there's a more positive story that can be told --

WOLF: Correct, there is, there was --

FEAVER: --but, the Bush administration has no more credibility, because of WMD, etc. So, it was fresh eyes, but it was also fresh voices.

WOLF: [12:00] Right, there were some positive things. I actually did an op-ed piece for the Washington Post. I don't know where he is, but it was back in --

CRAWFORD: September --

WOLF: -- yeah, '06, and I said there are some very positive things that are going on. There were -- I think there will be a lot of -- when history looks at this, there will be a lot of times that you can say bad mistakes were made. Two of the biggest mistakes were one, when the Iraqi military was disbanded. Frankly, when I was in -- we were in up in Erbil, and through the region last year -- there are Iraqi military who are running ISIS.

Second one, that was when the Obama administration pulled out. Literally, things were beginning to work out, and if it were -- and when the administration pulled out, and if you were there talking to people, that just sort of kind of guaranteed that this thing was not going to be very successful. So, there were some [13:00] very, very positive things. Positive things for women, positive things

for corruption, positive things for -- there were. And I felt the Bush administration -- if you're the one that's doing something, it's hard for you to say all the great things, and I think better to have a group to look into it. And if you look at the Iraq Study Group, there were some positive comments, they were -- so they were not all negative. But ultimately, it was from that point on, what do you do to be successful? And I think when President Obama basically shut down America's involvement in Iraq, that pretty much guaranteed the failure.

FEAVER: But going back to the fresh voices point, that would explain the choice of some of the people that you put on there who are not necessarily military strategists. If this was only about "we gotta figure out a different way," if it's -- you said the second opinion. If it's a surgery, we need a second opinion you go to other surgeons, but if it's --

WOLF: Well, you had Panetta, yeah. There had to be [14:00] --

FEAVER: -- Jordan, or --

WOLF: -- yeah, it had to be people who one, had a credibility within their own parties.

FEAVER: Right.

WOLF: Jordan and -- and the Democratic Party; he was a big fundraiser for them, and --

FEAVER: Right.

WOLF: -- and so you had to have people like that, originally, Rudy Giuliani was on there, if you recall, Rudy Giuliani pulled off. But Gates was on the commission.

FEAVER: Right, so some experts, but then also some that were more -- Sandra Day O'Connor.

WOLF: Yeah.

FEAVER: Smart people, but who would not be giving -- recommending changes in strategy per se, but if they said things are going better, -- they would persuade people that the White House couldn't persuade.

WOLF: Everyone on there, I think, had a credibility with their own constituencies.

CRAWFORD: Yeah. So, right now, we're talking about a positive attitude about how well things were going, but what about the security situation --

WOLF: Well, no, no, no, it was not all positive. The very fact that I had to go into a hospital in Tikrit, and I had armed forces, private security people putting AK-47s in the women's faces, [15:00] was not a positive. I knew this thing was unraveling. I think the mistake was that there were many mistakes, many good things. It was a mistake when you disbanded -- I met with young Yazidi girls last year in Dohuk, who, the stories they told. we went out to the front lines with the Peshmerga. The Peshmerga told, X and Y and Z is running ISIS, all former Iraqi military people. When you disband it, the military, some of these guys had no place to go, their pensions were -- some went to Damascus, some went here. They are now, in essence, a lot of the operatives in there. So I'm not inferring that all things were good, and I don't think Peter would infer that. There were some positive things.

I thought you could make lemonade out of lemons in there, but I thought you need a kind of a change, but I'm not an expert. I can see it wasn't [16:00] going well, but I would never tell you that I knew what should be done, that's why I thought you bring people in that are experts, and have different experiences, life experiences. I think Gates is a pretty credible guy. I served with Panetta, Lee Hamilton, who used to be Chairman on the Intel Committee, Jim Baker understands that region so I thought if they could bring people like that in, whose credibility is such that they could come up with some other ideas, and make this thing work.

CRAWFORD: Let me ask maybe a little more general question here, so we can get a sense of attitudes. About that time, August, September of 2005, how you would characterize the mood in Congress about the issue of Iraq, and what did they know?

WOLF: Worried, worried, how's this thing going to go? I remember I was part of a group that went down to meet with the President, it was set up by Bill Young, who was Chairman of the Appropriations Committee and Defense Approps, and one of my [17:00] good friends, Duncan Hunter, we were both elected together. He was not supposed to win, and I was not supposed to win, and we both sat at the same table together in 1980. Duncan became Chairman of the Armed Service Committee; his son is a Marine who fought in Fallujah. We went down, and you

could just sense that there was a lot of angst, but not necessarily wanting to know, saying that you should do this, or should do that.

And there tends to be, if you're a -- the fairness is, or you're a Democratic Congressman, you tend not to want to hurt the Democratic Party, and you tend to want to be for them, if you can. If you're a Republican Congressman, you tend not to want to hurt your party, and you tend to want to help them if you can. That doesn't mean you're not going to call things the way they are, but you're always going to kind of give them the benefit of the doubt. So there were a lot of people in the Congress that wanted to give the administration the benefit of the doubt. And, so -- but there was, there was worry. And it was worry, if you could just read in the editorial pages, [18:00] there was worry in the country.

FEAVER: Right, a sense that we might losing the public support that would be necessary, and whatever remaining bipartisan support, is that what you would say from that period?

WOLF: Yeah, I think most of the Democrats at that time had pretty much turned against the war.

CRAWFORD: Yeah. When you returned from this third trip, and you have seen the security situation, and the types of things you've seen, what were some of the conversations you may have had with leadership in your own party, or in the other party?

WOLF: I didn't talk to the leadership of my party about it.

CRAWFORD: [laughter] OK. Well, so you don't talk to your leadership, but didn't you --

WOLF: Well, I talked to the leadership, but I was one of eight Republicans that voted against seating Newt Gingrich in 19-- I'm not going to check everything off with the leadership. This is my conscience. This is what I believed in. I saw things that other people were not seeing. So, I'm not [19:00] a robot. I'm elected to represent 700,000 people, and my oath is to the Constitution, and I'm their servant. I'm the obligee. And so I didn't feel I had to go and say "well, you..." -- I was a chairman of the committee, I felt this was the appropriate thing to do.

I never got a pushback, and in fairness to the leadership, nobody ever came in and said, "Wolf, we don't like what you're doing, don't do what you're doing." But I didn't feel that I had to clear this. People were dying. I went to see people with their legs off, and see people who had -- out of Walter Reed with -- now with all the new modern, guarding them, and helmets, and -- but you had the damage, the brain damage-- and so I felt an obligation. But to the leadership's credit, nobody had ever said, "We're opposed to this, don't do it, the Bush administration doesn't like it."

And again, I want to come back, I want to give credit where -- I think Hadley understood it. Now I don't know, Steve Hadley's not a friend of mine. We don't go bowling together, and golfing together, but I think [20:00] he understood there was something not well, and he was open, and of course, Peter, you would

know better what the discussions were, back and forth in a way -- the executive branch, and no administration likes the legislative branch. It never has, and it never will, and so I don't know what they were actually saying. But had Hadley not been willing to work this thing through the process, I think -- and then, I'm not sure that many of the members who served would have wanted to serve if there was outright opposition from the administration.

CRAWFORD: Well, those initial meetings, when you returned, I think you've said you met with Secretary Rice, and -- to get the State Department perspective, and they were -- you've indicated that they were cool on the idea --

WOLF: I don't know, the main one, I talked to Secretary Rumsfeld, who was very, very supportive, and I talked to the General --

FEAVER: Pace.

WOLF: -- Pace. And I talked to Peter [Feaver], [21:00] and I felt I had a legitimate -- I respected Peter. I didn't know Peter well, but I knew his wife. His wife worked in my office for a year. And so, I talked -- but I didn't go through the administration. And nor did I think I had to check with the administration. I didn't work for the administration. I was not on their payroll. I was not their person. I thought hopefully, and to the credit of the White House, how they can't -- Peter can -- I'll be anxious to hear Peter's comments on how the administration evolved to come around. But I think -- Hadley, I think, I sensed, you'll have to, are you -- is he being interviewed for this?

FEAVER: Yes.

WOLF: He knew things were not going as well as they could go. And I think I was perceived not as an enemy, not as somebody who wanted to undermine, but somebody who was honestly sincerely [22:00] trying to do it. And I was not putting out press statements, and announcing "Today, I spoke with" -- and so I think there was an understanding, and again, I think Hadley, when you look at this, I'm sure you're going to find that Hadley worked it through. And they'll tell you "I'm checking with X, I'm checking with Y." It wasn't I went through the administration to check in each and every--

FEAVER: To the extent that you did talk to folks in the administration who were reluctant or hesitant, what do you think was the reason for them being reluctant? Did they express arguments with you about why this would not be a good idea?

WOLF: No, not necessarily, Peter. I think the real reason was that nobody wanted to undermine the administration. Everything -- I think people were concerned. If you recall, there was an Iran-Contra group, and -- remember that? And I think people were [23:00] concerned. Will this be a runaway thing, and who knows where it's going to come. I said, "We have this thing in the box, and we have a control, and nobody's pushing us too much, and we're" -- and so, I think it was that they didn't want to effort. And I mean, the blood, the treasure that we have expended there. And so, nobody wanted to -- I don't think there was any maliciousness. I just think they didn't want to do anything, and people were dying

every day, and so, do we bring this thing in, and what does it mean? Is this going to turn into a kind of rogue elephant to go off?

And I think that's why, once Baker, and once Lee Hamilton came in, that sort of -- and I think to the credit of the Iraq Study Group -- and to the staff, and Ambassador Djerejian, and -- frankly, to get off of this, I suggested the same thing for [24:00] this administration to do on Syria, and that area, and they refused. And strangely enough -- Panetta refused, and I say, "Yeah, you were on it." Because, for the same reason they didn't want to be on it much, so to the Bush administration's credit, and to the failure of the Obama administration, the Obama administration, and -- I'll tell you, if you go there now -- Christianity will be over in Syria in four or five years. Two hundred sixty-- 270,000 people have died. This administration didn't want anybody to look at it. The Bush administration, you don't expect them to say, "Yeah, we're open to have somebody come in and do it." So, kudos to them, and black mark to this -- because they don't want anybody to make any judgment. They don't want anybody to say anything.

FEAVER: One of the concerns that --

WOLF: Look at Benghazi. [25:00] I was [inaudible] at Benghazi. They didn't even want to look at -- we lost an American ambassador, and three others, and "it was the video," they said. They didn't want anybody to look, so -- I never faulted the administration for not -- I thought it was a good idea, but I understood, I used to be in an administration. I worked in the Nixon administration. I worked Secretary

Rogers C.B. Morton[3]. So, I knew initially there was a suspicion of the Congress, and I didn't expect them to embrace it, but in all fairness, Hadley working -- whoever he worked with, and I guess Peter was involved -- did embrace it, I think the recommendations were posi-- and I think it's almost a model for where we're going to have to go now, because the political process is more partisan now than it's ever, ever been. I can recall on Desert Storm, you had Democratic Congressmen getting up, and speaking in favor of what President Bush number one did on it, and those days are over. You do not have this [26:00] bipartisanship, so I think you're going to have more of this, and frankly, they would be better if they did this on ISIS, and what's taking place in Syria. They don't want to do it.

FEAVER: So the one argument that was discussed inside was concern that what if this group reached a decision that the administration didn't like? For instance, they say, "The war is lost, and abandon hope." At that point, we would be in even worse shape if there was a credible voices that reached a drastic conclusion, at odds with the policy. So, did anyone ever express that to you? Do you remember hearing something like that?

WOLF: No.

[3] Rogers Clark Ballard Morton (1914-1979). Morton served as Secretary of the Interior from 1971 until 1975 in the cabinets of President Nixon and Ford. He represented Maryland in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1963 to 1971. Wolf served as assistant to Morton in the Interior Department from 1971-1974.

FEAVER: It wasn't like "we don't trust you, Congressman Wolf; we're worried that once created, it can go rogue," as you said, and might come back with a recommendation?

WOLF: Nobody said -- it was my suspicion that there was concern that they would lose control, that they would say things. [27:00] It was my understanding that, frankly, Jim Baker was down there in Florida on the recount, and I don't think Jim Baker was going to undermine -- how great -- Lee Hamilton, I've known Lee Hamilton for years. He's just not that kind of a guy, and so, that's what he later went on to be the 9/11 --

FEAVER: Earlier, yeah --

WOLF: -- he did the -- earlier before that, he was -- so I just didn't think that that was going to -- but it could. It could have.

FEAVER: Had you picked those names when you were selling the --

WOLF: No, no, no, we were talking about people like that.

CRAWFORD: Well, let's talk about the actual conception of this type of group. It's not going to be tied to any branch of government, there's going to be no real statutory responsibility, you're going to have these think tanks, and other non-partisan institutions, sort of, to administer it. Kind of maybe give us a history of why you think, at that point, why you thought of that point, this was going to be the only real, really good way to get the [28:00] so-called fresh eyes on the --

WOLF: Well, all of the groups are credible. Frankly, the Congress had put a lot of money into building it. If you ever go to the Institute for Peace -- so they are a little -- and Hadley's there now, it's kind of a waystation for people back on -- they have a -- they're credible. [Inaudible] was an ambassador, I forget where he was an ambassador from. Djerejian is somebody. He was the ambassador to Israel, he was ambassador to Syria. Frankly, I think Obama would have been better picking a group of them, people like that to sort of shape and see what they're going to do. And CSIS, and the fellow who ran CSIS, I've known him for years, so I thought they were credible. They were quasi-institutional, in a sense that, I think, you scratch the average person over there, and it's a former government, be either a DOD, or State Department, or CIA, or NSA, or something. So, you just couldn't bring in 10 people off the street, because [29:00] they may be wonderful people, and they may be really good, honest, decent, ethical, moral people, but didn't have the understanding. I think you needed groups that had the understanding, and so, that's why I think they were the -- CSIS is Democratic, or not Republican? It is U.S. Institute for Peace, Democrat or Republican? So, there was no -- and Jim Baker, who -- I've known the Bakers for years, and Jim Baker's wife Susan, and I know his record -- when President Bush got elected, President Bush number one, on the day of inauguration, Jim Baker met with me early in the morning to talk about Sudan. I just felt Baker is this kind of a guy, and so, there was never any danger of -- and that's why they were picked.

CRAWFORD: [30:00] But is there a sense here that there's no way that Congress could ever --

WOLF: No. No.

CRAWFORD: -- could offer any type of review, sort of?

WOLF: No, I don't think so.

FEAVER: Once launched, did you stay involved, did you get briefed on it?

WOLF: Yeah, they briefed me, and I went down there, Peter, I didn't have the answers. I didn't know -- so I didn't feel like it was my job to ride herd, or to check, or -- I felt these were people -- it's kind of like when you have a pretty serious health problem, and your doctor says, "Here's what we're going to do." You do what your doctor -- so, I thought they were of the type that could do it. So, they kept me informed, I would talk to them, but no, I was not riding herd and checking to see what they were doing.

FEAVER: Did it take as long as you ex-- did it take longer, shorter --

WOLF: I think it took too long, but I think, if my memory serves me, I think they wanted to have the report, so it didn't come out [31:00] impacting the elections.

FEAVER: The '06 election.

WOLF: Yeah, yeah.

FEAVER: So --

WOLF: So, I -- there was something -- they wanted to, sort of, not have it -- what's the exact date it came out?

FEAVER: It came out December of '06, yeah.

WOLF: So, they didn't want it to be, like, October surprise, something like that.

FEAVER: The reason I ask is my understanding of your conception was you wanted to launch it in August '05.

WOLF: I did, I did. If the patient's dying --

FEAVER: Yeah, launch it right away--

WOLF: -- and the doctor tells me -- right, exactly, exactly.

FEAVER: -- and report in January of '06, or something like that --

WOLF: Right, right.

FEAVER: -- and it took longer to get through --

WOLF: It did.

FEAVER: -- and then, once it was passed, it took longer, maybe, to stand up, and get the thing, yeah.

WOLF: It did, it did. But that was because, if my memory serves me, both Secretary Baker and Congressman Hamilton did not want this to come out before the Presidential elections, or the elections to fall --

FEAVER: Midterm, yeah.

WOLF: -- and the midterm, have a -- [32:00] and have a big, big issue. Secondly, it took a while to get the administration to come forward. Actually, I thought, at the time, to come back, great idea, you do it right away, so if the patient's dying, we're not going to wait for it, you're going to kind of put the tourniquet on, and do what

we had to do. But yeah, it did take a little bit longer to set up than I thought it should.

MCCORMICK: Aside from the duration, from your vantage point as somebody who had conceived it, but then was an outsider, but receiving briefings, and having some visibility into it, in terms of the --

WOLF: I had no involvement in the recommendations. No, I was not involved in what they did.

MCCORMICK: I'm just curious as to whether your perception of how the study group functioned in its deliberative phase, did it match with what your expectations had been in pitching the idea?

WOLF: It did, yeah, it did, yeah, it did. And I think the concept has merit, as I said before, that, when you have these tough issues, particularly more so now than even then, the partisanship of the nation -- the nation has never been more divided than it is today. [33:00] The Congress was never more divided. And so, I think that concept, obviously, co-chairman of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, we had five and five. I think that is going to be more and more, and so, yeah, I think that's going to be the way more of these things are going to have to do, particularly in the days that more of Congress is more partisan, more divided. You don't think Harry Reid was going to help come in, and help give it -- I'm being -- it's a critical statement, but do you think Harry Reid was going to

come in and -- look at the way some people -- look at the way Hillary Clinton treated General Petraeus.

FEAVER: In September of '07 --

WOLF: Do you remember?

FEAVER: Yeah.

WOLF: Betray us? Do you remember that? I met with General Petraeus -- General Petraeus, you can say what you want about -- he gave his life for this. That was -- that was not easy, over and over. [34:00] And many of the guys out there -- Harry Reid wasn't going to -- after General Petraeus was treated the way he was treated, I don't see any other way of having a bipartisan good, honest -- and they're good people. My best friend is a Dem who used to contribute to my campaign. I have a good re-- I like Nancy Pelosi. Nancy and I are friends. We don't agree, except for China, but you don't demonize, and I think what -- when I watch what took place, I actually -- I was not on the committee, but I went, and I sat into these hearings. The way they treated General Petraeus was pretty rough. I can still see the full-page ad, I forget --who paid for that ad?

FEAVER: Moveon.org.

WOLF: Yeah. "General Betray Us," betray us. And Hillary had some pretty tough things to say. Did she go in then, first time that he was head of the CIA, and she headed the State Department, did she go apologize, or did she say, "General, I" --

[35:00] I don't know, I don't know. But, he was away from his family, and he gave a lot to the country, as did many others.

CRAWFORD: So, I'm curious, you said earlier that you secured the funding, essentially through an earmark.

WOLF: Yes.

CRAWFORD: Did you get any response from the Democratic leadership at that point? Did you have any interactions with them over this? What was the general reaction to that this had -- maybe not slipped by them, but it was something they hadn't expected?

WOLF: No, I don't think anybody viewed it in a -- I don't think anybody in Congress in either party -- this wasn't to help the Republican Party, it wasn't to hurt the Democratic Party, it was to kind of help the efforts, so no, I don't think anybody viewed it as a -- obviously, there are Democrats on my subcommittee, and they never raised any objections, so I don't think anybody viewed it in a negative way [36:00] in Congress.

CRAWFORD: Did that change over, say, the course of 2006 in Congress, particularly as people became aware that there were other reviews going on in town, and there was an election?

WOLF: No, no, no, quite the contrary. When it came out, there were a lot of very positive comments. I can remember once, I was testifying before the House Rules Committee, and I think former Congressman Sestak was there, who was running

for the Senate, and I think he was very complimentary of it, and then Peter Welch, who is a Democratic Congressman from Vermont, was very, very complimentary. You can go look at the record, I forget what he -- but he was very -- no, no one really was critical of it when the report came out.

FEAVER: We should move the story ahead now to the fall of '06, when the Baker/Hamilton commission's in its final deliberative phase. [37:00] Were you aware of the other internal Iraq study reviews?

WOLF: I just heard -- no, I was not. I was not, and I don't think the administration doesn't really share that a lot.

FEAVER: Right.

WOLF: Maybe they did with Congressman Young, or Duncan Hunter, but no, it was not.

FEAVER: Were you aware of the debates inside the Iraq study group itself? Baker/Hamilton debates about what the final recommendation should be?

WOLF: Somewhat, they wanted a consensus. They didn't want a 6-4. They didn't want a 7-3. They wanted to have a consensus.

FEAVER: And did you help forge that consensus?

WOLF: No, no, I did not, no. I give all them the credit. I did not.

FEAVER: And what was your sense of their final recommendations? Did it live up to what you had hoped for when you launched it? Looking back from the perspective of having read the report now, what was your [38:00] view of it?

WOLF: Well, I think it did. I had no -- the Surge is mentioned, it's Chuck, that was really Chuck Robb, if I -- I forget what page it's on, I remember -- no, I thought they did a good job. It's a static document that sort of, at that time, life goes on, and it's not like the Constitution. But no, I thought they did a good job, and again, I'm biased, because I think Jim Baker and Hamilton, and they had Ed Meese later -- Ed Meese's son was an officer over with General Petraeus -- it was a pretty good report, and I thought they all, both Republican and Democrat, were very, very responsible, and it doesn't mean that everyone -- I think if each person could have written their own report, they all might have been a little bit different around the edges, but overall, no, I was pleased with what they did.

CRAWFORD: [39:00] When would you say the first time you were actually -- heard the Surge as a real option, a surge of troops as an option to this, to the issue in Iraq?

WOLF: Well, I think General Keane, maybe, I think you guys were talking about it. I don't think you can credit the Iraq Study Group with the Surge. I think you all were working to the Surge. There was no -- it was pretty clear what had to be done, you almost had two options: One was go out and get out, and the other was -- so I think, I'm sure you guys talked to General Keane, and talked to a number of others, and General Petraeus.

CRAWFORD: Well, as a Congressman, is this something that it becomes evident on Capitol Hill, after a certain point in 2006, then there is this option of really increasing troops, and what would you say would be the general response for most

[40:00] Congressmen to this idea? Because people were talking about a surge in the press at some point in 2006 before the Baker Hamilton Commission --

WOLF: Well, I think the Surge was successful. I don't think anybody -- you either had to surge, or you had to get out. The President Obama, the Obama administration, made a decision to get out, and we have now seen -- if you've been to Iraq lately, the second-largest city, Mosul, is an ISIS stronghold. Baghdad is a Shi'a-run operation. Anyone who's Christian -- the Iranians pretty much run Baghdad. And so, there was a feeling, so I think you either had to get out -- Obama got out, and I think we see what we are seeing now, and probably maybe the end of Christianity in that region, unless [41:00] -- even the Obama administration now, there's a guy named Raphael Lemkin who came up with a definition of "genocide." What I saw, what I'm seeing, what I know of -- we used to have a young staffer who works with me, but just got back -- it's genocide. This administration will not call what is taking place in Iraq and Syria genocide. And so, you're going to see the end of Christianity, you're seeing the Yazidis, what's taking place -- and so, you had to get out at that time, phase down, there were a group of people, or you had to almost get out -- would have been probably modeled mainly after maybe Vietnam, remember the helicopters taking off, or maybe you're not old enough to remember, but in Vietnam, or surging, and I think that most people would acknowledge that what the administration did was good, and I think where we got

to, and then when President Obama came in, and the Obama administration [42:00] did what they did -- we're facing where we are.

CRAWFORD: Well, all of this is occurring in a pretty tense election year, 2006. Can you maybe characterize what, the politics of it, particularly in the Congressional races, and maybe even your own Congressional race?

WOLF: I really don't know that I can tell you that. I never felt any pressure on the issue. And I don't think it was an issue. I could have been out there, I don't know. I think you'd have to talk, and look at history, and see what -- I don't know what was taking place in other districts, and other people, races.

FEAVER: Did you say --

WOLF: The war was not popular, though, so --

FEAVER: Yeah. Well, the Republicans lost the House --

WOLF: Was that the reason that --

FEAVER: -- well, there were scandals, but also, the Iraq War.

WOLF: Yeah, I think there were some other -- I don't want to -- I think a lot of things.

FEAVER: But, [43:00] when the report came out, what was your sense about the rollout of the report?

WOLF: Yeah, it was a good rollout.

FEAVER: Did it accomplish what you wanted, in terms of its political and policy impact? Setting aside the quality of the report, but was its effect what you had hoped for?

WOLF: I thought the rollout was very good. I was there, it was a big deal. I believe it was up on the Senate side, it was on every news show. That night, the comments were very, very positive. It was America at its best, in the sense that Republicans and Democrats can sit down, and kind of work things out. I don't think you should give it the credit for coming up with the idea of the Surge, or the Surge is in there, I think -- I would think it helped lead to -- and again, Peter, you were better -- I think it helped lead to more [44:00] success than was currently taking place before the Surge.

And then we had the '08 elections, and then we had the change, and then we had President Obama, the Obama administration saying that we're going to withdraw, and believe me, the Iraqis knew that we were -- and now, you see chaos. When we were there, we went up to the front lines, we went out with the Peshmerga, and they showed me their weapons. Their weapons are so old. They're the type of weapons that you in North Carolina would probably hang over your mantle to tell your grandkids they were really old. They said, "We can't get any aid, we can't get any support." We don't understand why, we see the Catholic bishop, Bishop Werth[4] said, "we're just going to see the end of Christianity." The Pope has called it genocide, and yet, we see no response from this administration, and so I think to the -- yeah, I'm a [45:00] Republican, I didn't agree with the Bush

[4] It is unclear to whom Wolf is referring. Bishop Joseph Werth is Bishop of Transfiguration in Novosibirsk (Russia). He was named the Latin-rite Apostolic Administrator of Siberia in 1991. However, Antoine Audo, Bishop of Aleppo of the Chaldean Catholic Church, is better known for his outspoken support of the diminishing Christian community in Iraq, Syria and the broader Middle East.

administration on everything, but I think overall, where they were at that time, they tried to set this thing up, and put it in such a way, that on the handover, there was a better opportunity for us to say, "Right now, Iraq is a failure."

The Christian Church has gone down -- more Biblical activity took place in Iraq than any other country in the world, other than Israel. Abraham's from Iraq. Daniel is buried in Iraq. Ezekiel is buried in Iraq. When I was there last year, we went to Nahum's Tomb. I put my hand on Nahum's Tomb, the Old Testament prophet. And the stories -- and it's gone. Christianity's gone, the Christian Church, it was one and a half million in 2003, and now they're down to 250,000. Seventeen Christian families leave every day. Almost every Christian we met with, we met with all the different groups, said, "Does the Church in the West -- does the Christian Church in the [46:00] West care about us?" And Martin Luther King's greatest criticism of the Church, because he said when he led the boycotts -- ever read the Birmingham letter from Birmingham jail -- he said, "I was disappointed in the Church. I thought they'd be with me."

Well, the Christians in Iraq are disappointed with the Church in the West. We went into one little place, a little, kind of an old school, and the man was living in one room, he had four kids, one has left, and is in San Diego, he has a daughter up on the Turkish border, and he has two little kids with him. He tells a story: ISIS came in, took over his village, his wife had breast cancer – I've had cancer in my family [inaudible] -- so four or five days later, went to the hospital in Mosul to get

treatment. ISIS told him, and told his wife, "We're not going to give your wife treatment unless she converts." She does not convert. [47:00] She said, "I will not con-- I will not deny Christ. I will not." He does not. She goes back to the little village, she dies.

I was in Israel a couple of months ago. We went to Capernaum. You ever been to Capernaum? At Capernaum, you go over, there's a church that looks down on Peter's house. It's actually Peter's house. Peter saw Jesus, Peter ate with Jesus, Peter -- right there at the Sea of Galilee, that's where Jesus walked on the water, Peter -- Peter denied Jesus three times. This Iraqi construction worker and his wife will not deny Christ. And so they say, "Where's the Church? Where's the West?" And so, Iraq has failed, and what we've -- but -- and to get back, I thought what the administration, to summarize -- and I don't think we can beat this dead -- [48:00] there was reluctance, but I understood it.

Hadley, I thought caught the vision. There was no opposition that I know of, no one said to my face, up in the Congress. I felt a moral obligation not to check with my leadership, to check with this administration. We put the money in, nobody ever objected to it, I think, on the floor, or in committee. You pick people who are good, honest, ethical, decent, moral people of both political views, and different parties. They came up with, I thought, a very good thing, which sort of helped, and I think at 2008, when the Bush administration left, as much as Iraq is a failure now, I think there was a potential opportunity, but it's gone.

FEAVER: So, just reaching the end of our time --

WOLF: Yeah, I got it too, I gotta go.

FEAVER: So there's one last question about the December timeframe, the '06. So the reporters rolled out -- was it your sense that the Bush administration embraced the report, or implemented the report, or tried to merge the report to what they were doing? How would you characterize the Bush administration response to the report's conclusions?

WOLF: I think you could better answer that. I would say "relief" might be. But I think -- I don't know what went on in the White House, so I --

FEAVER: But from your perspective, were you disappointed in how it was received that -- more trying to get your view of how you thought the administration, how it responded.

WOLF: No, I -- you're really pulling me back -- I don't think I had any sense of disappointment, I don't think I had any sense of -- but I don't want to leave you with you guys thinking that I think the Iraq War was a wonderful thing, and everything was perfect. Believe me, I don't. [50:00] But I think the administration -- and again, let me give a bouquet to Hadley, who, because I think had Hadley not been there, I think that there would have been a resistance, whether there were some in the administration who didn't want to sit down with the President, and say "Mr. President" -- there's sometimes, people tell stories, "when I get in to the oval office, I'm going to tell that guy just" -- and I'll say, "Get in the oval office."

Chuck Colson, was a mentor of mine, tells a story that there was a group of religious leaders coming in to see Nixon, they said, "Boy when I tell him, I am going to tell him." And they got in, and all of a sudden, the photographer --[makes shutter sound] [laughter] -- And they never tell. So whether they just didn't want to tell the President, they don't want to say "Mr. President, this is not going well, I don't know," but overall, I thought it was a good thing. And I think it may very well be a model for where we're going to have to go in the future.

FEAVER: So, [51:00] I have no further questions.

MCCORMICK: Nope, I don't either.

WOLF: Great. Great.

MCCORMICK: Thank you very much.

WOLF: Great. Thanks so much.

FEAVER: Well, thank you very much!

WOLF: Sure.

[END OF AUDIO/VIDEO FILE]