

# An Interview with

# Stephen Hadley



*Did the first George W. Bush Administration have the correct organization, structure, and functions for the National Security Staff? Did the NSC system exercise effective management our efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq?*

*Hadley:* To this day the Tower Commission report of 1987 contains the best thing written on the proper role of the National Security Advisor. There is only one thing I would quibble with, and we saw it in the Afghanistan and Iraq situations. Because of Oliver North (and Iran-Contra), the Tower Commission emphasized that the NSC and the National Security Advisor should not get involved in operations,

which is absolutely true. But I think one thing we've learned since the Tower Commission report is that implementation management is a task for the NSC – not to do the implementation, but to see that it is being done by the appropriate agencies of the government.

The NSC system has served our country well in developing a process for raising issues for decision by the President. But once you get a policy decision by the President, the issue is implementation and execution. I think that is a new frontier for the interagency process; not that the NSC is going to run operations, but the NSC has the responsibility to ensure that the policy decisions coming from the President are actually implemented and executed effectively. We spent a lot of time doing that in the Bush 43 administration.

We tried a number of ways of doing this. In terms of Afghanistan, the first step was what we called the Afghan Operations Group (AOG). The AOG was an interagency team that met at least once a week or even more often in their office at the State Department. They were supposed to develop plans, to assign responsibility, task due dates, and really move the implementation and execution of our policy in Afghanistan. I always said that I would give the NSC policy development process a "B," but the interagency implementation and execution process only a "D," not

*This interview was conducted by Dr. Joseph Collins and Dr. Nicholas Rostow from the Institute for National Strategic Studies (INSS) at National Defense University. The interview took place October 7, 2014.*

just for the Bush administration, but for any administration. I think the AOG was a “B minus” in terms of what it did. It was a first step to having interagency coordination and oversight over the implementation and execution, a good first step.

When Zalmay Khalizad was Ambassador to Afghanistan we developed an implementation strategy called, “Accelerating Success in Afghanistan.” When I was Deputy National Security Advisor, we did this in the Deputy’s Committee. We developed a series of initiatives to try to address political, economic, and social issues. We not only developed the programs, but in a parallel process in the Office of Management and Budget, Robin Cleveland ran an interagency process to find the funding for it so that when we presented it to the Principals and then to the President for approval, it was an implementation plan that had funding associated with it. I think it’s the only time we did that, but it should be a prototype for how we do implementation. When you get a policy decision, you ought to have an interagency process in which people divide up the tasks, take responsibility, indicate who is going to be in charge, what the due dates are, and have a parallel OMB-led budget process that makes sure you’ve got the funding for all of it. Indeed, we made sure that whenever there was an initiative that came up on the policy end, in the paper that would go to the Principals, there would be a fiscal annex which indicated whether there was a money requirement, and if so, how much was funded from where, how much wasn’t funded, and where we were going to get it. Again, it probably in the end was honored more in the breach, but it was one of several efforts to focus on the implementation and execution piece.

### *Did the second term arrangements work better?*

*Hadley:* The next incarnation of implementation management was after the “surge decision.” We needed somebody full-time to oversee implementation and execution. I just couldn’t do it full-time due to the other things I was responsible for. That’s when we brought in Lieutenant General (LTG) Douglas Lute. I resisted efforts from Secretary Rice and Secretary Gates to put him directly under the National Security Advisor. I told them he would have to have a direct line to the President, but the way we did it was while he had direct line to the President, we always went in to the President together, so he was not a separate voice. I thought it would empower him so that he could call up the Secretary of State or Secretary of Defense and say, “You are falling down on the implementation and execution.” And so LTG Lute did exactly that. He had an interagency group to develop implementation plans that would assign agencies responsibilities and due dates. He would particularly, for example, get civilians tasked to go to Iraq, an area where the State Department was very slow. LTG Lute would have a weekly meeting, and he would say to the State Department, “Alright, your number was 15 people by today, where are you, how far behind are you, when are you going to get it done?”

Complex operations require that you integrate political, economic, civilian, social, and developmental objectives involving many agencies. You have to coordinate it in the interagency. And that’s what we tried to do with LTG Lute. This was basically a recognition that you could not make the Iraq strategy succeed if it was left to the bureaucracy to be executed

in a routine manner, because in the ordinary routine course it would not get done in time. We tried to get LTG Lute to inject a sense of urgency and accountability into the process.

*In both Afghanistan and Iraq, should we have brought our allies in on the initial planning? Should the advantages of securing a broad range of international support have weighed more heavily in our strategy and plans, especially for Iraq?*

*Hadley:* One of the things I think I have to talk about is this notion that there wasn't a plan for post-Saddam Iraq, which is just not true. The dilemma was the following: the President wanted coercive diplomacy; he wanted to prepare a war plan, and to be seen preparing forces in order to give strength to the diplomacy. But he was hopeful that Iraq could be resolved diplomatically, and that Saddam could be convinced either to change his policies or to leave. There were a lot of people who, of course, didn't believe that. They thought that Bush came in with the settled intention to go to war, and that diplomacy was just a cover. They thought the diplomacy was designed to fail in order for the President to have a pretext to go to war, which was not the case. Indeed, the President never really decided to go to war until late in the process. But the dilemma was, if we started, and it became known publicly that we were planning for a post-conflict, post-Saddam Iraq, everybody would say, "See, we told you, the diplomatic effort is not real, they're already preparing for war." And we would undermine our own diplomacy. So we had a dilemma, you had to delay the post-war planning as much as you could because you didn't want to jeopardize the diplomacy, but you still want enough time

to develop the post-war plan. We did the post-war planning in the Deputy's Committee. I think the problem, systemically on that, turned out to be something that was identified in a study that James McCarthy did for Donald Rumsfeld and that he briefed me about in 2005. And what he said was, "the charge that you guys didn't do post-war planning is wrong. I've seen the planning; it wasn't bad. But what you didn't understand was that while military plans were being developed by CENTCOM, there was a system for translating those military plans into operational orders all the way down to the squadron level. There wasn't an established way of taking that post-war planning and putting it into the process, with implementing orders all the way down to the squadron level. So, you did all the planning, but it had no legs."

I assumed Jay Garner (head of the Office for Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance - ORHA) was briefed on all these plans. He says he was not, and I can't understand why he wasn't; we certainly had him in some of the meetings where plans were being devised at the end. But I know from people who were then lieutenants and captains, they didn't have any instructions on how to handle the post-war problems. So, there's a systemic problem: when you do these integrated operations and you have a post-war situation, and you're going to have to do integrated execution, we don't have a way of taking the post-combat plan and turning it into interagency guidance that goes down to the field. And that of course was one of the things we tried to fix, post-surge, by having LTG Lute run the interagency process.

The last piece we got in place was the political dimension. Paul Wolfowitz said we should have gone very quickly to an interim

government and passed authority to the Iraqis as early as possible. That's exactly what the plan was. It's ironic. The problem was the Iraqi Governing Council, which was a step to move in that direction, did not work because the Iraqi elite were not ready to participate.

And one other thing: you know the military piece of this post-war planning was of course Phase IV. The actual military piece that was developed by CENTCOM called Phase IV was briefed a couple of times to the President and to the NSC Principals. It was separate from, but in parallel with what we were doing with the Deputies, which was all the other post-war planning. I was told by someone who participated in the planning at CENTCOM at the time those Phase IV plans were done that, "You know, you need to understand that the military did not think that Phase IV was their responsibility."

The view was, "When we get rid of this guy (Saddam), we are going home." It's interesting that General Tommy Franks resigned shortly after Saddam was toppled. Now you can understand General Franks had been in two wars, he was exhausted; but the military apparently never embraced the Phase IV mission, and the best lesson from that is something that General John Allen said at a review of the Iraq War about two, two and a half years ago. Allen said, "The thing I've learned from Iraq and Afghanistan is, that when you do your planning, you need to begin with Phase IV and what you want it to look like; how you are going to get it to look like that? And then work backwards." So, where you want to end up informs your Phase III, II and I planning about how you are going to get there. This was a new idea to me; we didn't do it that way. I don't think the United States has ever done it that way. And that's exactly the right way to do it,

and the reasons why all these lessons learned studies are so important.

After the past three years, we've now decided that the Middle East is still important to us. It's a threat to the homeland, and we need to get more engaged. We've got a reasonable strategy, and it may work after a year or two. First in Iraq, and then if we've succeeded in Iraq, and we've bought some time in Syria to build forces, maybe we will succeed in Syria. But, if we're not going to have to "mow the grass" every five or ten years dealing with a terrorist threat in the Middle East, we are going to have to get active and try to transform those societies: to help them provide effective governance to their people, give them reasonable economies that provide jobs, give them some participation in their governments, some sense of dignity and worth, or we're just going to have to be doing this again. And so the lessons from our efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq are terribly important because somebody's going to have to develop a plan for how we are going to strengthen these societies so they can deliver for their people, and so they do not become again such congenial places for terrorist recruitment.

*And it's so hard. In Libya, we did just the opposite. We had "no footprint" after the kinetic phase. We delivered the Libyans from a dictatorship and into chaos.*

*Hadley:* And you would have thought we would have learned from Afghanistan 1990, right? We walked away. Afghanistan 2001 and Iraq 2003, we learned that lesson. We weren't going to walk away, and that's why we had a post-conflict strategy, even if we didn't do it very well. The basic problem is, we spent nearly 50 years, post-Vietnam on an enormous

effort to learn how to recruit, train, fight, and improve our military, so we have the best military in the world. We have not made a similar effort to develop the capabilities we need to do post-conflict operations. They are largely civilian capabilities. They're in the U.S. government and private sector, and we have not developed a systematic way to identify, train, exercise, deploy, do lessons learned, and improve. We just haven't done it. And so every time we have one of these, whether it's Bosnia, Afghanistan, Iraq, or the 2011 Arab Awakening, we are starting from scratch. In Bosnia we tried relying on international organizations but it didn't work. We tried it in Afghanistan, dividing up responsibilities among countries: the Germans had the police, Italy had the justice sector, the UK had narcotics. We divided it all up, everybody had a piece. This was an effort not to be unilateral. To be multilateral, but everybody's piece was small enough that it was everybody's second or third priority, and it never got done! So we gave it to the military, not exclusively, but we gave the military the lead, supported by all U.S. government agencies, in Iraq in 2003. And it turned out, the military didn't have the total skill set either! So, you know, this is a systemic problem. It is not an NSC process problem per se, but it is an implementation and execution problem. We have not developed the kinds of capabilities that we need. And I think we're going to come at it once again, when, after the kinetic phase against ISIS, there's going to have to be some work done. How are we going to do that?

*The other view is that of General Daniel Bolger in his new book: he basically says we won the war in Iraq and Afghanistan after we captured the capital cities and got the*

*government in place. He thinks we should have left in a few months.*

*Hadley:* We had that conversation. We had that conversation when it was clear we were going to war, and the President had that conversation with his NSC Principals. He asked, "So, if we get rid of Saddam, what is our obligation to Iraqi people? Is it Saddamism without Saddam, or, putting it another way, a strong military leader within the existing system that simply agrees that he will not support terror, and will not develop WMD, will not invade his neighbors, and will be not quite as brutal to his own people as Saddam was. Is that okay?" The President's view was we would get rid of Saddam Hussein for national security reasons, not because we were promoting democracy out of the barrel of a gun. We were going to have to remove him for hard national security reasons, but then what was our obligation to the Iraqi people? He said, "We stand for freedom and democracy. We ought to give the Iraqi people a chance, a chance with our help, to build a democratic system." And that's how the democracy piece got in, not that it had to be a Jeffersonian democracy, not that it had to be in our image, not that we wouldn't leave until the job is done, but we would give them a chance. And once we got into it, we realized that there had to be a democratic outcome because that was the only way you would keep the country together: Sunni, Shia, and Kurds working together in a common democratic framework. Otherwise, the country was going to fall apart. As we thought about it and got well into it, it was also clear that there was the potential that Iraq could be a model for the Middle East because in the Middle East it was either Sunnis oppress Shia, or Shia oppress Sunnis, and both of them beat up the Kurds.

We wanted to show that Sunni, Shia, and Kurds could work together in a democratic framework and develop a common future, where the majority ruled but the minority participated and had protections.

The issue now will be the future of Sykes-Picot: is it dead, do we have to redraw the borders? The people I've talked to about that say, "If you start trying to redraw the borders, it will never end." Because there are no clean borders and people will make historical claims that will be overlapping; it's a prescription for turmoil and bloodshed. The issue is not redrawing the borders, the issue is changing the quality and nature of governance within those borders. That's what we tried to do in Iraq.

The other thing we did, that worked extremely well, was the Tuesday afternoon meetings of the Principals in the National Security Advisor's office, principals only: Vice President, Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, Chairman Joint Chiefs, CIA Director, the DNI. The only plus one was my deputy, who was the note-taker. We started this in 2006 before Donald Rumsfeld left. All the tough operational issues and strategy issues got vetted in that meeting, at the Principals level with no leaks, in a very candid exchange. They were the most useful sessions because we would hash things out, and all the issues were on the table. And it was invariably the Vice President, who would say, "Steve, this has been a very good discussion, now how are we going to get this before the President so he can make a decision?" That was an innovation in the second term that worked extremely well.

There was a Deputy's level working group that worked the details with some guidance from the Principals. So that way you make sure you're addressing the strategic, operational, tactical issues, and that's why you

have levels that are organized, addressing issues at their appropriate level. The question is: can you keep it all knit together? That's what the National Security Advisor is supposed to do.

*On Afghanistan, early in the process, we settled on a "light footprint approach." Some in DoD also favored that approach in postwar Iraq. In retrospect, did we get this right or not? Any lessons here for the future?*

*Hadley:* The light footprint approach. Everybody says the experience of the Russians and the British in Afghanistan needed to be taken to heart. People forget that the Taliban were overthrown with no more than 500 CIA and military Special Forces on the ground linked up with the tribes; Special Forces on wooden saddles calling in airstrikes with GPS and cellphones. And that was powerful: for the Afghans, we did not look like the occupiers that the Russians and the British had been; we looked like liberators because we were the enabler of the Afghan people to throw off the Taliban. And that fact is why, even today, after all they've been through, 13 years later, most of the country still wants us to stay. So the light footprint was a brilliant strategy, and one of the reasons some of us were loathe to ramp up the U.S. force presence. It was precisely because we did not want to lose the mantle of being liberators and enablers and become occupiers.

And similarly, everyone says we under-resourced Afghanistan. When we did what I talked about earlier, "Accelerating Success in Afghanistan," one of the things we looked at was -- this is the fourth poorest country in the world. It has limited human infrastructure. You don't want to overwhelm that economy because what you get is corruption and

inflation. Well, guess what we got when we started throwing money into that economy: corruption and inflation. That was a reason for the light footprint approach in Afghanistan that made sense at the time.

We would have liked to have done the same process in Iraq, but there weren't any ground troops in Iraq that were going to dispose of Saddam. You remember the efforts we made: we had an overt training program and a covert training program, neither amounted to a hill of beans. Ahmed Chalabi was telling DoD he would give us thousands of people; he ended up with about 100.

The lesson for what we are doing today in Iraq is that a light footprint approach is exactly right. If you talk to Sunnis, if you talk to Shia, if you talk to Kurds, they are not asking for U.S. combat forces on the ground. What they are asking for are enablers: intelligence, training, weaponry, and embedded Special Forces to give them tactical support. And that's exactly what we should do. I spoke with Secretary Kerry about Iraq several months ago. He was thinking about Iraq in 2006 and 2007. I said to him, "It isn't Iraq in 2006 or 2007 that is the prototype for Iraq (and ISIS) today. It is Afghanistan in 2001, where we were enablers with somebody else's capabilities on the ground."

*Another vexing set of problems was our attempt to build-up the Army and police forces in Afghanistan and Iraq. In both countries, we struggled to start the process and had to endure many programmatic changes along the way. How did the NSC system work on these critical missions? Did the NSC system guide the process effectively, or was it also caught up in complex events and cross-cutting legal authorities? This question is a tough one, and*

*it involves the allies as well. The training of army and police in the future is going to be much more important, where indigenous people are in combat, and we are going to be in a training mode.*

*Hadley:* My sense was the military did the military training, and we went through a learning process. Initially we tried to train to American standards. My impression is we finally got the training right in Afghanistan under LTG William Caldwell, in terms of the military side. In terms of police training, State had that (until NATO training mission took it over, around 2009-2010).

Eventually we learned that we need to train to "good enough" standards, which are not necessarily American standards. On the military side we finally got the training right, this last time around in Afghanistan in 2010 and 2011. In terms of police training, State had that until the NATO training mission took it over, around 2009-2010.

The State Department Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL) did not inspire confidence. It was all about turf, it was neuralgic. They never got it done, and at the end of the day we pulled the police training mission away and gave it to the military. Turns out the military is not the best police trainer, and so again it was a classic case where we gave it to the military by default because we don't have the kind of civilian capacity in place to do it right. So, I'm still not sure if we know how to do police training.

One of the things we decided is that Afghanistan needed something between a military force and police, they need a gendarmerie. So we tried to get the Italians, and others with these kind of forces, to do some training. We were probably slow to do that,

that's actually an area where international participation would've enhanced us. I'm not sure we now have a plan for how we are going to do police training. We need to start developing those plans and capabilities now! Or we won't have them, and we will screw it up again! It's very hard to do. We were more confident than we should have been that we could do it, and we had to learn a lot. The military also had to re-learn how to fight the war in Iraq, in 2005, 2006, and 2007, so we could actually do the Surge. That is really an issue: how does the military re-learn how to fight a different type of war, and do it in a timely way, so the war isn't lost! But the Armed Forces actually learned it, and implemented it, and turned the war in Iraq around. And that of course is the great story of Iraq. It was a war that was lost, then was won – our coalition forces working with Iraqi forces defeated al-Qaeda in Iraq. And if not for Syria and Maliki, we wouldn't be where we are today,

*Did Iraqi exiles play too strong a role? Intelligence was a big problem from the very beginning, and if you follow the memoirs of the people who were in DoD, the reason why Iraq gets off the track initially is because of bad intelligence on WMD, bad intelligence on the Iraqi infrastructure, bad intelligence on the Iraqi police, etc. There we were in Iraq and Afghanistan trying to protect the people, and we didn't know the first thing about them.*

*Hadley:* You also have that in Syria today. Why were we surprised by the turn of events there? We were surprised by it because we aren't there! With the Surge, we had a pretty good idea of what was going on in Iraq. General Stanley McCrystal had this incredible synthesis of operations and intelligence that

created a killing machine like we've never seen. But it was because he had lots of military assets and lots of intelligence assets to cover his back that he was able to do what he did. In Syria, we are surprised about the events because we aren't in Syria; we don't have intelligence assets there. We're relying on the Free Syrian Army and a few other people.

Iraq in 2003 was much the same thing. We hadn't been in Iraq for a decade. It was hard to have good intelligence about it. I think that one of the questions for the intelligence people is: did we do enough to pull together non-governmental experts?

The intelligence community still had the notion that, if you haven't stolen it, it isn't intelligence! In the past all they did was intelligence, rather than seeing themselves as an information aggregator. Going after non-traditional sources of information, and that's of course the promise of this explosion of cell-phones and social media, we have information that we can mine in a way that we never could before; we can aggregate it, we can map it, etc. So one of the questions you can pose: are we working now to develop information about these conflict-prone societies and the various actors so we can design reasonable strategies to bring some stability to these countries once (and if) we get through the kinetic phase? Let's design now an information gathering strategy, so we won't be caught again without the information we need.

On the subject of exiles, I don't think they played too strong of a role. I mean, certainly some in DoD fell in love with Ahmed Chalabi, but the State Department hated him and the CIA hated him, and I basically as the Deputy National Security Advisor had to broker the peace to keep them all on the same page.

Chalabi may have affected DoD, but he didn't really affect us.

*Some members of the Administration have said since they left office that even without the WMD issue, the United States should still have invaded Iraq? Was the WMD factor, the most important one, or just one of many?*

*Hadley:* If you look at the UN resolutions in Iraq, there are four things that Iraq was in the dock for: WMD, invading its neighbors, supporting terrorism, and oppressing its people. And our view at the NSC was that they should be the grounds for going to war; they should be in the UN Security Council resolutions, and they should be in U.S. presentations to the United Nations. State resisted that, and they may have been right. Secretary Powell said, "Look, you have got to go with your best argument, and in this case, less is more," and the best argument was WMD. We at the NSC wrote an initial draft of the UN Security Council resolution that included all four elements, but Powell didn't want to use it. He wanted a resolution that was predicated on WMD, and then we could get a second resolution that would deal with the other things. Of course, the second resolution never came. Powell's speech was supposed to have all four pillars, and in the end it was a WMD piece, with a small and controversial portion on terror, and an even smaller portion on human and civil rights. It was a one-legged stool, and if someone kicks out the leg of a one-legged stool, the stool falls over.

Should we have gone to war if there wasn't WMD? This is a tough question. The Deulfer Report says that Saddam would have gotten back into the WMD business. He had the capability to do it; he had the intention to do it.

Once he got out from under sanctions, he would have been back to WMD. I will remind you that once in 2005, 2006, and 2007, but particularly in 2005, once the Iranians get active in their nuclear program, you can bet Saddam Hussein would have been back in the nuclear business. So you can argue that maybe we should have gone into Iraq, even if we did not have solid evidence of the WMD.

I think as a practical manner, however, that the country wouldn't have. Just think of the practicalities of it. I say to people, "It was not so much an intelligence failure, it was a failure of imagination." Nobody ever came to me, the President of the United States, or anybody else I know of, and said, "You know I've got an interesting thought, maybe Saddam actually got rid of his WMD, but he doesn't want to tell anyone about it because he doesn't want the Iranians to know because he doesn't want the Iranians to take advantage of him." If you look at the reports I've heard about of the FBI debriefs of Saddam Hussein, that's what he says. But if you had had a red cell coming in to the Oval office, one of these outside the box, non-consensus intelligence pieces, that would have been a very interesting piece to put before the President of the United States, and would have provoked a very interesting conversation. So I think the problem wasn't really a failure of intelligence, I think it was a failure of imagination to think outside the conventional intelligence construct. We failed. We are guilty of that. I didn't think of it; the President never thought of it; nobody else thought of it. But one of the things we need to be able to do better is entertaining these kinds of out-of-the-box explanations.

I think that actually in the Surge, bringing outside people is one thing that helped the President get to where he needed to be, and it

is one thing that I am pleased that we did. He was talking to everybody about it. There are these two metaphors on the Surge that sort of clarify. One is Donald Rumsfeld. He kept saying “You know, teaching someone to ride a bicycle, at some point you have to take your hand off the seat of the bicycle.” He must have said that 10 times, and finally on the 11th time the President said, “Yeah, Don, but we cannot afford to have the bicycle fall over.” If you look at it from that standpoint, it is a wholly different construct. Second, the President said: “Casey and Rumsfeld are right. Ultimately, the Iraqis have to win this and take over, but we can’t get from here to there, given where we are; we need a bridge to get the violence down and to allow people then to start the political process again.” And that’s what the Surge in Iraq was, it was a bridge. It was a bridge to basically enable what was the right strategy, but we weren’t executing it in a way that would get us there. And so it’s that sort of clarity of analysis and clarity of thinking that you can’t always get from the system. Outside-of-the-box intelligence is hard. There are too few truths.

*In retrospect, did we have too few troops in Iraq after the shooting stopped in 2003? Could we have had a lean attack force and quickly transitioned to a fuller force for stability operations? To what extent did the Principals all understand the war plan? How did the military plan for “Phase IV” mesh with the civil plans for the new Iraq?*

*Hadley:* We talked about the problems of Phase IV. The plan was that after the fighting stopped, there would be Iraqi units that would surrender. We would vet those units, and take some of them and put them to work in some post-conflict reconstruction, cleaning up

activity. And when we were comfortable with their leadership, effectiveness, and loyalty, we would then give them security responsibilities. We thought that was going to be about 150,000 people, so we would have our forces, and our allies, and we would have 150,000 Iraqis. We thought this was going to work because in the latter days of the war, we heard from units in the north, whole divisions were negotiating to surrender with their equipment. But the war ended, and to this day, I don’t know what happened to those units and what happened to their equipment; nobody surrendered as a unit. They all melted away with their equipment. So we found ourselves, if you think about our post-war plan, 150,000 people short. So initially, Secretary Rumsfeld and Secretary Powell agreed we have to try and get the allies. Powell went out, and said to all our allies, “We need troops, post-conflict stabilization troops, how about it?” Zero, zero. And there is a lesson there for what we are now doing in Syria. The coalition that we are putting together needs to have a comprehensive agreement on what they’ve signed up for, and what they are going to contribute. It’s not just the initial operational campaign, the allies need to agree to stop some of the things they are doing, vet jihadists, and counter the propaganda. They’ve also got to agree to be supportive in post-conflict reconstruction, and they have to agree to put up some people for security.

So, the problem was we were 150,000 short; we went to the Arab states and asked, “Can you give us some people?” And they said, “No.” And I think it’s a failing on my part, I don’t remember anybody in the NSC meetings saying, “You know Mr. President, you know why the violence is going up? We thought we were going to have 150,000 more troops, and

we don't have them. What are we going to do to fill that gap?" I don't remember doing it, because the answer would have had to be, we need more people, and that of course was something the Pentagon did not want to hear. But, we should have had that conversation.

*The Iraq surge decision was a very creative decision. It was the President, essentially, looking at all his military people and saying "You're wrong, I'm not taking your advice on this."*

Hadley: I don't think that's a fair statement. The President had an instinct on where he wanted to go in terms of the Surge. In October of 2006 I received a back-of-the-envelope estimate on what a Surge would look like, and it had the magic number five brigades, which gave me confidence that a surge was viable. The NSC staff were all proponents of the Surge. I was not reluctant, but I had a view that this was our last chance to get Iraq right, and we had to be sure. So I pushed back at them, saying, "Do the analysis again, run it again." The only finger I put on the scale was saying, "There will be a surge option coming to the President in this packet. You can put anything else you want, and you can say anything you want about it, but there will be a Surge option. Otherwise we will not be giving the President all the options."

So the President knew this was coming, but he wanted his team to be onboard. Initially Secretary Rice was not on board. The Vice President was not on board. Rice and State Department Counselor Phillip Zelikow were pushing, "Don't get involved in sectarian war, step back, preserve the institutions, and let it die out." One of the most interesting sets of meetings was in the first week of December

2006, when the President was dealing with his NSC Principals, asking all kinds of probing questions, but really trying to bring everybody onboard to what he thought he would ultimately decide on, which was the Surge option, and he did it. Rice finally said, "I'll agree to more troops, but you can't have troops doing the same thing they've been doing, they have to be doing something different." And that of course says, it's not just about the troops, it's about a new strategy. The Vice President was conflicted because he wanted to be loyal to Secretary Rumsfeld who was not a Surge proponent. But the Vice President was also hearing from others, and while Cheney was not an overt champion of the surge, he played a very interesting role. I think part of it was the he was comfortable with the process I was running, and he realized he did not have to be out there pushing the Surge; it was going to happen. So by the first week of December, the President had brought his team of NSC Principals on board – but he still had a problem with the military. He also had a new Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates.

We were ready to announce the new strategy in December, but the President said, "I don't want to give the speech now; I want Gates to have an opportunity to go to Iraq, and come back, and make a recommendation to me." So Secretary of Defense Gates went to Iraq and was persuaded by General George Casey that we did not need a Surge. At most, one brigade or two brigades would do. Gates later said, "I got suckered by the military, and I made a mistake." Then we had the meeting in the "tank" (at the Pentagon with the Joint Chiefs of Staff), which was the President's attempt to win over the military. The President understood that if there were a split between him and the military in wartime, when he's

changing the strategy, at a time when the country has largely given up on Iraq, and the Congress is going to oppose his strategy, a split between him and the military under those circumstances would be a constitutional crisis and would doom his strategy. A split within the military, between General Petraeus and the people who want the new strategy, and Generals Casey and Abizaid (the field commanders at the time), would also doom the strategy because Congress in hearings would exploit this. The objective was to have everybody in the senior military ranks in the same boat. It's okay if some lean right, and it's okay if some lean left, but they all need to be in the same boat. The meeting in the "tank" was the vehicle for doing that. The President and Vice President choreographed it in the car ride over. Cheney was going to smoke out the military Chiefs, but Bush was going to have to do the heavy lifting.

The Chiefs are not the operators; they are not fighting the war; they have to raise and train the troops, and they were worried about breaking the force. They made all these arguments about strain on the military, indefinite prospect of rotations to Iraq and Afghanistan, and what that would do to the force in the future. And they were right. But the President said, "The best way to break an army is to have it defeated." Then the Chiefs said the American people won't support a Surge, to which the President replied, "I'm the President, my job is to persuade the American people, you let me worry about that, you let me worry about the politics." They came back and said, "It will break the force, we don't have enough people," and the President replied, "I will get you more people." At that point, the Chiefs came out and supported the Surge. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Peter Pace has

already worked out that, "It won't be just a military surge, but a State Department surge, and an Iraqi surge. They will all participate." This was something arranged in the lead up to that December meeting.

The military objected to this being just a military surge; it should also surge civilians; it shouldn't be just Americans, but needed to include Iraqis. The President had gotten Maliki to agree to provide divisions, to provide brigades, to let it go on in a non-sectarian way, and to agree the insurgents could not have a safe-haven within Sadr city. In the end the President came out of the meeting with a rough consensus. The chiefs were grudgingly onboard, Secretary Gates had come onboard, and the President brought Secretary Rice onboard. Cheney was now freed to support it fulsomely. While they didn't think it was necessary, even Generals Casey and Abizaid in the field were willing to support it. The final issue was, do you give the new commander the option for five brigades, or do you commit the five brigades and say to him, "If you don't need them, you can send them home." Petraeus said, "I want the brigades," and the President resolved it.

How did the interagency system preform? The participants argued strongly their views, they interacted directly with the President, their needs were addressed, and at the end of the day they came on board. Efforts by the Congress to poke holes in the strategy largely failed. And so I think it was a good process, even if it wasn't one of the academic models that are out there in the literature. It wasn't a case of the President making a decision, and the military unhappily salutes, nor was it the Commander in Chief deferring to his military. It was the President actually bringing his military along, taking into the account the best

military thoughts, but making his own judgment about the politics and about the strategy, and about where we needed to be. The President got his military advice from his military, he heard them out, but in the end he made his own decisions. He worked to bring them along where he wanted to go. So, at the end of the day when he announced his strategy, the military was in the same boat. Some leaned right, some leaned left; it wasn't without grumbling, but at the end of the day, we avoided a constitutional crisis, we avoided a split in the military. And we had a strategy which, when he announced it, the world was stunned and couldn't believe he was going to do it. He sustained it, and fought for it, and we sustained it with the Congress because we had 40 plus votes in the Senate, controlled by the Republicans -- the Congress was unable to block the strategy, and it was implemented. Petraeus and Crocker made it happen on the ground, it succeeded, to the point that Senator Carl Levin at one point, a year or so later said "Bush was right about the surge, and I was wrong." [PRISM](#)