

Sadat Forum: 9/11 and its Aftermath: Squandering Global Goodwill
September 10, 2021

Gregory Ball: Good afternoon everyone. My name is Greg Ball. I'm Dean of the College of Behavioral and Social Sciences and a professor of psychology here at the University of Maryland, College Park. It is my pleasure to welcome our panelists and the audience to this timely Sadat Forum on 9/11 and its Aftermath: Squandering Global Goodwill. I needn't say how important this subject is to all of us, and how painful the journey has been since that tragic day 20 years ago.

I can't think of a better group of people to address the question at hand. Before Professor Telhami, the Anwar Sadat Professor for Peace and Development, introduces the speakers in more detail, I want to personally welcome Ambassador Ryan Crocker, who is a distinguished American diplomat, having served as an ambassador to both Afghanistan and Iraq; Dean Amaney Jamal of the Princeton School of Public and International Affairs, who's an expert on Arab public opinion; and Senior Fellow at Brookings, Bruce Riedel, who has had a distinguished government career, including serving as Special Assistant to President George W. Bush on the Middle East, when the 9/11 attack occurred. Of course, the panel will be moderated by our own Professor Telhami, to whom I now turn to lead the conversation. Thank you all for joining us.

Shibley Telhami: Thank you Dean Ball and thank you all for joining us, and thank you especially to my esteemed panelists. In all honesty, as the Dean said I can't think of a better group of people to have the conversation I hope we will have today, so thank you for joining us. I'm obviously not going to do lengthy introductions, this is an amazingly distinguished group that - that would take forever to fill in all the details, but I am going to say a few few things about each one of them.

Let me start with the welcoming Ambassador Ryan Crocker, who is, I think, widely regarded as one of America's top diplomats period. I needn't to go through his entire resume but just to give you a flavor, he has served as ambassador to six countries during very critical times in our nation, including Ambassador to Afghanistan, Ambassador to Pakistan, Ambassador to Iraq, Ambassador to Kuwait, Ambassador to Syria. So he has had some of the toughest missions during critical times and, therefore, he was really part- he saw things firsthand. He was already recognized as an exceptional diplomat throughout his career and ultimately received the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian award. After retiring, he also became the Dean of the Bush school at Texas A&M and has had affiliations with multiple institutions, including Princeton and, more recently, as non-resident senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Next is Amaney Jamal. Amaney, to my mind, is a star scholar, who is now Dean- really we're hosting her- I don't know if this is her first public event beyond Princeton since she's become Dean, which is just a few days ago. So it's a pleasure to welcome her, she has had a distinguished career prior to becoming the Dean of Princeton School of Public and International Affairs as a scholar, who is a- an award winning author of multiple books and academic articles,

highly recognized nationally and internationally, written about many of the issues that touch on our conversation and has been a Principle of the Arab Barometer, which has measured Arab public opinion over many years, and she is there obviously to talk to us about some of those findings and her assessment of Arab policy over the past two years, and how it's been perceived in the Middle East, particularly.

Last but not least, is my friend and colleague at Brookings Bruce Riedel who, to my mind, is one of the finest government analysts I ever interacted with in all my years of interacting in government. Those who've known Bruce have appreciated the fine analysis and the intellectual honesty that he brings to his analysis, while he was in government, and since leaving government. He served for many years as a CIA analyst in many Middle Eastern countries, and he happened to be Special Assistant to President George W. Bush for the Middle East, when the 9/11 attacks occurred. Since then he's also advised President Obama, particularly in Afghanistan and Pakistan, being charged with preparing a White Paper for the Obama policy on that issue, and has been a Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution and a- a Director of the Brookings Intelligence Project- Intelligence Project. He has been prolific, those of you who follow him, he's written many books and he has a new one coming out on the U.S.-Jordanian relationship. So I am really excited about having this conversation with this distinguished panel.

Allow me first to give you a bit of a personal introduction to the issue at hand that perhaps could set the mood and also give us a little bit more of a background in the issues that some of us have been part of. Twenty years ago to the day, today, I received a phone call in my office at the University of Maryland from William Burns. At the time, Burns was Assistant Secretary of State for the Near East. He asked me to pencil in a day in Sept- later in September for President- for Secretary of State Colin Powell to deliver an important speech on foreign policy that would set a different tone, as our Sadat Lecture for Peace. And I was very excited but that speech had a history and some of us on this panel are familiar with that history, a little bit. Needless to say, Secretary Powell, admired as he was, and popular as he was throughout the Bush administration, he was not the one who was driving policy on the Middle East, most of the time. And he has wanted to give a speech that would set a different tone for months, but the White House was reluctant to have that done. And he had prepared drafts for many months. As we know, the the Bush administration at the time was dealing with the Middle East, mostly focused on possibility of confrontation with Iraq, even prior to 9/11 but the issue of the day, was the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which had- with the advent of the second intifada, which was very violent, for the previous months. And the Bush administration was certainly taking a very clear position, supporting the government of Israel in that confrontation.

Something happened later in the spring, early summer when the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, Prince Abdullah, sent a letter to the President, turning down an invitation to meet with him and criticizing American policy toward the Palestinians. This came as something of a shock to the administration. The relationship with Saudi Arabia was critical for the President at that time. And consequently I was invited personally with three other experts from the outside, to come to the White House for a meeting with them, National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice and other officials of the White House for brainstorming about what to do, in fact my colleague Bruce

Riedel was at that meeting at that time, so was William Burns himself from the State Department. And she was very frank, she said, our approach is not working, and she was trying to figure out what- to get ideas about what to do. In the meanwhile, there is no question that Powell's pitch was stick and hold more over the summer and clearly when Burns called me on September 10, 2001, he had written authorization to give that speech that he had wanted to give. Obviously we know what happened the next day, the horror we all experienced that- that- that turned things upside down, turned priorities on their heads. And clearly Secretary Powell didn't deliver the Anwar Sadat lecture at- in- in September of that year. But Nelson Mandela ended up actually giving that lecture because 9/11 brought Nelson Mandela to Washington and he met with President Bush and he gave his support for the war, the early war in Afghanistan. I want - you know- I think it's very interesting to see to review the shift in Mandela's position over a very short period of time, which I think speaks volumes about American squandering of the global goodwill that came our way in the immediate aftermath of that horror. The sympathy that even got support from countries like Iran.

I now recall that Mandela was a critic of the West and American foreign policy, he was really kind of an unlikely supporter of President George W Bush. And yet, speaking at our Sadat Lecture in November of that year after meeting with President Bush. He spoke, by the way, to 10,000 people that turned out for him during that painful month for the University of Maryland, with not only 9/11 but also the tornado that killed two of our students on campus. Speaking at Maryland he said, "We have had the occasion to express ourselves publicly in support of the current military actions by the United States and Britain in pursuit of those they identified as the perpetrators of the acts of terror. We accept that the United States and Britain are bent on bringing to book the identified terrorists and that the unfortunate civilian casualties that arise are coincidental. We accept that they will and-are taking all precautions possible within the war situation to minimize civilian casualties and suffering. This is what he said after meeting with Bush and even after he went to South Africa, he gets some criticism as the war was expanding. And two weeks later, he says, in South Africa, "I support the strikes against Afghanistan as far as it is intended to flush out Osama Bin Laden, I have no sympathy with the terrorists who kill 5,000 civilians. I can't tolerate that."

And yet within two weeks when the scope of war became clearer and civilian casualties in Afghanistan were rising he were- he was beginning to have doubts and change his positions. He- he said a couple weeks later, "I never supported the bombing of the whole of Afghanistan and the killing of innocent children, elderly people, women and the disabled. I confine myself to Bin Laden and his organization." And within months later, his regrets went to the very idea that he even gave a green light to the war itself. He was changing his mind even about a limited operation, he said "Our- our view may have been one sided and overstated. Such unreserved support for the war in Afghanistan gives the impression that we are insensitive to and uncaring about the suffering inflicted upon the Afghan people in the country. Labeling of Osama Bin Laden as a terrorist responsible for those who- acts before he has been tried and convicted could also be seen as undermining some of the basic tenets of the rule of law."

But what really turned the attitude of- of Mandela around completely was the beginning of the

talk of an American war on Iraq within months without the support of the United Nations. And ultimately, he called the U.S. stand as arrogant, he called President Bush as a President who can't think properly and wants to plunge the world into a Holocaust. He had come a full circle, this is all within a few months from, you know, a clear support coming from someone who is not likely to be an ally of President George W Bush. And I think this perhaps maps out a lot of the transition that occurred in international opinion and views of what the U.S. was doing in Afghanistan and, obviously, more importantly, lead- in the lead up to the war on Iraq.

So let me take this introduction and go right to it with a question first to Bruce Riedel. And the real- the question here is, you were at the White House, when the horror happened. When Al-Qaeda attacked us on 9/11. And I wonder if you could give us a sense about what the real options were on the table as you saw them at that time. And I'm not really talking about sort of the the emotional part of it, which we all understand and it's been talked about, and we all felt. But more about analytically as someone who was there, as someone who has been a great analyst of American policy and the Middle East over the years and of terrorism and counterterrorism. What were the real options on the table as you saw them and how did they develop in- in the coming weeks?

Bruce Riedel: Thank you Shibley. And first of all thank you for inviting me to the- such a distinguished panel. Let me, let me say a few words of background about the situation in the White House in September of 2001. All summer, particularly in the beginning of August on, we were inundated with intelligence reports of an Al-Qaeda attack inside the United States, inside the homeland. Secretary- Director of Central Intelligence George Tenet was literally going door to door in the administration, warning that an attack was imminent. Unfortunately, the Bush administration didn't do anything about it. National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice never called a meeting of the Principals or of the Deputies to discuss the threat environment. I am convinced that had such a meeting been held, we probably would have thwarted the plot. It would have come to the surface that there were two Al Qaeda operatives known to be in the United States of America, and that would have led to tracking them down.

So in addition to the shock, there was great concern in the White House that an investigation into what had happened would find that the administration had bungled the job very, very badly. So they wanted very much to go on offense and to take action. In addition, of course, the reporting that we had suggested that 9/11 was just one of many attacks that Al-Qaeda and Osama Bin Laden were planning. We recently in the last week or so have gotten declassified information by- a major Al-Qaeda plot to attack Israel in March 2002 which would have been devastating in the context of the Second Intifada.

So the option on the table, was there really wasn't an option. The option was, we've got to break up Al-Qaeda's infrastructure in Afghanistan and in Pakistan as quickly as possible. We went through the motion of asking the Taliban to turn them over. We went to the Pakistanis and asked them to put pressure on the Taliban to turn them over and the Taliban refused, okay, outright insisted that he was a guest, and that he was not a threat, and they would not take any action against him. The quickly- the options nailed down to how are we going to go into

Afghanistan.

Fortunately, the CIA had already been planning such a mission for months and months. One of the reasons why George Tenet wanted a meeting was to get the authority to send his operatives into northern Afghanistan, work with the Northern Alliance, Ahmad Shah Massoud and others in order to track down and get Osama Bin Laden one way or another, and essentially that CIA plan was what morphed into the invasion of Afghanistan.

It was a tricky operation, as we have all come to learn Afghanistan is on the far side of the world. It's a landlocked country, it's not that easy to get to. In the end, we were able to get there, but there was quite a challenge. Now the option that was under the table, I would put it, which became glaringly obvious in time, is that we were not only going to go after Osama Bin Laden, we were going to go after Saddam Hussein, even though there wasn't one shred of evidence that linked the Iraqis to the 9/11 attack.

I recently found my diary for 2001 and it shows that on September 14, I was in the Oval Office with the President when he talked to Tony Blair. And in the middle of the conversation with Tony Blair about 9/11, George Bush says we're going to attack Iraq too, three days after 9/11. He tells the British he is going to attack Iraq. Now, Tony Blair was stunned, you could tell listening to the phone call, the British Prime Minister was just completely taken aback. Now in time, of course, he would come around, but at the moment he didn't see this as making any sense at all. But that option would, as you pointed out, ultimately become exercised and by the spring of 2002, the White House was openly talking about going to war with Iraq.

Shibley Telhami: Yeah this, this is really great. In fact I want to stick with this point and go to Ryan, because I think Ryan, if you, if I recall correctly, you, you were dispatched to be Head of Mission in Afghanistan really within weeks, early January 2002. And so a lot of the things that Bruce talked about in terms of the mission as it was defined and the complexity of that mission given where Afghanistan was and how much presence we didn't have in that country, I wonder what things looked like to you. And if you would, if I could add more to this transition about how it was seen from the outside, your thoughts on three connected issues that impacted the way the world saw it. In some ways Bruce touched on them already. One, obviously, is the way ultimately we defined the war on terrorism, you know they hate us for our values. But the other is how the mission itself evolved in Afghanistan. People were- didn't know how it's going to go and obviously it wasn't like some people expected. But the third, perhaps Bruce highlighted that early on, the Iraq war that was not easy to separate, because the mission, if you are already planning to go to- to an Iraq war, in a way, this is a stepping stone. What you do in Afghanistan isn't just an objective in itself, but it is setting the stage for something bigger. Was that obvious at the time?

Ryan Crocker: I had just returned to Washington from Damascus. I was Ambassador to Syria '98 to 2001, and had taken up the duties of Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs covering Iraq and the Gulf area. So, before I got to Afghanistan, my life had already changed, in the sense that when civil aviation reopened, I was on one of the first flights

out of Dulles heading for Europe and on to Geneva to sit down with something called the Geneva Group, this was a group convened under UN auspices, the legendary Lakhdar Brahimi, in this case, at UN headquarters in Geneva. The participants were Italy, Germany, Iran and the United States. This had been in existence for some years. It was a forum that allowed us to talk directly to the Iranians on matters pertaining to Afghanistan. I didn't even know it existed, because in the unique tribal structure of the State Department, Afghanistan was part of the South Asia Bureau, whereas I was part of the Near East tribe, and the boundary was the Iranian boundary to- to the East, with Afghanistan and Pakistan. But after 9/11, we have something to talk to the Iranians about. They- they also saw the Taliban as an enemy indeed, almost went to war with them in the late 1990s. So we had this interesting experience of actually having a common objective. And the Iranians that I talked to got very impatient with us, "are you guys gonna take out the Taliban or aren't you?" They provided their order of battle for Taliban forces, described how they would proceed if they were us, which is rather an extraordinary concept. And we talked about what Bruce just mentioned, the Northern Alliance and that area that had never fallen under Taliban control. They had their guys, of course, in with the Northern Alliance right from the beginning, when the Taliban took over in 96 and maybe before. And indeed, my primary Iranian interlocutor was not a career diplomat, it was a career Revolutionary Guard officer and part of the Quds force, Qasem Soleimani's outfit. And we got along pretty well. Both of us were sort of inclined to action. And at one point with authorization from the Agency, I put to him that, so you got your guys up with the Northern Alliance, we got our guys up with the Northern Alliance. And I'll bet you anything that the Northern Alliance is probably playing us off against each other. He agreed that was probable, so I said how about, you know, my guys talk to your guys on the ground. He found that intriguing but in our next meeting came back to say that Haji Qasem found that maybe just a little premature, but see how things play out first.

So when I did get to Afghanistan, Kabul, guess what? My negotiating counterpart was their ambassador to Afghanistan. And we continued the conversation, in Kabul, again at UN headquarters or the UN mission there. Lakhdar Brahimi wants more. Except Lakhdar Brahimi wasn't there. He just gave us the flag and the office. So we were having some fairly productive conversations. And then of course we had the State of the Union address 2002, the Axis of Evil, in which Iran was so labeled. And, and that kind of ended that as a productive process and kind of sad here really. One of the issues we had under discussion was Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a notorious Mujahideen leader. Very anti-U.S. The Iranians had him under house arrest. So we were talking about how he might possibly be handed over to the Afghan Interim authority, and then to us. And then we have the State of the Union. My Iranian interlocutor called for an urgent meeting and I just, God, rolled my eyes and said, Jesus he's going to shred me. But what he did was kind of a final courtesy, really, if you will. To tell me that Hekmatyar had been deposited by Iran across the border in Afghan Balochistan, in a specific little town. We rolled on it immediately and what he told me was true, but Hekmatyar had already gone. And we spent years trying to track him down. Eventually he did come out of the cold but, you know, I wonder how many American Service Members lost their lives to Hekmatyar, before he switched sides, that wouldn't have, had some bright boy in Washington not decided to slip Iran in there at the last minute, so.

Many tangled stories here.

Shibley Telhami: Yeah well this is fascinating and I want to come back to it, because obviously you had that mission early on, and then we came back to both Pakistan and Afghanistan in a big way and I'd like to explore that a little bit. But I want to turn it to Amaney more about the regional perspective, meaning sort of given what you study obviously you, you also follow what happens in our own country and you analyze that as well. But- but in terms of the reaction, at least in the Arab world, that you study so well and that you and I have done a lot of public opinion polling on. In terms of, how would you kind of describe the evolution, if there was one in the region, in the evolution of the reaction to 9/11 and then American response to 9/11? Maybe we can differentiate both because I think 9/11 itself created a tremendous amount of goodwill across the globe, but America's reaction to 9/11 generated a different kind of reaction. So it's not really 9/11 it's what America did in response. And that might be really a good way to describe what transpired, also in the Middle East, so I'd like to hear you, particularly with regard to those three issues that I articulated, namely how the U.S.- how the Bush administration defined the war on terrorism, particularly the tone, except by saying it's you know "they hate us for our values" sort of message that was sent out. Versus the- the the scale of war in Afghanistan and civilian casualties versus the focus on Iraq, which was, as Bruce suggested, was from day one, but certainly publicly, it became much more focused in the weeks ahead. So I'd love to hear from you kind of a description of how you saw that evolution in the reaction in the Middle East, particularly.

Amaney Jamal: Yeah no those are great questions and again it's an honor to be here with the distinguished panel- the panel panelists here. So, initially, you know, on the eve of 9/11 when those towers came down, I think, in the Middle East, as elsewhere, across the globe, people were horrified. People were horrified that this happened on American soil. People were horrified that this happened in the name of Islam. It was unfortunate if you- even- even when you thought about the media coverage. While in most countries, there were vigils in front of like U.S. embassies, U.S. missions to commemorate the loss of life. Oftentimes what was sort of captured on Fox news were just like you know the few radical groups or you know hoodlums if you may who were celebrating the attacks. But by and large, the citizens across the region stood by the United States, stood by the tragedy of the United States and they were there, you know in vigil with their candles in hand commemorating the events. And I think, just like both Bruce and Ryan pointed out, that in the initial days as the U.S. was preparing for an attack on Afghanistan to rid the region of terrorism, I think, by and large, you could say, although nobody in the region and in the MENA region supports war, there was this this sort of silent conviction that terrorism is a problem, and if Arab and Middle Eastern governments can't take care of it, they would probably welcome somebody else to help them out on that front right, you know. This is when Al Qaeda, you know people were nervous about Al Qaeda across the board. And initially also after 9/11, just to we we- sort of contextualize the events accurately, the Bush administration came out initially very, very specifically to sort of emphasize that this was not a clash of values, and this was not a clash of let's say Islam in the West. He visited the DC mosque in Washington DC, he made a very, you know very thoughtful speech. A lot of- several people in the Muslim community were actually taken aback by it in terms of just feeling in a very positive way.

However as the Bush administration began to plan its attack on Iraq, which had no rational- we had no rational goal, it was not necessarily linked to the war on terror. We began to see this escalation of a discourse that pitted the U.S. against Islam almost to say, well, the reason we have to go into Iraq, right, which was not linked to Afghanistan, which was not linked to Al Qaeda, which was not linked to any of the other issues that the U.S. was dealing with vis a vis the terrorist threat. Well you know Saddam Hussein ultimately is, like many of these other leaders who has the potential and the propensity to support radicalized movements, because ultimately we have this civilizational divide between the Middle East and the and the United States. And that's when you begin to see this value clash, and then you know, language like the axis of evil, language like the reason why we were attacked was because the people in that part of the world don't share our values here at home, right. So it's all of a sudden a value issue. Again when you're saying that, you're basically saying that their values are so primordial, so backward and so uncivilized, it justifies intervention at the mass scale, at the mass scale of what we saw then. Not only what we saw in Afghanistan, but what we saw in Iraq. You know, the whole shock and awe type of sort of like you know invasion there. So it's no surprise that the public, you know sort of was won over in terms of being green lighted going- for the U.S. to go into Iraq with this massive devastation. Put- putting our U.S. troops on the ground, in Iraq, to take down an entire regime.

You know, like, if you take a political science course, political science 101, the minute-the minute you take down the security apparatus of any country, you are committing our troops on the ground to do state building work when that's not our troops' jobs to be doing. So, we get engaged, we found ourselves stuck in Iraq. We found ourselves putting our children on the ground, fighting a war that we could not win, we could not build a state. And then, using the language of civilizational divide to justify that that war, I think, was just like you know shocking. The truth is it, then we began to see the whole language about well the WMDs, the weapons of mass destruction. First we were told they were in Baghdad, then they were outside of Baghdad, then they were north and then there were east and they were west and then we couldn't find them. And then we had to then rely even more on the civilizational divide and the language of civilizational inferiority, if you may, to justify why we stayed in Iraq because we had to now, we have really had no other strategy.

So then, linking all of that, back to the region and sort of like public opinion, where we are monitoring- monitoring it in the Arab Barometer, the Arab Barometer begins to pick up a lot of these opinions around 2006, 2007 so this is post-US invasion, but the U.S. is still deeply embedded in Iraq at the time. And what you see there is that the war on Iraq really did not serve- if there was a US geostrategic sort of strategy, which you know, and I sort of believe when you're dealing with this sort of war on terror, the fight on terrorism, you're ultimately dealing with a war on minds- on hearts and minds. It's a it's a war that requires some soft power, right. And the idea behind that is, you want to make sure the language and the discourse of terrorists only reaches a minimal audience and that the majority of the population out there are basically swayed against that terrorist doctrine, so that they are not going to turn against their own people, their own governments or let's say external actors. So in that sense, the U.S.

is also very responsible in terms of promoting a discourse that makes- ensures that you keep these terrorist groups contained and they cannot sort of disseminate and reach out of the you know different territories to reach broader audiences. The war on Iraq did not help. The war on Iraq- with the devastation that hundreds of you know upwards of 200,000s in the way of civilian casualties, you get Abu Ghraib that comes out of Iraq, again this dehumanization and, you know dehumanization of Iraqi prisoners. All of this contributes to this anti-American discourse that the U.S. is an imperial force, the U.S. is capable of dehumanizing the citizens of the region, and it has ulterior motives. The discourse plays out, of course, is that this was a war to secure the oil fields of Iraq, not necessarily to U.S. geostrategic interest, it basically put U.S. troops in harm's way. So it really did put back these efforts of winning hearts and minds, and I think people are still contending with this right now.

Shibley Telhami: When you know it's interesting, of course, you're analyzing the consequences of the Iraq war, which many of us saw and obviously opposed, some of us scholars took an ad in the New York Times saying it's not in America's national interest. But, to be fair to people in the government like Ryan Crocker and Bill Burns and Bruce Riedel, they saw it too. And, in fact, Karen DeYoung of the Washington Post in her book revealed that, you know, Powell had asked Ryan Crocker and Bill Burns to prepare a report about the consequences of what would come out and they of course spelled it out. All of the things that we know about, the sectarianism, the destabilization, the intervention from outside players, Iran, Saudi Arabia and others. So it isn't that it was hard to foresee, it is that those who are making the decisions didn't didn't want to hear that message. And that takes me back to- to Bruce again. At that moment could it have been different, was there- were there options that could have been pursued, that could have taken America in a different course after 9/11? And I say that because at one level it's obvious. The rallying behind the flag that took place was unprecedented in my memory. You have a super empowered President in ways that I had never witnessed, a man who was elected by less than 50% of the American people. And the next morning after 9/11, his approval rating goes up to 90% because people obviously want to rally behind the flag and say "take us where you want to take us we'll go with you." He certainly had an opportunity- President Bush had an opportunity to take us in different places and he chose to take us in this path and if Bruce is right, and I have every reason to believe he is, that he from day one wanted to take us to Iraq. I wonder whether there was another set of options that was even presented by people like you Bruce. And I say that because you also mentioned about the fact that Al Qaeda was driven, unlike the conventional wisdom, not by the value of conflict, not even by so much by the presence of American forces in the region, but motivated at the core by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which is something that was denied early on. You wrote a piece in the Brookings website two days ago, based on some of the new classified- declassified information saying Al Qaeda was always motivated by Israel-Palestine and it still is, its leadership is motivated principally by that. But there was a fear that that might translate into an anti-Israel backlash in America, and I want to take a- within weeks in in early October of 2001, a man who had been supported by President Bush, the Prime Minister of Israel Ariel Sharon issued a warning saying he was fearing that this will be another- there'll be another Munich, that the U.S. will sell Israel out too after 9/11. So there was a certain sense, maybe that this could have taken a different course than the one it took, that the administration may have been able to focus on Israel-

Palestine, if it had wanted to. The public was behind the President. The international community would have wholeheartedly supported, certainly governments in the Middle East. He could have even ended, if he wanted to, the sanctions on Iraq and the public would have supported him. So I wonder if there was any time when you were there in the early days, when there was anything presented, other than this course that ultimately took us to Iraq?

Bruce Riedel: It's very good question. I mean- divide divide and concord. There was the immediate, overwhelming need to respond to Al Qaeda in Afghanistan before another attack came. There was no- was no arguing in the administration "we shouldn't do that," there was consensus that we should. Colin Powell, Rumsfeld, Cheney, all of them agreed, this is the immediate response.

There was debate over a bigger question, you put your finger on it exactly Shibley. You don't have to be a, you don't have to read every statement of Osama Bin Laden and Ayman Al-Zawahiri to realize the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was the motivating factor behind it. There's- there's a famous quote, which I suspect is not really true, in which Osama Bin Laden was asked, did he attack the United States because of our values, and he responds back "if I didn't like the way you dressed woman, I would have attacked Sweden, not the United States." The point was the Israeli-Palestine conflict and Secretary Powell did make a very strong case that we had to address this issue. You'd earlier mentioned the speech that he was to give. That speech in the end morphed into many things, but one of them was in George Bush's address to the UN General Assembly, in either October or November, for the first time an American President endorsed a two-state solution and called for the creation of a state of Palestine. Some will argue, yes, but we'd been talking about that in the Clinton administration for the previous eight years, but the President had never called for the creation of a Palestinian state in a public statement. This was significant new ground. That's as far as the Bush Administration wanted to take it, for a variety of reasons, including the fact that Clinton administration failed so grievously at Camp David, there was no appetite for real negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians, there was only an appetite for trying to get a ceasefire in the Second Intifada. And that all fell apart by March of 2002, with the apprehension of the arms shipment going from Iran to the Palestinians.

That was an option that could have been explored. You know you could have taken advantage of 9/11 to use that in the Second Intifada, pivot to the ending, say okay, we've seen that this got out of control, 3,000 Americans are dead. It's now time to call upon you, Yasser Arafat, you Ariel Sharon to end the violence, separate the parties. But that that was not what the- what the Bush administration wanted to do, and we've all said it was very clear very quickly that the people who counted in the Bush administration, the President, the Vice President and the Secretary of Defense were not satisfied going to Afghanistan, they were intent on going to war with Iraq one way or another.

I should also say there never was serious evidence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. The last two years of the Clinton administration, we frantically looked for any hint of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq in order to justify the continued sanctions. Thankfully, Saddam Hussein

threw the inspectors out, which gave us the justification to keep the sanctions in place. If he hadn't done that it would have forced us to produce evidence of weapons of mass destruction, there was none. And that was a known fact in the United States government in 2001. There's the famous line of George Tenet, "it's a slam dunk." One has to look at the context for that conversation. The President has brought George Tenet and his deputy into the Oval Office in order to lay out the case. They lay out the case for weapons of mass destruction and the President said, "That's it? That's all you've got? There's no better evidence than that?" And that's when George made the unfortunate comment, "it's a slam dunk." The point was the President heard the evidence and he knew there was no weapons of mass destruction. It remains one of my- one of the mysteries of my life. Why was the President of the United States so obsessed with Saddam Hussein in 2001 and 2002 that he wanted to go to war? What was the root cause of that obsession? I don't think we have a good answer twenty years later.

Shibley Telhami: Yeah no, I agree, and that has always been my my puzzling question about what is what is what is driving the President on this issue. I want to go back to Ryan really about connecting Iraq and Afghanistan. You know Ryan, I mean I think one of the issues when you went in early on in early January, obviously, you have to define a very immediate practical mission that that you have to deal with, at a time when the infrastructure was limited. And that but later on, you became an ambassador to Iraq you came back to Afghanistan, Pakistan and I'm I'm just wondering whether you thought the Iraq and Afghanistan issues were directly connected, by which I mean that that early drive toward the Iraq war that that Bruce described, that the President had obviously- everybody else was pushing for within the administration, those who, like you had reservations were pushed aside, including the most popular man, Colin Powell. So was there a direct connection in the sense that that decision really affected what we were doing in Afghanistan? And later on to the Iraq war and the entanglement in Iraq and the focus in Iraq did that undermine the mission and redefine it in the Afghanistan conflict? How would you answer that?

Ryan Crocker: Well before I got to Afghanistan, I got to Iraq. It was the beginning of December, I was asked to fly out to Turkey and then go by road down into the Kurdish areas in northern Iraq. The message I was to convey to the Kurdish leaders Massoud Barzani and Jalal Talabani was that no decisions have been made in Washington about a possible military intervention in Iraq. What we needed the Kurds to do was to do nothing. Do not speculate, do not assume, and above all don't try to preempt. In other words do not send your Peshmerga south to precipitate a war, expecting that we will then launch one. These are very experienced individuals, they knew exactly what I was saying. That yep keep- that do what we tell you when we tell you to do it, don't mess this up, and it will be to your advantage. So in my mind, and then, of course, by the end of December, I was on my way to Afghanistan, so December '01 was pretty eventful for me.

But it also established in my mind, a connection here. And, indeed, while I was in Kabul I remember one long long evening with the President- or Chairman Karzai at that time and a couple of his key advisors, we were going through lists of names trying to identify hyphenated Afghans, in the United States and really throughout the developed world who might be recruited to return to their country of origin and bringing their skills with them to do things like road

building and electrical generation and healthcare and just about everything, because there was nothing left. By the time the Taliban were ousted by us, I mean it was just a complete zone of devastation. And I took that lesson back with me actually to Washington and when I got back in April, thinking well you know nobody's asked me what I think of this, but it does look like there is a reasonable probability we are going to go to war in Iraq, and if we do, maybe we could do some of the homework first. Certainly wished we'd had- there had been some efforts to identify those Afghans before the fact. And that led to something called the Future of Iraq project, in which we sought out the best in the brightest who are from Iraq originally who still had connections there who cared about it, and put together a project in which a number of papers were written on again what might be necessary to do in Iraq if Saddam was removed from power by us. It wasn't the papers we were aiming at, it was building that rolodex. So that unlike Afghanistan, if we did go into Iraq, we would have a list of people that we could call on for some of that now infamous nation building. So again the connections were there, I certainly saw them and I even before I got to Afghanistan, I was hearing some of the same things that Bruce had described. That there were folks over at DoD, who were saying well, this is actually going to slow us down on Iraq you know, we've got to deal with Afghanistan now so we're gonna have to push Iraq off to the side for at least a little while. So there, there was that sense of inevitability throughout this process.

But I would have to say Shibley, we are of course a democracy, certainly flawed- all democracies are. November 2002, the congressional elections and by and large, the American people voted to have a big old war in Iraq. I- we had Bush's UN speech, but that election to me, that sealed the deal. We were gonna go. Four years later, when I was in Pakistan, the 2006 congressional elections, the American people voted not to have a big old war in Iraq, but but guess what you can't rewind the film.

So a- you know, we talk about, you know, the American people, as the bedrock of our democracy, and that is absolutely true. But with that goes a certain responsibility that the American people should not try to duck or avoid. We we got the war we wanted in 2002, and unfortunately, could not undo it when they decided otherwise in 2006.

Shibley Telhami: Yeah this is interesting and I'll come back actually to this connection, because I want to bring it up to the to the moment, you know sort of have the last 15 minutes discussing now. But I have one more question about then to Amaney and it's really about this public opinion that you talked about. We do know that Arab governments typically deal with the U.S., they have to it's a superpower, they're dependent on it, many of them in the Gulf and elsewhere. And even those who didn't like the Iraq war, made fights against it- ultimately when the U.S. made a decision, they went along and they had every interest to pretend that it was the right thing to do. But the public of course isn't- that was not where they were from the beginning, you and I have done a lot of public opinion polls that showed public opposition across the board in all the countries where we have done public opinion polls. The issue is that, was that also amplified during that period, beginning with 2001 through the Iraq war, by the fact that we have had an information revolution in the Middle East? In the late 90s, we have the rise of satellite television, particularly Al Jazeera, that amplifies the message, that makes public opinion more

animated, that impacts the war of ideas and creates more space for opposition. I wonder how you saw that evolving during that period, and how much of it, how much of a factor you thought that was in the projection of this anti-Americanism that was taking place?

Amaney Jamal: Yeah thank you Shibley for that question. So the- definitely as the Arab media and Arab media outlets have become more sophisticated, and this period sort of coincides with the the advent of satellite television in the region, you get your Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya and then you get sort of the response with Alhurra, you get this war of media satellite channels to sort of win hearts and minds in the region. And you know I think these these satellite stations definitely did contribute, not necessarily only to some, you know, increasing levels of anti-Americanism, because that sort of then sort of reinforces this idea that Al Jazeera has only been anti-American and Al Arabiya is sort of in the middle and then Alhurra has come on the scene to try to sort of win hearts and minds in a pro-American fashion. And it sort of leaves us with the idea that that if we can just get the PR right, without policy change we can get the hearts and minds formula in place. And the truth is, remember, even as the media is sort of circulating around, you have this devastating war in Iraq and it's becoming clearer and clearer for the populations in the region that the U.S. is going to be there for quite a while. And every day, every day, I mean as as as all of you know, all my colleagues know, who are with us, the numbers games, that the number of deaths and casualties coming out of Iraq was devastating to the region and to our morale here in the U.S. Again, and you sort of see this.

What's also though going on at the time, is that, in my opinion, as the situation in Iraq gets worse for the United States, the- you know you sort of see this rise in Islamophobia happening. You get 9/11, you get you know calls for quiet and peace. But then, year in and year out, levels of Islamophobia, the rhetoric, the anti-Islamic rhetoric in the United States is also rising. So this is also being broadcast back to the Middle East, via satellite right. All of the what's going on in the U.S. So it's sort of now it's sort of really sort of playing out. If you're watching this now, looking back 20 years you're thinking oh my God, this is playing out like a clash of civilizations. When nobody ever thought this was going to be a clash of civilizations, it's really it's playing out in the U.S. as such, it's now playing out in the in the Middle East. And we're forgetting that there's this horrible ongoing war, and you know, bringing Bruce's point back to this, not only there's an ongoing war in Iraq, but the- on the Arab-Israeli side of the equation, the situation, or at least the hope for Palestinians is diminishing. You know Oslo is failing, the Clinton effort failed, and now you're seeing sort of like this entrenchment of occupation on the West Bank. So the future of the Palestinian State is becoming more and more elusive. So all of this is happening, but the way it's playing out on the the theater, the international theatre, if you may, is we have- we're we're involved in this civilizational war. And that makes it far more difficult to sort of address, because now you're sort of like out there, like you know all of us are out there, trying to sort of like talk about why it's not necessarily civilizational per se. Thank you on that.

Shibley Telhami: Yeah I know, and I think- you know I've always believed that the clash of civilization theses had a a self-fulfilling prophecy built into it, because we are what we have to defend and I've shown that in some of the polling that I've done, where if the, if people in the Arab world feel that you are really- your policy's anti-Muslim, that you focus on them because

they're Muslim, they become more Muslim. That identity rises to the top and and clearly intensifies the conflict with the U.S. So we've we've witnessed this in a- in a very graphic way because we've had a lot of data from the Arab Barometer, from my project and other projects that really have mapped this out.

I want to turn now to the last 15 minutes to more the current moment. Let me start with Bruce. And Bruce I want to, I want to connect in a way to the link between Afghanistan and Pakistan, and the reason I want to do that is, I recall, when you helped produce the White Paper for Obama back in 2009, it was really a White Paper about Afghanistan and Pakistan, you always saw that those two are deeply linked, that addressing one means addressing the other, that you can't separate them so much. And in recent months, a) you were critical of the way the Trump administration was handling this negotiation with the Taliban, and later critical of the Biden administration, what you thought was ignoring Pakistan in its pursuit of an end of conflict in Afghanistan. So I wonder if you could elaborate more about that link and tell us where we are now on that issue, given that the U.S. has pulled out.

Bruce Riedel: The Taliban, their origins were intimately connected Pakistani- to the Pakistani military and to the Pakistani intelligence service. The Musharraf regime realized pretty quickly after September 11 that they were in trouble, and that they needed to do something dramatically different. And, in effect, Pakistan in the late fall of 2001, did exactly what the Biden administration did this summer to the government of Afghanistan. In both cases the supportive outside power pulled out the enablers that made the Afghan Taliban army in 2001 and the national government in 2021 work. And without those enablers on the ground, it was relatively easy to drive them out of the country in a hurry. Now Pakistan switched policies quickly after that, and resumed its intimate relationship with the Afghan Taliban, which it maintains to today.

The United States I think has neglected Pakistan badly the last seven months. The President has yet to call Prime Minister Imran Khan on the phone. This is the sixth largest country in the world in terms of population. Whether or not you wanted to talk about Afghanistan, Pakistan in its own right merits discussion. And here's what I would say for the future. For the last 40 years our policy towards Pakistan has been revolved heavily around our Afghan policy, either to defeat the Soviets, or to beat the Al Qaeda. We needed Pakistan in a certain way and our thinking about Pakistan was heavily influenced by Afghanistan. I would argue, one virtue of where we are in the last few weeks is we're freed of that, we can now deal with Pakistan on its own, as an entity that requires its own very unique American approach. We can engage Pakistan without constantly worrying about our supply line through Karachi. In that sense we've been freed, we should take advantage of that. I should say also engagement doesn't mean agreement. We engage with the Russians, we engage with the Chinese. But it does mean an active and significant dialogue. We should have Imran Khan come to the United States, invite him to a meeting in the Oval Office, to talk to Congress. As Ryan knows better than I, he's a bit of a quirky individual and that will come through. But all the better. We should know the man who's, theoretically whose finger is on the trigger on one of the largest nuclear weapons arsenals in the world. Whether his finger really is on the trigger is another question, but he is the Prime Minister of Pakistan, and we need to deal with it.

Shibley Telhami: Yeah. I want to ask Ryan a question related to the moment. I know that despite your reservations about the U.S. getting involved in war period and obviously Iraq particularly, you had very clear reservations that you expressed in the New York Times about the way the Biden administration pulled out of Afghanistan, so I wonder if you could tell us more about that, but also tie something into it, now that the U.S. is out, and that's it. You know, we now have a new reality on the ground, whether or not the sort of stuff you talked about early on, after 9/11 where the U.S. was coordinating with Iran or the Iranians wanted to coordinate it with us about a strategy towards the Taliban, whether now that could be revived? This is actually a question from my colleague Dana Priest, whether or not there is a new opportunity or even need for that to happen.

Ryan Crocker: Well it's a- that's a waterfront covering question. Yes, I think that we have had both a strategic failure and a tactical failure. The strategic failure, being a decision taken not by President Biden, but by President Trump to engage in direct negotiations with the Taliban without the government of Afghanistan present. That that was a long standing Taliban demand, we came into it and I said at the time that that fact means, these are not peace negotiations at all. These are surrender talks. We're done, and we're going to get out any way we can. And that's pretty much how it rolled out. So we delegitimized the government of Afghanistan and demoralized basically the entire country, and certainly it's armed forces. That was compounded when President Trump basically compelled the Ashraf Ghani government to release 5,000 Taliban prisoners who immediately rejoined the fight. So I am, I'm just devastated to hear from the President of the United States, as well as others that, you know, we can't be fighting for Afghanistan when its own forces won't fight for it. Well, those forces were totally demoralized by our decision to abandon the country. They died by the thousands for- for years in this campaign, and they stayed in the field. So, this could not have been more calamitous then, if we had tried to turn it into a clown.

And then, of course, President Biden comes to office, I think there was a disagreement actually in the administration very early on. Jake Sullivan as National Security Advisor on day two of the administration called his counterpart, Ambassador Mohib who had been on the Trump Administration's "do not call" list, and then after the call the NSC issued a statement, basically saying that- that National Security Advisor had told his counterpart that we have serious issues in front of us, both of us, and that he looked forward to dealing with these issues with Afghanistan as a key and tested ally. A week later, of course, the Secretary of State, sent a letter to President Ghani saying something very, very different. It was an extremely harsh letter in tone, and the the main message was, the zero option is most definitely on our table. Well, that was a calculated insult. Secretaries of State do not send correspondence to chiefs of state. And it furthered again that delegitimization of the government, it made it President Biden's policy now, as did his embrace of President Trump's envoy, Ambassador Khalilzad. So it should not- maybe the pace of collapse was a surprise, but the collapse, not at all. We had made it painfully clear, we were done. The Taliban was coming back, not our problem, and we now have, what we have. And I worry greatly about the long term consequences of this.

Shibley Telhami: Yeah.

Ryan Crocker: I agree, you're completely right on on Pakistan. However, I fear that what we have done now is going to increase the challenges to Pakistan zone stability. We have emboldened Islamic militants around the world. We've given the Taliban the narrative that "they clad only in the one true faith" have defeated the infidels. Well the Pakistani Taliban has certainly heard that one, I think. And they aim of course to overthrowing the government in Islamabad, not in Kabul. So the Pakistanis are in I think for some real trouble. And once again I mean it's 6-7-8 as sixth most populous nation, 220 million roughly, the seventh largest standing army, and the eighth nuclear weapon nation. So we had better figure out a new a new Pakistan policy and figure it out pretty quickly, because that is one of the danger zones that I think that they will be heading into as a consequence of our decision. On Iran, you know I don't think we can have that conversation. The Iranians did support the Taliban just to get at us. But it's an uh-oh moment for them too. Again their history with the Taliban: not so great. I think we need to keep an eye on that down the road, a bit. There may be some necessities, if not opportunities but but right now I think we've got to focus more particularly on Pakistan.

Shibley Telhami: Wait I want to give the last word to Amaney but I want to say on on this issue- withdrawal, obviously, most people were troubled by the way the withdrawal took place. I happen to actually think that the withdrawal decision, ultimately, is a good one. There's a lot of people that agree and disagree on this, we all will. And nonetheless, I was not surprised by the collapse of the army. Partly because the assessment was without the U.S., they had no chance to win. And if I were in their place, I would have quit rather than fight and ultimately lose and lose thousands of more people. I don't think that was surprising to me, I wrote about that early on. But it's a painful time. Now we need to think ahead about what we could do better. Let me give Amaney the last word, but the- I just want you to think about it, Amaney, in the context of the reality. So the U.S. has pulled out of Afghanistan, on the way out of- maybe completely- from Iraq. Those are two huge issues that have undermined America's standing. The Israeli-Palestinian issue still remains, that was already the major grievance prior to 9/11. How do you see attitudes shifting, if at all in the Arab world?

Amaney Jamal: Yeah so I'm going to try to be brief, just to be mindful of the time, but you know what what's striking about the the Afghanistan issue, in terms of everything that Bruce and Ryan highlighted, what we have to be worried about worried about are the second order consequences that will affect different segments of the population across the region who have been working with the United States. Whether it's through USAID campaigns, whether through civil society and NGOs, whether it's through the women's empowerment, right. A lot of the women empowerment NGOs are linked to Europe and the United States. And this idea that the U.S. can abandon support, just like that and walk away is going to make people think twice about partnerships with the United States. That's where I'm worried. That's where we in the Arab Barometer are going to be monitoring. And so, this is this, this is something that we need to keep our eyes on as we move forward. Again, you know, I think part of this is that, you know, the U.S., you know it would be nice if- we have to be sort of consistent in terms of our goals, and what are- what we want to accomplish in our intervention and our diplomacy with the Middle

East. And if we want to accomplish anything above and beyond the stability and the status quo of our alliances, then we sort of have to sort of be thinking 2, 3, 4, 5 years down the line. So you know, in many ways, I think this was a blow to the youth in the region who were- who are looking to the United States, who are looking to external actors to in terms of that hope of a better future. And I'll end it on that point.

Shibley Telhami: Well, thanks so much and, by the way, we're about to release a poll with Marc Lynch on the Middle East Scholar Barometer. And you will find that the majority of the Middle East scholars agree with Ryan, and you, that the way the withdrawal was handled undermines America's credibility in the Middle East. So there is a, you know, majority of scholars actually agree on that, it's divided close, but the majority do. We'll release that next week.

I'm so grateful to all three of you for joining us, this has been an exceptional conversation. Thank you Ryan, thank you Bruce, thank you Amaney. I am so pleased with having some of your time for this busy period, this has been, of course, a horrific event that we're commemorating tomorrow. It's one that has changed us. And I recall that, within a few days, I wrote a piece in the New York Times just a week later, saying you cannot defend your values by subverting them, and I think that that's the path that we took unfortunately in the past two decades. Thank you very much, I look forward to seeing you again.