

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB NEWSMAKER LUNCHEON WITH CO-CHAIRMEN OF THE
IRAQ STUDY GROUP
JAMES BAKER AND LEE HAMILTON

TOPICS INCLUDE:
PRESENTATION OF THE ANNUAL GERALD R. FORD FOUNDATION JOURNALISM
AWARDS

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MR. ZREMSKI: Good afternoon, and welcome to the National Press
Club. My name is Jerry Zremski, and I'm the Washington bureau chief
for the Buffalo News and president of the National Press Club.

I'd like to welcome our club members and their guests who are
here today, as well as those of you who are watching on C-SPAN.

We're looking forward to today's speech, and afterwards I'll ask
as many questions from the audience as time permits.

Please hold your applause during the speech, so we have as much
time as possible for questions. For our broadcast audience, I'd like

to explain that if you hear applause, it may be from the guests and
members of the general public who attend our luncheons, and not
necessarily from the working press. (Laughter.)

I'd now like to introduce our head table guests and ask them to
stand briefly while their names are called.

From your right, Judy Mathewson, a Bloomberg News reporter and a member of the Press Club; Martin Tolchin, senior editor and publisher of the Politico newspaper and Politico.com; Susan Page of USA Today, a two-time winner of the Ford Foundation Journalism Award for Outstanding Coverage of the Presidency, and an NPC member; Marty Allen, chairman emeritus of the Ford Foundation.

Robert Guest of The Economist, accepting the award for James Astill, the winner of the Ford Prize for National Defense Reporting in 2006. Mr. Astill (sic) came all the way from New Delhi to be with us here today.

Bob Schieffer of CBS News, host of "Face the Nation" and a member of the National Press Club.

Skipping over our speaker and the podium, Angela Greiling Keane of Bloomberg News, the chair of the National Press Club Speakers Committee.

Skipping our speaker for a second, Ken Dalecki, a freelance reporter and editor, and the member of the Speakers Committee who organized today's luncheon.

Charlie Savage of the Boston Globe, winner of the Ford Prize for Reporting on the Presidency in 2006; Jack Ford, chairman of the Gerald R. Ford Foundation and son of the late president; Helen Thomas, columnist for Hearst Newspapers and a National Press Club member; Austin Kiplinger, member of -- chairman of the board of the Kiplinger Washington Editors and a member of the NPC for more than 50 years, one of our Golden Owls; and Carl Leubsdorf, the Washington bureau chief of the Dallas Morning News and a National Press Club member. (Applause.)

The National Press Club is honored once again to host the Gerald R. Ford Foundation's presentation of its annual Awards for Outstanding Reporting on the Presidency and the National Defense. Our club has had a long association with the foundation and with the 38th president of the United States. Gerald R. Ford spoke at the club before, during and after his presidency and holds the record for repeat appearances, having addressed club audiences 18 times.

President Ford, who died on December 26, 2006 at the age of 93, is missed by many in this room, including members of the press and former members of his brief but historic administration. We will want to send our greetings to Mrs. Ford, who we hope is watching these proceedings on television from her home in California.

One of our National Press Club members, the late Time Magazine White House correspondent, Hugh Sidey, once described Gerald Ford as the only president who genuinely likes reporters. (Laughter.) He truly believed that a free and unfettered press was vital to the preservation of our democracy. One way he demonstrated that commitment was to establish his foundation's journalism awards program and to personally present the awards at this podium until failing health prevented him from doing so.

Jack Ford, the president's son and chairman of the Gerald R. Ford

Foundation, will now make the awards presentations.

JACK FORD (son of former President Gerald R. Ford): Thank you, Jerry, for the warm welcome.

Let me begin by saying on behalf of the family and mother, in particular, we're all honored to have you here today. Specifically, Mr. Hamilton and Mr. Baker, your participation today is greatly appreciated by not only the family, but the entire Gerald R. Ford Foundation. Needless to say, dad's recent passing was a difficult time for the family, one that we'll never really get over.

But for all of us in the family, that burden was lightened tremendously by the sympathy and love and outpouring of affection for dad during the entire funeral process. The fact that the nation would rise up and respond in such a way to the man that all -- and us in the family think of as "Dad," but who really was a man who found no higher calling than to serve his nation meant the world to us.

So with that in mind, today, as was mentioned, was really one of dad's favorite days of the whole year. He actually liked the members of the press. (Laughter.) It wasn't that they always got along or that they always agreed, but in his heart he knew that the media, the press played an important role in our democracy, and he respected that and respected the job that they did. And these journalism awards reflect that respect that he held for the media.

And this year, 2007, marks the 20th Anniversary of the Gerald R. Ford Journalism Prize.

The Ford Foundation established the journalism competition in 1988 because Dad wanted to recognize and encourage thoughtful, insightful journalists and I might also add, journalists with a certain amount of brevity. (Laughter.)

Judging is based on the ability of the journalists to foster better public understanding of the issues, and the prizes recognize reporting excellence. Winners are selected based on their year-long records not on a single article. And Dad felt that this was very important that it was the body of work and not a single article. The judges for the Journalism Prize who have the difficult task of selecting these winners, are led by Jim Cannon for the prize for reporting on the presidency. And I'd like Jim to stand and be acknowledged here, if he would, please. (Applause.)

MR. : (Off mike) -- of our judges are here, Jack.

MR. FORD: Okay.

Mr. : (Off mike) -- Candice Nelson and Hal Bruno are here today. (Off mike.)

MR. FORD: Great. Well thank you all for that good work.

For the prize on national defense reporting, the judges were led by Debbie van Opstal. Is Debbie -- there we are. (Applause.) Thank you, Debbie.

MS. : (Off mike.)

MR. FORD: Thank you all for doing a great job.

So with that in mind, I'd like to invite my older brother and my younger brother, Mike and Steve Ford, to come up and help with the presentation of the awards.

And, Mike, would you step up?

MIKE FORD: Sure. It's with great honor, on behalf of my father and the Gerald Ford Foundation, that we would recognize the Gerald R. Ford Journalism Prize for Distinguished Reporting of the Presidency. As White House reporter for the Boston Globe, Charlie Savage exposed a persistent and unprecedented expansion of presidential authority that infringed on the separation of powers embedded in the Constitution.

Broadening the impact of his articles, Mr. Savage quoted legal scholars on how the president's practice of approving bills, only to defy them, diminished the rule of law.

Members of Congress, alerted by Mr. Savage's reporting, moved to counter the president's reach for greater power by demanding that the president execute all statutes duly debated and legislated into law.

Mr. Savage merits the Ford Prize for Journalism for Presidential Coverage in 2006 by his diligence of reporting, by his insight in detecting a common purpose in isolating events, and by the quality of writing that provided better public understanding of this president and his way of governing. And we would like to honor Mr. Charlie Savage of the Boston Globe.

(Applause.)

CHARLES SAVAGE (Boston Globe reporter, Ford Prize winner): Well, thank you very much. I'd like to thank the Ford Foundation and the Ford family for having these awards. I think it's critical to shed light on this particular topic in Washington, especially right now. I would also like to thank my colleagues at the Boston Globe. And in particular I would like to single out my bureau chief, editor and friend, Peter Canellos, without which -- without whom this project would not have been possible. It was a true collaboration, and I share this award with you, Peter. (Applause.)

My package was about the expansion of presidential power under the Bush-Cheney administration, but I would like to say at the onset that I do not see this as a partisan issue, because a liberal president would be just as tempted to exercise unilateral powers to impose his or her policy agenda as a conservative president going forward.

The bulk of my package was about the issue of signing statements, as referenced earlier. For those who are not familiar with this previously obscure device, it is an official legal document, a technical document which is entered into the Federal Register on the day that a president signs a bill into law, and it consists of

instructions to the executive branch bureaucracy or the military about how they are to implement the new statutes created by a legislative package now that they are on the books.

And very often, especially in the current administration, these signing statements have been used to inform the executive branch that certain sections of new bills are unconstitutional, in the president's view, and therefore need not be enforced as written.

Although previous presidents have used this device, the current administration has used it more often than all previous presidents combined, when the numbers of bill sections are compared looking back into history. And the vast majority of the bill sections which had been declared unconstitutional are those sections which restrict the president's own powers as commander in chief or head of the executive branch. And so by failing to enforce, or at least claiming a right not to enforce such a statute, what we're really talking about is claiming a right to disobey a restriction on presidential power that was imposed by Congress and signed into law by that very president.

After this reporting came out, there was a great deal of discussion in Congress, and also the American Bar Association declared the growth of this device over the last 20 years by administrations of both parties as contrary to the rule of law and a threat to the constitutional system of checks and balances.

I've been spending the last year thinking about executive power greatly, actually more than the last year, but especially in the last year. I'd also like to thank the Boston Globe for giving me six months off recently to complete a book about presidential power generally, both in the last -- both in the current administration but also looking back to Watergate and beyond. If I could be forgiven a plug, the book's title is "Takeover." It will be out in September, but there is a pre-order page on Amazon now. (Laughter.)

And that circles me back again to thanking the foundation and the Ford family. As part of the research for that book, I spent a week in Ann Arbor, Michigan, at the Ford Presidential Library. The research staff there was very helpful and it was a fascinating -- it was a fascinating experience to immerse myself in what was happening during the Ford administration right after Watergate, right after Vietnam, when Congress was imposing all kinds of new restrictions on presidential power, sort of a backlash to the growth of the -- what Arthur Schlesinger called the imperial presidency during the preceding two decades.

And that, of course, was the formative period of our current vice president, who has spent the next 30 years on sort of something of a mission to roll back what he saw was the excesses of that period, to restore constitutional -- the presidential power to what he believed was the proper level. And that policy is what's been playing out the last few years.

So thanks again to the Ford Foundation, the Ford Presidential Library and the Ford family, and thank you all very much. (Applause.)

JACK FORD: Next I'd like to ask my brother Steve to step up and present the award for National Defense Reporting.

STEVEN FORD (son of former President Gerald R. Ford): The judges for distinguished reporting on National Defense are pleased to report that they have selected James Astill of The Economist as winner of the 2006 Gerald R. Ford Prize for Distinguished Reporting on National Defense. The judging panel felt that Mr. Astill brings an exceptional level of literary journalism to his craft. His insightful analysis combine brevity and accessibility. The judges agreed that Mr. Astill brings to life compelling stories that illuminate larger pictures. He connects details to broad themes in ways that help explain events as complex and diverse as drug trade in Afghanistan and the counterinsurgency movement in Iraq.

Bolstered by anecdote and underpinned by analysis, his work synthesizes ideas and issues to communicate complex national security conundrums to a wide audience.

The case for such reporting has never been stronger. This year, the 20th year of the Ford Journalism Prize, Americans continue, continue to struggle with complex global realities, daunting challenges to America's interests and national security, and intense debate on the nature of U.S. engagement around the world.

Mr. Astill could not be here. But Robert Guest, the Washington correspondent for the Economist, would like to come up and accept that award. (Applause.)

ROBERT GUEST (Washington correspondent, The Economist): On behalf of my colleague, James Astill, thank you very much. He would have loved to have been here today, but alas, he was struck down by some foul tropical disease while reporting on the civil war in Sri Lanka last week.

Oddly enough, this is not the first time I've had to accept an award on his behalf. (Laughter.) I had to do it in London a while back because he was stuck in Afghanistan dodging bullets. And if you notice, there's a theme running through these things. I mean the judges have been so kind as to point out that he writes well and he's clever and all that sort of stuff. (Laughter.) But what I'd like to emphasize is his physical courage.

He is truly exceptional in this regard.

I've had to -- I remember working with him on a story once about the economics of civil war, and there was a very clear division of labor. I did the economics, and he did the war. (Laughter.) I sat there in London with a nice cup of tea, leafing through World Bank reports, and he was lying in a ditch in Congo -- (laughter) -- watching people do unspeakable things to each other.

I also had the privilege of being his editor for a while, which was in some respects a very easy job, because he writes with clarity and panache, and you don't have to do any editing. What you do have to do is a great deal of worrying about his physical safety and where on Earth he is. He has this willingness to go absolutely anywhere,

which is extremely rare at The Economist -- (laughter) -- a newspaper populated mostly by people who will not venture outside St. James's, London, and whose idea of a risky assignment is to order the oysters at lunch with a contact. (Laughter.)

He also has this ability to really move mountains to get into places that are difficult to get into. I -- since his parents, alas, are not here today, I can share this one with you. There was one particular African country that was very difficult to get into for a journalist, and I said to him over the phone, "How on Earth are you going to get a visa to go into this place?" And he said, "Well, the lady in charge of the visas at the embassy is rather attractive, and I think she quite likes me, and" -- well, I'll draw a veil over the rest of that story. But suffice it to say he got in -- (laughter) -- he got out in one piece, and he got the story, which is what matters.

So thank you very much to the judges and to the Ford Foundation. And on behalf of my esteemed colleague James Astill, thank you very much indeed. (Applause.)

MR. ZREMSKI: We are delighted to have with us today two distinguished speakers who are in the tradition of public service exemplified by President Ford: former Secretary of State James Baker and former Representative Lee Hamilton. They were co-chairmen of the Iraq Study Group, the 10-person bipartisan panel appointed by Congress in March 2006 to assess the situation in Iraq and make recommendations.

The group issued its report in December and included 79 recommendations. They suggested greater cooperation on Iraq between the executive and legislative branches, and broader diplomatic efforts. In addition, the group pushed for stronger measures for reconciliation within Iraq, renewed efforts to settle the Arab-Israeli conflict, accelerated efforts to train Iraqi security forces, and the establishment of milestones for Iraqis to reach to enable the gradual withdrawal of U.S. forces.

Our distinguished speakers are well-known so that I will only touch on the highlights of their long careers.

James A. Baker III served as secretary of the Treasury under President Reagan and secretary of State under George Bush, Sr. As a matter of fact, as secretary of the Treasury, Mr. Baker laid the cornerstone for the newly renovated National Press Building. His long record of public service began in 1975 as undersecretary of Commerce in President Ford's administration. He holds numerous awards, including the Presidential Medal of Freedom. He is currently a partner in a Houston law firm and his honorary chairman of the James A. Baker II Institute for Public Policy at Rice University.

Lee Hamilton served for 34 years in the U.S. House of Representatives from Indiana, including service as chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence. He has served on numerous blue ribbon commissions, including as vice chairman of the 9/11 commission. He is currently chairman of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.

Our speakers have promised to keep their formal remarks brief so that we'll have as much time as possible for questions.

Secretary Baker? (Applause.)

MR. BAKER: Thank you very much. Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you, Jerry. It's a pleasure for me to be back in the Press Club, and I'm delighted to be here with members of the Ford family. And I'm honored to be asked to pay tribute to one of our country's finest presidents, a person that you've already heard from this podium this afternoon was a very special human being. He was, in addition to that, I'm proud to say, my friend. He was my first boss in national politics, actually. He gave me my start in national politics and public service. He personified, I think, all that is so very good about America because Gerry Ford was comfortable with himself, he was popular with friends on both sides of the aisle, he was admired and respected by his staff and he was effective as a leader.

He took an humble Midwestern work ethic to every difficult situation that confronted him, whether it was being a member of the Warren commission or whether it was replacing Richard Nixon in the White House.

I happen to be one who will never forget Election Day 1976 because I was chairman of President Ford's general election campaign that year, and the president had started out with a deficit of about 25 to 30 points in the polls which he overcame by Election Day. And it looked to us that day like a win might be possible. The president had really busted his tail in the campaign. He campaigned extraordinarily hard in a campaign that was really stacked against him from the very first day he took office.

On the night of the election, I remember thinking to myself that I actually might be able to light up that victory cigar that the president had given me when we went in to give him the exit poll results, and it wasn't until about 3:30 the next morning that we learned that Jimmy Carter had won the closest presidential election since 1960. That election was so close that had fewer than 10,000 votes shifted in the states of Ohio and Hawaii, President Ford would have one the vote in the Electoral College and of course won the election.

Now despite that razor-thin margin, the president was very stoic in defeat. He had worked very, very hard, he had come so extraordinarily close, yet he graciously accepted the results. I remember his long-time friend, the former St. Louis Cardinals' catcher, Joe Garagiola, had been watching the election returns with the president and the residents at the White House. And Joe said, he said afterwards, he said, "You know, I've seen former Cardinals' Great Enos Slaughter get more upset with an umpire saying, 'Strike two,' than Gerald Ford did when he realized he wasn't going to win that presidential election." (Laughter.) That didn't mean he wasn't upset because he was, but he refused to ask for recounts, as many of his supporters had implored him to do. And he told us, he said, "No fellas," he said, "we're not going to do that because I lost the popular vote." That's just the kind of person that Gerald Ford was.

You could always trust him; you could always trust him in everything, but you could certainly trust to do his best and to then go on from there. That characteristic of selflessness, I think, is the reason that President Ford was able to help heal this nation of ours in the aftermath of Watergate when he pardoned President Nixon.

That was an extraordinarily courageous act. That was a time when the buck truly did stop on the president's desk. But it allowed the nation to move forward from a troubling time, and as we get further and further from that event, I think more and more people in this country realize that it was the right thing to do.

President Ford recognized at the time that doing that would hurt him in the polls, and there is no doubt that it did two years later. And we used to see it every day in the polling. Still, he knew that closing the door on Watergate was the right thing to do, and he honestly confronted that issue when he spoke to the nation. Here's what he said.

He said, "My conscience tells me that it is my duty to not only proclaim domestic tranquility, but to use very means that I have to ensure it."

Gerald Ford was the right man to help restore America's confidence in itself because he reflected so many of the virtues that Americans desire in their public officials -- sincerity, integrity, judgment, intelligence. I think Americans instinctively understood what I was very, very fortunate to see up close.

But I think it's shortsighted to remember Gerald Ford as simply the post-Watergate president. Although he had only 29 months in the White House, he used that time wisely and productively to confront monumental issues that faced him when he took office, including inflation, an energy shortage, and an unstable at the time, very unstable, Cold War. In the aftermath of Vietnam, the president continued the country's policy of detente with the Soviet Union and China, and that played a vital role during the mid-1970s in easing the tensions of the Cold War. And he did this at the very same time that he was helping restore America's confidence in its role in international affairs following the collapse of Cambodia and the fall of Saigon.

He was also able to focus the attention of the world and this country on other important matters. He persuaded -- and was the first to do so -- Israel and Egypt to accept an interim truce agreement. He was the first president to begin to emphasize the need for regulatory reform, and the first president to call for a national energy policy. He was an early supporter of majority rule in South Africa.

Had Gerald Ford been given a full term in office, his already sizable footprint in American history would have been even bigger.

Gerald Ford represented the very best of this country. He served our nation when bipartisanship was more than just an empty slogan, when it was actually practiced, and he was a leading practitioner of it. President Ford had political adversaries, but President Ford never had

political enemies. That's because he knew how to disagree agreeably.

Today, more than 31 years after he left an office that he did not initially seek but graciously accepted, Gerald R. Ford is remembered by those of us who worked with him as an honest, ethical and extraordinarily talented public servant. But more importantly, perhaps, ladies and gentleman, we remember him as a wonderful human being who always put his country's interests ahead of his own. And those of us who worked for him not only admired and respected him; we genuinely loved him.

Thank you very much. (Applause.)

MR. HAMILTON: Good afternoon. It is of course a high honor to be here with my highly esteemed friend and colleague from the Iraq Study Group, Jim Baker.

Many tributes have been paid to President Ford over the last year, and that is certainly appropriate. His life stands as an example of public service, common dignity and extraordinary achievement. While many talk of course of his accomplishments as our 38th president, I remind you today that for the vast majority of his life -- public life -- President Ford was a man of the House. From 1948 to 1973, Congressman Ford built a record in the Congress that, on its own, stands the test of time. And time and again, he turned down offers to run for the Senate or for governor.

I came into the Congress in the election of 1964. By that time, Congressman Ford had already risen through the ranks through his leadership of the Young Turks.

And during my first year in the Congress, indeed, on one of the first days that I ever attended a session, he surprised many by edging out my Hoosier colleague, Charlie Halleck, to take over the position of minority leader.

Gerald Ford's approach was straight and square -- no wiggling. He put his head down and, as he said, he "worked like hell." He followed the rule his mother had set: Tell the truth, work hard, and come home to dinner on time. (Laughter.) He believed the truth is the glue that holds government together.

His greatest dream and his political ambition was to be speaker of the House of Representatives. He pursued a Republican majority relentlessly, even if unsuccessfully. I remember numerous meetings when Minority Leader Ford would sit down with the Democratic speaker -- John McCormack at first, and then Carl Albert. And here's how those meetings went. The speaker would say, "I want to bring up such-and-such a bill. I have blank number of Democratic votes." He would turn to Gerald Ford. Gerald Ford would say, "We on the Republican side oppose this bill, but we have blank number of Republicans who are going to vote for it." Then, after they added the tally, the speaker would make a decision whether to bring the bill forward. At bottom, though each was intensely partisan and spoke passionately for their cause, these men had a deep respect for each other. They held very strong views, but they knew how to do business. Indeed, that's exactly what they were doing -- the business of the nation -- in a

civil and productive way. They were professionals practicing their craft.

Congressman Ford made extraordinary contributions working across the aisle with the chairman of the Appropriations Committee, George Mahon. Gerald Ford was the ranking member on the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee. Without doubt, and through the administrations of several presidents and many secretaries of Defense, they worked to bring continuity to the national security interests of the United States.

Gerald Ford was a strong supporter of robust American engagement and leadership in the world. He got his start in politics by working for an internationalist Republican, and I might say, a Hoosier, Wendell Willkie. He was elected to Congress by defeating an isolationist incumbent, and over the years, he used his seat on that Appropriations Committee to show real and patriotic leadership through the heart of the Cold War. As Jim Baker said, Congressman Ford was exceedingly popular with his colleagues on both sides of the aisle. He was a strong partisan, but he had a talent for friendly persuasion. He understood the words of the Prophet Isaiah, "Come, let us reason together."

Part of the reason he was such a strong choice, maybe the only choice, to be vice president is that President Nixon knew that Gerald Ford would draw little opposition and much support from within the Congress. As president for 895 days, Ford steadied the nation with dignity and began the national healing after Vietnam and Watergate. For him, the presidency was not a prize to be won, but a duty to be done. And he accomplished much more than just healing.

He forged the Helsinki Accords, opening the way to the collapse of communism. He acknowledged the seriousness of the global energy crisis. His prudent fiscal policies and his frequent vetoes cut inflation in half and boosted the U.S. economy out of a very deep recession. And as a really nice, normal person, he restored our faith in government. He was the right man at the right time. And he said, at the prompting of his son, Jack, when he lost to Carter in 1976, that you must lose as graciously as you plan to win. He was indeed a good man.

He and Betty Ford were also good friends to my wife, Nancy, and me. They lived quite close to us in Alexandria. Betty Ford was often generous in giving Nancy a ride or a helping hand.

This very senior member of the House never thought twice about extending the hand of friendship to a more junior member of the opposing party.

Let me also say that in remembering President Ford, we also note Betty Ford's extraordinary and courageous contributions to her husband and to the life of this nation.

Nancy and I knew her as a warm and generous friend. Americans and people around the world honor her own unique and important legacy. She was a candid and refreshing first lady.

Sam Rayburn, in summing up his career, said, "I served with, not under, eight presidents." Gerald Ford served with seven presidents.

Then, in a time of national peril, he was called upon to assume the office himself. He won a place in our hearts because he reflected and championed the core values of the American people.

President Ford was authentic, and couple that authenticity with a deep respect for the American system of government. As he said when he took over the presidency, our Constitution works.

He had a Midwestern rectitude, an old-style normality and a remarkable absence of spite or malice. Honest and unassuming, patriotic and tolerant and compassionate, and though a man of extraordinary achievement, he was at home not only with princes and presidents, but with ordinary folks.

Thank you. (Applause.)

MR. ZREMSKI: Thank you very much.

We have a lot of questions about the Iraq Study Group, but before that, I'm going to start with just a couple of questions for Congressman Hamilton and then a couple of questions specifically for Secretary Baker.

First of all, Mr. Hamilton, despite 9/11, our borders are not secure. Shouldn't border security be a higher priority for Congress and the administration?

MR. HAMILTON: Well, I think border security is one -- only one aspect of national security, obviously a very, very important aspect of national security. But I don't assign it a higher priority than many other things.

My own personal view is that the highest national security priority is to try to rein in the loose nukes around the world.

And if I were calling all the shots, I would put even more of an effort than we do today. We spend about a billion dollars a year now toward that effort.

We have had some threats coming across the border. We all remember the Canadian border of a few years back. To my knowledge, we've not had terrorist threats coming across the Mexican border. But clearly, because these borders are relatively open, we have to strengthen our ability to guard these borders against future threats.

MR. ZREMSKI: If you were still in Congress, would you vote to end funding for the Iraq war?

MR. HAMILTON: No, I would not. I do not think that the right thing to do for a member of Congress at this point is simply to cut off funding for the war, even if you happen to take the view that we should begin to responsibly exit from the United States. I see what's happening now. As a process, it's kind of a painful process, maybe even a messy process in many ways, with the Congress and the president

clashing with one another over a supplemental bill, over a resolution of some kind, in a few days over a defense appropriation bill, a number of ongoing clashes.

But here is what is significant, in my view. What is significant is that gradually, slowly, the two sides are beginning to come together. And Jim Baker and I said in that Iraq Study Group report that this country is going to be much stronger off in conducting our obligations in Iraq if we have unity of effort. And I strongly believe that that's beginning to happen, a little more slowly than many of us would like, but it's beginning to happen, and I think that's the process we see now unfolding.

MR. ZREMSKI: Okay. Secretary Baker, the administration seems to be inching toward diplomatic engagement with Iran and Syria. Is the president doing enough?

MR. BAKER: Well, he's started, and you got to crawl before you walk, and walk before you run. Diplomatic engagement has begun with those countries. In the Iraqi Study Group report, Lee and I took pains to point out that in terms of suggesting engagement with Iran, we did not think that we should engage with Iran on a bilateral basis with respect to our concerns about its nuclear capabilities; that the administration is handling those properly that the administration is handling those properly by dealing with those in the Security Council of the United Nations.

So diplomacy is sometimes a long-term process, but once you get started, sometimes you open up possibilities to get some things done, and they've done that. They've at least gotten things started. They are talking now to both Iran and Syria, particularly of course about how both of those countries can contribute to a more stable situation in Iraq.

It was our view, when we wrote the Iraq Study Group Report, that none of Iraq's neighbors want to see a chaotic Iraq, and both Syria and Iran have confirmed that. That doesn't mean they'll cooperate with us; that doesn't mean we don't have to be tough when we're talking to them, and talking per se in and of itself is not a strategy, but diplomacy can be if you do it right.

MR. ZREMSKI: How has the Bush administration's foreign policy differed from what you expected when he was elected?

MR. BAKER: Well, I think it's been perhaps a bit more muscular, particularly in the Middle East. One of the things that we have -- again, that we recommend in that study group report is that we do a bit more to engage diplomatically, that we pay attention to the soft power of the United States. My own personal view is we are in a global war against terror; I believe that. I think there are people out there that still want to come over here and do us great harm, and that one of the things we have to do to win that war against terror, we have to not rule anything out, we have to military options on the table, but we also have to use the soft power of the United States and win the hearts and minds of some of the people in that part of the world. That's why we called for the diplomatic engagement. That's why we called in part for -- one of the things we called for was an

active effort to try and resolve the Arab-Israeli dispute to the extent that we could.

MR. ZREMSKI: Okay. Now I have a series of questions regarding the Iraqi Study Group, so I would say either of you could choose to answer.

First of all, have events in Iraq in the last six months bolstered your opinions of the Iraq Study Group's recommendations? Yes or no? And please explain.

MR. HAMILTON: Go ahead, Jim. (Laughter.)

MR. BAKER: Well, I think yes. I mean, we began by telling what we thought was the truth about the situation in Iraq. The first sentence of our report says events -- "The situation in Iraq is grave and disintegrating." It was grave and it was disintegrating, and we don't know whether the surge is going to come -- whether it's going to work or not. By the way, people should understand that there was a provision in the Iraq Study Group Report that called for a surge, provided the commander on the ground thought that it was the right thing to do.

MR. HAMILTON: There were three principal recommendations that we made in the Iraq Study Group report. First of all, we said that the primary mission of U.S. forces in Iraq should be training Iraqis. The administration, I think, is moving in that direction. My own view is that you cannot get out of Iraq without making it the primary mission. It's a very tough thing to do to train the Iraqi soldiers. We haven't done it very well over a period of four years. We're getting better at it, but I think it's an essential part of the mission, and it'll be increasingly recognized by the president and his administration.

The second recommendation was that our assistance to Maliki be conditional, conditional on his performance. In the supplemental bill just passed by the Congress, you have what I would call a weak conditionality. The president signed that bill, so they are clearly moving in the direction of conditional assistance to Iraq, which I think is necessary to put leverage on the Maliki government to act.

The third recommendation, as you all know, was the diplomatic offensive -- Jim's already referred to that -- and they are moving in that direction. So I think they're coming our way.

MR. ZREMSKI: The political and military situation in Iraq has deteriorated since the Baker-Hamilton report was presented. Are all of its recommendations still applicable, and which are and which are not?

MR. BAKER: Well, I'll let Lee answer for Lee. I think we agree on this. But as far as I'm concerned, they're still applicable with one possible exception. What we laid out in that report, as Lee has explained to you, is a mechanism, a way in which it might be possible to begin to reconfigure the mission or transition the mission from one of referring sectarian violence to one of fighting al Qaeda and preventing the disintegration of the country and the possible start of a regional war.

We had a date in that report, which a lot of people erroneously jumped to the conclusion that we were calling for pulling all American combat troops out of Iraq by March of 2008. That's not what that said. What that said was, if we do the right thing by training, and as we put trained Iraqi brigades in place, and subject to the changing conditions on the ground, it could be possible to be out with combat brigades by then.

My own personal view is I think the American people -- I don't think a majority of the American people want us to just completely leave Iraq to the devices of al Qaeda and to leave a failed state there for al Qaeda, and they do not want to see a regional war, a conflagration develop as we leave. So I think they would favor a responsible way of reconfiguring our forces, a responsible way of drawing down. That date would, of course, be something different in my view at least, because we were talking about that date when we came with a report in December of 2006. This is now June of 2007.

MR. HAMILTON: I agree with Jim's observations. I don't really think the situation's much improved in Iraq since we left. The violence has continued. In many ways it's gotten worse for American forces in recent months.

It is hugely disappointing to me that the Maliki government has not summoned the political will or capability, whatever it is, to move more aggressively towards national reconciliation. I still hold out hope, I guess, that that will be done, but I must say, I do not have as much confidence that it will be done as I might have had back in -- when was it, Jim? -- Labor Day when we were there.

I hope very much that the surge succeeds, however you define success. And I hope that because if it does, then I think it becomes not only a way in, but a way out of Iraq. And if we're able to say that we have to some degree pacified Baghdad and the environs, then I think it may also be possible to say that we can begin to redeploy in the direction that Jim mentioned just a moment ago.

MR. ZREMSKI: Are you disappointed that the president didn't embrace the most significant recommendations of the Iraq Study Group? And what political factors prevented him from doing so?

MR. BAKER: Well, I think the last part of the question you need to address to the administration and not to us.

But as Lee indicated earlier, it looks more and more like the administration is moving toward embracing all of the recommendations of the Iraq Study Group report. And in fact, the president himself said as much, I think, in his press conference toward the end -- sometime the end of May -- when the press asked him -- said, "Mr. President, if the surge doesn't work, do you have a plan B?" And he said, "No." He said, "That would be a plan B-H, Baker-Hamilton."

It looks to me like they might be moving -- as Lee said, moving in our direction. I think that would be good because, as Lee also said, we're not going to be able to do what we have to do in terms of a responsible disengagement from Iraq if the country is not unified.

We need unity to deal with this very difficult problem that's facing the country, and the only nonpartisan approach that's out there today -- bipartisan approach -- is the Iraq Study Group report -- approach.

MR. ZREMSKI: The Bush administration recently talked of using South Korea, where U.S. troops have been for 50 years, as a model for Iraq. Your reaction?

MR. HAMILTON: I've never been very high on historical analogies. I think you -- there are just too many differences in circumstances between now and the period following the Korean War. Maybe those with a better knowledge of history than I have can make those analogies, but I kind of draw back from them.

We have a unique set of circumstances, a unique country, unique problems, unique challenges in Iraq, and I think we have to deal with this most difficult public policy problem, how to responsibly remove ourselves over a period of time from Iraq. And I do not personally find a lot of guidance from historical analogies.

MR. ZREMSKI: Does the decision to replace Peter Pace signal a change in policy or strategy in Iraq?

MR. BAKER: Does the decision to --

MR. ZREMSKI: To replace Peter Pace.

MR. BAKER: -- to replace signal a change in policy? Not in my opinion, no. I don't think it does at all.

MR. ZREMSKI: What is your reaction to American assistance and funding going to tribal elements, including some former insurgents, in Anbar province to aid the fight against al Qaeda in Iraq?

MR. HAMILTON: Let me see the question. I can't -- I read better than I hear. (Laughter.)

Well, look. I think we are trying different strategies in Anbar, and that's certainly a different strategy to try to work with different tribal elements in Anbar. Anbar, as you all know, has been a very difficult spot for us over a period of years.

The paper this morning, of course, reported that there are tensions within the tribal groups within Anbar, and that's exactly what you run into time and time again in Iraq when you're dealing with a history and a culture, ethnicities, tribal groups that we only partially understand. But if we can come together with them in fighting al Qaeda, which remains one -- if not the principal -- enemy that we have, then it certainly is advantageous. Holding them together, keeping them together is an enormously difficult task, and that will be the challenge for us.

MR. ZREMSKI: I think I'd like both of you to answer this one. Has the invasion of Iraq made another 9/11 more or less likely?

MR. BAKER: I don't think that I personally have a crystal ball that would permit me to answer that question. I understand the arguments on both sides.

One thing I do know and believe very fervently, and that is that if Iraq was not the center of the war on terror before we went in there, it certainly is now. And we need to be very careful about how we get out of there and the extent to which we get out of there, and be very careful about whether we turn that country over to al Qaeda, in much the same way that we -- that happened when the Taliban was powerful in Afghanistan.

MR. HAMILTON: This was the kind of question that always used to frustrate me when I was in the Congress, and I guess it still does. The fact of the matter is, nobody knows the answer to that question. You can speculate all you want to, and I can speculate, but you simply don't know.

What I do believe is what Jim said earlier; I think they are plotting to attack us again in this country and that we should better do all that we can everywhere we can to strengthen our defenses and to be prepared to go on the offense.

We have been exceedingly fortunate in this country because we've not been attacked on the continental United States since 9/11. We can say that that's due to our good policies. That may be true. You can't disprove it, and you can't prove it. It may be sheer luck -- you can't prove that or disprove it either. The fact of the matter is, we're fortunate for whatever reason you want to pick out that we have not been attacked, but surely prudence is -- dictates that we do all we can to prepare ourselves.

We'd better learn how to take a punch, and we had better learn how to be responsive because I think in all likelihood attacks will come.

MR. ZREMSKI: How can we expect diplomatic and financial assistance from the world's nations in our effort to extract our young people from Iraq with our national prestige at such a low point globally?

MR. BAKER: Well, we can do some of the things we recommended in the Iraq Study Group report for starters, but I don't think -- I don't think -- as I said earlier, there's not -- none of the neighbors of Iraq want a chaotic Iraq. It is in their self-interest to make sure that that country does not just simply disintegrate into chaos. So there is -- there's potential there, and I think the prospect there that would help us. That's why we called for a conference of the neighbors, along with other countries and countries other than neighboring countries that don't want to see a chaotic Iraq as well.

MR. HAMILTON: We've been hugely disappointed that we haven't had more assistance from our friends across the world, no question about it, and particularly disappointing to us has been the passivity of the neighboring countries. Now that's a -- comes about, I think, in part because they simply didn't agree with the way the United States went in to the war, and there was -- has been, I think, a very strong feeling that: Okay, folks, you Americans created this mess; now get

yourself out of it.

I think that's changing. I think they're beginning to understand what Jim's been talking about here in response to two, three questions. They're beginning to see the implications of a(n) Iraq that comes apart, and they're beginning to see the implications for themselves.

This is a huge challenge for American diplomacy. We've got to keep working at it, and we've got to have these international conferences and the bilateral diplomatic offenses that we talked about in the report in order to drum up support for -- from the neighbors and from Europe, Japan and other parts of the world.

MR. ZREMSKI: We're almost out of time. But before I ask the last question, I have a couple of other matters to take care of.

First of all, let me remind our members of future speakers. Tomorrow, Dr. Helene Gayle, the president and CEO of CARE International and entrepreneur Sheila Johnson will be with us; on June 14th, John Rowe, president and CEO of Exelon Corporation; and on June 18th, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, author of "Infidel" and research fellow at the American Enterprise Institute.

Next, in appreciation of our thanks to Mr. Hamilton and Mr. Baker.

MR. BAKER: Thank you very much.

MR. ZREMSKI: And for your coffee for your long commission hearings on the next commission you'll surely be appointed to -- (laughter) -- the National Press Club mug. (Applause.)

And our last question -- our last question actually is for Secretary Baker, and it is a little bit different in nature than our earlier questions.

I overheard you talking about bird hunting earlier today. I was wondering if you were planning on inviting Vice President Cheney to join you? (Laughter.)

MR. BAKER: Now, I'm going to give you a very straight answer to that question. Vice President Cheney hunts with me almost every fall and I'm still here. How about that? (Laughter, applause.)

MR. ZREMSKI: I'd like to thank you for coming today.

I'd also like to thank National Press Club staff members Melinda Cooke, Pat Nelson, Jo Anne Booze and Howard Rothman for organizing today's lunch. Thanks to the National Press Club library for its research. The video archive of today's luncheon is provided by the National Press Club's Broadcast Operation Center. Press Club members can access free transcripts of our luncheons at our website, www.press.org, and nonmembers can purchase transcripts, videotapes and audio tapes by calling 1-888-343-1940.

Thank you very much. We're adjourned. (Sounds gavel.)

(Applause.)

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