Interviewer:
Iâ€™ll warn you, even though weâ€™re the Military Academy of the Army, Scott here is an Annapolis grad.
Paul Bremer:
Oh, dear.
Interviewer:
The only one at West Point.
Paul Bremer:
The only one who survives?
Interviewer
Long-tailed cat in a room full of rockers.
Paul Bremer:
Yeah. Yeah.
Interviewer:
But weâ€™re lucky to have him.
Paul Bremer:
What year were you at the Academy?
Interviewer
In 1988, sir.
Interviewer:
Yeah.
Paul Bremer:
1988.
Interviewer
Yes sir.
Interviewer:
Good man. So weâ€™re ready to roll, are we?
Interviewer
Mm-hmm.
Interviewer:
Okay, weâ€™re onâ€•okay. So today is September 21, 2011. We areâ€•
Paul Bremer:
Right.
Interviewer:
In Washington at the offices of Ambassador Paul Bremer, and Iâ€™m grateful to you to coming and spending some time with us.
Paul Bremer:
Good to be with you.
Interviewer:
What we like to do with these oral histories is really start from the beginning. I mean sort of tell the story of your life, in a sense, and so I would like to start with when you imagined for the first time that you wanted to be a diplomatâ€•that you wanted to go into the foreign service. Could you tell us that?
Paul Bremer:
Well, I got very interested in international affairs, really, when I was a teenager. My father had been in the Navy during the war World War II, and after the war, went into international business. He had also been a teacher of languages before that, and so I was interested in languages and international affairs. And it basically was something that followed me through high school and then into college and afterwards.
Interviewer:
Did he speak a lot of languages, then?
Paul Bremer:
Yes, he did, yeah.

Interviewer:
How many languages did he speak?
Paul Bremer:
Well, he spoke French, Italian, and Latin.
Interviewer:
And you grew up sort of with a zest for languagesâ€•
Paul Bremer:
Yeah.
Interviewer:
As a result of that. What languages did you learn immediately, then?
Paul Bremer:
Well, I learned immediately Latin and Frenchâ€•I didnâ€™t speak Latin. I could read and write it.
Interviewer:
The dead language, thatâ€™s right.
Paul Bremer:
I started French, I guess, when I was in eighth grade or so.
Interviewer:
And how many languages do you speak now?
Paul Bremer:
Well, I confess to only still speaking three: French, Norwegian, and Dutch. But I have forgotten another seven or eight languages, so.
Interviewer:
And Norwegian and Dutch you learned because of being posted thereâ€•
Paul Bremer:
Right.
Interviewer:
Is that right?
Paul Bremer:
Yeah.
Interviewer:
Yeah.
Paul Bremer:
Yeah, I learnedâ€•I always learned the language of whatever country I was posted in.
Interviewer:
And then you go toâ€•letâ€™s see, you go to I believe to Andover, is that rightâ€”Phillips Academy.
Paul Bremer:
Right.
Interviewer:
Then you go to Yale. What was your major at Yale?
Paul Bremer:
History and history of art.
Interviewer:
Yeah. History of art, reallyâ€•thatâ€™s interesting.
Paul Bremer:
Yeah, I thought I was going to be an architect at one point.
Interviewer:
Ah.
Paul Bremer:
And that fell apart when I realized I had neither the patience nor the skill to be an architect.
Interviewer:
Well, but you went sort of somewhere along the way into the act of construction, didnâ€™t

you?
Paul Bremer:
Yeah.
Interviewer:
I mean or reconstruction, so weâ€™ll getâ€•
Paul Bremer:
Yeah, well, thatâ€•yeah.
Interviewer:
Weâ€™ll get to that down the road. So you complete your studies at Yale.
Paul Bremer:
Right.
Interviewer:
And youâ€™reâ€•whatâ€™s your career ambition as you graduate from Yale?
Paul Bremer:
Well, I wasnâ€™t too sure. I knew I wanted to do something international, and I went for a year of graduate studies at the University of Paris after I finished college to study international relations. Still uncertain as to exactly whether I was going to go in the direction of business, where my father was, or in the direction of government service. And so after I finished my graduate work at the University of Paris, I went to business school, still uncertain as toâ€•
Interviewer:
And that was at Harvard, was it?
Paul Bremer:
What I was going toâ€•it was at Harvard, yeah. And my father was, I think, anxious that I go into business when I finished, but he hadâ€•during the period that I grew up right after the war, in the â€™50sâ€•used to preach to us every evening over dinner, you know, the importance of public service. He said, you know, â€œYouâ€™re lucky to be born in the greatest country, and anybody who has an opportunity ought to try to give something back in public service,â€ which he had done during the war. So, that sort of, in the end, was always working on me And by the time I got to thinking seriously about, â€œOkay, now what am I going to do,â€ I decided that I would pay my public service duty, as my father wouldâ€™ve called it, for four or five years, and then go into business. And so I interviewed a variety of places in the government, including both Army and Navy Intelligence.
Interviewer:
I was going to ask you that.
Paul Bremer:
Yep.
Interviewer:
Army and Navy both, huh?
Paul Bremer:
And CIA, the Department of State, and the Department of Commerceâ€•since I was studying business, I talked to the Department of Commerce. In the end, State Department actually seemed to fit best because of my interest in international affairs, so I went to the State Department.
Interviewer:
Now, this is a very different world that youâ€™re operating at that time from now, and when cadets watch this, the Cold War is ancient history to them. Frame the moment, if you could forâ€•
Paul Bremer:
Yeah.
Interviewer:
I mean â€™cause, you know, being interested in the CIA or the State Department during those years was to want to engage with the Cold War, in some respects.

Paul Bremer:
Yes. I had been interested in, and had followed closely, some of the major events of the Cold War during my time growing up. The launching ofâ€•well, actually, starting with the Hungarian Revolution in 1956, because as it turned out, several Hungarian refugees came to Andover as post-graduate students, who had left when the Communists went into Hungary.
And I remember very vividly beingâ€”you know, getting out of bed at three oâ€™clock in the morning, one November, cold November morningâ€•Andover is in the north of Massachusettsâ€•to go out and watch Sputnik go over for the first time. Soâ€•and then when I wasâ€•
Interviewer:
Sputnik being, of course, the Russianâ€•
Paul Bremer:
The very first satellite.
Interviewer:
Space program that excited the need toâ€•
Paul Bremer:
Right.
Interviewer:
Emphasize on the science here, right?
Paul Bremer:
And then when I was at Yale, we had the Bay of Pigs fiasco, in myâ€•
Interviewer:
That would have been â€™61, Iâ€™m thinking, right?
Paul Bremer:
My junior year. We had the Cuban Missile Crisis shortly thereafter, and I can remember the bombers going over us at New Haven, wondering what that was all about. So Iâ€•there were some of these events that made aâ€•the Berlin Wall went up. These events brought home the Cold War pretty dramatically at a time when I was in my late teenager and early adult years. So when I entered the diplomatic service in the late â€™60s, the Cold War really framed American foreign policy. As far as I was concerned, that wasâ€•and I think it was for everybody. It was the central question: were we going to be able, in some fashion, to avoid a nuclear confrontation with the Soviets? And that really framed the whole foreign policy strategy in those years.
Interviewer:
Did you consider yourself a Democrat, Republican, Independent at the time? What wasâ€•
Paul Bremer:
I was a conservative Republican from a very young age.
Interviewer:
And straight through the Goldwater years, thenâ€•you were a Goldwater enthusiast?
Paul Bremer:
I actually did work in the Goldwater campaign.
Interviewer:
Is that right?
Paul Bremer:
I was a schlepper, you know, passing outâ€•
Interviewer:
Andâ€•
Paul Bremer:
Passing out things. But I actuallyâ€•I met him before he was a candidate, because I wasâ€•I worked at the radio station at Yale during my time there, for four years, and we had a public affairs show. I canâ€™t remember what it was called. But anyway, I was charged to meet and greet Goldwater, and bring him in and interview him, so I met him. I guess it

was in 1962 or maybe â€™63.
Interviewer:
A lot of people mark that campaign as the beginning of the rise of the conservative movement in the United States going forward from there. Do you see it that way?
Paul Bremer:
Well, it certainly was the first time that, certainly in my lifetime, that the conservative part of the Republican party had a candidate. Of course, he got soundly trounced. But in a way, you could argue, much as Al Smithâ€™s loss in 1928 eventually paved the way for a Catholic to become President, Goldwaterâ€™s loss in 1964 began to make the case that Ronald Reagan kind of brought and won in 1980, so. This is all in retrospect.
Interviewer:
Sure. Was it lonely to be a conservative at Yale at the time?
Paul Bremer:
Yes.
Interviewer:
And how did that feel, and was Bill Buckley around asâ€•
Paul Bremer:
He was. Yes, I knew Bill, and of course he wasâ€•
Interviewer:
Up long before you, of course, yeah.
Paul Bremer:
12 or 13 years before me.
Interviewer:
Yeah.
Paul Bremer:
Yes, he was, and I read his magazine. In fact Iâ€™m one of the very few charter subscribers to National Review still around, because my father and Iâ€•I was, I guess, 14 when it first came outâ€•gave me a subscription to National Review, which Iâ€™ve had for whatever it is nowâ€•55 years.
Interviewer:
So the State Departmentâ€•did you go right to the State Department from Yale?
Paul Bremer:
I did, yeah.
Interviewer:
And what was your first post, then?
Paul Bremer:
First post was Afghanistan, Kabul, Afghanistan.
Interviewer:
Wow. So what year would this have been in, then?
Paul Bremer:
1966.
Interviewer:
What was Afghanistan like in 1966?
Paul Bremer:
About like what it was in the year 950, I would say, give or take 50 years.
Interviewer:
Wowâ€•very primitive.
Paul Bremer:
Extremely primitive. We asked to go to Kabul, actuallyâ€•it was you get a choice, you know, sort ofâ€•
Interviewer:
â€œWeâ€•â€ by â€œwe,â€ you mean?
Paul Bremer:
My wife and I.

Interviewer:
Your wife and I.
Paul Bremer:
Yeah. Weâ€•youâ€™re given, in the foreign service, a theoretical ability to ask for a place, and for a variety of reasons, I wanted to go to a part of the world I hadnâ€™t been to before. I wanted to go to a developing country. And I wanted to go to a medium-sized U.S. Embassy where I would haveâ€•where I thought I would have responsibility quicker than if you go to Paris or London or someplace. So we had heard a bit about Afghanistan, and I just said, â€œLet me go to Kabul.â€
Of course, the personnel guys at State Department said, â€œWe got one here.â€ And they cut orders, about two weeks later, and I was in Kabul, and it was fast.
Interviewer:
Laughter Now, thereâ€•
Paul Bremer:
{:.text They said, â€œBefore he can change his mind.â€
Interviewer:
It was a monarchy at the time, is that right?
Paul Bremer:
It was still a monarchy, yep.
Interviewer:
Describe the monarchy if you could.
Paul Bremer:
Well, I mean Afghanistanâ€™s had a kind of a bumpy history, but there was a king, King Zahir Shah, who at the time, I think most people saw, and I think subsequently saw, as a moderate, reasonably liberal monarchy. It was a constitutional monarchyâ€• there was a Loya Jirga, there was a parliament.
The politics were fairly tribal and opaque, but there were at least structures there. It certainly couldnâ€™t be defined as a modern democracy, and certainly the government they have today is much more representative than what they had then.
Interviewer:
As a diplomat in Kabul during those years, what did you do?
Paul Bremer:
Well, I was a junior officer, and in those days, in the State Department, they had a program at medium and large embassies where they tried, overâ€•usually they had a two-year tourâ€•they tried to give you six or eight months in two or three of the various sections of the embassy. So I started off as the consular officer responsible for looking after the welfare of American citizens in Afghanistan, and issuing visas to people who wanted to travel to the United States, and a variety of other things.
Interviewer:
Not a lot going either way, I would imagine, during that time.
Paul Bremer:
Well, actuallyâ€•no, actually there werenâ€™t that many visas issued for coming here. But we had a small but difficult American community there. These were in the years when Americans used to take the Holland America Ship Lines. Students would take the Holland American shipping line to the Netherlands. Theyâ€™d buy an old, beat-up Volkswagen, and theyâ€™d decide to drive to Kathmandu, where drugs were readily available. So they drove through Europe, across Turkey, across Iran, across Afghanistan. They usually ran out of money in Afghanistan, and then they found, to their surprise, that there were also drugs available in Afghanistan. Not actually the heroin, not the hard stuff, but essentially hashish. So a lot of the consular officerâ€™s time was spent getting these people out of jail and sending them home to their anxious parents. It was aâ€•there werenâ€™t a lot of Americans there, but it was a pretty active responsibility.
Interviewer:

Was there a strategic importance to Afghanistan at the time in respect to the Cold War?
Paul Bremer:
Yeah, and I wentâ€•I wentâ€•the second part of my time there, I served in the political section. There is a rotation that I mentioned. I think, yes, at the time really in some waysâ€•in the 1950sâ€•really, since the Second World War through the early 1980s, you had a kind of a replay of the great game that was played out between Britain and Russia during the nineteenth century in this general area of Afghanistan. We wereâ€•â€œweâ€ the United Statesâ€•was giving a great deal of aid to the Afghansâ€•I mean today it wouldnâ€™t be a lot of money, but then it was quite a lot of moneyâ€•for development. In particular, in Helmand Valley, in the south, in building roadsâ€•we built the road from Kabul down to Kandaharâ€•we built an international airport now thatâ€™s still in Kandahar. And the Russians were competing with us. They built the roadâ€•which they obviously were thinking ahead better than we were.
They built a road that would take tanks, as it turned out from the river, which is the border in the north, down to Kabul. So there was a fair amount ofâ€•
Interviewer:
Border with the Soviet Union, right?
Paul Bremer:
Borderâ€•
Interviewer:
Yeah, withâ€”butâ€•itâ€™sâ€•
Paul Bremer:
With the Soviet Union, actually, thereâ€™s Pakistan.
Interviewer:
Yes, yes.
Paul Bremer:
So there wasâ€•it was an interesting place diplomatically because it was one of only really two diplomatic posts in the world where American and Russian diplomats actually had a fair amount of social and diplomatic interaction, the other one being Berlin. And so it was, in that respect, somewhat interesting, just because we were kind of on the frontline. It wasnâ€™t a very important frontline, but it was a frontline, and theâ€•
Interviewer:
So you got to know your Russian counterparts in Kabul.
Paul Bremer:
Well, you got to know them. I mean I was too junior to be of very much importance, but there was, there were a fair amount of back-and-forth amongâ€•particularly among the people in the intelligence side of both embassies.
Interviewer:
I could imagine that this was aâ€•
Paul Bremer:
A lot of competitive recruiting of each other.
Interviewer:
Oh, sureâ€•Iâ€™m sure.
Paul Bremer:
Yeah.
Interviewer:
And I think it must have been a significant listening post, too, Afghanistan.
Paul Bremer:
Yeah.
Interviewer:
For intelligence purposes across theâ€•
Paul Bremer:
Yeah, as a matter of fact, one of the things that happened while I was consular officer was a couple of very grubby people showed up speaking no known language one day in my

office. And after some researchâ€"it turned out they were Uyghurs who had made it there from China. There is a small border with China in Afghanistan at the end of the Wakhan Valley. And these Uyghurs, who have become much more prominent in the news since then, had somehow come across. I donâ€™t know how they did it, because the mountains are between 22 and 25,000 feet up there. Anyway, they made it across and were actually seeking some kind of refuge in the United States. Well, they were passed on to the appropriate other parts of the embassy for whatever happened.
Interviewer:
Did you travel much in Afghanistan at the time?
Paul Bremer:
Yes. I traveled around, particularly when I wasâ€•I then moved from the political section after some period, and I did some very interesting travels during that time. I traveled also when I became the economic and consular officer, which was the third rotation I did.
Interviewer:
By each rotation, you mean you left to another embassy post and then come back?
Paul Bremer:
No. No.
Interviewer:
Or you mean just were moved within theâ€"okay.
Paul Bremer:
Yeah. The junior officersâ€•the term is you rotate among the sections of the embassy.
Interviewer:
I see.
Paul Bremer:
No, we were there for a little less than two years, and it was just a question of moving from one section to the other. Yeah, I traveled. I traveled. I guess the longest and most interesting trips were down to the south and southwest part, where you have the tri-border area of Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, which is one of the most remote places in the world thatâ€™s still like inhabited. Itâ€™s very, very remote.
Interviewer:
But you mustâ€™ve alsoâ€•you said Afghanistan was very tribal. Itâ€™s very tribal now.
Paul Bremer:
Yeah.
Interviewer:
I mean you mustâ€™veâ€•in the events of the last decade, where weâ€™ve gotten to know words like Pashtunâ€•
Paul Bremer:
Yeah.
That mustâ€™ve been a familiar definition to youâ€"
Paul Bremer:
Yes.
Interviewer:
Long before. How could you characterize this kind of tribal structure?
Paul Bremer:
Well, it was pretty clear if you studied the history of Afghanistan that the Pashtuns have pretty much run the place to the extent itâ€™s ever beenâ€•itâ€™s only been effectively a country since 1888, so itâ€™s not that old. But theyâ€™ve always provided the kings since the British decided to effectively call it a country.
I can remember when you went into government offices in those days, it was quite often that behind the desk of the official would be a map that would be called â€œLoya Afghanistanâ€•â€ it means â€œgreater Afghanistan.â€ And it showed an Afghanistan that went all the way to the Indus River, so they were ignoring Lord Curzonâ€™s line there pretty much. And it begins to define some of the problems we see today in Afghanistan and

Pakistan, in factâ€•
Interviewer:
Well, isnâ€™t some of theâ€•
Paul Bremer:
Because the Pashtuns have aâ€”
Interviewer:
Yeah.
Paul Bremer:
Very big idea about how big a country they have.
Interviewer:
Sure. And isnâ€™t there a kind of clash between whatever notion of a national identity vs. a tribal identity, and a religious identity?
{:.time 0:18:27
Paul Bremer:
Yeah.
Interviewer:
I mean there are many ways to identify yourself in Afghanistanâ€•
Paul Bremer:
Yeah.
Interviewer:
And theyâ€™re less rigidly in the national identity scope than we are in the West, of course.
Paul Bremer:
Yeah. Oh, yeah.
Interviewer:
Making it more difficult, I imagine, for the kinds of things weâ€™re trying to do there now.
Paul Bremer:
Yeah. I donâ€™t think thereâ€™s any question. It is aâ€•if you compare it to Iraq, which is the only other country I have lived in in the areaâ€•it isâ€•Afghanistan is a much more tribal, much less centralized. This was brought home very strongly to me on this trip I mentioned down to the three border areas. I went with another guy from the embassy and a couple of Afghans, and we drove. We went acrossâ€•from Helmand Valley you go across what is ominously called the Dashti Margo, the desert of death. We got across, it was okay, but itâ€™s pretty isolated.
You get down in there, down towards the far southwest, and we were in townsâ€•we were in Land Rovers and stuff. We were in towns where they had never seen an official from Kabul, and many of them had never seen a foreigner. They didnâ€™t know who we were, of course, and but we had a couple of guysâ€•we had a guy from the Central Bank who was originally from that area. We had another guy from another part of the government there. And it reallyâ€•I mean obviously there was no electricity, no running water, no nothing.
But it always brought home to me that the writ of Kabul has never stretched to the borders of what we call Afghanistan. And it made a pretty big impression.
Interviewer:
By â€œthe writ of Kabul,â€ you mean the sense that there is a civil society that extends out of Kabul.
Paul Bremer:
Well, that they had authority of any kind down there.
Interviewer:
Yeah.
Paul Bremer:
I mean basically, in this little town we were inâ€•which was all mud buildings and everythingâ€•there was a local khan, and he had what you would sort of call sort of a castle, with crenelated towers on it. And he basically was in chargeâ€•he dispensed

justice, life and death justice, over the people, â€™cause there was no other government there. There was no policemen, there was no firemen, there was no electricity. There were farmers, and then there was the khan.
Interviewer:
To take us out of the chronology for a second, just on that subject.
Paul Bremer:
Yeah.
Interviewer:
Then I want to come back to it, but thatâ€™s one of the big differences between Afghanistan and Iraq, right? I mean thatâ€"the fact that Iraq had a civil structure that you could recoverâ€•
Paul Bremer:
Right.
Interviewer:
Or seek to recoverâ€"
Paul Bremer:
Right.
Interviewer:
Was very different than where we are in Afghanistan, where we almost have to build one.
Paul Bremer:
Well, ifâ€•I mean theyâ€™re basicallyâ€•the two countries are different in every important metric. Theyâ€™re reallyâ€•theyâ€™re different in every metric. I mean if you look at the population, Iraq is 70% urban and 30% rural, and I donâ€™t think Afghanistan even has 30% urbanâ€•very different. Secondly, you have a long, long history in Iraq, going back more than 1,000 years, of central control from Baghdad, first under the caliphs, then under the Ottomans, then under, eventually, the British, and so forth and so on.
So there is a sense, even though itâ€™s not as strong as it would be in maybe Iran, there is a sense of Iraqi-ness. They are quite proud of being the land between the two rivers and so forth. Of course, Iraqâ€•and then you donâ€™t have that in Afghanistanâ€•and itâ€™s a very long history.
And Afghanistan, really, was cobbled together by the British in 1888. They got tired of having to go there and beat up on the tribes, or get beaten up by them, as they did a couple of times in the nineteenth century. And they said, â€œOkay, letâ€™s find a guy here who has the best chance of holding it together.â€ And it was a Pashtun, so they gave him a bag of gold and said, â€œOkay, hold this place together.â€ Thatâ€™s 100 years ago, a little more than 100 years agoâ€"so the history is different. And then, of course, on an economic basis, thereâ€™s no similarity at all. The Iraqis have not only oil, but they have water. They have really good and some of the most fertile land anywhere in the world, and the Afghans have some fertile land, but itâ€™s more arid. They donâ€™t have, so far as we can tell, anyway, major natural resourcesâ€•remains to be seen.
And of course, the tribal structure in Afghanistan is much more articulated than it is in Iraq. They really areâ€•on almost any major metric, theyâ€™re very different.
Interviewer:
Do you think that makes our task there next to impossible?
Paul Bremer:
Well, it makes it much harder in Afghanistan. Iâ€™ve always felt that it was going to be harder in Afghanistan than in Iraq, given what I had seen of Afghanistan.
Interviewer:
Are you optimistic nonetheless, and if so, why?
Paul Bremer:
Well, I think in Afghanistan, if weâ€•if we have the patience to stay some more years with our military force and with some capacity to reconstruct, I think they can make it. But it remains to be seen if weâ€™ve got the patience to stick it as long as itâ€™s going to take.

Interviewer:
From Afghanistan you go to the Netherlands, is that right?
Paul Bremer:
No, we went to Africaâ€•Malawiâ€•to East Africa, yeah.
Interviewer:
And differences, similarities?
Paul Bremer:
Well, we were in Malawi, which is a very small country in territory, although very heavily populated, and so very densely populated. Different climate, obviously, although itâ€™s not as tropical as, say, West Africa, it nonetheless had tropical area.
It was just a very different experience. I mean a totally different country. We had a lot of fun there and had a lot of good friends, but it was notâ€•obviously, you canâ€™t really make a comparison to Afghanistanâ€•much smaller embassy, which, in a way, was good, because it gave me much more responsibility.
Interviewer:
And from there you goâ€•
Paul Bremer:
Well, from there, I went back to Washington.
Interviewer:
I seeâ€•to the State Department here, or toâ€•
Paul Bremer:
Yes, State Department.
Interviewer:
And what were you doing at the State Department at that time?
Paul Bremer:
Well, I wasâ€•
Interviewer:
This wouldâ€™ve been during the Nixon years that we are now, or?
Paul Bremer:
This was in 1971, yeah. I had asked for and was assigned to the Operations Center, State Operations Center. And actually, the first six months or five months I spent at the NMCC at the Pentagon, â€™cause we had an exchange program in those days. We still have a defense rep at the State Opsâ€•I donâ€™t think they any longer have anybody at the NMCC. It was in the middle of the Vietnam War, so the time at the NMCC was, in a way, interesting. I was mostlyâ€•I mean as a State rep there, youâ€™re just there as a distant early warning signal.
You know, if something is going on, youâ€™re supposed to pick up the phone and call over to State Ops and say, â€œHey, somethingâ€™s going down here.â€ A big thing that happened while I was on a midnight shift over there one night was the Pentagon papers came out, and we had some other stuff. But so I spent time at the NMCC, and then also at State Ops, and then went into the Secretaryâ€™s staff, and eventually became Special Assistant to the Secretary of State. At that time it wasâ€•
Interviewer:
This wouldâ€™ve been Deanâ€•no, this wouldâ€™ve beenâ€•
Paul Bremer:
Bill Rogers.
Interviewer:
Bill Rogers.
Paul Bremer:
Yeah.
Interviewer:
And were you there for the transition there to Henry Kissinger happened?
Paul Bremer:
Yes. Yeah. Rogers resigned in lateâ€•well, the late summer of 1973, and I stayed on and

became Henryâ€™s Special Assistantâ€•eventually, his Chief of Staff.
Interviewer:
Give me a little personality sketch of these two men, â€™cause Secretary Rogers was, I think, a longtime Nixon friend, right?
Paul Bremer:
Yeah.
Interviewer:
And Kissinger was a longtime academic. I think had come out of the Rockefeller Association, andâ€•
Paul Bremer:
Well, yeah, heâ€™d been at Harvard. Yeah, Bill Rogers had been, I think, actually Attorney General or Deputy Attorney General in the Eisenhower administration.
Interviewer:
In the Eisenhower years, right, after Brownell, I guess, yeah.
Paul Bremer:
He was an attorney, a corporate lawyer, basically, from New York. A very nice manâ€•I enjoyed working for him. But he was dealing with a very difficult situation, because President Nixon distrusted the State Department, and I think, in retrospect, probably sent Rogers over there just to keep it quiet. And effectively ran foreign policyâ€•I mean he is, I think, probably more than any President in the last century, he reallyâ€•maybe even before Teddy Roosevelt. He really loved foreign policy and engaged in it, and he was good at it. And of course, he hired Kissinger, effectively, to be able to staff him from the White House. So the NSC National Security Council, in those days, really ran the foreign policy.
Interviewer:
So remind the viewers, the National Security Advisor was Henry Kissinger at the time.
Paul Bremer:
Right.
Interviewer:
And there was then this competitiveâ€•even though there had been a National Security Advisor, I think, going all the way back to the Eisenhower administration and even before. But it had not served the same purpose asâ€•
Paul Bremer:
Well, yeahâ€•I thinkâ€•yeah. I think the realâ€•the firstâ€•
Interviewer:
Prominent.
Paul Bremer:
Prominent one was actually under Kennedy.
Interviewer:
With John Bundy, probably, yeah.
Paul Bremer:
Bundy, yeah. But so it wasnâ€™t really an articulatedâ€•
Interviewer:
Right.
Paul Bremer:
Postâ€•certainly not till the early â€™60s, although itâ€™s, you know, it could be foreseen in the National Security Act of â€™47. But anyway, yeahâ€•so Nixon intentionally concentrated the power over foreign policy, national security policyâ€•not just foreign policy, national security policyâ€•at the White House under the NSC, leaving Rogers and the State Department somewhat outside the circle.
Interviewer:
And the mood at the State Department mustâ€™ve been one of a bit of resentment at that time, I would think.
Paul Bremer:

Well, you know, I was a young Turk in those days, and I remember the Under Secretary for State, U. Alexis Johnson, was sort of a great old foreign service officer. Invited a bunch of us to come have lunch in his office, and we were all bitching and moaning about this, that. And one of the young Turks said, â€œYou knowâ€•â€ the morale was at the worst itâ€™d ever been at the State Department, and Johnson took off his glasses and looked at him, and he said, â€œYoung man, as long as Iâ€™ve been at the State Department, the morale has always been at its lowest level.â€ Laughter
Interviewer:
Laughter What a great line. What a great line.
Paul Bremer:
So I donâ€™t takeâ€•you know, I donâ€™t take that stuff too seriously.
Interviewer:
Yeah. Yeah. So Henry Kissingerâ€•give me a little character sketch of Henry Kissinger.
Paul Bremer:
Well, Kissingerâ€•
Interviewer:
Because he becomes Secretary of State while Nixon is still Presidentâ€•
Paul Bremer:
Oh, yeah.
Interviewer:
Or when Fordâ€•
Paul Bremer:
No, no. Rogers resigned in I think August of â€™73. Nixon appointed, or nominated, Kissinger as Secretary of State right away, in September, early September of â€™73. He was quickly confirmed by the Senate, and came over to State I think around the 25th of September, something like that.
The reason it sticks in my mind is I had intendedâ€•I was pretty tired of all of this, you know, 18-hour day stuff. And so I had intendedâ€•and I told Kissinger I would stay, you know, a couple of months, just to help him through the transition, and then I wanted to go off.
Well, the problem was two weeks later the Yom Kippur War in the Middle East broke out. October 6th, I think it was, 1973. And that was followed immediately by the war, the Arab embargo, and by the time any of us came up for air, we were in the spring of â€™74.
Interviewer:
And the Watergate wasâ€•
Paul Bremer:
Watergate was lapping around the ankles and knees and waist of the President. I went with Kissinger on the various shuttlesâ€•the shuttle diplomacy that took place. And then, of course, Nixon resigned in the summer of â€™74. So it wasâ€•anyway, I didnâ€™t get away for another couple of years is what happened, instead of two months.
Interviewer:
Were you on Nixonâ€™s visit to China?
Paul Bremer:
No. I was on his visit to Moscow, which was in â€™72.
Interviewer:
Tell me about that.
Paul Bremer:
Or â€™70â€•yes. Or actually, I was working for Rogers, â€™cause that was in â€™72 I went on that visit.
Interviewer:
What was it like to be in Moscow in â€™72 with an American Presidentâ€•
Paul Bremer:
Wellâ€•
Interviewer:
In the middle of the beginning of dÃ©tente, really?

Paul Bremer:
It was quiteâ€•it was aâ€•I mean it was obviously a historic event.
Interviewer:
Yeah.
Paul Bremer:
I mean I was justâ€•I was Rogersâ€™ Special Assistant, so I was not a big player. It was exciting. They signed the SALT 1 agreement there. There was a lot ofâ€•as you say, it was kind of the culmination of the policy of dÃ©tente that Nixon had started, in a sense, because of the agreement on strategic arms.
Moscow was very different, I guess, than it is today. I havenâ€™t been there for 10 years, but it was a pretty cold, dank place. I mean, you know, there was only one hotel, and then, you know, there was the Kremlin. It was not a greatâ€•
Interviewer:
A lot of borscht.
Paul Bremer:
A lot ofâ€•yeah. Except in those days, anyway, at the hotelâ€•we stayed at the Rossiya Hotel, it was the only one thereâ€•they had the curious ritual that they closed the restaurant in the hotel at mealtimes so that the staff could eat. Which was sort of kind of typical of the way the Communist world worked, as far as I could tell.
Interviewer:
Now, youâ€™re a conservative Republicanâ€•
Paul Bremer:
Right.
Interviewer:
Working in an administration that isâ€•and for a Secretary of State whoâ€™s promoting dÃ©tente.
Paul Bremer:
Right.
Interviewer:
This would not have been Goldwaterâ€™s point of view about all these things.
Paul Bremer:
No, probably not. It certainly was not my fatherâ€™s point of view, who was at that time still alive and rather uncomfortable with the Nixon policy.
Look, I joined the foreign service to be in the public service, and my view of the foreign service officerâ€•as it would be if I were a military officerâ€•is you go in and you do what youâ€™re told. If you come to a point where you literally cannot support it, you have only one choice, which is to resign, and that was my view of my entire career in foreignâ€•I didnâ€™t come to that point.
Interviewer:
Now that youâ€™re not in the positionâ€•
Paul Bremer:
Right.
Interviewer:
Can youâ€•were you disappointed with dÃ©tente?
Paul Bremer:
No.
Interviewer:
Did you think it was the wrong place to go?
Paul Bremer:
No. I thought at the time it was the right policy, and I still thinkâ€•I still think it was the right policy. I think history is a funny thing, but the combination of dÃ©tente, which you could argue it anesthetized both sides for a while.
I wasâ€•the one thing that I didnâ€™t like about dÃ©tente was the fact that the Russians

kept building up, and we were not meeting them, particularly on, in those days, ICBMs. But you could make an argument now when you look back that because of what Reagan was able to do, we got the time to effectively bankrupt the Soviet Union. I mean thatâ€™s what basically happened. In 1989 they went into Chapter 11â€•actually Chapter 7, â€™cause they didnâ€™t come back. So youâ€•I mean you can make a lot of arguments. At the time, I was notâ€•I mean I was following policy. I didnâ€™t find that it was so offensive to me I couldnâ€™t support it.
Interviewer:
Well, retrospectively, a lot of neoconservative conservativesâ€•
Paul Bremer:
Right.
Interviewer:
Look back at that and believe well, from Acheson forward, we took the wrong approach.
Paul Bremer:
Yeah, I donâ€™tâ€•
Interviewer:
You donâ€™t agree with that?
Paul Bremer:
I donâ€™t share that view.
Interviewer:
Describe Kissinger.
Paul Bremer:
Well, Henry is aâ€•I mean there are a couple of things to say. Heâ€™s obviously brilliant. He has that capacityâ€•which is really geniusâ€• to look at a set of facts and draw a conclusion from them that, in retrospect, is obvious. But when you looked at the same facts, you didnâ€™t see it.
In fact, if you read his books, particularly about the nineteenth centuryâ€•and I spent a lot of myâ€•when I was studying I spent a lot of time in the nineteenth century on foreign policy. I thought I knew something. But it wasâ€•itâ€™s interesting.
When you read his booksâ€•his book on Metternich, his book on diplomacyâ€•and I know all the facts of what heâ€™s describing. Suddenly he has a different perspective on it. Itâ€™s as ifâ€•you know, I studied art history. If you look at a Jackson Pollock picture, and you say to yourself, â€œWhat is that?â€ You know, heâ€™s dribbled paint all over and everything, and it sells for hundreds of thousands of dollars. But he did something nobody else did before. Thatâ€™s the genius. There is in Henry that spark of genius.
Interviewer:
Well, and the comparisonâ€™s even richer when you think that an artist actually sees something.
Paul Bremer:
Yeah.
Interviewer:
He sees something. Not just that he did something like that, but he actually sees things differently.
Paul Bremer:
Right. Right. I have anotherâ€•
Interviewer:
And it sounds like thatâ€™s what Kissingerâ€•he saw thingsâ€•yeah.
Paul Bremer:
I have another storyâ€•
Interviewer:
Okay.
Paul Bremer:
That comes from art.
Interviewer:

Yeah.
Paul Bremer:
Because I subsequently taken upâ€•Iâ€™m now a painter. I was told by one of my teachers, painting teachers, that Monet one day was out painting in his garden in Givernyâ€•I guess water lilies or whatever. And some guy came up and said, â€œThatâ€™s not the way it looks.â€ And Monet handed him the brush and said, â€œOkay, tell me what it looks like,â€ soâ€•anyway.
Interviewer:
Thatâ€™s a great anecdote, yeah.
Paul Bremer:
So Henryâ€™s brilliant. Heâ€™s an extremely demandingâ€•as Secretary of State, he was extremely demanding. I say â€œwasâ€ because I also ran his consulting company after I retired from the foreign service, and I worked for him under different circumstances, where he was under less pressure.
Interviewer:
Differentâ€•not as demanding, then?
Paul Bremer:
Not as demanding, but with a temper. Hisâ€”he has a capacity for grand strategy that I donâ€™t think weâ€™ve seen in high American statesmen for a long time. I think Acheson had it. George C. Marshall, to some degree, had it. Teddy Roosevelt probably had it. But itâ€™s pretty rare, and it might be partly because Henryâ€™s not a born American. He comes from Germanyâ€•
Interviewer:
How would you describe that grand strategy? I mean you ticked off really four really important thinkers on foreign policy right there. But what was Kissingerâ€™s particular contribution to that chronology?
Paul Bremer:
Well, I thinkâ€•I think his grand strategy was to understand that the goal of our foreign policy is to define in advance American national interests, and to determine where you had leverage to make that happen by working with or against other forces, whether itâ€™s Russia or, of course in his case, China. Bringing China into the equation was a stroke of political genius, which again, a lot of conservatives were unhappy about* {:.time}
Interviewer:
Well, because itâ€™s a Realpolitik sort of approach, right? I meanâ€•
Paul Bremer:
Well, it wasnâ€™t justâ€•yeahâ€•no, but then it was seen as being, you know, abandoning Taiwanâ€•
Interviewer:
Yeah, yeah.
Paul Bremer:
To Chiang Kai-shek and so forth. It wasnâ€™t just Realpolitikâ€•it was alsoâ€•
Interviewer:
Yes, a real abandonment of what had been an ally.
Paul Bremer:
Soâ€•but bringing China in, in the early â€™70sâ€•late â€™60s, early â€™70sâ€•really was what gave us some leverage with the Russians. And you can argue, allowed aâ€•wouldâ€•could have allowed a more or less orderly resolution of the war in Vietnam, if the funding hadnâ€™t been cut off by Congress in â€™73. Anyway, I think what Henryâ€™s capacity is is to see the kind of world as a whole, and find the interlocking ways, and to find ways to get some leverage there. And it certainly made him one of our great Secretaries of State.
Interviewer:
Some might say, thoughâ€•and more conservative thinkers would say this, I would

thinkâ€•that thereâ€™s a certain cynicism to his view of the world. That heâ€™s sort of playing people against each other, and that thatâ€™sâ€•
Paul Bremer:
Wellâ€•
Interviewer:
Itâ€™s not as principle-based, perhaps, as another approach.
Paul Bremer:
Right. Well, I thinkâ€•foreign policy is alwaysâ€•there is always aâ€•foreign policy is serious. There is always a tension between values and interests. Sometimes they coincideâ€•sometimes they donâ€™t. And you have to find a balance. Now, I think a fair criticism of Kissingerâ€™s time when he was Secretary was his de-emphasis on human rights in other countries. He basically has the Westphalian, post-Westphalian view that what goes on inside a country is its business, and what we care about is the external manifestations of the countryâ€•what it does outside its country.
Itâ€™s easy, now, in 2011, to say, â€œWell, gee, thatâ€™s really outmoded.â€ It wasnâ€™t so obvious 40 years ago that the Westphalian system was falling apart, or should fall apart, or needed to be succeeded. Jimmy Carter, to his credit, put human rights much higher on the agenda when he became President in 1977, and I can remember feeling a bit uncomfortable about it because itâ€•I wasnâ€™t working for Kissinger any more, but it contradicted, kind of, the worldview of Talleyrand, Metternich, Kissinger. Anybody you want to name from 1648 forward.
Interviewer:
This is a good point to actually leap forward here, because that same tension is present when you go to Iraq.
Paul Bremer:
Yep.
Interviewer:
So letâ€™s go toâ€•we can come back, perhaps, in a future interview to where you were post the Nixon years.
Paul Bremer:
Yeah, sure.
Interviewer:
But youâ€™re in retirement, am I right, when youâ€™re called upon to go to Iraq.
Paul Bremer:
Yes.
Interviewer:
Youâ€™re in Vermont. Youâ€™re in your country home or something.
Paul Bremer:
No, I was working. No, I had a companyâ€•I was running a company.
Interviewer:
You didâ€•alright.
Paul Bremer:
Yeah. No, I had left Stateâ€•
Interviewer:
I guess Iâ€™m thinking the opening of your book wasnâ€™t there some reference to a call or something?
Paul Bremer:
Yeah, well, we have a house in Vermont, butâ€”
Interviewer:
Yeah.
Paul Bremer:
No, I was working. I had my own company.
Interviewer:
I see. Okay.

Paul Bremer:
But in any caseâ€•
Interviewer:
And what were you working onâ€•just give me a brief idea. What kind ofâ€•
Paul Bremer:
I was running a company called Marsh Crisis Consulting. It was a consultingâ€•I was CEO of aâ€•I set it up. It was owned by Marsh McLennan, theâ€•
Interviewer:
Rightâ€•the brokerage.
Paul Bremer:
The conglomerate, and we were doing crisis management planning and exercises for CEOs, corporate CEOs.
Interviewer:
And where were you when you got this call, or did you have any inkling you were going to get this call?
Paul Bremer:
No. I wasâ€•my assistant was called by somebody in the Secretary of Defenseâ€™s office, Don Rumsfeld, one Wednesday afternoon in late April, 2003, so the warâ€•the kinetic phase of the Iraq War was over. And asked to come to see him the next day, next afternoonâ€•it was on Thursday afternoon.
Interviewer:
Was Jay Garner already thereâ€•
Paul Bremer:
Yeah.
Interviewer:
And then Orhoff was allâ€•
Paul Bremer:
Oh, yes. No, this was, as I say, late April, so.
Interviewer:
Yeah.
Paul Bremer:
Yeah. I had had a conversationsâ€•two conversationsâ€•much earlier, before the war, with Scooter Libby, the Vice Presidentâ€™s Chief of Staff, and Paul Wolfowitz, both of whom I had known for 25 years, about doing something in the administration.
And from Wolfowitz, I think a more direct conversation at some pointâ€•I think, again, before the warâ€•I donâ€™t really knowâ€•about the possibility of doing something in Iraq. It mustâ€™ve beenâ€”no, the war mustâ€™ve been going on, â€™cause he wouldnâ€™t have talked to be before the war. It mustâ€™ve been in March. So I had an inkling that they must have something to do with these conversations I had.
Interviewer:
So your assistant is called and Secretary Rumsfeld is asking you to come to his office.
Paul Bremer:
Right.
Interviewer:
And you do.
Paul Bremer:
Yeah.
Interviewer:
And paint that scene for meâ€•his office at the Pentagon, I assume, and heâ€™sâ€•
Paul Bremer:
His office at the Pentagon, yeah, andâ€•
Interviewer:
Who was there when you got there? Was it just the Secretary?

Paul Bremer:
Nobody. Well, he wasâ€•
Interviewer:
It was just you and the Secretary.
Paul Bremer:
Yeah, there was nobody in theâ€•a little background. I had known him briefly in the Nixon years when he was Chief of Staff at the White House, then became Secretary of Defense. And Kissinger, of course, was Secretary of State.
Interviewer:
In the Nixon years, or in theâ€•
Paul Bremer:
I mean Ford.
Interviewer:
Ford years.
Paul Bremer:
Ford, yeah, sorry. Anyway, so I had sort of known him a little bit, not much, and of courseâ€
”
Interviewer:
He was not like a close friend.
Paul Bremer:
No, no, no, no. Then he came back in. President Reagan brought him back on a special mission in the Middle East in â€™82, I think, at which time I was working for George Shultz as Secretary of State. And I had a fair amount of interaction with him then because I was Executive Secretary of the Department. He needed staff support, and we found him some, so.
And then I also had a couple of meetings and discussions with him during the 1990s when he wasâ€•he had chaired a commission onâ€•what was itâ€•ballistic missile defense? I canâ€™t remember the commission he had, a blue-ribbon commission of some kind. He and I talked about that.
Then I was appointed to head a National Commission on Terrorism, and I talked to him about how heâ€™d organized, and could I find some staff, and he made some suggestions on staff. So I had known him.
Interviewer:
That was the â€™90s for your National Commission onâ€•
Paul Bremer:
National Commission on Terrorism was â€™99 to 2000, yeah. And I think his commission had reported by thenâ€•I think his commission had reported in â€™96, â€™97, that period.
Interviewer:
Right, right.
Paul Bremer:
Anyway, so the point was I had known him.
Interviewer:
Yeah.
Paul Bremer:
Yeah, so yeah, no, I went into his office and we chatted a bit, and he asked me about Iraq. I donâ€™t remember all the details. In any case, he, in the end, asked if I would be willing to go over there. And I said, â€œYes,â€ and in my book Iâ€™ve written someâ€•he said, â€œWell, how are your relations with the other people on the National Securityâ€•of the National Security people?â€ I said, â€œWell, Iâ€™ve known Colin Powell since he was the V Corps commander.â€ Because when I was Ambassador to the Netherlands, Colin was the V Corps commander. And I had known him also when he then came back and worked at the NSC, I guess in the lateâ€•I canâ€™t rememberâ€•the second Reagan administration.
Interviewer:

Right.
Paul Bremer:
And I was Ambassador at Large in those days. I had known Dr. Condoleezza Rice briefly, not very well, during the Bush 41 presidencyâ€•I was out of government at that time, but I stayed involved in things.
Dick Cheney was a classmate of mine, briefly, twice, at Yale, and so he wasâ€•he was gone. And Iâ€™d known George Tenetâ€•Iâ€™d come to know George quite well because of my work on the National Commission on Terrorism.
Interviewer:
Right.
Paul Bremer:
So I told Rumsfeld, I said, â€œI donâ€™t know the President. I know his father, but I donâ€™t know him.â€ And I saidâ€•he said, â€œWill you have any trouble? Will any of them have a problem with you going over?â€ I said, â€œI donâ€™t know. Tenet might not be happy, because my commission report on terrorism was pretty critical of him and of the CIA.â€ He said, â€œWell, Iâ€™ll check around this afternoonâ€•I donâ€™t know.â€
Interviewer:
Did you know what job he had in mind for you?
Paul Bremer:
Well, I knew it wasâ€•I didnâ€™t know what it was going to be called, but I knew it was basically replacing Garner, andâ€•
Interviewer:
And did you sense from him that there was disappointment in Garner?
Paul Bremer:
No.
Interviewer:
You did not.
Paul Bremer:
No.
Interviewer:
Because thatâ€™s really the sort of characterization a lot of people have about this.
Paul Bremer:
Yeah, I donâ€™t think thatâ€™s fair. I think that from my conversations then and since, I think that is unfair. I think the planning, as far as I knowâ€”and again, I was not in government before the war. But what I was told was they had planned all along to have aâ€•to have somebody with political and diplomatic skills come in fairly soon. Garner had always been planning to leave by June 15thâ€•there was nothing unusual about him planning to leave.
I think itâ€•I think his departure was very badly handled by the administration, and again, itâ€™s in my book. I thought he was notâ€•he was not treated well. He knew â€•
Interviewer:
Well, letâ€™s go to some of the reasons for that, because I think you do articulate on that in your bookâ€•I think you say that there had beenâ€•it wasnâ€™t that there was no plan. It was the wrong plan.
Paul Bremer:
Right.
Interviewer:
Andâ€•
Paul Bremer:
Which is the usualâ€•
Interviewer:
Right
Paul Bremer:

Circumstance. Thatâ€™s the way itâ€•
Interviewer:
But it is different than there being no plan.
Paul Bremer:
Yeah, Eisenhower has the best statement. He says, â€œThe plan is nothingâ€•the planning is everything,â€ and he knows a thing or two about plans, yeah.
Interviewer:
But the idea had been that there would be a refugee crisis, and that Jay Garnerâ€•
Paul Bremer:
Right.
Interviewer:
Would be the perfect person for that because of his workâ€•
Paul Bremer:
Because heâ€™d been inâ€•
Interviewer:
In the Kurd area.
Paul Bremer:
Yeah.
Interviewer:
But then when there was no refugee crisisâ€•
Paul Bremer:
Right.
Interviewer:
He was the wrong man to be there, was theâ€•thatâ€™s the way itâ€™s sort of been. Or at least that his purpose, the usefulness of that kind of expertise, was not as criticalâ€•
Paul Bremer:
Right. Right.
Interviewer:
And not as critical for as long as we thought it might be. Is that wayâ€•is that a fair characterization of it?
Paul Bremer:
I donâ€™t know. I wasâ€•again, I was not involved before the war. What I gotâ€•and I canâ€™t even remember, you know, it was a pretty busy periodâ€•was that it had always been foreseen that there would be a transition.
Now, as you say, basically the pre-war planning had planned for contingencies that in fact didnâ€™t evolve, so in a way, to have an organization called â€œThe Organization for Humanitarian Reliefâ€ didnâ€™t make much sense any more. I mean the title itself kind of said, â€œWeâ€™re planning over here. The problemâ€™s over here.â€
Interviewer:
Whose fault is that, do you think, then, backing it upâ€•letâ€™s go to that. So what was theâ€•if weâ€™re going to learn from this, in other words, whatâ€•we talked about planning. How do you planâ€•how can you miss the plan so obviously, as we did in this case?
Paul Bremer:
Well, I donâ€™t thinkâ€•I donâ€™t thinkâ€•in my view the pre-war planning assumptions were not far off. I mean it was a reasonable assumption that there would be a humanitarian crisis. There would be massive refugee movements within and around, and that there would be damage toâ€•major damage to the oil fields, because thatâ€™s what happened in 1991. And then you say, â€œWell, the planners are always fighting the last war.â€ Well, which war are they going to fight?
They canâ€™t fight the next one, â€™cause thatâ€™s what theyâ€™re planning. So I donâ€™t know that the fault of the pre-war planning was so much in the assumptions. It turned out things were different, so then you got to switchâ€•you got to move.
Interviewer:

But doesnâ€™t planning have to beâ€•thereâ€™s this set of assumptions, and this is the plan for that. Then if this changes to this set, then we have this plan.
Paul Bremer:
Wellâ€•
Interviewer:
I mean ideally.
Paul Bremer:
Yeah.
Interviewer:
I understand that weâ€™reâ€•
Paul Bremer:
And I donâ€™t knowâ€•frankly, again, I donâ€™t know whetherâ€•maybe there was a Plan B somewhere in the midst of the bureaucracy before the war. I donâ€™t know. But anyway, the planâ€•
Interviewer:
You talk about discussing this with Ryan Crocker, I think, that there had been a State Department kind of studyâ€•
Paul Bremer:
Well, the State Department had done something called â€œThe Future of Iraq,â€ and in part of the bureaucratic wrestling that began when things got rough in Iraq was people alleging that the State Department had this great plan. Well, Iâ€™ve read this great planâ€•itâ€™s about 2,500 pages. Itâ€™s not a plan. Itâ€™s a series of papers written by Iraqi exiles in the United States and Britain. Itâ€™s totally internally contradictory. What do we do about this, what do we do about itâ€•itâ€™s the priority transportation, is it oil? Itâ€™s not a plan. Itâ€™s a series of kind of papers written by people. And Ryan admitted to me when I asked him about it, when he was then working for me, he said, â€œItâ€™s not a plan.â€ Itâ€™s not a plan, and you can go look at itâ€•itâ€™s not a plan.
Now, you know, itâ€™s no secret that there obviously were, before and after the war, tensions between State and Defense, and it isâ€•that, by the way, is also not unusual. In fact, I think itâ€™s healthy. Itâ€™s a sign that theyâ€™re both doing their jobs.
Interviewer:
Although it was particularly vigorous in this situation.
Paul Bremer:
Now, it was vigorous in this case, although, having been working for George Shultz when Cap Weinberger was Secretary of Defense, or, you know, when I sawâ€•I worked for Cy Vance when Harold Brown was Secretary of Defense. Those two got along reasonably well, but the Weinberger-Shultz was about at the same level as the Powell-Rumsfeld, so letâ€™s not, you know, letâ€™s not get too carried away here.
Itâ€™s possible that had the relations been better between State and Defense before the war, you mightâ€™ve come up with a plan that said, â€œWell, what if we donâ€™t haveâ€•â€ itâ€™s possible. But certainly what the State Department didâ€• â€œThe Future of Iraqâ€ was not a substituteâ€•you could not have run the reconstruction, political and economic reconstruction of Iraq with those 2,500 pages. It wouldnâ€™t have done it.
Interviewer:
How much of the surprise, though, can be related to the faulty intelligence on the WMD?
Paul Bremer:
Well, you haveâ€•to answer that question you have to say, â€œWhat was the surprise?â€ Obviously, there was surprise there wasnâ€™t WMD. Thatâ€™s a separate matter.
I think there wereâ€•there was one real surprise, which is actually the unbelievably decrepit state of the Iraqi economy. To me, that was the biggest surprise. Now, whatâ€•having looked at post-conflict situations, what is not a surprise is the importance of providing security. That is where the planning problem really was.
We did not have adequate security, and that really was not related so much to whether

there was going to be a humanitarian crisis, they were going to do the oil wells, there was going to be refugees. That was a straight military question: do we have enough people on the ground?
Interviewer:
So you think that was just a blunder.
Paul Bremer:
Yes. And I said so at the timeâ€•
Interviewer:
Right, I understand.
Paul Bremer:
And Iâ€™ve written about it, Iâ€™ve said it since, andâ€•
Interviewer:
Rightâ€•no, I know you have, and but you lay that at the feetâ€•
Paul Bremer:
I mean I think that was the serious problem, even before I left.
Interviewer:
And you lay that at the feet of who, then?
Paul Bremer:
Well, I donâ€™t know, because Iâ€•I mean you can makeâ€•you can make an argument thatâ€•and Douglas Feith probably made the argument in his talks with you. Before the war, there seems toâ€•and I only learned this long after I left Iraqâ€•there seemed to have been two different views of what the post-war was going to look like. We go back now to the whole question of Westphalia. Was it going to be the case that, having defeated Saddam Husseinâ€™s regime, we were going to have a quick in-and-out, and basically get out quickly, and leave the future of Iraq to Iraqis right away?
Orâ€•which was the position, as I understand it, of Feith and some others at the Pentagon before the war. And he has in his book discussions of an NSC meetingâ€•I donâ€™t know, March 15th or 16th, shortly before the warâ€•about this, when the President was presented that option and an option that apparently was supported by the State Department and the CIA which said, â€œNo, this is going to be harder. Reconstruction is difficult, and post-conflict takes time. Youâ€™re going to have to have time, and we got to help the Iraqis.â€ What I have heardâ€•and I have no firsthand knowledge, but Iâ€™ve heard it from, you know, talking to Doug Feith, Steve Hadley, some of these other people, and some people who worked in the Pentagonâ€•was at that meeting, at that NSC meeting before the war, the President seemed to indicate he was in favor of a short, quick occupation, in and out. Sometime between that period and certainly by the time I was called inâ€•but Iâ€™ve heard itâ€™s really actually more like the first week of Aprilâ€•the President moved to the position that I heard from him, which is, â€œWeâ€™re going to take our time to help the Iraqis put in place a representative government,â€ and so forthâ€•Iâ€™ve written about it.
Interviewer:
The fear here, of course, is you want toâ€•he didnâ€™t want to be in a position of state-building, right? That was a nasty word for a little while.
Paul Bremer:
Nation-building, yes.
Interviewer:
Nation-building, Iâ€™m sorryâ€•nation-building. And yet he didnâ€™t want to also leave and watch it allâ€•
Paul Bremer:
Right.
Interviewer:
Fall apart.
Paul Bremer:
And there are two problems hereâ€•well, one problem twiceâ€•and that is itâ€™s not clear to meâ€•and again, I havenâ€™t looked at the papers and I donâ€™t know. But itâ€™s

not clear to me that either of these decisions, or inclinations, was ever actually memorialized in a fashion which the National Security team understood, because if you think about April, Baghdad falls on April 9th. Abizaid tells the press on April 17th there is no Armyâ€•theyâ€™re all gone. There isnâ€™t a unit standing.
The President, by the time I met him, which was the day after I met Rumsfeld, so whatever that wasâ€•April whatever that Friday wasâ€•was clearly saying, â€œWeâ€™re going to take the time we need to take to give the Iraqis a chance to rebuild theirâ€•â€ rebuildâ€™s not the right word. â€œGet a representative government,â€ and, you know, â€œkind of put them on their feet.â€
But at that same time the Presidentâ€™s telling me that, you have Jay Garner and Zal Khalilzad over in Baghdad having a meeting, I think on the 25th of April, basically saying to the Iraqis, â€œWeâ€™re going to be out of here in a month.â€ You have Garner, as in my book, actually saying it to the National Public Radio, almost the same day that the President says to me, â€œWeâ€™re going to stay.â€ He says, â€œWeâ€™re going to have a government here by April 15thâ€•by May 15th, middle of next week.â€ And as you know from my book, I almost drove off the George Washington Parkway. I was on my way to the Pentagon. I said, â€œWhat is he talking about? The President says weâ€™re supposed to take our time.â€ He told it to me. He said it at an NSC meeting.
So you have the political, part of the political apparatus, Garner and Khalilzad, who are operating on a different assumption than what I heard. And you have the military, basically, in their briefing to me in the tankâ€•again, like the last week of April and the first week of Mayâ€•saying, â€œHereâ€™s our draw-down plan.â€ They put up a chart, and draw-down plan shows we hadâ€•by then, I think we had 180,000 American troops in the country then, and another 20,000 Brits.
â€œAnd weâ€™re going to draw our 180,000 down to 30,000 by September 1st, 2003.â€ And I said, â€œWhoa. Howâ€™s that going to be?â€ Soâ€•
Interviewer:
Does this mean that Garner and Khalilzad did notâ€•had not caught up with the administrationâ€™s change of view on this?
Paul Bremer:
Thatâ€™s why I saidâ€”what I donâ€™t know is whether the Presidentâ€™sâ€•decision is the only right word for itâ€• was actually memorialized in a fashion that was then disseminated to the bureaucracy. Normally in the administrations, you get the NSDD or whatever theyâ€™re called, and thereâ€™s, you know, â€œThis will be our policy.â€ I donâ€™t know if such a thing existed, butâ€•
Interviewer:
Well, it would seem that this problem laid with the President, then, not communicating it.
Paul Bremer:
No, I think it lay with the National Security Council. Itâ€™s not the Presidentâ€™s job to pick up the phone and call, you know, third-level bureaucrats and O6s and tell them what the job is.
Interviewer:
Right. Right. But Garner was not going off the reservation on this.
Paul Bremer:
I donâ€™t think so. I donâ€™tâ€•but all I canâ€•I can only give the objective facts. To me, it was quite clear before I even got to Iraq that both the political side of the house, of Garner and Khalilzad, and the military side of the house, with the Joint Chiefs of Staff, were going off this way, and the Presidentâ€™s policy was over here. So there was obviously a gap.
Interviewer:
Well, let me ask youâ€•again, I know you can only look at the facts that you know. But it would seem it was also there may have beenâ€•I mean the military has aâ€•doesnâ€™t like to have to do security operations.

Paul Bremer:
Right. Right.
Interviewer:
They would prefer to fight the war and get out, right?
Paul Bremer:
Rightâ€•no question. No question.
Interviewer:
This sort of went against the culture on that side.
Paul Bremer:
Yeah.
Interviewer:
Whether you think that was a factor in this.
Paul Bremer:
Iâ€™m sure it was.
Interviewer:
Yeah.
1:00:06
Paul Bremer:
Iâ€™m sure it was, and then it becameâ€•on top of that, it became more of a factorâ€•although that was later, in â€™03. That was when the Ramadan Offensive started. It became more of a factor when they realizedâ€•particularly the Armyâ€•that they were now going to have to fight the kind of war that they didnâ€™t want to fight, which was essentially a â€œguerilla war,â€ as Rumsfeld at one point called it. You knowâ€•
Interviewer:
Well, counterinsurgency, right? I mean Iâ€•
Paul Bremer:
Whatever you want to call it.
Interviewer:
Yeah, butâ€•
Paul Bremer:
They didnâ€™t want to fight an insurgency.
Interviewer:
A much more difficultâ€•
Paul Bremer:
So it wasnâ€™tâ€•I mean it was a double problem. It was a double problem.
Interviewer:
Well, and culturallyâ€•or I should say doctrinally, going backâ€•
Paul Bremer:
Well, right. I mean to meâ€•
Interviewer:
Like â€˜Nam the Vietnam War, we donâ€™t want itâ€•we donâ€™t wantâ€•
Paul Bremer:
To me, the most interesting moment was after Petraeus finished his secondâ€•he was thereâ€•
Interviewer:
Right.
Paul Bremer:
As commander of the 101st when I was there, and then he came back to start the training near the end of my time. Then after that, heâ€™s called back to do what? Heâ€™s called back to write a counterinsurgency doctrine.
Interviewer:
Yes.
Paul Bremer:
And I scratched my head and I say, â€œHeâ€™s not editing oneâ€•heâ€™s writing

oneâ€•interesting verb.â€
Interviewer:
Tell me, did you know Jay Garner before?
Paul Bremer:
No.
Interviewer:
You did not know him.
Paul Bremer:
No, never met him.
Interviewer:
But you got to know him, obviously.
Paul Bremer:
Yeah.
Interviewer:
Whatâ€™s yourâ€•what were your impressions? Give me a little sketch.
Paul Bremer:
I liked him enormously. He was a very dedicated patriot, veryâ€•a niceâ€•just a plain nice guy. I liked working with him.
Interviewer:
Was thereâ€•
Paul Bremer:
But Iâ€™m not sure he reciprocated, becauseâ€•
Interviewer:
Wellâ€•
Paul Bremer:
He was not handled very well by the folks back here. I did everything I could to try to make him comfortable, â€™cause I knewâ€•
Interviewer:
Yes.
Paul Bremer:
It was awkward for him, and heâ€•as I said in my book, the night I met him down in Kuwait before I came up, I mean heâ€”his wife had been in tears the night before, â€™cause they had portrayed it that he was getting fired. I mean it was just very badly handled back here.
Interviewer:
And just howâ€•who handled it poorly and why, do you think?
Paul Bremer:
I donâ€™t know.
Interviewer:
Yeah.
Paul Bremer:
I donâ€™t know. They were leaking all over the place.
Interviewer:
Rightâ€•okay. And in your relations with him there, were they strained because of the way things were being handled?
Paul Bremer:
I think they were from his point of view, understandably, because I was supplanting him. Andâ€•
Interviewer:
But you didnâ€™t see yourself as supplanting. You saw yourself as sort ofâ€”
Paul Bremer:
Well, I saw it as a natural progression.
Interviewer:
Rightâ€•okay.

Paul Bremer:
And yeah, it was awkward. I tried hard in everything I did to not make it any more difficult for him. He was underâ€•it was hard for him, and I, as I said, I have great respect for him, and I thought he was shabbily treated.
Interviewer:
Have you remained in contact at all?
Paul Bremer:
Yes, I have.
Interviewer:
Yeah.
Paul Bremer:
Yeah. In fact, I just sent him a note this morning.
Interviewer:
Now, there are a couple of things that are critical decisionsâ€•or maybe they were not decisionsâ€•that happened around this time, and one ofâ€•the first one, weâ€™ll deal with the first oneâ€•de-Baathification.
Paul Bremer:
Right.
Interviewer:
Theâ€•well, tell me the story of de-Baathification from Garner through your transition to yourâ€•
Paul Bremer:
Well, I donâ€™t know the Garner part. It first was brought to my attention literally the day before I left for Iraq. On a Friday, which wouldâ€™ve been the 9th of May, Feith asked me to come by his office, and he showed me this draft de-Baathification decree. He said, â€œWe just want you to take a look at it. Weâ€™re going to have Jay issue it tomorrow,â€ or something. And again, Iâ€™ve written about it.
I looked it over and I said, â€œGee, you know, I think itâ€™d be better if we wait till I get out there. Let me talk to the political guys about this first.â€ And Feith said, â€œFine,â€ you know.
Interviewer:
Did you have an attitude aboutâ€•historically, this is something that every occupation or whatever has to deal with, right?
Paul Bremer:
Right.
Interviewer:
I mean thisâ€•I meanâ€•
Paul Bremer:
Well, I knewâ€•Iâ€™d read a lot about both MacArthur and Lucius Clay. I knew moreâ€•to me, the more apt comparison was the German one and what weâ€™d done, de-Nazification. And Feith, in fact, I think said to me, orally, â€œThis is sort of based on the de-Nazification model.â€ So, that was at least familiar to me. But Iâ€•and I didnâ€™t know enough about Iraq. Donâ€™t forget Iâ€™d only been in there, in this thing, for a week, or two, at that point. And I said, â€œLet me get out there and take a look at it.â€
So I got out there, I talked to the staffâ€•Ryan Crocker, the other guys who were there. And Garner has written or said since that he raised objections with me. Frankly, I donâ€™t remember it, but if he says he did, he did. Heâ€™s an honest man.
We hadâ€•we had questions about how we were going to be able to handle the ministries, â€™cause we were the government, and theâ€•in any case, I issued it, I think, on the followingâ€•the Friday when I got there and met with some of the Iraqi political leadersâ€•told them about it, they liked it. Iâ€•itâ€™s allâ€•
Interviewer:
But so was everyone more or less in agreement? You say you wentâ€•did Ryan Crocker think itâ€™s the right thing to doâ€•

Paul Bremer:
There was noâ€•Jay says he raised objections with me, and again, I donâ€™t remember that, but it was so chaotic I might not have remembered it. No, there were noâ€•nobody was saying, â€œThis is a terrible idea. Donâ€™t do this.â€ Andâ€•
Interviewer:
Did youâ€•
Paul Bremer:
When Feith handed it to me, showed me the draft, he said, â€œWeâ€™re ready to go with this.â€ Which I interpreted as meaning, you know, â€œThis is government policy.â€ I mean heâ€™s the number three man at the Pentagon, and I assumeâ€•and I stillâ€•Iâ€™ve never heard that it wasnâ€™t cleared around, you know, with the State Department and others. Iâ€™ve never heard that it wasnâ€™t. So there it is.
Interviewer:
Do you think it was a mistake now?
Paul Bremer:
No. I think the policy was exactly right.
Interviewer:
Was it a mistake to do it when you did it, then?
Paul Bremer:
No. It was right to do it at the start. We needed to send a political signal that Saddamâ€™s days were over, and that the Baath Partyâ€™s days wereâ€•actually, Tommy Franks is the one that outlawed the Baath Party, not me. In his freedom message of April 10th, he had said that the Baath Party is no longer legal. The ideologyâ€™s outlawed, and so forth, so myâ€•that had already been done. That water was already over the dam.
Interviewer:
You could outlaw it without getting rid of those who had a former association with it, right?
Paul Bremer: * {:.text} Yeah, you could, but I agreed it was the right thing. No, the mistake I madeâ€•when I issued the decree, I said to the press and to the Iraqis, â€œWeâ€™re going to have to get Iraqis to actually help us with the implementation.â€ Because we have no capacity to make the kind of fine judgments that had to be madeâ€•did Abdul become a teacher because he believes in the Baath ideology, which was permeated all the books, and he wants to promote it to the kids?
Or did he become a member of the Party because it was the only way to get a job to be a teacher? We donâ€™t know enough about Abdul to know.
So I said right at the start, â€œWeâ€™re going to have to turn this over to Iraqis.â€ The mistake I made was when I turned it over to the Iraqis I turned it over to politicians, which was a mistake. I shouldâ€™ve turned it overâ€•I shouldâ€™ve set up some kind of a panel of Iraqiâ€•respected Iraqi judges, and there were such things.
Ironically, the judges were less polluted by Saddam than almost any other section, largely because he ignored the courts. He just set up military tribunals or set up special whateverâ€•
Interviewer:
Sure.
Paul Bremer:
Whenever he wanted. He didnâ€™tâ€•
Interviewer:
He invented his own judicial system when he needed it.
Paul Bremer:
Yeah, he didnâ€™t care about that.
Interviewer:
Right.
Paul Bremer:
So if Iâ€•but anyway, so the mistake was turning it over to politiciansâ€•this was in

November of â€™03â€•who then essentially tried to implement it in a much broader fashion than we had intended, and we had to kind of pull things back.
Interviewer:
And did they use it also, therefore, as a political kind of revenge?
Paul Bremer:
Sure. Sure, sure. It wasâ€•sureâ€•
Interviewer:
I mean it was natural politicians would want to then, you knowâ€•
Paul Bremer:
Yeah, I mean which is not surprising.
Interviewer:
Yeah.
Paul Bremer:
But I think an important myth has grown up about the de-Baathification, which needs to be countered. You read in the press, you know, weâ€•even now when people are writing about Libya, they say, â€œWeâ€™re not going to make the mistake of destroying the government the way we did in Iraq.â€ This is just nonsense. Basically, the de-Baathification decree affected less than 1% of the Party. The Party had two million people. This affected something like 20,000.
Most of whom had already left the countryâ€•all the ministers, deputy ministersâ€•anybody who thought he might be subject to our action was gone. The ministries were basically being run, more or less competently, by senior civil servants, usually at a director general level, and I think a couple of ministries had a secretary general, one level up. But basically, the ministries worked fine. We had our senior advisors there.
It was interesting when theâ€•when the de-Baathification decree, when I discussed it with the senior advisors, who were Americans, British, Poles, whatever they were in each of the ministries, they all thought, â€œOh, this is going to be awful.â€ The reaction of the ministries was overwhelmingly favorable, and basically, the government ministries ran fine. Thereâ€™s simply a complete myth that the government sort of collapsed after these people left. Not true, any more than it would be here, by the way. I mean the bureaucracies have a certain momentum of their own.
Interviewer:
Well, but this is usually articulated as a reason why the order devolved and the insurgency started toâ€”
Paul Bremer:
Oh, noâ€•I donâ€™t think the de-Baathification did that. No. I think thatâ€™s not right. I mean I think the Baath Party, some Baath Party membersâ€•and some members of the former Iraqi Army, after we disbanded the Iraqi Armyâ€•certainly became members of the insurgency. I donâ€™t doubt that. But they didnâ€™tâ€•in the case of the Iraqi Army, they certainly didnâ€™t do it because they werenâ€™t paid, because they were. They did it because they wanted toâ€•they wanted to reestablish effectively Saddam-like control over theâ€•donâ€™t forget Saddam was still aliveâ€•
Interviewer:
Right.
Paul Bremer:
For the first six months, too, so there was a lot of peopleâ€•a lot of people among the probably ex-Baath Party and the ex-Army were thinking, â€œWe can bring this guy back.â€ A problem we may still face in Libya if we donâ€™t get our hands on Gaddafi pretty soon.
Interviewer:
Whatâ€•Ahmed Chalabiâ€•
Paul Bremer:
Right.
Interviewer:
Tell me about him. When did you meet him and what role did he play in all of this?

Paul Bremer:
I met him at that first meeting with the group of exiled politicals, which was inâ€•
Interviewer:
This is upon arrival in Iraqâ€•
Paul Bremer:
Well, a week later, yeah, withinâ€•
Interviewer:
Right, right.
Paul Bremer:
That Fridayâ€•like I actually arrived in Baghdad on the Monday. And he was one of a bunch of them.
Interviewer:
Did you know himâ€•you did not know him before that.
Paul Bremer:
No. No. I donâ€™t think Iâ€™d ever even heard of him.
Interviewer:
Really.
Paul Bremer:
I know heâ€™d been prominent around Washington, but I was in business those years. And Iâ€•interestingly, neither before I went nor after did anybody in the administration tell me, â€œWe have to do this or that for Chalabi.â€ I think both Mr. Rumsfeld and Mr. Feith have both said they never pushed him, and certainly thatâ€™s true in the case of me. Nobody ever picked up the phone and said, â€œHey, wait a minuteâ€•Ahmedâ€™s our boy.â€ I know thatâ€™s sort of another piece of conventional wisdomâ€•
Interviewer:
It is, yeah.
Paul Bremer:
Around here, but anyway, I never had that pressure.
Interviewer:
Or at least also that the conversation withâ€•the future of Iraq was built around conversations at his home that happened a long time before that.
Paul Bremer:
Well, Iâ€•thatâ€™sâ€•yeah. That I donâ€™t know.
Interviewer:
Before you, I mean.
Paul Bremer:
All I know is I was never put under any pressure to do anything special about Chalabi.
Interviewer:
And so then after that first meeting, any other detail to your relationship with him? Did heâ€•
Paul Bremer:
Yeah. Weâ€•he actually played a very helpful role in economic, development of the economic policy, because among the people in Iraqi government at that time, he had arguably the most experience in actually commercial financial affairs. And he was instrumental in getting our sort of overall economic strategy approved. This is in Septemberâ€•September-October of 2003. So he played a very helpful role there. He did not play a helpful role when he took over the de-Baathification campaign.
Interviewer:
Tell me about that.
Paul Bremer:
Well, what happened was we were in the fall period, September-October of 2003. Our policy and the policy of our allies wasâ€•the British particularly, but, you know, letâ€™s give as much authority as we can to the Iraqi government. I said, â€œI agree. Fine.â€ So

we were trying to figure out how to carry out what I had said we were going to do, which is setting up an Iraqi body to implement the de-Baathification decree. And the obvious one was the governing council, which was the Iraqi government at that time. And they were always straining for this, saying, you know, â€œGive us more responsibility. Give us more responsibility.â€ So there was my mistake. I said, â€œOkay, weâ€™ll let the governing council be responsible for, you know, developing the implementation plan of de-Baathification.â€ And the governing council turned it over to Chalabi, who was a member of the governing council. How that happened I donâ€™t know, but anyway, he wound up with it. And he initially madeâ€•sounded as if he was going to be quite reasonable about the implementation.
We metâ€•he was appointed in early November, and he came and briefed my senior staff on his plans around the 12th-13th of December, somewhere a month later. He was really quite reasonable. But then, gradually, we began to get reports that teachers were being fired that were not affected by the decree as it was written, particularly at the universities. And we began to have some feedback which then got worse.
I had a meeting with Chalabi, told him to back off. I had finally actually sent him a letter drafted by our peopleâ€•rather stiff letterâ€•and in the end, we sort of had to repatriate the process to get the teachers back to work. And so some of itâ€™s in my bookâ€•I canâ€™t remember.
Interviewer:
Do you think, then, thisâ€”in some respects theâ€•what you refer to as the myth of de-Baathificationâ€•was written backwards from that moment?
Paul Bremer:
Oh, no question, because there wasâ€•it was notâ€•you know, we started taking public opinion polls in September of â€™03, and we polled about every three weeks. De-Baathification, every single time, was the single most popular thing we did in Iraq. It never polled less than 95%. So itâ€™s absolutely was the right thing to do. What Tommy Franks did, outlawing the Party and taking these top-level members of the Partyâ€•and again, a point I make sometimes when I talk about it publicly: it was modeled on de-Nazification, but was much, much milder. And de-Nazification, we actually jailed 800,000 Germans, and the de-Nazification decree said not only can you not be in the governmentâ€•you canâ€™t be in the private sector. Whereas the de-Baathification simply said you canâ€™t be in the government. You can go off and set up a company and be a farmer, journalist, set up a newspaper, but you canâ€™t work in the government. So it was a much more narrowly constrained document as written.
Interviewer:
On the other hand, wouldnâ€™t it be historically accurate to say that the Nazi ideology was much more pervasive as an ideology thanâ€•
Paul Bremer:
Oh, no, thatâ€™s completely inaccurate, completely inaccurate
Interviewer:
Okay, tell me about that.
Paul Bremer:
Hitler was in power for a grand total of 12 years. The Baath Party has been effectively in power since 1963, three times as long, so no, it is definitely not accurate. Thatâ€™s the way we see it, because we see so many movies about the Second World War, for obvious reasons.
But the Baath Party ideology permeated Iraqi society more deeply than the Nazis did in Germany, because they were there three times as long.
Interviewer:
Tell me about, then, the next one, the decision to disband the Iraqi Army.
Paul Bremer:
Okay.
Interviewer:

You write in your book that it was almost not a decision.
Paul Bremer:
Right.
Interviewer:
It was almost a fait accompli when you arrived there.
Paul Bremer:
It was a fait accompli.
Interviewer:
Yeah. Tell that story, if you could.
Paul Bremer:
Well, as far as I can tell, some of it retrospective, and then Iâ€™ll tell you, you know, weâ€™ll try to pick up where I came into the movieâ€•there seems to have been a plan before the war that we would use the Iraqi Army, whatever was left of it, in some sort ofâ€”as public works reconstruction crews to go out and repair roads and fix whatever we had bombed and put the railroad tracks back in placeâ€•whatever. Not clear exactly what they were going to do. That policy, as Doug Feith has written, was essentially irrelevant by the end of the war. Because as I wrote in my book, and as John Abizaid said I think the 17th of April, there wasnâ€™t a single unit left standing anywhere. Not only that, there were no barracks left, basically, as part of the looting in the post-war, post-kinetic phase. You know, everything was gone, and the conscripts, the Shia draftees, had basically gone home. They were back in their farms and their villages somewhere.
So the question really that was posed, and it was posed before I hadâ€•again, I was still a businessman, and Walt Slocum, who became my advisor on national security, began to work on this right after the fall of Baghdad.
The real question was do we recall the Iraqi Army, or do we rebuild it, do weâ€•and do we thenâ€•
Interviewer:
But do you reconstitute it as a security force, you mean, givenâ€”or as an aid of the security force.
Paul Bremer:
But it wasnâ€™t going to be aâ€”there was no way it was going to do what some people had thought before the war it was going to do, because it didnâ€™t exist anymore. So you had to either reconstitute it, or build a new Iraqi Army, orâ€•and how do you build a new army? Do you use contractors? Do you use some of the otherâ€•I mean a lot of discussions. Slocum had a lot of these discussions, as heâ€™s written.
Starting at about the time Baghdad fell, I guessâ€•somewhere in early April. And by the time I was asked by the President to come in, Slocumâ€™s discussions had pretty much reached the point that we were going to create a new Iraqi Army, but be willing to use officers of the old Iraqi Army up to the rank of colonel. And he had discussed this with Wolfowitz and the JCS Joint Chiefs of Staff and so forth, and briefed me on it sometime before Iâ€•initially, just once, before I left for Iraq.
And saidâ€•he told me, â€œWhile youâ€™re getting into Iraq, Iâ€™m going to Britain to brief our allies the British about it, and Iâ€™ll report to you when I get to Iraq.â€ I got to Iraq on the 12th. He came in on the 13th or 14th. And he reported that the British had been briefed on the idea of building a new Iraqi Army. They thought it was fine. There was no objection raised. There had been no objection raised in any of his discussions in the Pentagon.
We then had a series ofâ€•and I think itâ€™s in my bookâ€•a series of kind of conversations, memos, back and forth, including the text of the decree, which was cleared by JCS. It was shown to McKiernanâ€•he raised no objection.
Rumsfeldâ€™s Chief, or Chief of Staff, whatever you want to call him, Larry Di Rita went through it sort of line by line the night before we issued it to make whatever corrections or editorialâ€•change the â€œbutâ€ to â€œmaybeâ€ or whatever. And I informed the

President. I had also told Rumsfeld, obviously, and I informed the President that we were going to issue the decree. Nobody ever raised any objections. Now, it is a fair criticism to say, as Colin Powell subsequently told me, that the first he ever heard about it was at the NSC meeting where it was approved, on whatever the day wasâ€•May 19th or 20th. Thatâ€™s a fair point. Itâ€™s not my job. My job wasnâ€™t to keep everybody in Washingtonâ€•thatâ€™s the job of the Pentagon, which had the lead on this, and/or the National Security Council. It is clear that there was notâ€•and the President wrote in his bookâ€• there wasnâ€™t a broad, deliberative process back here to look at the thing. And whether that wouldâ€™ve led to a different decision is an interesting question. I happen to think it was the right decision anyway, but it is clear that something didnâ€™t work back here.
It was another example of the problem that I referred to earlier, where the President had a vision of what our long-termâ€•sort of what our approach to Iraq was going to be, that some of the political and military guys were obviously not following. Not because they were being disobedientâ€•they just didnâ€™t know what the policy was.
Interviewer:
Some of this, though, just theâ€•I mean the enormity of the taskâ€•and nation-buildingâ€™s not exactly a simpleâ€•
Paul Bremer:
Right.
Interviewer:
Actâ€”and to ask a democratic republic like ours, where the personnel changeâ€•
Paul Bremer:
Right.
Interviewer:
With a certain rapidity to engage in something that is as constructive as thatâ€•thatâ€™s a tall order.
Paul Bremer:
Right.
Interviewer:
So I mean were we biting off moreâ€•and does this go to the, you know, the historical advice against doing this kind of thing?
Paul Bremer:
No, I donâ€™t think so. I thinkâ€•I mean itâ€•I thinkâ€•I supported the warâ€•yeah, weâ€™re almost there time wise. I supported the war before the war, but I was supporting it because of my concern about terrorists getting their hands on weapons of mass destruction, since Iâ€™d been doing counterterrorism for 20 years.
Interviewer:
If weâ€™d known what we knew afterwards, then you would not have supported the war, is that right?
Paul Bremer:
Probably not. Because Iâ€™m not sureâ€”
Interviewer:
You didnâ€™t support it as a planting a seed of democracy sort of thing, huh?
Paul Bremer:
No. Well, no, but I think that for all the mistakes that were made and all of the inaccuracies of the intelligence, I think actually it is a good thing, what we did, and it is in the end the right thing to do.
We didnâ€™t do it for that reason primarilyâ€•although if you go back and look at the Presidentâ€™s statementsâ€•particularly Dr. Riceâ€™s statementsâ€•before the war, they talked about bringing democracy to Iraq. It was not, admittedly, kind of theâ€•it was number two. There was WMD, and then there was making the case thatâ€•
Interviewer:
Well, itâ€™s a harder one to sell, isnâ€™t it, ultimately, as a reason forâ€•

Paul Bremer:
Well, it certainly is now, after the experience in Iraq and Afghanistan, yeah. It doesnâ€™t make it wrong. I happen to think, again, Iâ€•again, I go back to my counterterrorism experience. I mean I think in the endâ€•itâ€™s really kind of off the subject.
Interviewer:
Sure.
Paul Bremer:
We can get back to counterterrorism another time.
Interviewer:
No, no, finish.
Paul Bremer:
Well, inâ€•I used to argue when I was involved in counterterrorism that we can go out and kill terrorists, and thatâ€™s good. We should do that as much as we can. But in the end, when you have to change the context, you have to change why are there terrorists?
And at least arguably in some placesâ€•in many placesâ€•the terrorists thrive on a condition where people donâ€™t have any feeling that they have any control over their life. That is to say they donâ€™t have a representative government of some kind.
They donâ€™t have much feeling that the government is responding to their needs, whether itâ€™s in Pakistan or Yemen today. And so the fight against terrorism missedâ€•
Interviewer:
Is attacking symptoms, essentially, rather than theâ€•
Paul Bremer:
Yeah, youâ€™re attackingâ€•well, and terrorismâ€™s a tactic, as people say. Thatâ€™s true. Itâ€™s not a strategy, itâ€™s a tactic.
So there is a good argument, in my view, to be made in terms of American national interest that the promotion of representative government is in our interest. Itâ€™s one of those places where our values and interests actually coincide. Weâ€™re not going to be everywhere. Weâ€™re not going to go fix Chad, and weâ€™re not going to be able to make some other country perfect.
But it is at least an argument to say that we are, broadly speaking, better served when countries have representative government. And so, you can make the argumentâ€•and it is a retrospective argument now in terms of Iraq, â€™cause it wasnâ€™t the primary reason we went in thereâ€•that it serves our interest. Obviously, the play is only in the second act, and weâ€™ve got some more acts to go in Iraq, so letâ€™s see. But in any case, we kind of got distracted, and I think I need to stop.
Interviewer:
No, I think itâ€™s very much on point, and I think a good place to conclude.
Paul Bremer:
Yeah.
Interviewer:
And if you donâ€™t mind, weâ€™ll come back and pick upâ€•
Paul Bremer:
Yeah.
Interviewer:
On a lot of other things, but I appreciate your time with us today.
Paul Bremer:
Okay.
Interviewer:
Thank you so much. End of Audio