

THE ASPEN INSTITUTE

ASPEN IDEAS FESTIVAL
CONVERSATION WITH COLIN POWELL

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P R O C E E D I N G S

SPEAKER: Ladies and gentlemen, please, if you take your seats. Thank you very much, would you please take your seats. Thank you. Jim?

MR. LEHRER: Hello everybody. I'm Jim Lehrer and this is Colin Powell.

(Applause)

MR. LEHRER: And for the record, I would like for all of you to know that neither of us is or has ever been a member of a teachers' union. A quick reminder about this man. He was born in Harlem of Jamaican parents. Grew up in the Bronx. Graduated from the City College of New York. In 1958, was commissioned a second lieutenant in the United States Army. Served in the army for 35 years as an infantry officer. Later was deputy national security adviser, chairman of the Joint Chiefs Of Staff under President George H. W. Bush and afterwards he was secretary of state in the first term of President George W. Bush. General, Mr. Secretary good afternoon.

MR. POWELL: Good afternoon Jim. Thank you, good afternoon everyone. Thank you. Thank you.

1 MR. LEHRER: A while ago Lee Hamilton said there
2 is no good solution to Iraq. Do you agree?

3 MR. POWELL: Let me expand my answer beyond
4 that simple question. I thought the panelists did a good
5 job of laying out different positions. But let me put
6 that in the context that I know well and that is of an
7 infantry officer in how you go about a problem like this.
8 When you look at a problem like this the first thing you
9 have to do is understand the situation and not pretend it
10 is a different kind of situation in order to make it
11 easier to handle. What we are facing in Iraq now, and
12 what causes Mr. Hamilton to say things like that, in my
13 judgment, is a civil war. It is a civil war that really
14 broke out in the beginning of last year with the bombing
15 of the Golden Mosque.

16 Until that point we were fighting an insurgency
17 that we really didn't acknowledge was an insurgency. So
18 we kept saying, well we can start to draw down, we can do
19 this, we can do that. And then it became a full-scale, in
20 my judgment, civil war. The administration doesn't agree
21 with that judgment but if you look at the national
22 intelligence estimate, which reflects the unanimous view

1 of all the 16 intelligence agencies of the government;
2 they call it something more complex than a civil war.
3 With all of the essential elements of a civil war and it
4 is a deteriorating situation. What is the war about? It
5 is a war that is about power and survival. And it is a
6 war between the minority Sunnis and the majority Shi'ites
7 with the Kurds watching to see whether they want to be
8 part of whatever results from this civil war or not be
9 part of it. And we have to understand that because it is
10 that kind of a civil war it's not a civil war that can be
11 put down or solved by the armed forces of the United
12 States. Many people talk about General Petraeus but the
13 one thing that Dave Petraeus, who I have known since he
14 was a First Lieutenant, has said all along is that this
15 cannot be solved militarily.

16 Well, then what is the military part of the
17 surge about? All it really can do is put a heavier lid on
18 this pot of boiling sectarian stew. But only the Iraqis
19 can turn down or put out the fire. When the surge was
20 announced late last year, earlier this year my immediate
21 concern with the concept of a surge is that it didn't seem
22 like it was strategically synchronized. It had three

1 parts to the surge as I think you heard from the panelist
2 earlier, one, increase the number of American troops by 25
3 or 30,000 as it turned out to be. Secondly, build up the
4 capacity of Iraqi security forces both military and police
5 forces. And third, make this government effective. It is
6 the Iraqi political system that has to come together and
7 start to remove the causes of the civil war.

8 In the military we say you pick the decisive
9 attack. What is the main attack? What will really solve
10 this problem? And the main attack is this political
11 component; what the Iraqis have to do. What we're doing
12 with General Petraeus is a supporting attack. Building up
13 the Iraqi security forces is also a supporting attack
14 because we don't know yet whether those security forces
15 are going to turn into armed militias to keep the civil
16 war going or whether they will be loyal to a government
17 that they believe in and they believe represents the
18 dreams, ambitions and aspirations of all the people.

19 A lot has been said about Al Qaeda. But you
20 notice it wasn't talked about that much by the panelists.
21 The administration talks about it all the time. The
22 President constantly says it is a problem with Al Qaeda

1 and we have to fight them there or we will fight them
2 here. But the considered view of the intelligence
3 community is that Al Qaeda only constitutes perhaps 10
4 percent of all of the belligerents in this conflict. It
5 is a nasty 10 percent. It is a 10 percent that is
6 focusing on killing American troops. And they are the
7 most effective 10 percent with their enhanced IEDs and the
8 way they go about it. But it's still 10 percent. General
9 Keane just said two different things. At one point he
10 said Al Qaeda is not going to be able to make it because
11 the Sunnis now are going after them and the Shias really
12 wouldn't tolerate them in the first place. But then a
13 little later he said we don't want to leave an opportunity
14 for Al Qaeda to take root there. The fact of the matter
15 is the Sunnis will go after them but we shouldn't rejoice
16 in this initially because the Sunnis are not necessarily
17 then going to be on our side. They are the ones who are
18 the source of the insurgents that were killing us, before
19 what as the civil war turned out to be the case, last
20 year.

21 And so Al Qaeda is something that has to be
22 dealt with. And I understand why the administration wants

1 to focus on it. Why the military wants to focus on it.
2 But even if you got rid of Al Qaeda you're still going to
3 have the civil war that can only be solved by the Iraqi
4 political leadership. Much was said about Mr. Maliki and
5 his government. It's a government that hasn't extended
6 its authority outside of the Green Zone to any large
7 extent. It is a government that is as much organized
8 around sectarian interests within the parliament, within
9 the Cabinet, as it is a government that has come together
10 for a single national purpose. Everybody says we've got
11 to go make sure that Mr. Maliki has the will. So the Vice
12 President has gone over and told him you've got to have
13 the will. The Secretary of Defense has gone over. The
14 Secretary of State has gone over. Everybody has gone over
15 and delivered the same message. And Mr. Maliki always
16 says yes. But that is not the right question. The
17 question that should have been asked at the beginning of
18 the surge, as we move in with all of our troops, not only
19 does Mr. Maliki have the will to do the political part of
20 it, does he have the means, does he have the ability? And
21 the answer so far is a flat no. He does not yet
22 demonstrate that he has the ability or the means to

1 exercise that ability.

2 And so we have this lack of synchronization.
3 Five brigades went over and as General Keane said they
4 have quieted things down in certain places. But will
5 those places remain quiet when our troops go away if we
6 haven't solved the underlying causes of the disquiet? And
7 my judgment is that it's not going to happen unless the
8 Iraqi security forces really become competent very, very
9 quickly; and they have not demonstrated that yet to the
10 level needed to secure the country. And in the absence of
11 a national government with capability and with the will
12 and knows what to do, and can make it happen, and that
13 will marry that security force to it as a national army
14 then I think we are in difficulty and I think that is what
15 Mr. Hamilton is saying.

16 Well, then where does this all lead to? Where
17 does this all take us? The civil war will ultimately be
18 resolved by a test of arms. The Shias will ultimately
19 prevail because they are 60 percent of the population.
20 And their militia can be pretty violent. They will
21 prevail also because they are determined not to be ruled
22 again by a Sunni the way they were ruled under Saddam

1 Hussein. The Sunnis are struggling for power and survival
2 and it's going to be resolved in a test of arms. It's
3 going to be very ugly. It's not going to be pretty to
4 watch. But I don't know any way to avoid it. It's
5 happening now and the only reason it isn't more explosive
6 is because of the presence of American troops. I think
7 that as you get to the end of the year with all of these
8 mystical lunar deadlines; September, October, November --
9 Petraeus. Now, we're sending General Jones, a great
10 soldier over. He is going to evaluate the Iraqi security
11 forces because the Congress doesn't trust the
12 administration to do it. This is strategic incoherence.

13 (Applause)

14 So what I think will occur is all the reports
15 will come flowing in towards the end of the year. If the
16 American government of the President and the Congress have
17 not seen significant improvement with respect to the
18 political situation and what the Iraqi government is able
19 to do and significant improvement in the Iraqi security
20 forces, I think our government will have to start saying,
21 "Okay, let us back off and see if we can contain this in a
22 way that Lee Hamilton described." General Keane says he

1 thinks we have until sometime next year. That may be the
2 case. But I don't think we have any later than that. And
3 one of the principle driving reasons is that the United
4 States Armed Forces, meaning the United States Army and
5 the United States Marine Corps, cannot sustain this. It
6 is a volunteer force, these young officers and sergeants
7 and enlisted men are going back for their second, third
8 and fourth time. It is a very married army. And they
9 can't keep doing that. So I don't think the surge can be
10 repeated over and over. So all these things will come
11 together and force decisions at the end of the year,
12 unless there is a significant improvement in the political
13 environment on the ground.

14 A lot was also said with respect to the
15 neighborhood, the region, what will happen. I'm not sure
16 how much of a spill over there will be and whether it will
17 result in wars in other parts of the region. But nobody
18 can guarantee that. I think we should be talking with
19 Syria and Iran. I talked to Syria, I visited Damascus
20 twice, met with President Assad. It is a difficult
21 conversation just as Lee Hamilton used to have with the
22 Russians. I used to get criticized for going to Damascus.

1 But nevertheless, I went because I thought it was
2 important. On one occasion I was in Jerusalem and Prime
3 Minister Sharon said to me, "Colin, let us talk." We go
4 in a private room, he says, "I don't want you to go to
5 Damascus. I don't think it serves the interests of peace,
6 and we don't like it here in Israel when you go to
7 Damascus." I said, "Ariel, thank you very much but I am
8 going anyway. I am Secretary of State of the United States
9 of America and not the foreign minister of Israel. I'm
10 going to Damascus." And so he laughed and he said, "Well,
11 since you are going --

12 (Laughter)

13 -- do me a favor." The rockets had just started
14 to come across the northern border from southern Lebanon.
15 Sharon says to me, "Tell President Assad that we have
16 enough trouble down here. The situation is very volatile
17 and he should use his good offices to see if he can stop
18 it." I went to Damascus and had a long conversation with
19 President Assad. It is always a difficult conversation
20 with him and his ministers but at the end of the
21 conversation I pulled him aside and I passed the message
22 and he just nodded, he didn't say anything. And the

1 rockets stopped that night. Then Mr. Sharon thanked me
2 the next day. Diplomacy isn't always out in the open.
3 And it is difficult. As George Mitchell once said when he
4 was negotiating the Northern Ireland agreement, "I failed
5 for 744 days and then on the 745th day, I succeeded."
6 That is what diplomacy is all about. We should be talking
7 to Syria and Iran. And you can't have negotiations or
8 discussions when you put preconditions down that are the
9 results you want. They will not do it. You can't say to
10 the Iranians, let us talk about your nuclear program and
11 suspending enrichment before we talk, but I will only talk
12 to you if you suspend enrichment. They are not in a
13 weakened position. They are in a very strong position
14 right now, and they will not negotiate under those terms.
15 You can't say to the Syrians, we won't talk to you or we
16 don't want to talk to you because you will want
17 compensation. Well, so far they haven't asked for any
18 compensation and if they do, as Nancy Reagan used to say,
19 just say no. But you have to talk with the people you
20 perhaps dislike the most in this dangerous world we are
21 living in. Particularly, when with respect to Iraq we
22 need this help from outside. And so, our wonderful young

1 men and women are doing everything that the nation asks of
2 them. We should be so very, very proud. Tom Brokaw and I
3 talk about this a lot, you know, it was the greatest
4 generation at World War II. I'm telling you these kids are
5 part of a great generation and we should be proud of what
6 they do for us every single day.

7 (Applause)

8 But we have to face the reality of the situation
9 that is on the ground and not what we wish it to be. And
10 I don't think we have done that well enough in the last
11 several years. We had a real high when Baghdad fell. On
12 that April morning everybody thought it was terrific and
13 for several weeks after that ratings were sky-high,
14 everybody looked brilliant, looked terrific, and then the
15 second phase of this war began. And from that point on we
16 did not respond by facing the reality that was on the
17 ground as opposed to facing just wishful thinking and
18 buying into it. Now, at this point in our history and in
19 the history of Iraq we have to face the real reality on
20 the ground and not turn away. I will stop at that point
21 because I am not supposed to give a lecture.

22 (Applause)

1 MR. LEHRER: I have got about 35 follow-up
2 questions to what you just said. But you mentioned, for
3 instance, the strategy of was wrong, this was mishandled,
4 they didn't do the diplomacy right. One thing after
5 another you just went through that was mishandled. How
6 could so many important things be so mishandled?

7 (Applause)

8 MR. POWELL: I don't think -- I think it begins
9 with not wanting to see things as they were. When the
10 insurgency started and we all started saying look at this,
11 what are we going to do? The decision was made at that
12 time not to have additional troops sent in and in fact the
13 troop flow was stopped, when we could have more troops we
14 stopped pouring troops.

15 MR. LEHRER: Were you in favor of more troops in
16 the beginning?

17 MR. POWELL: Yes.

18 MR. LEHRER: A lot of more troops?

19 MR. POWELL: Yes.

20 MR. LEHRER: Were you in favor of the Powell
21 Doctrine, which would have been to send more troops in
22 there to win the thing?

1 MR. POWELL: I am always in favor of the Powell
2 doctrine. Really. The Powell doctrine doesn't exist in
3 any military document. It is something that was ascribed
4 to me by a reporter, of all things, but nevertheless -- I
5 will take it.

6 MR. LEHRER: So it had to be -- yeah, yeah
7 right.

8 MR. POWELL: Makes it even more powerful if it
9 was in the Washington Post not the Military Manual. But
10 it essentially says choose your political objective
11 carefully, use all the tools available to you, economic,
12 diplomatic, political - and as a last resort use the
13 military. Because then we're putting young American lives
14 at risk and young lives on the other side as well. And
15 when you decide we have to use military force then do it
16 in a way that is decisive. That you are sure of the
17 outcome and you have anticipated what could happen that
18 might require force. And we had this debate, General
19 Franks and I discussed it, even though I was no longer on
20 the defense side of it I was the Secretary of State, but I
21 called Tommy Franks as a fellow general and we talked
22 about it. And he was comfortable with the troop level and

1 we then argued it out in front of the President and the
2 Joint Chiefs of Staff and General Franks and the other
3 military leaders were satisfied with the troop level and
4 on the Ninth of April it looked like they were exactly
5 right. Because the regime had collapsed. Baghdad was
6 ours. And then the circumstances that hadn't been planned
7 for began to occur.

8 MR. LEHRER: As a practical man, I know you hate
9 these kinds of questions, but I'm going to ask it anyhow.
10 It is a what-if question. If the Powell doctrine had been
11 -- or forget Powell doctrine -- let's say 500,000 troops
12 had been sent in there and the plan was -- the advanced
13 planning had been done with the knowledge that hey this
14 thing might fall apart if we're not careful. Let us send
15 500,000 troops in there would we be talking about a
16 different situation today?

17 MR. POWELL: A different situation but I'm not
18 a fortune teller and I can't say that everything would
19 have been solved. But when we became the liberator of
20 Iraq and the Iraqi people on the Ninth of April we also
21 became the occupier. We became the government. And we
22 were responsible for imposing order on that society. And

1 that society started to shatter because we had broken the
2 civil structure. The military was dissipated at that time
3 and then disbanded; improperly in my judgment. And the
4 whole civil service went away. So there was no civil
5 society, there was no governing structure. And it was our
6 responsibility at that point to become the governing
7 structure. And we did not have that as a political -- as
8 part of our political plan, political will to do that.
9 And we did not plan well enough for that. And we then did
10 not have enough troops to impose order. And the troops
11 that were there, were not clear whether they were supposed
12 to start shooting people, for example, who are burning
13 down ministries. That was a time when you needed to be
14 rough, when you needed to impose order. You needed to
15 impose martial law -- everybody in their homes until we
16 sort this out. And that didn't happen and then ministries
17 started to be burned down; the very ministries we were
18 planning to use to reconstitute an Iraqi structure. And
19 we did not respond in a proper way, in my judgment.

20 MR. LEHRER: General, one of the things that you
21 said many times, one of the lessons you had learnt from
22 Vietnam was that without public support for military

1 action it ain't going to work. Do you concede that that
2 is now -- we are now at that point on Iraq?

3 MR. POWELL: Clearly, we are. But remember
4 where we were in the fall of 2002. The Congress had
5 passed a resolution that gave the President the support he
6 needed to continue the diplomatic process and if necessary
7 Congress certainly implied a sense of the Congress that if
8 military action was necessary the Congressional support
9 would be there. And then in the initial phase after
10 Baghdad fell, everybody thought this was terrific. The
11 President was running at 65 percent popularity and the
12 American people were fully behind that. And they were
13 fully behind it, I think, for the next year or so. But
14 then when you didn't see the Iraqi government start to
15 kick in, when you didn't see these claims about the
16 competence about the Iraqi security forces to be real, and
17 when it didn't start to gel the American people started to
18 drop off with respect to their support. And then I think
19 it really hit a tipping point with the Golden Mosque. The
20 American people were no longer shielded from anything and
21 they saw in brilliant colors the nature of this country
22 and these people and what they were prepared to do with

1 each other in order to retain power or gain power and
2 survive. When we didn't see any improvement, that is when
3 public support really started to drop off. Public support
4 might stabilize if the surge would have shown some
5 improvement in not only quieting things down a bit, but in
6 actually demonstrating to the American people that the
7 Iraqis are now stepping up to the task. But right now, I
8 think, the support has tipped over to the point that you
9 know -- you saw the kind of audience reaction you got
10 earlier when people were talking about -- some of the
11 panelists were saying Senator Feinstein or others saying,
12 "Well, you know we have to think about leaving by the end
13 of the year." So, I don't know how you're going to be
14 able to right that ship -- that ship of support by just
15 saying that it's Al Qaeda and they are coming here. I
16 don't think that will do it in and of itself. Because the
17 American people understand that Al Qaeda is a danger, it
18 is a threat but that threat is still also in the Western
19 regions of Pakistan and perhaps parts of Afghanistan where
20 the real problem may be. And the American people have not
21 connected Al Qaeda or Iraq to 9/11 in the way some in the
22 administration would like and the American people, I

1 think, now see this as a civil war.

2 MR. LEHRER: But wouldn't it be a fair statement
3 that if an American people just listened to your opening
4 comment laid out the situation and the possibilities and
5 this and that and whatever they would say wouldn't you not
6 be -- would you not understand why an American people
7 would say, "Forget it, get this thing over with it is not
8 worth anymore American blood and resource.

9 MR. POWELL: I think that is what they are
10 starting to say.

11 MR. LEHRER: Is what they are saying,

12 MR. POWELL: I think we're seeing that
13 reflected in our body politic. Andrea Mitchell gave us a
14 report earlier that another very prominent senior
15 Republican senator has said we've got to change. And I
16 think it is reflected in last fall's election. It is
17 reflected in the President's standing within the country
18 and it is reflected within the general feeling sort of on
19 Iraq where over 60 percent of the population, and now
20 close to 70 percent, say it's time for us to figure a way
21 out. Now, we can't just blow a whistle one morning and
22 all 180,000 troops leave. That isn't sensible. It has to

1 be a gradual kind of reduction of forces with the
2 strategies associated with it. And I think you heard the
3 panelists talk about this earlier. We just don't get the
4 train to leave. We say okay we are going to step outside
5 the major areas of conflict and see if we can stabilize
6 the rest of the country and protect it from intervention
7 from outside, while the Iraqis try to resolve this. It
8 will be a test of power. Maybe it will reach a point where
9 there is sufficient exhaustion on both sides, as we have
10 seen in Northern Ireland and other places, where they say,
11 "Okay, let us come together. We are all Iraqis, let us
12 figure out a political solution for all of this." One
13 danger that is seldom talked about but is very real is
14 down in the southern part of the country where you don't
15 have the kind of violence that you see in the center;
16 triangle of death, so to speak, or at Anbar and Diyala and
17 those places. But the southern part of the country isn't
18 under great government control either. It is being run by
19 tribal sheiks, by groups that have come together and made
20 their deals among the tribes and it's going to be a long
21 time before that part of the country, even if the central
22 part is resolved, how you bring that into a federated

1 system where they start to think in national terms and not
2 sectarian terms.

3 MR. LEHRER: I think would it be fair to say
4 that the end result of what you just said is not an
5 optimistic view?

6 MR. POWELL: Well, there is -- it is hard for
7 me to be optimistic. But what is it that I see at the end
8 of the -- the end of the game. I see a country that has
9 probably stayed together. Its three constituent parts
10 stay together -- the Sunnis, the Kurds and the Shias, and
11 it will have a Shia dominated government that hopefully,
12 will be sensible enough to give the Sunnis a piece of the
13 action with oil revenues, political presence,
14 participating in the government in a real way. It will be
15 a Shia regime that will be more fundamentalist than we
16 would like. It will be a Shia regime that will probably
17 be linked more closely to Iran than we would like to see.
18 But it will not be Iranian dominated. Because we still
19 have an eight-year war between them that is recent
20 history. And it is the difference between Shia Arabs and
21 Persian Shi'ites. So there is that difference.

22 MR. LEHRER: Let me ask you --

1 MR. POWELL: I don't know how much that will
2 spread and contaminate other parts of the region. One
3 thing we could do which was touched on by the panelists,
4 as well, is to see if there is anything that could be done
5 and it's hard to be optimistic at the moment because of
6 the weakness of the parties but the Middle East peace
7 process underlies all this as contributing to the overall
8 instability in the region. So I wish President Bush and
9 Dr. Rice and their colleagues all the best as they try to
10 get something started with respect to the Israelis and the
11 Palestinians.

12 MR. LEHRER: A personal question. The
13 conventional wisdom I would guess in this hall and the
14 majority opinion in this country, among all citizens
15 whether they be Republicans or Democrats whatever how will
16 they view the war is that you could, you personally could
17 have stopped this from happening. What is the truth? I
18 don't know -- I'm just saying that, that is what people
19 think. That is what people think.

20 MR. POWELL: I know, people say that to me.
21 But --

22 MR. LEHRER: What do you think, what do you say

1 when people say that to you like I just did?

2 MR. POWELL: Well, I just asked you how I could
3 have -- I could have -- I tried to avoid this war. I went
4 to the President in August of 2002 after coming back from
5 a trip and seeing all the planning that was underway and
6 we had a long meeting upstairs in the residence. Dr. Rice
7 was there but it was essentially a conversation between
8 President Bush and myself. And for the better part of two
9 and a half hours I took him through not only the military
10 planning that was being done in the Pentagon but I took
11 them through the consequences of going into an Arab
12 country and becoming the occupiers. It is said that I
13 used the Pottery Barn Rule I never did it, Tom Friedman
14 did it, he is next, he's the one who did that. But what I
15 did say to him, once you break it you are going to own it
16 and we're going to be responsible for 26 million people
17 standing there looking at us. And it's going to suck up a
18 good 40 to 50 percent of the army for years. And it's
19 going to take all the oxygen out of the political
20 environment. And you need to understand this and the
21 expense is going to be enormous. And he took it all
22 aboard and he said, "What should we do?" And I said,

1 "Well, we should take it to the United Nations. Because
2 they are the offended party. It is their resolutions that
3 have been offended." And I briefed other members of the
4 Cabinet over the next day or two and we then had a meeting
5 a week or so later and every member of the national
6 security team agreed with the judgment that we take it to
7 the UN. And we worked for seven weeks after taking it to
8 the UN in September and got a resolution unanimously
9 approved by the Security Council with some get-out clauses
10 for Saddam Hussein to avoid the conflict. And I said to
11 the President, if we can solve this diplomatically are you
12 prepared to accept that outcome, even if it means that we
13 have a "changed regime" in Baghdad with Saddam Hussein
14 still there, but no longer a danger or a threat but we
15 wouldn't have a "regime change." And it was not something
16 that he was immediately attracted to. But he said yes, he
17 would have to and we tried. But at that time I made that
18 point to him I also had to say to him that you are the
19 President, you will have to make the ultimate judgment,
20 and if the judgment is this isn't working and we don't
21 think it is going to solve the problem, then if military
22 action is undertaken I'm with you, I support you. And

1 frankly, when military action was undertaken it looked
2 like it was extremely successful. It was a lack of
3 planning for these latter phases and the things that got
4 out of control that really has brought us to this point.
5 And so, could I have stopped it by quitting? I assure you
6 that would not have done it. And to quit while it was
7 underway was not my way of doing business in serving in
8 the administration. And so I stayed till 2003 and then in
9 early 2004 in a conversation with the President, I told
10 him I thought it would be wise for him to make some
11 changes in this team at the end of 2004 after the
12 election, and that it would be the time for me to leave.

13 MR. LEHRER: Pick up on another point you made.
14 You praised the young military, mostly young military, of
15 today that are fighting in this war and their families.
16 And much has been said about, they are the only ones who
17 have paid any price for this war. Only people in America
18 who have made any sacrifice or even been asked to make any
19 sacrifice. Do you agree with that?

20 MR. POWELL: There is some truth to it. I
21 mean, this is a very serious conflict and we are paying a
22 lot of money, we are all paying a lot in taxes. But they

1 are the ones who are paying with their blood and a lot of
2 tears. And we have not fully mobilized the nation so
3 there is no draft of course. But we have not fully
4 mobilized the nation behind this effort. We're very proud
5 of these youngsters and they are not all just poor kids
6 who had nothing else to do. These are wonderful young men
7 and women who were looking for opportunity but more than
8 anything else they want to serve their country and they
9 want to serve their buddies. And they want to do the
10 right thing. And they believe they are doing the right
11 thing over there. But it's not a large enough force to
12 handle all the responsibilities they have there or
13 elsewhere in the world. And I don't sense that in the
14 American public there is a willingness to sacrifice much
15 more or to do things that might make the burden easier. I
16 don't see the American public putting that pressure on
17 their members of Congress or on the administration. And I
18 think that the American people, including those in this
19 room -- believe it was initially successful, but it hasn't
20 gone well since, and we have done the best we could do,
21 and it's time now to figure out how to turn it over to the
22 Iraqis, to stand back, to try to contain it, to try to

1 help them, train their troops as you heard from the
2 panelists earlier. We can do a lot of what was in the
3 Baker-Hamilton report. And I think that would probably be
4 after the surge is over the best contribution we could
5 make to helping the Iraqis. And that is to train their
6 troops up to take over these responsibilities. The
7 American soldiers cannot sit there forever even if there
8 was another 100,000 of them. We can't sit there forever
9 sitting on this lid of boiling sectarian stew.

10 MR. LEHRER: A related issue. There was a
11 discussion here at the Festival this morning about the
12 specific subject and it went like this. The conclusion,
13 one of the conclusions was of one of the speakers was that
14 the volunteer army has made it too easy for the leaders of
15 this country to engage in military action. Because they
16 are too -- and they are not connected enough to the
17 populace. They are not -- do you agree with that?

18 MR. POWELL: Well, we didn't have a volunteer
19 army during the Vietnam War. I mean, no, I don't think
20 the evidence is there. I was a lieutenant colonel when we
21 got rid of the draft. All of us lieutenant colonels and
22 junior officers were mad. We thought the American people

1 were walking away from us by ending the draft and it took
2 us about eight years to realize that we could create a
3 force that was far superior than any other force America
4 has ever put in the field. But it was understood that,
5 that force would be of limited size and capability, maybe
6 to handle two small wars in two different parts of the
7 world. But if we ever got to the point where something
8 more was needed then you bring up the guard and the
9 reserves and if you needed more than that then the nation
10 would have to face the possibility of going back to the
11 draft. I don't think you can get any kind of a draft
12 through the Congress right now because the nation does not
13 feel that level of threat and challenge. As the Reverend
14 Butts said in his powerful presentation, Iraq is over
15 there and it is a problem but we have got problems here in
16 America and I think Americans are starting to see now how
17 do we deal with problems we have at home. Haven't we
18 spent enough treasure and lives trying to stabilize this?
19 Isn't it now the turn of the Iraqi leadership, the tribal
20 leaders, Prime Minister Maliki and all of the others to
21 now take on this burden. We have given them one last
22 chance but the surge can't be continued. And if the surge

1 doesn't have the effect that General Keane and a lot of
2 others thought it would have then we have to move on. You
3 have to remember that last summer the generals in charge,
4 General Abizaid, came before the Congress and I'm sure
5 that Senator Feinstein may remember this and said, he has
6 talked to all the division commanders and we don't want
7 any more troops coming over. We don't want anything like
8 a surge and he wanted to start handing over greater
9 responsibility to the Iraqis at that time. The
10 administration did not believe that that was the right
11 solution. They did a number of studies, they consulted
12 the think tanks, talked to the Joint Chiefs of Staff and
13 decided that they had to try the surge as a way of seeing
14 if we could stabilize things so that the political process
15 could work and Iraqi forces could start to take over. But
16 as also noted, even Mr. Gates is now saying because he
17 knows the pressure on the armed forces, Secretary Gates is
18 now saying we will have to start drawing down in the not
19 too distant future.

20 MR. LEHRER: Follow-up on the voluntary military
21 issue. You have to take my word for this but I have it on
22 good authority that President Bush said a year ago to a

1 group -- small group of outsiders that if there had been a
2 draft he would have been impeached by now because of what
3 happened with Iraq. Do you agree with that?

4 MR. POWELL: Well, I don't know that he said
5 it. You have --

6 MR. LEHRER: But you agree with the premise, do
7 you agree with the premise?

8 MR. POWELL: No, I don't know --.

9 MR. LEHRER: Has it been that serious?

10 MR. POWELL: Well, I'm going to play a word
11 game with you.

12 MR. LEHRER: Okay.

13 MR. POWELL: If we had a draft we probably
14 would have had a much larger army and maybe it would not
15 have turned out the way it has turned out. But the way
16 I'm reading the point here is that the public would have
17 been so involved, and more interested in this from the
18 beginning --.

19 MR. LEHRER: The public might not even happened.

20 MR. POWELL: -- by coming back to the Congress
21 passing a resolution. They don't like to talk about it
22 now but they did by a handy majority reflecting the will

1 of the people at that time this problem had been dealt
2 with. And in the initial stages nobody was talking
3 impeachment everybody was talking this is terrific. And
4 one of the points that often gets overlooked. If we had
5 not dealt with this problem the way in which President
6 Bush decided to deal with it by using military force, and
7 I supported him on that, and it just went by the boards
8 and the resolutions were ignored and Saddam Hussein was
9 free to do what he wanted. There were no stockpiles. He
10 had the capability, and believe me, he had the intention.
11 Is anybody sure that we wouldn't be seeing those weapons
12 and stockpiles now. This was a man who was determined to
13 threaten his own people, to threaten the region. He had
14 such weapons in the past and he had used them in the past.
15 A lot of them were destroyed in Desert Storm and in the
16 aftermath of Desert Storm with the UN inspectors. But he
17 had not changed who he was. And so President Bush felt
18 strongly that this was a problem that had to be dealt with
19 now, either through peaceful means, by the changing the
20 nature of the regime, or by military means, a regime
21 change totally.

22 MR. LEHRER: Change of subject. Go back to what

1 our mutual friend Reverend Butts said about the country
2 generally. Do you share his feeling about the things --
3 that the things are really broken in this country that go
4 beyond Iraq?

5 MR. POWELL: The Reverend Butts and I are good
6 friends and I have been to some of his facilities and
7 spoken to his students. And I share all the concerns he
8 has. But I would also want to put those concerns in
9 context. Because just above Abyssinian Baptist Church in
10 Harlem sits the City College of New York, was my alma
11 mater. And in the City College of New York there is the
12 Colin Powell Policy Center for Policy Studies, which I'm
13 very proud of. And you should see these kids, the college
14 is 90 percent minority. 50 percent of the students are
15 immigrants, not their families, the kids themselves. And
16 they come there every day and are killing themselves
17 working hard coming from poor families, coming from
18 homeless situations. We had a kid who came from Russia
19 and was living under the George Washington Bridge and now
20 he's a Rhodes Scholar with CCNY. So it's still that place
21 of hope and opportunity. It's still the place that
22 notwithstanding all the problems that Reverend Butts spoke

1 about and he is absolutely right and I believe it's still
2 the place -- America is still the place using the imagery
3 that the Reverend gave you about the Statue of Liberty,
4 you go to any embassy or consular office of the United
5 States anywhere in the world today you're going to see a
6 line of people and they are all standing there and they
7 are all saying the same thing, "I want to go to America."
8 So we're still that same place, we haven't changed.

9 (Applause)

10 MR. POWELL: This is a story I love to tell
11 Alma will get mad at me but I got to do it. Every time I
12 go to New York I love walking up one of the great avenues.
13 And I will always stop at a corner and buy a hotdog from a
14 hotdog stand peddler. You know New York hotdogs with the
15 red onions, I love them. And I always have to have one
16 going up Madison, Park or Fifth. I used to do it when I
17 was Secretary of State. I'd come out of the Waldorf start
18 up and I'd stop at a corner. It was a little trickier
19 then because I had five bodyguards and three New York City
20 police cars running alongside and the hotdog peddler would
21 take one look and go, "I've got a green card, I've got a
22 green card, I've got a green card."

1 (Laughter)

2 MR. POWELL: But I do it alone now, all by
3 myself. And I'll walk up to the guy and I will order my
4 hotdog, with lots of mustard, and a lot of the onions, a
5 lot yeah. And he will prepare it and we will be talking to
6 each other and it will be an accent from a faraway place.
7 And he will hand me the hotdog. I will take it. I will
8 start to hand him the money and almost every time the same
9 thing happens. Aren't you that guy on television -- you
10 are General Powell. Right, I am General Powell. And I
11 hand him the money and he will say no, I won't take your
12 money. You've already paid me. I'm here.

13 (Applause)

14 MR. POWELL: Same spirit that brought my
15 parents here. So while Reverend Butts and the panelists
16 who just left are absolutely right that America has
17 problems, think of where America was 49 years ago, when I
18 was the young soldier and I entered my career as a second
19 lieutenant. We were facing two great empires, one in
20 Europe and one in Asia; Soviet Union and China. And they
21 said they were superior in every way; economic, militarily
22 and they were going to challenge us and they were going to

1 beat us. And we had this strategy for containment and
2 everybody thought that we were on our last legs. Think of
3 the early 70s from 68 to 74, when we lost Dr. King on that
4 Memphis balcony on April 4, 1968, and we lost Bobby
5 Kennedy about two months later. Think of the race
6 troubles we had in the late 60s and early 70s. Think of
7 what we were going through with the Vietnam War then. This
8 is peanuts compared to what we were going through then.
9 Think of the disgrace of a Vice President, leaving office,
10 a President leaving office. Think of that evening, April
11 4, 1968 when we had to put buses around the White House,
12 bumper to bumper to keep the people of Washington, D.C.
13 from burning down the White House, in our nation's
14 capital. We were really shaken as a people, more so than
15 any other time in my life. And then suddenly we
16 stabilized ourselves and this man of simple Midwestern
17 virtues and values, Jerry Ford, came along and kind of
18 reminded us of who we were. And we still went through
19 some difficult times but by the early 80s we had come
20 through that and we had restored our confidence in
21 ourselves. And as I ended my military career I watched as
22 this enemy I prepared for all these years went away. And

1 we were able to start reducing our armed forces, reducing
2 our nuclear weapons. So it is that America that is still
3 here. It is that America that people are a little unhappy
4 with right now. You know the polls -- everybody says they
5 are mad at America. I think they are mad at some of the
6 things we have done, they are mad at some of our policies.
7 They are mad at some of our personalities. But I'm
8 telling you the world still looks to America to solve its
9 problems. They still trust us. They still trust America
10 even though they may have differences. And when you talk
11 about the problems within the country that Calvin captured
12 so beautifully. I travel around the country a lot and I
13 see a lot of communities at ground level just the way the
14 Reverend Butts described them and we all try to do what we
15 can with the wonderful programs he runs and what my wife
16 and I have been doing with the America's Promise Alliance,
17 with a lot of youth programs, with educational programs.
18 We try to do what we can. But I also go to lots of other
19 places in this country. I have spoken to probably 100,000
20 people in the last month and a half. And I go to trade
21 associations and companies and mass audiences and I come
22 back to Washington somewhat renewed. People are hard at

1 work. American people still believe in the American
2 people, still believe in America. And they have seen
3 tough times before. We have come through racism. We have
4 come through segregation. We have come through a civil
5 war. We have come through lots of trials and
6 tribulations. Don't sell ourselves short. As the Reverend
7 said, "just keep pushing, keep pushing."

8 (Applause)

9 MR. LEHRER: General Powell, Mr. Secretary,
10 thank you very much.

11 MR. POWELL: Thank you, sir.

12 (Recess)