

DAVID PHILLIPS
December 14, 2005

CHARLES FERGUSON: Okay. State your name, as they say.

DAVID PHILLIPS: Uh, my name is David Phillips.

CHARLES FERGUSON: And can you say what your title and role was when you were involved with the State Department on the Future of Iraq Project?

DAVID PHILLIPS: I served as a senior adviser at the State Department from 1999 to 2003. And at the end of that tenure, worked in the, uh, u-, uh, State Department's Near Eastern Affairs Bureau. And was a part of the Future of Iraq Project; uh, particularly the Democratic Principles Working Group, which was one of the Iraqi bodies that was convened to look at the new Iraq.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Okay. Can you tell us the first time you had any involvement with Iraqi policy matters? When was that?

DAVID PHILLIPS: I served as president of a group called the Congressional Human Rights Foundation. And a Kurdish doctor came into my office in November of 1988 with some pictures from Halabja, and some pretty gruesome stories about the use of chemical weapons against the Kurds. Uh, that's, was my initial involvement in Iraqi matters. I subsequently made a couple of trips to Iraq in the early 1990s, right after the Gulf War, in '92 and '94, and visited Halabja and other areas in northern Iraq. Uh, had extensive dealings with the Kurds and other Northerners.

CHARLES FERGUSON: And why don't you tell us about those dealings? Those trips?

DAVID PHILLIPS: I was horrified at the stories I heard and the evidence that I gathered, uh, about, uh, the atrocities committed against the Kurds. I was also given some of the Iraqi Mukhabarat military intelligence documents on the Anfal campaign, and took copies of them out after my first visit there, uh, soon after the Gulf War. Uh, because I had a human rights and humanitarian background, I was deeply interested in, uh, Iraqi affairs and atrocities committed against the Iraqi people — not only the Kurds, but also the Shiia. So my involvement, uh, in Iraqi matters has been over 17 years, and it's been from a human rights and humanitarian perspective.

CHARLES FERGUSON: And when you traveled to Iraq and gathered this information in the early 1990s, when you say “Iraq,” I assume you mean Kurdish-controlled northern Iraq; Kurdistan, essentially. Am I right with that?

DAVID PHILLIPS: Yeah, I was always north of the 36th Parallel.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Yeah. Okay. Can you tell us what you found, what you concluded, about what had occurred?

DAVID PHILLIPS: That WMD was used against Iraqis by Saddam Hussein. That the Kurds had suffered a terrible genocide, and there needed to be more awareness and greater U.S. leadership in addressing, uh, Kurdish issues. And in particular, uh, addressing the question of authoritarian rule in Iraq, which is why I was an initial supporter of regime change. Later reconsidered, uh, my support, because of the mismanagement by the Bush administration in the postwar period.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Okay, we will soon get to that. What was the next time after that that you had any involvement in Iraqi affairs?

DAVID PHILLIPS: My involvement in Iraqi affairs was continuous from...

CHARLES FERGUSON: Oh.

DAVID PHILLIPS: ...1988 through the mid-1990s.

CHARLES FERGUSON: I see.

DAVID PHILLIPS: I made a couple o’ trips there.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Okay.

DAVID PHILLIPS: In ‘92 and ‘94.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Um hm.

DAVID PHILLIPS: But because —, of my human rights portfolio, and my role in Capitol Hill, this was one of the issues that, um, I paid a great deal of attention to. Had extensive relations with, uh, Iraqis, eh, uh, in the exile community, and those living in northern Iraq.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Okay. So what was the nature of your involvement or activity after those two trips, in the mid- to late 1990s?

DAVID PHILLIPS: After th-, after the, uh, two Kurdish parties ended up in conflict with one another, I [was] disappointed that they had squandered a, the international goodwill. And um, suspended my active involvement in Iraqi matters for a short while.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Why don't you say a few words about that internecine conflict.

DAVID PHILLIPS: I, in the mid-1990s, the Kurdistan Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, uh, ended up, uh, in conflict with one another. Uh, there was an aborted coup against Saddam. Uh, the Iraqi National Congress was also involved. As a result of that aborted coup, uh, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan established ties, uh, operationally with Iran and the KDP, with Saddam's forces, whom they invited into northern Iraq. I felt that, uh, the decision by both leaders was not correct, and uh, th-, the intensity of my involvement lessened after that, for a few years.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Um hm. Okay. And then? What happened next?

DAVID PHILLIPS: Well, to fast forward to September 11th, it was abundantly clear, within days after the attacks, uh, uh, in the United States by Al Qaeda, that the Bush administration wanted to link Saddam Hussein, uh, with Al Qaeda. And that the agenda that, uh, Bush administration officials had developed in the late 1990s for regime change in Iraq was ripening. Their rhetoric became increasingly fiery and confrontational. So I reconnected with my Iraqi friends, and took a renewed interest in what was going on. That culminated in more extensive involvement.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Describe that involvement.

DAVID PHILLIPS: I w-, w-, in the summer of 2002, uh, I had discussions with Iraqis about, uh, what kind of governance arrangement they envisioned for Iraq after Saddam Hussein. I learned that they were drafting a constitution. There was a working group of constitutional scholars in northern Iraq that included Kurds and other Iraqis. I was invited to northern Iraq by President Jalal Talabani, who is now the president of Iraq. Uh, he expedited permission for my travel through Syria and across the Tigris River. In fact, I was given a code number by Syrian, uh, In-, Interior Ministry — 3462 — and in-, instructed by the Kurds to show up on the banks of the Tigris River at a cinder block hut, where a Syrian

official would know of my passage, and give me a slip allowing my passage across the Tigris, and my return through Syria.

Uh, I embarked on a journey to Iraq because I wanted to make sure that if the United States did go to war, that Iraqis had a chance to share their views about power sharing and democratic aspirations post-Saddam.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Okay. And so tell us about your involvement with the State Department Future of Iraq Project.

DAVID PHILLIPS: During this time, I was working as a senior adviser at the State Department, so I...

CHARLES FERGUSON: ...a consultant, to clarify.

DAVID PHILLIPS: Yes, I was a special government employee. I had a fancy title, but I was never a part of the bureaucracy.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Yeah. Okay.

DAVID PHILLIPS: So obviously, my interests in going to Iraq; the execution of my trip; some of the details and arrangements of my trip; uh, were discussed with senior State Department officials. When I came back from, uh, Iraq in July of 2002, I, uh, went to the State Department and briefed senior officials on the discussions that I had had.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Who did you brief?

DAVID PHILLIPS: I, uh, briefed, uh, undersecretary of state Mark Grossman, and Ryan Crocker, who is the deputy assistant secretary of state [in] the Near Eastern Affairs Bureau, with lead responsibility for the Iraq policy...

CHARLES FERGUSON: Um hm.

DAVID PHILLIPS: ...at State.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Okay. So continue. I'm sorry.

DAVID PHILLIPS: Uh, I had some concerns about, um, Turkey's involvement, and the prospects of the, uh, of uh, Turkey taking a military action preemptively to secure its interests in

northern Iraq. Uh, I was also concerned about relations between the two Kurdish leaders. Uh, if in fact the U.S. was gonna go to war, and I was gonna play any kind of role, I needed to hear from Iraqis themselves what they thought about regime change; what they thought about U.S. military action; and the case that was being made for war, based on WMD.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Um hm.

DAVID PHILLIPS: And Iraqis confirmed in those discussions that they believe strongly that, uh, Saddam had weapons of mass destruction; that he would use them against Iraqis again, against Iraq's neighbors, if necessary.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Now this was Kurds, I assume.

DAVID PHILLIPS: All Iraqis I was speaking to. I was speaking with Turkamen, with [As]yrians, with Shiia, and with Arab Sunnis.

CHARLES FERGUSON: I see. Okay.

DAVID PHILLIPS: The north had become a kind of safe haven for Iraqis who were against the regime.

CHARLES FERGUSON: I see. Okay. I'm sorry. Continue.

DAVID PHILLIPS: Uh, so they were all committed to regime change. They would have liked to have done it on their own. But I think they recognized they didn't have the capability for that. So they, um, were very keen for the U.S. to get involved militarily. And based on their enthusiasm for that, I also, yeah, embraced this notion of, uh, a U.S. role in regime change. And also acknowledged the importance of a postwar plan that represented the interests of all of Iraq's sectarian and ethnic groups. You know, if we went to war, it was important that we had a plan for winning the peace. My discussions with Iraqis was about that.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Okay. And what did they tell you, what did you conclude, what did you then tell the State Department?

DAVID PHILLIPS: [Well] I expressed concerns; I shared some observations. You know, I prepared a written report that was submitted to them.

Uh, during that summer, there was, uh, increasingly bellicose rhetoric coming out of Washington. On August 21, there was a meeting at the president's ranch in Crawford, where the top national security advisers, except for Colin Powell, attended. And a few days after that meeting, I got a phone call from a State Department official, telling me that the Future of Iraq Project was now getting ramped up. It was gonna become more robust and more active. And that one particular element of it — this Democratic Principles Working Group, which the Iraqis call the mother of all working groups, was gonna play a key role in constitutional issues, and looking at questions of de-Baathification and the role of the military. And would I m-, uh, participate, uh, in the activities of the working group. And I was glad to do so.

CHARLES FERGUSON: And tell us about that participation, tell us about what the working group did, how it worked.

DAVID PHILLIPS: Uh, there were, uh, 17 different working groups that were organized by the Office of Northern Gulf Affairs at State. But it was an interagency process. Uh, hundreds of Iraqis were involved. They produced thousands of pages of recommendations; uh, millions of dollars of U.S. taxpayer money was spent. Uh, those recommendations identified areas of common interests among Iraqis. They also red-flagged problems that would result in the event of, uh, the removal of Saddam Hussein. Over a series of meetings, in the U.K., w-, we had different working groups and different special topics. Iraqis got together to draft a plan for the future of Iraq. There was a lot of agreement about core elements of the plan, but there were clearly areas where Iraqis didn't agree. On the role of Sharia law, for example; the demarcation of federal states; what to do with Iraq's oil revenues.

Uh, it's interesting that during the discussion about Iraq's constitution that those were the exact same issues that came up as areas of disagreement. And after the elections, uh, on December 15, Iraqis are still grappling w-, through its constitutional committee, with how they're gonna revise the constitution to address the core concerns of Iraqis in those areas.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Okay. And what did you observe of U.S. preparations for the war? What did you see, what did you think of what you saw in the months before the war started?

DAVID PHILLIPS: Uh, there was an effort —, by U.S. officials to cover a lotta ground in a very short period of time. [I mean], there was clearly a political calendar that was being worked, and the technical experts were tryin' to catch up, by developing recommendations that could address some of these key stability questions, uh, after Saddam. Uh, there were a range of different officials involved, who attended these meetings. Uh, including, uh, those from the office of the vice president and the Pentagon. Even though State was taking the lead, uh, it was obvious to anyone in the room that the real center of gravity on this issue rested with the representative of Dick Cheney and Don Rumsfeld in the room.

When th-, the, President Bush appointed a special envoy for free Iraqis, Zalmay Khalilzad, um, in early December of 2002. There was a great relief at the State Department that finally, the locus had been moved from State over to the National Security Council. That's where the real decision-making lay. State was just playing a caretaker role.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Why don't you tell us what the...

DAVID PHILLIPS: Let me explain this process a little bit more, because...

CHARLES FERGUSON: Sure.

DAVID PHILLIPS: ...there were a series of meetings of the Democratic Principles Working Group that was supposed to set an agenda for a large Iraqi opposition conference in December, that was finally convened in London. Uh, the process of preparing that agenda and drafting papers for that meeting really broke down completely, because of an effort by Iraqis associated with the Iraqi National Congress to essentially hijack the process. And when Iraqis finally got together in London, uh, the level of chaos and disarray, um, was amazing to all the U.S. observers that were there. There had been great pains taken to identify which Iraqis should be invited; uh, to invite delegations that represented different parties and different groups. Ultimately, hundreds of Iraqis who were uninvited just showed up, and demanded to participate.

And what was abundantly clear from that meeting was that the U.S. knew very little bit, heh, the U.S. knew very little about the Arab Shiia in Iraq. And they ultimately controlled the tone and tempo of

that Iraqi opposition conference in London. Uh, they were much closer to Iran than they were to the United States. So many of the problems that we've encountered with the Shiia, and the Islamist parties, were foreseen as early as December of 2002.

CHARLES FERGUSON: And what happened to the work done by your working group and the Future of Iraq Project?

DAVID PHILLIPS: On January 21 of 2003, the president assigned, uh, to the office of the Secretary of Defense lead responsibility for postwar civilian administration in Iraq. And because the work of the Future of Iraq Project highlighted problems that might have slowed down the, uh, march to war, a decision was taken within Don Rumsfeld's office, uh, to suppress the work of the Future of Iraq Project, and essentially ignore it, and take steps to undermine it.

A month after that, uh, after Jay Garner was appointed, uh, the head of the Office for Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance, he convened a dry run on postwar planning, at the National Defense University, on February 21 and 22.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Were you there?

DAVID PHILLIPS: I was not there.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Okay.

DAVID PHILLIPS: That was the first time that, uh, General Garner even learned that there was such a thing as the Future of Iraq Project.

CHARLES FERGUSON: I see. And what were you doing during this time, in January and February of 2003?

DAVID PHILLIPS: [Eh], the center of gravity had shifted to Zalmay Khalilzad and the White House, my work had been primarily with the State Department. So the period of my extensive involvement in postwar planning was really from August through January. Uh, the White House kept a very close hold on, uh, the assignment of roles, uh, for postwar administration. And it was clear that anyone who raised questions about the feasibility of goin' to war, or who highlighted problems wasn't welcome in that process. There were a number of State Department officials and other experts on Iraq

who, uh, were not allowed to participate. And even the initial deployment of Jay Garner's, uh, group excluded many of the civil servants in the U.S. government who had worked on Iraqi issues for many years.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Okay. And in particular, it excluded you, too.

DAVID PHILLIPS: [And] my interest was in giving Iraqis a voice. Uh, my voice wasn't important. I was glad to work with them, and to have the opportunity that I did. But it was clear that the ideas that, uh, I had, and that were represented through my work, weren't viewed with favor by the administration.

CHARLES FERGUSON: What were those ideas? What did you recommend? What did you feel?

DAVID PHILLIPS: [Eh,] the importance of handing over sovereignty quickly to Iraqis; of defining, uh, early on a role for the international community; of developing a power-sharing arrangement that decentralized authority from Baghdad to the regions, and that took into account the primary victims of Saddam's atrocities, uh, in the, mm-, mm-, allocation of responsibilities in the new Iraq.

CHARLES FERGUSON: And tell us what happened.

DAVID PHILLIPS: What do you mean?

CHARLES FERGUSON: After the war.

DAVID PHILLIPS: After the war, there's still a war going on.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Okay. Good point. Tell us what happened after the United States invaded Iraq and deposed Saddam.

DAVID PHILLIPS: Well, I have a lot of admiration for American fighting men and women who were the point of the spear, and rushed into Baghdad. But the reality is that they had no instructions for Phase IV stability operations. So when there was a spasm of violence after the, the statue of Saddam was torn down in Firdos Square on April 9, 2003, the U.S. troops that were there, uh, didn't know what they should do. Uh, logically, they thought they should protect the oil ministry, thereby

reinforcing the perception that we had gone to war to control Iraq's oil assets. Don Rumsfeld said that freedom is messy, but we shouldn't underestimate the, uh, the degree of mess that was created in those first days.

Seventeen of Iraq's ministries were totally gutted. The copper wiring was pulled out of the wall, the plumbing out of the ground. Anything that wasn't bolted down was taken. The universities were all ransacked. The hospitals were all ransacked.

One of the key points that we made in our Future of Iraq planning was the need to demonstrate, from Day One, immediate benefits to the Iraqi people from liberation. This looting and violence set that back in a big way. And then the security problems that in-, that resulted from the looting were exacerbated by the fact that we just didn't have enough boots on the ground to stabilize the country.

There are 70 large weapons storage depots. We weren't able to secure them. Many of the munitions that are used in attacking U.S. troops, uh, today are actually looted from those warehouses. The [Al Ca-Ca] facility, which had seals from the International Atomic Energy s-, Agency had those seals broken, and explosives that are capable of detonating a nuclear device were taken. There were probably a hundred and forty, uh, Al Qaeda members, uh, on the Iran-Iraq border prior to war.

DAVID PHILLIPS: There were probably a hundred and forty Al Qaeda members on the Iran-Iraq border, border prior to war. Because we didn't have enough troops, or work with our allies, in going to war, we weren't able to secure those borders. The estimate now is that there are between five and ten thousand foreign fighters and jihadists that poured across the borders to, in order to go and kill Americans. The, uh, National Museum was gutted; the National Library was burned. The pride that Iraqis took in their country was undermined seriously by the looting and chaos that ensued as the regime was decapitated.

CHARLES FERGUSON: And if this had been done competently, differently, how much different do you think Iraq would be now than it is?

DAVID PHILLIPS: It would have been hard to create a liberal democracy in Iraq under any circumstances. But because we encountered such serious problems from the very first day that we toppled the regime, what would have been a hard job was made even harder.

CHARLES FERGUSON: So, difficult to say how much difference it would have made.

DAVID PHILLIPS: There was nothing in the Future of Iraq Project that was a silver bullet, that would have made Iraq easy to stabilize post-Saddam.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Um hm.

DAVID PHILLIPS: It was a planning process. And, uh, implicitly was consultative, involving a whole broad range of Iraqis. That didn't jive with the Bush administration's plan to give power to Ahmed Chalabi and the Iraqi National Congress, so that they could then do our bidding in Iraq: transform the country into a liberal democracy; a launching point for getting rid of the Baathists in Syria, the mullahs in Iran, creating a safe space for U.S. interests in the broader Middle East. Nothing wrong with promoting democracy. In fact, I've devoted two decades of my working life to those goals. But if you don't consult with freedom's beneficiaries, you're not gonna be able to achieve what you've set out to do.

CHARLES FERGUSON: And the description you just provided of the administration's motives; do you think that those were in fact the administration's motives: that the administration's motives primarily related to acquiring a strong ally and basing system in the Mideast from which to weaken, or if necessary, attack Syria and Iran, as opposed to concerns about WMD and terrorism?

DAVID PHILLIPS: [And] when I, uh, took a trip to Iran after the war, I had a senior U.S. official tell me that, um, his counterparts in the Pentagon would much rather be picking bombing sites than picking topics to discuss with Iranian officials about U.S.-Iran cooperation. Uh, it's, uh, a co-, there are a combination of reasons why the U.S. went to war in Iraq. And I think it'd be simplistic to say it was purely for ideological reasons...

CHARLES FERGUSON: Um hm.

DAVID PHILLIPS: ...although that was a paramount cause for, uh, mm-, going to war, particularly among the neoconservatives in the administration. There were, uh, also, uh, oil interests that had a lot to do with it; uh, opportunists who felt they could make some money off of Iraq's reconstruction, and as the economy was privatized, uh, allow U.S. industries to play a primary role as the beneficiary. So there were complicated and varied reasons why we went to war.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Um...

DAVID PHILLIPS: I think that there's a legitimate concern, mm-, after 9-11, that a rogue regime, uh, like Iraq, uh, which might be developing weapons of mass destruction, could give that WMD to a terrorist group like Al Qaeda, and without any fingerprints on it. Um, uh, the terror group could attack the homeland. Uh, that had a lot to do with the motivation, I think, particularly coming out of the office of the Vice President, in targeting Iraq.

CHARLES FERGUSON: And do you think that that was a serious concern?

DAVID PHILLIPS: Uh, it's now proven that Iraq had no WMD. But given Saddam's temperament and history, and his dislike of the United States; his attempt at assassination of President Bush's father; uh, if he had the capability of doing harm to the U.S., he certainly would have explored those options.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Hm. Okay. Now, if I can take you back to the period of your earlier visits to Iraq, starting in '88, and then in the early and mid-1990s. You said that the people you spoke with were in favor of regime change, including in favor of U.S. military action to achieve regime change. Do you think that their opinions represented the majority of Iraqis, or do you think this was an unusual segment of the population?

DAVID PHILLIPS: The people I talked to in Iraq during the summer of 2002 were all supportive of regime change. I think they would have preferred to do it themselves, but they realized that they couldn't, which is why they looked to the United States for various kinds of support. Anyone who was a victim of Saddam's regime wanted to get rid of him. Those who benefitted from the power

and privilege of being close to Iraq's leader obviously wanted to maintain the status quo. The vast majority of Iraqis wanted new leadership.

CHARLES FERGUSON: And do you think that the vast majority of Iraqis supported U.S. military intervention to achieve that?

DAVID PHILLIPS: Iraqis are very nationalistic, and uh, independent throughout their history. Uh, the vast majority wanted to be able to do it on their own. And there were efforts to that effect. But those efforts were unsuccessful. So those, uh, who were most keen on getting rid of Saddam, uh, sought support from other states. The U.S. was one of them; Iran was as well.

CHARLES FERGUSON: So do you have any sense of what fraction of the Iraqi population, before the war, was favorable to U.S. military intervention?

DAVID PHILLIPS: You know, I've o-, only spoke with, uh, uh, with a s-, limited number of Iraqis, so I can't say what the whole population thought.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Hm. Okay. And what do you think the consequences of the current situation have been for the future of Iraq? What do you foresee, going forward?

DAVID PHILLIPS: Well, Iraqis are, uh, are miserable today. Because, um, they were promised liberation by the U.S., and they were delivered, mm-, chaos instead. Uh, the failure to hand over sovereignty, and give Iraqis responsibility for their future, uh, has a lot to do with the nature of Iraqi resentment towards the U.S. It's also the U.S. and the British who authored the resolution in the Security Council in which we described ourselves as the occupying power. So by labeling the U.S. forces there "the occupation," we riled Iraqis, who have a long history of resisting occupation.

There have been a series of elections — three in 2005 — the elections in December fif-, of December 15, uh, for a national assembly that will serve for a four-year period, uh, will determine what kind of governance Iraq has, going forward. Right now, Iraqis want to have basic services, and they want improved security.

If a new government is formed, and it's able to deliver on those items, uh, then Iraq has some prospect in the future. Uh, if Islamists take over, uh, and Arab Shiia fundamentalists find common cause

with [Saliphists] in the Arab Sunni community, and try to institutionalize Sharia law around the country, or roll back the autonomic provisions that have been given to the Kurds...

DAVID PHILLIPS: One of the key functions of the new government will be to appoint a committee to make amendments to the constitution. Uh, a lot of the most difficult issues, uh, that divide Iraqis weren't addressed, eh, uh, effectively in the constitutional debate prior to the December 15 elections.

Uh, the debate so far has polarized Iraqis, pitting secularists against Islamists, Arab against Kurd, Shiia against Sunni, men against women. If the National Assembly takes steps to deepen those divisions, uh, or to roll back Kurdish autonomy, or implement Sharia law broadly throughout the country, uh, then that could be a catalyst for the intensification of violence, and ultimately Iraq's fragmentation.

I know that when President Talabani met with George Bush in the White House in September of 2005, he made it very clear that the Kurds have some red lines. And if those red lines are crossed, I think you'll see the Kurds withdrawing to the north, suspending their cooperation with Baghdad. And that could, uh, inflame the situation, and result in intensified civil war, not on sectarian grounds, but ethnically based.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Are you still in touch with a lot of people in Iraq, or not?

DAVID PHILLIPS: Am I still in touch with a lot of people in Iraq?

CHARLES FERGUSON: Yeah.

DAVID PHILLIPS: Yeah, I talk to Iraqis a good d-, a good deal.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Okay. Are the majority of them optimistic, pessimistic?

DAVID PHILLIPS: I mean, there's public opinion polling that you could refer to. Uh, and I'm sure some of your other interviewees will be able to shed light on that. I think Iraqis remain hopeful. Uh, but they haven't demonstrated a great ability for compromise and consent. And unless they cooperate, and this new government is one that is inclusive, the likelihood that the country is gonna be viable, uh, diminishes day by day.

CHARLES FERGUSON: When you were working on the Future of Iraq project, did you have direct dealings with, did you speak with, people in DOD, people in the White House...

DAVID PHILLIPS: Um hm.

CHARLES FERGUSON: ...people in the National Security Council?

DAVID PHILLIPS: I did.

CHARLES FERGUSON: What did you tell them? What did they tell you? What was your sense of where their heads were at?

DAVID PHILLIPS: Uh, you know, there was a march to war that, um, from the summer of 2002 onward seemed inevitable to me. Uh, the planning for postwar, and the debate about, uh, intelligence and WMD, seemed to be geared around justifying policy conclusions that had already been made.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Did you ever express concerns to them about the inadequacy of postwar planning, or the nature of their plans?

DAVID PHILLIPS: E-, ah, sure, I expressed concerns, from the beginning: about the importance of, uh, unh, having a dialog with Iraqis about giving them ownership of the political transition; about, uh, a timetable which was accelerated, and which didn't allow for consensus to emerge.

CHARLES FERGUSON: And what did they say?

DAVID PHILLIPS: Eh, then took onboard those concerns. I think that they shared those concerns, but decisions had been made at the top that this was going forward. I think everybody was reconciled to that fact.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Um hm. I see. Okay. Okay. I don't know, we might be more or less done. Is there anything that I didn't ask about that you'd like to talk about at all?

DAVID PHILLIPS: Uh, sure, I could talk a little bit more about a few items.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Please.

DAVID PHILLIPS: You know, the Future of Iraq Project prepared a, uh, a list of sites that, um, should be protected in Iraq. And when, uh, there were, uh, missile and, uh, and Air Force attacks, uh,

on Iraq, prior to the, the land invasion, uh, those sites were protected, indeed. Uh, but the field commanders were never given the list of sites, which contributed, in part, to their inability to secure strategic positions and institutions in the country.

Through the Future of Iraq Project, we talked about de-Baathification, and what to do with the Iraqi armed forces. And we shouldn't be under any illusions: everybody in the group viewed the Baath Party as, uh, a criminal institution, and felt that the leadership of the Baath should be held accountable. Uh, there was disagreement among Iraqis about whether or not the whole party should be banned. But they did agree that individuals should be held accountable, and that there should not be guilt through association in criminal procedures going forward.

There was also extensive discussion about what to do with the security situation, uh, right after the decapitation of the regime. And uh, Iraqis emphasized the, the likelihood of, of violence and recrimination. Uh, there was debate about what to do with the Iraqi security services. And here again, uh, we should be very clear that the Mukhabarat and the Special Republican Guard that were responsible for atrocities, uh, were viewed by Iraqis as having no place in, uh, the new Iraq. But they did recognize that, uh, other security structures, that were not directly tainted with war crimes or atrocities, uh, could be co-opted and turned into partners in security.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Such as?

DAVID PHILLIPS: Such as the Iraqi army.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Um hm.

DAVID PHILLIPS: So the decision to, uh, eliminate the Baath Party leadership, and the decree that was issued by, uh, Jerry Bremer and the Coalitional, uh, Coalition Provisional Authority to, uh, get rid of the Iraqi armed forces, uh, directly contravened the advice that Iraqis had developed prior to the war.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Hm. What happened, by the way, to the Iraqi police?

DAVID PHILLIPS: What happened to the Iraqi police.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Yeah.

DAVID PHILLIPS: I think...

CHARLES FERGUSON: Were they disbanded? Did...

DAVID PHILLIPS: Yeah, I think that they were disbanded as well.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Huh. Okay.

DAVID PHILLIPS: I, I'm not, I'm not familiar with the details.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Okay. So your point being that the work that was done in the Future of Iraq Project anticipated a number of the issues that arose, and made recommendations contrary to the decisions actually taken by the Bush administration and the occupying authorities.

DAVID PHILLIPS: [Yeah], the Future of Iraq Project emphasized the importance of a speedy handover to Iraqis. Iraqis emphasized the importance of, uh, their own sovereignty and responsibility. And they warned U.S. officials that if, uh, the U.S. troops were ever viewed as an occupying force, that there would be a backlash, and resentment, against, uh, uh, U.S. troops on the ground. The decision to establish an advisory committee to Jerry Bremer, instead of accelerating the handover of power fueled the kind of resentment that Iraqis, um, had, and which worsened over, over, uh, the subsequent years.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Okay. Very good. Thank you.

DAVID PHILLIPS: Sure.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Great.