

Graham Allison
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CHARLES FERGUSON: Okay. What was your position in the Clinton administration?

GRAHAM ALLISON: I was Assistant Secretary of Defense in the first term of the Clinton administration, with responsibility for strategy towards Russia and the former Soviet Union.

CHARLES FERGUSON: And tell us what you think about the Iraq war.

GRAHAM ALLISON: Well, I thought it was, uh, misplaced priorities, I think, if [UI] in a phrase. Uh, and uh, then I didn't imagine that it would be executed, at least in terms of the total package, uh, as in-, ineptly as it was. And I think the net result of it has been, uh, very negative for American national security.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Why don't you say more about why you were surprised and how you were surprised at how it was executed?

GRAHAM ALLISON: Well, the, uh...Saddam clearly a, uh, a bad guy, an evil guy; uh, horrible to, uh, his, uh, his fellow citizens. Uh, and anything bad that happens to Saddam would be a good thing. Uh, and uh, uh, Iraq, uh, is clearly a complicated, uh, player in the region. Uh, and because of that, uh, for more than a decade, uh, the Central Command, which is the, uh, military commander that has responsibility for this territory, has had a plan for military action, uh, to take down this, the, uh, Iraqi government, uh, including specifically Saddam and his regime.

Uh, and that's a plan that's been, you know, considered, reviewed; uh, it was part of the, uh, plan that, uh, General Zinni, who was CENTCOM just before Tommy Franks, had worked through. And uh, so I would imagine that if some political leadership decided to undertake such an action, on the basis of their calculation of interests, that that plan would have been executed. That plan called for four hundred and fifty or five hundred thousand, uh, men; uh, mainly because the aftermath of the war was going to be the challenge; uh, the stabilization, uh, of the country. Uh, and of the, of the structures, uh. And that it was gonna take a long time. So as, uh, according to Zinni, when we had him here for an

event, he said he thought that, uh, you know, it was a minimum five-year undertaking with a few hundred thousand people at a minimum; and maybe for a decade.

Uh, it was that calculation that led, uh, uh, General Shinseki, when he was chief of staff of the Army, though he was kind of an example of the new, uh, army that had built a new cadre of leadership, to say he thought that this was a, gonna require several hundred thousand people for a decade, to make Iraq into a place that was not more problematic than it was under Saddam.

So given that this was a problem people had addressed before, that they had thought about, that they [they] reasonable view about, that seemed to be related to the problem, I would have imagined that we would have proceeded in that fashion.

Now, I was[n't] against proceeding at all, on the grounds that I thought that first Saddam was in his box. That was a view held by Secretary of State Powell, I believe. Uh, but that was certainly my view: that he was not more threatening than they had been in the decade previous. He hadn't done anything new or different than the terrible things he had done for a decade. Uh, and that secondly, there were much higher priorities, uh, that the U.S. had to address, especially after 9-11. Because the rationale, the stated rationale for toppling Saddam was that after 9-11, we woke up to new dangers. And especially to the danger that terrorists might get a nuclear bomb, and bring it to an American city.

I think that insight is correct. I believe that [the] terrorists might get a nuclear bomb — somebody like Osama bin Laden — and I don't have any doubt that if he got a bomb, he could successfully bring it to an American city, or several, and blow 'em up. And I don't have any doubt that he would do so. I mean, he said that he would. And he's got a rationale for how this would advance his objectives.

So it's a real threat. But the question is, what does that have to do with Saddam? What does it have to do with Iraq? And I would say, very little. Whereas, in the case of North Korea, and Iran — two other of the so-called, uh, whatever; Axis of Evil; you know, the trio — in the case of North Korea, they in fact do have, and did have, when President Bush decided to focus on Iraq, two nuclear bombs' worth of plutonium. And while we were distracted with Iraq; while we were consumed, actually, by Iraq;

North Korea took this breathing space to actually move their arsenal from two weapons to eight weapons, and to turn back on their factories and facilities for making more weapons, which are running today.

And similarly, Iran, uh, which is also a complicated regime, and which was a number of years away from its goal line of being able to produce the material for nuclear weapons, got a breather over this period, while we've been consumed with Iraq. They're gettin' very close to its own goal line.

So I thought there were much higher priorities that deserved the attention of the American government, and the focus of the national security establishment, than Iraq. But I also thought that if we decided to, [UI] president for whatever combination of reasons decided to focus on Iraq, that he would do so on the basis of the well-developed plans of people who had been studying this problem for a long time. Uh, and I think when, uh, for whatever combination of reasons, Secretary Rumsfeld, uh, and he decided to go light, and to go fast, and to go, uh, with, uh, insufficient forces; and then, for whatever combination of reasons, allowed themselves to imagine that there was not gonna be a problem the day after we toppled Saddam. I mean, uh, in the CENTCOM plan, they never thought it was gonna take more than 18 days to finish the military operation. So that was their plan for, over a long period of time. That was the easy part, as they thought of it.

And then came the hard part. Which is, what do you do with it, now that you own it? And that was the challenge that would require a very substantial presence, so that there would not be any security, there would, there would be no incentive for anybody to create a security problem, and you would have tried to prevent the emergence of an insurgency. Uh, and you would have tried to then do some version of, of, uh, reconstruction.

That also seemed to me to be a hugely challenging undertaking. And the notion that you're doing somethin' that takes a few hundred thousand people for a decade; you know, you, you then have to say, well, okay; how serious is the threat posed by Saddam that would lead us to undertake such a major venture? And I think if President Bush had understood clearly how big, uh, a undertaking this was, he would have, I think, concluded — rightly, in my view — that, look, Saddam is, uh, where he is.

Uh, you know, he's a bad guy; he's doin' horrible things to, uh, his fellow citizens. But uh, we've lived with him for a long time, as we've lived with a lot of other bad guys in the world. And we can continue to keep him in his box.

The argument to the contrary — and I think the most powerful argument to the contrary, by the people who thought this was the right thing to do; somebody like Ken Pollock, for example, who, you know, wrote a book, basically making the case; uh, and so that's from a Democrat's point of view, rather than, than a Republican's — uh, was that the sanctions were eroding; that eventually Sa-, Saddam would escape the sanctions; and then he would go about doing some things that he had previously not been doing because he was in the box.

But in my view, if you imagine anything like even 10 percent of the level of effort that's gone into the diplomacy and, and uh, and in-, and, and expenditure of American influence on Iraq, as it's turned out; if, if 10 percent of that had gone to the maintaining of the sanctions, or even if we'd just done 'em unilaterally, ourselves, or with the Brits; uh, he would still be in his box today; Iraq would be a very unhappy place; he would be an evil guy; uh, but, uh, we would have had all the time, energy, money, lives, uh, to focus on problems that matter a whole lot more.

CHARLES FERGUSON: What do you think of the ethical or humanitarian argument for deposing the regime, because Saddam was such a bad guy; he had killed so many people, inflicted so much damage on others in the region? And the only way to continue to contain him was the sanctions, which took a heavy toll on the Iraq people?

GRAHAM ALLISON: Well, I, I wouldn't discount the human rights, uh, considerations. And I think there's no question that he was a horror, uh, to his people. Uh, but, uh...if I look around the world, I can find quite a lot of people who are horrible to their fellow citizens. I mean, let's take Mr. Mugabe. Uh, and the U.S. has not heretofore taken upon itself to go around, and ridding the world of, you know, bad guys, uh, who are not direct threats to us in the immediate, uh, situation. And especially not proposing to do that without, eh, unless a whole bunch of other people will go along with us.

So you could say, well, what about, what about, uh, Bosnia, or what about Kosovo? And I'd say, in those instances, the U.S. was prepared to bomb somebody. And if the job that was required was simply bombing somebody, and if there were a NATO, uh, group that was prepared to do it, you might say, well, does this get high enough off, up on the agenda?

Actually, in the case of the, the genocide in Rwanda, uh, there's a, that's an interesting case to be made. And we have argued here in the school on it. What, what level of catastro-ta-phe, in human rights terms, would justify intervention, uh, on a humanitarian basis, basically? I, I, uh, I guess the place where I would get a little squishy is in the genocide instance. I believe the U.S. could imagine trying to get stated a principle in which some larger group than just the U.S. alone, judging that genocide was occurring, would, uh, recommend military intervention for the purpose of stopping a genocide. But we didn't do so in Rwanda, under President Clinton.

And we had Kofi Annan here for a forum event last year, 'cause I teach this case in my class. And he said he thought, and sadly, that if the s-, equivalent case arose today, the international community would be unlikely to intervene on humanitarian basis, even for that. So I, I think while it's a real consideration, I don't think it was an, a sufficient consideration.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Well, why not? I mean, it's one thing to say that it doesn't happen. It's another thing to say that it ought not to happen.

GRAHAM ALLISON: Well, from the point of view of American national security, which is where I start — uh, and where I, [it] may be where I stop — uh, but I would say that the, uh, the U.S. is interested in building a global community that respects human rights; and that is democratizing; and that is therefore creating a more peaceful and more prosperous world, in which the U.S. can live and thrive. So that's the big picture.

Now, in that effort, can the U.S., essentially alone, or the U.S. and the Brits alone, become the, uh, arbiters, uh, of international, uh, or sorry, of, of, of, of the world? Or not just policemen, but basically, uh, the nannies and policemen? Uh, and I would say that that, that, that the proposal to do that, or an effort to do that, is likely, first, to be hugely expensive, in terms of lives and treasure, and, and

focus and energy. And there's lots of other problems that are competing that have to be addressed, like North Korea and Iran, while we focus on Iraq.

But secondly, that the world's not likely to take well to such an undertaking, anyhow, because it didn't elect us to be the moral arbiters of, uh, the universe. And as a consequence, the f-, the backlash from that, or the blowback from that, is likely to be very large.

And I would say another big negative that therefore comes out of the Iraqi venture, especially given that the way, the way that we end up having to do it — that is, without a UN cover or authorization — has made more credible the story that bin Laden tries to tell, which is that this is Americans coming to seize Arab lands or Arab oil. Uh, and since he had warned, for a long period of time, that that was what the U.S. was about, that, uh, narrative, uh, is validated in the minds of large numbers of people in the, in the Arab and Muslim community, by the actions and the way that we took 'em. Whereas if we had ended up with some version of, uh, a U-, a NATO cover, or NATO authorization for Bosnia, initially that was responded to very badly, as well. But because it was a very limited task, and because a limited exercise of American military power was able to get to a successful conclusion, and because you had this big magnet of Europe that was also part of the same story; you're able now to see a, a [stale stay] that's a, very, very much a work in progress. But an evolution, in the Bos-, in the Balkan situation, that I don't think there's any, any counterpart, other than the, uh, in the Iraq story.

CHARLES FERGUSON: And turn now to the WMD question, in Iraq and in general, and with regard to terrorist risks. First of all, ex ante; before the Iraqi war; everybody seemed to think that Saddam did in fact possess WMD.

GRAHAM ALLISON: At least chemical and biological weapons.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Yes. And most people also seemed to think that he had a nuclear weapons program, although nobody thought that he had yet developed a weapon. Were you surprised, along with everybody else, when it turned out that he didn't have any of things?

GRAHAM ALLISON: Well, let me address that, uh, very clear-, s-, specifically first. Because the intelligence communities — all of them — uh, had said so conclusively that he had chemical and biological weapons, it had been accepted as a well-known fact that he had chemical and biological weapons. And when I read intelligence when I was in the government, or when I listened to the discussion in the runup to the war with, uh, with Iraq, I thought there could be no question about the fact that he had chemical and biological weapons. But President Clinton had the same view, as did pre-, as did President Bush. So I do not fault President Bush for believing the intelligence that said he had chemical and biological weapons.

Now that we have seen the 9-11 commission report, and we've gone through this history, we have all, I think, rightly discounted the intelligence reports that we got previously, which had a credibility that they didn't deserve.

And I would say, for the people who worked on the problem — it was never one of my issues, so I didn't work on it — they should have pushed harder on, to, to under-, uncover the basis on which these conclusions were reached. I think the 9-11 commission report and the WMD commission report both are very helpful, as one sees that actually, this was coming from a deduction rather than an induction. So they said, he had these weapons before, because he used 'em — no question. He's been unable to account for what he did with the weapons. And he won't account for them. So we conclude he must have weapons.

Now that's a, that's a reasonable conclusion. But any case, that's a deduction, I [would] say. And if you told me that was your conclusion, I would say, well, okay, so probably that's right, but I don't feel so comfortable. If you simply tell me, absolutely he has chemical and biological weapons, and I know 450 places where there are, which is what the intelligence community said, now I think you probably have a spy who's actually seen these things. And...

GRAHAM ALLISON: Okay. On the WMD, I'd say first, uh, I believed that Saddam had chemical and biological weapons, and so did the whole national security establishment, on the basis of intelligence reports that were unanimous — American, Russian, Israeli, British, French — so it was not

any disagreement about that. How all these people came to have this view as a matter of conventional wisdom is an interesting story in itself, and [UI] to some extent, in the WMD commission.

The p-, uh, conclusion was reached by deduction, in which from the fact that Saddam had had chemical and biol-, biological weapons, which he had used, and he had been unwilling to give an account of what happened to the stockpiles of these weapons, it was deduced that he must have some weapons. That was a plausible deduction. It turned out to be wrong.

Uh, the reports that were given by the intelligence community included so much precision — like, we know where the, 450 places where these weapons are — that most people reading the reports would have concluded — I think President Bush may well have done; I certainly did — that the intelligence community had seen such weapons. If people had pushed on those estimates, which they should have done, they would have been able to distinguish between, okay, we simply are not able to account for weapons that he previously had. And on that basis, believe that he has weapons. As against the alternative, which is, people have actually seen, seen such weapons.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Why do you think the U.S. and, as you correctly point out, the world intelligence community made such a huge error?

GRAHAM ALLISON: I think that, uh, it's the reason why the 9-11 commission and the WMD commission are so scathing about the intelligence community. And I think what had to happen was that since it had been a hundred percent that he had chemical and biological weapons, which were used — so there's no controversy about that fact; and that he had built up a stockpile of such weapons — they, that just came to be a well-known fact. He then, uh, w-, th-, with the sets of di-, diff-, successive sets of inspectors eliminated some of those weapons, but was unwilling to eliminate the rest. And I think people just, in the intelligence community and elsewhere, eh, somethin' became a well-known fact. And maybe nobody went back to look at it, uh, more carefully. Certainly after this event, anybody reading intelligence reports, or hearing, you know, leaks of intelligence reports, should exercise a great deal more skepticism.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Now the WMD question with regard to terrorists. You said earlier that you thought that there was a real risk that Al Qaeda and/or other groups might obtain and would be able to use, and would chose to use, WMD against the United States, including nuclear weapons. Could you expand on that?

GRAHAM ALLISON: Well, I mean, this is the subject of my nuclear terrorism book, so I've been thinking about this for some considerable period of time. So let me do the nuclear piece, and then maybe we do the others.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Okay.

GRAHAM ALLISON: Okay, so nuclear weapons. Uh, we don't have any doubt that Osama bin Laden killed 3,000 people. And that that he regarded as, uh, a successful attack. And indeed, if you look at his, uh, his video, as he discusses it, it's very clear that he would have been happier if 300,000 people had died, rather than 3,000. So mega-killing of Americans, he thinks is a good thing.

Secondly, he even has explained his objective; to, quote, kill 4 million Americans, including 2 million children. And I describe this at some length in the, uh, in the introduction to this nuclear terrorism book. He th-, uh, d-, several, uh, maybe two, two and a half months after the 9-11 attack, up on the Al Qaeda Web site, came this very interesting letter, in which, uh, his spokesman explains that the goal is to kill 4 million Americans, including 2 million children, in order to balance the scales of justice, [through] his eyes, for the Muslims who have been killed by what he calls the Jewish Christian Crusaders; by whom he means Israel and the U.S. And he goes through, then, a set of battles and incidents — some Israeli, some American — like the sanctions against Iraq, or Somalia — and calculates the body count, from his point of view: how many people we killed, or how many people the Israelis killed. And he totes it up, and says, that's 4 million. [Well], I believe he's serious about the 4 million.

He even then, as, uh, Mike [Schillier], who was the CIA agent who was the head of the bin Laden desk, uh, has noted, uh, bin Laden [UI] went further in, uh, '93, and '94, to get a fatwa from a leading cleric, uh, declaring that under, uh, Islamic law, the killing of up to 10 million Americans would

be justified for the crimes that had been committed against, uh, Muslims, under some version of an eye for an eye, or, you know, tooth for a tooth equivalent in, uh, in Muslim, uh, uh, uh, ethic, uh.

So I would say first, here's the person who has a understandable reason, or, eh, from his point of view, as he [has explains] it. A motivation to kill at the mega level. That's first.

Secondly, he's troub-, he, he's, he's challenged the Al Qaeda community to trump 9-11. So 9-11 sets the bar. That's 3,000. And, and Al Qaeda's MO is a combination of megadeaths and spectaculars. So if you ask, what's at the top of that list, well, what, what gets over the bar of 3,000, with 9-11? Videoed, with airplanes crashing into buildings? Not much. And above the bar, the top of the list, would be a mushroom cloud enveloping an American city. I describe in the book, uh, this dragon fire incident, in which a month after 9-11, the U.S. believed, for, for a few days, on the basis of an I-, of an intelligence agent's report, that Al Qaeda had actually got a nuclear weapon, and had brought it to New York City, and was about to explode it. And that was the occasion when Cheney evacuated Washington, because it was thought, usually they do twos. So there was probably somethin' else, not just New York. The [nest] teams were sent; these nuclear experts; to New York, to look for any signs of radioactivity. It turned out to be a false alarm. But when the U.S. government went through this hypothetical, there was no basis for dismissing an intelligence report that there was a weapon, a live weapon, that could be used in New York City.

Actually in the book, I go through this, this, uh, uh, sort of interrogatory that occurred between Tenet and uh, and President Bush, uh, when this intelligence report became available. And question, uh, did the former Soviet arsenal include weapons of the description that Al Qaeda had given of the weapon that said was in New York? Answer, yes.

Were all these weapons adequately accounted for?

Answer, uncertain.

Uh, could Al Qaeda have acquired one of these weapons?

Yes.

Could Al Qaeda have brought the weapon to New York, and the U.S. government not otherwise know anything about it?

Answer, yes.

So the bottom line on the basis of which, actually, the U.S. government acted was that there was no basis for dismissing such a report.

So, first [he] got a motivation. Two, there's a potential capability. Now then I look and see, Al Qaeda has been, for more than a decade, out trying to buy a weapon, or material from which they could buy a weapon. The 9-11 commission report identifies three instances in which they were scammed. So they bought some, uh, material from South Africa. It turned out to be the wrong stuff. Actually, the guys that went to visit, the Pakistani nuclear scientist who went to visit, uh, at, at his request, Osama bin Laden, when he was in Afghanistan, said he was fascinated by nuclear weapons, and showed them material that he had got from Uzbekistan. And they explained to him again that he had gotten the wrong stuff.

So the man's searching. He's got money.

Uh, when I go through the logic of the questions, and we got a [who] out there, who's motivated. There's means that are conceivably available. [There's] motive, and there's means. And now, when you get to opportunity, how hard is it to get a weapon into the U.S.? Not harder than all the other illegal things that come into the U.S. every day. As one of my former colleagues likes to tease; if you have any doubt about the ability of a terrorist group to bring a nuclear bomb into the U.S., say to New York, they could always hide it in a bale of marijuana, which we know, you know, comes to American cities. So all the ways...

GRAHAM ALLISON: Yeah, yeah. If we, if we, if this were Sherlock Holmes, he's looking at the case. He would say, uh, MMO: motive, means, opportunity. Now, do we have a clearly motivated, uh, actor, who, uh, by both his description of his motives, and his behavior, would like to explode a nuclear bomb in an American city, or several American cities, if he had an opportunity to? Yes.

Means. Has he been searching for a nuclear bomb or the material from which he could make a bomb? Yes. [This] well documented in the 9-11 commission report. And as I describe in the book, there's a lot of nuclear weapons and materials still in places that are in-, inadequately secured.

Opportunity is, if he got such a bomb, could he bring it to an American city? And I think the answer is unquestionable. Uh, as I, uh, this colleague, uh, [my], uh, former colleague, is now chancellor at UCLA, like to tease. He says, if you have any doubt about the ability of terrorists to bring a nuclear bomb to New York or Los Angeles, they could always hide it in a bale of marijuana, which we know comes to American cities regularly.

So all the ways that illegal things get into our country, which is a huge number of ways, are precisely the same ways that terrorists could take advantage of the opportunity to bring a bomb to a city.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Okay. And what, if any, relationship do you think exists between this kind of risk and what we have done in Iraq?

GRAHAM ALLISON: Well, that's a very good question. I'd say that, uh, the reason why I am most, uh, disturbed by Iraq is that with respect to the agenda that matters most — namely, preventing terrorists bringing nuclear bombs to our cities — Iraq was, at best, a big diversion; and was, at worst, a strategic blunder. Right?

Now, why? What?

Scarce resources, that needed to focus on, first, catching Al Qaeda leaders, including Saddam, and Al Zawahiri...

CHARLES FERGUSON: Sorry.

GRAHAM ALLISON: Yeah.

CHARLES FERGUSON: You said "including Saddam."

GRAHAM ALLISON: I'm sorry. Excuse me. Thank you. Okay. So. Uh, why a, uh, a diversion? But even more likely, a strategic blunder? A whole list of reasons first.

GRAHAM ALLISON: I'm sorry. Yeah, good. So scarce resources, that should have been focused on Osama bin Laden and the rest of the leadership of Al Qaeda, including his number two, Al

Zawahiri, were diverted from Afghanistan, where we had [him] on the run, to Iraq, and the runup to Iraq. And starting in March of 2002. So very, very shortly after 9-11, resources like Arabic speakers; like special forces units; like Predators; like some CIA agents; were moving from Afghanistan, while we were still having, uh, Osama on the run, to get ready for Iraq, and to begin operations in Iraq. So that's number one.

Number two. The high-priced help of the U.S. government was all consumed by Iraq. So the Secretary of State; the Secretary of Defense; the president; the vice president; the national security adviser. As one of my friends there says, Iraq just sucked all the air out of every other thing on the American foreign policy agenda.

So the topic that the president was talking to Putin about was Iraq, not about insecure nuclear weapons in Russia. The topic that the president was talking to Mussaraf, in Pakistan, about was Iraq, not about catching, catching Osama bin Laden, or a-, about the fact that the father of the Pakistani nuclear bomb program was also running a nuclear black market marketing operation. So it just sucked all the air out of other things. So in terms of priorities, this is a misplaced priority. If somethin' matters more, it should get the more attention, not Iraq. That's the second thing.

Thirdly, the, uh...Iraq basically, uh, validated bin Laden's, uh, uh, narrative. Now, strange as it seemed, but bin Laden had been telling people in the region that the Americans were the enemy; that the Americans were gonna attack Arab and Muslim countries; that they were gonna occupy Arab and Muslim countries; and that they were gonna do so for the purposes of stealing their oil. That's his story.

And uh, Osama had no love whatever for Saddam. He thought he was a horrible guy, too. So he was quite happy to see somethin' bad happen to Saddam. And when it turned out that the way that we've done this, and the situation we find ourselves today, he's able to say to quite large numbers of people, you s-, remember the story I told you? I've been on the record about this. Look at the behavior. See how it's similar to that. And now, if you take somethin' like the [Pew poll] on people in the region, and what they think about the U.S., and what, what they think about why we're in Iraq, they believe this, uh, Osama story.

Next. It, it's also been realizing, uh, Osama's vision. Again, if you go back and read what he said before, he, he really was, earlier than Sam Huntington, into this clash of civilizations. He wants Muslims everywhere to see themselves as under assault by the American-led West. And he wants Muslims to feel fearful about that. And he [UI] wants 'em to push back, by joining him in this effort to liberate, I mean ultimate, in the first instance, uh, you know, his lands, especially Saudi Arabia. But then the region. And then he's got this more messianic view about a Muslim caliphate, the so forth and so on.

So now, again, if you look at this recent [Pew] poll, if you ask Muslims in the Muslim community in Nigeria; in Nigeria; do they worry about America's using, Americans using —, military power against Muslims there, they say yes; almost half of 'em. They say, where in the world would they ever conceivably get such an idea? Because this picture of it, as they see.

Uh, and then I would say finally, here we are, uh, well no, not finally; another one. Uh, t-, t-, another of the rationales used for Iraq was that this was going to rid Saddam of nuclear weapons that he might otherwise transfer to terrorists. Now that it's evident that, one, he had no such connections with Al Qaeda; and two, he had no nuclear weapons. And actually, there was not a plausible case for his having nuclear weapons, or even a very well-developed nuclear weapons program, before we attacked him. When the IAEA inspectors offered their view of the status of the nuclear activities in Iran, I mean, in I-, in Iraq, Mohammed [Al Berday] said, there's almost no activities there. We've not been able to find anything, any evidence of any ongoing programs. So I think their, their conclusions were very close to where we actually came out in the end.

So overall, I would say, if the main problem were preventing terrorists bringing a nuclear bomb to American cities, Iraq has been a, it's been a strategic, uh, black hole.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Hm. Okay. And what do you think the consequences of our adventure in Iraq have been for the Mideast region?

GRAHAM ALLISON: Well, that's an interesting one. Uh, when the, the, at this point, the answer is very uncertain. Because, on the one hand, it's made, uh, everybody very nervous. Uh, and mostly, it depends on how things turn out.

Uh, I think that, uh, what [we've end up] doing, and the way we've done it, is, uh, in the best of cases, gonna bring to power a Shiite-dominated government after the elections. Uh, in the region, this is called a Shiite moment, moment. Uh, in general, this region has been dominated by Sunnis. And Sunnis dominate politics in the area, including in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, elsewhere. So the idea of a Shiite, uh, Muslim, uh, dominated government, while quite attractive to Iran, since it's a Shiite Muslim country, is very nervous for the rest of the, uh, of the area.

Uh, in addition, the fact that we've come there, and are proposing to have this transition, and to build democracy, as President, as President Bush says, uh, out of the barrel of a gun, makes everybody very nervous, and very skeptical. And they mostly think this is a, is a, uh, is a, is a canard; that we must have some real reason, like getting the oil, or somethin', you know, much more specific.

So I would say we've managed to shake up the chess board; to make everybody nervous. Um, some of them, uh, presumably seeing us in a fix, uh, or sort of stuck in a, in a, in a, in a quicksand, or, or quagmire, think, well, okay; I guess this will teach the Americans a lesson. Some thinking, oh my god, the aftermath is gonna be even worse. Most of 'em just, just very, very worried. And I think both in the populations and in the governments, most of the governments being lousy governments, that are, have only very limited legitimacy, there's just mostly, uh, concern.

Actually, of the, of the parties, if you said, which, which of the, which of the governments, in terms of its interests, has been best served by what's gone on to date, it would have to be Iran.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Indeed. A point that others have made. As I'm sure you know, a number of your colleagues here at the Kennedy School, including, for example, Ash Carter, were in favor of the war. Did you talk with Ash Carter about his arguments in favor of the war?

GRAHAM ALLISON: Eh, the, the war was greatly debated here at Harvard, as you can imagine, in the period, in the runup to the war. And uh...there were arguments on both sides, as, as usual. Uh, I think we had, uh, I don't know; here at the Belfour Center at least, uh, four or five, you know, director sessions debating this. Deutsch was the most skeptical. Uh, uh, because he, I think, had some knowledge of, uh, Iraq and of, uh, the problem of what do you do after you own it? Uh...

CHARLES FERGUSON: Because he'd been director of the CIA, or?

GRAHAM ALLISON: I think, I think because [of], one, he was director of CIA. He had, you know, at least looked into the issue. So we had, I sponsored a debate between Deutsch and Bill Crystal, uh, in the forum, which you can actually get the digital, uh, version of, and which you'll see the arguments on both sides. And John was, I think, early on to the question; what, how do you deal with it once you own it? [I mean], that was his, his main objection. He never thought it was gonna be a difficult thing to do militarily. Nobody here did. Okay?

Uh, the people who were in favor of it were either persuaded by the argument that, uh, while there were enough bad things about Saddam that maybe that was enough to do something. There was a group that was in favor for humanitarian, or signi-, significantly impacted by the, the, uh the argument in terms of a humanitarian intervention, like Michael [Ignatieff], I thought, uh, made a very eloquent and, and uh, and principled case, uh, on, for the positive.

I was very nervous about it, first because I thought that we had higher priorities. 'Cause I'd been pretty much focused on likelihoods of nuclear bombs going off in American cities. And the various routes in which that would, could occur. He was on the list, but somewhere down towards a dozen. I mean, at the, you know, not number 12 or 13 or 14; nowhere no, close to 1, 2, or 3.

And in the, the second thing was, as I think the CIA estimate, uh, also, uh, confirmed, when they did the NIE, just before the war, that if you were worried about Saddam's using chemical or biological weapons, or transferring 'em to terrorists, the most likely scenario in which that would occur was the one in which you were attacking him in order to kill him. And so I thought that if he had chemical or biological weapons, particularly smallpox, that I could see no reason why he wasn't gonna release smallpox in the U.S., in the runup to this war, or at the outset of this war.

And the U.S. government was enough concerned, both about smallpox and anthrax, that the forces who were gonna operate in the region were vaccinated for both anthrax and smallpox. But here in the U.S., there was no such equivalent effort. It was begun, and then it became too complicated, and so people said, well, let's don't do this. But if you were, if Saddam were the person whom President Bush

described, and if he had the weapons that President Bush said that he had, which were the reasons why we needed to take him out, why would he not, when we're in the process of toppling him and probably killing him; killing his two sons and putting him on trial, in which, at the end of which he'll be certainly humiliated and you know, jailed forever, and maybe, uh, and maybe killed; why would he not, in desperation, do whatever he could against us?

So that was a scenario for the worst case for us. And I thought we should, that actually, in national security terms, to undertake such a provocation, or, or uh, uh, without having us adequately defended, was very, very dangerous. So that's where I, where my mind was. I wrote a piece on this, a *Washington Post* op ed, that basically laid out that argument, that said, until the president could say to the pu-, public that we're adequately defended against what CIA says Saddam would be likely to do if we do what he's proposing to do, he should delay. Uh.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Okay. And back for a moment to the nuclear terrorism question. The risk of such an attack obviously depends heavily on the availability of nuclear weapons to terrorists. Tell us a bit about that.

GRAHAM ALLISON: Well, how could a, somebody like Osama bin Laden get a nuclear bomb? Well, there's a piece of good news, and then there's a number of pieces of bad news.

The good news is, making the -, fissile material from which a nuclear bomb could be constructed is too hard for a terrorist group. You can't, it doesn't occur in nature; comes in only two brands — highly enriched uranium and plutonium — neither of which you can make in your bathtub or in your back-, backyard or in your basement.

Making fissile material requires a multibillion-dollar, multi-year investment in a substantial facility. So only governments are gonna do that.

Now, governments can do that. Pakistan, they did so in about a decade. But [it was] a big undertaking. Iran has been working on this problem now for 18 years. They're just getting towards the finish line. So s-, states can do it, with a big undertaking. That the first point. That's good news. So he can't make it. So he's gotta either get a nuclear bomb that somebody, some state, made. Or get the

fissile material that some state made, in order to make a elementary nuclear bomb, constructed from a hundred pounds of highly enriched uranium.

Now, where would you get a bomb or such material? The most likely place is Russia; not because Russia wants to lose any, but because that's where the highest concentration of weapons and materials are that still remain vulnerable to theft. There are still about 16,000 nuclear warheads in Russia, about. And there are about 60,000 lumps of highly enriched uranium or plutonium from which bombs could be made. And according to the U.S.-Russian Cooperative Threat Reduction Program, about half of that is at this point adequately secured. So that's the first place.

Secondly, Pakistan. There we know that the father of the Pakistani nuclear bomb program was simultaneously running a nuclear black marketeering operation. So to Libya, he had sold a nuclear warhead design; from China, a good, good bomb design. Nuclear starter fuel, uranium hexafluoride, from North Korea. Centrifuge technology from his own facilities, which is the machinery that takes uranium hexafluoride and makes highly enriched uranium. And nuclear consulting services.

Now, to whom else was he making sales? Well, he visited Iran quite frequently. He visited North Korea frequently. He visited Saudi Arabia. So I'd worry about, uh, uh, Pakistan.

GRAHAM ALLISON: Further reason to worry about Pakistan is that within the ISI, their intelligence services, and the military, were a number of people who were very close to Al Qaeda. F-, very sympathetic to Al Qaeda. So even after Musharraf switched to become our ally in the war on terrorism, you can't change people's minds by simply the boss, you know, shifting. So in terms of sympathies, you could imagine, within the structures that control the Pakistani nuclear weapons and materials, someone deciding that for ideological purposes — not just pecuniary — that they would provide a weapon or material. So I'd say Pakistan is another source.

Then you have, uh, the material from which bombs can be made, that can be found at risky research reactors in about 20 developing and transitional countries. These are research reactors that operate on highly enriched uranium, some of which were provided by the Soviet Union back in the old Cold War days; some of which [have] actually were provided by the U.S.

So in places like Belarus — uh, certainly not a place where you would like to have weapon material from which a bomb could be made — or Uzbekistan, or Syria, or Ghana, or South Africa, you can find research reactors that still have enough, uh, highly enriched uranium from which a terrorist could make a bomb. So I [would] say that's another quite dangerous.

And then, if we come even closer to home here: within the U.S., while I think our, the record of the U.S. government with respect to nuclear weapons and materials has been excellent, uh, you still have research reactors at some universities, that operate on highly enriched uranium. And the material there often inadequately secured.

So I would say, unfortunately, there are about 20 potential sources of b-, bombs or materials from which terrorists could make a bomb.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Okay. Was there any evidence that Saddam had ever thought about using WMD against the United States?

GRAHAM ALLISON: Well, I've never investigated this issue myself. But in the reports that have been done, uh, both the 9-11 Commission report and the Dufler [SIC] report, I don't think I've seen any evidence of, uh, Saddam's intention to use chemical or biological or, if he would ever to have nuclear weapons, against the U.S. And I think he would rightly have calculated that if, as a government, he were to attack us with weapons of mass destruction, he would be thereby sealing his own, and his regime's, uh, death certificate. So h-, h-, there's no reason to think he was not at least as deterrable as any other state that might consider attacking us with...

CHARLES FERGUSON: Uh...

GRAHAM ALLISON: ...weapons of mass destruction.

CHARLES FERGUSON: So you regard him as having been deterrable and rational. You know, when people discuss this question, they point to things such as his destroying the Kuwaiti oil fields in '91, when he was retreating, even though we had warned him not to do that; attempted to assassinate President Bush; etcetera.

GRAHAM ALLISON: Well, he did-, he, he, he was known as a risk-taker. Uh, and he had taken some risks. And uh, so I think that was a characteristic. Uh, he had made some bad calculations, and he, uh, you know, but what, what governments don't end up, you know, making some, some bad calculations? But in terms of his dealings with the U.S., he had been very careful, I think.

Uh, he, he imagined, uh, that he could obs-, he could invade and hold Kuwait with, uh, without our response. Well, if you looked, actually, at the deliberations within our government, you know, even Mrs. Thatcher thought we might not respond adequately. So it wasn't completely a, a, you know, out of the, out of the picture.

Uh, so I would say, overall, uh, he woulda had no reason to imagine that if he attacked us, that we would[n't] respond with overwhelming force. And actually, he knew he was in the crosshairs, given the sanctions and the sanction regimes, and all of the activities, [I mean we], at the time that we invaded him, we were f-, overflying about two-thirds of his country. And bombin' him ev-, you know, three or four days a week, whenever we saw anything we didn't like.

So the idea that we were not there, watching; you know, capable; powerful; uh, I think didn't, didn't make sense.

Now the more complicated case is, okay, well, could he have transferred weapons to te-, weapons of mass destruction to terrorists? If one looks at his behavior historically, he had been very cautious. So he had terrorist groups that did, that conducted actions against Iraqis from time to time. But he had been very careful with respect to us, I think.

So I, I didn't see, in that pattern of behavior, anybody that looked all that much more dangerous — I mean, he was dangerous; he's a bad hombre — but more dangerous than Iran? Excuse me. The Iranians have killed a whole bunch of Americans. Uh, [Cobart Tower]; the Marines in the, in Lebanon. Uh, so, and, and at the time we were making a decision, or the president made the decision to go to war with Iraq, we knew for sure that Al Qaeda, and Osama bin Laden, had conducted a half-dozen major attacks on us, the most recent of which had killed 3,000 people. So it's not like if we had energy to go

focus on somebody that was wishing us ill, that we didn't have some higher priority candidates, in my view; at the top of that list being Al Qaeda.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Okay. I think I'm just about done. Is there anything else that you want to say; anything you think I've missed; anything you'd like to talk about?

GRAHAM ALLISON: No, I think, uh, on the picture, you, I think you've done a good job.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Okay.

GRAHAM ALLISON: Good.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Well so have you.

GRAHAM ALLISON: Okay. Thank you.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Thanks. Very much.