

TRANSCRIPT

## Defense Writers Group

A Project of the Center for Media & Security  
New York and Washington, D.C.

---

Honorable Gordon Gray  
Deputy Asst. Secretary of State, Near Eastern Affairs  
April 4, 2006

THIS IS A RUSH TRANSCRIPT AND MAY CONTAIN ERRORS. USERS ARE ADVISED TO CONSULT THEIR OWN TAPES OR NOTES OF THE SESSION IF ABSOLUTE VERIFICATION OF WORDING IS NEEDED.

Q: All right, let's get started. Welcome to Mr. Gordon Gray. He's the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs. On the record. Welcome, good to have you.

A: Good morning everyone it was nice meeting you all. I don't promise, as a matter of fact I promise I won't remember all your names. But I'm Deputy Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs; my responsibilities are North Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, and Iran. I've been in the job since the end of July and I was in Cairo for three years before that.

Q: Last week you were in Turkey. A trip over there discussing various things including Iran and I wonder if you could fill us in a little bit on what your expectation is, what you would like to get from Turkey in the way of policy towards Iran? How did it go? Was it positive? Where are you going with them?

A: One of the reasons I went over is that the relatively new ambassador, US Ambassador in Ankara, Ross Wilson, wants to expand the dialogue that we have with the Turks on foreign policy issues and I think particularly on Near Eastern issues and very specifically on Iran. The previous, I was there at the end of March but the previous month, the end of February Ambassador Schulte, a representative to the [UNV] in Vienna was there for similar consultations on Iran and part of the reason I was there was what I would call good diplomatic practice, making sure that we're consulting with our friends and allies. Part of it was to hear what their concerns are.

I would say, and obviously I don't speak for the Turkish government, but two of the big concerns I heard neither of which were particularly surprising but both of which are worth bearing in mind. One was concern about the future of Iraq and you the Kurdish problem in general and

transferring this concern to Iran as well. And then the second concern was whether there was going to be, whether the United States plans to go to war with Iran and particularly after the invasion of Iraq that's for them, being a neighbor of course, is an issue of particular concern.

Q: And what did you tell them? [Laughter].

A: Well I told them two things. I told them as far as the Kurdish issue in general we have a clear policy regarding the territorial integrity of Iraq. We have a clear policy regarding the territorial integrity of Iran and we have also a clear policy of working with Turkey very cooperatively on trying to combat the terrorist threat including the threat from the PKK which in 1997 we designated as a foreign terrorist organization.

As far as the question you really wanted to ask which was the military question, I told them what our senior leadership has said on the record which is that the President rightly never takes any options off the table but I think our track record was pretty clear on, I think it's very clear as a matter of fact, on how we want to proceed and we've followed a diplomatic track very assiduously.

At many points in the road people said, people were skeptical about whether it would work, some people perhaps were skeptical about our commitment but I think we've seen a very, the United States has been very solidly supportive of the EU Free effort and we've been very supportive of trying to work this issue through the IAEA and it's at the Security Council.

Now when I was in Turkey that was before we succeeded in the getting the Presidential Statement, I said we were committed to getting a Presidential Statement and I'm glad that the rest of the P5 didn't make me a liar, and we remain committed to this path.

Q: You mentioned about Iran, Iran is having the war games out on the streets. They claim to have fired a bunch of new fangled weapons, a very fast torpedo, a radar evading missile and a flying boat. Do you have a read yet of whether these really happened and how concerned are you now about oil shipping in Strait of Hormuz?

A: They did have the exercises, the naval exercises that you mentioned. We are concerned about you know the timing of this, why Iran is having these. It is my understanding is these are not regularly scheduled naval exercises but to answer your question I'm not aware that it's got any impact as far as shipping in the Gulf goes.

Q: Are they being accurate about their new weapons? Do you have a read as to whether or not these new weapons do exist?

A: Well I've seen one description of the, Iranian State Television called it something like a, some rather unprofessional description, super-modern high speed boat or something like that. The article I saw I think it was the British Defense Ministry in answer to a question said it was not a

hydrofoil but didn't give any other information. I don't have any....

Q: Super-modern....

A: Super-modern flying boat, yes.

Q: So US intelligence hasn't verified this? That's what I'm asking.

A: I don't talk about intelligence matters on the record.

Q: But are there any unclassified verifications that this took place other than news reports?

A: Yes it took place but I'm not going to go into any intelligence.

Q: The war games or the firing of these weapons, the test firing of these weapons?

A: The war games took place. On the record I'm prepared to say we've seen the press reports that weapons were fired.

Q: I'd like to ask about the impact of Iraq on the region that you are responsible for. There is a school of thought that's emerged that says the Iraq serves as the new Afghanistan for a new generation of Jihadis. In that Afghanistan is the place where bin Laden got his start, it is the place where people got blooded, where their ideology was crystallized, where they networked, where they trained, and the same thing appears to be happening in Iraq now. It's a place where this new generation of Jihadis is networking, they're training, they're getting military experience, they're building up their ideology and the question is have you started seeing an outflow of veterans of the Iraq insurgency taking this training, taking their ideology and their commitment to other parts of the Middle East where they want to start the Jihad there, in particular the Arab Peninsula.

And if you could talk about that and the concern that US officials have expressed at least right now in private about the impact on places in particular like Jordan, Saudi Arabia, countries that surround Iraq.

A: I think you raise a potentially intellectually valid area of potential concern. In kind of doing a quick mental survey around the area I would say that Jordan is the only place that comes to mind, and I'm thinking of the hotel bombings. I think they were November 9, last year.

Q: What about the attack on the main oil refinery that's loading in Saudi Arabia?

A: Right that would be difficult for me to attribute to Iraq because there were certainly terrorist incidents in Saudi Arabia predating the intervention in Iraq. So I'd be reluctant to attribute it to that but I think you can, one can attribute the November 9 bombings to people coming from Iraq.

And it's obviously something that we're working on trying to secure the borders with Iraq's neighbors so that we don't have terrorists or Jihadists as you put it going in much less coming out.

Q: But have you seen, first of all you talk about you've seen the one incident which was in Oman at the hotel but I'm asking about potential. Could that kind of thing be seen in greater number and have you seen any attempt, any evidence of an outflow of Jihadists taking their knowledge from Iraq and going to other parts of the region?

A: Not yet, no. But I agree with you, the possibility exists but apart from the incident in November I can't say, I can agree with you intellectually that it's a potential problem but I can't, apart from the incident in Oman I can't site an example where it's happened.

Q: Is this something that the Turks expressed concern about? Is this something that other governments in the region are expressing concern to the United States government about?

A: They haven't in meetings with me, no.

Q: Can we ask about Jill Carroll? The Monitor is now saying there was a [inaudible] from the US government.

A: It was extensive.

Q: [Inaudible]. They changed their tune that she was safe. Can you tell us as specifically as you could what the US government did to get her liberated?

A: No I can't because one of my colleagues in the A Front office follows Iraq and I just don't know.

Q: I know you were in the Gulf. We were just talking about Iraq. But I thought it would be fair to ask you about it.

A: It's certainly a fair question. I'm not saying it's not a fair question it's just I don't know and I can't give an answer.

Q: We'll come back.

Q: Let's go back to our policy toward Iran. [Kent Hunts Wood] said the other day that they are often critical of US policy he didn't expect the US would be attacking, going to war with Iran, but his concern that the US might bomb installations, might take some military action. I don't think I've ever heard the US government say that it plans [inaudible], if everything's on the table. That's a throw-away line, but I haven't heard the US say they had no attention of taking any military action against Iran. Is that foreclosed?

A: I'm not going to parse the Secretary's words beyond what she said most recently or at least most recently that I saw when she was in the UK with her British counterpart which is that, the quotation I saw attributed to her, which I think pretty well sums it up or very well sums up where we are is that the military option is that, it's an option but it's not on the agenda.

Q: President Bush said I believe in two speeches, one I heard of that Iran was exporting ID technology to Iraq, and then Peter Pace was asked point blank if he had any evidence that the government was directly involved in doing that, he just said flatly no. What evidence do you have?

A: I think the British have also, Prime Minister Blair in particular I think it was in middle or end of December spoke to this issue that, and I think what you're referring to is especially engineered improvised explosive devices which are appearing in Iraq but are particularly in the south of Iraq since that's where the preponderance of the British forces are, that's why they're particularly concerned, and it's either Iran or it's surrogates are providing that, providing those in Iraq, and you know it's obviously a source of concern because it's killing coalition troops.

Q: So are you saying that Iran or its surrogates, so Tehran, the government of Tehran itself is providing this technology for surrogates?

A: It's either doing it directly or through surrogates, yes.

Q: Okay is that it?

Q: That's it.

Q: Yes, my question is about Russia and China making concessions against sanctions in the Security Council Statement. Do you believe that that hindered the legitimacy of the actual statement in the eyes of the Iranian government and do you further plan any kind of further negotiations with Russia and China to open up the possibility of sanctions?

A: Well to answer to the first part of your question I think that as I was saying before as we look at the pace of our diplomacy, originally it was the United States supporting the EU3 effort. Then we went to the Board of Governors, we got a 27-3 vote and I think what was important about the vote was that it was not just the EU3 and the United States, it wasn't just the West and the United States. We had countries as different as Brazil, Egypt, Yemen, India and of course Russia and China voting to refer this matter to the Security Council.

We now have Presidential Statement which is a consensus document so its got the support of all 15 members of the Security Council and you know as well as I do the disparate geographic composition of the Security Council, so I don't think it detracts in any way from the legitimacy of it. I think it's a triumph and I think Secretary Rice deserves a great deal of the credit for being

able to get different perspectives and produce a document that everyone agreed upon.

As far as whether you know what the next steps in the Council will be and whether Russia and China will support sanctions, that's to be seen but I think the Secretary was just in Berlin for a meeting with the P5 plus Germany and those talks with parts thereof will continue and hopefully they'll be successful.

Q: This is a mechanical question that's so simpleminded it's going to sound tricky and it isn't.

A: Uh oh you're setting me up to not know the answer.

Q: Maybe so. The State has to divvy up the world somehow and when you divvy it geographically there is always the problem which you have a boundary, you know somebody [inaudible] here and somebody else [inaudible] over here, but you know there's that getting out of the stovepipe route. I'm just curious because Iran is your parish and it is adjacent to or close to a couple of countries and another bureau of keen interest has.

At the working level, the DAS level and below in Washington and then out in the field, can you talk a little bit about how you know how do you keep better visibility between where your bureau stops, but there are things--Just talk a little bit about how that works.

A: Sure.

Q: Bear in mind that most of us live with the Pentagon. Barry's the exception, he knows State, but most of us don't. Talk a little bit about that.

A: Well I think I wouldn't call it stovepiping because you can't have an Assistant Secretary that's responsible for the whole world, and you know where do you draw the line? The lines have to be drawn. That makes it incumbent on the rest of us to make sure that we're not just focusing on, you know if I'm in Near East bureau or NEA, not just focusing on NEA and particularly with Iran there's obviously interplay with Turkey, there's obviously interplay with Afghanistan.

I think my trip to Turkey though was an example of the European Bureau saying well we've got a problem, or we've got an issue not a problem, that doesn't just end at our geographic responsibility. Let's see if we can get people from outside of the European Bureau, and I'd put Ambassador Schulte in that because he reports to the International Organizations Bureau.

Similarly with Afghanistan we've got a good back and forth with--

Q: Is it routinized in any way, the trip to Turkey obviously was obviously an event. Is this sort of cross-line contact routinized in any respect either here in Washington or out in the field?

A: It's, I don't know how you'd say routinized. When we have meetings to discuss issues we, you

know, invariably call in people from different offices I'd say it's not just routinized in a geographic sense, in other words reaching out. But also functionally because we've got, if you look at Iran there's obviously, there's rightly big focus on the nuclear issue but that shouldn't obscure the fact that we've got a lot of other concerns and we've talked about the concerns with Iraq but we've also got concerns with terrorism, we also have concerns about their human rights record at home, so we need to reach out. I mean I hate to tell you, I hate to say, particularly on the record, that holding a meeting is proof of progress or proof of, you know, intellectual openness but that's what we do for a living in some respects and so it's routinized in that sense.

Q: If it comes to a military option against Iran, would a military strike destroy the democratic movement in that country? How do you keep that option on the table and also the policy of promoting democracy?

A: Boy, I don't want to--you know, that's a hypothetical built on a hypothetical. I don't want to go down that road. [Laughter].

Q: Let me ask a question more concrete which is, you know obviously the State Department is trying to promote democracy in Iran and you know there has been a criticism that actually any public efforts to promote democracy undermine the actual democratic movement in the country by making them look disloyal or beholden to the United States. Can you talk a little bit about that?

A: Sure. I think what I would do is perhaps broaden the description of what the US government is trying to do beyond promote democracy and put it more in the sense of promoting civil society. And there are a number of ways in which we're looking to do that. And the Secretary, I guess it was in her February budget testimony, requested the \$75 million supplemental. Roughly two thirds, not roughly, precisely two thirds of that, \$50 million, was a request to expand our broadcasting into Iran so that the Iranian people have the opportunity to learn more about what's going on from the outside world than what they just hear on state controlled, through the state controlled media.

We do have the VOA Farsi service but that's only broadcasting four hours a day, so the idea would be to expand that programming. There is radio Farda which broadcasts and apparently from what we've heard gets through particularly in the south of Iran but we only have one transmitter so it's easily jammed.

So that's \$50 million and that's very much outreach to the Iranian people. We're also looking at expanding our scholarship and exchange programs. But there's also a request for democracy programming in that which is a \$15 million request which is over and above the \$10 million in the '06 budget and we're very mindful of the concern that I think is implicit in your question which is that we don't want to smother an Iranian non-governmental organization with our embrace and a million dollar support for an NGO in many parts of the world goes unnoticed. Obviously it wouldn't in Iran and that's why we're going to have to be very careful in how we

allocate the money so that we don't end up undermining these groups because that's the antithesis of our goal. That undermines civil society groups rather than promoting them.

Q: I had a question about the Iranian President, I'm sorry, don't ask me to ....

A: Ahmadinejad.

Q: A few issues on him.

A: Yes, there are. [Laughter].

Q: Given his election and some of his alarming statements, we know how that has been received in the West but when you're interacting with people in your region are they perceiving him the same way people in the West are, and were some of those statements turning points in helping to get some of these successes with the Board of Governors?

A: It's difficult for me to imagine that the statements he made which were really so outrageous didn't have an effect on European public opinion and on the European governments. I think also his speech at the general assembly in September was people looked at it in contrast to [Khatami's] speech which was eight years before which was much more of, it was a much smoother speech.

There was a lot of, I wasn't working the Iran account then but I remember it was an interesting speech; it gave a lot of people hope that perhaps the Iranian regime was going a different direction then thus far it has. So it's not just, I think it's his entire track record. It's not just his outrageous sound bites as well. It's just he's been confrontational all the way down the road.

Q: In the Near East I mean people in your region I mean do they have the same, are they on the same wave length as people in the West?

A: I don't think that a lot of the comments about Israel and denial of the Holocaust have resonated in the Near East the way they've resonated in Western Europe, certainly not at the popular level.

Q: Forgive me if I've been following this particular issue, but was he one of the hostage takers?

A: We don't, when we reviewed the evidence in connection with his visa application to come to the United States to speak to the General Assembly our conclusion was that there was evidence that he may have been a terrorist and therefore we gave him a waiver but there were claims by former hostages that he was a hostage taker and we're not going to dispute those claims. They were there.

Q: I'm interested in your current thoughts on the stability of Saudi Arabia. It was just a couple of

years ago or so that I remember General Abizaid saying that he was more concerned about Saudi Arabia and Pakistan at that point then he was about Iraq. The course of the insurgency of course in Iraq has caused that issue to overwhelm some of the other concerns in the region, but just looking at Saudi Arabia for a moment, what are your thoughts about the stability of the kingdom?

A: Well I would use as a benchmark if I may 2001 to 2002. And the reason I'd like to do that is I was at that time that was my previous Washington assignment I was head of the office of Arabian Peninsula Affairs. It was right after 9/11 and there was a great deal of concern in Washington. And when I say in Washington I mean in the media, in the analytical community, in the think-tank community, academic community, about the viability of the Al-Saud and there were several analysis written suggesting that the Al-Saud would you know, their time was limited and it was limited in number of months rather than number of years. So comparing it four and half years down the road if you will, I'm more sanguine now and I think Washington, all these different elements that I've mentioned are more sanguine, and I think I would attribute that off the top of my head to probably two factors.

I think one is the Saudis and I would say particularly since 9/11, particularly since the May 2003 bombings have taken terrorism much more seriously than they did before. We're seeing excellent cooperation there and a real commitment. So I think that's one reason I see it as more stable.

And I think by definition there was, I don't want to call it instability but perhaps uncertainty in a better word. When you have the situation when Crown Prince Abdullah was the de facto ruler of the country but not the de jure ruler of the country, and with his accession to the throne I think that enhances the stability of the country because the government's better able to act in the manner that it sees fit.

Q: Would your assessment, or how would your assessment change if Iraq were to splinter? I mean what kind of ramifications do you think that would have for Saudi Arabia?

A: Well I think it would, the ramifications would be if, getting back to your question if we saw an outflow from Iraq of terrorists going to Saudi Arabia.

Q: Where would be the most likely place? The Eastern Province around Katif and Hofuf with the Shiites?

A: The most likely place for?

Q: For that kind of inflow of Jihadists from Iraq.

A: That's a good question I think it would, I think to answer that question you would have to look at what the outflow is and I don't know, that's an interesting question. I don't know where, if there's one area in Saudi Arabia where a preponderance of foreign fighters emanate from,

because they'd be most likely to go back to where there's support. That's an interesting question.

Q: There's I guess one school of thought that the Iraq War has empowered Iran politically. I guess I'm curious whether you see that at all and whether the Iranians seem to be exerting greater influence on the political side both in Iraq and within, more broadly within the region.

A: Well I mean they weren't exerting any, I mean when Saddam was there they weren't exerting any, so yes they're exerting more influence; and unfortunately it's not constructive influence. The Secretary said on several occasions that obviously Iran is going to have a relationship with Iraq. What we're asking is that it have a transparent relationship with Iraq.

As far as whether it's acting more boldly in the region than it was before, I would say it's acting in a more, yes it's acting in a more confrontational manner; but it's hard for me to disaggregate that from other factors that are going on such as the Ahmadinejad election, the higher price of oil, it would be difficult to say it's only because of factor A, factor B, or factor C.

Q: Do you think Iraq is having an influence on its bolder actions within the region?

A: Iraq in what?

Q: I guess do think it's playing a, you were saying there were other factors like the price of oil and the election, do you think Iraq is a factor at all?

A: Do I think it's one of those factors? Yes. Yes I do.

Q: And it what, I guess in what way is it driving them, could you make the argument that it's driving them to act more boldly? I get the oil, I get the elections.

A: I think it's giving them an opportunity to exercise influence with a nearby country in a way that it's been shut out of some of the other countries because they've been able to stand up to Iranian pressure through whatever tools, that fact that they have government, things like that.

Q: In relation to that I wonder if, you know, we've heard from the Pentagon that Iranian agents have been active in Iraq. There's been this flow of IED materials. But has Iran played a direct role in the recent sectarian violence? And is it backing any particular Shiite group as a surrogate? And I'm thinking specifically Muqtada al-Sadr?

A: I'm not aware that it's playing a specific attributable role in the sectarian violence. I would defer to my colleagues who work more closely on Iraq on that issue but I'm not aware that they are. And yes they have very close ties to Sadr, there's no question about that.

Q: Well is it, from the Iranian point of view, do they see it in their interest to foment this sectarian violence? Do they have something to gain from the situation?

A: You know that's, I would argue that they have what is in their best interest is a stable Iraq and a peaceful Iraq. I don't see how they benefit from an Iraq where there's violence, where there's no government formed and things like that. But we're not talking about my calculation of what's in Iran's best interests. Your question is about what Iran's calculation is. You'd have to put that question to the Iranian government. I just can't answer it as an Iranian would.

Q: Can you say whether the Iranian sort of power players are monolithic on this or are there different groups within the Iranian regime that may be playing different games?

A: I think that's certainly possible but I don't think that, that doesn't exculpate the Iranian regime's responsibility to act transparently vis-a-vis with all of its neighbors including Iraq.

Q: Could you lay out what those factions are?

A: I'd rather not on the record.

Q: On the third anniversary of the invasion of Iraq a lot of people are focusing on the lessons we've learned from the last three years. President Bush, Secretary Rice have admitted tactical mistakes and the President's speech on Talafar really sort of outlined what the military has learned about counterinsurgency and applying the lessons of the last few years to try to improve their performance.

I'm curious, I mean Iran obviously has a lot of very close parallels to the buildup diplomatically to Iraq. I wonder what lessons you've learned from that buildup that are informing how you're approaching Iran. I mean I think I see signs of it but I'd like to hear you describe it to us.

A: Well the first thing I'd caution is drawing overly close analogies between Iran and Iraq; and again I'd refer to the Secretary's comments in the UK where she specifically said Iran is not Iraq. One of the reasons she gave she cited was that with Iraq there were 12 or 13 years of Security Council resolutions and we're still working on our first Security Council resolution on this issue. So I think I'd caution against going too far.

We have similar concerns, but I wouldn't say that necessarily means that the outcome is going to be the same or that the lessons easily transfer. You know, I defer to our senior policymakers whether the diplomatic track that's being pursued is one that's being pursued because it's, you know, a lesson learned or because that's a promising avenue for success in trying to convince Iran that it needs to abandon its plans for nuclear weaponization.

Q: Let me run three sort of milestones of the debacle that preceded Iraq diplomatically and see if you have, because you clearly have changed your tack on these.

The first Iraq you had the Secretary of State walk out on a limb on intelligence he now has

publicly said, that he was ill served by, and I'm curious how you're handling intelligence in your discussions now with people. Are you as sure, for instance, as you were on Iraq?

Secondly we lost Turkey on Iraq. Clearly you've been to Turkey recently; you're trying to keep them onboard.

Three, we split the Transatlantic Alliance on Iraq, in the first Bush term. There was no concessions to EU3 as far as offering carrots. Now you're offering those carrots so you've managed to keep the Europeans with you on this.

Are those not lessons you've learned from the first one? Can you talk about in those areas what you've; I mean clearly you're not just going at this with a clean slate. We've learned something from this experience haven't we?

A: You're asking me to attribute motivations to senior policymakers who don't share their motivations with me. I mean I think that's a question you need to address to the Secretary or to....

Q: I mean this is your portfolio, can't you share with us I mean can't you share with us what the thinking within the department is? I'm not asking you to presuppose what Secretary Rice would say, but you obviously have a game plan you're working from here as you approach and try to isolate Iran et cetera. It has clear parallels to what happened with Iraq and I'm just trying to ask you what the thinking is now that is different from the thinking three years ago. I mean we must have learned something.

A: Right but the reason I direct your question in a different direction is that I was in Cairo from 2002 to 2005 so I can't, you know, I can't kind of give you this inside baseball on who was thinking æx' about æy' and how they have or have not changed since then.

Q: Look I mean, on those areas that I talked about can you give me the game plan now? I'm not asking you to sort of characterize your predecessors or whatever.

A: Well I think the game plan is clear which is to follow a diplomatic strategy on the nuclear issue that will produce the proper mix of incentives and disincentives for the Iranian regime to change its calculation on whether it really makes sense to follow a nuclear weaponization program. But I think that's only part of the story. I think we're also looking in the long term at ways that we can help the Iranian people and try and build a civil society, try to make their lives a little bit easier. I won't repeat what I said in answer to that question.

Q: Different region. The Defense Department obviously is conducting kind of low end training operations in Africa. I wonder if you could talk a little bit without getting into specific intelligence what are your concerns with some of these groups that operate or are said to operate in Africa, GSBC and those kinds of groups, in terms of what kind of threat that they would be. It kind of dovetails off his question a little bit, or could potentially bring. And are all those

countries up there, Mauritania, Mali, Chad, Niger, Algeria, on board with the war on terrorism?

A: You're going a bit beyond my very limited expertise or even specialization, because I don't deal with most of the countries in Africa. But as far as the North African countries that are in my portfolio--Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya--we've got excellent cooperation with them on counterterrorism and I think the reasons are different for each country, but are still very compelling reasons. In the case of Morocco, of course, the Casablanca bombings in May 2003. Algeria goes without saying I think. Tunisia's very wary even though it's economically more sophisticated, more diverse, you know more middle class things like that. And Libya, I mean I think one of the reasons that they've renounced terrorism is that they realize a real threat to them is economic migrants coming from the south and you know, an intermediate range or short range missile isn't going to defend them against economic migrants who are going through Libya hoping to reach Italy or somewhere else in Europe.

Q: What other kinds of concerns though about some of these groups that have potentially infiltrated now, what is your role as a safe guide in those areas? Do you have to dovetail with what the Defense Department's doing in terms of...

A: One of our concerns is trying to, implicit in your question I think is that this is not just an issue of one country or another it's a regional issue, a multilateral issue. One of the things we're trying to do is foster greater regional cooperation on these issues and that is, I mean to be honest that's complicated by the lack of resolution on the Western Sahara issue. And that's one of these reasons we'd like to see that, one of the many reasons we'd like to see that resolved is so that for Morocco and Algeria in particular but the entire Arab Magrab Union can work more cohesively on some of these issues.

That hasn't hindered bilateral US-Algerian, US-Moroccan, et cetera cooperation, but I think we need to get them talking, working together as well.

Q: In the run-up to the vote on the Presidential Statement at the UN...

A: It's not a vote, it's a consensus document.

Q: The P5 received a briefing from the IAEA on the current state of the Iranian nuclear program and in it the IAEA informed the P5 that the Iranians were much, much closer to starting up and running the centrifuge cascade of 164 [inaudible] machines than anybody had basically thought. This provoked a deepening of concern within the US government at least, that the Iranians were mastering the enrichment process on a far faster time scale than had previously been expected. And again ratcheted up the concern that they're moving in a way that could give them at least enough enriched uranium by 2008-9.

A couple of days later as I was writing that story, Mr. Al-baradi came out publicly and said wait a minute there's no imminent threat and this is not really, we don't see this. And there are echoes

in that going back to James' question about Iraq where you had a very big difference of opinion between the US government and the IAEA.

Can you talk about that concern, whether or not, how serious the US now looks at that timeline and sort of the differences with Mr. Al-baradi that seem to have emerged now over the last couple of weeks?

A: I don't want to, I can't speak about it in great detail for two reasons, one is that I don't pretend to be a technical expert and two is the little I know is derived from intelligence analysis which obviously I can't comment on.

But we can, you know, we can hear from one expert who says it's going to be a threat in æx' months and another expert that says no, it's going to be a threat in æx+2' months or, you know, æx' years or æx+1' years, whatever you want. What I am not hearing whatsoever is anyone disputing Iran's track record. And I mean this is the IAEA, which I think is important.

There's been an 18 year clandestine Iranian program. I haven't heard anyone dispute that. The Iranian's broke the Paris Agreement that they reached with the EU3. I haven't heard anyone dispute that.

So I think the direction is clear and I think the fact, again in answer to the question I had before, when you get a vote of 27-3 at the IAEA Board and you're talking about the vast difference of countries that I mentioned. Those governments are all convinced. And I would note that for example Yemen was on the Security Council in 1990. It's one of the two countries that did not support the Use of Force Resolution following the invasion of Kuwait, so I would say perhaps, and it's the same precedent now as it was then. If it convinces the Yemeni government that's a pretty high standard proof in my book.

A: Never the less there still appears to be a major difference over the exact nature of the threat given the fact that the Russians and the Chinese didn't seem to be in any way rushed to conclude a Presidential Statement. It took them three weeks to do what the United States expected, and Secretary Rice said it should take only 24 hours I believe is what she said.

And now you've got Mr. Al-baradi saying wait a minute there's no imminent threat either. I mean how serious are those differences?

A: I'll defer to you to ask Mr. Al-baradi how he defines imminent threat, I haven't heard anyone in the United States government say if there's not a resolution by the end of this month, on December 31st, Iran is going to have a nuclear weapon and they're going to have the capability to deliver it to, you know, fill in the blank.

So if imminent threat means by the end of the year I don't see what the difference of opinion is. I think what's of concern is that we've got a very strong track record on this issue by Iran, we also

have a very strong track record of Iran pursuing a very confrontational foreign policy, and this is not something that happened last year or last administration or whatever. I mean we all know their involvement with terrorist activity and Lebanon and Argentina and Saudi Arabia etc., etc., etc.

Q: Okay. We're out of time.

A: Thanks very much.

Q: Thank you, appreciate you coming in.

A: I enjoyed it, thanks a lot.

END TEXT