

Center for Strategic and International Studies

Global Security Forum 2014: Iraq in the Balance

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Date: Wednesday, November 12, 2014

*Transcript by
Federal News Service
Washington, D.C.*

ALTERMAN: I'm Jon Alterman, a senior vice president here at CSIS, the Brzezinski Chair in Global Security and Geostrategy, and the Director of the Middle East Program. We've assembled an all-star panel for you today. In fact, we have seven stars, since General Cartwright earned four and Vice Admiral Harward earned three. On your left, we have General James Cartwright, the Harold Brown Chair in Defense Policy Studies at CSIS. Before joining CSIS, General Cartwright had a distinguished career of almost 40 years in the Marines, where he started as an aviator and rose to senior levels as a strategist. He served as the commander of the U.S. Strategic Command, and as the vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the nation's second-ranking military officer. And here and, to my left, your right, Vice Admiral Bob Harward. He's currently the chief executive of Lockheed Martin in the United Arab Emirates, but he had a distinguished 38-year Navy career with the SEALs, capped off by being deputy commander of CENTCOM. He served on the National Security Council staff. He was the representative of the chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff to National Counterterrorism Center. He was the deputy commander of the Joint Forces Command. He's been decorated for fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq and elsewhere. What is striking about all his awards is he's gotten awards from the CIA, the State Department, the White House, and the Navy. And when you talk about sort of the rise of jointness and interagency; I don't know anybody who's been awarded more interagency awards than Bob Harward.

What I want to do today in talking about Iraq is to try to take the discussion away from the tactical level on which most discussions on Iraq have been conducted and to ask people who have been working these problems some more strategic questions. To try to do that, what we're going to do is we're going to show you a little video that we prepared here in the Ideas Lab that tries to put forward some ideas about Iraq that are a little broader and more strategic about what outcomes might look like, and then we'll have a discussion with our panelists. And after I have asked them a whole list of questions I don't know the answer to, then you can ask the questions that you don't know the answer to. So could we start by rolling the video? Thanks.

Iraq in the Balance video is shown (the video can be viewed [here](#).)

ALTERMAN: That's actually a shortened version. And later this week, we'll have the full version on the website, and it'll be on iTunes U and all kinds of things.

It's all a series of hard problems. And as the gentlemen were discussing with me downstairs, in many ways, the strategic questions are not the military questions. But I think it helps us to understand when people who have been in the strategic discussions discuss how to even pose the strategic questions.

And I think the first strategic question to address is, has Iraq become more strategically important to the United States or less strategically important to the United States in the last 10 years? Where is it on that scale? And what's most important about Iraq's future and what's least important?

CARTWRIGHT: These questions – you know, is it more important or less important to us – some of that is our choice, some of that is their choice, and some of that is – in this case, ISIL, ISIS, the events, the regional stability – that are imposed on us as a result of the activity.

So whether they're more or less important to us in a strategic sense was somewhat overcome by events when they were against by this rebel force and the movement down the rivers towards Baghdad. That put not only Iraq in question as to what it was going to look and how it was going to play and be a part of the region, but also Syria, Turkey and all of the countries there in that area. And so from my perspective, this is not an "OK, let's start from scratch." And I think the film alluded to it. We have a deck that's been dealt to us. We're going to have to play those cards. And so as we play those cards the question is, "What set of tools can be most effective, have the greatest opportunity, for what set of objectives?"

And I'm not sure that we should decide whether Iraq should be one central government, look like us—you know, those questions. But I do believe that in the taxonomy of strategy, at the national level for us, a government that is representative and inclusive, a government that has a sense of and an employment of the rule of law – and I think particularly important today is a government that is perceived as accountable to the people.

Now, whether that's a democracy, whether it is three countries, I think those are internal questions that we ought to set the stage for. So any strategy now that we put together from a military standpoint or from a national standpoint should be judged on the basis of those three issues: rule of law, the accountability side of this equation, inclusiveness. And as we build the strategy, what we want is the maximum number of tools available to be used across the maximum amount of time as we go forward.

But at the end of the day, there is no military victory. This is a diplomatic activity of which an element has, by requirement now, become military. But every step along the way, every decision that you make and every opportunity that you come to, should not be for free. In other words, we should have a say in saying, OK, we'll do the following things if you demonstrate a more inclusive approach to governance, a better rule-of-law approach –

ALTERMAN: So our military assistance should be conditional.

CARTWRIGHT: Conditional. It has to be conditional.

ALTERMAN: Do you agree with that?

HARWARD: Without doubt. And I think now what we've learned the last 12 years and our capabilities at this strategic level to collaborate and have the capacity for the policy and strategy that's important is better than it's ever been before.

I'm struck somewhat, being not a historian myself but having lived through the history of this region for so many years –

ALTERMAN: A graduate of high school in Tehran.

HARWARD: – and being in Tehran when it fell in 1980, early '79, January '79 when the shah left – I remain kind of glass half full as opposed to the glass half empty. And we're at one of those times where we really have the focus to see the opportunity that this situation presents.

At no other time have we had more partners willing and wanting to be involved in the solution of how we're not only going to support Iraq, but what is the solution for Syria as well? So I think bringing all those things together at this time is really the opportunity for this administration, our country, and all the coalition partners to give that focus it needs.

I don't know if it's a weak state. It's very much a maturing state. And if you look at any history – this may be a very poor analogy, but when my daughter was born she was a very beautiful girl, and she's always been a very beautiful girl. Some kids start off very ugly but they grow up to be beautiful young ladies. (Laughter.)

We're in that growth here, and I'm more encouraged now, because the region has always been very dynamic – dramatic shifts periodically, but what we've learned and experienced the last 12 years, where we are in our focus now and more countries wanting to be involved in Iraq, which has not been the case, really presents opportunities here.

ALTERMAN: But certainly one of the challenges we've had is when we start talking to the different allies, people want to be involved in Iraq but toward a different end. So one of the critiques that we've heard, for example, is that the Saudis are adamant that Bashar has to go and will not be party to any sort of action involving Syria which does not push for the rapid and complete removal of Bashar al-Assad from power.

The Turks have been willing to turn the other way in some cases with the economic activities and the passage of people and goods across the border because they see this as important to push Saddam out. And they say, first we'll get Saddam (sic) out and then we'll work on the post-Syrian environment.

How do we bring those allies together? Because it seems to me the allies have interests in Iraq, but their interests, their goals are not always aligned either with each other or with ours?

HARWARD: I would suggest particular – because this difference of opinion, especially on the Syria solution, has been there for several years now, and great debate and dialogue with all the partner nations on that approach.

I think that's changed because the existential threat some of these nations have seen have changed also, predicated on what's occurred here in the last few months. So I think those are game-changers that will give us greater flexibility to look at what is the prioritization of their short-term goals and how they lead to the longer-term goals of each of these partners.

ALTERMAN: Let me ask you about three particular countries: Russia, China, Iran.

CARTWRIGHT: Piece of cake. (Laughter.)

ALTERMAN: For starters.

CARTWRIGHT: You know, my sense here is that, number one, what we do as a nation, the United States, in this activity, again has to go back to that strategy, those three elements. And then we judge, you know, our decisions based on our contribution to those issues, those attributes.

And so, to the extent that country A or country B, you know, out of self-interest, wants something of Iraq is important to that country and we ought to consider it, but at the end of the day it's Iraq that has to decide what Iraq wants to be and how it's going to interact with its neighbors and how it's going to build the ability to interact with its neighbors. You demonstrated how oil made that relationship very different.

And so the question now, when you look at China, when you look at Russia, et cetera, I think what's more interesting – Russia is going to be a player in this – is that that region – you look at Syria and Iraq – is part of the old silk route, and as such that route is becoming ever-more consequential in the world strategically. The ability to move oil, to move goods by land is 30, 40 days faster than you can do it by sea from one end to the other, and you can see the economic impact of Central Asia and those others starting to grow.

That energy quotient in that is going to be consequential strategically to that growth for the region but also for that whole area of the world. And so the question is – from my perspective – how do you allow Iraq to stabilize itself, be a contributor to that activity, be a contributor in a form of governance that it decides but is associable, so to speak, with the other nations so that they can trade and they can live together in that region? If you try to get tactical on this and try to solve each person's problem or each person's wish, you end up in a conundrum that can't be solved.

ALTERMAN: All right, so understanding the Chinese are concerned about extremism and the Chinese are interested in the flow of energy, there's a large question with the extent to which we can cooperate with Russia and Iran on Iraq, and Russia and Iran on Syria. Where do you come down on those questions?

CARTWRIGHT: I think the energy issue is somewhat at the heart of this discussion when you talk Iran and when you talk Russia, but China also. That is probably the nexus of the activity, even though that energy is part and parcel to the flow of the goods in that region.

And so whatever the decision is, it's got to allow the ability to facilitate the trade, the interaction, the movement of goods, the movement of energy, food, etc., across that – what we used to call the silk route, and to build that infrastructure out in a way that you can move across those borders coherently and that trade is facilitated, not hindered. And instability any place along that route is going to hinder that.

And so what you're looking for here is – you know, typical Americans, we would like to have this done in a commercialist period of time. You know, another 30 or 60 seconds and, OK, we've made our decisions; now it's fixed. That's not going to happen. I mean, that's just unrealistic. But can we use this opportunity and turn it from something that nobody really wanted to do, which was, you know, get involved in another conflict – can we use it as an

opportunity to apply leverage to get a set of attributes that would allow that country to determine its own fate, understand sovereignty and be able to interact with its neighbors? That's the question.

ALTERMAN: And that sounds to me like bringing the Iranians and the Russians into some sort of cooperative understanding and then maybe – I mean, how do you come down as somebody who understands this well, I first heard you talk about Iran a couple of years ago – how would you think about Iran and Russia and the future of Iraq and Syria? Do they have a role in our planning and our thinking?

HARWARD: Without a doubt. I think that's – getting back to my initial point, there lies the opportunity – where are the things we can reach consensus on, where are the things we can talk about – and how that opens the door to some of the broader issues we're dealing with.

So this is a legitimate national security concern that they want to coordinate and cooperate on. The opportunity is – you have to seize it, because that then lies itself open to a dialogue on a lot of these other issues that we need to address. So I think that's one of the – as in any opportunity, there's good news and bad news – that's one of the good news of this horrible situation we're in.

ALTERMAN: Do you do that principally through intelligence cooperation, through military cooperation, through a sort of diplomatic process? I mean, we were talking downstairs about the extent to which we have gotten much better at interagency operations than we were ten years ago. If you are thinking about building out a strategic opportunity with Iran and Russia on security here, how do you start it and how do you keep it moving? What channel do you look for?

HARWARD: I think all of them, just as you said. Each of them have capabilities and accesses, much less linkages, that can be leveraged. And again, going back to how we've matured in the last ten years of the interagency process, the collaboration and the cooperation is really unprecedented.

So the team will get this right if the policy – if the over-arching policy – is we're going to move in that direction. So, at the end of the day, that decision on what policy we're going to embrace – and it's difficult because each of these countries, Russia, China, Iran, we have much different policies on. So looking at it through this lens can reshape some of the policy. If engagement and cooperation to open the dialogue is your policy, here's the perfect opportunity to exploit it.

ALTERMAN: You had talked before about the importance of remembering that the military is a relatively small and almost subsidiary piece to this whole process, but as we look at military operations, because they're dramatic, because they make good television, because they can be catalogued, because you can graph them, there's a seduction toward a military focus because you can deliver clear results in a defined period of time.

As you're thinking through the process of this kind of larger approach, how do you keep it from drifting into more of the military space than it should be? How do you keep the complementarity of the broad spectrum that Admiral Harward was talking about?

CARTWRIGHT: I mean, as I said earlier, and I truly believe, there is no military solution to this activity, but I think you've characterized it in a way that's useful in that if we take what's occurring today, where we have train, advise, type of activities going – and they usually go at three levels.

First you go in and you just try to restabilize. You set up, at the inner safe enclaves, an ability to recruit soldiers, train in tactics, techniques and procedures, get them somewhat ready. The next stage of that is that you move those trainers and advisers further out to the operational units, because if Cartwright was trained at boot camp, when he gets to 101st there's more training that has to be done. So that's the step that we're seeing begin to be executed. And then the third step is you start to embed forces.

Now, if that taxonomy is true, that's three key decision points that the State Department and diplomacy can use and say, we'll move to this next step, but we need to see the following things happen first. So you've got an opportunity to negotiate your way – and don't be looking for 100 percent solutions or things like that – but, are we moving in the right direction? Is the government responding? Do they understand the urgency of the situation? Then, you're using the military's activities and the leverage of them and the visual effect and all the emotional effect to move that bar in the right direction. And those are the steps we're looking for right now. If we just rush ourselves, you know, OK, it's inevitable, you know, that we're not going to win unless we have boots on the ground – OK, you've skipped over so many steps and now we're owning the problem, as the United States, and the outcome is our outcome, not the country's.

And that's the piece that we're trying to sort our way through, and the patience of the interagency to look at the steps, look at the opportunities, look at the points of leverage and to move through them and to have as many as possible, you know, without stringing out a conflict is really I think where we are right now in this discussion.

And I absolutely agree – I mean, I think whatever inroads we can make in a discussion and a dialogue with Iran, with any of the regional actors, with Russia, with China – I think all of those are absolutely essential, because at the end of the day, each one of them wants to see that they've got to ability to realize a future, you know, that has trade going on, that has the ability to move across borders etc. And absent that, they're all disadvantaged.

ALTERMAN: Let me ask you a question based on your experience as somebody operating in the field: One of the drivers of the Sunni insurgency is disaffected Sunnis. Who feel they don't have a future in their own country, who feel they need Da'esh, ISIS, ISIL— whatever you want to call them, the Islamic State—to protect them and to give them a place at the table where they can negotiate for their future. As an operator, how do you distinguish between the people who are fighting against you who you can potentially incorporate, potentially deal with, people you can't deal with – people who are beyond the pale? How do you decide who the potential partners are in a very bloody conflict as we're seeing now?

HARWARD: Well, as you know well, that's been the benchmark for the last 14 years of war, so to speak, since the beginning of our military presence in Afghanistan in 2001 and 2003 in Iraq. And we built capabilities – unprecedented in our history to be able to do that – using technology, using equipment, using people to do that. So we've become very good at this. In this situation though, it's going to have to be in concert with the government of Iraq. And while there have been some previous political shortfalls in that regard, I think here's one of those opportunities to partner. As you looked when we came out of Iraq and went to this present, a lot of those capabilities that we were building and leveraging in partnership with the government of Iraq were attrited. Because we did not have the capacity and the backbone of our personnel and our equipment in place to provide that.

So as we go back into this train, advise, and assist, those personnel with that background, those previous relationships, that equipment and that capability will be reintroduced. It will have to – there'll be some corporate knowledge and experience in doing that that will have to be reconstituted and built, but aligning it to the new government and the opportunities to build this infrastructure that can support that in line with the government objectives is the right place and the right time, so to speak. So I think – although I can't confirm – that's one of the priorities as we bring in these forces and they align that. But we have unprecedented ability to do that today that we've learned in conflict in the region over the last 13 years.

ALTERMAN: Is there anybody we should decide we're not going to work with on the Sunni side because their hands are too bloody, because they've tolerated too much?

HARWARD: Well, I think at the moment, that's the second priority. We have to get after the problem first.

CARTWRIGHT: I think it was really important also to – as we put the training – move to this second step of train, advise, to reach out to Anbar, to reach out to the Peshmerga, to say, we're going to include them. There's no way around it. We're going to be here; they're all going to be part of this issue. Rather than just stay centralized in Baghdad and centralized in that region. Demonstrate that we're going to get out and be inclusive in the solution set here.

ALTERMAN: And that's conditional or unconditional?

CARTWRIGHT: It was conditional. It wasn't offered, best I understand, but it was a demand on our part that we'd be allowed to do that. The agreement is that it won't necessarily happen on the first day, but that it's going to be part of this second stage of train and assist.

ALTERMAN: And should our working with the Peshmerga and others be conditional as are our efforts to work with Baghdad?

CARTWRIGHT: I think so.

ALTERMAN: And if they say, we'll do our thing, you do your thing, then we may do less than we might want to do. And that's – and that's OK?

CARTWRIGHT: Again, don't look for the 100 percent. You know, push hard to get the attributes that you want.

ALTERMAN: Let me ask a military strategy question. And that is: Some people say, you know, what really has to happen here is somebody has to lose – that you can't get the deal you need if everybody thinks, "We actually at the end of the day have to be in power." Somebody has to say, "We're not going to be in power." Is one of the problems here that every side still thinks it can win?

CARTWRIGHT: Well, I mean, you can argue the psychology of war and you can argue the psychology of diplomacy and negotiation, but the idea here is that you find a solution through compromise that gives everybody something important to them. And everybody will also feel that they didn't quite get everything that they wanted if it's a normal approach here. And so what you're looking for with military action in that negotiation, in that diplomacy, is, how do we get the imperative to believe that there's something better than fighting? How do we start to change the will such that the diplomatic piece of this in the compromise can occur? I mean, if the state of things is nobody's willing to, that makes it significantly more difficult and stretches it out. The point is, how quickly can you bring people to an understanding that the alternative to the kinetic activities is a far easier and better path and more fruitful path than the kinetic side of the equation?

And the kinetic is, at its essence, the basis of saying, "OK, I've lost all hope here and I'm willing to die now." And the question is, how quickly can you show an alternative that is plausible, but doesn't satisfy everybody's itch, but gives everybody enough that they believe they can work in that environment and survive and prosper?

ALTERMAN: I think one of the problems we had with the Maliki government was that Maliki thought he could get more. I mean, there was Charge of the Knights, there was always an element of, "We can get more from fighting. Now is not the time to compromise with those people. Now is not the time to be inclusive." What makes this a different opportunity with a different solution set?

HARWARD: I think that change in government. A new government does not have to inherit some of the legacy of the Maliki government had. So there lies the opportunity to diffuse those Venn diagrams of these separate entities and create that overlap that's a much bigger sphere. So I think they have the steps initially to set a tone and a prioritization that did not exist before.

ALTERMAN: Well, you do have a former militia leader who's the minister of the interior. I mean, one could be forgiven for being skeptical that the opportunities are really that different under this government than they were under the previous one. Not to say that there aren't opportunities, but I think there are many who look and say it really hasn't changed from then.

HARWARD: I can't argue that. Yeah, I would agree wholeheartedly, but there lies trust, but verify. Now let's see what actions occur to change that path. I agree with you completely.

CARTWRIGHT: But my sense is the imperative that's been created is through ISIL and the brutality, number one, and number two, because of the path that was taken in Iraq, the ability to fend that off on their own has exceeded their capacity, their capability for a lot of reasons: for the sectarianism, for some of the decisions – resource decisions, etc. – that have been made. So now, that imperative is the basis for an opportunity. And the question is, how do you use it?

ALTERMAN: How do we think through the Syria conflict in this context? Is there a necessary extension of the policy towards Syria? Do we need to have a clearer understanding of an endgame in Syria? Or can we deal with Iraq, where we have a friendly government that wants to cooperate with us in Syria; we try to re-impose the border and leave it? Does that work or do you need to bring Syria in?

CARTWRIGHT: Well, I mean, my sense – it's arguable – but my sense is the same three attributes are desired out of an end state for a Syrian government structure, A. B: If we are basically taking the tack – which I agree with – of the sovereignty of the nation, the sovereignty of that border must remain intact. The decisions that are made internally by those governments, we'd like to influence them so they're accountable and all of those types of things. If that's true, then this should not turn, for us, into a war that erases that border. So, things like rules of engagement for hot pursuit, rules of engagement for preemptive attacks on threats from one side of the border to the other have to be very, very clear, very well understood, but they should be there to preserve that border and to make sure that what's occurring on one side is ruled by one government structure, and the other side by another. If we erase that border, it will make the conflict harder. It may appear easier from the standpoint of maneuver for military forces, but politically it makes it very difficult.

ALTERMAN: How do you think about Syria in this context?

HARWARD: Well, I'd just come back to what General Cartwright said, you know, the border, unlike other areas where we've had safe havens, this is not a safe haven. We can militarily accomplish our objectives for the near term Iraqi situation rather readily, while a sovereign clear border – the access and the things you can do with that militarily – are unprecedented, unlike and very dissimilar to a safe haven such as the FATA. So I think you can address those short-term military issues you have to do to protect the sovereignty and the border of Iraq and make it somewhat separate from your longer-term political objectives in Syria. You can link that later, but for the near term, I think that's a very plausible. And one of the real differences here, as we apply that force, as we reinforce Iraq and our partners to do those types of things, it helps build a better political solution in Syria over the long term, as well.

ALTERMAN: Is there a way to get the other parties with a keen interest in Syria to share an "Iraq first" understanding? My sense is for Turkey and others, in many ways they're more concerned with Bashar, and we're more concerned with the government of Iraq. Is that is it possible to get everybody to accept our prioritization?

HARWARD: It's to be determined, I would say.

CARTWRIGHT: Yeah, we might be able to, we might not. I'm not sure that it's essential to the solution set. We have equities and history with Iraq recently that make it important to us to catch it while we can, give it the opportunity to succeed. That end state is likely to come a little easier than solving the Syria problems right off the bat. Now, I could be completely wrong on that. You could see a flop real quickly. But each nation in this coalition has got to decide where its priorities lie and where it wants to put its resources. What you would like to be able to do is to get an agreement on what are the desired attributes at the end state and what's our progress towards those attributes? But anybody that's in this to erase borders, reshape borders, things like that, are probably going to come up against, certainly, our intent.

HARWARD: But one more caveat: So I do believe the "Iraq first" problem can be addressed in a collaboration. I don't think there will be an issue with that.

ALTERMAN: One last question before I go to the audience: When you're fighting a non-state actor, how do you know it's over? How do you declare victory against a party that won't surrender?

CARTWRIGHT: When there's a – this is kind of my opinion of it, but – if you say that, rule of law, you know, transparency and accountability, inclusiveness are all the attributes – when people in the country start believing that they are actually finding those attributes useful and moving in a direction that gives them a better life, then you're going to know that you're on the right path. Saying that there will never be discord or that discord's gone away is an interesting bar but not theoretically achievable. What you want is that the will of the people at large is driving you in a direction away from confrontation and towards more of a diplomatic approach to solve their problems. That's when you have it. The idea that people are insiders or outsiders is a difficult ideas and, you know, at the end of the day, you don't want to find yourself taking sides, what you want to do is say, are these attributes coming in place, are they getting stronger, is this country standing up on its own feet and starting to do the right things? Is the will of the people doing that? If the will hasn't changed, then you've got a problem.

ALTERMAN: And so Afghanistan is a sort of candidate for that, but not quite there?

CARTWRIGHT: It's a candidate, correct.

HARWARD: Hope for the best, plan for the worst. I think you can just assume – and if I was a prudent planner or policymakers – that non-state actors will never have success. That we're going to build organization, processes and procedures in refinement of what those non-state actors will do in the region and beyond for many years again. So I would just assume it's never going to be over. And if you've looked at our policy through the years, we've been on both sides of the table with these non-state actors. If you look back after the Soviet invasion and our funding of the mujahideen. So we flip-flop. If you're going to take your consistent policy; if your long-term policy is going to be that we're going to – I don't want to use the target, but – be dealing with non-state actors who pose an existential threat – to nations that are developing a governance, that are reflective and responsive of – as people for the long term– is a very safe

assumption in my regard. So I think plan accordingly, because we're going to be in this business for a long time to come.

ALTERMAN: Do you think it will last as long as the war on drugs? The war on poverty?

HARWARD: Yeah, without a doubt.

CARTWRIGHT: Yeah, I don't think less than 30 to 50 years.

ALTERMAN: That's long after I have to get my kids through college.

HARWARD: Yeah. I mean, there will be conflicts – kinetic type conflicts – during that period and there will be periods of diplomacy etc., but the idea that this issue is a: “OK, if I just do these things on January the fourth, this'll be over,” is not realistic. This is generational.

ALTERMAN: Are you optimistic that we can spread the notion that we have of what a settlement looks like, which is everybody has a role, everybody has a seat at the table, as opposed to a desire for triumph over the evil ones, which I think is in many ways the way a lot of actors in the Middle East still see their politics?

CARTWRIGHT: I'm optimistic that those attributes will be part of the solution set. They will not be part of the solution set probably as we envision them, because it won't be our decision. And we've got to be ready to negotiate and to compromise and things like that. But those attributes to settle this for some period of time – of a 50-year peace or something – will be part of the solution. I'm confident of that.

ALTERMAN: OK. We have some microphones and I will call on you. If you'd do me a favor and identify yourself, to only ask one question until we've had everybody ask, and third: One of my pet peeves is people who make statements and then say for their question, what do you think of my statement? So we have this incredible talent. If you could genuinely ask them questions – I certainly haven't covered it all – I would be grateful. Let's go right here. Sir.

Q: Excellent panel. George Nicholson, policy and force structure consultant for SOCOM. One of the things your former boss, Jim Mattis – almost bankrupted me, the number of books I've got in my library, but I think when he returned, he had 5,200 books in his library – but he talked about the criticality of the future of understanding the cultural, the historical, and political background of the areas in the world we're dealing with. Stan McChrystal has said the same thing in the last two years. He said what he would change when he went to West Point is less of a focus on engineering, but more of a focus on those items. From where you all have both stood, the importance of understanding – before we start breaking china out there – of understanding the background and rivalries that go back tens, hundreds, almost thousands of years – of being able to understand them?

CARTWRIGHT: I mean, for me, strategy based on historical is not the way to go. Historical gives you context for strategy and you should not go into a strategy without a good –

and I absolutely agree with what you're saying – an absolutely good, solid understanding of the history, as best you understand it. When you get on the ground, the detail of that history becomes far more important, far more relevant to your opportunity to actually provide the national command authority with the leverage points to end the conflict. Not understanding that brings you to peril almost always.

ALTERMAN: I see a question over here. Sir.

Q: Peter Humphrey, I'm an intel analyst. There's about three or four times more Kurds in the world than Palestinians. I think it's nuts that Palestinians deserve self-determination and the Kurds don't. This is their best chance in centuries – why don't they go for it? All they have to do is promise not to take Turkish territory and promise to help suppress the PKK. Why aren't the Kurds going for it?

CARTWRIGHT: I'd love to take that one on. Listen: the Kurds, the Sunnis, and Shias; all the different factions in Iraq have more enemies individually than they do collectively. Just as we're working that Venn diagram to make that center piece bigger – inclusive policy – the same thing applies to their enemies. So I'm very concerned that the end of the day – and we've felt this way for many years – that any of these entities that break out on their own in the short term, may give you a solution, but over the long term, they become targets for those who have interest in their – it makes their national security interests individually much greater and much more threatening than they do collectively.

So again, it – for the long term, a federated approach – it has to be included with all the entities if you really want a long term stability in the region. So that may be their best opportunity short term and they may be able to accomplish it. But down the road, it could create some significant problems for them internally, much less externally. So I'm very concerned with how that would evolve. Because Iran and the Turks have a much different approach on the Kurds than they do on the Sunnis and Shias, and those may be overriding considerations down the road.

HARWARD: He's right.

ALTERMAN: Right here in the front.

Q: I'm Aizen Morrogi, a medical corps officer, and I served in Iraq. One of the essentials of having a coalition is to have partners in that coalition, and do we have a real partner in the Iraqi government? That they talk to their population one thing and then they turn around and tell us something different. So what is your take, do you think there is a real partner in the current Iraqi government?

CARTWRIGHT: If I'm an Iraqi and I'm looking at partners in the United States – tactical, operational, strategic – we've been down that road. We came in, we built partnership and then in 2010, we walked away from many of those partnerships. And so this goes to the region at large. And from a military perspective, this ebb and flow of our policy could probably be illustrated in force presence. You know, where we were before 9/11, where we were at the

peak of the Iran-Iraq War, what level we're at now and what level that's going to be down the road. If you look at our other commitments in Asia and Pacific, we have been consistent throughout our history in that – after WWII – of our presence and commitment and partnerships.

So if you look at this region, we can't decide if we want long term partnerships through military presence, through political engagement, so I think we have to – again, back to your overarching policy: Making a commitment to this region that we haven't had before will help build that trust and confidence that this is a genuine partnership, because in that partnership, we've asked a lot of our political and military leaders to not sacrifice, but put a lot at risk by what they've invested in our partnership. We've got to take that into consideration if we're going to maintain and really make it a true partnership. So – and that affects how domestically they work. And internationally – when you look at some of the other partners in the region and the things we've asked them to do in supporting our policies.

ALTERMAN: I saw a question here and then one back there.

Q: Roger Wallace, Pioneer Natural Resources. I have another Kurdish question. Were either of you surprised at the response of the Peshmerga to the initial onslaught by ISIL? And what does that mean to the overall effectiveness of the Peshmerga and sort of the continuing battle against ISIL?

HARWARD: I was surprised. I was very shocked. After looking at some of the after-action, I could understand why they had shifted their focus. And if you look at this in the more strategic, we had a significant intelligence failure here. If I look at one of the areas that across the board, over the last 12 years, have grown, you could say benefitted tremendously over the last 12 years is our intelligence apparatus, the resources, the growth the number. And yet, we can still miss and be surprised by what happened here. So, yes, that did take me by surprise. But since then, the actions and efforts, the ability to reconstitute, reinforce, encourages me with the right focus, they'll get it right. But yeah, I was very surprised.

ALTERMAN: Another question there, in the back.

Q: I'm Ali Wien with the RAND Corporation. Should the United States assume that groups in the vein of ISIL will just continue springing up, kind of like the Whack-a-Mole game? And if that assumption is correct, how sustainable is indefinite counterterrorism policy on the scale that we're pursuing it now?

CARTWRIGHT: My sense – and I think you probably are along the same lines – is normally there's three stages to this activity. There's the incipient stage, where you actually have the opportunity to cut the head of the snake off. It's usually an individual – an iconic individual, a bin Laden or whatever. And then there is that stage where you build the ability to reinforce. So you lose a person, you got a person to stick in. And then the third stage is franchising where the pieces start to come and there isn't a single. We're in franchising. Unfortunately, we're in franchising. And so this is going to be around for a while and there will be an element of Whack-a-Mole.

The question is, in the political solution that you make for a particular country, let's say Iraq, does it put them in a position to repel these things with some reasonable expectation of success and to be able to do it and to understand not just that these guys don't agree with you, but what is it they don't agree with, why don't they agree? Is it that they can't feed and house their families, they've lost all hope, those types of things? Or is it, you know, in the lack of accountability of the governance? But understand those and respond, because none of these issues are static. They change.

But we are definitely in franchising, in my opinion, on a global scale of this activity. And so knocking one off – taking an ISIL off the street – is not going to change it. The maturation that's gone on now is one that has now, in both Yemen and in this area, starting to go and control territory. That's the fundamental shift that you've seen. You're in a franchising stage that is now starting to want to control territory. That's a big change. It comes with baggage for those who are trying to do it, for the terrorists. But we're in this for a while.

HARWARD: I would add, I'm less concerned about the ground-seizing. That's why we were surprised so much. But what concerns me about these franchises – and I agree completely that's where we are – is how they're learning, building more corporate knowledge and becoming much more strategically threatening.

I look at – I was always confused – because we defeated the Soviets in Afghanistan by taking out their air. We provided Stingers, enabled them. And yet, no one leveraged that against us in our 13 years of war. No one had a concerted campaign to go after our air. I was always surprised at that. And yet you saw here in Syria, Chinese-used platforms to take out air.

So they've learned their lessons. So I'm more concerned about this change in acquisition of state capabilities and strategic tools that can cause, black swan-type of events and capabilities for these disparate groups that we're going to have to confront and deal with.

So the ground thing is, I think, part of this intelligence failure. How could we be so surprised to see much land? We can recruit from that. It's some of these strategic threats that are what we're really going to have to keep our eye on.

ALTERMAN: Senator.

Q: Thank you very much. John Warner, retired member of Congress. Very distinguished discussion and panel this morning. But I want to talk about an immediate problem, and that is, the president just reiterated yesterday, the Iraqis are going to do the fighting on the ground.

Let's go back over the years, General, when you and I were in public office. You owned a general staff overseeing the rebuilding of an Iraqi military force. Some \$20 billion over time was appropriated by the Congress in reliance upon representation from the Department of Defense that this job is being done and it will have a mission and a value in the future.

Now, you know well what has happened. The president has said they're going to do the fight. What have we learned from the past that will be changed in the future? And what's the period of time by which these newly trained individuals can pick up the responsibility to make a truly air-ground team combatant force against ISIL?

CARTWRIGHT: I think those are the questions that we ought to seriously reflect on moving into this activity and seriously reflect on when we look at the military strategy that we would like to employ. We did the training. We did the equipping with America's tax dollars and lives. And divisions disappeared off the battlefield very quickly.

In the interim between our departure and now, the government governance was not as holistic and inclusive as we would want it to be. It was allowed to shape the military into a tool of self-preservation of the government, rather than the people. It was allowed to go back to sectarian organizations, and then resourced accordingly and supported accordingly.

So part of what we have to do is have some assurances that that's not the path that we're on. That's why it was so important to say, "If we're going to go in there, we're going to have the opportunity to train Peshmerga. We're going to have the opportunity to get out into the western areas and train those forces so that the Sunnis and the Shiites are all given the opportunity."

Is there a guarantee that it'll be better than when we left it the last time? The question is, is there imperative there? Do they believe that they are sufficiently threatened that there's no better way to get it? You know, the question about "Are you our friends?" Well, when I look around, nobody else was going to run to the support of Iraq. So they've got to know that we're the best game in town.

So the question now becomes, what's our leverage and how do we play it to get down that path? At some point, do you go to embedding, do you put ground troops in there again? I don't think that's necessary today, I mean, based on what I see today. But what is absolutely essential is that we have to have people in there that understand integrated air-ground space, all of the pieces – naval – operations.

And the Iraqis don't. And we knew that when they left. They just hadn't had the time, number one. Number two, they don't have an air force. They don't really have good artillery fires, etc., to support them. The logistics are weak. We knew that departing, command and control. So that's where we have to focus. We may have to provide some of that if this continues on.

But I think the key here is the early-on leverage to say, "OK, we were here. You squandered the opportunity that we gave you. Are you really ready to come to the table?" And that's really important in this discussion. If they are not, or we go down the same path again, I think we're the fools.

ALTERMAN: Should we insist on units that are integrated in terms of ethnicity and sect, or should we allow sectarian...

CARTWRIGHT: That's for them to work.

ALTERMAN: That's for them to work?

CARTWRIGHT: In my opinion. But what we should insist is that all of them are included in the game.

ALTERMAN: OK. Gentleman in the green tie and then the woman next to him. Thanks.

Q: Thank you. Ed Stewart at the MITA Group. Thank you for a great panel. I want to tie together two things that you all said, something about the length of this war – 30 to 50 years – and then who are our willing partners. And I'd like to hear from you all, when you're in the region, who are our partners that'll be here in 50 years? The Turks? The Saudis? The Gulf? Who are those partners either right now or emerging? I want you to see if you can take us forward 30 to 50 years at the conclusion of this and who's going to be at our side at that time. Thank you.

CARTWRIGHT: Looking 30 to 50 years out, you're always wrong. But you are looking for enduring partners. They will change over the time. Those partners will always operate first in self-interest, and then where you align is to how strong at any given point in time the relationship is, the willingness to commit, etc.

What I think that we have to do is come up with – this is my opinion, so take it that way – but we have to start to find what used to be called extended deterrence, but we have to find a way to show that we have skin in the game, we have responsibilities and we understand them, and we are accountable for them in our relationship with those countries that are willing to be our partners in this and that there is, through that extended deterrence – and that was always, mentally, nuclear weapons, that's not really where I'm focused. The issue is, how we build border systems, how do we build passive and active defenses that put into question anybody who would incur, either at the terrorist level or at the nation-state level, the desire to go into someone else's country and put those in place in such a way that the worry of that being brought to the table is enough to put in doubt any adversary's idea or mental state that would say, "I can get away with this." So we've got to start to build that mindset in the region.

And we've done that. I mean, quite frankly, CENTCOM has been incredibly good at things like standoff distances for terrorist activities, things like passive defenses. Missile defense has become very capable. The air forces and the navies of these countries are now starting to adapt to the threat that's there, not the threat that they, you know, maybe wanted to buy the big shiny platform for. And so, you know, this is going to be part and parcel to what does that look like and how do we start to get to it. And, you know, to my mind is that's a doctrine. That's a partnership doctrine that we say for this region, this is what we're willing to do. This is what we stand for. If you stand for that, we'll help you. We'll be part of your extended deterrence.

ALTERMAN: Do you agree?

HARWARD: Without a doubt. Every point. But this commitment, again, that you're on this embracing and understand – and I don't want to call it a war – but this long-term presence and engagement, that's going to be a consistent theme overriding in our policy is part of it, because I think that's where we've been sporadic. We've lost that partnership. We look at certain junctures; we break away when understanding – and it's economically, it's militarily, it's politically, all those ways. How do we ensure that our partners believe – believe – that we have that long-term commitment? I think that's where we've suffered in the region, and because they sacrifice so much when they make that commitment, that you pay a heavy price when you break that bond and that long-term approach.

ALTERMAN: Does growing North American energy independence shape the commitment we should be willing to make, the nature of the commitment, their interpretation of the commitment?

CARTWRIGHT: Well, I mean, it's energy today. It may be water tomorrow. I mean, you know, those things will ebb and flow. The question in my mind – and you know, this commitment is not just in our eyes, in other words, and in our form. For years, our commitment was we'll put forces in your country. Well, today that's not as reinforcing of their national sovereignty as they'd like to be. It's almost like a slap in the face to say, OK, you must have an American division on the ground because you can't take care of yourself. That's not what we want. So we have to shape it in a way that they understand and the perceptions in their cultures and in their region convey the commitment but in a way that's palatable to them.

ALTERMAN: I think the last question, lady right here.

Q: Davika Bhat from the Times of London. This question's almost an extension of the previous question. Beyond those friendly international and regional partners, you talked a bit about working with Russia, China, and most interestingly, Iran in the future. Could you elaborate a bit more on that and specifically what you sort of anticipate those roles could be, as I say, particularly with reference to Iran?

CARTWRIGHT: Is it what role do we expect China and Russia to play in this?

Q: Yes. (Davika Bhat)

CARTWRIGHT: OK. You know, from my standpoint, they have as much at stake, if not more, because of today it is the coin of energy, you know. And we have a temporary windfall right that that, you know, has adjusted some of the calculus here. But at the end of the day, for China and Russia, that energy issue is real, it's today and it's long term, and it will there in 30 to 50 years. I mean, that's going to be important to them. And so they're looking for an assurance, a level of security, a level of certainty and surety that access to those energy reserves and opportunities is at least fair and equitable, OK? And what they don't want because they both understand that geographically it would be hugely disadvantageous – they don't want a friend and an enemy, because you're going to have to cross those borders to move the goods and to move the commerce, etc., and so you want a region at which you have a reasonable expectation of access, fair access, the opportunity to create trade and then to move across borders to move

that trade. Absent that, you're hugely disadvantaged. So that's where China and Russia are going to come down.

My sense is, you know, this is just me talking to my counterparts in those countries, that they'd like to see each of the countries work out their problems, but they'd like to see it in a context of an understanding that to facilitate the region and to make the region flourish, you've got to be able to move across these borders with your goods and commerce and whatnot, and you have to have an assurance that there's enough political and diplomatic stability in the region that access to those markets is going to be a reasonable expectation.

ALTERMAN: Are you optimistic in the longer term that you can bring the Iranians into a...

HARWARD: Well, I think the geopolitical content of this problem is a driving factor in doing that. Yes.

CARTWRIGHT: Yeah.

ALTERMAN: Importantly, I want to, before I thank the speakers, announce that lunch is just outside on that little panel by the windows. But I do want to thank the speakers for some really, really thoughtful and probing insights. I want to thank you for your patience with our sound system and thank you for coming. We look forward to seeing you again soon. Thank you.

(Applause.)

(END)