An Election Year Debate:

American Foreign Policy and the Middle East

May 6, 2004

In-Depth Reports

Robert Satloff, The Washington Institute: Dr. Mathews, how would you define "success" in Iraq? Is it achievable, and, if so, what is required to ensure it? What would be the consequences of failure to achieve your definition of success?

Jessica Tuchman Mathews: Let me first say that I speak only for myself, not for any institution or candidate. I was a vocal opponent of the Iraq war before it started, in part because I was convinced, after much study, that there was no immediate weapons-of-mass-destruction (WMD) threat. I also believed that the notion of delivering democracy through such a campaign, especially in the Middle East, was a dangerous fantasy. Even if we could create a democracy in Iraq, the notion that we would thereby initiate a domino process in the Middle East does not stand up to analysis.

I have a modest definition of success: a stable, whole Iraq run by a modestly pluralistic government. I do not count elections as a sign of success. The chances of success on these terms were slim to begin with, and they are even smaller now.

That said, I have tried very hard, as have my colleagues at the Carnegie Endowment, to continue talking about approaches that might work. Measures that could have worked a year ago can no longer work. Even some measures that could have worked four weeks ago can no longer work. Events are changing the situation on the ground in irreversible ways. Correcting mistakes does not get us back to where we would have been had we not made them. Reversing de-Baathification does not undo the damage done by de-Baathification.

Nevertheless, there are several steps we can take to improve the chances for success. First, we have to stick to the June 30 deadline for the handover of power, even though there is no Iraqi entity prepared to receive such sovereignty. In fact, it is debatable whether we ourselves still have any sovereignty to turn over; sovereignty has been slipping through our fingers very rapidly. In any case, we cannot pretend that we are turning over full sovereignty, because everybody in Iraq knows that we are not. Nevertheless, I would invent some kind of symbolically potent diplomatic mantle to hand over -- it would be too harmful to let June 30 pass without changing anything.

Second, I would issue an official statement that the United States will not establish any permanent military bases in Iraq. That would make a big difference in terms of public opinion.

Third, we should amend the core mistake of forswearing the strategy employed in Afghanistan -- that is, we decided from the outset of the Iraq campaign to eschew both multilateral involvement and an interim administration. Nearly everything that has gone wrong in Iraq has flowed from that initial mistake. As a consequence, we have talked only to those Iraqis who are friendly toward the United States. As it happens, these are not the people who have a major political following in Iraq. We have not talked to a number of individuals with such followings because we find their beliefs, values, or politics distasteful. Now, however, we should try to convene a kind of national assembly (something similar to the Loya Jirga in Afghanistan) and include everybody who has significant political support. The

core problem is that we still are not connected to the people of Iraq.

Another scandal has been overlooked in the past few weeks, since the fighting in Falluja -- namely, the question of what happened to the process of "Iraqification." In November-December 2003, the Bush administration said it was hiring 11,000 Iraqi policemen each week. I looked at those reports every week and said, "This cannot possibly be right." But the Coalition Provisional Authority said that it had a force of 80,000 Iraqi policemen. It turns out, though, that only 2,900 of these policemen are trained; 59,000 of them are described as being "on payroll," and another 13,000 are in training. Ambassador L. Paul Bremer recently said that we can train 25,000 policemen within the next year. Why only 25,000? If we can train 25,000, why can we not train 100,000? Why did we spend so little money on building up and training Iraqi forces? Why did this and other attempts at Iraqification fail?

David Frum: Dr. Mathews laid out a characteristically cogent case. I will not disagree with all of it. Indeed, questions regarding our commitment to involve Iraqis are crucial. It often seems like this has been a liberation of Iraq without Iraqis. Yet, there is nothing wrong with starting out by talking to individuals who are friendly toward the United States. There is nothing wrong with saying that individuals who participated in the nightmare regime of the republic of fear ought to be excluded from the political process -- or, at the very least, that they ought to be disarmed. That is a large part of what de-Baathification has meant.

As for the definition of success in Iraq, we must remember that the United States went to war in Iraq partly for the sake of Iraqis, but mostly for its own sake. And on that criterion, a great deal of success has already been achieved.

First, the United States has removed the most powerful anti-American dictator in the Arab world. I invite you all to consider what this world would look like if, in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks and with UN sanctions crumbling, Saddam Hussein had been allowed to remain in power. It was highly unlikely that U.S. troops would have been deployed indefinitely in the desert bordering Iraq in order to enforce sanctions and inspections. Alternatively, not sending such troops at all would have been bad, and sending them temporarily only to withdraw them later would have been worse still. Either way, we would have sent a powerful message that those who defy America increase their power. When we were making these decisions, we all assumed that Osama bin Laden would be rounded up quickly. But think of a world in which Saddam Hussein still had job security, Osama bin Laden remained at large, and the U.S. campaign against terrorism had been bogged down since December 2001. What kind of message would that have sent?

It is a success, too, that the United States reaffirmed the credibility of American threats. It has been U.S. policy since 1991 that Saddam should be removed from power. Accordingly, the United States experimented with various ways of removing him. In 1991, President George H. W. Bush called on the people of Iraq to rise up and remove Saddam. That did not work. In the mid-1990s, several coups were attempted. They did not work. In 1998, Congress passed the Iraq Liberation Act, which made it a statutory policy of the United States to remove Saddam. That did not work. Then money was offered to resistance movements inside Iraq. That did not work. It became clear that either a decade-old U.S. policy would be thwarted or America would have to exert itself.

Although I am not a huge admirer of the UN, one of the successes of the Iraq war is that it will now mean something when the UN passes a string of Security Council resolutions against a particular country. For example, America's current strategy for dealing with the threat of an Iranian nuclear breakout is to refer the International Atomic Energy Agency's reports of Tehran's violations to the Security Council for action. Can you imagine what a joke that approach would be if Saddam were still on his gold toilet more than a dozen Security Council resolutions later?

From this perspective, the removal of Saddam Hussein was, in itself, an important American success. The exertion of U.S. power in the region was, in itself, an important American success. The exposure of Saddam's killing fields was an American success.

I agree with Dr. Mathews that there was too much glib prewar talk about the domino effect of democracy. Many observers did not want to talk about how problematic the Middle East is. In the wake of the September 11 attacks, the suffering and grief of thousands of people in New York evoked tremendous sympathy in many parts of the world. In one part of the world, however, it seemed to evoke cheers. There was no apparent feeling for suffering. Certainly, the suffering of others is always easier to bear than one's own suffering, and what has happened in the Middle East since 1945, and especially since 1979, is one of the most horrific human-rights stories in history. Yet, it does not seem to have evoked any kind of intellectual or moral response in the region.

The Iraq campaign has not gone as well as many had hoped it would, nor has it proceeded in the manner predicted by many with more knowledge of the region than I have. But there are several achievable goals that we can lay down as markers. For one thing, the United States can keep its promise to the Kurds in northern Iraq that they will not suffer again what they suffered before 1991. We enforced that commitment for a dozen years, and we can continue to uphold it in a unified Iraq. The United States can also achieve success by ensuring that Iraq has a representative, Western-oriented regime that respects human rights.

Another pragmatic goal that the United States can achieve is the rapid return of Iraq to the world economy. After the September 11 attacks, many wondered why we should involve ourselves in Iraq when most of the hijackers came from Saudi Arabia. But people in Washington and at The Washington Institute know how difficult it is to mobilize U.S. action on the problems in Saudi Arabia because of the extraordinary power that the Saudis have over the world economy. If Iraq returns to the world economy, Saudi Arabia would have somewhat less power over global economic prospects. This would in turn make Riyadh more amenable to new ideas and to a more honest and open relationship with the United States.

Satloff: Neither of you named democracy as a reasonable near-term objective for Iraq.

Frum: Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld always used the phrase "representative government." That is good. The word "democracy" is both too big and too little. There is a real risk that democracy can mean sham elections of the kind that some of America's Cold War allies would sometimes organize for our benefit. That is not enough. At the same time it could mean too much; it could mean the whole texture of liberal democracy as it is experienced in countries that have had the benefit of many hundreds years of favorable development. But it is not farfetched to imagine a representative Iraqi government that respects human rights and pluralism.

Satloff: The most serious charge by former White House counterterrorism coordinator Richard Clarke is that the Bush administration willfully and consciously sidetracked the war on terror in order to prosecute the war against Iraq. According to Clarke, this approach produced the worst of all possible outcomes: more terrorism and a more dangerous situation for America in Iraq. How would you evaluate these charges?

Mathews: He is right. President Bush is losing the war on terror on four or five different counts. First, and probably most important, the situation in Iraq is producing more individuals who are willing to either become or support active terrorists. I would be willing to bet that the number of such individuals being generated every day is greater than the number of militants we are killing in Iraq. Although we do not have reliable estimates of actual terrorist recruitment, we do have polling data demonstrating regional sentiment toward the United States. Strongly anti-American feelings are more prevalent across the entire Muslim world than they have ever been, by a wide margin. Today, those who have very strong antipathy toward the United States are potential supporters and enablers of terrorism; they are the people who feed terrorists, house them, finance them, and hide them.

Second, while we had our eyes on Iraq, North Korea may have reprocessed enough nuclear fuel to make eight bombs. And a North Korea with eight bombs presents totally different problems from a North Korea with one bomb. A Pyongyang with only one nuclear weapon would not waste it or sell it. A North Korea with eight bombs would have

plenty to spread around, however. We also took our eyes off Iran. The irony is that there was indeed an axis we should have worried about -- the nuclear axis of North Korea, Iran, and Pakistan, not Iraq.

Third, Afghanistan is sliding back into chaos. More than 50 percent of its gross domestic product is based on illegal drugs. We are now forming new militias in order to minimize the spread of violence.

Fourth, given the focus on Iraq, far too little has been done on the homeland defense front.

Finally, we have fractured many of our alliances outside the Muslim world, not just with Europe, but much more broadly. Hence, when we need enthusiastic cooperation in the police and intelligence work required to track terrorists and shut down money laundering, we get, at best, reluctant cooperation.

For all of these reasons, we are far less safe today as a result of the Iraq war than we were a year and a half ago. It adds up to losing the war on terror.

Satloff: Mr. Frum, what do you make of Clarke's charges?

Frum: Richard Clarke was a great and capable public servant. Just about everyone I know who worked with him admired him. I am sorry that he has chosen to become the kind of media figure that he has become; it is unworthy of his record.

In his most recent book, Clarke seemed to distinguish between the war on terror and the war against al-Qaeda. He depicted the war on terror as, essentially, a manhunt. According to this view, winning the war on terror requires only that we track down a certain number of al-Qaeda trainees and then deal with some of the roots of Muslim and Arab anger by addressing the Israeli-Palestinian problem. That strikes me as an unrealistic view.

Many of the things that Dr. Mathews said bear serious consideration. Iraq has had costs. It has affected the American alliance with Europe, and that is a very important thing. But I do not buy into the idea that, when we look at poll numbers showing the deterioration of America's favorability rating in the Muslim world, we should say, "We need to get back to the good old days of 1993 to 2001, when they really liked us." (Laughter.)

Of course the United States wants and deserves to be liked. But it is not simply how people feel about the United States that predicts whether terrorism will occur. One of the great clichÃ©s that needs to be shot down is that terrorism is an act of the hopeless. In fact, people who feel despair tend to be passive. People resort to violence when they believe it will work. In those years when people thought it would work, we saw a crescendo of terrorism. Therefore, one of the crucial steps in ensuring America's safety is to make clear that terrorism will not achieve its objectives.

We all can imagine how easy it would be for terrorists to paralyze the U.S. economy. It would take twelve suicide bombers at twelve shopping-mall food courts on a single day. So why has it not happened? I do not know the answer to that. But I think one reason is that, if there are terrorists who think rationally, they would look at the September 11 attacks in America and the results, and they would look at the March 11 attacks in Madrid and the results, and they would conclude that terrorism against the United States is a strategic mistake. It rallies American opinion and spurs the United States to take actions such as removing the government in Iraq. However little Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein liked each other beforehand, al-Qaeda's fatwas make clear that the survival of Saddam's regime was an important emotive goal.

The United States does want people around the world to have a positive image of America. President Bush is such an American character that it is sometimes difficult for him to connect with people in other countries, and that is a real problem. Yet, many of the problems that the United States faces internationally are not a product of its behavior. Many Americans, and even others, assume that only the United States acts, while everyone else simply reacts -- in other words, that all key world events occur only as a result of U.S. actions. And that is a great illusion.

Satloff: Mr. Frum, I read your new book, An End to Evil, on a flight to Morocco recently. I was certainly the only passenger on Royal Air Maroc reading a David Frum book, I can assure you. (Laughter.)

Frum: My publisher will have to work on that. (Laughter.)

Satloff: In that book, you provide a roadmap to a world without evil. Evil has been around for a long time, so you certainly bit off quite a mouthful. Your list of targets is pretty long. In addition to the other members of the "axis of evil" -- Iran and North Korea -- you target Syria, Libya, and Saudi Arabia and call for major changes in policy toward Russia, China, the UN, and others. A reader might come away from your book with the notion that you are proposing a very long war. You talked earlier about rallying American opinion. Are the American people ready, do you think, for that sort of protracted war?

Frum: I am old enough now that I can remember conferences from throughout the Cold War. And one of the topics covered during such conferences was, "Can a democracy tough it out?" The lesson of the last century is that democracies are best equipped to endure these long struggles. The United States outlasted the Soviet Union in the Cold War, contrary to the expectations of many people who were much smarter than I.

I do not worry that the American people will lack staying power. I worry that another administration might abandon some of the more hopeful and generous elements of President Bush's vision. Think of the horrific story of abuse in Abu Ghraib prison. Rush Limbaugh claimed that what happened there was nothing worse than what happens in the "crypt" at Yale's Skull and Bones society. Here is someone who speaks for a very important segment of the American populace. A significant part of his audience consists of those who do the American people's fighting for them. The danger here is that if Americans become weary or disillusioned, they may react with too much violence and not enough hope.

Mathews: What you would have in that event is an America that has ceased to be America. You would have an aggressive, global hegemon that goes around attacking whoever it decides is evil. And you would probably end up with a lot more of the sort of people for whom Rush Limbaugh speaks -- the sort of people who, you say, committed the abuses at Abu Ghraib -- but you would not have America. You would not have a country that I would value. And I would be surprised if anybody else in this room would value that country. (Applause.)

Satloff: It has been more than two and a half years since the September 11 attacks and the start of what President Bush has called a "war on terror." But terror is just a tool, not an ideology. Would it not be more accurate, and would we not do ourselves a favor, if we called this a war on radical Islam? And would that, then, drive our policy in a different direction?

Mathews: The core of your question is whether this sloppy way of talking about the war has served us well in thinking about policy. It has not. The Army War College recently published Jeffrey Record's brilliant monograph Bounding the War on Terrorism, in which he goes through Bush administration statements about that war and concludes that we have declared an unwinnable war by defining it so broadly.

The axis that we should have been worried about did not include Iraq. It is important to look beyond ideology and examine the facts. Currently, the most dangerous country in the world is probably Pakistan. And that was true two years ago. America has engaged in a national self-hypnosis regarding Saddam Hussein. Without nuclear weapons, Saddam was a threat to his region, not to the United States. And we knew he had no nuclear weapons. So we got ourselves into a kind of a national frenzy about something that was not a threat. My point is that, although theory and grand visions are valuable, it is even better to have facts and serious analysis. Future U.S. success will require us to narrow our focus, not broaden it.

Frum: It is a terrible irony that the main force inhibiting the Bush administration from speaking more candidly about the nature of the threat the United States faces is its desire to follow the advice offered by Dr. Mathews and

those who agree with her. The difficulties of alliance management have prevented the United States from speaking candidly about what the central problem is. That is, the failure to speak bluntly about the threat of extremist Islam is largely attributable to Washington's desire to maintain the alliance structure that we are told is so essential. Many U.S. allies in the Arab world and Europe would mutiny if President Bush spoke more clearly about the nature of the threat. It is unfortunate that the administration began trying to placate others; by doing so, you sometimes end up deceiving yourself a little bit.

Yes, radical Islam is at the core of the problem. And even in the case of North Korea, our main anxiety is not that Pyongyang might use its nuclear weapons against South Korea or Japan. In fact, North Korea hopes to extract money from South Korea and Japan. Rather our main fear is that Pyongyang might sell such weapons to a radical Islamic group bent on using them against the United States, Europe, or Russia.

Mathews: But we have wasted fifteen months doing almost nothing about North Korea.

Frum: Our problem with North Korea is we wasted eight years when the problem was solvable.

Mathews: No, we did not.

Frum: The moment was 1994. If you want to know why the Bush administration focused on Iraq now rather than later, it was because of the memory of the lost opportunity in North Korea in 1994 -- probably the last moment when military action was feasible against North Korea. Pyongyang's nuclear ambitions could have been headed off at the pass then -- perhaps at some cost, but at a lot lower cost than in 2002 or 2003.

Mathews: In 1994, we believed that North Korea had two nuclear weapons, which they built in 1989. My guess is that you picked 1994 because it was during a Democratic administration. (Laughter.) But in fact Pyongyang's nuclear breakthrough happened under a Republican president several years before that. So this is a nonsensical argument. (Applause.)

Frum: I picked 1994 because that was the year the Clinton administration considered going to war. They went up to the brink. That was their moment, and they decided not to do it. One reason why they decided not to do it was because, in the middle of the North Korean crisis, Saddam Hussein moved Iraqi troops to the Kuwaiti border. The Clinton administration rightly decided that it could not cope with simultaneous crises in the Persian Gulf and Korea. In other words, so long as Saddam was in power, ready to take advantage of any American imbroglio, a lot of the things that you and I might agree the United States should have done -- including putting new kinds of pressure on Pakistan and Iran -- were impossible.

Mathews: Saddam Hussein was not the reason the Clinton administration decided that starting a war with North Korea was a bad way to stop nuclear proliferation. This point highlights one of the fundamental differences in worldview at play in this discussion -- namely, whether force and regime change are the most effective ways to solve problems around the world. I believe, as a general principle, that they are not. The extraordinary failing of this administration has been its attitude of "we do not do diplomacy."

Frum: Perhaps. On the question of talking with the North Koreans, I would have felt better about them if they had at least offered us fresh lies in 2001. But the idea that we were supposed to believe the same lies they told us in 1994 -- that this time when we gave them money, they would not develop more nuclear weapons -- was not conducive to American self-respect.

Satloff: One area of foreign policy that President Bush and Senator John Kerry seem to agree on is Israel. President Bush has been a vocal supporter of what Ariel Sharon has said he wants to do. Similarly, when Senator Kerry appeared on Meet the Press recently, he was asked whether he supported President Bush's position. He gave an unqualified, one-word answer: "Yes." Do you believe that either candidate will adopt different policies on this issue

should he win the election?

Frum: I think John Kerry has had one of his changes of heart. As the election draws closer, he takes on new views. I find that I like the new views a lot more than I liked the old ones, so I hope they are all permanent. But Kerry has, over the course of his life, taken a less supportive position on some of these issues.

We should be careful about over-personalizing this. American attitudes toward the Middle East have been driven by events. I do not know that the Bush administration ever intended to arrive at its current policy regarding Israel and the Palestinians. The issue is now driven by the complete discrediting of the legitimacy of the present Palestinian leadership, which the United States nurtured during the Oslo years. No one, at this point, can usefully deal with that leadership. The reactions to President Bush's statement rejecting the so-called Palestinian right of return reinforced the fact that it was never going to be possible for any Palestinian leader to say, "We accept that there will be a state called Israel that will have sovereignty over who enters its territory, and that the losers of the 1948-1949 war will not have a right to reclaim territories lost in a war they started." The fact that President Bush's remarks have been greeted in the way that they have sets a context that John Kerry or any other national leader will have to deal with. I do not believe that Kerry would have much room to deal with the issue differently from the way President Bush has.

Mathews: I believe there would be a profound difference. I do not pretend to speak for John Kerry, but I believe that, under a Kerry administration, the United States would be much more actively engaged. A great many of John Kerry's foreign policy advisors held senior posts in the Clinton administration, and therefore believe in engagement. For that reason alone, a Kerry administration would have a totally different approach. The Bush administration has made an astounding error in completely disengaging on this issue (with the sole exception of three speeches and four days of follow-up efforts).

James Schreiber, The Washington Institute: Dr. Mathews, I was struck by your assessment that we are losing the war on terrorism. The overthrow of the Taliban, which harbored al-Qaeda, was a positive step in that war. Do you believe that Libya's change of heart was unrelated to Iraq? Do you believe that the scientists who leaked information about Pakistani nuclear dealings did so in a vacuum? Did the European effort to halt Iran's nuclear developments occur in a vacuum? Aren't those developments part of the war on terror?

Mathews: That is a good question. The most positive development is that the Bush administration's apparent seriousness about WMD before the war in Iraq did reawaken people, including Europeans, to the dangers of nuclear proliferation. If we can build on this momentum, it would be very positive. Yet, any such efforts will inevitably be undermined because it is now clear that WMD had nothing to do with the war. We now know that the inspectors had barely begun their work before the war began. They did not reach full capacity until mid-February (when the first U-2 flights were launched), and the invasion was launched only three weeks later.

Regarding Pakistan, we already knew a lot about what was happening on the nuclear front. Pakistan's underground nuclear network did not come to light because Pakistani scientists told us something new. As for Libya, I have no firsthand knowledge, but according to Martin Indyk and others, Libya had been trying to work out its deal with the United States for quite some time. Simply put, Tripoli saw an opportunity to get a particularly good deal -- it was not frightened into doing anything.

Frum: Let me step back for a moment. One of the unfortunate things about any election year is that we seem to be given a set of two choices about how to evaluate events. Choice number one, which benefits the party in power, is that the war is going well -- things are getting better, we have many more successes than we have problems, and we are on an upward trajectory. Against this, the party that is out of power has to argue that things are going badly and getting worse, and that all of the current administration's decisions have therefore been mistaken.

But the downward trajectory in the conflict between the United States and extremists is in part the result of problems

that had been accumulating quickly in the decade or so before the September 11 attacks. Even if the United States had made no mistakes after those attacks, the momentum was such that we would probably still be in a worse situation.

Much of what the United States has been doing since the September 11 attacks has been like waking up from illusions and realizing that a lot of things that we thought were basically acceptable were not acceptable. For example, we have told ourselves again and again, "After this latest atrocity, surely the Saudis get it. Now they will cooperate with us." Yet even now, after they have fought gun battles with extremists in Saudi oil refineries, the Saudis are still not fully committed to saving themselves.

Pakistan's problems go beyond its terrible pattern of nuclear proliferation. It is one of the most dysfunctional societies in the world. It is a large country full of highly educated and capable people imbued with radical ideas.

So there has been a downward trajectory on several fronts. But it was not caused entirely by decisions made in the past eighteen months. Those decisions have had costs as well as benefits. But they have been, on the whole, correct.

Ze'ev Schiff, The Washington Institute: Dr. Satloff, your first question was not answered in full. You asked about the consequences of American failure in Iraq. What would it mean for the United States to lose in Iraq?

Mathews: How many times in the past few months has each of us read that it would be a catastrophe if we were to lose? Thousands, at least. Yet, none of the editorials or articles ever goes on to say what would come next. Well, we need to start asking what comes next, because we may be facing that.

One of the things that I find most appalling is that every time anybody in the political arena raises serious questions of this sort, the response is, "You are not supporting the troops." My view of supporting the troops is giving them a task that is achievable. My view of not supporting troops is giving them unarmored Humvees and sticking them in a situation where they die for a cause that is not achievable, under a set of policies that have been bungled beyond belief.

So we must think about what happens if we leave Iraq. I do not know whether there would be more violence or less, because I do not know how much of the current violence is caused by our presence. When I was there in September 2003, military leaders were already saying that the fact of our occupation was becoming a source of violence. Another key question concerns what would happen to the Kurds without U.S. troops. If they seceded, Turkey might intervene. How would such intervention affect Turkey's future with the European Union?

There are countless other questions like these. I do not see anyone asking any of them. We are back to that horrible Vietnam situation where the strongest reason for staying is that we cannot afford to leave -- but without the analysis that goes behind that reasoning.

Frum: Leaving Vietnam was pretty costly. We paid the price for a long time. There were moments that looked pretty dark in Vietnam where we now realize how close we were to achieving success.

The United States will leave Iraq, and it will probably leave soon. It should leave. No one ever intended for it to stay indefinitely. In the immediate aftermath of the war, many of the people who had most ardently opposed the war became advocates for staying the longest. Meanwhile, many of the war's strongest proponents, like Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, wanted to leave the earliest.

What would constitute failure in Iraq? If the United States were to take steps that made it appear as if it could be beaten -- if it were to show Islamic radicals that their techniques work -- the result would be more terrorism. The failure that really frightens me is the sort that occurred in the wake of the bombings in Madrid, when Spanish voters essentially provided incentive for future acts of terror. If we're looking for examples of the potential for catastrophe, we need only look at the impact of the Madrid attacks on European politics and shudder.

Mathews: Secretary Rumsfeld's policy -- I have heard it from his mouth -- is that we will keep fourteen permanent bases in Iraq. That is not leaving.

Frum: Secretary Rumsfeld has always talked about future U.S. bases as a measure that would be taken only with the negotiated consent of an Iraqi government. He would never call for imposing such a measure on Iraq -- in fact, he wants U.S. forces to leave the smallest possible footprint there.

Dennis Lormel, Federal Bureau of Investigation: Beyond what is going on in Iraq, tremendous effort has been shown across the government to develop numerous great initiatives for addressing the terrorism problem. I honestly believe we are winning the war on terrorism on a number of fronts.

Frum: One set of initiatives that Dr. Mathews and I may agree on involves the home front. It is difficult to argue that we have a truly serious counterterrorism policy here at home. The FBI is still responsible for domestic counterterrorism, and we know how well that has worked. We have been learning extremely disturbing facts from the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States. Moreover, when police apprehend someone in the act of committing a crime, they still have no way of finding out if that person is entitled to be in the United States. We have had a string of amazingly good luck, and numerous terrorist plots have been foiled in the United States and abroad. But a lot more must be done before the cigars can be passed around.

Mathews: The biggest effect of the Iraq war has been to give millions of people a new sense of having been wronged, a new feeling of humiliation, and a new source of anger against the United States. In a sense, Abu Ghraib is a bigger issue in the United States than it will be in Iraq, in that it shows us our lack of legitimacy for saying what we were saying and doing what we were doing in the Middle East.

Before the war, I believed that one of the key reasons why launching it would be such a mistake was that it would reinforce the views of people who already do not like the United States. President Bush put the issue of regional democratic reform on the table in a way that it never has been before, and that is a very positive thing. Yet, he promoted it in such a way as to associate democracy in many Arab minds with anti-Americanism.

Frum: I agree with Dr. Mathews about the importance of democracy. When we think about the purpose of this war and whether we are succeeding or failing, we should begin by asking a number of crucial questions. What is the fundamental cause of terrorism? Where does it come from? Are we dealing, as Richard Clarke seems to suggest, with a single gang of bad guys? Are we dealing, as many European governments seem to believe, with people who have understandable grievances against the United States? Or are we caught up in a regional civil war caused by that region's own dysfunctions?

As I mentioned previously, one often hears the opinion that only America acts, while everyone else reacts. Sometimes, however, America is the one reacting. Sometimes the United States is scrambling to respond as well as it can to a situation that it did not cause, cannot control, and cannot fully understand. Under such conditions, the United States is bound to make a lot of mistakes. The solution to the terrorist problem lies not in changing American behavior, though, but in trying to protect ourselves while urging others to change their behavior. That was one of the core insights on which President Bush built his idealistic statements about democracy.

Ultimately, the answer to the problem of terrorism will be found not in Washington -- despite the good work of The Washington Institute -- but among people in the Middle East who decide that murder and tyranny are not the solutions to their problems. Such violence is not a culturally specific phenomenon. Europeans have engaged in murder and tyranny on a vastly larger scale, as have Americans. We know where these impulses come from. We also know that they cannot simply be managed -- they must be overcome. ❖

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