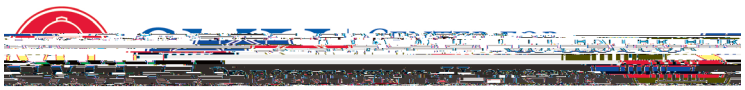


SATTLER: I'm John Sattler, retired Lieutenant General, United States Marines. I'm here also to answer Paul's questions.

MILLER: Thanks for being with us, General. Appreciate your time.

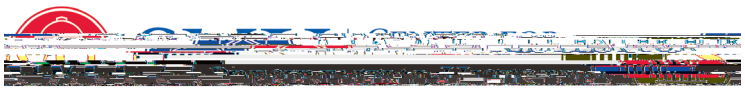
SATTLER: Great to be here. Thanks, Paul.

MILLER: As you know, we're doing this project on the Iraq surge decision. We're seeking to interview people [00:01:00] who were involved in the decision over the course of 2006 to kind of understand how and why the decision was made, as a great case study of national security decision-making and presidential decision making. So we're trying to interview the folks involved and get a good sense of what happened when, and who said what, and who believed what when. So thanks for being part of this.

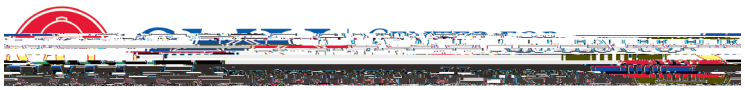
SATTLER: I'm looking forward to the opportunity to answer the question, Paul, keeping in mind it was what, nine years ago? And I'll try to recall as best I can. It was a pretty important time in all our lives.

MILLER: Yes. OK. So, just for the record would you state what your position and job was in 2006?

SATTLER: In 2006 I was the J5, the Director of Strategy and Policy on the Joint Staff. So I worked for the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs. I was at Camp Pendleton as the I-F Commanding General, then I rolled back into D.C. probably in the August timeframe. [00:02:00] I think I started on the Joint Staff August/September of 2006. So I was relatively new in the job at the time.



MILLER: OK. As you know, we want to focus quite a lot of our time on the formal



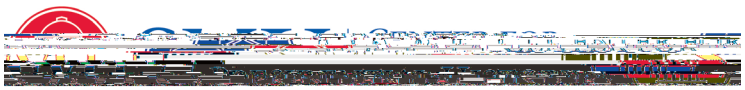
SATTLERI did not. They briefed their product directly to the chairman, my understanding was. So no, I did not have a role in taking their product and morphing into anything else.

MILLER: Well, we understand that General Pace briefed the colonels' report to Steve Hadley in early November, and then later on, the joint chiefs presented a product representing their view in later November. Are you familiar with this?

SATTLERI am, yes.

MILLER: Can you say, what's the relationship between those two briefings? Between the colonels' report and then the JCS report later on?

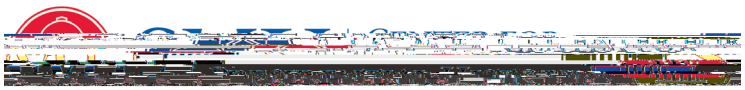
SATTLERI truly think that the chairman, General Pace, he wanted to see what the NSC came up with [00:06:00] -- very interagency approach, as you well know -- then the Council of Colonel



want you to think and be resilient and malleable. So I think that General Pace was the recipient of all this coming in, and maybe General Lute and the ops guys [00:07:00] were involved in morphing it together, but the policy and strategy folks, I do not remember me being in the room when we kluged it together.

MILLER: So are you able to comment on the relationship -- what influence did the Council of Colonel's report have on the rest of the joint chiefs thinking?

SATTLER: I know for a fact General Pace took it on board as a strong data point. I know the final outcome -- where we went with the surge -- was different, much different, than where we went into our first meeting with Dr. Crouch and the whole crew. I don't Colonel



we are stressing the force. So I went into the NSC probably thinking surge was not a good idea.

MILLER: Was going to be a real stress on the force?

SATTLER: Yes. Yes. Maybe it was a good idea, but resourcing the good idea, there was a reality that was going to come to roost.

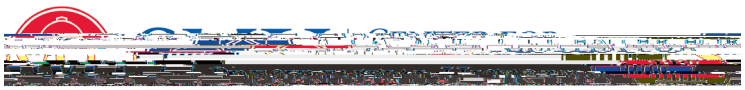
MILLER: So that actually is a great segue into where we're going to go next with this. The formal interagency review chaired by J.D. Crouch, it was commissioned right after the midterm election and kicked off a few days after that. Can you describe, what were your instructions, the position you were to advocate for in that review, what were your initial views at the beginning of that review? And then I want to ask how it evolved. But start by kind of describing kind of your going-in position? [00:11:00]

SATTLER: I recollect both General Lute and I going in, talking with General Pace when he told us. First of all, we were both like, Hey Boss, we both have full-time jobs, as does everybody, and we were thinking, whoa. This is going to take a long period of time. It was our primary point of place of duty. So the chairman, he said, "When they ring the bell, you're going to be there. No substitutes. You two are going to be there." And we did. So there was a little bit of hey, we were both fairly knew to the J-3 and the J-5. Knew we had great people, as did the chairman. So first of all, that was it -- fully dedicated, you're in there every day. No missing. We got it. We did. And the second part was we talked about the stress. He, General Pace, talked

about the stress on the force, whether or not a great concept or idea has to also be -- we have to be able to resource it, to bring it to fruition. So he -- I believed anyway -- I walked out of that meeting thinking that our position was, hey, [00:12:00] the surge is a great idea, comma, but we just don't have the forces to do it. We're going to break the force, break the families, and we're going to break the tone that we told the young men and women coming in we're going to crush them. So I went in thinking: surge, bad idea.

MILLER: And the grounds of that was not on doctrine, but it was on resourcing?

SATTLER: Yes. Absolutely not doctrine. So, there was some philosophy that, if you put more people on the ground, you put more targets, you create more antagonism and you throw gasoline on the fire, vice water when you think you're putting it out. I'll be honest. My own personal -- because we did the surge for the Battle of Fallujah, we didn't bring outside forces, but General Casey tightened his belt and gave us great Army battalions and an Army Cav regiment that showed up in our Army MB battalion, so for all intents and purposes we surged for the Battle of Fallujah. It was just internal with General Casey. [00:13:00] And in that case he tightened his belt in all those areas as we did in Al Ambar. We surged the Marines into Fallujah, we tightened our belt out towards the Syrian border. So that experience told me that -- I am a believer that if we have the resources, I believed it was a good idea, but I was convinced it would break the force going into the first meeting.



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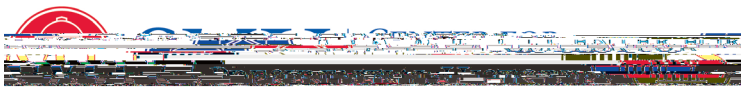
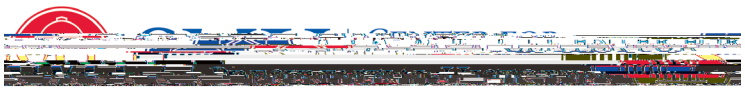


MILLER: Do you recall the State Department's position during the Crouch review? [00:15:00]

SATTLER: There was some really heated -- State Department had everything on the table, everything from status quo to precipitous withdrawal. I remember that with Philip and I going nose to nose on, "We'll order them out!" And I remember screaming, "That's an unlawful order. No Marine or soldier is going to -- we put our arms around these people. We told them we'd be there. We cannot withdraw next week. That is an unlawful order." We got really into it, which you should in a meeting like that.

MILLER: Sure.

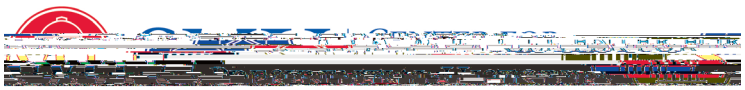
SATTLER: Then the State Department also took a look at the surge. So they came in with all three options on the table, with the idea let's debate them, let's let the chips fall where they may. And I was very impressed. I think OSD did the same. We never collaborated with Dr. Cambone and the OSD team. When Doug Lute and I got our guidance later on, every time we went to an NSC to discuss big issues, Ambassador Eric Edelman and I would talk, or I'd go up to his office, and we'd make sure, [00:16:00] if there was a disagreement between the joint staff and OSD, at least we both knew where we were going to part, a little bit or slightly. But in this case, General Pace wanted all chips on the table and candid discussions, so Doug and I were not influenced by anything that OSD was coming in. I truly --



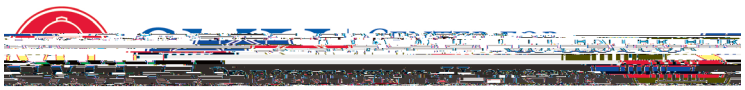
double pump. Some of the officers do and some of the senior NCOs do, [00:18:00] but I think that the realization that there were enough brigades, army brigades-- there was one Marine regiment we could surge on in, too-- but there were enough army brigades, if the surge would work in a certain timeline. It wasn't in perpetuity, but if we can surge over this period of time, we won't break the force and we can go up two, four or five brigades. And that's when I started to be a little more open minded, and I went in thinking the cupboard was bare. And as a matter of fact, if you found something on the cupboard, whether it was a Marine unit or an Army unit, it was worn out, it needed more time to rearm, refit and recuperate, and then get back into the game again. So, as we started to discuss what's available, what was their dwell time, how long would we use them for, I think the facts and the very persuasive presentations by others, changed me over time. [00:19:00]

MILLER: And do you recall who it was that dug up that information about the available brigades and the Marine regiments and at what point in review was that presentation made?

SATTLER: Well Doug Lute, the forces for are run by the J3, so I don't think it came initially from Doug because Doug was so much in the morass of filling the request for forces, etc., that the CENTCOM commander came in, doing the dwell time, doing the rotation, and briefing the SecDef on. It got down to, Paul, can we cut them short two days on their right- seat, left-seat ride, to give them the right dwell,



or we have got to get this unit out. SecDef didn't want to break faith with them; we told them they'd be out by this time. You're trying to give this one their dwell, but get this one out on a timeline, and those two forces were clashing. So, General Lute was involved heavily, heavily in that. I believe, if I remember correctly, it might have been Meghan O'Sullivan or Peter Feaver that actually brought forth the [00:20:00] -- and I'm not even sure where it came from -- an outside assessment as to where some of the brigades were. It was called the quilt or the blanket that showed every Army unit, when they went in, when they came back out. Every brigade listed. And you could track it through, and Doug Lute was the master at it, to find out dwell time, when they should come back, etc. But for some reason I remember it came outside of that, but then I think Doug went back and took a hard look at it with his team, and came out and said, "This period of time, we can have five brigades who will have dwell, who won't break dwell if we go in and surge and we accomplish the mission in accordance with this timeline". So everything had to kind of line up. It wasn't we were betting on luck or betting on hope, but if we surged in, General Petraeus could get the mission accomplished, we could get them in and get them back out and the force would be sustainable without breaking faith , [00:21:00]breaking trust, or breaking their backs.



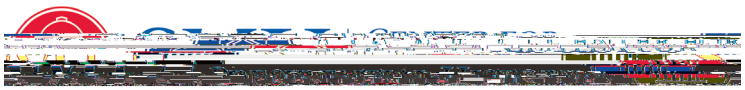
SATTLER: I believe. That's my take on it, yes. And then that's when I started -- you're always a little skeptical, where did this come from? Because I'm sitting next to I think a national treasure, Doug Lute in all the work he was doing. But I think that they did point some stuff out. I wish Doug was here so we could have this conversation, but I believe Doug went back in and really dug hard and they tightened the belt, did a couple of those little "this is going to be painful and tough but doable." And I think at that point in time, the not breaking the back of the force and doing the surge became a viable option to me personally.

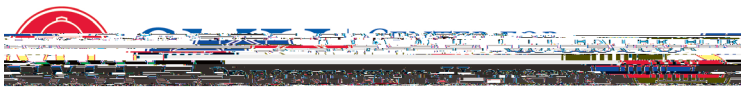
MILLER: We have interviewed Doug separately, so we've got his recollections on camera [00:22:00] So there was some discussion then about the availability of the resources which was persuasive to you.

SATTLER: Correct.

MILLER: But you previously noted that there's also MNF-I maybe objected to the surge on doctrinal grounds, maybe not doubting that the strategy would work. Was there discussion in the Crouch review about that subject?

SATTLER: Yes. I mean, obviously it was status quo, which well I thought , no, status quo is not going to cut it. Doug had been involved in it, I'd been involved in it. I'd been on the ground. Others had been over working inside of Baghdad as ambassadors, working under the ambassador, etc. A lot of experience on the





MILLER: Yes. I want to make sure I understood. Those three things you identified: the leadership of Iraqi forces, the political forum (the new government's willingness to go after bad actors), and then the transition time . Were those things actively discussed in the Crouch review?

SATTLER: Yes.

MILLER: Yes. OK. And so, OSD, MNF-I, and maybe State Department, these were things they were concerned about and why they were worried the surge in COIN might not work?

SATTLER: Correct.

MILLER: OK. And, again, was there any particular discussion or argument that helped persuade the State, OSD and MNF-I that this stuff could actually change for the better? [00:30:00]

SATTLER: I think some of the heated discussion on some of the other options that actually, by great discourse, we believed they were options but not the best options, or I'd even use the word -- I believe they weren't viable -- but, they probably were viable but not through my eyes and maybe through Doug's. But as we moved forward, the other part of it became the civilian surge, which meant, OK State Department. One day we just started saying, "We're your forces here. The provincial reconstruction teams are critical and we don't [illegible]