

April 19, 2012

To: Katonah Great Decisions Participants

From: Fred Piker – Discussion Leader

Re: Summary of 4/17/12 Meeting – “Exit From Afghanistan & Iraq: Right Time, Right Pace?” – Topic Leader: Tyler Beebe

10:15: KICKOFF

Welcome and Introduction of Guests & New Chapter Members

As noted in the 4/12 Updated Participant List, Gerry Golub has decided to join our Chapter. Additionally, welcome again to guest Bob Krasnow (who attended on 4/3) and to an additional guest, Darwin Green.

Future 2012 Day Time Meeting Dates

5/15

Future Schedule of 2012 Spring Daytime Meeting Topics

5/1 – “Middle East Realignment: The Arab Upheaval” – Co-Topic Leaders:
Mike Kornfield & George Roy

5/15 – “Mexico & Its Relationships with U. S. and Central America” – Topic
Leaders: Joe Adams and Maureen/John Carpenter

Topics Suggested So Far For September 2012-Mid January 2013

By 5/15 dates and topics will be scheduled. Members’ suggestions are welcome. **As previously indicated, on 4/24 the Planning Committee will formulate the program.**

Turkey
Immigration
Sovereign Debt/Foreign Policy Issues
Human Rights
Role of Foreign Policy
Climate Change/Foreign Policy Implications
Future of the Euro
U. S. Military Power

Islam
Aging & Population
Brazil
Turkey
Russia & Putin
North Korea
India
Iran
Potential Change in China Arising from New Leadership
Book Review-“Strategic Decisions”-Author-Zbigniew Brzezinski

4/18 KVL Program – 7:30 P. M. – “Making Sense of the Presidential Politics” – a lecture presented by Dr. John Barry Kotch

Participants were reminded re the 4/18 program.

Summer UN Program for High School Students-Rick Shiels

Rick discussed a two week intensive program he will lead this summer at Mercy College. Additionally, he invited Chapter members who have experience in Africa to travel to Dobbs Ferry to talk one afternoon (between July 11th and July 19th) with the students.

April 17th Talk at Columbia University – “Turkish Diplomacy Within the Framework of the UN in the 21st Century” – His Excellency Ertugral Apakan – Ambassador of the Republic of Turkey to the United Nations

Attention was called to the 4/17 afternoon program.

GROUP DISCUSSION

CHAPTER MOTTO - “DISCUSSIONS SHOULD BE CONDUCTED WITHOUT FONDNESS FOR DISPUTE OR DESIRE FOR VICTORY” – BEN FRANKLIN

Topic Introduction

During his introductory comments, initially Tyler focussed on Iraq. He assessed the condition in which the U. S. has left the country after eight years of war; highlighted the current political, economic, and social realities; and reflected on their future prospects. For Afghanistan he highlighted the disturbing trends facing the U. S. and NATO as the risk of a resurgent Taliban grows and pressure mounts for an earlier than scheduled troop withdrawal. Following his comments, we turned to the discussion questions listed below. Tyler’s introductory comments and the discussion questions were directed toward the central questions: (1) How do these countries fit into U. S. Middle East foreign policy?;

(2) What developments lie ahead?; and (3) In formulating its response, what is the U. S. role and responsibility? **Note: a copy of Tyler’s comments is included as an attachment with this transmission.**

Preliminary Discussion Questions

LISTED BELOW ARE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY TYLER. IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT SOME OVERLAP WITH THE FPA QUESTIONS LISTED ON PAGE 70 OF THE 2012 FPA BRIEFING BOOK

1 –Were the withdrawal from Iraq and the planned exit from Afghanistan too precipitous? Should the timing in either case have been pre-announced?

2 –Are there any circumstances under which the U. S. should get re-involved in either country?

3 –To avert a Taliban takeover once the troops are gone, prior to their exit from Afghanistan what can the U. S. and NATO effectively do?

4 –Over the long term will the West have to pump billions of dollars in aid into both Iraq and Afghanistan? Should the West consider cutting the cord?

5- To what extent and how effectively is Iran meddling in Iraq? Also, is Pakistan influencing events in Afghanistan? What can/should we do about it?

6- What are the prospects that Al Qaeda and the Taliban will combine to fill the vacuum in Afghanistan and join to promote world terrorism?

7- It would appear Afghanistan is a good candidate to become a failed state. Do you agree: Yes?/No? & why? If so, could Iraq face a similar fate?

8- Is the Sunni-Shiite divide in Iraq so deep that it may never be resolved?

Participant Observations

-Pre-announcement of the withdrawal relates to: (1) The U. S. political environment; and (2) Logistics associated with withdrawal, including the transition

-Although the U. S. is withdrawing, we will still have a local “presence” – a string of Middle East bases including fast reaction forces to step in where and when needed

- A potential positive to the U. S. withdrawal – a Taliban takeover might prove to be beneficial – insurgents teaming up with national and local leaders to provide improved governance
- The corruption, incompetence, etc. associated with Afghan & Iraqi leaders brings to mind parallels with the U. S. withdrawal from Vietnam
- During the early years of the wars the tribal chiefs seemed to exert much local power and control. What role do they currently play?
- Is there really a viable central government in either Afghanistan or Iraq?
- The Taliban are doing a better job at “winning hearts & minds” than the U. S. and other foreign forces
- Much of the unrest in both countries relates to the arbitrary drawing of country lines by the former colonial powers
- During the 1970’s Russian intervention recall the U. S. supported the Taliban and Karzai
- Remembering the Saigon visual, how big is the helicopter pad on top of the U. S. Iraqi embassy?
- Relevant to our discussion is the 4/17/12 NYT’s editorial, “Echoes of the End of the Raj” – empires cost too much – Britain learned that – now it’s America’s turn
- Should Al-Queda start “to build another campfire” that might pose a threat to the U. S., and/or get its hands on Pakistan’s nukes, and/or other such instances– these might trigger the U. S. to become re-involved in either and/or both countries
- Were the U. S. to become re-involved, it should only do so with a network of countries rather than try to do it unilaterally
- Foreign policy should not be “fear driven”; rather objectives driven
- What is the outcome in Iraq and Afghanistan for which the U. S. is willing to settle?
- A principal reason for U. S. intervention in both Iraq & Afghanistan is to help ensure a good U. S. economy
- In assessing the U. S. exit from Afghanistan & Iraq, we should evaluate it against our goals and objectives

-The widespread U. S. belief in its “manifest destiny” leads to a “blind spot” in our foreign policy

-After a pre- war buildup and start of the action, neither the U. S. nor any other country can accurately predict the future outcome

Also relevant to our discussion is the WSJ 3/17/12 article, “America is Stuck With the Mideast” – global oil markets and commerce mean that American presidents will simply not be able to set this region off to the side

12:00 P. M-ADJOURNMENT & COMMENCEMENT OF OPTIONAL CURRENT EVENTS MODULE

We discussed foreign policy implications associated with North Korea’s recent rocket launch failure

12:30 P. M. – ADJOURNMENT OF OPTIONAL MODULE

Hope you can join us on 5/1.

Best regards,