"The Riedel review was very rapid and the idea at the time was to get some fingers in the dyke and then do an assessment later."

Regarding why the second strategy review took place: "The president got the sense that what McChrystal was seeing was worse than what was expected or understood." IE, it wasn't the leaking of the assessment, but rather the contents of the assessment that compelled the second review.

"There are many differences between Iraq and Afghanistan and I laid those out ahead of time: history of central government, literacy, government revenue, terrain, nature of society, infrastructure, terrain, enemy headquarters locations (inside Iraq, outside Afghanistan), rule of law, and ability to pressure the
LESSONS LEARNED RECORD OF INTERVIEW

insurgent leaders. If the enemy has sanctuary you can't compel that enemy. And I told congress that we wouldn't be able to flip AFG the way we flipped Iraq. I knew it was going to be a longer process. I had no expectation that we would be able to flip AFG. I did believe we could drive down the violence level. And we did achieve that for over a year."

Regarding why there was no 4th option provided by the military: "An 'option' in the military needs to accomplish the mission. There's no sense in providing an option that will not be viable, not accomplish the mission. Our view was that 40,000 additional U.S? Forces was the minimum needed to do the mission."

Regarding why more red flags weren't raised about the short surge timeline: "The timeline was just sprung on us. We had no discussion of that during the process. Two days before the president made the speech, on a Sunday, we all got called and were told to be in the Oval office that night for the President to lay out what he would announce two evenings later. And he laid it out, there it is. Take it or leave it. 30K plus Gates' 10 percent. And we're going to begin the drawdown the summer of 2011. None of us had heard that before. And we were then asked, are you all okay with that? He went around the room and everyone said yes. And it was take it or leave it....Until that point, nobody ever thought this was going to last forever, but nobody presumed we would begin drawing down in July 2011."

Regarding his hope that he could get the timeline extended in 2011: "Obviously that's in the back of your mind. We hoped for an extended surge, and we also had not discussed the speed of the drawdown, so I hoped for a slow one."

"The President not only imposed the deadline to begin the drawdown of forces, but he also dictated the pace of the drawdown."

"We did a monthly teleconference with Obama on Afghanistan and Pakistan. It was weekly with Bush during the Surge in Iraq."

"The president was not deeply involved in the Riedel review. He drove the subsequent process in the summer and fall."

On CERP: "What drove spending was the need to solidify gains as quickly as we could knowing that we had a tight drawdown timeline.... And we wound up spending faster than we would have if we felt we had forces longer than we did."

"VSO expansion was absolutely driven by the timeline."

"Special Forces are special and you can’t mass produce them."
"We didn't have enough white SOF to do VSO, so I added two infantry battalions. And we split all of the A teams in half, augmented them with a squad or more of infantry and doubled the number of VSO sites. Again, this was a big-time race against the clock. We need to extend security while we can, while we have the forces."

Regarding capacity among different SOF: "I think it's fair to say the Green Berets, the Army SF, had a gift for this. It was very much in line with the FID that has long been a task for Green Berets, and other SOF had emphasized that less. If you look at the mission of SEALs and even Marines it generally connected more to CT for maritime operations, so I don't think it should be a surprise that they were initially less comfortable with VSO, though they did very well over time."

Regarding measuring success in VSO: "Blocks were turning from red to amber to green. And if you do this week after week after week you can feel whether it's working or not. I also visited many sites and was comfortable that, while very difficult, the concept was working."

Where VSO succeeded: "It succeeded where you had a good SF team, which had the self-confidence and the capability to go into an area without security, establish themselves, survive, understand the human terrain, go through the whole process we had for recruiting, vetting, training, equipping for a local force that is supported by the tribal elders and overseen by the Afghan Police at province level."

Regarding the development/governance components of VSO: "It was working initially, but we ran out of development people from the embassy. So we're trying to replace them with uniformed people, and they're not the professionals in that area."