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CONFIDENTIAL

June 1, 2010

For: Hillary
From: Sid
Re: Israel strategy/Petraeus

This memo is in two parts, one about Israel and strategy, based on information from Pat Lang, the other about General Petraeus, who met privately for more than an hour today with Sean Wilentz.

I. "The Guns of August Moment"

We may be entering a period in which events tumble in an accelerating unraveling similar to the descent into war that occurred in August 1914. All analogies, of course, are imprecise, and this one may be scare-mongering, but it might be the most helpful in formulating strategy now. While many, many things need to be done, perhaps the most pressing is preventing a great unraveling. More on this after relating my conversation with Pat Lang today.

Pat queried his network and came back with information on Rahm's meetings with Netanyahu and the Israelis and Israeli plans. You can check the information out and judge it for yourself. Pat's informants are current US intelligence officers and Middle East sources throughout the region. According to Pat, the Israelis insisted that Israel remain the preponderant military power in the region. At one point, the Israelis raised the issue of NATO membership, a bizarre concept that failed to take account of Turkish reaction as well as the inherent limitations on Israeli action such membership would impose. Pat also picked up Israeli contingency plans to bomb Iran, not with aircraft but using ballistic missiles and submarine based missiles, possibly including low level nuclear weapons.

Pat is a very cautious and highly experienced former intelligence operative and analyst. Whatever one thinks of his information, it provides a point of departure, even if it is faulty. Under the current circumstances, an unraveling could easily take place through any number of unforeseen events that lead to a variety of catastrophic conclusions. Consider just one scenario: Turkey could decide to have its navy accompany aid ships; if attacked Turkey could invoke Clause 5; and so on. US policy should not be brinkmanship, but pulling everyone back from the brink. US weight should be thrown into the balance to attempt to slow down the action of all

parties and force them to assess potential unintended consequences. The US needs to set sharp limits, if we can.

II. The Petraeus Confessions

After Sean Wilentz published an op-ed in the NY Times on Grant about two months ago, he received an unexpected call from Petraeus, who is interested in Grant and a Princeton graduate. Today he came to Princeton to see Sean and he spoke freely and widely. On Grant, to begin with, he said he identified with him because of his "loneliness." He said that when Scooter Libby was knocked out of the administration Cheney's ability to function suffered and his influence gradually fell. That's what provided the opportunity for the surge. Bush became more open to a different approach in relation to Cheney's loss of power. Petraeus said that Rumsfeld bore a lot of responsibility for the post-Katrina disaster. He said that regular army troops at nearby Fort Hood could have prevented much of the chaos. Sean suggested that's probably true about the oil spill now, whatever he meant by that, and Petraeus agreed, whatever he meant. (I would use the army to build the barrier island that Gov. Jindal is demanding.) On the Obama administration, he said he greatly respects you and feels you have a sense of strategy, including on the Middle East. He described Obama as intelligent but cold and lacking in vision and, worst of all, surrounded by terrible advisers—specifically naming Axelrod and Rahm. He said that they have no strategic understanding, operate day to day, and even on that narrow calculus are unimaginative and give poor advice. He describes the President as isolated in a "cold" White House with bad advisers, using the word "cold" several times. On the Israeli raid, he said it was an act of incredible stupidity from a military point of view. He said that troops should never, ever be dropped into the middle of a hostile mob. That the Israelis didn't know this was astonishing. He felt the Israelis had other viable options and chose the worst possible one.