



GEORGE H. W. BUSH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

**TRANSCRIPT**

**INTERVIEW WITH BRENT SCOWCROFT**

November 12-13, 1999  
Washington, D.C.

**Interviewers**

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**Attending**  
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To cite an interview, please use the following general format: [name of interviewee] Interview, [date of interview], George H.W. Bush Oral History Project, Miller Center, University of Virginia.

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**Zelikow:** General Scowcroft, thank you for participating in this oral history session. I assume that you're aware of the ground rules that we've discussed for the preparation of transcripts, your opportunity to review those transcripts, and the chance you'll have to revise answers to be sure that they are accurate if you're uncertain about an answer you gave to a question in the sessions we're conducting today and tomorrow. I'd like to start with a little bit about you. Could you, in your own words, look back on how you were trained? How would you describe the training and upbringing of a statesman in your case?

**Scowcroft:** I have probably an unusual history. I wanted to go to West Point since I was about 12 years old. I read a book called *West Point Today* and fell in love with it—not with a military career, I just wanted to go to West Point. I was fortunate enough to do so. I graduated into the Army Air Force—which shortly thereafter became the Air Force—without any particular strategic vision in mind. I just enjoyed flying. Shortly after I got my wings, I was in an aircraft accident and spent two years in the hospital. I was told then I would never fly again, so I started rethinking what I should do. The opportunity came to go back to West Point to teach, so I took advantage of that and went to Columbia and got my master's degree and ultimately a doctorate.

Then I pursued an eclectic Air Force career. I did fly again, but not operationally. I focused on strategy concepts and went on and had a two-year teaching tour at the Air Force Academy. From there, I went into Air Force plans, and then into the office of the Secretary of Defense. When I was promoted to one-star general—it's like being a second lieutenant over again—there aren't any great jobs for a one-star general. The Air Force said, "How would you like to go to the White House as military assistant?"

I had no idea what that was. It was a management job in charge of all the Defense Department resources that are used by the White House—Air Force One, the motor pool, the helicopters, Camp David, all those things. So in the absence of any attractive job, I said, "Fine. I'd be happy to do that." I spent about a year doing that, and then Henry Kissinger needed a new assistant. Al Haig was going back to the Army, and he asked if I wanted to join him. I said, "Sure. I'd be happy to." And that's what launched me on a semi-political career.

**Zelikow:** What year did you graduate from West Point?

**Scowcroft:** I graduated from West Point in 1947. I was part of the last three-year class at West Point. They had cut from four to three during the war, and they actually split my class in half. Half remained three, and the other half became the first four-year class.

**Zelikow:** Where did you grow up?

**Gen. Scowcroft:** I grew up in Utah and had a tranquil youth in a small town—about 25,000 people at that time—with a lot of mountains nearby. I enjoyed the outdoors. I knew about the Depression, but I did not personally participate in it. My father was a wholesale grocer, and we were adequately cared for.

**Zelikow:** In books, people have described you as a Mormon. Is that fair? Do you consider yourself a Mormon?

**Scowcroft:** Yes, I do. I have close personal ties to some of the church leadership. They would not consider me a good Mormon. I don't live by all of the rules the Mormons like—I like a glass of wine and a cup of coffee. But yes, I do consider myself a Mormon. It's part of a religious and a cultural heritage.

**May:** Could you say something about your fellow students or fellow faculty members or teachers whom you remember?

**Scowcroft:** I went to graduate school at Columbia at a wonderful time. Some of the real greats of Columbia teaching were there, and I was able to take advantage of it. Columbia is not an intimate graduate school. But because I was there as a pre-training, if you will, to go back to teach at West Point, I had unusual advantages. My guiding star was William T. R. Fox, who had a really fine strategic mind, and I was fortunate to have him to guide me. I won't go through the list, but he's probably the one person who stands out in my mind as having shaped the way I thought. This was the time when [Hans] Morgenthau's epic treatise was new, and I guess I cut my teeth on realism, but with a human edge that came from Fox and some of the others.

**May:** What years were you at Columbia?

**Scowcroft:** I was at Columbia in '52 and '53. I got my master's there. West Point's only 50 miles from Columbia, and I went down to evening classes and other things to fulfill my residence requirements for the doctorate.

**Zakaria:** General, when you studied as a graduate student, outside of Fox's influence, were there books that you remember as having had an enormous impact on you? Were there books you used as a professor that you found particularly useful in thinking about strategy?

**Scowcroft:** The most influential book for me was Morgenthau and a book of reading by Morgenthau and Ken Thompson, who's at the University of Virginia. The book that I primarily remember—and was most influential in my life—was Morgenthau's, because he set a philosophical framework to look at the world. And while I never adopted it wholesale, I think I'm much closer to that kind of formulation than I am to any other. I did read other books that criticize Morgenthau, but I think that was the most deeply ingrained.

My international law professor was Leland Goodrich. I can't remember the name of his book, but that was influential as well—primarily as a counterpart to Morgenthau. Comparing the fundamentally different outlooks of those two men and what they represented, I think, provided an unusual framework for me. It's one that has pretty much stayed with me. I hope it's a little deeper and richer than it was when I was a graduate student, but I think those influences were very important in my formative years.

**Zakaria:** The central strategic event that was going on, I imagine, was the Vietnam War. Morgenthau, as you know, was a critic. What did you think of the realist critique made by Morgenthau, [George F.] Kennan, [Walter] Lippmann, that the war was being fought in a peripheral part of the world, and that the United States should have focused more on core issues?

**Scowcroft:** The issue of Vietnam, of course, was nowhere around. Even the theory of a Vietnam War was nowhere around. The issue when I was a graduate student was the Korean War. I was a supporter of the Korean War, on the theory that this was really perhaps the first conflict that the United States had engaged in where the military was an instrument of foreign policy rather than—at least in the popular mind—as a crusade to make the world safe for democracy, the war to end all wars. Here was a deliberate use of the military in pursuit of our foreign policy and national interests. I thought that was exactly what the military ought to do.

I had mixed feelings all along about Vietnam. I did feel that it was somewhat in the periphery, but if, in fact, the domino theory had any validity, the perils of a success in Vietnam could be very dangerous for us and our position. I did not agree with Morgenthau's more extreme position there, but I thought we had not gotten into Vietnam on any kind of a thoughtful strategic basis. [Dwight D.] Eisenhower was the first to have to make a decision on Vietnam, and that did happen while I was teaching at West Point. Eisenhower said, "No, we're not going to get involved in that, and certainly we're not going to use nuclear weapons at Dien Bien Phu."

**May:** What were the years you were teaching at West Point and at the Air Force Academy?

**Scowcroft:** I taught at West Point 1953 to '57 and at the Air Force Academy from '62 to '64.

**May:** The period when you were at West Point was the period of Kissinger's nuclear weapons book and Kaufman's symposium and so on? Did you get engaged in the issues raised by those books at that time? Two questions, first, in your own mind, and second, was this a subject of debate among the faculty?

**Scowcroft:** When I was at West Point, I was just beginning what came to be my focus on military strategy and especially on nuclear weapons and their management. At West Point, my primary teaching experience was Russian history, and subsidiarily, contemporary foreign governments and European history. So I worked hard on those primarily and yes, the Kissinger book especially was a topic of discussion among the faculty at West Point. I was not teaching in that particular area at that time, although it was in the same department. It's hard for me to remember exactly what I thought about nuclear weapons.

My introduction, of course, was Fox, who was part of a small book—I can't remember the name of it now—but a very small book. It was the first one on nuclear weapons and what their role was. The thrust of it was that they had transformed war, and it would never be the same again.

That was my first notion. The second was Eisenhower. First, what surprised me was what I took to be his attitude toward nuclear weapons, which was that they were a bigger and better way to wage war. But in actual practice, his understanding was that that really wasn't right, and they were different in a way that set them aside. So that was the evolution of my thinking about that.

**Zelikow:** What we're pursuing, of course, with these questions is formative episodes, because usually a lot of people figure out how they think about the world because they lock onto opinions about events that occur while they're learning how to think. Those are often quite early in their lives. They have key events that decisively shape the way they view the world. So what we're doing with these questions is working through key things and debates that were going on while you were learning how to think about the world, to see if any of those were really shaping. I just wanted you to see where these questions were all going.

For instance, flexible response, and your attitudes toward flexible response and that whole debate which was dividing the military. You were an Air Force officer. The Air Force from [Gen. Curtis] LeMay on down had a view, which was not necessarily the same as Maxwell Taylor's view. Did you find yourself an easy supporter of the Air Force's orthodoxy, or were you already a little bit off the reservation?

**Scowcroft:** I was quite a bit off the reservation from the extreme Air Force position. There was a General down at Maxwell, who in 1950 or '51, for example—somewhere around there, I'm not exactly sure—wrote a book saying, "Look, the Soviet Union is a mortal enemy. We ought to take them on now while we're very superior and not wait until they build up." This was kind of a preventive war thing. I was not very sympathetic to the whole notion of massive retaliation and the first NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] strategy of a trip wire. I applauded the introduction of flexible response, as what I thought a more realistic way that, if we in response to some minor event had to use our strategic nuclear weapons, we would have started something incommensurate with the nature of what was happening. I thought that the [John F.] Kennedy approach—which was to beef up our conventional forces, and go to a flexible response—was a far better way to do it.

**Zelikow:** Did the Air Force consider you a foreign area officer, or what we now call foreign area officer? You then became an air attaché.

**Scowcroft:** I was a fortunate beneficiary of a very relaxed Air Force at this time, about military careers. If I had been in either the Army or the Navy, I think I could not have done what I did. I sort of picked and chose. I never did say to myself, *I'm a career Air Force officer. I'm going to be in for a full career.* But I was able to go from one job to another—challenging, interesting jobs, very unusual for a career pattern. And the Air Force did not hold it against me that I did not serve the normal number of times in operational units and so on. So I have only good words for the way the Air Force handled me. But, no, I was not categorized in any way that I know of. The Air Force doesn't have the foreign area kind of specialty. I served one intelligence tour as an assistant attaché in Yugoslavia, and that was another very formative experience.

**May:** When was that?

**Scowcroft:** That was in 1959 to '61. [Josip Broz-] Tito was still very firmly in control. I really took that job as part of my teaching Russian history. Here was a communistic experiment in Yugoslavia that was turning away from the classic Soviet Communism into workers' management of industry. And, of course, Tito was a heretic in the Communist community. So this gave me a chance to look at the Communist system from a different perspective and, of course, in the light of recent events, it gave me a little background in Yugoslavia that I wouldn't otherwise have had.

**Zakaria:** I wanted to elaborate on Philip's question about the events that might have shaped your life. I was thinking of the '50s and the '60s, because you were teaching during the '60s and were thinking about these issues. Were there any events that left a strong impression on you that you felt passionately about? I'm thinking about things like the [Alger] Hiss trial, the firing of [Gen. Douglas] MacArthur, the Bay of Pigs, Vietnam. Is there anything you remember as having made you think, *Gosh. We're doing something very, very wrong here*, or somehow shaped your view of U.S.-Soviet relations, or even the making of foreign policy, Presidential management?

**Scowcroft:** It's hard to look back. There are few things that jump out at me. But when people say, "What did you think about this and that?" I realize they were important. The things like the Hiss trial, the career of Richard Nixon. Before I knew Richard Nixon, I was not a particular fan of his. I thought he had a fine appreciation of foreign policy, and I was very sympathetic to his foreign policy. I was not sympathetic to the ways he had made a career—the whole notion of the internal communist menace. One of the things that I remember now, in terms of debate, who lost China? The China lobby. I remember a magazine called the *Reporter Magazine*, which got started, and reached fame, and collapsed on the issue of investigative reporting, one of the early ones, about the insidious China lobby. All of these are bits and pieces that went into my making, but I can't think of anything that stands out particularly as formative.

When I was teaching at the Air Force Academy, I taught international relations and defense policy. This was at the time of the [Robert S.] McNamara revolution in defense, and that had a big impact on me in two ways. I thought that McNamara was doing what he was doing in a manner that was probably destructive rather than creative. But at the same time, I felt that he was bringing to the military something that was badly needed.

The habit of the military was, "We feel these things, we know what we're doing, we know what the strategy is, we know what the odds are." In fact, it was seat-of-the-pants. And what McNamara brought to the military was self-analysis. Analyze what you're doing, look at it, put it under the microscope, look at it analytically. Don't just react emotionally. I think McNamara fundamentally changed the military in a way that has made it a much better instrument than it was before 1962.

**Zelikow:** I'd like to stay just a little longer on your shaping years before you start working for Kissinger. Pursue the Yugoslavia point a little bit, which you described as an important episode in your life—as it would be, your first foreign service. But also tie that into the teaching you'd been doing on Russian history. You'd have to have been thinking a lot about what you thought Russia was and had been, and also perhaps European history, too. And how the experience of serving in Yugoslavia changed or affected that. I'd like you to think about the issues that

preoccupied you as a teacher, and the ways you thought about Russia, the eastern Communism, and your Yugoslav experience.

**Scowcroft:** I came early to the Soviet issue. I did not focus in my graduate work at Columbia on either the Soviet Union or Communism. But I do remember there was a chapter of the Young Communist League at Columbia, and I remember going, for example, to a lecture by Howard Fast, whose novels I loved, saying what a wonderful, idyllic place the Soviet Union was. That started me thinking about it. I was not a revisionist at all on the Soviet Union or the beginning and the course of the Cold War. The more I got to understand about Russian culture and history, the more I understood the complexities of it. It was not simple, straight, world domination that was happening here, but it was a pattern of the way they thought against the pattern of the way we thought, which sort of led us down the path we were going.

Yugoslavia was very helpful in putting a different picture, really, on what Communism did to people and how Communist systems work. When I was in Yugoslavia, it was a period of warm official relations with the United States. They had just made a big purchase of F-86 aircraft, and the Soviet Union was slightly menacing at that time. We had a good relationship with the Yugoslav military and with the government. But at the same time—we had a tiny baby when we went there—they would harass the servants, make them come in once a week and report on everybody who had been to the house and so on. You could see the system, as it will, working behind the scenes.

They were trying to attract tourism, for example, and they had all these flashy brochures. It's a beautiful country. But when the tourists would get to the borders, they would tear out the seats of the car and look for contraband and so on. So I got a more personal view of the complexities, the callous brutality that goes with the kind of regime that at that time was trying to show a human face on what was still a Communist system. It helped give me a detachment that I hadn't had before, and helped me realize that most everything is more complex than it seems, or than you read about as a student. Is this enough detail? I haven't thought about any of these questions, to be honest with you.

**Zelikow:** It is, in a way. You need to think, take a moment to reflect, *Is there something I want to tell them that they need to know about me that isn't common knowledge*. Take a moment to think about that. I'm getting ready to get into Nixon. But I wanted to ask you one more question about just how you managed to get stars with this record, because I know a lot of people with records like this who don't get stars. That's interesting to me.

**Scowcroft:** I'm a pretty ordinary person, and there isn't anything magical about what really happened to me.

**Zelikow:** You didn't have that experience of being tortured by the secret police which scarred you for life?

**Scowcroft:** I did not, no. No, I didn't. I think of that because that made me think, *How do I differ from somebody like a John McCain?* I think John McCain came very quickly to a kind of maturity and perspective on life that has taken me a lot longer and has come much more gradually, and maybe less complete.

**Zakaria:** You studied the Soviet Union, and you lived in Yugoslavia. What did you think about the relationship between Communism as an ideology and foreign policy? In other words, did you think that Communist states had something about them in their DNA that made them expansionist? Did you think this was *realpolitik*, and the Communist ideology was just a mask? How did you think about those issues, thinking both about the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia?

**Scowcroft:** The Yugoslav experience modified somewhat my views of Communism, and it turned out, perhaps, not properly. Because what I saw going on in Yugoslavia, which is a multiethnic country, was an attempt to bridge the ethnicity in a greater vision, and the greater vision, of course, was the Communist Party. In Yugoslavia, the Communist Party was heavily influenced by the Partisans in the war. These were people whose formative period was fighting a cause, and that gave them a bond that was probably more important than the ideology.

I saw Tito, trying, by the things he did, to remove the hostility and the differences among the population. And I thought he had done an adequate job. I also saw Yugoslavia as a country without any territorial designs on anybody. So I concluded that there was nothing instinctive in Communism, or in the Slavic soul, that demanded expansion.

But one of the things that I did get from my study of Russia was that here is a country, without natural boundaries and borders, open to invasion—which had happened over and over again. And I concluded that one of the ways they sought to maintain the security of their heartland was by expanding their borders and having more strategic room. On top of that, I did believe that ideology had added to that, if you will, nationalist feeling. The true sense that history was marching in a single direction, and that the Soviets—not Yugoslavs, now—the Soviets, saw themselves as the agent, or midwife, of history, and accelerating it.

Yes, there was an expansionism. Was it a world design? No, I don't think so. In fact, as we see now, some of the moves were quite defensive. But later on in the '70s, the correlation of forces is, I think, expressive of what motivated the Soviet system.

So I believe it *was* expansionist, and in the aftermath of World War II they saw the collapse in Western Europe as the opportunity that history was giving them to reorder societies. It was the Marshall Plan, and subsequently NATO, which prevented that happening. So I have a very traditional view of the Cold War.

What do I think about the Russians now, in light of this? I'm not sure. People think there is something innately within the Russian soul that seeks expansion. I don't really think so, but I think that history does form the way people think. If you look, for example, at the way Britain developed as opposed to the way that France and Germany developed—the fact that Britain was isolated, and that it didn't need to have a standing army to repel invasion all the time. Therefore, the King didn't have leverage over his nobles, and he had to pay a price for raising armies, and the price was liberty for the nobility. That wasn't true in France, for example, because of the imminent threat of invasion. I think that carries over in a larger way to Russia.

**Zelikow:** I'd like to go back to your career for a moment. You became a Brigadier General by the end of the 1960s and got what might be considered a plum job at the White House. But I look back on your career—teaching, a little bit of intelligence work—and it's hard to imagine that the



Air Force says, “This is how to become a General, have career like Scowcroft had.” So as you look back on your career, why do you think you were able to be elevated? Why didn’t you retire as a Lieutenant Colonel?

**Scowcroft:** As I said, I had a very unusual Air Force career, and in the lower grades it didn’t matter so much. I performed, obviously, adequately well, to be promoted up to Lieutenant Colonel below the zone—that is, at the first time it was possible. That was not true when I was promoted to Colonel. I was promoted at the regular time. And at that time I thought, *That’s the end of my career*. But I actually spent less time as a Colonel than I spent as anything else other than a Second Lieutenant.

I think it primarily happened because of an assignment I had out of the Air Force Academy into Air Force headquarters, where I was in the long-range planning division. My boss in that division was a General by the name of [Richard A.] Yudkin, and he sort of took me under his wing and brought me along and challenged me and stimulated me. My guess is he brought me to the attention of the Air Force leadership. I went from that assignment to the office of the Secretary of Defense for a year or so, and then—again, because of him—I was brought back to the Air Force and put in a special small shop—which was the Air Force relationship to the Joint Staff—that worked the papers for the Joint Chiefs of Staff. It was very key job.

**Zelikow:** This was in what year?

**Scowcroft:** This was in 1969.

**May:** What time did you work with Yudkin?

**Scowcroft:** I went there in ’64. Sixty-four to ’67, and then I went to the National War College and then back to the Pentagon.

**Zelikow:** You were working as a liaison with the Joint Staff in 1969?

**Scowcroft:** Yes. As I say, that was a key job. One of the jobs of this group was to brief the operations deputies before they would go into meetings of the junior JCS and to brief the Air Force Chief of Staff before he would go into meetings. That was a major step. Then in 1969, with the new Nixon administration, in Vietnam they decided on the course of Vietnamization, and I was given the job—under a BG [Brigadier General]—of Vietnamization as far as the Air Force was concerned. Finally, I was sent down to the Joint Staff, to be the special assistant to the director of the Joint Staff, where I spent a year. So through those sorts of exposures to the Air Force leadership, I was able to overcome what otherwise would have been the kiss of death—that is, the unusual nature of my career.

**Zelikow:** Did you have a particularly important experience with respect to bombing decisions in Indochina, such as a key role in the menu bombing? You were in that compartment, and you played a planning role with respect to the menu bombings, or other planning roles where you developed very strong opinions about issues of escalation and coercion?

**Scowcroft:** When I was in the Joint Staff, the Vietnam bombing was going on. My primary work was issues that were before the Joint Chiefs of Staff, planning issues, rather than operational

issues. So I didn't work very much with the J3, who actually did the bombing planning. However, while I was there, the director of J3, who ran the bombing, moved over and became the director of the Joint Staff. So he took part of his bombing with him, and I did become involved in a strategic way—not in target picking, but in the philosophy of what was happening, yes.

Now, how I got to the White House is a little bit of military politics. Henry Kissinger's deputy at that time was Al Haig, and the Air Force very badly wanted that position. There was no notion that Al Haig would ever leave, but I think one of the things they did is look around for who they might get close in case Al Haig left. I had the kinds of credentials that would most likely appeal to Henry Kissinger—in terms of my teaching, my graduate degree, and so forth.

So they sent me over to a job that had absolutely nothing to do with Henry Kissinger, but it got me inside the White House. And the Air Force strategy, inasmuch as it was a strategy, worked.

**Zakaria:** Just very briefly back to the target picking. Do you remember at the time, any discussion of whether it was a good idea that the President was picking targets himself—if President [Lyndon] Johnson, in his picking of targets, was doing the wise thing? I ask that, of course, because as you well know, during the Gulf War, the administration made a very public point of saying that the President was not picking targets himself.

**Scowcroft:** The issue of picking targets, White House involvement—yes, it was a subject of much, much discussion inside the Pentagon. I was relatively relaxed about it, in this sense: To have a President picking targets is a disutility out in the field. He can't possibly know what the tactical situation is. It's an inefficient way to operate. The people who are experts in it ought to do that.

On the other hand, to have the experts out here doing it is an inefficiency to the President's strategic purposes in Washington. He has things he has to be concerned about. And my conclusion was if there's to be a disutility in the field or in the White House, it's better to have it in the field. That's still my view. In the Gulf War, for example, the President didn't pick the targets, but the President made quite clear and went over what the categories of targets were, what would be hit, what wouldn't be hit, what was our philosophy. Our philosophy was we didn't want to destroy Iraq, so the targets were focused on military issues—not power plants, not the kinds of things which would have to be rebuilt by somebody after the war.

I still think the notion of the President just saying, "Ok, we'll go to war and then turn it over to the military," is not right, nor is the reverse.

**Zelikow:** You're also kind of an air war skeptic, for an Air Force career officer. You show up, at least in the written accounts, again and again lining up with the skeptics on what air power can do. Is that something you picked up through book learning, or through experience in having to think about what bombing could coerce people to do back there in the 1960s?

**Scowcroft:** I've thought a lot about air power and the use of air power, and I think it's a marvelous instrument. But it's not an all-purpose instrument. One has to look at what the objective is. There are different kinds of wars. With respect to Saddam Hussein, we were in part trying to influence his mind, but primarily our goal was to drive him out of Kuwait. I think the

air part was crucial in doing that because it weakened his forces, and it undermined their morale so that it made a much easier job for the ground forces when that came.

The objective there was very different, for example, from the objective in Kosovo. There the objective was compellence. We were trying to change somebody's mind. That's a very difficult thing to do. I think that's giving air power a charge that by and large it's not equipped to do. I was not sympathetic to a solely bombing campaign in Kosovo, and even with the outcome, I think it was the wrong strategy.

There are cases when air power can do a certain job by itself. I think, for example, in some kinds of conflict it's sufficient to stop an invading army for long enough for us to get ground troops over there. It can do a lot of things there. But this "immaculate coercion," as Arnie Kanter put it once, is a mistake. It's a siren song that we'll regret if we make a practice of it.

**May:** By something like 1980, you would have been on anybody's list of a half-dozen or so eminent defense intellectuals—the only one in uniform that I can think of. When did you become a defense intellectual? You talk about working with Yudkin. Yudkin was one of the most energetic and thoughtful users of the RAND Corporation, for example. Did you have any associations with those people? Did you begin to think of yourself as part of that company in the '60s?

**Scowcroft:** I don't know if I ever became a defense intellectual. When I worked for General Yudkin, I got my first association with RAND because some of the briefings we had about the future of air power, we would take out and brief RAND, and sometimes the RAND board, on it. I worked with members of RAND. I was not primarily involved in arms control when I came to work with Henry Kissinger. That developed gradually. I was no longer in uniform in 1980. I retired when I became National Security Advisor in '75. But I probably acquired it more after I left the [Gerald R.] Ford administration and left service, because I turned my attention to arms control and so on, and focused on that sort of thing until I became really comfortable with it. Then in the '80s—well, you helped us on the President's commission for strategic forces, and I just sort of grew into it.

**Zakaria:** General, the other formative influence people have sometimes is heroes, people they remember. Often military people will have military heroes, but you might have had Presidents, Secretaries of State. Again, thinking back from the late '40s to the '60s, before we get to the White House, before you start meeting these people on a regular basis. Who were the people you admired? Who would you have associated yourself with politically or in history?

**Scowcroft:** I have several heroes. One of my early heroes was General Eisenhower, who, I thought, made the transition from General to politician very smoothly, and ran the country the way I thought it ought to be run. Even before that, though, General [George C.] Marshall, was one of my real heroes. The power of his intellect, the flexibility of his mind, the modesty of his personality, I thought were terrific. Later on, General [Andrew J.] Goodpaster became a role model. He was Commandant the year that I was a student at the National War College, and I thought he was simply outstanding. Interestingly enough, he and General Yudkin had been at NATO in an important time, and so I got to know a group of them, again, through the ministrations of General Yudkin.

**Zelikow:** I'd like to move forward to the Kissinger NSC [National Security Council]. You actually started working at the White House when, 1970?

**Scowcroft:** No, the end of '71, as the military assistant.

**Zelikow:** You became part of the National Security Council staff when?

**Scowcroft:** First of January '73. I was military assistant for one year. One week after I arrived in the White House, I was on the advance trip for President Nixon's visit to China. Three months after I'd been there, I ran the advance trip for his visit to the Soviet Union, so I started out with a marvelous opportunity to visit parts of the world and learn—especially the parts of the world that I had academically been interested in.

**Zelikow:** Your rise at the NSC seems rapid to me. You started at the NSC at the beginning of '73, and then within the space of little more than a year, you're the National Security Advisor. You're the National Security Advisor in all of '75.

**Scowcroft:** I didn't start at the bottom of the National Security Council. I replaced Al Haig as Henry's deputy, and for the first few months, that was awkward. I didn't know anything about the NSC, and there were at least three people who thought they should have been in my shoes. So it was a steep learning curve. In 1973, after I had been in the job about nine months, President Nixon made Henry Kissinger Secretary of State, but left him as National Security Advisor.

**Zelikow:** But your role naturally increased?

**Scowcroft:** So my role increased. In fact, I became the National Security Advisor because he spent more and more time over there and less and less time in the White House. I pretty much ran the thing—other than sharing the meetings and so on—until '75, when President Ford did his own Saturday night massacre and replaced the Secretary of Defense, the Director of Central Intelligence, and took the National Security hat from Henry Kissinger.

**Zelikow:** Was it Henry who picked you for the deputy's job?

**Scowcroft:** Yes, it was.

**Zelikow:** Why did he pick you?

**Scowcroft:** Well, he tells a story, which I'm sure is apocryphal, that on one of our trips somewhere—and since I owned Air Force One, I used to travel on the Presidential trips—he saw me standing toe to toe on Air Force One with Bob Haldeman—when he was at the height of his power and glory—arguing that he couldn't do something he wanted to do. And he said, "That's the man I want."

**Zelikow:** Okay, here's Henry. He's a strategic thinker, he's making you his deputy in a role in which he's really relying on you to be a strategic thinker, or is he? Does he perceive you at this point as a strategic thinker who can understand what he's trying to do in the world and be an effective implementer, at the very least?

**Scowcroft:** Not immediately did he think of me as a strategic thinker, no. He saw that I had an adequate background, but Henry still thinks that intellectual Generals are a menace. He says, “Of course, I don’t mean you.” But no, he didn’t. I think, in all honesty, one of the reasons he picked me was that he thought I had integrity. When Henry would take his trips to Vietnam, or his negotiating trips, and leave Al Haig back with President Nixon, he thought things happened that shouldn’t have been happening. I think that at first he got me because he thought I would be trustworthy, then the rest, gradually. It’s not easy to be an intellectual comrade of Henry Kissinger’s. That has to grow. It didn’t start that way, no.

**Zelikow:** You started as Kissinger’s deputy. You have already mentioned coming into an atmosphere—let’s say not an atmosphere of complete mutual trust and respect or regard. What are some of the memories you took from those years, especially ’73 and ’74—which were difficult years—about the way the NSC was run, the way the NSC should be run better, or what you really liked about the way the NSC worked? Just reflect a little bit about that experience as you were learning that very steep learning curve there in 1973.

**Scowcroft:** When I got to the NSC, as I say, I had a steep learning curve. But I was not unfamiliar with the kind work the NSC did, because while I was a planner for the Air Force and then special assistant to the Director of the Joint Staff, in 1969 with the new Nixon administration, they put out a whole bunch of study requirements for issues around the world. A lot of them fell in the Defense Department, and I was involved in processing them. So I was familiar with what was generally going on, and I must say I admired the way the NSC—and Henry Kissinger, therefore—was reaching into the bureaucracy to try to get the assembled knowledge. After I got there, I saw it didn’t play as great a role as I had imagined at the far end of the stick, but I was generally familiar with how the process worked.

One of the things that surprised me at the time was the relationship between Henry Kissinger and the Secretary of State, Bill Rogers. In my year as military assistant, I had gotten to know Rogers quite well—he needed airplanes to fly around, and so on—and I went out of my way to accommodate him. When I got into the NSC and found the relationship, I was at first alarmed. One of my uncomfortable jobs was to support the way the White House treated the Secretary of State. I’d already seen from my position that President Nixon wanted to run foreign policy from the White House, not from the State Department. If he had wanted to run it from the State Department, he would not have picked a lawyer who had been Attorney General to be the Secretary of State, I figured. Instead, what he wanted was somebody who was loyal and would in a sense acquiesce with the center of policymaking being in the White House, not in the State Department. That was an awkward situation and remained an awkward situation. While it was obviously the way the President wanted it run—and therefore I supported that—I was uncomfortable with it.

On the whole, though, I was an enthusiastic supporter of the NSC system as it had evolved under President Nixon and Henry Kissinger. The modern NSC really began with McGeorge Bundy. Before that, there was an NSC, but it was divided into two parts. The management to study the formal process was done under Robert Cutler and Gordon Gray and so on, but the advising part was really Andy Goodpaster with Eisenhower, and they were separate. When [John F.] Kennedy came in and cut this very large organization down to half a dozen people, Mac Bundy became

the first modern National Security Advisor. There wasn't really a National Security system under Mac Bundy, and it only gradually grew back as the need for it became apparent.

Walt Rostow started a committee system, but the committees were run by the State Department, and they went up through a State Department hierarchy until they got to the NSC. I think one of the worthwhile things that Richard Nixon did was to take the informality and the closeness of advice of the Kennedy NSC, and married it with the more organized, if you will, military staff system of Eisenhower into something that did both. I think it was a good blend, and that has essentially, with a little tweaking at the side, been the model ever since.

**Zelikow:** Can I ask you to reflect a little bit about other lessons you drew from the NSC experience, either positive—you've mentioned some already—or negative, in addition to the relationships with the State Department. As you know, Kissinger's relationships with the Pentagon—and specifically with the Joint Chiefs of Staff—were not all one could wish. We could go into much more detail about that, but I don't want to dwell on that period. I'm mostly interested in the lessons you took from that, positive or negative, on substance or relationships.

**Scowcroft:** The main lesson that I learned was the importance of personality in getting the business of government done. There was friction that I observed first hand between Rogers and Kissinger, and then watched with the benefit of having been a practitioner, [Zbigniew] Brzezinski and [Cyrus] Vance, and [Caspar] Weinberger and [George] Shultz. There's enormous friction in the system when you have personality conflicts, and they interfere enormously with getting the business of government done.

When I became National Security Advisor in 1975, George Bush became Director of Central Intelligence, so we worked together on a daily basis for a year. One of the things we talked about was the importance of having a structure at the top, where you didn't waste enormous amounts of time with personality problems and were able to focus on the job. That was a lesson, a stark lesson, for me.

**Zakaria:** Most of the histories of the Nixon-Kissinger years—in fact I would say all of them—dwell on the atmosphere of tension, perhaps even deviousness and duplicity, at the White House and NSC, an enormous amount of constant outwitting of bureaucratic rivals, etc. Tell us, from having been there, is this picture highly overdrawn? How did you feel about it at the time, and did you think it was effective? In other words, if there was Machiavellianism serving the purpose of getting an agenda done by cutting the live bureaucracy out of the game, and things like that. How do you react when you hear this bureaucracy of the system described later on?

**Scowcroft:** As you look at the operation of the NSC, especially in a time like the Nixon-Kissinger period when there was a lot of the friction that we have discussed, I think some of it is overdrawn. Richard Nixon is perhaps the most complicated personality that I have ever encountered—a mixture of compulsions, fears, and so on. Henry Kissinger is not a simple personality. And the interaction of those two was quite a burden for me, who frequently found myself in between them. The two of them admired each other, but each was jealous of the other. Watching them operate was awesome. Dealing between the two of them, as I had to do, was a very complicated human process.

I think that at that level, personality is everything—not everything, that’s an excess. It is so important. The difference in the way things ran, for example, with Gerald Ford, who was as simple and straightforward a person as you could ever imagine, the antithesis of a Richard Nixon, who was brilliant, but beset by devils, always with a double agenda on everything. Here with Gerald Ford, what you saw is what you got. He was not afraid to make decisions. He’d make decisions and put them behind him, not second-guess them.

Richard Nixon used to make tough decisions, but then he would go hole up in Camp David and wouldn’t talk to anybody. You know—was it the right decision? Would it work? So personality is extremely important. One of the problems with our system is that rarely does a President know, when he’s selecting the people around him, how they’re going to interact with each other. Most of the time he usually knows all of the people, but he’s not intimate with them, and certainly they’ve never worked together before. So our system has a built in risk factor as to how well people are going to work together.

**Zelikow:** Détente. In your memoir with President Bush, you talk about the down sides of détente because these were some of the lessons you carried with you into the Bush administration. When you were an architect of détente, when did those down sides become apparent to you? When did you become worried about the way détente was going? You could see the domestic base of détente eroding around you in 1974 and ’75, what kind of lessons did you take away from that experience? Did you think you’d made mistakes in the way you had thought about détente back in the seventies, or did you think the real down sides only emerged later?

**Scowcroft:** Détente began as almost a tactical maneuver. We were having trouble with the Congress; we were having trouble with weapons systems. They were not being approved, and the unremitting hostility with the Soviet Union was beginning to wear people out. Détente really began before I got to the White House. This was an exercise designed to do two things: first, to un-demonize the Soviet Union in a way, and say, “Look, this is not a climactic struggle that’s a short term issue. It’s a longer term issue. We’ve got to learn to live with the Soviet Union. We’ve got to learn to try to manage this hostile relationship in a way that doesn’t devour us.”

That leads to arms control, which really started in the [Lyndon] Johnson administration, but became a strong part of détente. That process also helped get the weapons systems that we couldn’t get by waving the Soviet flag. The argument was, “We have to have these systems if we’re to be able to bargain away Soviet systems.” That made a lot of sense. I think the problem was that détente evolved into—especially in the eyes of many in the Congress and the American people—into a strategy, not a tactic.

It took on a life of its own, the sense being that the threat is now going away, we don’t have to do all these things, we don’t have to be alert, the Soviet Union—or the relationship—is fundamentally changing. I think that—coupled partly with Watergate, but importantly the Vietnam conflict—led to a real enervation within the United States and, in part, with our allies in Europe. That led the Soviet Union to say the correlation of forces was changing in the late ’70s and so on. So what I took from this, I thought détente was a useful thing to have started, but that it took on a life of its own and became destructive.

When we came into office in 1989, that was very much on my mind. We had a new General Secretary of the Communist Party, a very different kind of person. [Mikhail] Gorbachev was not the old [Leonid] Brezhnev type individual. But I had détente very much in mind. What I was fearful of was that Gorbachev—as I thought he had actually done with the [Ronald] Reagan administration at the end—was seducing us, with kindness rather than with new missiles. The danger was we’d fall into the same trap that we had with détente.

I said, “Atmospherics are not enough.” That’s what détente was, atmospherics. We have to see not only Gorbachev saying that things are different, we’re prepared to do all these things and so on, but actually see some actions. People as important as Maggie Thatcher and a number in the Reagan administration said, “The Cold War’s over.”

I said, “The Cold War is not over. All of the elements of the Cold War are still in place. The only thing that’s changed is the rhetoric, and we cannot once again go down the path that we went on détente, because you can only turn the ship of state around very, very slowly. If we get seduced again this time by a Gorbachev whose goal is really to re-energize, modernize the Soviet Union, modernize the economy, so that they can compete stronger, then we would be making a fatal error.”

So that was the mindset that I came into the administration with. I don’t think President Bush ever bought on completely to my theory, but he listened carefully, and I think it affected the way we operated early on. In the administration, Jim Baker did not agree with me at all. Jim went beyond me on the “left” side, but that was the way we operated. So when we would reach out to the Soviet Union, we’d say, “We’ve got to see things on the ground. We’ve got to see concrete things that show that a difference is being made.”

**Zelikow:** If I can pursue the personality issue for a moment with President Bush. Did you play a role in getting Bush the job at CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] in 1975?

**Scowcroft:** I had absolutely nothing to do with any of that. I don’t know how all that happened. Well, I do know, Bill Colby—it was time for him to go. We’d gone through this horror of the investigation of CIA. President Ford and Jim Schlesinger simply did not get along. Jim used to come over and meet with the President once every week or two, and I usually sat in just to take notes on anything that came out of it. Jim Schlesinger has a kind of professorial air about him. He’d sit down, slouch in the chair, and start to lecture the President, and I could see the red rising in the President’s neck.

I told Jim, “You know, that’s not the right approach, Jim. You shouldn’t talk to him that way.” Well, he changed, but not enough. The President decided something had to be done. He claimed to me that the whole thing was his idea. I think his Chief of Staff had a lot to do with what happened, Don Rumsfeld. Don Rumsfeld was Chief of Staff and ended up as Secretary of Defense.

The whole issue of Henry Kissinger and his two hats, I think, is related to Ronald Reagan and the upcoming primary battle. Kissinger was a *bête noir* of the conservatives at that time because of détente and “dealing” with the Soviet Union and this dark menace. I think that one of the reasons for the switch in making me National Security Advisor was to make that separation so



that Ford would not be so intimately linked with Henry Kissinger in the eyes of the Republican primary voters.

**Zakaria:** Can we stay with Kissinger for a minute? You've been called a protégée of Kissinger's. You're seen in many ways as having some kind of philosophical association with him. What did you learn strategically from Kissinger? I know you've thought about this, and you've probably talked about this a good bit, but when people say Kissinger affected them—and he affected a number of people in the foreign service, and people like [Lawrence] Eagleburger—what was the kind of thing that you saw in him that left an impression, both positive and negative?

**Scowcroft:** Henry Kissinger is a dear friend of mine, and I have enormous admiration for him. He has, to my mind, one of the true strategic minds in this country. That is very rare. What do I mean by a strategic mind? He never looked at problems in isolation. When he was looking at the solution to a particular problem, he was also looking at everything else going on and how different ways to resolve this problem would impact other problems. His goal was to try to bring all these threads together down the road so that they would be mutually supporting—an unbelievable capability, and one that I can think of very few other people who have. I agreed principally with his world view, but not entirely. He is more of a pure balance of power person than I am.

**Zakaria:** General, this is to close out the Nixon/Kissinger years, and therefore if there's anything else you think of as having left an impression on you, this would be the time to talk about it. What I was wondering is, what about Nixon as strategist? You've talked about what you learned from Kissinger. Were their styles different? What did you learn from Nixon as a President? As a foreign policy thinker? Was there a difference between their two approaches that's worth talking about?

**Scowcroft:** Nixon was a strategist in the global sense of the term. Kissinger's strategy was more the active: how you get things done and how you do them in a way that works. The conceptual part of the strategy was perhaps more Nixon's than it was Kissinger's. Nixon had this vision of China as a counterweight to the Soviet Union, to take advantage of the split of the giants—which had pretty much been ignored up to then—and to use it. He had a practical sense of the Cold War and the conflict. He didn't personalize it, but he did think that the Soviet Union was an implacable enemy. But at the demise of the Soviet Union, he reached out immediately and strongly to try to support the new Russia, and to help it along the path back into the community of nations.

It's hard to analyze Richard Nixon because, as I indicated a bit ago, he almost always had more than one agenda. I used to think while he was talking to me, whether this was the real Richard Nixon or whether I was a part of some stage in some game that he was playing. Sometimes you could figure it out, frequently you couldn't. I assumed he always differentiated, but I don't know. I was very fond of him, but he was not a warm, cuddly personality. He was ill at ease with himself and ill at ease with everyone else—other than when he really got to know you—and would never let his hair down altogether.

He was a deep thinker in foreign policy and, I think, quite wise.

**May:** I inferred from what you said a little while ago about Kissinger's lack of skill in managing the American political system that one of the lessons you extracted from observing him and then participating in that was the need to cultivate relations with the congressional majority, or with the congressional support. The first question is whether you thought that President Nixon did that better, if you could actually learn anything from watching his management of the American political system, and second, whether I'm right that you drew some lessons out of what you thought was a weakness in the Kissinger system.

**Scowcroft:** I think Nixon did it fairly well, but it was a duty, and I think everybody looked at it that way. He made a few very close friends on the Hill, but by and large he went to the . . . it was his distant personality. It was hard to get people to rally to him because they loved him, and so that was very awkward. What I took from these kinds of relationships and my view about the political system we have, is that it really wasn't designed for efficiency. It was designed to protect the individual against a powerful central government. To do that, it sets the different parts of the government against each other, which is a recipe for paralysis. You would not construct our government if you were looking for a model of effective prosecution of the laws and so on. So to get around that, you have to do informal things. You have to reach out, evade and avoid the constitutional blocks that can lead to paralysis.

I learned that slowly. When I first became National Security Advisor, I had learned by then to deal with the press, although I was still uncomfortable with it. But I did not reach out to the Congress. I thought that was not really my job, that that was the congressional relations people. I realized after I left office in the Ford administration that that was a serious mistake, and that the National Security Advisor in an informal way can convey the impressions of the White House and can do work in a sometimes more useful way than even a Secretary of State, who has his separate institutional relationship with the Congress.

So in the Bush administration, I spent an enormous amount of time—I had a wonderful congressional relations person—and I spent a lot of time interacting with the Congress and talking to them about what we were trying to do, why we were trying to do it. I think in some small way it paid dividends.

**May:** You said that you had learned how to deal with the press. Could you say a little bit about that?

**Scowcroft:** One of the things that happened when I first joined Henry Kissinger, I said, "Look, I don't have any experience in dealing with the press. I have never given a press interview. I don't do press. You do the press." Well, he had enough insight not to let me get away with that. So the first thing he did is turn Joe Alsop over to me. So gradually through Joe Alsop, Meg Greenfield, and a few others, I lost my—I'm going to have to say it—fear of the press, that I would say something that would turn out to be stupid. I had done enough that it wasn't a disagreeable job, and I did realize the importance of talking to the press. I used to have weekly meetings with a half-dozen of them, off the record, or background meetings, to discuss what we were doing. So I was somewhat accustomed to working with the press. I knew a lot of Congressmen, but I really had not focused on the importance of bringing them along so that when we needed them they were there and understood what we were trying to do.

**Zelikow:** It sometimes seems that the DNA of the Bush administration is really the Ford administration, much more than the Reagan administration that had preceded it for eight years. This true not only on the personality side of Bush, Baker, [Richard] Cheney, and even lower level people, [Robert] Kimmitt and others—people one level down—not just from a personality side, but also on the way you do business. Your experience as National Security Advisor in the Ford administration seemed to form models for you of the way you thought the Bush administration should work. Could you comment on that? You touch on this somewhat in the memoir, but is that a fair characterization?

**Scowcroft:** One of the problems that we had at the outset of the Bush administration was, to what extent were we a new administration and to what extent were we a continuation of the Reagan administration. The press seemed to take it for granted that we were simply a continuation of the Reagan administration. I thought that was a mistake. I thought that we ought to look at ourselves as a new administration starting over. As one of the manifestations of that, I set in motion a whole review of foreign policy, from start to finish, of the policies that were in place. Were they doing what we wanted? Should they be changed? It turned out to be pretty much a failure. The bureaucracy just came back with what you'd expect: Everything's fine.

Beyond that formal way of saying, "This is a new administration; this is not just a continuation," we also had a series of speeches with the President, which laid out our relations with the Soviet Union, with Western Europe, with arms control, to set a pattern of "This is what the Bush administration is."

I had, of course, been a close observer of the Reagan administration, and there were a couple of things I admired and some that I did not. I thought that the Shultz/Weinberger enmity was a real drag on the ability to make coherent policy. I think that the way they handled the NSC at the outset of the administration cost them dearly. They looked back at the [Jimmy] Carter administration and at the competition between Brzezinski and Vance and said, "We're not going to have that." So Dick Allen, the first National Security Advisor, reported not to the President, but to Ed Meese. That made him, in my mind, largely ineffective. The National Security Advisor is junior in grade to all of the people he works with. He's able to be effective to the degree that he can represent the President and understand what the President's thinking is, what he wants done, how he wants it done, and also has access to the President.

In my opinion, the Reagan administration never recovered from that first error. As a matter of fact, they ended up with more National Security Advisors than the total before them. I wanted that not to happen. There was one very complicating factor in our administration, and that was Baker's relationship to the President. It was close, personal, and created an imbalance, in a way, as you look at it. One of the great advantages of the Bush structure was that we had all worked together before. So we were not strangers in working habits and points of view and attitudes.

**Zelikow:** Working together principally in the Ford administration?

**Scowcroft:** Yes, yes. As a matter of fact, technically President Bush worked for me, in a way, as National Security Advisor, when he was Director of Central Intelligence. He and I, having been inside the NSC together in the Ford administration, had a common feeling about how an NSC ought to operate. So, faced with the benefits on the one hand, and the Baker situation on the

other, I set out to form a relationship with Baker that would deal with this kind of intimacy. The first part was to reassure him that there would be no repetition of Vance/Brzezinski or Kissinger/Rogers. I told him that I would never go on press talk shows—that he and the President were the spokesmen for the administration and I would never do anything like that without telling him what I was going to do and, in essence, get his permission.

I also told him there would be no secrets between the President and me that he didn't know about. After the first jockeying, it worked well. And after time, Baker got very relaxed about it. I had no such problem with Cheney. In this great massacre that President Ford perpetrated—incidentally, I had no role in what happened—Cheney was elevated to Chief of Staff at the time I was made National Security Advisor. Cheney and I have been good friends ever since, so I had no such problems with Cheney.

Yes, my practical experience in the Ford administration about how to get things done and how to work things, and also my observation of the way the Reagan administration worked and was different, fed into how I thought the system ought to work in the Bush administration. I was able to talk to the President about this, and how I thought it ought to work, in a way that would not have been possible had he not have been a practicing member, if you will, of the National Security Council under Ford. A lot of people have said how wonderful we all worked together, and part of it was by accident. But part of it was not. It was the fact that we all knew each other, the fact that the President had been inside the system—not only in Ford, but also as Vice President—that helped make it the operation it was.

**Zakaria:** Ideologically, what is going on at the time is a very vigorous assault on the Ford administration, basically by the conservative Republicans: an attack on détente, an attack on Kissinger personally. This, as you know, scarred Kissinger, and has left a very deep impression on him, I think it would be fair to say. How did it affect you, and maybe how did it affect President Bush?

**Scowcroft:** The Ford administration, especially the year he was running for reelection—he was running against Ronald Reagan, the darling of the conservative wing of the Republican Party—got to be very complex. The President actually said at one time that he was not going to use the word détente anymore. He stood by Kissinger, and even at his own peril, for example, sent Kissinger on a tour of Africa at a time when it was the wrong thing for him to do politically domestically.

**Zelikow:** That was the summer of '76, I think.

**Scowcroft:** Yes, it was in the summer of '76, I think in April or May, as the campaign was still going on. The nominee was not resolved until the convention. It created enormous problems for me. There was great pressure from the President's people for me to go on television a lot more. I knew that would make Kissinger very nervous. I talked to President Ford about it, and I said, "I'll do whatever you want." He said, "No, let's leave it the way it is. Let's not do that."

Kissinger thought almost constantly about resigning. I don't know if it left any lasting scars on me, because mine was the part of trying to manage it. I think it did, in part, on Kissinger, because he's very sensitive to the right wing of the Republican Party now.

**Zakaria:** Why do you not feel that way? Is that because you thought these guys were implacably opposed?

**Scowcroft:** I thought they were wrong to start with. I thought that one of the real problems in the Ford campaign was that the campaign people never got over the primaries and running to their right against Ronald Reagan. They did not appeal to a lot of moderates that they could have, had that not happened. It made one difference substantively, and that is that for the year 1976, it killed arms control with the Soviet Union. In January of '76, we could have had an arms control agreement that would have put a cap on MIRV-ing [Multiple Independently Targetable Re-entry Vehicles] and balanced off the Soviet missile force and the U.S. force in a way that would have given us a leg up on future arms control. The President did not go forward with that, and I think it was probably a mistake. He didn't go forward with it because of the political climate. So when it came to the general election, Ford had nothing to point to as an achievement. If he had an arms control agreement, it might have made a difference.

**May:** You explained quite clearly why you thought Kissinger was not very good with people, but on the other side, one of the characteristics shared by the people you identified as heroes, and Kissinger, was an extraordinary ability to choose people, to identify talent, and something that you have exhibited since. What did you learn from that? Did you take any general principles?

**Scowcroft:** What did I learn about choosing people from Kissinger or other role models? I don't know that I learned that much. I learned some negatives from Kissinger. His first NSC staff was, from his perspective, pretty much a disaster. He got a bunch of young intellectuals in who deserted him, especially over the bombing in Cambodia. Choosing people is an instinct. It's an art, not a science. I think that Nixon was quite good at it, partly because he was rather unsentimental, and—while I don't think he ever fired anybody personally—he was quite willing to have somebody else toss them over the side if they were not working.

President Bush was a pretty good judge of people. But unlike Nixon, he was very sentimental and loyal in his friendships. I used to remind him of what somebody said about Franklin Roosevelt, that a President has to be a bit of a butcher now and then. I wish I had learned something more scientific about the process of choosing people, because it is one of the most crucial, and one of the most error-ridden, processes we have. It's more important in our system of government than in any other I can think of.

It's easy to see other people and how they do it, and the mistakes you made, but I don't know how best to correct them, how to reach people, to get the best out of them, to get them to want to do the extra kinds of things, but not because they're afraid if they don't do it. I think when people are afraid, their brain partially closes down.

**May:** Who are some examples that you saw doing that, this managerial style?

**Scowcroft:** Well, I think Gerald Ford. George Bush to a fault. I think probably Andy Goodpaster.

**Zelikow:** I'd like to take you into the 1980s. You were not invited to join the Reagan administration, for reasons that to outsiders seem apparent in your association with policies that the early Reaganites considered discredited and wrong. But from the outside you have a chance

to really think hard about what happens during the 1980s, especially on strategic issues. I'd be grateful for the way you thought about some of those great issues of the '80s such as ICBM [Intercontinental Ballistic Missile] vulnerability, MX [Missile X], SDI [Strategic Defense Initiative], and INF [Intermediate Nuclear-Range Forces].

**Scowcroft:** The period of the '80s, or period after I left office in the Ford administration, I really began to focus more on the whole U.S.-Soviet relationship and arms control, part of it. Arms control was the meat—indeed, it was almost the entirety—of the U.S.-Soviet relationship. We had very little else to talk about. I looked at SALT I [Strategic Arms Limitation Talks] and ABM [Anti-Ballistic Missile] treaty, and I thought they were useful, and part of an overall process that ought to be continued. I was opposed to SALT II, even though I was on Carter's arms control advisory panel. I thought that it did not do the kinds of things that ought to be done.

What were those? I thought that the goal of strategic arms control ought to be to improve the stability of the balance and to reduce the chances that a crisis would produce an impetus toward the use of nuclear weapons—that is, having vulnerable weapons, for example. Or having a tremendous advantage in a first strike. Those are the kinds of things I thought we ought to deal with. That's what framed my thinking.

With the Reagan administration, the way I like to describe it is, I was allowed to work in the yard and cut the grass and trim the flowers, but I was never allowed inside the house. President Reagan did make me chairman of a commission on strategic forces, which ended up advocating the MX missile and a small single-warhead missile. That was partly a political decision, how to get something done, and that solution appealed to both sides. But I think it had a strategic rationale. That is, we were at a deficit with the Soviet Union in heavy, large MIRV systems. They had the SS-18. We had nothing even close to comparable.

So psychologically, I thought it was useful to develop the MX as a short term deterrent to any Soviet ideas that their forces were better equipped to launch a first strike than ours. For the long term, my notion was a small, mobile, single-warhead missile, for two things: single warhead, so that it was not an attractive target for a Russian first strike. Indeed, a first strike would leave them worse off in terms of warheads, assuming two-on-one targeting. Then they had nowhere to start targeting, since it was mobile. So that was a great step towards stability—mobile, so they couldn't find it. I was a strong believer in that. Subsequently, START II [Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty] was partial fulfillment of my dream about stability.

I was opposed to SDI for two reasons. First, I didn't think we were close to knowing how to do it. Secondly, I thought that it was likely, in the process of being introduced, to be severely destabilizing, because it would upset the kind of balance that I thought we ought to be working toward. When you introduce a defensive balance, you throw out the calculations. So the combination of not knowing how to do it well, but the process of trying to do it—inducing a new arms race that would almost by its nature be destabilizing—I was opposed to it. I was opposed to INF elimination. I thought we went after the wrong missiles. I agreed with the goal, but I thought we ought to go after the short-range missiles first, the kinds of missiles that were "battlefield missiles," if you will, and also missiles that would go off in German territory of some kind or another.

What we really needed to do strategically, if we were to use nuclear weapons short of ICBMs and so on, was to get behind the front lines and be able to interdict Soviet reinforcements coming up to the battle line. Those are INF forces. They're not the short ones. So I thought we gave ourselves two problems with INF. We removed our ability to do the kinds of strikes that they were useful for, what we really needed to stop a Soviet assault. It left us with short range weapons that were increasingly difficult politically to maintain, and to have acceptable in Germany. Actually, when the Cold War began to collapse in 1989 and things started to break down, it created a tremendous problem for us, especially with German unification coming up. Those weapons would all go off in Germany.

**Zelikow:** I'm going to press here for a couple of minutes because I think this becomes very important for the Bush administration, and it's not discussed very much in the memoir. Did you accept large parts of the Team B critique? This is partly, of course, a question that touches on discussions you must have had with George Bush at the time, but also later. Did you accept the Team B critique of Soviet intentions, for instance, in its nuclear posture?

**Scowcroft:** One of the fascinating experiments of the Ford administration was the Team A, Team B experiment. The philosophy behind it was to try to test whether the make-up, or ideological position of the analyzers, made a difference in the kind of estimates that came up. Team A was the ordinary estimate. Then they took a Team B, selected of conservatives, to look at the same data and come up with the same kind of analysis.

I thought it was a very useful experiment. I don't know if I agreed wholly with either side, because I do think one of the problems with estimates is that the estimators have a vested stake in the outcome of their previous estimates. So they tend to straight-line things, hanging on to their early estimates as long as possible in the face of changed circumstances. I thought that Team B took a worst case analysis of almost every ambiguous situation.

The real damage that Team B did is that the report was released and became a political issue. One of the mysteries of our dealing with the Soviet Union was how we made them 10 or 20 feet tall—when we now look at the shell of what happened. It's true not only of the Soviet Union, but of East Germany. How did it happen? I still think we need more research on how this really happened.

In fact, the Soviets were deploying system after system, at what would for us be enormous cost, and at a rate that we couldn't begin to match—partly because of our politics, but partly, actually. Were they as good as ours? No, but they were okay. We tended to solve our problems of physics with exquisitely designed systems, thus very temperamental systems. The Soviets didn't take that approach. They couldn't do the kind of fine work that we did, so they overwhelmed physics with brute force. That's why their weapons were bigger. They didn't depend on this exquisite timing of the primer and so on. They just . . . Boom! Very different philosophies.

I think that Team B was somewhat excessive, but the Soviets were, in military terms, a serious problem for us right up to the end. They managed to keep a force that was at least adequate for their needs. At sea they never did match us, but the Russians have no history of sea power. I don't know that that has anything to do with it, but they did not match us at sea. But in ICBMs, they were good.

**Zelikow:** As you go into the Bush administration, what an irony that you're confronting the issue of SNF [Short-Range Nuclear Forces] modernization with a completed INF treaty. To you this must have almost seemed like an exact reversal from the situation you thought should have been confronted. We should be talking about INF modernization, SNF elimination. Instead we've got it exactly backwards. Although the INF issue you might have perceived as one that, of course, was buying a treaty as a product of a need to deploy new INF systems, I assume you endorsed the deployment of new INF systems. It sounds like this is a strategic conception that would have needed to be in place in 1981 or 1982 in order to avoid the situation you found yourself in when you entered office in 1989.

**Scowcroft:** When we came in 1989, I thought we were reaping the fruits of nuclear weapon mistakes of the Reagan administration. That administration bragged on having eliminated a whole weapons system, and I thought that was totally irrelevant to any arms control goals, had nothing to do with anything. The goal wasn't how many physical weapons there were. What is it you're trying to do? We were left with the weapons in Europe being unsuited to the task, a political millstone around the German neck, and a need to preserve these forces that really were ill suited for the task because of the fear that if we move too fast, there would be a move to nuclear disarmament in Europe that would be one-sided.

So we had this agony for the first six months of the Bush administration, trying to negotiate on short range nuclear forces, to deal with the German problem—the Germans wanted to get rid of them all. We were concerned about not de-nuclearizing Europe. So it created a very difficult problem. Fortunately, we came out with a compromise that not only worked, but let President Bush look like a hero.

**Zakaria:** Did you share your critique of the Reagan years in individual parts or even as a whole with George Bush? The one thing that strikes me as interesting in the way you're describing this is you say, "We were confronted with this situation." But, of course, the President had been for eight years Vice President in the administration that had perpetrated these mistakes. So a) did you talk to George Bush about this during the '80s? And b) tell us about the complexity of dealing with that challenge of having a President who was Vice President during an administration of whose policies you were critical.

**Scowcroft:** I agreed with the grand sweep of Reagan strategy, but as we've mentioned, in specific instances I thought it was wrong. And here the Vice President was an integral part of that structure. I just told him the way I thought it ought to be. He and I didn't have continual contact in the '80s, but from time to time we did. One of the interesting meetings we had, he had invited me down to dinner at the climactic day of the Reykjavik meeting and breakdown. We were sitting there watching television, eating, and Secretary Shultz—with tears in his eyes—saying how close we had come to something. I turned to the Vice President and said, "We dodged a bullet." He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "That would have been a classic disaster."

**Zakaria:** And what did he say?

**Scowcroft:** He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "Look. President Reagan wants to get rid of nuclear weapons. That's deep inside him, and we let him sit down alone with Gorbachev without



a counter plan or anything and walk down this road, which would have been a disaster.” We were not close to a triumph. That’s the one good thing about SDI: It kept an agreement from being made. He said, “Well, I’m not sure I agree with you.” Then we talked about from time to time. I think he always knew all through the ’80s where I was coming from, but he and I didn’t talk during the ’80s in any sustained way about a nuclear strategy.

**May:** Did you have anything to do with creating the Team B experiment?

**Scowcroft:** I don’t think I had anything to do with creating it, although . . . We had talked about the issue of influence on the estimates based on the people who do them. There was another issue at the time, and that was the Vietnam estimates of the kinds of materiel that were coming in across Cambodia, and there were different counts. I think it did come out of PFIAB [President’s Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board] the actual notion, but I was an enthusiastic supporter of it, because I did have this feeling about estimates that when you have the same estimators year after year doing estimates, you’re likely to have the estimates skewed by the time you get very many years down the road. So I thought this was a very useful exercise. But I deplored the fact that somebody made the actual Team B results public.

**Zelikow:** Did you advise Vice President Bush in the ’88 campaign? Did you interact much with the campaign?

**Scowcroft:** I would not say I was a campaign advisor. In June, he and I had a very long talk about what I thought foreign policy in the campaign ought to be, and I made a number of appearances at rallies. But no, I was not a campaign advisor. Indeed, I had no thought of going into a Bush administration.

**Zelikow:** Were you asked to act as a surrogate, appearing or writing pieces on behalf of the candidate?

**Scowcroft:** I did write some. I wrote one for *Newsweek* on [Michael] Dukakis’ strategic thinking, but I did that on my own. The campaign didn’t ask me to do it. *Newsweek* asked me to do it.

**Zelikow:** As you enter the Bush administration, would you like to describe how you began to perceive your role when it became clear that President Bush wanted you, and wanted you not as a Defense Secretary, but as a National Security Advisor?

**Scowcroft:** After Bush was elected, the day after, he said he wanted Baker as his Secretary of State (which didn’t surprise me in any respect). He didn’t make any other appointments for quite some time. Then, just after Thanksgiving, on Sunday morning he asked me to come down and have a cup of coffee with him. I got down there, and Jim Baker was there. We sat down, had a little banter, and he said, “I’d like you to be my National Security Advisor.”

As I say, I had not been planning for a job in the Bush administration. I was quite comfortable doing what I was doing. Had I thought about what might be interesting and what might not be interesting? Yes, sure I had. I had thought I didn’t really want to be DCI [Director of Central Intelligence], and I’d been National Security Advisor. I thought the one thing that I hadn’t done

that would be challenging would be Secretary of Defense. It would be unusual, because there had not been a military man as Secretary.

Anyway, that was in the back of my mind, and I said yes. Was I disappointed? I wasn't disappointed, but the advantages of it didn't dawn on me right at the moment. They came later when I realized how fortunate it was that I had been in the job before. I had spent the '80s doing a lot of thinking about the process, government, how it ought to run, what the world was like, where it was going, and I was probably far more nearly suited to do the National Security job than I was Secretary of Defense. So I didn't hesitate at all.

**Zelikow:** When did you decide on [Robert] Gates as your deputy and begin thinking, *All right, how am I going to do this?*

**Scowcroft:** When the President asked me to be his National Security Advisor, as a matter of fact, I had done some very recent thinking about it. I was on the [John] Tower Commission, the three-man commission that looked into the Iran Contra affair and made some recommendations about the organization and operation of the National Security Council and the staff. So I had some pretty fixed views about what I wanted done. But a lot of the work had already been done, because I had talked to Frank Carlucci, and after him, Colin Powell, about the Tower Commission report. They had pretty much done what needed to be done. It gave me a currency with thinking about the structure and operation that stood me in good stead.

I was, first of all, concerned with personnel, and very first of all, with a deputy. It took not long for me to settle on Bob Gates. Bob had been a very junior staff member in the Ford NSC. I knew him, I had followed his career, and I thought that he would be an ideal deputy. He would have the kind of currency that I did not have in the period in between. He was widely respected. I thought it unfortunate that he had had to withdraw as nominee for DCI, but I thought it was a very courageous thing that he had done to take himself out of the running and avoid an embarrassment for Reagan. So it seemed kind of a natural.

It wasn't as easy as it looked though, because the Hill—especially the Senate Intelligence Committee—didn't want him to leave. He was very high in the congressional eyes, and it took some talking to get them to agree to let him go. They thought they had an agreement with the Reagan administration that Bob would stay as deputy. I said, "Look if you leave him there, he's never going to be DCI. If he's going to get promoted to anything else, he needs to get out and away from that environment and into something else."

So I finally convinced them that I would make sure, and I would consider myself responsible, and if his absence at CIA were a problem, I would assure them that we would deal with the problem. So after that, I sat down with a yellow pad and wrote out the names of all the different geographic and functional areas in the NSC that I wanted to keep. I wanted to reduce the staff, first of all. I thought it had gotten too big in the Reagan administration, and I wanted to cut it back. So I made the boxes, and then I wrote down, frankly, all the people I knew, and where I thought the people I really wanted to have would fit. Then I got Bob in, and he looked at the list and he added some names and changed some names, and we put them in a kind of order. For almost the first month, it was almost exclusively personnel.

**Zelikow:** This was before you took office?

**Scowcroft:** Yes, before I took office. I was announced about Thanksgiving, and until about the first of January, it was almost all personnel.

**Zakaria:** Did you feel because you had been in this establishment so long, that you knew enough people, you trusted enough people that you could fill these boxes by yourself? Or did you seek new names, people you might not have met before but had heard of?

**Scowcroft:** I sought, first of all if I could, people I knew, because I wanted to be able to start off running and therefore have people that I knew could do the job. Did I have candidates for every position? No, I didn't, and when I didn't, I would call friends or ask for recommendations for those positions. In a few cases, I did keep on members of the previous staff. But this gets back to an earlier issue. I wanted this to be a new administration, and therefore I wanted the President's advisors basically to be new people. I told Colin Powell to tell his staff that they should not plan to stay on. I may keep some of them on, but they should all plan to go. It wasn't because they were not doing a fine job. That was a clear case that I wanted the signal to be "This is a new administration with its own approach to issues."

**Zelikow:** I think that's a good place to stop for now.

**[BREAK]**

**Zelikow:** We were talking about the selection of the NSC staff. I've heard a story that James McCall mentioned to me about you calling the old staff into an auditorium to tell them, in effect, "I just want to let you know that you're all going to be fired." Now of course you didn't say that, but do you have any idea where a story like this may have started?

**Scowcroft:** When we started thinking about the transition and I talked to Colin Powell about it, I said that one of the things I wanted clearly to establish was that this was a new administration. This was not an extension of the Reagan administration. Therefore, one of the things I wanted to do was have a staff focused on President Bush. I said, "I'd be happy for you to tell me who in your staff you think is really outstanding and I ought to retain."

He said, "All I want to know is what I should tell them." I said, "What you should tell them is that they should expect not to stay on. There may be some who will stay on, but they should not anticipate. In other words, they ought to try to make new plans."

I subsequently told them that personally, and said I would do everything in my power to ensure that they were placed somewhere. The principle had nothing to do with the quality of the staff. It had only to do with my wanting to make a clear break—in attitudes of mind—that we were starting out, and that the slate was as clean as one can make it in terms of the way people thought. Now maybe I overdid it, but that was my—

**Zelikow:** One of the striking things about the staff is that the staff did not have much representation of traditional political appointees. Almost everyone on the staff had prior executive branch experience. In the case of some people I know, perhaps even like myself, people didn't even know what my political affiliation was, much less ask about it. Yet I know that there were large baskets of resumes that were forwarded to you, many of them with real expectations attached to them.

So I'd like to ask if you can remember, when you were going through this personnel process in December 1988, and maybe even a little before, when your new senior directors were coming to you and suggesting, "Here are the people we want on the staff"—which included also people like [Condoleezza] Condi Rice, whom you already had your eye on—whether there were any issues or difficulties you had in setting a selection criteria for lower level staffers, too, or in fending off political intervention.

**Scowcroft:** In the selection of the staff, I first talked to the President. I first talked to him about Bob Gates, because I wanted to make sure there was somebody that the President felt comfortable with. In the course of that conversation, he said, "Look, the staff is yours. I'm comfortable with whatever you do." There were baskets of resumes, of course, and I went through the resumes. And some of them may even have led to appointments. I honestly don't remember that.

But there were only a couple of cases of people who had some particular association with President Bush that I went back to him and said, "Would you really like it if I would find a place for them?" But by and large, no, there was no pressure, and I think I made no decisions based on party affiliation. Now, you know the bulk of the people probably would turn out to be Republican just because I looked at people who would have a similar outlook. But that was not a criterion established by the President, and I didn't have undue problems with the personnel shop.

**Zelikow:** Are there any comments you'd like to make on the selection of key senior directors such as, for instance, [Robert] Blackwill, [Arnie] Kantor, [Richard] Haass, who clearly are critical appointments from your perspective? Any issues arise or judgment calls that you would like to be sure are on the record?

**Scowcroft:** In particular cases on the senior staff people, there were some that were politically sensitive. In fact, there were two that were politically sensitive. One was Middle East affairs, and the other was arms control. I was careful on arms control. There was an individual who had a deep background in arms control, but, in fact, was a liberal Democrat, and I did not choose him for that reason.

**Zelikow:** Excuse me. You're not referring to Lin [Linton] Brooks, the incumbent senior director?

**Scowcroft:** No, somebody else. On the Middle East, on the other hand, there were people who were unhappy about my selection of Richard Haass. There was clearly a case, in my mind, of someone a) with the right background; b) with objectivity in the region—and it's sometimes hard to find somebody in that region who has that objectivity. I got some phone calls saying, no,

Richard Haass had written this, and he'd written that, and how could I do this? It turned out fine. These were not big problems. I was very fortunate in the freedom that I had to select staff.

**Zelikow:** Did you play an active role in the President's selection of critical ambassadors during the transition personnel process?

**Scowcroft:** Yes. A critical role, I don't know. But what ordinarily would happen is that State would draw up the list of things they would like, and then Jim Baker would bring it over, and he and I would talk and agree or disagree on certain people. Areas where we disagreed, we would take them all to the President anyway, and then we would point out areas where we disagreed. Of course, White House personnel and ambassadors played a role. The whole issue was not just between Jim Baker and me, but between political and career appointees, and who would go where and so on.

Right at the beginning, we set out with the President where he wanted to be, first in terms of a general percentage. Did he want to move more toward career ambassadors or more toward political ambassadors? Where was he on the scale? We had the percentages for the last five administrations as to where different Presidents were. So we did it philosophically at first and then filled in the squares to match that.

**Zelikow:** What point did he pick on that spectrum, as you remember it?

**Scowcroft:** Slightly more career. He moved slightly toward the career.

**Zelikow:** Do you remember any critical issues in the choice of your initial ambassador, say, to Britain or Germany or Israel or Japan, China? Anything that stands out as a particularly difficult or contentious call?

**Scowcroft:** I don't recall. We changed very few ambassadors. Instead, we let them serve out their time. That was true in China, that was true in Russia. Of course, they were ambassadors we might have chosen anyway. The biggest problem was political appointees, and how suited they were for the job. The campaign, for example, had a lot of people who wanted to be ambassadors, let's put it that way. And when we thought they were suitable, where was an appropriate spot, both where they could do a creditable job and the kind of country where the environment was better for a political appointee? And where did we really need a career person to do the kind of work that was involved? We spent quite a bit of time on that.

**Zelikow:** Were you consulted about the decision to nominate John Tower for Secretary of Defense, or was that pretty much a *fait accompli*?

**Scowcroft:** I certainly was consulted. We had list of candidates for that. It was clear early on in my own mind that the President wanted it to be John Tower. But we did go through a long list, which then became a list for the deputy or for service secretaries and so on. The President clearly wanted John Tower in that job.

**Zelikow:** Did you try to talk him out of it?

**Scowcroft:** No, I didn't.

**Zelikow:** You had worked with Tower on the Tower Commission and on other things?

**Scowcroft:** I had worked with John Tower, and he knew the defense business very well. He was very, very smart. What we underestimated was the degree to which he had created antagonisms on the Hill with a somewhat imperious management of the Armed Services Committee. There were people—especially, I think, staff people—who encouraged opposition in the Congress to his appointment.

**Zelikow:** The fight that you got on Tower was not a fight you saw coming?

**Scowcroft:** No, I did not see it coming. I thought there might be some grumbling and so on, but here's a two- or three-term Senator. I thought the issues of comity would prevail over any views, personal or otherwise, about Tower and some of his past. No. I was quite surprised at the turn of events.

**Zakaria:** Brent, you took on an unusual role, being National Security Advisor to the President who had already announced that the closest friend he had ever had was going to be Secretary of State. You talked a little about this, and I wonder if you could elaborate. Were you apprehensive about this? Did you talk to the President about it? Did you talk to Baker about it? In this first furor or even beyond, what's your sense of how much of a problem that was for you?

**Scowcroft:** Baker was probably the most unusual appointee, in my terms, given his relationship with the President. I don't remember having talked to the President explicitly in those terms. One of the interesting things happened early on, though, which made me feel a lot better. I think Jim Baker at the outset felt nervous about his job responsibilities. After all, he's a man who didn't have a background in foreign policy and had never served in a job requiring it. He had a President who had lived it for a number of years, and a National Security Advisor who had done the same thing. So I think he was a little defensive at the beginning.

He and I started talking about staffing the National Security personnel and first started talking about his deputy. He asked me what I thought, and I gave him a few names. I said, "If you want my view on who the best person in this country is, it's Larry Eagleburger." And, sure enough, he picked Larry Eagleburger. I thought that was the act of a big man. Because it was one thing to have me next to the President with my association with Henry Kissinger, but to have as his deputy another intimate of Henry Kissinger—and not to worry about that—was great.

That solved a lot of the potential problems with Jim Baker, because, of course, Larry Eagleburger and I were very close friends. We used to talk back and forth all the time. Baker used that connection as well. For things that he wanted to get to the President, didn't want to do publicly, and didn't want to ask me publicly to do, he'd talk to Larry, and then Larry quietly would talk to me. So it turned out to ease a lot of the potential for problems there. And I must say it was not really an issue. Jim Baker and I both tried to avoid situations where the President would have to choose between us. Neither one of us was sure which way he'd go. But it turned out much better than it could have.

**Zakaria:** You said in passing something about Kissinger "and that really bothered Baker."

**Scowcroft:** Well, here's Kissinger, Mr. Foreign Policy himself, the great Republican on foreign policy. And now Baker was going to be Secretary of State and would inevitably be compared with Henry Kissinger. So to have two people who had worked with Henry Kissinger close by him, I suspect took some doing.

**May:** I want to back up a moment on the Tower question. You saw the White House-Defense Department relationship from the Defense Department side, first with the Joint Staff side as well as OSD [Office of the Secretary of Defense], and then from the White House. You dealt with Mel Laird. I wondered what general rules you might have formulated from your Ford administration experience or other experience about the White House-Defense Department relationship.

**Scowcroft:** I don't know that I had any fixed rules. One that I had to remember for my own self, in dealing with Defense, was *Don't talk to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs until you've talked to the Secretary of Defense*. I made that mistake enough times in the Ford administration. Just as a courtesy, even if it was not a big issue. That's an unusual relationship. It's the only department that has that kind of dual personality. And in NSC meetings, of course, some people say that Defense has two votes. Well, there aren't any votes, but that there was that relationship in which the Chairman works for the Secretary of Defense but is the principal military advisor to the President.

I tried to facilitate that relationship operating in a way that was best for the country. How effectively it worked depended on who the Chairman was. I didn't have any special rules for Defense. The interaction between the White House and Defense is not nearly so intimate as that between the White House and State, because in State there are half a dozen issues a day that come up. In Defense, they're fewer. They're bigger, but they're fewer when they come up.

**Zelikow:** If I could follow up on that, because it also has to do with the composition of what you call the Core Group. In the memoir, you said the Core Group evolves out of meetings that you date to March '89. I noticed that the Core Group that you described in March '89 includes Cheney, but it does not include [William J.] Crowe. Yet clearly at some point Powell is in those meetings. Am I reading too much into this, or is there a change? Crowe doesn't seem to be the player that Powell became.

**Scowcroft:** The Core Group changed somewhat. It was less military oriented at that time than it became when we started having more military kinds of operations. It wasn't deliberate, but when we first established the informal group in March of '89, it happened for a couple of reasons. The President got uneasy after the first NSC meeting or so, with leaks. So that was one reason to have an informal Core Group rather than a formal NSC meeting. In a formal NSC meeting, the principal is allowed to bring one person, and by the time you finish, you've got 30 people in the room or so. After an NSC meeting, the principals go back and brief their various leadership on what went on at the meeting. So the propensity for leaking is rather high.

The Core Group was principals only with the President, no notes, no debriefs, no nothing. It was an informal way to make decisions. That was the first reason for it. The other reason for it was that we were just coming up on reviewing the studies that we had asked for. The first one we were going to review was on Europe, and I wanted to have a serious discussion on Europe—

where we ought to go with the Europeans, what we ought to be thinking about, how much did we want to push European unification, togetherness? What was going to be the role of NATO? In other words, a long-range view about the evolution of Europe and U.S.-European relations, and I didn't want it to be a canned format.

So that got started that way, and we had this one meeting. I said, "Before we have the formal meetings and we come to decisions, I think we ought to talk." The President said, "Okay, let's do that." Afterwards the President said, "Gee, I liked that." And so that's how it evolved. In that case, Crowe was not an intimate participant in the kind of discussion we had on Europe. It wasn't that there was any prejudice against Crowe. That came after he left office.

**Zelikow:** The question is about the difference between the informal Core Group and the Principals Committee of the NSC, because I noticed one thing, and I had a hypothesis. What I noticed was the President really didn't run very many National Security meetings except these fairly informal meetings. Even the Principals Committee seemed to be something that you would usually run, except for very unusual occasions, especially after you get through the policy reviews of the first year.

The hypothesis is this: The President liked to have free thinking strategizing sessions, principals only and he's there. But when you get into principals plus one, larger groups, Principals Committee, those are operational meetings, to refine concepts that have already been hashed around informally, and he doesn't feel like he needs to be there for that. He feels like you can run a meeting like that. Is that a fair characterization?

**Scowcroft:** The Principals Committee is different from the Core Group. The Principals Committee was one of the innovations that I wanted to make in the structure of the NSC. It was a meeting of the principals of the NSC, without the President. I thought it was very important. One of the things I noticed in the couple of meetings in the Reagan administration that I attended for a variety of reasons, there was a lot of wasted time debating in front of the President things that were not Presidential-level issues. What I wanted was a meeting for everybody to be clear on what the issues are, to clarify positions, to resolve those we could resolve and so on. So that when we went to the President, we had something more crisp and didn't have to establish all these positions beforehand.

That had not been set up before. It was tried in the Reagan administration, and George Shultz said, "I will not attend any meeting of which I'm not the chairman, unless the President's the chairman." I did not want to have a Principals Committee with the Secretary of State—or anybody else—as chairman, because this is the one place where I was as much an arbiter, intermediary, facilitator and so on, a role no Cabinet head can play because he can't divorce it from his own responsibilities. So with a certain amount of temerity, I proposed this, first to Jim Baker, who was quite aware of his predecessor's views, and he said, "Fine, let's do it."

So that turned out to be a very useful device. Sometimes it was a principals meeting with just the principals, sometimes with one staff person—especially if it was a complicated arms control issue.



That's very different from the Core Group. The Core Group was essentially the Principals Group with the President, or an informal group of the NSC, however you want to look at it. The Principals Group was to relieve the President of things he didn't have to be involved in and to make more efficient meetings with him. The Core Group was to facilitate informal discussion and reduce the chances of leaks.

**Zelikow:** The Core Group is basically the President, you, Cheney, Baker, maybe—depending on the issue—the Chairman of the JCS, that gets it up to five. Always the Chief of Staff and the Vice-President? Or sometimes maybe the Chief of Staff and the Vice-President?

**Scowcroft:** Mostly, mostly. And my deputy as note taker. I was the only one who had two people at the Core Group meetings.

**Zelikow:** Eagleburger seems to have come to one or more.

**Scowcroft:** He came to some, and of course he always attended when Baker was out of town. Gates came to all of them, not as an alter-ego to me, but as a note-taker.

**Zakaria:** Take us inside this Core Group. You obviously think this was something that worked well, the President seems to have thought so. Give us a sense of what the nature of the discussion was. Perhaps there's an anecdote or an example you can give that will explain why this was so useful to the President in strategizing.

**Scowcroft:** One example that comes to mind was one of the meetings where we had as much controversy as on any other. The idea was whether we should propose, in INF meetings, a U.S.-Soviet troop reduction, in addition to the INF. We had done one in '89; this was in '90. There was a very sharp difference of opinion. It took three meetings to resolve it. The President played it skillfully. He would ask questions rather than voice his opinion so as not to stifle the discussion. But Defense, in general, was very reluctant to make more reductions. Baker was very reluctant to make more reductions, not for Defense's reasons, but it would complicate his negotiating role. The President felt we needed to appear to get out in front on recognizing that the U.S.-Soviet confrontation was changing, and we ought to be in favor of it.

**Zelikow:** This sounds like January 1990?

**Scowcroft:** Yes, January 1990. And I agreed with him. It really got quite heated, but the President never forced the issue. Finally, we were arguing a point: "Well, we would really destabilize the Europeans. If we proposed more cuts in Europe for American troops, the Europeans would think we were ready to bug out of Europe, and it would be a disaster." So we debated that. And finally I said, "Instead of just debating this, why don't we find out from the Europeans what their attitude would be?" So we did, and it came back that the Europeans thought it was probably a pretty good idea.

The major goal was to try to get Soviet troops out of Eastern Europe. So the last meeting Cheney said, "I feel the sand running out of the glass. If the Europeans don't have a problem, why should we?" It was a case where the institutional views were very strongly held by the participants. The President let the debate go on, interjected, but not in a way to force anybody to say, "Well, yes sir, you win."

In the end, we ended up with a decision that everybody felt good about because they had had their say and felt that the decision was a proper one. That was an extreme case, but that's sort of the way it happened. There was no restraint imposed on expression of views, and nobody worried about somebody else's back bencher saying, "Oh boy, you should have heard what X said today." The result was that, while they were very strong confrontational issues, when we finished, everything was fine, and nobody felt that they had not had a full hearing.

**Zelikow:** To the best of my knowledge, I cannot think of any press leaks out of a Core Group meeting at all.

**Scowcroft:** I don't recall any leaks coming from a meeting of the Core Group, which is one of the things the President really liked about it. As a result, we probably had too few NSC meetings. There were some meetings we had to have because by law we had to have them ratified by NSC. But the President really liked that device.

**Zelikow:** Of course, Nick Brady is not in the Core Group, and we haven't said anything about international economic issues and how they figured in foreign policy. Should people seize on that as revealing?

**Scowcroft:** No, I don't think that the fact that I haven't talked about economics should be taken for anything. International economics is perhaps the most difficult issue for any administration to deal with. National Security issues involve only a relatively few departments. There's still some controversy about who's in and who's out, but it's a relatively small, manageable group. There isn't a department or agency in the government that doesn't think it has a stake in economic affairs, most of those in international economics. So the question is how to manage it.

We didn't have any better success than anybody else. We toyed with different ways of doing it. The President asked me one time, "Why don't you create an economic deputy and get somebody, a banker or somebody who's really good, and you run it in the NSC?" I said, "I just don't think I can do that. I think that's too big a span. I don't think it's manageable, and I don't want to do that."

Nick Brady, the Secretary of the Treasury, felt that he ought to be in the Core Group. He was in most NSC meetings, as was the Attorney General. The issues we discussed in the Core Group rarely had a predominant economic aspect to them. They were mostly general strategy. In the NSC, my rule was whenever an issue had significant aspect—either economic or any other—the Cabinet officer from that department would attend the meeting.

Was it satisfactory? No, it wasn't satisfactory. I honestly don't know what the answer is. I know that the Clinton administration set up a National Economic Council, and I think it probably worked reasonably well when Bob Rubin was the chairman. I don't see it working particularly well right now. They got at one point, into the position where economic relations with China were run by the NSC, and economic relations with Japan by the NEC. We have not, as a government, figured out how to integrate economic affairs the way we have national security affairs.

**Zelikow:** Another personnel question, maybe the last for the moment, just on the appointments of Cheney and Powell. Cheney, rather early in '89, Powell a little later, spring of '89. The

memoir has accounts of how Cheney and Powell were selected. Was it as simply as it seems? Cheney's an obvious choice, Powell not as obvious, more junior General obviously being jumped up, but of course obvious in many ways because of his prior NSC service and Washington experience. Was this really pretty cut and dried in both cases?

**Scowcroft:** The appointments of Cheney and Powell both came after the administration was first set up, Powell according to ordinary turn of events, Cheney in an emergency. We had gone from January 20 to the middle of March without a Secretary of Defense. At the time we were doing the establishment, setting up the structure, doing the studies, and so on. Will Taft, who was acting Secretary, was a fine guy, but he was not in a position to speak for a Secretary who wasn't there.

The President was personally very involved in the Tower nomination and felt very deeply Tower's rejection. I remember as we were riding on the way back from the Defense Department to give Tower the President's chagrin and regret, the President asked me if I wanted the job. I said, "If you had asked that last November, I would have said yes. Now, I don't think so. I think I'm better where I am. No, I don't want the job."

I said, "We need to move fast. We cannot afford to go through another set of hearings like this one. So I think we'd better focus on a congressional member. It's the only hope we have of getting somebody through fast." The President said, "Like who?" And I said, "Dick Cheney. He knows the White House, he's been learning Defense where he is, he's part of the House leadership. It's a big loss for the House to lose Cheney out of the leadership, but his reputation couldn't be higher. I think you can get him through in a minute."

There were about five possibles that we talked about, the rest all in the Senate. After about an hour, the President said, "Well, I have one problem. Cheney's had a heart attack. Will you call him and find out what his medical history is?" So I did that, and I told the President "no limitation." So he picked up the phone and called Cheney. It happened all in one day, very, very fast. It turned out to be a great choice.

Colin Powell was, as I say, very deliberate. We all liked Colin Powell. I had reservations on two scores. To jump him over so many general officers could cause resentment. The other thing, he had not had true Joint experience, and I thought it would be great for him to go and be SACEUR [NATO Supreme Allied Commander] for a couple of years before he became Chairman. Cheney wanted Colin Powell very hard. The President knew Colin and was very comfortable with him. So that happened very quickly, too, and all my fears turned out to be unwarranted.

**Zelikow:** It sounds like [William] Webster was more the President's call, with his conception of what CIA should look like, more of a career image. There, of course, you're keeping someone who had already been in the job.

**Scowcroft:** Yes. The other principal in the National Security arena was the DCI, and the President there had very fixed views. He thought the Director of CIA ought to be treated more like the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. They ought to have fixed tours of duty. They should not be seen as political appointees. He liked Webster and was very comfortable keeping him in the job. In addition, he felt that the DCI should not be involved in policy. His job was to

deliver intelligence, not to engage in how the intelligence was used or in policymaking. He felt that Webster was just the right person to make that kind of distinction. My recollection is he didn't even think for a moment about changing that.

**Zakaria:** Looking back on it, this is the transition to potentially the most important year since the beginning of the Cold War. It essentially produces the end of the Cold War, the liberation of Eastern Europe, and starts a process in which so many of these conflicts around the world that had associations with the Cold War begin to either be wound down or peter out. It also sees the death of Communism and the Soviet Union, eventually. Are you thinking about this when the transition begins? Do you have a sense that you're on the eve of something like this? What are your thoughts when you're thinking about the very big picture in late '88 and early '89?

**Scowcroft:** In terms of substance of policy and the world we were facing during the transition, yes, I'd thought about it a lot—especially about this issue: Is Gorbachev for real? Does he really want to transform things? Or did the old men of the Kremlin—who certainly didn't think they were putting somebody in who would overturn the system—were they right? Was this a man who was going to make the system run more efficiently so that they could compete in a better manner?

I had the sense at the end of the Reagan administration that they had come to the conclusion, *It's all over*. I wasn't at all sure that was the case, principally because there had been zero movement about Eastern Europe. So I came in with a fairly specific notion of what to do about U.S.-Soviet relations, which are the key to it all. That was to change our policy toward the Soviet Union—which had been one based on arms control directly—to a policy focused primarily on Eastern Europe, and changing what we sought in Eastern Europe.

Our policy toward Eastern Europe had always been to encourage those states in Eastern Europe that caused the most trouble for the Soviet Union, so Romania was at the top of the list. I said, "What we ought to do is focus and give the most help and encouragement to those who are trying most to liberalize their internal systems." So Romania goes to the bottom of the list, Poland goes to the top of the list. Then, on top of that, to see what we could do about getting the Soviet Army out of Eastern Europe. That was the biggest barrier to the transformation of Europe, which I thought was key to the ending of the Cold War.

I even proposed to the President in late '88 and in one of the early meetings in '89 to the Core Group, that he make a proposal that U.S. and Soviet ground troops be withdrawn from Europe.

**Zelikow:** All of Europe or Central Europe?

**Scowcroft:** Well, we didn't get that far—Central Europe. In other words, the Soviets would withdraw back into the Soviet Union.

**Zelikow:** But we would withdraw across the Atlantic?

**Scowcroft:** Yes, and people said, "What a terrible idea." And I said, "Look, a fight between the Warsaw Pact and NATO, without U.S. on one side and without Soviet troops on the other, I'm quite comfortable about the outcome. I'm not even sure the Eastern Europeans would fight at all, but if they did, that's to our net advantage." It also leaves our Air Forces there, which is really

the core of the defense we have. It gets us off the hair-trigger worrying about how we're going to get eight divisions back over there. It does a whole bunch of good. Well, it was way too extreme, and Cheney about had a heart attack.

But what that did when you reduced it back, it got people thinking. And what we did for the first NATO meeting is propose a bilateral reduction on both sides, which turned out to be a great idea, and it did reduce Soviet presence in Europe. So yes, I had very specific ideas. My other one was I was very worried about Gorbachev going to Beijing, which he was going to do in May, I think. I wanted to get the President in conversations with the Chinese somehow before Gorbachev got to them, because I was uneasy about what Gorbachev might be able to do with the Chinese.

I was not responsible for the death of the Emperor of Japan, but that turned out to be a heaven-sent opportunity to get the President to Beijing before Gorbachev got there. So that was the other thing I had in mind, and then something on the Middle East as well. Yes, I had a specific program for what I thought were the core elements. In all this, arms control—which is my first love—was to be put way in the background until we had movement that really went to the core of what the Cold War was.

**Zelikow:** To circle back to a couple more administrative issues before we plunge further into the substance. One is paper flow. Did you have the right to move your paper directly to the President in all cases, which is not always the case? The Reagan administration, of course, had had some different staffing procedures. Was there any intermediary between the paperwork you wanted the President to see and the President?

**Scowcroft:** Administratively, I had an early talk with John Sununu after I was appointed—and at this point I knew much more about the process than John Sununu did—about how I wanted to work. I said, “There’s to be direct line” (I didn’t say it in those terms) “between me and the President, no interference with my access to the President. I have no problems sending memos through you or concurrently, letting you know. Or if there isn’t time, I will call you and tell you and invite you down to a meeting or whatever.” We early established yes, that I was the only one with a completely separate channel to the President.

Actually, it worked out fine. I kept John informed of things, and he frequently had views of his own on virtually everything. It did not turn out to be a problem. There was no problem like there was in the early Reagan administration.

**[BREAK]**

**Zelikow:** You began with, “Baker and I had different perspectives.”

**Scowcroft:** I was primarily concerned with the strategy of what we were doing. Baker was much more concerned with the tactics. When, for example, we would discuss issues of arms control and what we should propose to the President, Baker would almost always home in on the negotiability of what we wanted to do. And I didn’t care much about that. I was interested in how

we could change and improve the balance. So we had differences, but they were differences that didn't go directly to the heart of things. They were not differences like Brzezinski and Vance, who had different philosophies of how to deal with the Soviet Union. We didn't have that. It was much more this kind of thing, and therefore we didn't have too much trouble. Ideologically, on a map of left to right of the principals' group, Baker would be on the left, Cheney would be on the right, with me in between, closer to Cheney than to Baker, probably.

**Zakaria:** How did you see your role as NSC advisor? Did you see yourself as a coordinator or as the President's principal strategic advisor?

**Scowcroft:** I saw my role as two-fold. The first was to run the system, to make the process work and work efficiently, and provide the President with the perspectives he needed. And don't waste any more of his time than was absolutely necessary. I thought my second role was to provide a source of advice to him that was unalloyed by departmental responsibilities and interests. In other words, both Cheney and Baker had to represent their departments. Maybe not all the time, but they couldn't fall off too many times from strongly held views or they'd lose support with their own departments.

I didn't have any client other than the President. Not that I didn't have, maybe, points of view that had my own biases in, but they weren't institutional biases. Therefore, I thought my role *after* I had made clear what other people's views were, was to present my own view. So I thought I had two jobs.

**May:** One of the things that's very hard for historians to get out of documents is a sense of the process of how things worked, how paper moved, and how people dealt with one another. It's very difficult to do since it was complicated when you had one different crisis after another, some of which we're going to come to. But to the extent you can, could you recapture a typical day, when you start, what you do, what you'd read first, how you'd allocate time between intelligence briefings and the newspapers, your telephone calls, what you kept in your own office, what your rules for delegating were?

**Scowcroft:** Well, what was a typical day for me? I would arrive at the office by seven o'clock, having read a newspaper on the way in.

**May:** Which newspaper?

**Scowcroft:** Usually the [Washington] *Post*, interestingly enough, not because I thought it had the best news, but it had the most government-focused news and would contain the most nasty surprises if there were to be any. Then I would go through intelligence, talk to any of my principal staff people who had any problems, and then go down and meet with the President at 7:30. We would go through the President's daily brief, which he read every morning avidly with the briefer sitting there.

After we had disposed of that and discussed any issues that would come up, I would have a list of things that I wanted to discuss with him. Maybe he was having a meeting with somebody that day and I had something I wanted specially to tell him to be sure to do. Any variety of things that were on my mind, and he would do the same. Once a week when we were in town, Cheney and

Baker and I had breakfast together. Once a week I had staff meetings, just to stay in touch with everybody I didn't see more frequently.

The rest of the day was very eclectic, meeting people. We tried to use the NSC as a vehicle for sending signals as well. I did not ordinarily see ambassadors, with the exception of a couple of Soviet ambassadors who wanted to see me. By and large, the State Department did that. But when we had something we wanted to reinforce and wanted the signal to be very strong, to have me call an ambassador in to talk to him would be a powerful underlining of the message we wanted to convey. We tried to play that back and forth. So I did meet with a fair number of ambassadors, and a certain smattering of businessmen, especially in the Defense industry.

Once a week I had a background briefing with four or five press people, usually from different parts of the media. But by and large my day was quite eclectic. I guess I would ordinarily see the President between three and four times a day on one thing or another. I had direct lines to my principal counterparts in Great Britain, France, and Germany. After about 6:00, and the phone stopped ringing, I'd get my day's paperwork done and usually leave 9:30-10:00.

**May:** How did you maintain the relationship with Congress that you talked about earlier?

**Scowcroft:** I had a terrific congressional relations person, Virginia Lampley, and she kept me at it. When we had an issue they were debating, she'd say, "On this, before you get too far, why don't you go down and talk to Les Aspin, or pick up the phone and call Les Aspin," or do this or do that. So there was rarely a day that I didn't call or go meet with a Congressman of one kind or another. It turned out to be very important, especially with the kinds of things they don't like to be surprised on—military actions, and the things that we're thinking about, or things where we need to change their mind. That was a very important part of my responsibilities—time consuming, but very important. Congressmen like to be treated nicely, and I would invite them up frequently for breakfast or a lunch, one-on-one, just to chat to some of the key ones. I think it helped.

**McCall:** General, I want to follow up on something you were just speaking about, which is the role of the National Security Advisor. You've talked about what you perceived for the administration. You came into the administration uniquely prepared for the role. I want to talk about how you perceived it back when you first joined the Ford administration. Think about what was the role model, what were you anticipating the problems and the pitfalls to be, and bring us forward to the Bush administration.

**Scowcroft:** I have trouble differentiating my thoughts in the Ford administration with those in the Bush administration. They all sort of run together. I think as the Bush administration approached and I looked back at the Ford administration, the one thing that I was determined to avoid was a Kissinger-Rogers kind of relationship. I thought that that stemmed, importantly, from personalities, but there were also certain ground rules, and one of them was that the public explicator of foreign policy, other than the President, is the Secretary of State. It is important that there be no competition to be the one who talks to the press. So, as I said before, one thing I established right away was that I didn't go out and try to get ahead of Jim Baker. As it worked out, what Marlin Fitzwater liked was to blanket the talk shows. I'm not sure that's even a good

idea, but that's what he liked. So if you wanted to listen to a talk show, you were going to listen to the administration. That was a principal thing.

The other was meeting with ambassadors. Shultz, for example, said he forbade NSC meeting with ambassadors. Kissinger used to do it all the time. I tried to do it when it served some greater purpose, not just so that ambassadors would think that if they had anything important they had to come to me and not the State Department. An enormous facilitator in this whole thing was Larry Eagleburger and my relationship with him, because we got more resolved over the telephone, which served to avoid things that could have become a prickly issue between us. Kissinger has the reputation of being domineering and not paying attention to other people and running things his own way. I didn't find it that way. He held meetings of the subgroups of the NSC, he listened to people, he called people. So I didn't think I needed to make a course correction in that.

**McCall:** You've mentioned before role models for you, as National Security Advisor, Andrew Goodpastor and others. You describe very acutely, very clearly, what transpired, and what you were trying to learn. I'm trying to get a better sense of where that sense of direction was coming from in issues of integrity, issues of acting the broker.

**Scowcroft:** Well, as I saw myself, I was less looking for a role model than an amalgamation of what I thought were the best practices of different National Security Advisors. I had a little speech that I used to give to new general officers over at the National War College on the NSC. I'd walk through the different Presidential administrations and say how each one of them ran his own NSC. I was trying to pick from the best practices and avoid the worst, and I wouldn't say I had any one particular person as a model.

I was discouraged by the outcome of all the studies we did at the beginning and lowered my expectation of what the bureaucracy could or would deliver. But I thought it important to engage the bureaucracy in a way that Kissinger did in the beginning, not so much at the end, and that Brzezinski didn't do. Because if you don't engage the bureaucracy, you're going to get sniping like, "Well, they didn't listen to the system, and they made a lot of mistakes because it's just a small group of ivory tower thinkers."

I tried to make course corrections to emulate people who I thought had done certain things right, and to avoid things that either I or other people had done wrong. I think I failed both with the press and the Congress in my first stint. They turned out to be much more important than I considered in the beginning.

**McCall:** I have one question about the President's intent. General, you developed a surprisingly close rapport with President Bush over the course of several years prior to the administration. Could you reflect a little bit upon interpreting commanders' intent with the President, because he was someone who offered guidance up to a point, but you let him take the ball and run with it a bit.

**Scowcroft:** One of the important responsibilities of a National Security Advisor or anybody else—but it's particularly true of the National Security Advisor because he so often is in a room alone with the President—is not to guide his thinking. A lot of times you can get the answer you want by the way you ask the question. You can walk into the President and say, "You have three



or four things . . .” and you can say, “Oh, by the way, so and so said this this morning. I think it’s fine if you don’t have a problem.” Or you can say. “So-and-so called me this morning. He has something that needs your attention, boom, boom, boom, boom.” So in many cases, you can really get the answer you want by the way you phrase it and put it to the President. I think, frankly, in the whole Iran-Contra thing some of that was done with the President.

The other thing is interpreting the President’s guidance. If it was important and relatively formal, or was going to be, I was going to issue a guidance. What I frequently would do is go back and write it up, and before I issued it, would take it back to the President and say, “I want to make sure that this is exactly what you had in mind.”

There is *frequently* miscommunication. It’s amazing how many times there would be an NSC meeting, the President would make a decision at the meeting, I’d go back and write up the decision and send it around to the principals, and they’d say, “No, that’s not what we did. That’s not at all what the President said.” So it’s a very good point. It’s one that’s easily overlooked, but it’s extremely important. Again, it’s primarily the National Security Advisor.

To go one step further, I always had my geographical principals or had somebody reading the cables going out, because policy is really made by the outgoing cables from State and Defense. To make sure that what was going out to the field hadn’t been passed like that game of telephone with kids in a room.

**Zelikow:** I’d like to start with Central America, in part because it’s not covered in the memoir. It’s a very important issue in 1989 and certainly helps shape some thinking about the use of force, for instance. But before getting to Panama, Central America as a whole: You’d lived through and, of course, the Tower Commission had worked on, and the administration almost brought to ruin, in part, on its concerns for Central America. Where had you lined yourself up on the great Central America battles of the ’80s? Did you think this was a very important part of the world?

**Scowcroft:** At the outset of the administration, Central America loomed large. It had been a major preoccupation of the Reagan administration. I thought excessively so. I thought that Al Haig’s comment, ambiguous though it was, in the early part of the Reagan administration, that we “need to go to the source,” got us in a lot of trouble. But we were where we were, and we had major issues. They were important psychological issues.

Interestingly enough, Baker and I came to the same conclusion, independently, about Nicaragua. I’ll say what mine was, that the Reagan administration had made a serious mistake in this constant confrontation with the Congress. It was not producing results, it was embittering everything, and nothing was getting done. I thought we ought to change that. I thought we ought to go up and try to co-op the Congress. And Baker, interestingly enough, the first time we talked about Central America, said the same thing. So that’s what we tried to do.

Fortunately, Latin Americans had the same kind of view, and about the same time—I think it was in February—there was a meeting of five Presidents who said there ought to be a cease fire, we ought to repatriate the Contras, and there ought to be elections in Nicaragua. That gave us the opening, and we pursued that pretty steadily. It wasn’t easy.

**Zelikow:** Why wasn't it easy? I'll tell you, in the first months of the Bush administration, it looked like a magic act had been performed. I mean, this rabbit had pretty much disappeared from the foreground of American foreign policy without a huge amount of obvious commotion.

**Scowcroft:** Well, it wasn't easy because players kept jumping out of their positions, and we had to stuff them back. Actually, overall it went quite smoothly. But in Salvador there were some assassinations of nuns and so on, and [Daniel] Ortega would say, no, he wasn't going to continue with the cease fire. And the Contras said, no, they weren't going to be repatriated. It was a continuous struggle. But I think it worked. It tended, of all things, to put Central America back into a perspective of the other kinds of things that we were doing.

Interestingly enough, one of the places that led to a sense of caution on my part, and on the President's part, about whether the Cold War was over was our discussion with the Soviet Union about places like Central America. There, we detected absolutely no change from the Cold War. Gorbachev would swear they weren't sending supplies down there—and probably he was technically right, instead, it was the East Germans who were doing it. So the way the Soviet Union began to look—partly through our eyes on Central America—was at the core Gorbachev was doing a lot of things, and there were a lot of changes and so on. But out in the periphery, out where the rubber was meeting the road—except Afghanistan (and they didn't leave Afghanistan, they were driven out of Afghanistan in a way, the way we were out of Vietnam)—the Soviet Union was doing the same old thing.

Gorbachev would say, "Yes, we hear you. Yes, we hear you." And then he'd go on and do the same thing. So Central America became a kind of barometer of how much the Soviets really seemed to be acting on their fine words.

**Zelikow:** Let me focus in on a little country called Panama. By late '88 Panama is already also a source of some commotion, the [Manuel] Noriega indictments. The Reagan administration had actively considered military intervention in Panama, but had not done so. I wonder whether the incoming Bush administration also thought that had been overblown, was not as important. For instance, just to sharpen the question, according to one source I read, there's a meeting at State where Larry Eagleburger—who's your soul mate in many ways—turns to a State official and says, "We will never invade Panama," underscoring every one of those words. That official remembered it very clearly. That's in the spring of '89. Could you have imagined yourself saying those same words in early '89?

**Scowcroft:** Panama was a little different from Central America. In the first place, Panama was not the site of active hostilities like Nicaragua and El Salvador were. Panama first comes in to my view as a concern in connection with the President's decision to crank up the drug war. In the late Reagan administration, Noriega was indicted, which I thought was a strange way to behave. I thought that the United States indicting foreign officials, over whom we had no jurisdiction, was really an aberration. So I didn't take that very seriously. President Bush did. He kept mentioning the indictment of Noriega, and I kept saying, "You can't do that. You can't do that. You have no jurisdiction. It's a foreign official. They're unindictable anyway. And besides, how are you going to get him?" To me, things really started to happen with the election in May.

**Zelikow:** You're thinking of [Guillermo] Andara?

**Scowcroft:** Yes. The elections were going very badly for Noriega, and he stopped the vote count and seized the ballots. Fortunately we had President Carter down there poll watching. He was not down there at our request. He was down there poll watching. Well, that was what fundamentally changed our attitude toward Panama.

**[BREAK]**

**Zelikow:** We were talking about a fundamental change in American policy toward Panama in May '89. You're describing a situation in which the Bush policy is not the linear continuation of the Reagan policy. The Reagan policy is the indictments, the drug war. The administration opens, you're not sure that this is worth American military intervention, you're not pressing the cause that they were pressing. But there's a break, a new development, which is Noriega's handling of the election in May '89, which then—at least in your case—tips you more towards the people who might be considering stronger action. Is that a fair summary of what you've been saying so far?

**Scowcroft:** On Panama, my position evolved. My guess is it did not so much with President Bush. He had had a deeper involvement. He had carried messages to Noriega on behalf of President Reagan and so on. He was sympathetic to the indictment. Panama was not on my scope in the beginning. It came there with the elections, which were hijacked in the most outrageous, confrontational way. I believe there is probably where the President decided that as soon as the opportunity arose, something was going to happen. I wasn't there yet, but we had President Carter on board. He came back and gave us a report about how awful it was, and we used that to good effect.

**Zelikow:** Did Carter actually say anything to President Bush about American intervention in Panama? Did he suggest that he, Carter, thought military intervention should be considered?

**Scowcroft:** No. I'd say we had President Carter's support. He was a stickler for elections, and he thought the election had been stolen. Did he have support for military action? I don't think so. I thought—and I believe Cheney thought—that our Commander in Chief down there had become co-opted locally and didn't want to rock the boat.

**Zelikow:** You're referring now to Fred Woerner?

**Scowcroft:** Yes. Fred Woerner.

**Zelikow:** Who was then the CINC [commander in chief] south?

**Scowcroft:** My recollection is President Carter liked him and thought he was doing a good job. We replaced him with Max Thurman, who was tough, tough and decisive. The President made a big thing of the stolen election, of Billy Ford being beaten up by the . . .

**Zelikow:** Dingbats. Dignity Battalions.

**Scowcroft:** Dingbats, yes, Dignity Battalions. We kept looking for the kinds of things that could be done. We reinforced the garrison down there, but nothing much happened until, I think it was October 3<sup>rd</sup>, when there was an attempted coup. It was a coup we had some word of. We were unable to pin down exactly what the plotters had in mind, exactly who they represented, exactly what they planned to do with Noriega, which becomes important because of the anti-assassination Presidential directive.

We did take some measures, when the coup actually started, to block Noriega's forces. But the coup was unsuccessful. We did not act very decisively. In retrospect, I don't see how we could have done much more because it was so bizarre to make plans for military intervention on that basis. But as a result, we made some changes. One of the things we found when we had an NSC meeting on October 3<sup>rd</sup> is that the State Department had its intelligence sources, Defense did, JCS did, CIA did, but all of these intelligence reports were going straight up to their principals, and there was no cross communication. So when we got in the meeting, we found out that everybody had a very different idea about what was going on in Panama, which is not too surprising because it was extremely confused.

This was our first crisis. We didn't do particularly well in it, and it was probably my fault. As a result, though, I took the deputies committee—which was pretty much administrative, if not moribund—and made it a subcommittee of the principals group, as the first interagency group that would focus on all kinds of crises. After the abortive coup in October—and we got a lot of unfavorable press comment on our behavior in the coup—we really sharpened what we were looking for. We had the Defense Department do some contingency planning, and we were ready for what we assumed would be another coup.

The *casus belli* turned out to be an American soldier who was shot at a checkpoint. There were three of them, they tried to go through the checkpoint, and one of them was killed. A Navy lieutenant and his wife were stopped at a checkpoint, he was beaten up and she was groped. That was all the President needed. I was in sympathy with what he wanted to do and ready to do it, but I was surprised that he would do it on those particular grounds. Anyway, at that exact time, Noriega had the Panama Parliament declare war on the United States, which helped a little.

In this run-up from May to October, or May to December, which is when we moved, the President made dozens of phone calls. My guess is he talked to every Latin American leader a minimum of half a dozen times about Panama, about Nicaragua, about Salvador, on and on and on. The result was that when he ordered an operation against Panama on December 20, there was a resolution in the OAS [Organization of American States], deploring it and so on, but the ground work that he had done resulted in only the most *pro forma* kind of objections. I thought there would be an explosion in Latin America. Intervention, armed intervention by the United States was an absolute no-no. The Mexicans were the most extreme, but after they had said their piece, it quieted down amazingly well. And I think that is due solely to the President's arduous diplomacy in courting these people, in explaining what he was doing, in explaining what his fears were, so they didn't take this as part of a new American policy of gringoism in Latin America.

**Zelikow:** After the May elections, who made the decision to fire Woerner? Was that really the President?

**Scowcroft:** It's the President's decision, yes. He told Cheney to do it.

**Zelikow:** You weren't critically involved in propelling that decision?

**Scowcroft:** Well, I certainly weighed in, yes.

**Zelikow:** In favor of firing Woerner?

**Scowcroft:** Yes, Yes.

**Zelikow:** Because, of course, replacing Woerner with Thurman, you get the impression that the White House has already made the decision to intervene, and they're waiting for suitable provocation.

**Scowcroft:** Partly. I didn't know Woerner, but I knew Max Thurman very well.

**Zelikow:** And Carl Steiner, too, perhaps.

**Scowcroft:** Yes. I didn't know Carl so well, but I knew Thurman very well, and I knew exactly what we would get if we had him down there, if it was necessary. Did I think it would happen? As I say, it surprised me a little, the flimsiness of the excuses which the President was willing to take as action. I thought that Noriega would be smarter than he was and not give us the occasion and that we might not have the kind of provocation that we needed.

**Zelikow:** Were there any dissenters between May and December or even in the last minute in December? Were there any people who were saying, "Let's lay off this," or "Let's take a step back here"? Or strong pressure from the Congress to step back?

**Scowcroft:** There were objections—and I can't remember from what quarter—to the relieving of General Woerner. Some in Congress objected to it. My sense is that President Carter started to get concerned with the bellicosity of the administration, but I don't remember him actually saying anything. Yes, there were dissenters, and my recollection is that the Panama operation itself was not wildly popular. It was okay, but not wildly popular.

**Zelikow:** In the public at large?

**Scowcroft:** In the public at large, yes.

**Zelikow:** According to the available accounts, this operation, Blue Spoon, then becomes Just Cause. One of the interesting things about this is Powell seems to be quite gung ho about this operation. He seems very supportive of it, including in the deliberations in the Pentagon, which some people have contrasted with his relative caution in the run-up to the Gulf War. Also, the State Department seems pretty gung ho. Baker seems quite amenable to an intervention in Panama. But this is, of course, just from journalistic accounts. Do you recall at the time in December, when it really came down to it, was there a vehement debate about intervention? Is there a lineup that looks different from the one I've just described?

**Scowcroft:** I think that by the time of the intervention everybody knew what the President's mindset was. He had made it abundantly clear. After all, this was not a huge operation. This was what? 20,000 new troops down there, not a great operation. It's a great opportunity for the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs to test his troops in combat.

Attitudes toward the Gulf War were different. The Gulf War was a big war. This was not that big a war. We were quite comfortable with it. After all, we knew Panama, and we had thought about it for months. So no, I don't remember anybody saying, "Are you sure we ought to do this?" No.

**Zelikow:** Any big arguments about the idea of snatching Noriega? The initial deployment in the summer included Special Forces units, Delta units, and a SEAL team. Was the President pressing for some other kind of military operation and finding his advisors unsympathetic, or was there pretty much a consensus all along as to how this thing should be done?

**Scowcroft:** There was pretty much a consensus. The President would have been happy to seize Noriega. I wasn't quite so happy about that because I thought that would really cause an outcry. One of the real problems with the operation was that Noriega had a CIA person in jail.

**Zelikow:** Mr. [Kurt] Muse.

**Scowcroft:** Mr. Muse, yes. The question was, "How can we be sure we can get Mr. Muse out?" That was really a masterful operation. They thought that through in enormous detail and had special teams to do that. We weren't thinking of seizing Noriega as separate from the operation. Now, Noriega had nine places that he used to frequent, and we dropped people or sent people to each one of the nine. But, of course, he wasn't at any of them.

But yes, the goal of the thing was primarily to seize Noriega. It wasn't even to fight the PDF [Panama Defense Forces]. The President made clear we had no problem with the PDF, the Panamanian troops. We had no problem with anybody down there but Noriega. In the run-up before the President made a decision to do anything, we checked with Andara, who had clearly won the election. Would he be willing to be sworn in as President at the start of the operation, to give it the color of legitimacy? He said he was. Those were the kinds of preparations we made.

**Zelikow:** Did you or the President roll up your sleeves and get into the war planning of Blue Spoon?

**Scowcroft:** No, no, not really. I looked at the Blue Spoon operation, which was modified not extensively, but some, for the actual operation. No, we did not.

**May:** Could you say a word or two about how you were dealing with Congress and the press in relation, say, to the abortive coup?

**Scowcroft:** Well, with the press on the abortive coup, we simply explained what the situation was. With the Congress we explained what the situation was, but also said part of the problem was theirs, and that we were sincerely hamstrung by the anti-assassination order. If you have a CIA operative down there, and he learns about a coup plot, can he help? Can he give assistance? Or is he an accessory to assassination if Noriega gets killed? It was a very difficult situation.

Judge [William] Webster, the DCI, actually testified that he thought we ought to do away with the anti-assassination order.

Congress wouldn't do that. But we did make changes to improve the ability of CIA to operate in support of coup groups. Especially after the Iran-Contra thing and CIA agents getting caught up in that sort of thing, there was a genuine reluctance to participate in what should have been primary CIA activities.

**May:** You said this to some extent rose to a higher level because of the President's decision to raise the level of the war on drugs. I inferred from that that his decision was reached in a different way, not involving the NSC process. Is that true?

**Scowcroft:** Yes, primarily. Just at the end of the Reagan administration there was a bill passed on drugs that set up a drug czar. The first incumbent the President appointed was Bill Bennett. I think President Bush appointed him. That became the locus of drug policy. We in the NSC had a fair amount to do with it. The Congress set up a drug czar, but they gave him no kingdom to run. So I offered to Bennett the infrastructure and facilities of the NSC to convene meetings and to do stuff like that. We participated in the drug stuff, but as a group along with all the others, we did not manage the drug policy in the NSC.

**Zelikow:** Did Bennett play in the Panama intervention decisions?

**Scowcroft:** No.

**Zakaria:** The Panama case seems to me an example of something that has happened a lot during the nineties, which is crises in areas that perhaps one would not have expected at the start of an administration, or on the basis of some kind of objective calculus, come to take up a certain amount of time or a great deal of time. You have implied that you didn't think that Panama would have dominated the space it did. In fact, with Nicaragua, your basic concern was, in effect, to take it off the table so that you could focus on the really big issues like U.S.-Soviet relations. What do you think is happening here that makes it a bigger and bigger thing? Are there real events? Is it a question of telegenic crises, you know, things that television captures vividly? Could you say a little bit more about what you seem to be implying, which is that the President had some kind of a strong feeling here, some kind of personal feeling, that keeps notching this thing up to the point where you go to war?

**Scowcroft:** I'm not sure I can answer how Panama got where it was. Certainly at the outset of the administration, Panama was not on my list of concerns. Nicaragua was, Panama was not. I think the press coverage of the election and Noriega's treatment made it a popular issue in the United States. It was still pretty much a side show. I mean, we have special responsibilities in Panama that we don't have in any other country that size. My feeling is that the President was leaning far forward here, and I suspected that his feelings, or animus, go way back before January 20, 1989, but I don't know exactly when. I've never talked to him about it in particular.

If we were going to intervene on these kinds of circumstances, Panama's probably the place to do it because of our paternalistic feeling both toward Panama, and especially our responsibilities to the Canal. I can't really describe the course of events that led us this way. Noriega, was he

running drugs and stuff? Sure, but so were a lot of other people. Was he thumbing his nose at the United States? Yeah, yeah.

**Zakaria:** Did anyone in the administration say, “Why are we spending so much time on Panama?”

**Scowcroft:** I don’t think anybody said, “Why are we spending so much time on Panama?” We all seemed, after the election, focused on, *Here is one disagreeable guy, and how can we get rid of him?* In the early aftermath of the election, I don’t think there were many people who said, “It’s going to take an expeditionary force of 20,000 troops to go down and do it.” I don’t think we were there.

That turn came after October, and you shouldn’t minimize October 3. But if we had already had our shakedown and operated the way we did in later years, we still wouldn’t have intervened in October 3. There just were not the grounds. We just didn’t know enough. It wouldn’t have made any sense. But we had a great sense of unease after October that we had not operated in a polished fashion. And, in fact, we hadn’t. We were sort of the Keystone Kops. In essence, Panama worked well for us. It didn’t for the poor captain who led the coup.

We didn’t make that same mistake again. Maybe we were looking for an opportunity to show that we were not as messed up as the Congress kept saying we were, or as timid as a number of people said. The whole wimp factor came back up after October 3.

**Zakaria:** Do you think that was important for the President?

**Scowcroft:** I think he’d made up his mind before then, but I don’t think it hurt.

**Zelikow:** I’d like to take just a few minutes to review the crisis surrounding the coup attempt in the Philippines that occurs at the end of November 1989, while you and the President are en route to Malta to meet with Mikhail Gorbachev. This breaks in Washington, and I should tell you there are divergent accounts about what happened. For instance, according to one prominent account by Bob Woodward, Dick Cheney doesn’t attend this crisis meeting because he has the flu, and I didn’t recall your mentioning Cheney’s illness in your book.

So what’s happened now is the Filipino government under [Corazon] Aquino has requested American military intervention. She has asked that we bomb the rebels. There are both bureaucratic and substantive issues involved in the consideration of this request and what is to be done. How did you hear about it?

**Scowcroft:** One interesting example of the way we improved our crisis management process was an attempted coup in the Philippines. There was a coup that I believe was started by the Army, and it also involved the Air Force. The coup plotters took control of an airfield right outside Manila, and they were planning to bomb the palace. That was the day that we were flying to Malta. I was on the plane, the President was on the plane, Baker was on the plane. We had finished dinner, and everybody had gone to sleep. I had a call from Gates, who outlined what was happening in the Philippines and President Aquino’s request for air support and bombing of the rebel air base. He said that Vice President [Dan] Quayle had convened the NSC, and everybody was there, Eagleburger representing State. Everybody was there but Cheney, and



there was a problem with Cheney. He said that the Vice President couldn't convene the NSC, and he was not coming to any meeting.

I said, "Well, go ahead and discuss what needs to be done." I may have my sequence a little out here. Cheney called and said he wasn't going to go to any NSC meeting chaired by the Vice President. Whether he was sick or not, as some accounts indicate, he did not say to me. Gates called back and said, "We've discussed, and what we think makes sense"—and I believe this was Colin Powell's suggestion, but I don't remember for sure—"is that we order a cap flown over the airport. Instead of bombing the airport, we just threaten, so that no aircraft will take off, and that will solve the same purpose without our getting actively involved in dealing with the coup."

Well, Jim Baker was in bed, and I decided I didn't want to bother him. And just as I finished with Gates, Cheney was calling again. I don't know, Vice President Quayle may have called as well. Anyway, that sounded like a good idea to me, so I asked Sununu, who was the only other one on the plane around, to wake the President, tell the President briefly what has happened, and that we all think that's a good solution. He did that. In the meantime, I talked to Cheney again, and maybe Quayle, and passed the word back that that was a fine solution.

I don't actually know what happened back in Washington. I had phones up to each ear. Everybody was calling with their version of the story. That's a condensed version of what happened. The important thing to me was not whether it was legal to have an NSC meeting without the President there, but that we were able to make decisions—admittedly, on not a very complicated case—when we were about as far apart as physically possible. So I thought we had fixed part of our communications problem in the NSC.

**Zelikow:** Did you express an opinion about the substance of what should be done or the process that should be used in considering it?

**Scowcroft:** I did not. When Gates first called and said, "What do you think?" and I said, "I think we have to support President Aquino. We have unusual responsibilities for—or we think we do—for the Philippines. We need to support her, but can't we figure out some way to do it that doesn't get us involved in hostilities? That would not be a good idea." As I say, I think Colin Powell came up with the idea. I did not, and I did not get in the middle between Quayle and Cheney of that little *contretemps*.

**Zelikow:** You may not attach much significance to it, but it strikes me that if I got the news that Scowcroft thinks we should try to avoid bombing (and I don't think that issue was settled clearly in Washington at the time Gates made his first call to you), that could have put a thumb on the scales. It might have had some influence in the appeal of Colin Powell's option.

**Scowcroft:** It might have. As I say, I don't know. Gates told me what happened, but I don't know if he gave me a blow-by-blow on the substance of the issues rather than the personalities involved.

**Zelikow:** We can ask Gates.

**Scowcroft:** That's my best recollection. I did say, "Let's try to avoid getting involved in hostilities."

**Zelikow:** Where was Cheney coming from on the substance?

**Scowcroft:** Cheney didn't have a problem with the substance, as I remember.

**Zelikow:** He was ready to go, either bombing or not bombing?

**Scowcroft:** I don't recall that option. I recall talking to him about the option that the group wanted to do. He had no problem with the option. Now I think he probably talked to Colin Powell separately as well. I'm not sure because Colin was in the meeting, I think.

**Zelikow:** Will Taft might have been there. Someone must have been there for OSD.

**Scowcroft:** Somebody was. It wouldn't have been Will Taft. I'm not sure who, but somebody was there.

**Zelikow:** So in a sense, there's the meeting in Washington, and then there's kind of a virtual meeting that's going on that you're chairing, handling all these different phone calls from Gates, Quayle, and Cheney?

**Scowcroft:** Yes. I was trying to deal with all of the personalities involved. Through it all, the substance was reasonably clear. We had to do what was necessary, but I thought it important we not do any more than was necessary, and the President agreed with that. I don't remember offering the President an option, only the preferred solution.

**Zelikow:** One more factual thread that I've seen presented differently. Did Quayle talk directly to President Bush on the plane?

**Scowcroft:** No. Nobody did but Sununu. Nobody did. The President was involved exactly the way I said, I know that. The President had gone to bed, the President was asleep, and I elected not to wake both Baker and the President because I didn't think it was necessary. I had to wake the President because Baker can't make the decision. So I asked Sununu to convey the message and get an approval of what was planned to do. And that was the President's only communication.

**Zelikow:** Did you catch any flak from Baker for not having awakened him? Or was he glad that you had not bothered him?

**Scowcroft:** I think he was glad I didn't make a point about him already being in the sack.

**Zelikow:** That's all I have on the Filipino crisis. Anyone else?

**Zakaria:** Brent, I going to not be here tomorrow, so this may seem like a collection of haphazard questions. There's a story, which may be apocryphal, of a meeting between Kissinger and either you, Bush, and Baker or some version of that in which Kissinger at one point suggests a kind of second Yalta, and suggests locking in the Soviet concessions that are being made in '89-'90 in return for certain concessions on our part. It's in some ways a version of the plan that you mentioned earlier that you suggested, a withdrawal of Soviet troops and a withdrawal of American troops from Europe. I'm asking this as a preface to the question, were you surprised,

in dealing with the issues of the Cold War in '89, '90 and '91, how much they were breaking in America's favor? The degree to which just waiting only gave you more and more advantages and unilateral concessions. I'm asking this in the sense of trying to figure out—was the focus on realism, the balance of power, the kinds of concerns that Kissinger and you might have had—was it inappropriate at this incredibly fluid revolutionary moment in world history? Did you think about that? Did you think, *My God, I'm constantly being surprised at how much the Soviets are giving in?*

**Scowcroft:** At the outset of the administration, Kissinger did come in with a proposal, and I don't remember the details of it. It was kind of a Yalta. It was different from mine, but it was more a détente-oriented thing of sharing Europe. We would do more of the military, but leave the Soviets the cultural and societal control that they had, something like that. It was a sophisticated notion that I didn't have much sympathy with, and Jim Baker leaked it to the press. Kissinger was very unhappy with that, because it was leaked in a way that sounded like a giveaway.

On the course of events, yes, they almost continuously surprised us with their rapidity. Our strategy was this, as I said before: We wanted to work through Eastern Europe, and we wanted to free Eastern Europe, or liberalize Eastern Europe, however far we could go. What we wanted to avoid, though, was a repeat of the pattern of Eastern Europe, in which ferment would grow, there would be an uprising, the Soviets would clamp down, the dissidents would be killed or dispersed, and there would be repression for a decade or so, and then the cycle would be repeated: Germany '53, Hungary '56, Czechoslovakia '68, and so on. So what we sought was to calibrate encouragement to the degree that would keep things moving fast, but not so fast as to provoke a crackdown. We didn't know where that line was, and it left us a little uneasy. In fact, events kept catching up.

So more sophisticated theories like balance of power, of realism or so on, simply were not applicable. We were dealing with a real world, fast-moving situation, not only in Poland, but then switching immediately from Poland as soon as that got going, and we got an amazing government there that we never thought we'd see, then comes Germany. The German situation moved faster than anybody thought—than we thought, than Gorbachev thought, than [Helmut] Kohl thought. So we were scrambling.

In all of our efforts, what we tried to do was to keep the process moving, but try to keep it underneath the level of Soviet alarm that would bring, either with or against Gorbachev, the hardliners in the Soviet Union in, saying, "No more, too far."

**Zakaria:** Switching slightly, but not really philosophically, what were you and President Bush thinking when you talked of a New World Order? Did you know that the word had a [Woodrow] Wilsonian connotation?

**Scowcroft:** One of the problems that we faced during the early days of the administration—and partly it stems from the time it took us to do the studies right at the outset—the press started writing, "Bush has no vision. He's just presiding over the system. He doesn't have any idea." So as it became clear that there was a new world emerging, I was looking for a cute way to encapsulate and show that we were thinking ahead, that we were out in front. You know, this

certainly was not the first time it was used, to be sure, but no, I did not know that it had a Wilsonian connotation, or didn't think of it at the time.

It was coined in one of the few times that I've had with the President absolutely uninterrupted for about four hours. We were fishing, and the fish weren't biting. We were sitting out in a calm ocean, and it was a marvelous opportunity for a philosophical talk at length. You know, you never have time with Presidents. They're always busy, and you have to focus on the issue. Here, it was open. So it started leading us into *What's this new world going to be like?* This was in August of '90, a couple of weeks after the attack on Kuwait. What's it going to be like?

I hypothesized that the fact of the Soviets standing up beside us and denouncing the aggression in Kuwait was a seminal event in the world. We had set up the United Nations in '45 with the notion that the Great Powers would really have responsibility for security around the world. It had never worked. We came up on the opposite sides of every crisis. Maybe that was ending. If that was ending, could we look forward to a world where the kind of naked aggression that had been the bane of mankind could be ended, that the Great Powers could actually act as the framers of the U.N. had in mind? Would it end conflict? No. But it might do a lot for interstate conflict and give small states a sense of security that they did not have to do the kinds of things they had to do now.

It went no farther than that, and it wasn't a vision of a whole world. We didn't think it was going to be a peaceful world. We thought it was going to be a messy world. But we thought if there was a chance to deal with interstate aggression in a way that had never been possible before, it would be a great boon.

**Zakaria:** What was Bush saying during this four-hour conversation? How would you characterize his vision of this?

**Scowcroft:** We were just sort of batting around all the ideas. What was the world going to be like? Would we be able to cooperate with the Soviet Union? What was going to happen in China? Was China going to fall apart? This was a really wide ranging discussion about what the future might look like, and how we ought to act to steer the future in directions that would be appropriate to the United States. It's all fuzzy other than the New World Order, which I wish I had never thought of.

**Zakaria:** Why?

**Scowcroft:** Well, because it's been used for all kinds of pernicious things, mostly turning the United States over to the U.N.. You know, if you come from Utah like I do, where every helicopter you hear overhead at night is the U.N., you sort of have second thoughts.

**Zelikow:** Well, the dwarves on your staff had come up with a phrase, "Commonwealth of free nations, Commonwealth of freedom." I was probably Dopey in that particular group of seven dwarves, and we had actually sneaked into a couple of Presidential speeches in Mainz and Leiden and Prague. Of course, we were tragically depressed that when the President actually thought of this on his own, he instantly discarded the fine words we crafted for him and chose New World Order instead. It might not have made any difference.

**Scowcroft:** One of the things we had great trouble doing was coming up with catchy phrases to describe what we were seeking. We wanted to do away with “containment,” and we spent I don’t know how long thinking of a word. We’d come up with “beyond containment”—terrible word. It happened in a number of places seeking to catch the imagination of what we were trying to do in the phrases, and we didn’t do very well, I’m afraid.

**May:** Procedurally, how did you interact with the people who were doing the speechwriting?

**Scowcroft:** I interacted with the people doing speechwriting generally badly. It was my notion that on foreign policy speeches—and the first speech was a famous one, because it was on Poland and the round table and solidarity and so on.

**Zelikow:** This would be Hamtramck, April ’89.

**Scowcroft:** Hamtramck April ’89. Hamtramck was a little ethnic section of Detroit that was heavily Polish. My notion was that the NSC ought to write the first draft and get the policy in there straight. And then the speechwriters ought to come in and put in the bells and the whistles and the fancy phrases. Well, the speechwriters thought that was an insult. They thought that they were quite competent in sitting down with the Philip Zelikows and so on and getting ideas and then doing the whole speech. We never really reconciled that, and, indeed, on a couple of speeches there were competing drafts.

The President didn’t want to hurt anybody’s feelings, and I don’t know which he preferred. The speeches that we got from the speechwriters tended to be campaign-like speeches: short thoughts designed for applause lines at the end of a thought, which we generally thought were very inappropriate. The President was a problem in speechwriting in that he rejected fancy phraseology—and I used to argue about with him about it. I said, “You know, John Kennedy was not a great speaker, but what’s-his-name was a great speech writer.”

**Zakaria:** [Ted] Sorensen.

**Scowcroft:** I said, “People remember those things.” And he said, “That’s not me. I don’t speak that way, and I won’t give a speech that doesn’t sound like George Bush.” So I would put little phrases in, and he’d take them out. We never did really resolve this issue as to how to do speeches. We tried sitting down and telling the speechwriters what were the issues, what needed to be in the speech, and so on. Some were better than others, but by and large, the speeches, I thought, missed some of the essence of what we were trying to convey.

**May:** What would you say was the best?

**Scowcroft:** I don’t know that he had a best speech. I could probably, given time, think about it.

**May:** It’s a little bit like Eisenhower and Nixon.

**Scowcroft:** Offhand, there isn’t one that stands head and shoulders.

**Zakaria:** During the relationship with China after Tiananmen, reading the memoirs, one gets a very good sense of how strongly both you and the President felt that the relationship had to be

kept on track. Somebody reading it does get the sense that you are very worried that it's going to get off track. What's going on in your head and in the President's head? Why are you so concerned? Do you not see that the Chinese have as much at stake in keeping the relationship going? Is it because you were both involved, in some sense, with the opening to China and have seen this very delicate and fragile relationship? In the memoirs, was struck by the degree to which it seemed like you felt this was hanging by a thread.

**Scowcroft:** The Tiananmen Square crisis was a very complicated one. The President and I—as distinguished, for example, from Jim Baker, and Cheney really didn't weigh in on the issue—felt that it was extremely important to maintain a relationship with China. We felt that, while the relationship had been really pretty good, it was based heavily on mutual antipathy to Russia and had shallow roots, and that China was wavering on its course between Deng Xiaoping and looking ahead. And the hardliners really wanted to return to a Mao-like system. Inasmuch as the Deng protégée—who was the Prime Minister at the outbreak of the Tiananmen demonstration—was sacked, we saw clear signs that the conservatives might reassert themselves. We also felt that the Chinese were deeply shaken and very fearful, not only of their own people, of their military, for example, but that this would be seen as an opportunity to come after them.

Were we moved by our relationship with China? I can't rule that out. Probably so. I would plead that it was hardheaded realism, not romanticism, but it certainly played a role. I think we feared that if we simply gave way to the crowd, the Chinese would retreat and feel that they had no choice but to return to the autonomy of the Mao period.

### **Saturday, November 13, 1999**

**Zelikow:** I'd like to first get you to talk some more about China. Let's start again with why you think the relationship with China is so important in 1989. Just to summarize, you didn't emphasize China as a counterweight to Soviet power as much any more. That aspect was not as compelling as it might have been in the 1970s. In a way it sounded as if you were describing the relationship as really important to us because it was going to be so important in determining which way China's future evolved, internally, which I thought was interesting. Talk a little bit more about why you thought, in 1989, *Why not let the relationship go? Why spend so much time trying to tend it?*

**Scowcroft:** When we started thinking about China—and we didn't start *de novo*. This is a continuation of the pattern since President Nixon's trip, and it's where we were going. We had come to the conclusion that—unlike 1945 when we made China a great power for political reasons, not because of any fact—we felt that China was becoming a power of significance in the region, that there was an opportunity to wean them further away, not only from conjunction with Soviet power, which they had done themselves, but from a joint ideology, if you will. We thought the counterweight to Russia, Soviet Union, was still important, but not so vital.

But we were uncertain about China's future. Mao is no longer there. Deng had not only taken over, but tried to put in place a successor to himself, without any notable success so far. It was not clear to us how China would evolve. We wanted to do what we could to make sure that they would evolve in a relationship with the United States and not revert to close ties with Russia. And we were frankly worried about Gorbachev's skill. He had mesmerized Europe already. He was skilled in mollifying the Chinese and saying the Soviet Union was different, they could have a better relationship, they could end conflict on their borders—which had been such a troublesome issue for both of them for a couple of decades. It was not so specific. It was general. When we got there in February, it was quite clear that, for the Chinese, the Soviet Union was still the focus of their concern and the reason for their reaching out to the United States. But we wanted to move China beyond that.

**Zelikow:** There are points in the account of 1989 when it seems like President Bush is willing to go more than halfway in order to keep the relationship with China afloat. I think some contemporary commentators might wonder, "This is puzzling. Doesn't China need us more than we need them? After all, they're more worried in some ways about Soviet power than we are."

**Scowcroft:** The President, when he was thinking about China, at the time of Tiananmen Square, I'm not sure thought in terms of who needed whom most. I think underlying his attempt to reach out were two factors. The first was, we had just slapped on pretty severe sanctions and done it more rapidly than anybody in Europe. And the Chinese took that very ill. Secondly, I think we all felt that there was greater internal instability in China that we had to be very careful about. The course of the month or so of the demonstrations in Tiananmen Square had seen a significant reversal in Chinese attitudes—from being open with the students and talking with them and trying to mollify them and so on, to martial law and a very severe crackdown, a crackdown that was accompanied by indications that the regime was in a panic that they may be losing control over the military.

I think he felt he had to go the extra mile and try to defuse any notion the Chinese might have that we were planning to take advantage of their situation—to do something to them, if you will—that there was no sincerity here. That we had not since 1972, in fact, established any kind of sense of mutual confidence. I think that was the motivation rather than, "How much should they do? How much should we do?"

**May:** Would you say a little bit more about individuals on the Chinese side? You dealt off and on with people there from the '70s onward, and you've stressed the concern about internal tensions in your book. You say a good deal about European leaders, you really don't say much about figures in China. I wonder if you could do that.

**Scowcroft:** We didn't know exactly who we were dealing with, which was another of the problems. Our preferred interlocutor was Deng Xiaoping. Deng said, "I'm retired." He wouldn't take a phone call from President Bush.

**Zelikow:** Did President Bush actually try to call?

**Scowcroft:** He actually tried to call.

**May:** At what time was this?

**Scowcroft:** This was a day or so after the Tiananmen Square. He tried to call, and they wouldn't take his call. Afterwards, we heard that they were very uncomfortable using telephones. It just was not their habit to talk on the telephone. We took that as signal. The Chinese let us know that Deng was retired. The new Prime Minister was Li Peng, and he had a reputation of being a hard-liner. And indeed, in the course of the month of Tiananmen demonstrations, the reports, intelligence, indicated that he was leading the crackdown faction inside the Politburo. As Deng phased out, he was replaced by Jiang Zemin. We really didn't know much. We had met him as Mayor of Shanghai, but, as a matter of fact, in June he wasn't even up in Beijing. The Foreign Minister we knew and liked, but we had no idea what kind of authority he had. So one of the other unsettling parts was who was doing what.

In fact, when I went over there in late June, I was received by Deng, and he and I, with the others in the room, had an exchange for about an hour. Then he said, "Now you can talk to the government. I'm just a private citizen." And he got up and left. I met him again in December, "As a friend," he said, "not as government." So it was not always clear to us exactly who we were dealing with. By December, Jiang Zemin was in place, and he had a very different kind of personality. Li Peng was very serious and businesslike. We really were still feeling our way as to how—in what was becoming a post-Deng period very, very, gradually—who was where and what the forces really were.

**May:** Do you think that you were as well served as was feasible by the U.S. Intelligence and academic communities who dealt with China?

**Zelikow:** And the reporting coming from Ambassador [James] Lilley and his staff?

**Scowcroft:** The intelligence, I think, guided us significantly. There's always the danger when you read intelligence, especially about personalities, that when you meet somebody—this is the first time I had met Li Peng at all—you already have a portrait in your mind. And the danger is, in my mind, that you fit his behavior into your portrait rather than the other way around, rather than seeing a blank slate out there and piecing together from how you interact with him what his portrait is. I ended up at the end of the meeting in June feeling very comfortable with Li Peng. We had good discussions, and I never later on had the view of him that was the stereotype in this country of the really tough hard-liner. He had a personality that was much more impersonal than Deng, for example, who is very intense.

When you meet with the Chinese, they always have the chairs arranged in a U shape, and the two principals are sitting side-by-side, which is not a great format for intimate conversation. Well, when you spoke with Deng, he would frequently sit forward on his chair and lean across the arm and be right in your face. Li Peng sat and talked and looked straight out at the opposite wall. That's kind of off-putting to Americans, but that was his style. I'm not saying he's a "sugar daddy" or anything, but I had respect for him. And I gradually gained greater respect for Jiang Zemin when I calculated that this sort of jocular style and quoting from the Gettysburg Address and so on was partly show. But it was a style, and behind that style was a very, very skillful way of managing people—very soft-line, very hard-line, put people at ease by appearing to be a bit of a jokester.



**Zelikow:** When the Tiananmen protests—they weren't called Tiananmen protests then, in May 1989—began to gather steam, you begin to get a lot of reporting about it. Do you view this in the sense of happy opportunity or anxious unease?

**Scowcroft:** When the demonstrations started, and the government reacted softly at first, we were slightly hopeful that something could come of it. As time went on, it seemed to us—and the intelligence sort of indicated it—that the leadership of the demonstrators was changing and that they were more calculating, more hard, less student. Then there were people taking advantage of the situation. The statue that they put up of what they called the Goddess of Freedom was nothing more than the Statue of Liberty, and I think quite obviously designed for American television, not for the spontaneous outpouring of sentiment from the demonstrators. So it gradually got ugly on both sides.

One of the turning points was when they were unable to receive Gorbachev in their standard arrival ceremony at the Great Hall of the People because the students were occupying it. They had to receive him at the airport instead. That was when it looked to me like there was no way we were going to, from our own interests, win out of this confrontation. It had turned ugly.

**May:** Were you surprised by the military action in Tiananmen Square?

**Scowcroft:** I was surprised two ways. First of all, I was surprised that the regime let it go on for so long. Just imagine, for example, Times Square being occupied by students for a month. Tiananmen Square is the communications, the transportation, hub of Beijing. All the streets at that time went across Tiananmen Square. So there was a kind of amazement that they didn't do anything at first. The first order to clear the square was given to local units who moved in to the square but then sort of fraternized with the demonstrators.

After that, there was a short period when the students started to drift away, and I thought maybe the steam would go out of the demonstrations and they would just end. What they had been doing was bringing troops in from outside the area with no sympathetic ties to the demonstrators.

**May:** Were you aware of that?

**Scowcroft:** We were aware of troop movements, yes. Beijing was not the only place there were demonstrations, but in Shanghai they were handled much more skillfully.

**Zelikow:** If I was a critic of the administration, I could say, "Did you consider giving a warning to the Chinese government not to use force when it became obvious to you that the use of force was clearly being considered against people demonstrating for democracy?" How would you respond to that?

**Scowcroft:** Our attitude toward the use of force was first of all, it would be difficult for us to warn the Chinese against clearing the students from the square. What really surprised us was the brutality with which it was done, unnecessary brutality, in our eyes. From the Chinese perspective, though, having gone through this session where the troops fraternized instead of cleaning out the square, I would guess that the regime was really shaken and really feared that the ultimate source of any authority—that is, the military—was not reliable. I would imagine that they gave orders, "You don't stop, you don't do anything, you just move right through. If

anyone's in front of the tank you run over them," so that there would be no possibility of a repeat of the fraternization. So I'd have to admit that yes, we were surprised by the nature of the final assault on the square.

There is one picture that is shown over and over on television, even now, of one small person standing in front of a tank with a satchel in his hand, and the tank trying to maneuver around him and him moving back and forth. That is a very telling picture in two ways. First, the bravery of the demonstrators, but also the fact that that tank commander was not trying to run down this young person, whoever it was, but trying to avoid damage to him.

Tiananmen Square has become an image, an icon of meaning. If you actually analyze that period of a little over a month, it becomes much more complex with many more forces at work. Did we understand them all? No. Not even close. Not even close.

**Zelikow:** Just to press the factual question. Did the administration seriously consider sending a warning to Chinese authorities about not cracking down, or not cracking down with excessive brutality?

**Scowcroft:** My memory is unclear about the communications during the month of the demonstrations. We did communicate, and we did urge conciliation. We did urge communication with the students. Exactly what the nature of the communication was, I honestly don't recall.

**Zelikow:** But the President himself did not attempt to intervene in a strong way to send such a signal? Call, pick up the phone?

**Scowcroft:** The President did not personally intervene during this period.

**May:** On the students' side, you spoke about the change in the composition of the demonstrating group. Did you have a sense of who the leaders were, and did you have any kind of contact with them?

**Scowcroft:** We didn't really know who the leaders were. There was a lot of email traffic from Chinese-Americans here over to counterparts in China, which gave us some informal intelligence about what was going on. We did not have good sources of intelligence, and the leadership was very shadowy. It's my impression that the leadership changed. I don't really know exactly what happened. To this day, exactly the organization, the structure, the goals of the demonstrators, and how they may—all of those or some of them—may have changed over the period—No, we had no way of getting good intelligence.

**Zelikow:** Were you satisfied with reporting from the Embassy and from Ambassador Lilley?

**Scowcroft:** Yes, I was satisfied with the intelligence we had, but we just weren't able to get more. There were Embassy people who would go through the Square and so on, but it was not what we would have liked, of course.

**Zelikow:** So then there's the crackdown. Of course, the administration feels obliged to respond. Can you say anything about how you or President Bush felt personally in the immediate aftermath of the news of the crackdown? You've already said that you were shocked at some of

the brutality. Would you like to add anything to that, your personal reactions, emotional reactions, analytic reactions?

**Scowcroft:** My personal reaction when the final crackdown came—I believe it was on a Sunday in Washington—was one of real dismay. We had worked very hard in the short period of the Bush administration—and back for me in the Ford administration, and indeed in the Nixon administration, with the opening to China—to start to build a relationship with this big, strange, new power. My first reaction, I think, was, “Maybe it’s all going down the drain.” And the result might well be that the conservatives would say, “We have fooled around with Deng’s liberalism. It hasn’t worked. We’ve got to go back to the old days.” That was my general reaction, and when I talked to the President about it—we had talked a lot about China in the first six months—he turned to his instinct, which in a time like this, is communication. That’s what started our recovery.

We cut off all military contacts, we cut off all joint R&D [Research and Development] that we were doing in the military. What he said is, “I want to punish the people who have done the harm, that is, the military. I don’t want to punish the Chinese people.”

**Zelikow:** When you made your first secret mission to China as part of the effort to re-establish communication, can you give us a sense of the atmosphere you encountered in Beijing? What it felt like, the tone you were encountering from the Chinese leaders?

**Scowcroft:** It was a mixed atmosphere. It was personally very warm. Deng greeted me like an old friend, very warm, very friendly. But his message was quite different. His fundamental message was, “This is a Chinese affair. It has to do with internal Chinese matters, it’s no one else’s problem, and you are interfering in Chinese internal affairs.” And, “We don’t have a joint problem, you don’t have any part of this problem. We will solve it in our ways, and the people responsible will be punished.”

It was a cold message, to which my reply was, “Yes, what you’ve done, this is your internal affair. But the way you have done it has repercussions in the United States, and that becomes our affair. Therefore, you cannot disentangle these things. The U.S. reaction is based on what you have done, and its repercussions in the United States. So it is a joint problem, and we need to work on it together.”

**Zelikow:** Do you think the Chinese really thought America could just go on business as usual in the midst of all this? Did they understand the Americans so poorly after all their contacts over the years?

**Scowcroft:** I think their position is one that—first of all, they’re extraordinarily prickly about their internal affairs. Remember Chinese history for over 100 years was one of gross interference by the Western powers, so I think they wear their sovereignty on their sleeve. But I think it was a defensive reaction. Deng felt he was not in a position to say, “We made a terrible mistake.” So how to put the best face on it was, “It’s none of your business what we do inside our country. Our relationship is an external relationship, not an internal relationship.” In fact, though they showed not so much there, but in many ways they do not understand the workings of the American government, especially the relationship between the Congress and the President. And

as we got into the Congress trying to put sanctions on the President vetoing bills and so on, I explained over and over again to the Ambassador how our system worked, but I think they never really believed it.

**Zelikow:** I'd like to bring the story forward to the fall of 1989 and talk about the fight over the [Nancy] Pelosi Bill. But before I do that, beyond the secret mission you undertook to China that you described, are there any other critical moments in summer, in early fall of 1989, that you want to be sure we discuss? That we haven't questioned you about?

**Scowcroft:** After my trip to Beijing in July, there was a general hiatus. My trip was not a negotiating trip. I made no attempt to reach out and start any constructive re-engagement. It was simply an explanatory trip. Simply, reach a hand out, say, "Look, let's sort our way through this. Let's not do anything drastic." There was a general hiatus for quite some time. Then in the fall there were two visits to China, one by former President Nixon, and one by Henry Kissinger. We especially asked President Nixon to get the lay of land and see whether there was any possibility for some movement back toward a relationship. He came back, as did Henry Kissinger, and they both said that they thought the Chinese would welcome an attempt to start a dialogue, at least, that might bring the relationship back some.

President Nixon came to the White House in late October, early November, and we developed the notion of another trip to China. The hook for this trip would be the President's meeting with Gorbachev in Malta. And so we offered the Chinese that I would come and debrief them on the Malta trip, and they accepted. That started the attempt at recovering something of a relationship.

**Zelikow:** By that time you had also worked out what you call in your memoirs the "road map."

**Scowcroft:** Yes, that was our idea, and my trip, which took place in early December, was in fact to try to establish a road map. And we did that. They were very tough negotiations, but we did establish a road map. They would take a step, we would respond, they would take another one, we would respond. It didn't actually go anywhere. They did make their first step, which was the release of a number of the people who had been seized as a result of Tiananmen Square. But then—and this is my interpretation—[Nikolae] Ceausescu was assassinated in Romania, and that stopped it. My sense of that was that the Chinese, during this period of 1989, were watching Communism fall in country after country. Everywhere it was giving way except Romania. I remember them commenting to me about the strength of the Romanian system. I think when that, the last remaining other than the Soviet Union, in the whole Communist lexicon of the Warsaw Pact, they decided, *We can't afford to let up in any way.*

**Zelikow:** And [Li-Zhi] Fang at this time was still in the American Embassy?

**Scowcroft:** He was, and part of my trip was to try to figure a way out. I set that aside early, and we both decided it was too early. We couldn't see our way clear at the time. I left some notions of what we could do if the Chinese were to let him go, expel him, whatever.

**Zelikow:** Was the executive branch united on policy towards China? Was this a pretty easy job of managing the policymaking inside the executive branch?

**Scowcroft:** In the executive branch, there were no overt differences. Jim Baker pretty much absented himself from China policy. It was done to the extent that it was done by Larry Eagleburger with me. But there were no strong differences of opinion about what we ought to do with the Chinese in the administration.

**McCall:** In the same vein, sir, what kind of expertise were you relying on within the administration of the China policy? How restrictive was the circle of knowledge on what was going on and what the intents of policy were?

**Scowcroft:** The President had reached out to Chinese academic experts. I can't remember exactly the time. I think it was probably just before he went to China in February. We had a half a dozen of them at Camp David for the weekend to talk philosophically about China, what was China about, and so on. In June, all of those experts—indeed all China experts, with the single exception that I can recall of Mike Oxenberg—deserted us, deserted the administration on how to deal with it. So we were pretty much thrown back on our own resources.

**Zelikow:** What do you mean by “deserted”? Disagreed with policy?

**Scowcroft:** Disagreed with the policy. Yes, yes. We got no support from the academic community other than Mike Oxenberg. So we were relying on the intelligence community basically and on our own instincts. The President, remember, knew most of these actors. The President of China, Yang Shangkun, was an old, old line general with whom the President, when he was in Beijing, had had a very good relationship. So he had very good instincts about China. But there was not a breadth of knowledge to turn to as there was, for example, in dealing with the Soviet Union.

**McCall:** If I could follow up on that. You're referring specifically to the President's personal contacts, and, of course, the hallmark of the Bush Presidency is personal diplomacy and personal contacts at the highest levels. Can you reflect a little bit on the President's efforts to develop these contacts with these offices in China, and also the frustrations he went through in trying to broaden those contacts even through Tiananmen, including the letter writing campaign that he mounted.

**Scowcroft:** During this period, we had very little access to personalities in the regime in China. The Ambassador's access was severely restricted. Military contacts had ceased. They had been quite extensive. Intelligence cooperation did continue; it was never cut off. But that was intelligence cooperation relating to the Soviet Union. So there was a pretty sharp absence of dialogue at the time. I had developed a very good relationship with the Chinese Ambassador here, who had been Director of Protocol when I first went to China in 1972 as part of the advance to Nixon's trip. We used him a lot, but he was recalled shortly after Tiananmen Square and a new Ambassador came with whom we had no relationship.

So it was a period in which knowledge about how the Chinese thinking was evolving—either from the top level, the contacts we had had, or at the bureaucratic level—was largely lacking. That's why we welcomed the trip by President Nixon and by former Secretary Kissinger to sort of open the window in to see what might be possible.

**McCall:** But one thing I'm trying specifically to get at is the President's own effort to break the logjam by the attempts at personal contact. You've already mentioned phone calls. We haven't talked about the letters, which are remarkable in themselves. We don't need to recount the letters, I just want to hear a little bit about that.

**Scowcroft:** The President, when he was rebuffed at trying to establish telephone contact with the Chinese leaders, wrote Deng a letter. In fact, he wrote Deng several letters. And there he did get a reply. And, indeed, that was the genesis of my trip. The President wrote this long letter to Deng about the importance, justifying the fact that we had cracked down on contacts, but underscoring the importance of the relationship, and that we really needed to have some communication. And if it would help for him to send somebody quietly, privately, to convey—the “feelings of my heart” is the way he put it—to the Chinese leadership, he'd be happy to do so.

We got an answer within 24 hours from Deng saying, “We'd be happy to receive somebody.” We had told the Ambassador, the one with whom I had the contact, that it would be me. So we got a quick reaction. The President continued to write, again to Deng, and then at some point Deng said, “You know, I'm a private citizen. I can't interfere in government-to-government matters. I'd be happy to hear from you anytime as a friend.” In essence saying, “You want to communicate with the regime. You have to communicate with them, not with me.”

**Zelikow:** What's striking about this story to the outsider is how far we're bending over to save this. The Chinese could be writing to President Bush saying, “Please, we want to try to save the relationship. Let us send a special envoy to you.” Instead, although the Chinese have launched the crackdown, the Americans are offering to send the envoy, are going out of their way. And it sounds a little bit like we know the Chinese can't figure out that this is what they need to do in order to save this relationship. We won't stand on protocol and wait for them to try to patch this up. We'll take the initiative to try to navigate these rapids ourselves. Is that fair?

**Scowcroft:** The efforts may look one-sided, and I guess maybe objectively they could be considered one-sided. I think that we did it in the context of what we saw as a very difficult period for the Chinese leadership. They were in a panic at what had happened. They perhaps realized they'd made a terrible mistake in the way they had handled Tiananmen Square, but saw no way to admit that, since that, in a sense, would be acknowledging that they were somehow inferior, and outsiders had a better concept of how the Chinese should manage their affairs than did the Chinese.

So the President said, “Look, here are our national interests, and I'm going to pursue them. If they're successful, fine. If they're not, we will have done our best.” To stand on, “Well, we've reached out a hand, and now we're going to sit back and wait and see; it's now the Chinese's turn,” I don't think ever entered his mind. He thought he was sincerely pursuing the national interest in trying to maintain a relationship with this strange, semi-cooperative, semi-hostile, great power that was just emerging from a self-inflicted isolation that had lasted a long time.

**Zelikow:** Did you give any consideration to curtailing intelligence cooperation with the Chinese? Or did we feel we relied too much on China, perhaps, as a listening post?

**Scowcroft:** I remember in the period being mildly surprised that the Chinese made no effort to terminate the cooperative program we had dealing with intelligence on the Soviet Union. There were some perturbations, I've learned later from people who were involved in the program, but by and large the program continued. We saw no reason to change that or to terminate it as a part of the termination of overall contacts, because it was clearly valuable to us. There were things we could learn there that were very difficult to learn any other way, since some of our other stations to learn about the Soviets—especially their missile program—were being closed down as a result of problems in Turkey.

**Zelikow:** How was the Bush administration able to win the fight over the veto override on the Pelosi Bill in late 1989? On the surface, that looked like a fight that the administration was bound to lose. You lost it big in the House, but were able to pull it out in the Senate. How did you do it?

**Scowcroft:** The first run-in we had on our policy toward China started in November of 1989, November, December, I don't remember exactly. It was on something called the Pelosi Bill, and it related to Chinese students who were studying in the United States. Technically, it was an infringement on Presidential prerogatives. In fact, though, it was to establish the principle that we would not punish China at every turn and every circumstance.

The President vetoed the Pelosi Bill, and as we geared up for the fight to sustain the veto, we could count only five firm votes out of the 34 needed to sustain the veto. I've never worked so hard in my life. We pulled out all the stops. But as an indication of the emotional aspect of this—and it was very emotional—Senator Pete Wilson of California got out of a sickbed and flew to Washington to cast a vote against us. This is a Republican Senator. That's a measure of the emotionalism and the difficulty we had. In the end we got, I believe, 37 votes.

We never lost a vote. There were other vetoes. And on the annual renewal of Most Favored Nation, which is called normal trade relations—which had to be renewed annually in order to have commerce with the Chinese—there was a fight virtually every year and several vetoes. We never lost a fight. It became progressively easier. But that one vote was as hard an effort as I think the administration ever put in on anything.

**May:** When you say you pulled out all the stops, could you illustrate?

**Scowcroft:** Discussing the issue with Senators over and over again.

**Zelikow:** Was that you personally?

**Scowcroft:** Everybody. Everybody in the administration.

**Zelikow:** Including Baker?

**Scowcroft:** Including Baker. Multiple efforts on individual Senators. We had lost it in the House. The House vote was overwhelming—not unanimous, but overwhelming. The only hope we had was in the Senate.

**May:** What arguments were most effective with Senators?

**Scowcroft:** It was fundamentally the argument that here is a large power growing in influence in the region, likely to become a world power, at the end of an era and moving toward a transformation, passing power first from Mao to Deng and now to another leadership, with enormous potential for good or ill depending on how they turned out in the region. It was in our fundamental interest to reach out to them.

On the narrow issue, if you want to change China, one of the best ways to do it is to encourage the Chinese to send their students—there were about 10,000 there then, now it's up to about 30,000. Send their students to education in the United States. If we do what the Pelosi Bill said, the Chinese will stop sending students here. That is the worst possible outcome if we believe in our principles and want to convey them to the Chinese.

**May:** Did you get any help from firms or companies that entered into trade with China?

**Scowcroft:** A little, not much. The degree to which business is prepared to help on really controversial issues is limited.

**McCall:** I was going to follow up on this, sir. You spoke of how Tiananmen becomes the great roadblock, and there's the effort to develop the road map back to some kind of bilateral reconciliation. How far along that road do you feel the administration got by the end of the administration, and were there some highlights along the way that we overlooked? Also, were there things you might have done differently to influence the progress?

**Scowcroft:** By the end of the administration, we had made considerable psychological progress, but little actual progress. As I said, the Chinese stopped the road map early on, and we did not try hard to resurrect it. The consequence was that, while the Europeans had been more emotional than President Bush in their sanctions on China, after six months or so they had all lifted them. They all had normal relations with the Chinese. The sanctions in the United States remained on (and some of them are still on) because we were unable to do anything in a concrete fashion to convince the Congress that the sanctions no longer needed to be in place. But the relationship between the two sides warmed up considerably, to the point that when we needed the Chinese in crucial votes—for example, as during the Gulf War—we didn't get cooperation, but we didn't get a veto either.

**McCall:** So specifically in venues like the U.N., the warmth had come back up to something manageable is what you're saying.

**Scowcroft:** During the campaign of 1992, candidate Clinton criticized the President as coddling dictators, and he had specifically China in mind. I think the degree to which we had come in the overall feeling of the relationship is best indicated by the fact that when he came in, he tried initially to reverse the relationship and threatened to cut off trade relations if the Chinese didn't do a number of things in human rights. He reversed himself a year later.

So I think the answer to the question, “Were we back all the way to where we were at the end of 1988?” is no. But it was a more or less normal relationship, with the exception of a few sanctions still on. I believe that the exchange of visits between President Jiang and President Clinton—in what? '97-'98—probably returned the relationship to what could pretty much be normal at that time. Now, there have been some troubles since. But it's hard to say what a normal relationship



with the Chinese is because there are always perturbations in it. It has never been a solid relationship.

**Zelikow:** Looking back on it, do you now have regrets about the way you handled or advised the President on policy towards China in 1989 or 1990?

**Scowcroft:** No. I don't have any regrets about the policy or the way I advised the President on the policy. I do have a regret about the trip to China in December of 1989, where I was, in effect, sandbagged by the Chinese. That's a personal regret. It does not go to the policy, although it certainly didn't help when I was filmed in a toast to the Chinese, didn't help the view of the Bush administration and the way we were treating China. But that's a small point. That's really the only thing I think was mismanaged.

**Zelikow:** How did you feel about arms sales to Taiwan? Looking forward, for instance, to the 1992 decision about selling arms to Taiwan, what was your attitude towards that policy and principle in that particular decision?

**Scowcroft:** That was the triumph of domestic politics over foreign policy.

**Zelikow:** How did it happen?

**Scowcroft:** It happened because Texas appeared critical to the President's re-election. Keeping the F-16 plant open in Texas was a major step in putting Texas in the Republican camp. We justified it solely on the grounds that—given the attitude of candidate Clinton toward the Chinese as expressed in campaign speeches—we and the Chinese would be better off with President Bush still in the White House than with no F-16 sale, but President Clinton in the White House. We told the Chinese that.

**Zelikow:** The question is how did this get teed up? Who suggested this? Can you break down how this happened and how the administration made this policy?

**Scowcroft:** I certainly was not advocating it. It came up from the campaign. I have no idea exactly where it came from, but in looking at the kinds of things you can do to win a state, this would be one of the things that would be a natural thing to do. We debated it for quite some time.

**Zelikow:** Who was on the other side of the debate?

**Scowcroft:** The campaign people who said, "This will be a big boost in Texas."

**Zelikow:** Now was this before Jim Baker?

**Scowcroft:** Yes.

**Zelikow:** So this would not be you arguing Baker representing the campaign. This would be you arguing against the people managing the campaign earlier in 1992. Charlie Black?

**Scowcroft:** I never personally debated anybody in the campaign on the issue. My discussions were with the President. The President dealt with the campaign. I didn't. I gave him all the

arguments one way or another. The French had sold some military equipment to Taiwan, and the Chinese cut off the French from selling in China. I didn't think the Chinese would do that to us.

"Will it hurt?" I told the President, "Yes, it will hurt. If you feel you need to do it, here's the way we will explain it to the Chinese." It was primarily my job to explain it to the Chinese. They didn't like it, and they still throw it back at us, but my sense is they understood why we did it.

**May:** What channels did you use to explain it to the Chinese?

**Scowcroft:** I explained it to the Ambassador.

**Zelikow:** How did the administration try to balance relations with Japan during this period? We have focused on China. Is this focus on China we've given and that you've given in your memoir an accurate reflection of the time and weight that China occupied in the administration foreign policy as against attention to Japan?

**Scowcroft:** If you compare focus on China and focus on Japan, my guess is that you will find the time allocation coming out about the same for the administration as a whole. My time was disproportionately focused on China because in China we had a political problem. Our relations with Japan were heavily economic at this period. Thus, while I was involved, I was not the principal player in the White House.

But we were very preoccupied with Japan in the trading relationship, in trying to open Japan to American commerce. That was an ongoing problem. The seriousness of it was best demonstrated by a trip to Asia that the President took in late '91, early '92, where—for the first time in my memory—he actually took some American businessmen on the trip with him. And on that trip I actually did personally negotiate one part of a trade arrangement with my Japanese counterpart.

Our relations with China were intense, but they were focused on very different things and without the criticality of what you might call the possibility of a revolutionary change in our relationship, which was true of China. The political relationship with Japan was not at stake. There was a lot of bitterness in the United States about Japan, no question about that. But it was not the kind of emotional hostility that infused the Chinese relationship.

**Zelikow:** Some critics of the administration have focused on that Presidential trip to Tokyo that you referred to and argued this is not the administration's finest hour. Did you have very mixed feelings about the trip and this venture at the time, or do you view this in retrospect as mostly a trip that was merely unfortunate?

**Scowcroft:** The trip that I just mentioned was a controversial trip. It had been scheduled for some time, but after elections in Pennsylvania—where former Attorney General [Richard] Thornburg was running for a Senate seat—had turned strongly on foreign policy and on the President's preoccupation with foreign policy, and Thornburg, who we thought originally was a shoo-in, lost, there was what I would call a "panic" in the campaign staff, in the political side of the White House.

It was at this time that Pat Buchanan appeared on trade issues, protectionism, and so on. Governor Sununu wanted to cancel the trip. I thought that would have been a terrible, terrible

signal to send about the President and whether his fundamental focus was on U.S. interests, or on, just narrowly, his own political future. The result was that we postponed the trip for a month. I can't remember why we postponed it, but that seemed to the political people to be useful. It was at that time we added American businessmen, which I think was a serious mistake.

But then I had a very different view about our economic relations with Japan anyway. This was a period when Japan appeared supreme, when they were buying up U.S. real estate, and all the books were saying, "Japan's supreme and we better learn to do. . . ." I never thought that was the case. To me, Japan was by its very nature a fragile economy, dependent to a degree no other industrial state was on both imports of raw material to sustain itself, and exports of finished goods, and therefore uniquely vulnerable to the world economy. Through accidents it had been able to build up a very powerful economy—the accidents being the Korean War—to get the Japanese economy going after World War II—and the Vietnam War, which really put them on their feet.

So I was quite relaxed about our economic relations and thought that it would come out all right in the end. I'm prejudiced on that score. The trip as it came out was not bad, and we actually did have good meetings in Japan with the Japanese leadership on economic and general matters. But it was a tough time, and it was accompanied by the very unfortunate incident of the President throwing up on the Japanese Prime Minister, which didn't help.

**May:** Could you say something about people in the Japanese government, about your opposite number? One is a general question about the personalities on the Japanese side, and the second is a comparative question about whether you felt that you or the administration understood Japan—people and processes—better than you understood China?

**Scowcroft:** Japan for me was probably the most difficult country we had to deal with. I don't think we understood the Japanese. I don't think the Japanese understood us. I believe that on many occasions our conversations were misunderstood on both sides. While China is much more isolated than Japan, much more insular, I did not have the feeling with the Chinese of the depth of misunderstanding that I thought we had with the Japanese.

That may or may not be true. But the Chinese seemed a more open and direct society than the Japanese. We liked, primarily, Japanese Prime Ministers who were open and direct and tough. They were not successful Prime Ministers in Japan because the Japanese don't do things the way we do. Just one anecdote: In the Ford administration, a Japanese delegation came over to meet with me because they were thinking about setting up in Japan a National Security Council, and they wanted to see how ours ran. I was describing it to them, and I said one of the functions of a National Security Advisor was to sharpen the issues involved and to have the arguments of the different people made clearly and succinctly—not try to bridge them over—so that the President would have a clear view of what the alternatives were and what the consequences were of different things. I said that that was an important part of the decision making process.

Well, at the end of all this, the Japanese said, "Do you really have to do it that way? We don't do things that way. We don't confront issues directly. We wait and build a consensus. And we know when we can make the decision—that's when the decision has practically been made itself."

That's so fundamentally different from the way we do things. We look at the way the Japanese act, and we think they're not cooperative. We think all kinds of things. They think we're direct and brutal and hardhearted. That is a serious problem between our two cultures.

My favorite Prime Minister was [Kiichi] Miyazawa, who was the recipient of the President's illness. It was primarily because Miyazawa could speak English, and thus he could go on television and speak to the American people. He didn't do it as much as I would have liked. A lot of leaders need translation, but I think the inability of most Japanese to speak English aids this miscommunication. I don't know that there's any solution for it, other than to get more Americans, scholars, on Japanese culture and so on. I do believe that it's a serious problem for our two societies.

**Zelikow:** Let me switch to North Korea before we depart entirely from East Asia. This was or would be a subject that you might take up with Japanese counterparts and with Chinese, perhaps from time to time, but how seriously did you regard the North Korean threat, especially in 1991 and 1992 as we became increasingly concerned about their reprocessing?

**Scowcroft:** North Korea was always a problem for us. In 1989-'90 it appeared that the North Koreans, perhaps, were prepared to open up a little bit. I don't remember all the time lines precisely, but the North Koreans did agree to join the Non-Proliferation Treaty and theoretically to open their nuclear facilities to inspection. That was just at the time that the IAEA [International Atomic Energy Agency] had teeth put back into it because of the Iraqi crisis. During that period there's also a thawing in relations between the two Koreas.

The South Koreans were hopeful that we could remove nuclear weapons from South Korea as a part of this getting together. It was something that the North demanded as a part of equality between the two. That in itself became the occasion for a major arms control proposal that we made to the Russians. Indeed, it was a unilateral move—but we suggested they do it too—to withdraw tactical nuclear weapons from around the world. One of the reasons to do that was we did not want to withdraw them from South Korea alone, but we didn't mind having it cloaked under a worldwide thing.

We actually started negotiations with North Korea, I believe in early 1991. The North Koreans had a new reactor that became the object of concern, and which has continued to be. At first we were unable to monitor the reactor, so we didn't know what was going on. Later on, when we were able to measure thermal images, we discovered that the reactor had been shut down for a long period of time.

**Zelikow:** And the fuel rods were removed.

**Scowcroft:** And the fuel rods were removed.

**Zelikow:** Did you know that in real time, or did we discover it in retrospect?

**Scowcroft:** No. In retrospect. That's why I mentioned the fact that we did not in the early time have satellites that could see the shutdown of the plant. That, plus the fact that the North Koreans first said they were going to withdraw from the Non-Proliferation Treaty, then they said they'd put it on hold. This brief period of sunlight suddenly turned quite black when it appeared that

they had joined the NPT thinking there would be only a cursory inspection and there wouldn't be any searching examination of their plants. Then when we saw that they very likely had been saving, or preparing to extract, plutonium from the fuel rods that we had not known they had extracted, that relationship turned very critical. But that was a progressive change from the high point in '89 and '90 down to '92, when it was dropping sharply. We were still learning about it in '92. It did not come to a head until 1994.

**Zelikow:** So at the time the administration left office, you had not yet been involved in serious contemplation of military or diplomatic options to treat this as what clearly became an acute crisis. It was still brewing.

**Scowcroft:** It was still brewing, but it was accelerating rapidly. I remember looking at photos of the nuclear facilities and unexplained things they were doing in different places, like clearing the way for a new reactor. They were building reprocessing plants. It was going south in a hurry, but it had not reached the crisis point.

**Zelikow:** So it was not yet the subject of active consideration of military possibilities?

**Scowcroft:** Not of military action, although it would have become so very soon.

**May:** I wanted to ask one last question about your sense of U.S. knowledge of both Koreas. Did you think that you knew about as much as could be known about the two Koreas?

**Scowcroft:** Our knowledge of South Korea was pretty good, I think. We had worked with them, fought with them, lived side by side with them for some time. We were impatient with some of their ways of doing things, and their, shall we say, measured—if not slow—progress toward full democracy gave us problems back here at home. It on the whole was a good relationship, and I think we handled it really quite well and gave the Koreans some running room.

Our penchant is to hector our friends who don't have the kinds of systems that we think are up to our standards. I think in the case of South Korea and in the case of Taiwan, we gave both of those societies room to develop at their own rate and in their own way. The consequence is that we have thriving democracies in both. North Korea I never felt we understood at all. They marched to the beat of a drummer that was beyond our conception. A visit to Pyongyang is a visit to a fairyland, a macabre fairyland. We've had a number of crises with North Korea since the Korean War, all of them with a rationality—assuming there's a rationality—that we don't understand.

I believe that we know almost nothing about what motivates the leadership and how they're likely to respond to any kind of stimulus, either positive or negative, because we've been surprised both ways. I tended to react negatively and feel that we were not so direct and strong with North Korea as I thought we should be. In the Ford administration, an incident came up while Ford was at the convention trying to get the nomination in 1976. A group of American soldiers, who were sent out to cut down a tree that was obstructing our view in the demilitarized zone, was set upon by a group of North Koreans and beaten—several beaten to death—with ax handles. The question was how to respond.

There were some who said, “Look, it’s not a big deal. Let’s not respond. It’s too complicated.” There were others who said, “We’ve got to do some retaliatory bombing or something.” And then there was an in-between kind of action that we ended up taking: to send out a squad, heavily armed, in full view of the North Koreans, and proceed to chop down the tree that was the cause of the incident.

It’s the only time I remember that about two weeks later, the North Koreans said it had been a very unfortunate incident. I don’t ever remember any kind of apology out of the North. I don’t know what to make of it. That’s just to say that we don’t know why they set upon the American troops and brutalized them, or why they did not react when we went ahead and did it anyway with adequate protection, or much less why they apologized. We have a blindfold on. That’s not the right term, because we can’t take it off. But we really are feeling in the dark about dealing with North Korea, in my judgment.

## **[BREAK]**

**May:** I wanted to ask you a question in the background of your discussion of China. After all, you were involved in the opening, the beginning, and were intensely concerned with China at that period. I wonder about your reactions to the handling of China policy in the period between the Ford administration and the Bush administration, and particularly how you appraised Brzezinski’s approach to China.

**Scowcroft:** We respected China. I think there was a great deal of continuity of general policy toward China from Nixon to Clinton through both parties, different Presidents, different styles—including Ron Reagan, who had started out as a strong supporter of Taiwan. The Carter administration had, perhaps next to Nixon, the most critical role in developing the relationship with China. We were not able to complete the process that Nixon started, completion being normalization of relations. That was left to the Carter administration, and they did it at the end of 1978, early 1979.

I would support the manner in which it was done, but it was part of a tension inside the Carter administration that I mentioned earlier, between Vance and Brzezinski with Carter sort of in between it—or going, in essence, from one to another. Secretary Vance wanted it clearly established that the primary concern of the United States was the Soviet Union, and that getting things right with the Soviet Union took priority. Brzezinski disagreed. The upshot of that disagreement was that Brzezinski was managing the movement of China toward normalization at the same time that Vance was trying to complete discussions with the Soviet Union.

No fundamental damage was done, but it’s not a model of how a country ought to conduct its foreign policy. There should have been an understanding of the priorities and how these two ought best to fit together to advance American interests. I think it went all right, but I don’t think it was a model of the way policy ought to be conducted.

**May:** Did you think during the Reagan administration that any opportunities were lost to continue the momentum or to adjust the margins of this difficult relationship?

**Scowcroft:** On the contrary, during the Reagan administration I kept holding my breath waiting for Reagan to do something related to Taiwan that would tip over the apple cart. He never did, and indeed, I think he took some steps that helped quite a bit in solidifying the relationship—especially coming as it did from someone who the Chinese knew had great sympathies with Taiwan.

There weren't any noteworthy developments in the Reagan administration that I recall, but I thought that we inherited what I would say was a pretty healthy relationship. When we met with the Chinese, just a month into the Bush administration, we had great discussions, but we didn't have a list of great problems to deal with. The relationship always went up and down, but it was a pretty steady progression until June 1989, in terms of improvement.

**McCall:** One of the things you raise in the book is a series of conversations you have with senior Chinese leadership that were very frank and direct, in which they discuss their feelings about the Soviet Union and some of their own ambitions. I was curious to hear if you gained from that a sense of what the Chinese objectives might have been in discussing that with you, but also what their objectives might be in terms of American policy in the Soviet Union.

**Scowcroft:**



The other thing that they did keep bringing up was the hundred years of humiliation at the hands of the West. But that was just in the course of describing Chinese history and why the Chinese behave the way they do. The one thing that—at least according to Deng—was still an open issue was the fact that the Russians held Chinese territory.

**Zelikow:** In 1989, what did they want the United States to do about Gorbachev and the Russians?

**Scowcroft:** [REDACTED]

**Zelikow:** Could you talk a little bit about your relationships with the political side of the White House or how you saw the President relating foreign policy and domestic politics?

**Scowcroft:** I didn't have close and continuing relationships with the political side of the White House. As I indicated, I played a minor role in the campaign, but I did not have a relationship with that group. But after the administration started, Lee Atwater began to ask me to come and talk about foreign policy to Republican groups that he would assemble. I got to know him quite well, and probably got to understand what he was doing and what he was trying to do better than I ever had in terms of the techniques of how one goes about relating—not campaigning itself, but relating, reaching out to groups.

That lasted for about a year until Lee got sick. Then I used to do speaking for the political side of the House from time to time to Republican groups with their big donors. That became fairly routine. But I don't recall any strategic discussions with them—maybe on a few narrow points, but there was not that kind of contact or relationship.

**Zelikow:** Would Sununu, or the President himself, regularly voice the domestic political concerns that might attend a policy decision?

**Scowcroft:** Yes. I don't remember asking Atwater, [Roger] Ailes, or any of the political gurus, what the domestic political content of a decision would be. Sununu thought he was an expert in that area anyway, as he did in the whole political aspect of it, and I felt adequately served. Boyden Gray also played a political role in addition to his role as legal advisor. I didn't give it an awful lot of thought. It was a part of the landscape, and when something was necessary I dealt with it. I did them what I considered favors in speaking to groups and aiding their fundraising and so on.

**Zelikow:** Other than the Taiwan case and the Tokyo trip, can you remember any other really notable examples of what we might call the intrusion of domestic political considerations into foreign policy decisions? Any other things stand out in your mind?

**Scowcroft:** The conjunction of political and foreign policy issues, to me, would not so much affect my concern about foreign policy as it did the politics. Following the Thornburgh defeat, the political people decided that foreign policy was a negative, and that they would stay away from foreign policy through the whole of 1992. And they largely did. I thought that was ill advised. It has always seemed to me that to try to win by adopting the strategy of your opponent is not the right way to go. I always thought that the President—despite the reaction that people were tired of foreign policy, they wanted to focus on the economy and so on—could have done more, certainly on the economy. But to run away from what he had done at a very crucial period



in U.S. and world history and not point out that the way that was managed was giving us the luxury of a relaxed campaign in which foreign policy didn't have to be a big issue, I thought was wrong.

**Zelikow:** Let me turn to some of the European issues then, and I'll take you to early 1989. You've said, both to us and in the book, that as you put it, "the fundamental structure of the Cold War remained in place." There had been a lot of rhetorical gestures, certainly a relaxation of tensions, but the Cold War had not ended, and you were careful to define what you meant by that. I quite strongly agree with that view, but a critical argument—and this is an argument you've heard—would be that you didn't get it. You didn't get Gorbachev's December 1988 U.N. speech. You didn't understand the historic significance of what Gorbachev was offering. You were caught in an older Cold War mindset. You heard this argument even in early 1989. What did you think about that argument then? What do you think about it now?

**Scowcroft:** As I looked at the scene when we came into office—which was dramatic rhetorical changes from the old Soviet Union, but little concrete evidence of any change in policy on the East, as opposed to the rhetoric—I was convinced that we had to move with caution. At the end of the Reagan administration, Gorbachev had given a speech at the U.N. in which he said he would cut back on a lot of troops in Europe. Critics have pointed to that as saying, "Look, this is a fundamental change. You people are still mired in the Cold War." That was the charge hurled at us.

To me it was a part of a strategy. The Soviet Union had periodically rescued us from ourselves by some act of singular brutality to remind us what they were really like and that we couldn't let our guard down. That was clearly a mistake for the Soviet Union, however you look at it. I thought the chances were that here was a new man—a man who had a history unmarked by any signs of sympathy for a different sort of system, selected carefully by his comrades in the Politburo—and that the most likely approach he was taking was that they'd get a lot more with kindness than they would get by threatening the West.

And indeed, by the time we came into office, Europe was basking in the thought that here was a new man and that the Cold War was over, despite that fact that nothing fundamental had really happened, and that the end result—if my worst fears were realized—was that we would unilaterally dismantle the defenses of the Cold War all the time that Gorbachev was restructuring a creaking Soviet economy to become more efficient. And we'd wake up one morning with a rejuvenated Soviet Union and a West that was in shambles. I thought that was fundamentally what we had to guard against.

How to deal with that? I've mentioned what I thought our policy ought to be: to move slowly, carefully, and attack the core of the Cold War, which was Soviet control over Eastern Europe. We were accused time and again of nostalgia for the Cold War, of sticking with Gorbachev too long in the later period. But Gorbachev never showed any interest in transforming the Soviet Union. He did do one thing. He did remove terror as the instrument that drove the Soviet Union. There's no question about that. So he was in that sense a humane person. It didn't help him because what he wanted to do was replace it with incentives, but he could not replace it with incentives because he didn't control enough of the machinery to know how to put the incentives in. But other than that, his goal was to improve productivity. It wasn't to transform the system.

All the things he was doing were in our interest as he went along, so we wanted to encourage him in his liberalizing moves to increase productivity. How did he want to get the reforms in? He wanted to cut absenteeism, drinking, corruption and so on. None of his programs were popular in the Party, so what he turned to was to threaten the Party with exposure of their corruptions and to hold elections so they'd have to run. What in fact he was doing was pulling apart the sinews that had kept the system together.

That was very much in our interest. What was not in our interest is that he move in such a way, or developments arise in such a way, that the guardians of the system—the KGB, the military, the Party officials—who were opposed to this whole thing, would energize themselves enough to either throw him out or force him to turn and back away. That's what we saw as our task. Could we have simply relaxed and let it all happen? I don't know. History never reveals its choices. I think it's unlikely. Gorbachev made a lot of serious mistakes, and most of them were beneficial to us.

As we started out in Eastern Europe with our strategy toward Eastern Europe, Gorbachev also had his strategy toward Eastern Europe, which was to create in the Bloc little Gorbachevs, little reforming Gorbachevs, totally misunderstanding the character of Communism in Eastern Europe. There was no halfway house between a Soviet system and a non-Soviet system the way he was seeking to do it in the Soviet Union. There maybe wasn't one there either. But there certainly was not any way to relax Soviet control over the satellites and have little Gorbachevs who would help him make his own reforms inside the Soviet Union.

So he looked benignly, or at least indifferently, to what we were doing, and to what was happening inside Eastern Europe until the Wall fell. Then he got scared. But up 'til then, he was very relaxed. In fact, he was helping us—helped us in Poland, helped us in East Germany.

**May:** In the postmortems of the performance of the Intelligence Committee with regard to the Soviet Union, we have learned that there was a much wider division within the community in interpreting Gorbachev than was disclosed outside. The question is whether, given all the constraints on your time and your own expertise in this area, you think you actually knew as much about the alternative interpretations of the Soviet Union as you needed to know, or if you would have benefited by having more exposure to these divisions among the experts?

**Scowcroft:** The intelligence community was divided on: a) what was happening inside the Soviet Union; and b) what the U.S. should do about it. I tried to follow it closely. Indeed, at one time when [Boris] Yeltsin was becoming prominent, we had people holding contending views down to the White House, and in the Oval Office, and let them set forth their theses in front of the President. I don't know whether I knew the depth of the disagreements. I think one of the difficulties with intelligence is that it's hard to know when you should take action on the basis of any particular report. One of the things I watched closely was for indications that Gorbachev was running into deep trouble and perhaps facing a coup or something like that. The other was, were there openings for us to move more rapidly than we were, and increase the pressure on him in any particular way.

Then there was the debate about Gorbachev and Yeltsin themselves. The CIA was predominantly pro-Yeltsin, anti-Gorbachev when we had this debate. I thought they were wrong. Gorbachev

and Yeltsin, as probably the two most influential in the system, were to me fairly clear-cut types. Gorbachev was an intellectual. He was not a democrat by any stretch of the imagination. He was not trying to transform the Soviet Union into a modern democracy. He moved more and more and more in that direction, but he was never right there. Even at the time when he came back from the Crimea and the attempted coup, he tried to defend the Communist Party and what they had done. So that's where he was. He had no rapport, no feel for the people. And he disliked Yeltsin, his protégée, who he thought had betrayed him.

I doubt Yeltsin was a democrat. I'm not sure. Not much of a convinced Communist; he was an opportunist and a populist. He saw, as his way to power, a finger on the pulse of what was popular. He split with Gorbachev in the Politburo in favor of more far-reaching reforms because he thought that was the popular thing to do, I think. They're two very different kinds of people. We didn't have a real choice between them, although we were widely criticized for supporting Gorbachev. Gorbachev, after all, was the General Secretary and the President, but Gorbachev was also doing our work for us. To have shifted significantly in 1990, say—when Yeltsin became Mayor of Moscow and subsequently President of Russia—would have, to put it mildly, alarmed the conservatives and perhaps precipitated the coup that we were trying to avoid.

Now the coup, when it did come, I have to say, was laughably inept. All of the people whom we feared in the Soviet Union turned out to be almost hapless. But we didn't know that beforehand. And, had the coup been more carefully planned, had it occurred in '89 or '90 instead of 1991, the results could have been quite different, quite different. So I think we perhaps can be criticized in not judging this narrow course we were trying to play, between moving at a rate that we thought was sustainable, but not that would overturn the apple cart.

We probably didn't have it exactly right, but it worked. When you look at the possibilities in this particular situation, or in any pattern of the demise of the world's great empires, their death throes are usually much less benign than was this one.

So could we have done it better? Undoubtedly we could have done it better. Did we use all the intelligence? Yes we did, but the intelligence was extremely confused at this period. As a guide to action, what it did clearly say is, "Things are getting worse. They're not getting better. Gorbachev has set things in motion he can't control. He's not likely to be able to hold on." All that was true. And by '90 we were starting to prepare for the fact that either Gorbachev was going to stop this or somebody would stop him. We were trying to consolidate the progress we had made so that we wouldn't lose it all.

But I don't know what we would have done differently. If we had known, for example, a year ahead of time, that there was going to be a coup in 1991, we probably would have tried to avoid it taking place by doing some things for Gorbachev that might have helped him avoid it. But that's real speculation. I'm not faulting the intelligence community. I don't know how you do something like this other than to show trends. To predict a specific end of something—either a coup or that somebody's going to lose power—is awfully hard to do.

It seems to me that they did their job. They said the situation is getting worse and worse and worse, and that Gorbachev now—rather than having a plan, which maybe he had in 1989—was just trying to hold on and placate the reformers, placate the conservatives, back and forth, just to

stay in power. We thought all along—or at least I did—that Yeltsin, in fact, was interested only in power, and that there was little for us to gain and perhaps much to lose by visibly switching horses to a man more likely to create a coup than was Gorbachev.

**Zelikow:** Go back to early '89. You've described the brainstorming sessions among the Core Group, certainly in March '89, about ways to take bold initiatives. You've made it clear that the President, you, Baker, were all interested in doing something that would be dramatic and that would commit the Soviets to some really irrevocable steps. In the course of that, a couple of remarkable ideas were voiced: your idea for withdrawing American and Soviet troops from Europe. Baker comes up with this "no tanks" idea. This is March 1989.

I have a quick question about that. You know the old arguments against your idea fairly well and knew these were old arguments that get their stuff back faster than we can, all the political arguments, the allies, NATO, and all of that. There are a lot of arguments about Baker's idea, too. Before historians analyze at length the details of your proposal, I'd like to get a feel for what's going on here. Is this a serious proposal? You thought hard about the objections, and this is something you really wanted to try to push through the U.S. government? Or is this just brainstorming?

**Scowcroft:** The notion of how to deal with Eastern Europe, which fixated us early in the administration, was part brainstorming and part serious. I've outlined my idea for the removal of U.S. and Soviet ground troops from Europe. I was pushing it partly to move the Defense Department off the dime. They didn't want to do anything. If somebody had said, "Okay, we're prepared to do it, now are you serious?" in the end I probably would have backed down from that. As I looked forward, I thought that the U.S. having troops on the ground in Europe was the best kind of security for preserving the Atlantic alliance, and I thought that was critical, not just because of the Soviet Union. So I think I would have backed down. I probably would have gone farther than we in fact went, which was to pull back about 30,000 on each side. I was very serious about the principle.

**Zelikow:** You mean pulled back 30,000 on our side to a net common soil?

**Scowcroft:** Yes. The notion was that the Soviets would reduce to our level, and then we would take another 30 below that. What I was trying to do was get Soviet troops out of Europe, out of Eastern Europe, to give more freedom for what we all saw as going on in Europe, predominantly in Poland. I thought Baker's proposal, for example, totally missed the mark. Tanks weren't the issue. The Soviet troops did not need tanks to repress movements towards liberalization in Eastern Europe. That didn't at all do what I was trying to do, which was to change the scene, and to change the character of the Cold War.

**Zelikow:** This is very interesting, because Baker, wrongly, was trying to think about the traditional military balance in the central front. You're making a different kind of conceptual argument altogether, which might imply that you're not as worried about the condition of the military balance in the central front in 1989. Instead, you really see the deployment of the military forces as playing political functions, and it's the political functions you want to get at.

**Scowcroft:** Baker was focusing on the traditional way we'd looked at it, in MBFR [Mutual and Balanced Force Reductions], in CFE [Conventional Armed Forces in Europe], yes, dealing with the balance, reducing the balance. I had a very different thing in mind. Reducing the balance was fine, but my objective was political: My objective was to lift the Soviet yoke from Eastern Europe at least to the degree that the Europeans could breathe and expand and liberalize. They were very different proposals. As for Defense's notion, Cheney said, "Look, we're winning. Why do we want to mess with any of this? We've found a winning formula. The Soviets are on the defensive. Let's just stay where we are."

We had a series of meetings over the course of the first few months on this issue, and the President finally turned to Cheney and Admiral [William, Jr.] Crowe and said, "I want a proposal for reductions." They didn't give him as big a proposal as he wanted, but it served the purpose. It started to do what I thought we needed to do, which was to change the situation in Eastern Europe.

**Zelikow:** Well, in fact, the proposal that we ended up launching at the NATO summit ended up having to be drafted in the White House. Your staff had to do it for them.

**Scowcroft:** Defense came up with a certain number of troops, which we changed. But they reluctantly did back off by saying, "No. We should not move a man now, we'll demoralize Europe." But yes, the plan that was adopted was drafted in the White House. The President was very insistent on this move. I don't know whether he saw the thing exactly as I did. I think his focus was a little different. What he said is, "Look, things are moving rapidly all the way around. We've got to get out in front. We can't drag behind."

Gorbachev was going around Europe preaching troop reductions, force reductions, all these kinds of things. He was the Pied Piper in Europe at that time, immensely popular. And the President was very restive with Defense's stand-pat philosophy.

**Zelikow:** I was struck by this, on the bureaucratic point, because a similar pattern recurs in January 1990. Again the President has to make the decision. And again, the actual proposal that's going to be tabled ends up getting drafted in the White House because the White House has to carry the day on the argument that it's been pushing, that the other agencies were resisting, for different reasons.

**Scowcroft:** This came to be the pattern for almost everything we did. In '89, the Pentagon had to be ordered to come up with—I believe the description was "as deep a cut as you think will not necessitate a change in NATO strategy." In 1990 it was the same kind of argument. In arms control it was pretty much the same way. The President wanted to take the initiative in arms control. When we ended up, the thing was virtually entirely drafted in the White House.

**Zelikow:** Here you're talking not about CFE, you're talking about START [Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty].

**Scowcroft:** I'm clear up to September 1991 now, and the dramatic move on tactical nuclear weapons, together with a strategic arms control proposal. Those were all done, basically, in the White House, by a President who wanted to stay out in front, and who saw intuitively that there

was a new world forming, and didn't want to be behind the power curve and be driven either by the Congress and the budget, or by the Pentagon's resistance.

I could understand the view of the Defense Department: "Let's leave things the way they are. Let's wait until there's a collapse over there and not do anything." That's the easy way out.

**Zelikow:** Let's switch this over to the restructuring of the core structure itself and the things leading up to the August 1990 speech that, of course, was overshadowed. It was supposed to be a key event in a process of restructuring the whole core structure of the U.S. military for the post-Cold War era. Is that, again, the same story of White House driving, or is that a situation where Cheney and Powell had more clearly come to grips with the need to restructure the military for post-Cold War defense policy?

**Scowcroft:** It was generally true that all of these initiatives were driven by the White House, and indeed, most of the detailed planning done by the White House. There was much more of a cooperative attitude on the general structure of the Defense Department for a post-Cold War world. The Pentagon agreement to look seriously at this, I think, was probably driven more by the Congressional budget proposals than anything else. They were going to have to come up with some reductions, because they simply were not going to get the budget to sustain the forces as they were. There, the plan was Defense-originated and -implemented. And Colin Powell, to his credit, did the work.

It was not exactly the kind of reductions that I would have proposed. It was looking at each area of the world and saying, "What is the situation likely to be in the next decade or so, and what kind of forces do we need to deal with that?" And he ended up with about a 25% cut in the forces, not an overall strategic way of doing it, but yes, they did not need too much prodding on that one.

**Zelikow:** Pull back again to 1989. Let's return to Eastern Europe and the political vision. I was struck, too, when you explained the shift from independence from the Soviet Union as the criterion for American policy in Eastern Europe, to changing the criterion to one of domestic liberalization. I was struck by that because I didn't remember any of your staff suggesting this particular idea to you. Am I missing something? Or is this pretty much your conception? I don't think this is President Bush's conception. I think it's important.

**Scowcroft:** I don't know where the idea of shifting our strategy came from. It came up very early on. I can't say that it originated with me. I can't say that it didn't. I honestly don't know. But it was inherent in what we were trying to do, that kind of change. Had we not done it, we still would have had Romania at the top of our wish list—which didn't make any sense at all, in terms of generally what we were trying to accomplish. The originator of the policy may never be known.

**Zelikow:** I notice a recurrent theme running all through 1989, especially in April before the Hamtramck speech, again before the Poland-Hungary trip, again after the Poland-Hungary trip in August 1989, and even into September: these running battles among the NSC and OMB [Office of Management and Budget] and Treasury over what we're going to be able to do to the Eastern Europeans. You've now made this conceptual shift where we're going to offer the Eastern

Europeans a carrot, we're going to change the criteria for offering the carrot, we're going to reach over the Iron Curtain to do this. What is the carrot? These arguments look intense, and are clearly somewhat frustrating to you. Can you try to recapture a little bit of the way those arguments looked from the White House?

**Scowcroft:** Our strategy for Eastern Europe was to reward moves toward liberalism. Reward meant aid of one kind or another. We had a terrible time with Treasury and OMB on that for two reasons. The first reason was that we had very severe budget problems. The President was trying to reduce the deficit, and so—and I don't remember the exact term that was used—if you wanted, for example, to give something to Hungary, you had to take it away from somewhere else in the budget. There was no extra money, no emergency money possible. It was the worst time in the world to implement the policy we had.

The second problem we had was specifically relating to what they had to do to get the money. The first was Poland. We wanted to support solidarity. We wanted to support the movement to liberalize in Poland. Secretary [Nick] Brady said, "Look, in 1976 we gave a whole bunch of money to the Poles. They squandered it. They didn't have a plan for efficient spending. They ended up much more deeply in debt, and we got nothing for it. This is not the time to provide money. Wait until they have a program. Wait until they can use the money." We said, "No, you don't understand. This is a political program. We want to encourage these kinds of moves, not respond to them, but encourage them."

There was a fight on both of these levels. It was a fight that never ended. The funds that we actually had available to provide to Poland, Hungary, and others were pathetically small. Fortunately, the spirit that was infusing all of Eastern Europe—and the obvious goodwill and support that the President was giving—was sufficient to give them the encouragement that they needed despite the fact that the money was virtually non-existent. It was a very, very, serious problem.

**Zelikow:** Pressing on the issue of funds for Eastern Europe. There was one important success story in August 1989, the stabilization fund for Poland, for which you were able to crack a meaningful size level of support, and which apparently required a Presidential decision. But on the other hand, too, I notice that the Congress seems to be quite willing to appropriate money for this concern, is basically pressing you to accept appropriations that they're willing to offer. Can you give us a sense of why this was so hard, and why the offers from Congress didn't seem too inviting?

**Scowcroft:** The Congress was not an ally of the President on the general budget approach. Indeed, one of the really embarrassing things was that the Congress was prepared to appropriate more money than we asked for. Here we were caught in our own budget policy. They didn't mind breaking the constraints. They didn't mind emergency appropriations, because then they could have gotten a lot of the goodies they wanted. The President was torn between his East European policy and his budget policy. He felt that if he gave way on the budget for these reasons, the Congress would insist that he give way on other reasons, and the discipline that he was trying to impose on the government as a whole would have been lost.

The result was that the NSC staff in particular was scrambling around, looking for little pockets of money here and there and elsewhere that could be shifted over. We borrowed ahead into the fiscal '90 appropriations to get additional money. Another problem was that in the end, we were pretty near the end of a fiscal year when all this was happening, the summer of '89 in Europe. By that time, most of the money had been appropriated and spent. At the beginning of a fiscal year, there are lots of things you can move around. By the time you come to the end of August and into September, there isn't anything left. It really was a serious problem. We were lucky that we got the kind of reception we did in Eastern Europe, given the fact that we were all talk and very little delivery.

**Zelikow:** I notice the Clinton administration in '95 comes up with \$40 billion for Mexico out of practically thin air, without a Congressional appropriation. Knowing a little bit about how they came up with that money, as you do, I wonder why the Bush administration wasn't equally able to perform such feats of fiscal legerdemain. Was it because basically OMB and Treasury didn't really want to help, and so they weren't as imaginative in coming up with ways to help?

**Scowcroft:** The federal budget is a marvelous instrument. There are all kinds of things one can do with it and to it, if one understands it. Brady and [Richard] Darman understood it. We were simply looking for some money. There are all kinds of funds tucked away that can be used if you know what they are and how to use them. But it takes a cooperative approach. We got no cooperation either from OMB or from Treasury. They were fundamentally against what we were trying to do. We were using—"bribes" is too strong a word—we were trying to encourage developments. Their philosophy was, "Let them set up a program. Let them get all organized and ready so that we know the money will be usefully used." In other words, they do all the work, and then we pay them off.

We were trying to say, "Come with us. We're encouraging you ahead of time." We never did really resolve that issue. It was acute in the summer and fall of '89. By the end of 1989, of course, it was all over.

**Zelikow:** I think the NATO summit story and the SNF and CFE stories tied into that. I would like to get you to talk a little bit about your view on German unification. I notice the President is becoming repeatedly outspoken. And, as you quite candidly recount in your memoir, you're somewhat more uneasy about unification than he is. What's striking to me is the President gives that interview to [Arnaud] DeBorckgrave the spring that gets on the front page of the *Washington Times*. He gives a press statement in September. He gives an interview with Johnny Apple in October that gets in the front page of the *New York Times*.

Did you ever talk to the President straight up and say, "Let's talk through where we really want to be on this German unification thing. I'm coming at this from a different perspective than you are, and I'm concerned"?

**Scowcroft:** German unification was one of those issues that emerged with extraordinary rapidity. First of all, we had been focused on Eastern Europe, but not East Germany so much, in the summer and fall of 1989. That policy was a tremendous success. Almost immediately, as it became apparent that that policy was succeeding, German unification looms on the screen as the



next big problem. Quite suddenly. It caught everybody by surprise, including Germans of all stripes.

At the outset of the administration, I was very careful on German unification. My sense was that it wasn't an active issue, and it wasn't at the beginning of 1989. Nobody was talking about it. We had ritual incantations about German unification, but it was not an issue for anybody. And I thought that was fine, and that it made no sense—with all of the other things we had on our plate—to make it an issue. It was so portentous an issue, on which so many people had strong and differing feelings, that it was pretty unpredictable.

The President never had that notion. We talked about it. He didn't disagree with me. What he did disagree with, though, were people who said, "Germany still has to prove itself. We don't know that Germany is really reformed. We don't know that we can trust unification." He said, "I don't believe that. I believe that Germany has earned the right to be accepted as a full democratic partner." I think that's more of what he was saying. Over and over again he came out with things that put him way out ahead of his administration. I think he did it more for that reason than any fixed notion about unification. When the two of us talked about it, he didn't say, "Oh, you're crazy," not at all. He stayed pretty much constant on his view. I'm the one who changed. My change started with the exodus of East Germans beginning in August, but really becoming an enormous problem affecting the whole [Eric] Honecker regime by October.

When the Wall fell, my thesis was no longer appropriate—my thesis being, *There's no pressure here; therefore, let's leave it alone*. The situation had changed, and East Germany was in an extremely unstable position. The notion of two Germanys as they had been in Europe for 40 years was no longer appropriate. At that point, I thought we could no longer avoid the turmoil that would be attendant to German reunification, but that the best way to handle it, if we had to face it—and I thought we did, certainly by December—was to do it as rapidly as possible.

**Zelikow:** One closing question. Bob Blackwell and I had written some memos pressing the issue of unification a little bit in the spring. We had written some language on this for the Mainz speech, and you've described your views. One thing that strikes me about it in retrospect is the fact that you signed this stuff forward to the President. You basically let this stuff go to the President, even though you might not have personally agreed with it, which in retrospect strikes me as interesting. You didn't kick the thing back to us and say, "Rewrite this. Adopt a sounder position."

This implies to me that you didn't mind letting the staff come up with things, or showing things to the President, with which you might not personally agree, because you felt that maybe you'd weigh your argument in with the President or balance it, but you liked him to see the variety of ideas. Is this my imagination, or is this actually a policy you pursued? Venting these ideas.

**Scowcroft:** My policy on German unification—indeed, in general—was not that I was trying to convince the President that my ideas were right. I thought they were right, but I was trying to give the President the benefit of the broadest kind of perspective to help him formulate his position. I had a very strong NSC staff, full of opinions, brilliant ideas. I used to argue within the staff all the time, but I don't ever remember a memo coming up designed for the President that I would not send to him. To me, that was a part of preparing the President. Indeed, some of them I

would carry up by hand and say, “Look, here’s a view by Bob Blackwell,” for example, “that I think you ought to know and you ought to evaluate. I don’t happen to agree with this particular approach, but it’s an important thought, and you ought to analyze it.”

I was comfortable with how the President came to his decisions. He thrived on knowing what different people thought as a standard against which he would phrase his own views. On German unification he was really pretty stable. When he and Helmut Kohl had dinner the night before the NATO meeting in December, and Kohl outlined his hopes for Germany unification—which was still on a much more measured pace than took place—the President said, “Go ahead. I’m with you completely.” Gave him a *carte blanche*. To me that was the decisive step on German unification.

When the Summit meeting with Gorbachev started, there had been no progress on the issue of German membership in NATO. The first plenary session we had dealt with this issue, with the full delegations of each—it was a room full of people. The President tried different approaches and wasn’t really getting anywhere. I was about to send him a note saying, “Look, it’s hopeless. Let’s move on to other subjects” when he happened to say to Gorbachev, “Do you agree that the Helsinki Accords give every country the right to choose its own alliances?”

He said yes, and the room suddenly got very, very still. I can’t remember who it was, maybe Bob Blackwell, who passed him a little note and said, “Get him to say that again”. So the President did, and he repeated it. The President pressed the point. I can’t remember the exact dialogue, but Gorbachev essentially said, “Yes, if Germany wants to be in NATO, they have a right to be. If they don’t want to be in NATO, they have a right to be.”

At this time Gorbachev’s delegation was just beside themselves, and there were visibly nasty comments being passed back and forth between them. Finally, Gorbachev who certainly saw this, asked [Valentin] Falin to make a presentation—Falin was one of his advisors—to make a presentation on why a Germany in NATO was not the right thing to do. He engaged in a backdoor discussion with Marshal [Sergei] Akhromeyev and a couple of his other advisors.

Well, this was an unbelievable scene. When they finished their little conversation and he came back in the discussion, he tried to back pedal, and said we ought to set up a commission to study this, and whatever happened ought to be done over a very long period of time, and we ought to have a different approach. Then he said, “Let’s have our foreign ministers discuss this.” [Eduard] Shevardnadze, the foreign minister, refused, and said, “This is a subject that has to be handled by the heads of state.”

So Gorbachev was nonplused at that. He talked again about this extended study and review and was obviously floundering. Once again, he said, “Let’s have the foreign ministers continue these discussions.” Then Shevardnadze relented and said, okay, he would do it. In all of the heads of state meetings I’ve been in, this was the most remarkable I have ever seen.

**McCall:** At a later point, one Soviet delegation ended up saying—this is months after, actually after unification had taken place—that it was at that moment that he knew it was over. Do you remember who said that? I don’t remember off the top of my head.

**Scowcroft:** I don't remember who said it. The meeting ended on that point, and there was no formal concession at that summit. But Gorbachev had taken a step from which there was no retreat. Once he acknowledged that countries had the right to select their own alliances, he had cut the ground out from under the Soviet position.

And it was indeed a month later that he agreed. But in the meantime there had been a NATO summit that redid the strategic concept to make it look less threatening to the Soviet Union, and a party congress at which he had driven home the notion that a united Germany could remain in NATO.

**McCall:** Still on vignettes from unification, could you take us to November '89—actually on the 9<sup>th</sup>—when word comes into the White House that the Wall is being opened. Can you recount that and record it for us?

**Scowcroft:** On November 9, 1989, I was in my office—it was about three o'clock in the afternoon—and word came in that the Berlin Wall had been opened. I went immediately down the hall to the President's office to tell him that, and Marlin [Fitzwater] came in while we were down there. The news was still uncertain. We didn't know exactly what had happened, other than the fact that people were going through the checkpoints without hindrance.

Marlin said, "You really have to say something about this. You can't sit and wait until we know what it is." I said, "But we don't really know what's happening, and we don't want to say anything that would indicate something that might not be true. In addition, this is no time to say 'We won, we have a victory.'"

The President really didn't want to make a statement in view of the uncertainty of everything. Rather than give a press conference, he agreed to let a press pool come in to the Oval Office and speak to him at his desk. So they came in, and he explained the news, what he had heard was happening, and how pleased he was at this. After he finished his statement, Leslie Stahl, one of the reporters, said, "You don't seem very happy about this. Isn't this the fundamental breakthrough in the Cold War?" And he said something like, "Well, I'm not an excitable kind of guy."

What he was fundamentally trying to do is not say too much that might be contradicted later, and also not to appear to gloat and stimulate a Soviet reaction to it. It was a difficult time, and he got a lot of flak for seeming uncaring about such a dramatic event in the ending of the Cold War.

**May:** You said in the book that after the Summit meeting where the Soviets were arguing among themselves, you finally thought that the Cold War was over. That's a big statement for a career diplomat who had grown up professionally in that world where there were two forces. Tell us not just why you came to that conclusion analytically, but what that then meant for you, given your whole professional experience.

**Scowcroft:** That Summit meeting, and the discussion that took place at the Summit meeting in early June of 1990, was a turning point in world history. For months, the President's speechwriters had included a phrase in speeches saying "The Cold War is over." And routinely I crossed it out and crossed it out and crossed it out. After this meeting, I came to the conclusion that this time I could leave it in the President's speeches. Why? Because the fundamental

building of the Cold War focused on Germany, on the division of Germany, and the subsequent division of Europe. And nothing could be more symbolic of the end of that period of history than the unification of Germany inside NATO.

**McCall:** I don't know how much the "vision" thing was talked about, but there was a vision that people like you and President Bush had had, that there was a long view of history, and that you were determined to carry on a policy that did not make the mistakes of World War I, to include people in discussions. You carried it through, I think, to a conclusion. You've heard the phrase "upon the shoulders of giants," and we've talked about some of your heroes. You were fortunate to be one of the people there when that moment happened. Was this ever in your thoughts—that in your lifetime you would see a free Europe at all, even a remote conception, when you started as a diplomat?

**Scowcroft:** My notion about the world that I was entering intellectually as I got deeper and deeper into foreign policy did not really include a world without a U.S.-Soviet confrontation. Did I think that at some point it would end? Yes. Did I know how it would end? No. I thought that eventually the Soviet Union would change, but that "eventually" was outside the policy framework in which I thought.

I don't think I was unique here. Generally speaking, the U.S.-Soviet confrontation—or the East/West confrontation, whatever—was a fixture of the scene as much as the fact that there was a France, Germany, United States, Soviet Union, and that it was to be managed and manipulated, not to be changed. That was still my general framework at the outset of the administration, although Gorbachev did seem like a different kind of leader.

But to imagine that less than three years from that point, not only would the Cold War be over, but that the Soviet Union would be dissolved, was beyond my frame of reference. As we look back on it, the events of this critical couple of years—1989 and 1990—sort of seem like it was inevitable, and it all went so smoothly and peacefully. Not at all. It was one of the most fundamental changes in world history, and the fact that it took place at all, and so rapidly, and almost literally without a shot being fired, is an incredible epic.

**McCall:** When you look back at it a decade later, does it still have the same kind of profound epic change emotionally for you that it had at the time?

**Scowcroft:** It still does, it still does. You know, the Cold War so profoundly affected all of us. It infused every part of our lives. It was a pattern of thinking. It was the world that we knew. It was at least as dramatic as [Christopher] Columbus discovering the new world that changed the whole shape of the globe. It was literally outside our frame of reference, and it remained so to me.

**May:** Did you and President Bush ever have a conversation about this? Did you look at each other and say, "Can you believe what happened?"

**Scowcroft:** Absolutely we did. Can I recall a specific event? Absolutely. We talked about it many times, and how fast things were happening, and how fortunate it was that we were on the right side of history in what we were doing. We were not bucking a tide. We were trying to mold

it and guide it into channels that would produce the right outcome and be peaceful. Yes, there was a sense of amazement through the whole administration.

**May:** What did you and President Bush do? Was there a moment when you just looked at each other and shook each other's hands or said, let's have a toast or a drink?

**Scowcroft:** I'll be honest, I cannot think of one, but I'm sure there were. Let me give that some thought, and maybe I can come up with one.

**Zelikow:** I'll switch subjects for a bit. You said the President described his awe and reverence for the Oval Office because it was not just a symbol of the Presidency, but it really was important for him to keep his perspective on events. Did you share this feeling with him? I guess you spent as much time as anyone, other than him, in there. Can you describe any moments in the Oval Office in which this feeling for the importance of what you were doing occurred?

**Scowcroft:** The Oval Office to me, however many times I went in it, always had this air of majesty and solemnity about it. It transformed discussions even. Did we joke in there? Yes, of course. But there's something about it that when you walk through that door, it has a subduing effect on you. One of the things that I saw so often was that people would come in my office before going down to an appointment with the President, and they'd be just furious. They would say, "I'm going to tell the President this and this and this," and they'd walk into that office and there were no outpourings. It is amazing. And to me it never changed. However many times I was in there, however many times a day, there was always something about it.

I was surprised to hear the President say he had that feeling because he's the President. But I think it's important that he had that. I think Harry Truman had that. I think it's part of the majesty of the Presidency that he, George Bush, doesn't think of himself as the President, but more as the custodian of that office and what it means, as a temporary resident to a continuing being, which is symbolized by the Oval Office.

**Zelikow:** Do you remember the first time that you heard of George Bush, even before you met him? The first time you actually met him, what kind of impression did he make on you? Tell maybe the circumstances, if you remember the date or year of a meeting. What was your first impression when you met him, if you can recall.

**Scowcroft:** I'm trying to remember when I first heard about George Bush. I'll be honest, I can't remember it. I may have vaguely known he was a Congressman at one time. I wouldn't have paid much attention to his run for the Senate in Texas, I don't think. My guess is the first time I really thought about him was when he became a permanent representative in the United Nations. At that point he was a familiar figure to me.

I actually met him in 1973 in the course of a Cabinet meeting. He was, at that time, just switching from his U.N. job to being party chairman. I remember him. My very first impression was he had a busy, busy air about him—very warm, very genial, but in a hurry. I met him actually as the Cabinet meeting was breaking up, and I introduced myself to him because I was the new boy on the block. That was my first encounter with him.

**McCall:** You guys got very close. It's obvious in the book that you had a relationship that grew. You guys came up with this "Scowcroft award for somnolent excellence." Tell me about the origin of this Scowcroft award for somnolent excellence.

**Scowcroft:** The President used to like to play little games. He has a great sense of humor, and he used it to help lighten some of the really tough days and tough decisions. I was pretty well known for falling asleep at almost any opportunity. And unbeknownst to me, he had put the staff photographer on my tail to take a picture of me every time he found me nodding. At the first Cabinet dinner that the President had, about six months into the administration, he said he had a special award to give. It was an award for somnolent excellence. The first winner of the award, after whom the award would be named, was Brent Scowcroft. And he had this big picture of me sound asleep on Air Force One. He went into great lengths, "Now, the award is not just for people falling asleep. That's easy. It's the way you do it, the way you recover, whether you do it with a start, whether you start talking as if you knew exactly what was going on—all of these things figure in it."

That continued until the end of the administration. One thing was CSCE [Committee on Security and Cooperation in Europe] summit. There were 36 heads of state around the table, and all of them were going to give speeches. It was deadly. The President would sit there. NATO meetings, any kind of meetings, he would hand me a little note saying, "Look at the guy, third on the left across the side, he fell asleep beautifully, recovery was a little stiff." I have a whole stack of little things like that that he used to great effect to lighten the load and make people feel good.

**McCall:** Was there actually a statue, or just pictures?

**Scowcroft:** Just the picture. The second year Dick Cheney won it.

**McCall:** You took a visit to the American Cemetery with President Bush at Anzio, Italy. Can you tell me your reaction and the President's reaction when you saw this, seven or eight thousand American soldiers lying there in graves?

**Scowcroft:** On the way to a NATO summit, we stopped by. We were going to be traveling on Memorial Day, and the President wanted to visit a cemetery. President Reagan had been to the better known ones in Germany, and we selected the one related to Anzio battle, the Nettuno Cemetery. It was one of the most marvelous places I've ever seen. I choke up when I think of it even now. It was a beautiful location, meticulously cared for by Italian workers, just spotless. It was peaceful, and it gave the air of serenity and love and caring. It's something I'll never forget, and the President also choked up as he was giving remarks. It was really a beautiful, beautiful spot.

**McCall:** Someone told me that's the only land that we conquered in World War II. The only land we took was the land for the cemeteries.

**Scowcroft:** It really is a very unusual cemetery.

**McCall:** It really makes you feel that these people are not forgotten.

**Scowcroft:** Right, exactly.