

Oral History Interview

**Dr. Harold Brown
Secretary of Defense, 1977–1981**

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**Conducted by Edward C. Keefer
October 1, 2012**

EDWARD C. KEEFER: This is an interview with Dr. Harold Brown by Edward Keefer on October 1, 2012, at 2:00 p.m., at CSIS [Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, DC].

I wonder if I could take you right back to the beginning of your life and ask you a little bit about your childhood, if that's all right. You gave me a little taste of that in the book.

HAROLD BROWN: Mm-hmm.

KEEFER: And I wanted to sort of, just partly for my own purposes but also maybe for use in the book, talk a little bit about your early life. Did you always live on West End Avenue in New York?

BROWN: I guess I was born in Brooklyn, but by the time I remember anything, I was growing up on West End.

KEEFER: And you were always at the same place on West End Avenue?

BROWN: No.

KEEFER: You moved around?

BROWN: We were in the—we were on West End or Broadway between 100th Street and 108th Street. I think we lived in two or three different places.

KEEFER: But always in that same neighborhood?

BROWN: Yes.

KEEFER: And what kind of a neighborhood was it in the 1930s? Has it changed much since?

BROWN: Well, I haven't been back, so I don't really know. It was a middle-class, largely Jewish neighborhood, but it was apartment houses mostly.

KEEFER: Right, which is basically I think what it is now.

BROWN: Yeah. I think it's probably a more mixed ethnic group.

KEEFER: You know, you mention in your book that your father was a modest man and a lawyer.

BROWN: Uh-huh.

KEEFER: What kind of law did he practice?

BROWN: It was—you know, it was individual law. I mean, it was—

KEEFER: You mean a client came to him, he would do what—yeah.

BROWN: Right, right, right, right.

KEEFER: Was he with a firm, or was he on his own?

BROWN: No, it was—he had two or three partners. They did, you know—it was a family business, although occasionally, occasionally business people. I mean, they did that kind of thing.

KEEFER: And you mentioned in your book that your father had served in World War I—

BROWN: Yeah.

KEEFER: —as an artilleryman.

BROWN: Yeah.

KEEFER: His nickname was Buster Brown. I found that in one of the letters to you.

BROWN: Yeah, yeah.

KEEFER: Well, nobody ever called you "Buster Brown," I don't think.

BROWN: No. [Laughter.]

KEEFER: Anyway, he was in France, correct?

BROWN: Yes.

KEEFER: And did he actually see action?

BROWN: He saw action.

KEEFER: Did he talk about it at all?

BROWN: I regret not having asked him more about it. I mean, he did talk about it. He was in action. I think he did tell me once that he saw a friend get killed right next to him.

KEEFER: That's interesting. But I guess as a child, you don't really—these things—

BROWN: I didn't really—as I say, I regret not having asked him more about it.

KEEFER: Yeah. What was his highest—do you remember what his rank was?

BROWN: I think he was a sergeant.

KEEFER: Sergeant. Well, yeah, that's pretty good. Now, I know who your mother—Gertrude, right?

BROWN: Yeah.

KEEFER: Did she have any special interests? Was she—

BROWN: She was—she actually, after she got out of high school, worked as a bookkeeper at a diamond firm, and that's all I know. By the time I had any interest, she was—you know, she was a housewife.

KEEFER: Yeah, yeah. And—

BROWN: She prided herself on her arithmetic capability.

KEEFER: Well, maybe that's where you got some of your physics background from. And you know that famous refrigerator story that she tells? Is that a real story?

BROWN: It's a real story, but she made too much of it.

KEEFER: Yeah. Did you—but you really were trying to look in the back of the refrigerator. [Laughter.] I guess the question I—was there any person in your youth who really influenced you strongly, teachers or—

BROWN: Yeah. There were a couple of teachers in high school who I think influenced me. I went to Science High School, and there were—in my senior year there, the English and the social studies courses were taught together. It was American history and American literature, and that, I think, intensified an interest that I already had in history and in the literature that goes with it.

And the textbook, I do remember in the English course was Parrington's book, *Main Currents in American Thought*, which at the time was a classic. So it influenced me. Even though it was a science—concentration was on science, both in that high school and then in my subsequent career, it kept alive in me an interest both in history and in literature.

KEEFER: Was there any subject you were not good at in high school?

BROWN: I wasn't too good at mechanical drawing.

KEEFER: Mechanical drawing. Well, I'm glad to hear that. [Laughter.] But everything else pretty easy?

BROWN: More or less.

KEEFER: Yeah, yeah. That's great. Now, those are my questions about your early life. I'd like to really switch gears now and talk about the B-1 decision again.

BROWN: Mm-hmm.

KEEFER: I was reading Ben Rich, who wrote a book called *The Skunk Works*. I don't know if you've looked at it, but he claims that [Zbigniew] Brzezinski came to see the F-17A in early June—and of course, the decision was in late June of '77—and asked a lot of questions and reported back to President [Jimmy] Carter about it. Do you have any recollection of this?

BROWN: Nope.

KEEFER: No, yeah. So Brzezinski was operating independently.

BROWN: Yes.

KEEFER: But you already alerted Brzezinski?

BROWN: There is considerable confusion here. The plane in question is the F-117, not the F-17, which was a Northrup competitor that lost to the F-16. It was a fighter-sized aircraft. Zbig could not have seen it in June 1977; it was just an idea at that point. Scale models of the F-117 flew beginning at the end of that year, but the decision for full-scale development didn't come until mid-1978, and first production was early in 1981. The decision to develop the B-2 came in 1980. So the idea of stealth did influence the decision to cancel the B-1, but it was stealth cruise missiles and the good prospects of the tactical-range F-117, rather than the prospective B-2 (which was not an active idea until 30 months later) that exerted the influence.

KEEFER: Yeah. And of course, the bomber you were thinking about was a smaller version.

BROWN: If by “the bomber you were thinking about,” you mean the F-117, no; that was not

thought of as a B-1 replacement or substitute.

KEEFER: Reagan's was a much larger, much more expensive bomber.

BROWN: Reagan's B-2, which Cap Weinberger never really wanted, was essentially the Carter administration B-2.

KEEFER: Yeah. Yours was going to be really a small bomber. So the other question that occurred to me, there was a key congressional vote on the B-1. Were any congressional leaders briefed on stealth technology before that vote by anybody you know? Because a lot of people, a lot of key congressmen switched, switched their votes and voted to go along with it.

BROWN: Again, I am trying to remember the timing. Some of—yes, there were Members of Congress who were aware of stealth technology, and in particular, I'm pretty sure that the Chairman of the House Defense Appropriations Committee, George Mahon, was aware. [They were briefed on stealthy cruise missiles and the F-117.]

KEEFER: Mahon. Okay, that's good. That's good. I mean, because a lot of the key ones did change their votes, and I think that would be—that's a conclusion that I'm glad to hear. I read your comments in *Foreign Policy* about PD-59 [Presidential Directive 59, "Nuclear Weapons Employment Policy"].

BROWN: Yes.

KEEFER: I must say I independently came to the same conclusion you did, and I agree with you. I think that William Burr is sort of overplaying this documentation.

BROWN: Well, as I said, maybe too acerbically in my response, investigative reporters have to believe that what they are uncovering both changes the story and is very important, whether it is or not. Now, I'm not saying it never is, but they have to assume it always is.

Incidentally, I'm still pondering whether to go back at him on his counter to my objection. Although, in general, what he said in his response to me was not very contentious or adversarial, I think he still has one thing wrong, and that is what he calls "launch-on-warning"—

KEEFER: Launch-on-warning.

BROWN: —which isn't launch-on-warning. It's launch-under-attack.

KEEFER: Yes.

BROWN: And there is a difference.

KEEFER: Yeah.

BROWN: In one case, you act on general worries. In the other case, you act after the other fellow has launched his attack—

KEEFER: When the missiles are in the area.

BROWN: —the enemy missiles are on the way but before they've landed.

KEEFER: That's correct. Yeah. I see that point, yeah. I mean, it seems to me that Brzezinski sort of sold PD-59 as a revolutionary change.

BROWN: Yeah. That's—

KEEFER: And you, of course, sold it as evolutionary—

BROWN: But—yes.

KEEFER: —from the previous administrations.

BROWN: Yes.

KEEFER: NSDM-242 [National Security Directive Memorandum 242, "Policy for Planning the Employment of Nuclear Weapons"].

BROWN: That's correct, and I think Brzezinski was echoing or channeling or supporting Bill Odom's view of it.

KEEFER: Yeah.

BROWN: I mean, Bill Odom had, I think, a more ambitious and revolutionary idea than was actually finally incorporated into the—into PD-59. You might find it valuable to talk to Walt Slocombe, who was handling it for me, because I think he and I thought alike, and I believe that as PD-59 was actually issued, it reflected our ideas.

KEEFER: I sent an email to Mr. Slocombe, but I better follow up with a letter. There is a charge that has been going around—I think it was started by Raymond Garthoff—that somehow Brzezinski sold PD-59 as a way to kill Russian ethnics but to not—did you—

BROWN: Save Poles.

KEEFER: Save Poles and Ukrainians. I mean, this has now become sort of—I've seen two or three historians that have cited to this.

BROWN: Yeah. Well, I've seen it too, and I'm trying now to remember.

KEEFER: Do you have any—

BROWN: The idea was at least floated, but I don't—I can't say and won't—don't believe that Brzezinski pushed it very hard, and I don't think it is confined to beat PD-59. There were limited nuclear options, some of which did not target non-Soviet Warsaw Pact infrastructure, and that was not—that wasn't initiated in the Carter administration.

The thought was that the central control of the other side was the Soviet command structure, and that the prospect of its destruction was the deterrent. The other Warsaw Pact countries were a sideshow. In case of an invasion of the NATO countries, any use of nuclear weapons would of course have hit the non-Soviet forces and their bases.

KEEFER: Yeah. This was only—

BROWN: Right.

KEEFER: —attacking the Soviets.

BROWN: Right.

KEEFER: Yeah, not the East Europeans.

BROWN: Right.

KEEFER: Yeah. So there's a sliver of—

BROWN: Yeah.

KEEFER: But it was certainly never written into anything—

BROWN: It was never the reason for nor specific—specifically highlighted in PD-59.

KEEFER: Okay. And then the other issue that I'd like to raise is that failure to notify [Secretary of State Edmund] Muskie about PD-59. Was this really a failure, or was it unintentional, or had State not done its homework and not briefed Muskie on PD-59?

BROWN: I think it was mostly the latter.

KEEFER: Bad briefing by State.

BROWN: I think [former Secretary of State Cyrus] Vance had been kept up to date on it as it went through, and I think maybe it just fell through the cracks—

KEEFER: Okay, I see.

BROWN: —largely at State. My recollection is that Ed Muskie had the work habits of a Senator—

KEEFER: Right.

BROWN: —you know, which didn't mean that he didn't work very hard, but it meant that he was not accustomed to the situation in the executive branch where you have to be up on everything all the time. You have to keep on, keep at your people to make sure that in the interagency process, you are fully briefed. As a Senator, especially a senior Senator, you control things pretty much, and the pace is not quite the same.

KEEFER: It's an obvious question, but obviously, you got along much better with Vance as Secretary than you did with Muskie, just because you were more friendly with Vance, or was it—

BROWN: Well, I don't think—I never—I was never at cross-purposes —

KEEFER: Yeah, with Muskie.

BROWN: —with Muskie. I was at cross-purposes with Vance much more than I was with Muskie.

KEEFER: Yeah, true.

BROWN: Although we were personal friends. So I don't think that played any part.

KEEFER: Okay. When I was doing a chapter on the Far East, it seemed to me that when you went to China in '80, you went there with sort of a—the idea of creating a military relationship with the Chinese, some kind of a burgeoning military relationship a little. But the Chinese seemed to be sort of hesitant. Was that your impression, that they were hesitant, and if so, why were they so hesitant?

BROWN: Well, when it came to asking for military equipment and technology, it was the opposite. I mean, they were the ones who were pushing very hard.

KEEFER: They wanted high-end stuff.

BROWN: Yes, very much so. And I was following the policy that we had developed in the Carter administration, which was to open discussion about it, which in fact did come to some fruition when Liu Huaqing came to Washington later in 1980 and talked with Bill Perry about the details, but not to promise them anything very specific. So in those terms, we were the ones limiting the military cooperation. On the other hand, when it came to discussing the strategic

situation, we were precisely in sync. We could have been talking from each other's talking points, as I said somewhere.

On the issue of transparency, they were then where they are now, and I think largely for the same reason, although it's now fading. I mean, the reason is going away now, and that is that they didn't want to show how far behind they were.

So I don't think—I do not believe the situation was that we wanted an alliance and they didn't—

KEEFER: Right, okay.

BROWN: —because at least my view—and I think it was the administration view—was that you wanted to be on good terms with the Chinese and help them out with defensive weapons when the time came, as the relationship developed, but we did not want to use them to poke the Russians in the eye.

KEEFER: And that was your argument really, wasn't it?

BROWN: Well, that was my argument with Brzezinski. I mean—

KEEFER: Yeah. Brzezinski who did want to use—

BROWN: He wanted to poke them in the eye, and Vance took the position that we mustn't let anything interfere with our attempt to reestablish détente with the Soviets, and if that meant stiffing the Chinese, we should stiff the Chinese. I think in the end, my position prevailed, but there are always nuances in these things.

KEEFER: So Vance comes across as very much the conciliator who wants to continue negotiations with the Soviets. So he didn't really see the value of a China counterweight?

BROWN: No, he—to some extent, I think he may have been overreacting to Brzezinski, but I think his take was that the important relationship was the Soviet relationship and that we should not risk souring it more than it otherwise would have been by a relationship with the Chinese that wasn't really in the end going to buy us anything.

KEEFER: Okay. That's a good summation. I think I understand that a little bit better. I want to switch now to sort of NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] and the whole threat of conventional weapons with the Soviet Union, and I know that was one of your major concerns. How successful do you think NATO was at countering that threat? I mean, there are all kinds of plans and the long-term development, the defense plan, but did it really amount to a major—

BROWN: Well, I think you have to look at it two ways. One is, how much did it change the actual conventional military balance.

KEEFER: Yeah, on the field.

BROWN: And the answer is, some, but not in any decisive way. To the extent that it did change it substantively, it was more what we did in the U.S. by prepositioning and assigning more forces and so forth and upgrading our equipment than it was the increased capability of any of the other NATO members. On the other hand, they did do some things. They did buy AWACS [airborne warning and control system] aircraft.

KEEFER: Right.

BROWN: They did commit, and to some degree carried through, increases in defense expenditure, at least for a few years, and I think it got the attention of the other NATO governments. And so that was the substantive part on conventional forces.

The other piece is the political part, and that is stiffening the political cooperation and getting across the message that it wasn't going to be a pushover essentially, and that did get the Soviets' attention, especially when we talked about advanced conventional weapon systems. I mean, [Soviet Chief of the General Staff Marshal Nikolai] Ogarkov, for example, got the message—

KEEFER: Yeah, you made that clear in your book.

BROWN: —on what we were doing, and that had some influence. And this is all on the conventional side.

KEEFER: Right.

BROWN: Separately, of course, there was a whole SS-20 ballistic missile business, which isn't on the conventional side, but the conventional and the nuclear influenced each other, and each reinforced the others, the other segment's message, that the Soviets weren't going to be able to over-awe the Europeans and get political—and dominate politically by virtue of a perceived overwhelming conventional capability, backed up by a nuclear deterrent that would essentially keep the U.S. from escalating.

KEEFER: That was really the importance of the cruise missile and Pershing II decisions.

BROWN: Yes, yes.

KEEFER: Of course, the agreement to put them on European soil didn't actually happen until the '80s, right?

BROWN: Well, the decision was taken in 1979 and 1980, but the deployments began in the '80s and were quickly overtaken by the agreement to get rid of both the SS-20s and the U.S. medium range systems.

KEEFER: In your book, you think that this is one of the sort of turning points in the Cold War.

BROWN: Yes. You know, you can't assign the outcome to any single—

KEEFER: Of course not. Yeah.

BROWN: —external, let alone—maybe not even to all, you can't—you can't assign the outcome entirely to all external things, let alone a single external thing, but I thought it played an important part.

KEEFER: I did a chapter on the SALT (Strategic Arms Limitations Talks) II and the MX missile, and one of the questions I had is Carter's comprehensive deep-cuts proposal very early on in the SALT negotiations. That's generally considered to be a mistake. Did you feel that was a mistake or not?

BROWN: Well, it was a mistake in the sense that it didn't work. Why it didn't work, perhaps the Soviets never would have bit on it, perhaps they never would have gone along with it. But the fact that it was exposed in the *New York Times* before they heard about it almost ensured that they would turn it down.

KEEFER: Which they did, right.

BROWN: And I can't be sure who did it, who floated it, but I think without that, at least there would have been some discussion of it. It is, after all, what's now being proposed 35 years later, and it would have been a good idea then, and I think it's a good idea now. We ginned it up secretly. In fact, it was Walt Slocombe and I who—Walt Slocombe was the action officer on it, and it was kept quite close within the Defense Department. In retrospect, it probably was a step too far, but it was intended seriously, and we would have been better off if there would have at least been a serious discussion of it.

KEEFER: It seems to me that it probably got leaked when it got to the White House? It's hard to say, isn't it? I mean, obviously, someone who—

BROWN: Well, I have a suspect, but it's just that.

KEEFER: Are you going to share that with me?

BROWN: No. [Laughter.]

KEEFER: I didn't think so. Yeah. Well, anyway—

BROWN: You know, I wouldn't be sure it was the White House source, because the State Department was very much against it.

KEEFER: Yeah, that's true.

BROWN: They were very much against it, because all that previous negotiation would have gone to waste.

KEEFER: Yeah. All the Vladivostok agreement, that's the unofficial agreement.

BROWN: Right.

KEEFER: So looking back at SALT, what do you think—SALT II—what do you think are the best things that you got out of it from your point of view as the Secretary of Defense? I mean, obviously—

BROWN: Well, I managed to get some fair amount of verification.

KEEFER: Okay. Yeah, good.

BROWN: And we did get some offensive limits. It wasn't enough, but perhaps the most important thing, I think, if you look, there was a single provision, the one I had to work hardest on, was to get the 1,500-kilometer range on the cruise missile, and without that, the conventional cruise missiles would have been much less effective than they were.

KEEFER: Surely delayed, wouldn't they?

BROWN: Well, at 600 kilometers, the cruise missile would have had to be small enough and short enough range, so that its conventional capabilities would have been much less.

KEEFER: Mm-hmm, yeah.

BROWN: So I think all of those were important.

KEEFER: Now can I switch? I'm sort of going through my chapters one by one. I'm going to switch to the Middle East, if that's all right.

BROWN: Yes.

KEEFER: And we'll start talking about Israel and the Egyptians, and I'll go on and ask a few questions about Iran. But this is just a sort of general—who were the easier to work with, the Israelis or the Egyptians, when you were negotiating military assistance or the Sinai airfields or—

BROWN: That's a good question. The Egyptians—the Egyptians were less demanding, understandably because they were new clients with no—without much political influence in the U.S., but at the same time, I would say they were more worried but less demanding.

The Israelis, it varied. It varied. Ezer Weizman, who was my opposite number, was very friendly and open and didn't push as hard as the Israelis' reputation for pushing is. On the other hand, [Menachem] Begin was very tough.

KEEFER: And how about on the Egyptian side? I know you met with [Anwar] Sadat a couple of times.

BROWN: Well, he, of course, was very friendly. He had a great personality, and that made him very easy to deal with, but so also were his subordinates. And I guess—you know, I was not involved deeply in the political pieces, but among the Israelis, Begin was tough. Weizman was cooperative. [Yigael] Yadin was scholarly and thoughtful, and [Moshe] Dayan was a hardliner who had turned peacemaker, essentially.

KEEFER: Of course, you went to Camp David once. It just happened to be a very key day that you went there. This was the day that Sadat almost left and—

BROWN: Yeah, yeah. I was—

KEEFER: You were drawn into the—

BROWN: As an observer, right.

KEEFER: But both you and Vance went to Sadat's cabin, right?

BROWN: No. Neither of us went.

KEEFER: I thought you went there before Carter—

BROWN: No. Carter and I were talking about the Defense budget—

KEEFER: Okay.

BROWN: —when Vance came in and said Sadat is leaving, and then Carter said, "I got to fix this," and he did. That's essentially what happened.

KEEFER: Because one of the Egyptians claims that you and Vance went there ahead of Carter.

BROWN: Vance went there to find out that Sadat was leaving, but I was in with Carter at that time.

KEEFER: I see. Okay, okay. Well, I mean—yeah, because someone—

BROWN: Okay. I think you got it wrong.

KEEFER: Yeah. That's a good point, because I was basing it on this. I forget the guy. The Egyptian who was aide to Sadat had you both there. On Iran, I remember that at one point early on, you said that the Iran rescue mission is going to be difficult. This isn't in—

BROWN: Yeah.

KEEFER: That was, I think, at an NSC [National Security Council] meeting. Did you ever privately talk to Carter about the difficulties of the rescue mission? Do you remember?

BROWN: No. I may have just repeated privately to him what I said at the NSC meeting. It was very tough, and we were—in my opinion, we were pushed into it by public attention. It was Walter Cronkite on the news that night.

KEEFER: Yeah. And *Nightline*.

BROWN: Right, right.

KEEFER: Day 452 of the hostage crisis.

BROWN: Now, should we have done it? As I say, I don't think we had any choice—well, we had a choice, but the other choices, aside from passivity, which as I say was infeasible in terms of public reaction—the other choices would have been much more aggressive.

KEEFER: Well, the so-called "military options," right?

BROWN: Yeah, yeah. I mean, you know, mining the ports, attacking—

KEEFER: Individual facilities.

BROWN: —individual facilities and so forth. You know, we could have done those, and they would have been easier at the beginning. I mean, it was the subsequent steps that would have been more difficult.

KEEFER: And of course, that would have endangered the hostages' lives, I think, with military action.

BROWN: Yes.

KEEFER: Did Vance ever talk to you about his concerns about the hostage rescue mission?

BROWN: Well, he was clearly against it, although in the end, that's not the reason he resigned. He had already essentially resigned.

KEEFER: But it was not necessarily because of the hostage mission?

BROWN: He had—no, it was not necessarily. It was not because of the—in my opinion, it was not necessarily because of the hostages.

KEEFER: What do you think it was?

BROWN: He felt that he was being—and that his policies were being overruled and sidelined in favor of Brzezinski's. I mean, that was the reason. Before the hostage rescue attempt—

I'm not sure I want to see this in—

KEEFER: Do you want me to shut this off for a second?

BROWN: Right. Turn it off.

KEEFER: Let me see if I can do that.

[Begin Audio File DS500071.WMA.]

BROWN: I don't even remember exactly what the subject was, but it had to do with the general attitude of the administration, either toward the Russians or towards the—

KEEFER: So it's much more than just the hostages.

BROWN: Right, right, right.

KEEFER: Well, that's a good point, because I think I focused too much on the hostage rescue mission as a reason.

BROWN: Well, it was certainly the occasion.

KEEFER: Yeah, that was the—

BROWN: And he did it before the—he submitted his resignation before the attempt, before the rescue attempt actually, but it was accepted afterwards. And Cy was in fact not present at the meeting when the final decision was made to go. Warren Christopher was.

KEEFER: Right. Christopher was. And you described that as probably the worst day of your career.

BROWN: Professional career.

KEEFER: Professional career.

BROWN: Sure.

KEEFER: I think everyone agrees that that was sort of a bad day. That was a really bad day. But do you think had there been more helicopters, would the mission have gone—

BROWN: I think it might have worked. It might have worked, but it was a dicey thing. I mean, you know, doing it in a city of a couple million people is not easy, but I think we could do it now. Given what we now—given the capabilities that we have now.

KEEFER: Yeah. In many respects, that's the beginning of the—

BROWN: Right.

KEEFER: —antiterrorist infrastructure, which we now have. It really starts after the hostage failure. Yeah. So it was still going to be a very difficult operation to get at, to extract people out. Of course, you had to go to the foreign ministry too, but you think it could have worked.

BROWN: It had a fair chance. It had a fair chance.

KEEFER: I know I've been over all the Holloway Report. I read all that, and I won't go through all of those details, but it seems to me that there were some basic problems.

BROWN: Well, I mentioned a couple of them in the book.

KEEFER: Yeah, you did in your book.

BROWN: We didn't practice enough, and everybody had to be in on the act.

KEEFER: Yeah. Everybody had to be in on the act. You had nobody—and then other people didn't know there was an act going on. Yeah.

BROWN: Right.

KEEFER: Yeah. That sort of basically was too bad. When you were in China, you also talked a little bit about Afghanistan because the Soviets had invaded.

BROWN: Well, it had just begun.

KEEFER: It just happened, yeah.

BROWN: I mean, you know, it was a couple of weeks before—yeah, no—a couple of weeks before my visit, and that probably conditioned the attitude of both of us, the Chinese and ourselves, but I'm not sure I had anything important to say.

KEEFER: Yeah. I mean, there was no attempt to sort of coordinate policy towards Afghanistan.

BROWN: Not during my trip.

KEEFER: Yeah. Yours was just a—I know there was a—I think it was Deng Xiaoping in the discussion, and it did come up, but it wasn't the details.

Okay. Let me move on to—we talked about the Pershing IIs and the cruise missiles. Those are key points. You mentioned in your book pension reform. I'm going to now talk about the volunteer Army.

BROWN: Yeah.

KEEFER: And why do you think—why did the pension reform initiative which you were—OSD—I don't know about you personally, but OSD worked very hard on it.

BROWN: Yes.

KEEFER: Why did it fail?

BROWN: The Navy fell off.

KEEFER: The Navy—

BROWN: It was the Navy.

KEEFER: Okay. Well, that's what I—

BROWN: [Secretary of the Navy] Graham Claytor thought he had the uniformed Navy signed on, but they fell off at the last minute, and why? I don't know. I think the same reasons that applied to the objections of the other services but more strongly.

KEEFER: Yeah.

BROWN: I mean, you'd have, especially at the senior levels, people who stayed in for 25 or more years and had convinced themselves that one reason they did it was that they would get full pensions, even though I'm sure it wasn't the reason.

KEEFER: Yeah.

BROWN: And they couldn't really put themselves in the position of a 20-year-old and ask how important is my pension to me.

KEEFER: My guess is that 20-year-olds don't think much about pensions.

BROWN: Well, that was my point, but that may be changing.

KEEFER: Nowadays.

BROWN: Yes.

KEEFER: I think people are more career-oriented—

BROWN: Right.

KEEFER: —as they look at—

BROWN: Right. At the alternatives. But then, I don't think—I think there were very few people enlisting in 1978—

KEEFER: You had some shortfalls.

BROWN: —thinking about, "Well, I'll get a pension in 20 years."

KEEFER: Right. Yeah. People were—I don't think that's a factor. I think once you're in government for 10 or 12 years, then you start thinking—or in the military—

BROWN: Right.

KEEFER: —then you start thinking about, "Oh, I got a pension. Maybe I should stay."

BROWN: Well, and of course, the proposal would not have eliminated the pensions. It just would have made—it would have gotten rid of the 20-year cliff.

KEEFER: Yeah. You could go and—

BROWN: I mean, the idea that somebody could serve for 19 years and not get any pension—

KEEFER: Exactly.

BROWN: —it just wasn't right.

KEEFER: So nobody is going to serve for 19 years. They're going to leave at 10 years or 12 years.

BROWN: Yes.

KEEFER: Yeah, right. Exactly. And, I mean, this was a time, too, that women really were coming into military in larger numbers.

BROWN: Yes.

KEEFER: You can see that just rising as a factor.

BROWN: Well, what struck me, I believe that at least—I spoke at at least one graduation at each of the military academies, and I was impressed, I think it was, at West Point that I was especially impressed that several of the honors graduates were women.

KEEFER: And they needed to have broader careers in the military.

BROWN: Yeah. We began to open them up. That still isn't complete. Even women—women serve in combat but not in combat specialties—

KEEFER: Right, right.

BROWN: —which is odd. I had been through something similar, of course, when I was at Cal Tech, which when I arrived had no women undergraduates at all.

KEEFER: I didn't realize that.

BROWN: And I managed to get—there were plans to admit them as soon as a separate dormitory could be built, which would have postponed it for two years, and I found a way around t that.

KEEFER: Did they have joint dorms?

BROWN: Well, what we did was we put in—we specified separate corridors for women.

KEEFER: I see.

BROWN: That didn't last very long. [Laughter.]

KEEFER: Can I switch now to the sort of election, the transition, and the legacy?

BROWN: Yes.

KEEFER: I think I know why you released the stealth, the idea about stealth, because it was cascading out in various—

BROWN: That was one reason. The other reason was that there was a strong push to revive the B-1.

KEEFER: I see, yeah.

BROWN: And—

KEEFER: In Congress?

BROWN: Yes. Oh, yes. Oh, yes. To revive the B-1, and of course, it did get revived. I wouldn't call the B-1 a fiasco, but it was not a success.

KEEFER: Very expensive.

BROWN: Not a success.

KEEFER: Very expensive.

BROWN: So that was another—that was an important reason, and because some Members of Congress knew about it and were trying to use it quietly to help prevent the revival of the B-1, some of the advocates of the B-1 started preemptively saying stealth, you know, doesn't work.

KEEFER: It's an imaginary technology.

BROWN: Right, right, right. And so that cascaded, and that brought it, I guess, to final impetus for me to go public on it, which I don't regret, because otherwise I think they might have been able to kill the B-2. But in retrospect, I probably made too big a thing out of it, which lent credence to the thought that it was entirely an electoral—

KEEFER: Politically motivated.

BROWN: Politically motivated thing.

KEEFER: But, I mean, that was not under consideration at all as far as you were—

BROWN: No. I think, in fact, Carter was a little bit leery of it. I felt it was important to do.

KEEFER: How about the release of the—with the existence of PD-59, was that something that—that was also prior to the election it was sort of released, and you gave a speech.

BROWN: Yeah, but it had been in the works for a long time.

KEEFER: Yeah.

BROWN: And of course, to have an effect on the Soviets, it had to be public.

KEEFER: Yeah, yeah. But could it have been done after the election?

BROWN: Well, who knows? [Laughter.]

KEEFER: Did you feel in that campaign that you were sort of drawn into it by some of the charges against—

BROWN: Yeah. Yes, very much so because the—I mean, the Republicans made a big deal about how defense had been neglected and weak foreign—weak defense policy and so forth. I had to defend it. That was—that natural response was intensified in my case by my disbelief in the economic calculations that the Reagan campaign was making, especially the idea that lowering taxes raises the take, essentially.

KEEFER: Yeah, yeah. So you felt that was a problem too.

BROWN: Yeah. That really wasn't my business, but it certainly made me wonder.

KEEFER: So you have no regrets about sort of duking it out with the Republicans and Reagan?

BROWN: No, I don't really. I don't really, because it was—you know, the Secretary of Defense and Secretary of State are supposed to stay out of politics, and I think that's probably right, but when they come under attack—

KEEFER: Right, exactly.

BROWN: —if you don't respond, you're essentially seen as admitting the correctness of the charges.

KEEFER: And when the election was over, there was a transition team under [William] Van Cleave. Do you remember him?

BROWN: Yeah, that was pretty funny.

KEEFER: Yeah. Was he as bad as—

BROWN: He was terrible. He was terrible.

KEEFER: Okay.

BROWN: And of course, as soon as [Caspar] Weinberger was named, the transition team was thrown out.

KEEFER: Right. Essentially, Weinberger fired them, didn't he?

BROWN: Right. But it wasn't the first time that I encountered Van Cleave. Van Cleave had been a member—he was involved in the SALT I negotiations.

KEEFER: Wasn't he one of the members of Team B, as well?

BROWN: Yes. That was in '76, but he had been involved in the strategic arms negotiations as a troublemaker before that, so—and of course, he came in heading this transition team, and I felt obligated to give him full cooperation. And he put together all kinds of stuff, and then when Weinberger became—was named, before he became Secretary, he essentially dismissed them all, which was, I guess, one of his best decisions.

KEEFER: Did you have a good relationship with Weinberger? Did you know him before you—

BROWN: No, I did not. I had met him once before, I believe, perhaps while he was Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare, and I was a university president. But it was a very one-time thing. I met him when my plane stopped off in San Francisco—

KEEFER: That's right.

BROWN: —on the way back, I guess, from Korea, and we spent a little time on the plane. And I—and then I met with him again after—before he took office, either just before or just after he took office. He was very polite and kind to me personally. He even said, "Why don't you continue to use an office in the Pentagon for a while." I didn't. And I met with him and told him, "Please pay attention to these four things." One of them was a highly classified NSA [National Security Agency] program. One of them was a highly classified Navy program. One was cruise missiles. I forget what the fourth one was. It may have been stealth technology. He never paid any attention to any of them, and he didn't like me and I didn't like him, but we were very polite to each other.

KEEFER: So there was no—it was just a business relationship.

BROWN: Right.

KEEFER: Well, he wasn't that interested in weapon systems at all.

BROWN: No, not at all.

KEEFER: He had no knowledge, no background.

BROWN: Famously—well, never mind. No, he was a grand strategist, and I think—I think he had a view of the world that was consistent and defensible but inappropriate and wrong for the time, essentially.

KEEFER: Can I make another abrupt switch to the whole question of base closings? There was

a sort of effort in the Carter administration. It was called "realignment" to make it sound like—

BROWN: Right.

KEEFER: But you were supposed to take the lead sort of to insulate the White House, and there would be a mechanism, a committee that would look at the economic consequences and try to mitigate those.

BROWN: But essentially, the Congress wouldn't play—

KEEFER: Did any bases get closed of the 20—

BROWN: The Congress wouldn't play.

KEEFER: So no bases, even though you had this big—

BROWN: I'm not sure, but what I remember is that the Congress—I think we may have—I think we actually did close a couple.

KEEFER: A couple bases.

BROWN: Yeah. But fundamentally, the Congress was going to defend its bases.

KEEFER: Yeah. Arsenal and shipyards, were any of those closed?

BROWN: Well, we did one. We closed Philadelphia Shipyard. That, of course, yes, we did close, and that really upset my good friend Fritz Mondale, who had promised during the campaign that it wouldn't be closed. But that was closure of a base that had been decided on earlier.

KEEFER: Earlier. And you just did the final coup de grace.

BROWN: Right, right, right.

KEEFER: I see. Yeah. And that's why BRAC [Base Realignment and Closure] came in.

BROWN: Right. The only way to insulate the process of closing bases from congressional— from congressional—understandable congressional protection of their constituents—you know, the Constitution makes them accountable to their constituents, so it's understandable that they behave that way. But the only way to protect the process from that happening is to get Congress to agree in advance that they won't second-guess it or that there will be limited second guessing.

KEEFER: Yeah. Yeah, it's a really hard issue. Well, I know it's been—

BROWN: Yeah. I think I say somewhere, maybe in the book, that the only thing harder than closing than opening—I'm sorry—the only thing harder than opening a new base is closing it.

KEEFER: Right. And you do tell a story about LBJ [Lyndon Baines Johnson] calling up your wife.

BROWN: Oh, yes. Well, he called me, but my wife—

KEEFER: But your wife had to—got the full LBJ treatment. But did you close those three bases when you were Air Force Secretary?

BROWN: No, no, no. It was only—He called to tell me to put the heat on a Louisiana congressman who was trying to hold up legislation or raise the debt limit. The threat was to close a major Strategic Air Command Base—Barksdale, if I remember—it's still open.

KEEFER: They had never been closed, either?

BROWN: No, no. He was—

KEEFER: Now, that wasn't about the bases, but, I mean, did you actually close those three bases? You said you had—

BROWN: I closed some—while I was Air Force Secretary, I closed those three Reserve bases, among others.

KEEFER: Reserve bases. That's right.

BROWN: But that was in the late '60s.

KEEFER: Yeah, right. So you had to have some success.

BROWN: Yes.

KEEFER: By the time of the '70s, it was not that—

BROWN: It was harder.

KEEFER: Harder, yeah. Well, I—

BROWN: We have more time if you want a little more time.

KEEFER: Oh, great, great. Well, let me ask you some more general questions and see if I can— if you have anything you want to add, but looking back, when or what did you admire most about President Carter?

BROWN: That's a good question. [Pause.] Two different sides of the same thing are what I admired most about him and what I found somewhat troubling. He really thought through problems from the beginning, and that meant that he had a real basis for his conclusions. Seldom did he come to things just off the top of his head, but the other side of that coin was it was very hard to get him to change his mind, even if there were new things.

KEEFER: I'm going to make that point. [Laughter.] Yeah, he was very stubborn. And what in your mind sticks out as the hardest fights to get Carter to change his mind?

BROWN: Well, he never changed his mind about Korea.

KEEFER: Never changed, yeah, but you managed to—

BROWN: We changed what he did.

KEEFER: Yes.

BROWN: But it wasn't so much me changing what he did. It was the congressional reaction, essentially.

KEEFER: Yeah, yeah. They weren't going to get the Korean—they weren't going to get the money for Korea if they—if you took the troops out.

BROWN: Right.

KEEFER: So he sort of bowed to pressure—

BROWN: Yeah.

KEEFER: —but he never really—he always thought he was right.

BROWN: Yeah. You know, Presidents—the Presidency is fundamentally a weak office. Some manage to overcome that, but constitutionally, it's a weak office.

KEEFER: Well, you sort of answered that question by saying you both admired and—was there anything that you didn't admire about Carter? [Laughter.] I mean, I know you don't want to criticize your former boss.

BROWN: Well, I already have.

KEEFER: Yeah, you have. Yeah.

BROWN: I already have, and I think although the book is overwhelmingly favorable about him,

I say that, a couple things.

KEEFER: I can think of an example. What about the neutron bomb? Do you think that he—you say that he never really was—gave you the go-ahead to sort of—

BROWN: I'm not sure that was his fault as much as it was the fault of his principal advisors, me, Brzezinski, and Vance, who proceeded on the assumption that he had approved it—

KEEFER: That he had approved it, yeah.

BROWN: —when, in fact, he never specifically had.

KEEFER: Okay.

BROWN: Now, the way he did it, of course, the way that he finally sank it was by adding conditions to the deployment that were essentially too onerous for [German Chancellor Helmut] Schmidt.

KEEFER: Right, yeah.

BROWN: I mean, he said that Schmidt had to publicly ask for it.

KEEFER: Yeah, right.

BROWN: And Schmidt was never going to do that.

KEEFER: No.

BROWN: Of course, Schmidt had had conditions of his own on another issue, cruise and Pershing missile deployment; first, that there had to be another country.

KEEFER: Right.

BROWN: Then that there had to be another continental country, and then that the Italians weren't enough.

KEEFER: Yeah, right. Right. [Laughter.]

KEEFER: I guess, generally, your relation with Brzezinski, in *Power and Principle*, he's sort of slightly critical of you. Did you—

BROWN: Well, essentially, what Brzezinski says in *Power and Principle* is, “Brown didn't really know much, and originally, he was too much of a peace lover but I finally brought him around.” That may be how he sees it.

KEEFER: Yeah, but you don't believe that.

BROWN: Well, I say something a little different in the book. What I say is Brzezinski thought that he knew more about diplomacy and defense than the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense.

KEEFER: Right, I remember that.

BROWN: And I imply without saying it that, essentially, he drove Vance from office, but it wasn't going to work with me, simply because I knew my job, and I had more horsepower than he did. I mean, there's no way that National Security Advisor can compete successfully with Secretary of Defense on the details.

KEEFER: On the national security details.

BROWN: Yes. Yeah.

KEEFER: Now, you mentioned—

BROWN: You know, Zbig felt that he was a combination of Bismarck and Metternich even more than—

KEEFER: Yeah, because of the complex.

BROWN: —Kissinger, whom he competed with at least in his own mind right at the beginning. And look, he's—Brzezinski was a smart guy. He had some good ideas—like the rest of us, not nearly as good as we think, but I think he's learned something from his experience. What he's advising now is very, very different from what he was advising then.

KEEFER: Right, yeah. Well, it's a different era, of course. You mentioned William Odom.

BROWN: Yeah.

KEEFER: He tended to be critical of DoD, even though he was, you know—

BROWN: Well, look, he was—he was Brzezinski's military advisor. Now, he was a smart colonel, and he got to be a brigadier general, and later he got to be a lieutenant general. He was a capable guy, a very hardliner, and Zbig, understandably, relied on him for military advice. It's very unlikely that one Army colonel or brigadier general, no matter how smart he is, is going to be able to come up with better advice than the entire rest of the military establishment. So, I mean, I think Odom was a capable guy, but neither Zbig nor Bill Odom were the field marshal that they thought themselves.

KEEFER: Yeah, right. Bill Perry makes a point. He made a point when I interviewed him. He made a point in some of his writings about the success in Desert Storm of the weaponry that were really developed by you and he during the late '70s.

BROWN: Yeah. That speaks for itself.

KEEFER: You agree with that book, I think.

BROWN: Sure.

KEEFER: To your mind, which were the weapons that really made—the conventional weapons that made the difference?

BROWN: Well, I think aside from the individual weapons, it was the whole network system.

KEEFER: Sort of the sole breaker thing?

BROWN: Yeah.

KEEFER: Yeah.

BROWN: Of intelligence and precision, precision munitions. You know, the stealth fighters took out the whole defense system eventually. The satellite capabilities that located the enemy forces, the precision-guided munitions that took out the tanks and the fixed facilities, all of those things.

KEEFER: This is a hypothetical question. Had they been used against the Soviets, would they have been equally successful, do you think?

BROWN: Well, certainly, Marshal Ogarkov thought they might have.

KEEFER: Might have been, yeah.

BROWN: Now, of course, they hadn't—they were still in development while I was Secretary of Defense. By the time Bill became Secretary of Defense, they were in the force structure, and now, of course, they're even more capable. So whether they would have been enough in the late '70s to stall a Soviet conventional blitzkrieg in Europe is perhaps doubtful, although there may have been enough worry in the Soviets' minds so that it helped squash any thoughts they might have had of doing it. But certainly, by the late '80s, when those systems were pretty well—had begun to be deployed and had been deployed to a significant extent, they could have had a real effect. And as I said somewhere, perhaps not in the book, but I think in an op-ed piece I wrote, the United States needed to do three things: need to develop them, need to deploy them, you need to use them. The Carter administration developed them. It's not clear whether it would have deployed them, yet alone use them.

KEEFER: Yeah.

BROWN: The Reagan administration produced them, but certainly, Weinberger's approach was not to use them. The Bush administration, George H.W. Bush administration, which had neither developed nor produced them, did use them.

KEEFER: Yeah. Of course, not against the Soviets.

BROWN: Not against the Soviets.

KEEFER: Against Soviet weaponry.

BROWN: Yeah. But what it shows is it takes more than one administration get things done.

KEEFER: Good point. So I think that's one of your big legacies, don't you think?

BROWN: Yes, I do.

KEEFER: Any other ones you would put in your—

BROWN: Oh, dear. [Pause.] Arms control.

KEEFER: Yeah.

BROWN: I mean, I really believe in strategic arms control.

KEEFER: And the fact that really SALT II became the model for—

BROWN: Right.

KEEFER: Yeah, for arms control. Well, how about the cruise missile?

BROWN: Well, no, but that's true. You can include that in the weaponry, in the weaponry.

KEEFER: Weapons revolution.

BROWN: It's a whole bunch of things.

KEEFER: How about just the—just convincing—

BROWN: I think—well, there's one other thing.

KEEFER: Okay.

BROWN: Jointness.

KEEFER: Jointness, right.

BROWN: Which had previously mostly gotten lip service. I mean, the only—the person who really got it started after World War—in the Defense Department was [Dwight] Eisenhower as President. I mean, he really believed in it. He put in the 1958 act, and after that, it went back and forth. We started a real push, which has been carried on since—in the Goldwater-Nichols Act, for example—

KEEFER: Right.

BROWN: —and I think really works. Now, there are a lot of things that need further refinement. I mean, the whole relationship of the unified and specified commanders who now have lobbies, they have big units in Washington who essentially advance their causes. Things have swung away from the services to the unified and specified commanders, but we operate with joint task forces. And now the unified and specified commanders' staffs have gotten big, without really replacing the service staffs. You need to rebalance again, I guess, but that's—that, I'm not going to take on.

KEEFER: You had mentioned in your book, you thought the service Secretaries might be able to go.

BROWN: Right.

KEEFER: But you had very good service Secretaries, by and large, didn't you?

BROWN: Yeah.

KEEFER: I mean, Claytor.

BROWN: Well, Graham, Graham was very good.

KEEFER: Clifford Alexander?

BROWN: Cliff—I hate to say it, but Cliff's principal goal for a long time was preserving the base at which he had had basic training.

KEEFER: Which one? Which base was that?

BROWN: It's in New Jersey.

KEEFER: Oh. Fort Hood? No.

BROWN: No, no. I forget the name. It's Fort Dix.

KEEFER: The training base. And then I know the Secretary of the Air Force and you had a little—

BROWN: Hans Mark was—

KEEFER: That was the one you got along best with, the previous one.

BROWN: Well, I had known—I'd known Hans very well for a long time. Look, they were good. They were good. Graham was especially good. Hans was good, and Cliff—Cliff did all right, but what does a service Secretary add to what the Chief does?

KEEFER: Right. It's a kind of a job that's more title than it is actual function.

BROWN: Well, it's a way of—it's become a way—it wasn't when I was there, but it has usually been a way of rewarding temporarily out-of-work politicians.

KEEFER: Yeah. In the old days, you make the point—and I think it's a good one—that there were a lot of people that actually moved on from Secretaries, including yourself.

BROWN: Right, right.

KEEFER: From service Secretaries to being in higher positions in the Defense Department. That hasn't happened much.

BROWN: See, what's happened is the Chiefs used to have two jobs. They used to be resource managers but also operators. If not even after '58 when they were no longer in the chain of command, they were at least members of a body that as a body functioned as the strategy, the board of strategy. That's not true anymore.

KEEFER: Yeah.

BROWN: You've got to—a Chairman who isn't in the chain of command either, but is the principal advisor, and now you've got a Vice Chairman who operates when he's not available, and the other Chiefs, well, they meet together, but they don't say much about the operation.

KEEFER: Were they a board of strategy when you were Secretary of Defense, or have they lost that function? Were they losing that function?

BROWN: They were losing that function. I mean, their principal—their principal involvement in operations was when the Chairman was away and one of the other Chiefs was Acting Chairman.

KEEFER: That was for—for a non-Chairman, that was the big time.

BROWN: That's right. And, you know, they—I'd meet with the Chairman or the Acting Chairman almost every day, and when it was somebody who was a service Chief, he had a different perspective, and he didn't really know as much.

KEEFER: But you did need them to get the Panama Canal Treaty, to get that recorded, go for SALT II. They were still needed for sort of those functions.

BROWN: Yes, they were. They were, but that really is—that's a way of validating a decision—I'm not sure how to describe it. I mean, there have been proposals that you have an advisory group, but that they be people who have retired from real active duty in their services, so that they're in principle not so parochial anymore. I don't think that works, because in many cases, when they retire, they become more parochial

KEEFER: And more political.

BROWN: Yes. [Laughter.]

KEEFER: Right.

BROWN: Okay.

KEEFER: Well, is there anything else I should know before I do the next draft?

BROWN: Probably a lot, but not much that I can think of.

KEEFER: Well, I want to thank you for giving me this time, and I'm going to stop this right now.

BROWN: All right.