Oral History Interview

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Conducted by Erin Mahan and Edward Keefer
February 11, 2011

EDWARD KEEFER: This is an interview with Dr. Harold Brown, former Secretary of Defense, [January] 1977 to January 1981. We are assembled in the Center for Strategic and International Studies on Friday, February 11, 2011.

So do you want to start with the first question?

HAROLD BROWN: You asked "What were the most significant weapons systems and related technology developed during my tenure, and conversely, what systems developed had less impact than expected?"

I think, in answer to that, I should frame it by saying weapon system development, let alone procurement, takes place over a sufficiently long period so that it's rare that one administration covers all of it, and so what we did was we initiated some things. We carried on and modified some things. We even terminated some things. But almost in no case in my tenure, as in anybody else's, were there systems that were conceived, developed, and fielded. That's not the way it is. So my answer, essentially, will be in the form of what systems did we play a major role in at some point in this long process --

KEEFER: Yes, moved along, moved to fruition.

BROWN: -- that are somewhere in the process, which were significant and valuable, and which were less so, and I can give some examples. Stealth technology is a clear example, and it

proceeded through the development and initial procurement of the F-117, the first stealth fighter. That was a program that was carried on in the black, as it was called, that is relatively secretly. It proceeded pretty quickly, and so we actually flew the first ones before the end of my tour and had decided to develop it at the beginning. So that was one where I think we covered quite a part of this spectrum, and it obviously had a big effect. It was very effective and kicked off the Gulf War, for example.

And an analogous technology, of course, was included in the B-2, which we began. If you look at the whole spectrum, we started it, but it didn't actually complete development and begin production until well after, I guess, mid to late eighties -- mid eighties. So that's one example. Cruise missiles. Again, the idea of a cruise missile wasn't new. I recall, in fact, visiting the Soviet Union in 1975 as a guest of the Institute for U.S. and Canadian Studies, and at that time I was out of office. I was President of Caltech [California Institute of Technology, Pasadena] then.

I was still part of the SALT [Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty] delegation. So for that and other reasons, I was well acquainted with the strategic balance that was seen at that time, and we were worried about big Soviet missiles capable of carrying lots of warheads. I took the occasion of that visit to tell them that they ought to be careful what they stimulated in the United States by their aggressive build-up of strategic ballistic missiles. I specifically mentioned that, in the cruise missile, there was something that could get around their own defenses and be a responsive threat to the Soviet build-up. So I was aware, and a supporter of, the idea of cruise missiles even before I came into office, and there were existing cruise missiles of a very primitive kind. The two big changes that were made that really made the U.S. cruise missile so

useful a military capability, not only for strategic nuclear purposes, but also for conventional warhead attacks on precise targets -- two things.

One was an engine, a turbine engine of small size, that enabled you to have a lightweight cruise missile that could be fired from a bomber or from a ship or from land, and because it was small, you could have a low cross section, not specifically designed geometrically and materially to be stealthy, but just by being small, it would be hard to detect. The other was a terrain following guidance system which was also a new development relying on terrain features to tell you where you were. That was later superseded by GPS [Global Positioning System] guidance, which was even more accurate. I guess you could say that -- and I'm just making guesses so this isn't quite classified -- the terrain follower was probably good to some tens of meters of accuracy, maybe more, maybe not that good, but in that order, maybe even ten meters, whereas the GPS, when it came in, was accurate to feet. Big changes -- those were big and important changes. So those are two things. GPS itself is another example, and it's also an example, and there are others, of Defense developed systems that have had an enormous civilian spinoff.

KEEFER: Was that exclusively done under your tenure?

BROWN: The first satellites went up before I left office. In fact, we were still arguing with the Office of Management and Budget [OMB] as to whether three were enough. I guess there must be a -- in order to do what we now do, there must be over a dozen to give you the coverage and accuracy that you need. So that's another one that was pretty much -- not entirely, but pretty much done at our initiative and began to be visible in the skies before I left.

I'm sure I can think of some others, but those are some examples. But let me give you some examples of some that didn't necessarily --

KEEFER: The losers?

BROWN: -- work out so well. Before I do that, let me say that the emphasis on technology and weapons systems was the result of a very close and fruitful collaboration between myself and Bill Perry, who was the Under Secretary for Research and Engineering then and, of course, later served with great distinction as Defense Secretary himself [1994-1997].

Sometimes, the ideas and impetus came from me. Sometimes, [they] came from him. In general, I would say that he was the person in the Office of the Secretary of Defense who actually executed most of these things. He and I kept close enough touch and thought enough alike so that he had very considerable latitude doing that. But as I say, it was an ambition that he and I shared and that I encouraged -- pushed him -- to do, and sometimes, it was my idea. Sometimes, it was his own idea.

Let me add one. AWACS [Airborne Warning and Control System] is another thing. It was fairly well along by the time I came in, but it was something that I pushed very hard, and this was a case where I pushed it on NATO, because I dealt with the other ministers of defense. I dealt with outside the Defense Department on most of these things. Bill, as I said, was essentially in charge of execution within the Defense Department. We'd talk about how to organize. For example, the Joint Cruise Missile [Project] Office came out of a discussion between the two of us.

Okay, let me talk about some things that didn't work out or didn't have the impact that we'd hoped. Two that occur to me were both in the electronics and software area. There was a project called Ada, which was an attempt to produce a software format that would be used across the whole Defense Department. As you know, there are so many versions of software you can't

count them, and it was an attempt to standardize. It didn't work out -- I won't say it didn't work out. It was done, but it wasn't used very much.

The same thing was true of a hardware electronics program, the name of which I forget, which was an attempt to introduce a new generation of electronic computing capability. Again, it was done, but it didn't have much effect, and the reason, looking back on it, was that, although the Defense Department's Research and Development programs had pioneered both electronic hardware and computing and software back in the fifties, sixties, and even well into the seventies, by the time those two programs were instituted, the non-Defense industry, the non-Defense infrastructure both in hardware and software, was far greater than what was in Defense. So this was an attempt of the ant on the log to steer the log, and it didn't work out, because the infrastructure, both in electronic hardware and software, was much more vibrant and had an enormously bigger market than that in Defense, so that's one example.

Another pair of examples and the reason why, in retrospect, I think they did not catch on. MILSTAR was a military satellite for communication. I can't remember, I think it was deployed, but it never had a very important effect, because the civilian satellite communication network is so much bigger that the military largely relies on it. Now, there are some specialized military communications satellites, but that one didn't get the usage that was hoped for. Okay, those are some examples.

KEEFER: Can I just ask you one follow-up question?

BROWN: Yes.

KEEFER: I think it was as I was reading Bill Perry's interview, he was talking about miniaturization of weapons, smart bombs, and computer circuitry even. This really all came in in your period in the seventies.

BROWN: It did. It did, but it largely was application

KEEFER: It was off-the-shelf stuff?

BROWN: Well, that's another problem. There have been attempts to do off-the-civilian-shelf products, rather than technology, in the Defense Department, and they're hard to do, because mil specs [Military Specifications] are specialized, overly specialized in my view. But smart bombs we've talked about, in a way. Certainly cruise missiles are examples, but you're right. That was only one example of smart bombs. Again, not all of them -- many of them worked but were superseded by other things.

For example, we had shells that had guidance in them. There was this exercise we did out in New Mexico to demonstrate a whole set of them using various guidance systems. One of them, as I said, was in an artillery shell that honed in on its target. There were others that worked on the contrast between a target and its background and so forth. So there are a lot of those. Should we go on to the next one?

KEEFER: Yes, please.

BROWN: Okay. "Did I convert President [Jimmy] Carter from skepticism about Defense spending and the Soviet threat [And if so, how did it come about]?" The president had made sort of a commitment, during the campaign, to reduce the Defense Budget. I forget the number.

KEEFER: Five to $7 billion.

BROWN: Six billion was the number that I remember. So when he came in, I looked at the budget that had been presented by the outgoing [Gerald] Ford Administration and [Secretary of Defense Donald] Rumsfeld, and I didn't find $6 billion. I did find $2.5 billion, I think, and actually amended the proposed budget to take out those things.

What happened -- I shouldn't have been so naïve, having spent eight years in government before -– because what happened was that the various committees of Congress looked at it and said, "Gee, that's great. We'll take out $2.5 billion but not out of our favorite projects --

KEEFER: Yes, right.

BROWN: -- out of your favorite projects." That was a lesson learned, although not easy to counter, because the Congress does have a veto, essentially, on budgets.

Nevertheless in retrospect, I still think I did the right thing. I didn't do it in the right way. I should have talked to the members of Congress beforehand and worked out a deal. If you tell them there's $2.5 billion too much, they'll automatically --

KEEFER: They'll pocket that.

BROWN: -- pocket it. But now, did I press Carter on the Defense Budget? Yes, we had lots of, I wouldn't say adversarial, conversations. You don't have adversarial conversations with a president and stay in his cabinet very long, but full and frank is the usual description. And I think it was a change in his attitude, or a maturing of his views on the Soviet threat that had a bigger effect than my arguments, because he knew there was waste in the Defense Budget, as there always is and as there is in every part of the government's budget.

The problem is identifying it and then dealing with it, especially with the Congress, because every piece of waste is in there because it's in somebody's interest.

KEEFER: Somebody's constituency.

BROWN: That's right. He knew that. He and I also differ, as his latest book [*White House Diary*] indicates, on the idea of zero-based budgeting, which he came in believing. [He] said, "You ought to start every year from zero," and of course, that's true if every year is different from every previous year. But if you have a five-year plan you shouldn't start a new five-year plan every year, and the problem is to identify the things that are on the margin and whose deletion does not ruin the rest of the budget. So that's what we really --

KEEFER: That's why you had all those bands and the three [budget] levels [basic, enhanced, decremented], and --

BROWN: Right, right.

KEEFER: -- that was your equivalent of zero-based budgeting.

BROWN: That's right. That's right.

KEEFER: Did OMB ever really accept that? Carter kept saying he wanted you to do zero-based budgeting, and you kept giving him your budget.

BROWN: Yes. In the end, that's not how decisions are made. People look at individual programs.

KEEFER: Yes, right.

BROWN: I think OMB did that, too, in the end. They killed some good ones, and they killed some bad ones.

MAHAN: Who were some of your allies on the Hill?

BROWN: Well, George Mahon, of course, was a real patriot and a real gem.

KEEFER: [Senator John] Stennis?

BROWN: Well, the House Defense Appropriations Subcommittee really was an outstanding group. On the Democratic side, not only Mahon, but several of the others really knew what they were doing. Now, they had their own pets.

What was his name from Pennsylvania [Senator Hugh Scott], the one with the mustache, who always made sure that the Army bases in Germany were fueled with Pennsylvania coal? And Bob Sikes from Florida -- both of whom came to bad ends in terms of corruption charges. But when it came to Defense matters outside their own districts, they were thoughtful, well-informed, and so forth, so that was a great committee.

The House Armed Services Committee was more difficult, because when Carl Vinson left and was succeeded by Mendel Rivers, those were two very different people. Rivers, of course, had some opposition from a group of young turks, including Sam Stratton, Lou Nedzi, and several others -- and I guess including Les Aspin, who took a rational, thoughtful, constructive position, again, except when it came to their own constituencies.

Sam Stratton, who was a good Congressman, delayed the installation of a 120mm, as opposed to a 105mm cannon, on the Abrams Tank until the Watertown Arsenal was able to make a 120mm cannon, and we didn't have to get it from Germany. So even the good ones had to get re-elected. [Once] Mel Price took over, relations got easier because -- I'm not sure whether Mel had already become Chairman when I became Secretary of Defense, but he and I went back a long way, because he'd been on the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy, so he was helpful. He wasn't very effectual.

On the Senate side, John Stennis was certainly a tower of strength and a man of great integrity on these matters. He didn't have the breadth of vision on geostrategic issues that Richard Russell had, but he was very good, very strong.

KEEFER: Sam Nunn. Did you find him [effective]?

BROWN: Sam was relatively new, but he was terrific. And continued to be. Uh, I've got to think. Gary Hart was a novel thinker, sometimes I think too easily caught up in fads by people who proposed to revolutionize the --

KEEFER: Is that why he was so keen on the vertical takeoff aircraft?

BROWN: Yes, I should have --

KEEFER: -- then smaller carriers?

BROWN: Yes. I should have talked about vertical takeoff aircraft when I talked about things that didn't work. But that's one that I actually kept from going on while I was there.

KEEFER: Yes, you did. You kept putting it back into development.

BROWN: That's right.

KEEFER: Endlessly putting it back into development.

BROWN: Right. Dick Cheney tried to kill it, but by then, it was too far along, and that was one he got rolled on.

KEEFER: Was there any reason why Hart, other than that he thought it was a good idea -- were they built in his district.

BROWN: No, I don't think it was.

KEEFER: Yes, he just became a kind of proponent of small carriers --

BROWN: That's right.

KEEFER: -- and V/STOL [Vertical and/or Short Take-Off and Landing] aircraft.

BROWN: Yes. Well, small carriers have a reason. A big nuclear carrier is obviously better on a one-for-one basis, but it can't be in two places at once.

KEEFER: Right and it requires a lot of [escorts].

BROWN: So what's the tradeoff? On the Republican side -- I'm trying to -- again, I've been around so long that these various stages blur into each other, and I'm not sure who was where when.

MAHAN: Well, and I don't want to get off Dr. **KEEFER**'s track of questions.

BROWN: Okay. All right.

MAHAN: Unless you want to pursue that path.

BROWN: Let me finish on this. Let me say one more thing about systems. There have been lots of good spinoffs from Defense, including the Internet, including jet aircraft transports, and including the whole computer business essentially. More lately, there have been some spin-ons, especially in electronics and so forth, but not all of them work.

The V-22, [Osprey tilt-rotor aircraft] you may recall, was widely advertised as being a big potential benefit for civilian transport. There were going to be vertical takeoff aircraft in every city, and you'd have them downtown. Well, we have V-22s, and the Marines are struggling with them. But what was promised as a revolution in civilian transport doesn't even mention V-22s for good reason, but I won't get into it.

Okay, Carter. As I say, I think Carter was more influenced by events than by anything I said. But I think, despite his occasional irritation with my pressing for specific programs and an

increase in the Defense budgets, he did come to understand that Defense capabilities were important. I think, actually, his having been in the Navy was no help in that regard.

KEEFER: I agree with you. I think it was just the opposite.

BROWN: Because he, as a Lieutenant JG, got to see a lot of ridiculous stuff. And that always stuck in his mind. "There's so much waste. I saw it," and he's right. But that doesn't mean that you can dig it out by the kind of decisions that are made during a budget.

KEEFER: So would you say that this sort of coincided with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan -- '79 is when he really --

BROWN: Well, by that time --

KEEFER: He could have been converted by then?

BROWN: Yes.

KEEFER: Because in '78, you sent a lot of very strong memos to him.

BROWN: Yes.

KEEFER: And I don't think he was buying it then.

BROWN: No, he wasn't. I think -- well, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan had a big effect on him. But it also became clear that unwillingness to increase the Defense budget was going to make the SALT Treaty not go through and was going to derail relationships with the [Congress] essentially.

I should finally say about my relations with the Congress that I found the most rapport and most similarity of views on these issues with moderate Republicans and southern Democrats, neither of which category exists any more. So that's a problem.

KEEFER: Yes, the old southern Democrat alliance with the military has broken down.

BROWN: Yes, but the moderate Republicans --

KEEFER: They're gone.

BROWN: -- took a sensible attitude, too. [The next question is: "Did I play a larger role in diplomacy than previous secretaries of Defense?"] Okay, Diplomacy. Of course, the degree that I played a part in diplomacy and foreign affairs pales in comparison with what's happened with some since. But I would also say I probably played a lesser part than [Secretary of Defense Robert] McNamara did. In most Secretaries of Defense, there's a Secretary of State inside striving to break out, partly because they fail to realize that the Secretary of State doesn't have the enormous weight of budget and constituency behind him or her so that the Secretary of Defense, even without playing an overt role in diplomacy and foreign affairs, can have a comparable effect on those things.

But I didn't try to be a secretary of state. I felt that two of them were enough already, nor did I try to necessarily mediate between [Cyrus] Vance and [Zbigniew] Brzezinski.

KEEFER: Even though Brzezinski claims that you did.

BROWN: Well, I didn't mediate.I guess my position tended to be in the rather large area between their positions. To the degree that he implies that, I guess I would agree. For example, on the issue of dealing with China, Brzezinski wanted to use China as a weapon or lever against the Soviet Union, and Vance took the position that we should not, in our attempts to normalize with China, offend the Soviets.

Well, I thought both of those positions were wrong. I thought we should deal with China to normalize relations, because that was good, and we should not let Soviet dislike of such a process interfere with us. But neither should we rub the Soviets' noses in what we were doing

with China. I didn't think it was a great idea for Brzezinski to go up to the Chinese-Soviet border and wave a rifle against the Soviets. But I did, inevitably, play something of a role and, in particular, I wound up, as I recall, being the principal interlocutor with the Northeast Asians, with the Japanese and the Koreans. Particularly since the others weren't paying much attention to that.

KEEFER: I think you saw more Korean foreign ministers --

BROWN: Yes.

KEEFER: -- prime ministers, and defense ministers than Vance did.

BROWN: Right. Well, but that's because the Koreans saw the situation largely in military terms.

KEEFER: Yes, and the Japanese -- it was more a matter of trying to get them to --

BROWN: To get them to do more.

KEEFER: To spend more on defense.

BROWN: That was a little complicated, because the Japanese Foreign Ministry saw itself as the intermediary with the United States and, even on military matters, they wanted me to deal with them, which I did. So it is true that, in '79 to the Middle East and in January of 1980 to China, I did serve as, essentially, an emissary of the administration, and to a significant extent, I think that may have been pushed by Brzezinski partly because he thought that what I would say was more like what he would say than what Vance would say.

But I think the president was the one who decided it, and in the case of the Chinese, Vice President [Walter "Fritz"] Mondale had essentially committed to his visits in '79. So the subsequent objections of State Department to my going at all, which were again part of Vance and the side concern that that would send the wrong message to the Soviets, were overridden,

because Fritz had essentially committed. I think that answers the question, "How and why did you take on these duties?"

KEEFER: Yes, I think so. You were asked to do it, essentially, is what you're saying.

BROWN: Well, in the case of the China and Middle East visits, yes. But in the case of Korea and Japan, it was because nobody else was doing it, and somebody had to do it.

KEEFER: Yes, right. I understand.

BROWN: [The next question: Was NATO stronger in 1980 than it had been in 1977? And if so, in what ways?"] NATO and [Robert] Komer.

MAHAN: This is one I wanted to ask, what were your lasting legacies. I ask, in part because I just got back from this centennial for the [Ronald] Reagan presidency on Reagan's legacy.

BROWN: Yes. Oddly enough, when I think about it, the natural answer is that the emphasis on high technology was an offset to the U.S.'s other limitations -- we didn't have the size of the military that the Soviets had, for example. But I'm not sure how lasting that will be, because I think others will catch up on technology. We'll still be ahead but maybe not as far ahead. More fundamentally, what I tried to do was to encourage joint operations. In principle, that had already been established by the 1958 act that set up what used to be called the CINCs [Commanders in Chief] but are now called Combat Commanders, because Don Rumsfeld decided there's only one CINC -- a new kind of monotheism, I guess.

But in practice, it really didn't work that way. What had happened was that, in the unified commands, you had the component commands, who really looked back to their own service, and that's always going to be true to an extent. But the services trained and promoted within the

service. It wasn't until you got into the unified commands that they even began to think that they were supposed to work together, and we started to change that.

Another evidence of the separation of the services was they didn't send their best people to work on the Joint Staff. The Director of the Joint Staff was a comer, and he would go on to greater things, but most of the people who were assigned to the Joint Staff weren't seen as the stars.

We put in a requirement that promotion to flag or general officer rank would require having worked in a joint capacity before then. Now, it's one thing to say that. It's another thing to do it, and I would have to more than admit -- I would have to assert that we didn't get very far during my tenure. But the rule was there, and we had started. We actually pushed back a few proposed promotions, because they didn't meet the requirements.

The services started to say, "Well, if you've worked for the Secretary of the Air Force or the Secretary of the Army, that's obviously joint service, because they do so much work with the other services." We had to push back and say, "No, no, that doesn't qualify." But that requirement, I think, has had a long-term effect, and we put in a lot of other things that were designed, also, to promote the value in joint service. As a result, the Joint Staff assignments are now seen as prizes. They sure weren't in the late seventies.

Now, this can go too far, because joint operations are not always the best way to do things. The Iran rescue attempt [Operation Eagle Claw, 24 April 1980], in my view, failed in part because there was an instance that every service had to be represented. Nobody wanted to be left out of something so important, which would have been okay if they'd trained together before.

And in that case, we also did not -- and this was a big mistake, including on my part -- have them practice together even before the attempt. Ideally --

KEEFER: So it really wasn't joint. It was really just --

BROWN: It was cobbled together.

KEEFER: It was thrown together. The president had them come all together for the big show but no joint --

BROWN: Yes, right, right, right. But yes, if it had been joint, it would have been jointly planned, and there would have been a group that had been practicing for two years to do something like that, because you never know what the exact situation's going to be. So I don't know whether that's the most lasting legacy, but I would put that on a par with the much better known and understood emphasis on high technology. The rest -- I don't know how lasting it is. The people all change. I wouldn't say that it put the relations between the Defense Department and the Congress on any new and better position.

But people count, and it is interesting and satisfying to me that, of the people who worked with me in Defense -- I forget how many have occupied Cabinet positions -- Bill Perry, of course, and Charles Duncan, the Secretary of Energy. Graham Claytor was only Acting Secretary of Transportation for a few months, because the president agreed he couldn't take away my two top people.Togo West has been Secretary of Veterans Affairs. Colin Powell, who was a military assistant --

KEEFER: To you and Duncan or to you as well?

BROWN: To Duncan. Well, yes, but Colin would sit in on our morning meetings, so I worked closely with him. So it's hard not to include that as a legacy.

MAHAN: Yes.

BROWN: Komer and NATO. I thought our NATO relations needed a lot of help and that the Europeans weren't doing their share. Of course, that's now a 50-year complaint. But I really worried that, because they weren't doing what they needed to do, and we had not really made credible plans for conventional defense, we were relying entirely on nuclear deterrent, and although in retrospect, I guess it worked, it wasn't a pleasant thing to rely on. In the end, we would always have to rely on it, but it would be useful to have some things we could do short of that.

Before Komer became Under Secretary [of Defense] for Policy, I put him in as a special assistant knowing that his reputation, well deserved for pushing actions very strongly, would fit there. In part because I was able -- even before President Carter was convinced by Soviet behavior that higher budgets made sense -- I was able to put in a nominal, and in fact pretty well observed, 3 percent annual real increase in the U.S. Budget partly as a way of pressing the Europeans to do the same.

KEEFER: Right, the "3 percent solution."

BROWN: Right. But we did more than that. We actually came up with a plan to get -- I forget -- five divisions over there in 60 days, whatever the number was.

KEEFER: Prepositioning of equipment and everything.

BROWN: Right, prepositioning equipment and arranging rapid transport. Now, would the Soviets have taken 60 days to get to the channel? They thought it wouldn't, actually. The Soviet Chief of Staff [Sergei Akhromeev], the one who ended up committing suicide after the Soviet Union fell -- what was his name?

KEEFER: I don't remember.

BROWN: Anyway, he once told someone that he thought they could have gotten to the channel in 30 days, but then he added, "But then, what would we have done?" My view was that -- and I've said this in reports to Congress -- I didn't know, but I thought that, if we could actually hold them for 30 days, their own internal contradictions, especially the split between the Soviets themselves and the Warsaw Pact forces would mean that, somehow, they wouldn't make it, or at least the knowledge and concern about that would be a separate deterrent from the nuclear deterrent.

I operated on that basis and tried to get the U.S. plans to be such that we could be a credible part of that and also use that to push the Europeans to do more. Now, how well it worked in the end -- I'm not prepared to say that it worked very well in the end. I would say it almost certainly kept things from getting worse, in terms of a European conflict.

KEEFER: Yes, a holding operation.

BROWN: That's right. That's right.

KEEFER: Can I ask you, did you find working with Bob Komer a trial sometimes?

BROWN: No, I think --

KEEFER: Did you have genuinely good relations?

BROWN: We had very good relations.

KEEFER: He certainly sent you enough memos. He was the most prolific memo writer I've ever encountered in government.

BROWN: Well, there were a few people in the department who could write well, and as a consequence, had probably a disproportionate effect. He was one. Jim Woolsey was another, and Russ Murray was the third.

KEEFER: Of course, what happens is that, when historians go through and read the memos, the people that write the good memos -- those are the ones that we're attracted to. So those three people -- I always enjoyed reading their memos the most.

BROWN: Of course.

KEEFER: So they're going to get the much better historical --

BROWN: Press.

KEEFER: -- press than bad writers.

BROWN: Well, okay, when you write about me, you can say at least I appreciated that.

KEEFER: Well, you also wrote lots of comments on those memos, but I'm not always happy, because it's kind of hard to read your writing.

BROWN: Gee, that's bad. No, but it's true. My way of dealing with it was to scribble stuff on it and send it back.

KEEFER: Yes, right.

BROWN: Well, I'm interested that you have the same judgment about who writes well as I did.

KEEFER: Yes, exactly.

BROWN: Unfortunately, the best writing is not always in support of the best case.

KEEFER: I think the most -- Murray was perhaps the one I would say that was the most contrarian. He would definitely take sometimes --

BROWN: Well, but that's okay.

KEEFER: That's his job. I assume that was what you wanted him to do.

BROWN: That's right. I probably decided in favor of systems analysis, when they came down on a different side from the services, only about 10 percent of the time. But by doing it, I made the other 90 percent a lot better.

KEEFER: Yes, true.

BROWN: Okay. Well, I think I've answered your question about NATO in '80 as compared to '77.

KEEFER: Yes.

BROWN: We stemmed the erosion, and actually -- I did get them to buy AWACS --

KEEFER: Exactly.

BROWN: -- which, of course, made a big difference to them and us.

KEEFER: And the French actually eventually bought them, too.

BROWN: Yes.

KEEFER: And the British had to scrap Nimrod.

BROWN: Yes. Well, Nimrod didn't work too well over sea and didn't work at all over land. [The next question: "What role you and your DoD team play in solidifying the volunteer Armed Forces?"]

BROWN: Volunteer armed forces. I'm not sure we did very well on solidifying the volunteer armed forces. It is certainly true that the hangover from the Vietnam War on morale, discipline, and attractiveness of the armed forces persisted even after the draft ended. That took a while to get over, and I don't think we got over it during our time. I think we did better than we were given credit for.

Part of the problem was, and is, that the way readiness is evaluated is pretty complicated. For example, the day a new weapons system is introduced into a unit, that unit becomes unready, because it hasn't had any experience with it. So what's reported is not a full accounting for how capable a unit is, and if it's not 100 percent manned, it's not ready. But that doesn't mean it can't fight. The system is too quantified. It doesn't allow for a smooth rating of capability. That said, and that is a kind of excuse, I think we still didn't go far enough in solidifying the force.

One thing I tried to do, unsuccessfully, was introduce more flexibility into recruiting by changing the retirement system. Cliff vesting at twenty years is something that no civilian organization could live with. So it must have been 1978 or '79 [that] we tried to change the retirement system to be more like a civilian system so that you would accrue retirement before twenty years, would not have to serve twenty years to retirement benefit, and you'd continue to accrue retirement benefits beyond twenty years.

We almost managed it, but at the last minute, the Navy fell off, and I think subsequently -- this is not something that I follow closely, but I think, during the [Bill] Clinton Administration, they did change things somewhat. But that was an example, in my view, of senior military officers looking at things from their point of view, rather than from the point of view of somebody entering -- if you're 50 years old, you think retirement is extremely important, and you assume that people join the military because they can retire in 20 years, and I just don't think that's true.

Another example of that -- and I'm getting away from your questions, unfortunately -- is the question of who should decide on senior promotions, promotions to three-and four-stars. I used to argue this with George **BROWN** when he was Chairman. I'd get into the tank with the

chiefs and raise this issue, and they would say, “Look, we know these people. We socialize with them. We know their families. We know who’s good, and we know who’s bad,” and my view was, “Yes, and that means you all think alike, and if you want to change anything, you have to pick people on a different basis.”

I didn’t do much of it, and those who’ve succeeded me and who have done a lot of it have sometimes done well and sometimes done badly. So I think it’s an argument that has not, in my mind, been clearly settled one way or another. But I do believe, and did believe, and did say, and actually got to do some of it by picking some of the people, that, “If you want to change things, you have to pick the people yourself. You can’t rely on somebody who knows them very well and has lived with them to tell you whether their characteristics are what you want.” They’ll tell you whether the characteristics are what they want.

[The next question: “Were U.S. armed forces more flexible, combat ready, and mobile in 1980 than they were in 1977? Were the charges of the “hollow Army” unfair?”]

BROWN: Well, I think when [General] Shy Meyer used those words, which I think he subsequently tried to explain in a way that was different from the way they were interpreted, what he meant was that we didn’t have much backup, and we didn’t have much staying power, that we could do a little bit, but things weren’t fully manned and so forth. Hollow implied that, if you’d tap it, it would break, and I don’t think he meant that.

Indeed, in deciding where to put resources, you have to decide between force structure, modernization, sustainability, and readiness. Again, in discussions with the chiefs, the services tended to, in my day -- I’m not sure it’s still that way. In fact, I think maybe it’s not. We’ll see when the next budgets come out.

Force structure was the most important to them, because they figured, in a pinch, they'd always get the resources to do the rest, but force structure takes the longest to establish. Modernization was next. Readiness and sustainability ought to be more important, but they somehow are down in the weeds when it comes to the money, because it's easier to stint on those, because those are less obvious on the surface.

You know how new the equipment is. You know how many units you have, but you can fudge, to some degree, the others. Although they talked a good game on readiness and sustainability, the services, unlike the combat commands, always emphasized force structure first and modernization next. Combat commands, in my day, had the opposite bias. They worried about what would happen if they had to fight next month or next year, where readiness and sustainability count.

I think the balance is better now, but they're always going to have that tension. I think, now, the combat commanders, at least the regional combat commanders, have to think longer ahead than they used to.

One of the things that I did -- and here's something that I should have added as a lasting legacy -- was to tighten the connection between the unified and specified commands and the Secretary of Defense. I put in a requirement that the unified and specified commanders report every six months --

KEEFER: That's right. I read [those reports].

BROWN: -- to the Secretary of Defense.

KEEFER: They were quarterly reports.

BROWN: It was quarterly? Okay. And again, that's something that's been tightened a lot, maybe too much, in recent years. But this was a way of producing more balance between the services and the combat commanders in budgeting, because I also had combat commander representation at some of the budgeting things. Again, that's gone a lot further since then, which is by and large good. I guess what I'm saying is I'm appropriating the good deeds of my successors as a part of my lasting legacy because I started it.

KEEFER: Fair enough.

[The next question: Which parts of your job were the most time and energy consuming? Which were the most enjoyable parts of the job? The least enjoyable?]

BROWN: Time and energy consuming and most enjoyable, least enjoyable. It's hard for me to make a judgment about that. I didn't like formalities, and I'm not much of a socializer. I wouldn't go so far as Colin Powell does when he says that, "I used to ask people to shove their --

KEEFER: Yes, I read that in his memoirs [laughter].

BROWN: -- documents under the door," [laughter].

KEEFER: Under the door so you could work on them with your formulas.

BROWN: But there's a reason for him saying it, so it's not completely untrue. Yes, I did not like the socializing. When I first came to Washington in 1961, my wife and I used to go out to social occasions twice a week for a couple years, and then I gained fifteen pounds and I quit. And in my subsequent positions, even as Secretary of the Air Force, where it was a very important part of the activities, I didn't go for that very much. I could put on a good face, but it's not something I would have chosen.

The most enjoyable part of the job was when things worked. But what I liked -- I liked intellectual sparring within the department, even with those relatively few members of Congress with whom it was profitable. To argue with Sam Nunn was fun, and to agree with him was even more fun. I guess that really is probably right. I did enjoy interaction with other governments, other countries. I liked that. I enjoyed it when I went to China. I enjoyed it when I went to the Middle East, Saudi Arabia and elsewhere, partly because it was enough different from the day-to-day activities of the Defense Department.

KEEFER: Right. Did you have a favorite defense minister one you got along really well with?

BROWN: Actually, I got along very well with the German, and there were two. The first was [Georg] Leber, and then there was Apel. I thought they had a tough job, and they did it very well. My opinion of them was confirmed when, in 1982, those two, along with Helmut Schmidt, went against their own party to support the deployment of the intermediate range of nuclear forces, which in my view, played a big part in the end of the Soviet Union -- well, at least the end of the Cold War, because it convinced the Soviet leadership that military capability, activity, and threats were never going to allow them to dominate Western Europe.

It was a piece of the reason that [Mikhail] Gorbachev, subsequently in his conversation on the beach with [Eduard] Shevardnadze, said, “We’ve got to change.” I think the big thing was that the Soviet Union wasn’t working, but this was a piece of it. One way that they thought they could succeed, despite the internal contradictions in the Soviet Union, was to overawe Western Europe, and I think 1982 put paid to that. Okay.

KEEFER: Do you have time for one more question?

BROWN: What time is it?

KEEFER: It's quarter after 4: 00.

BROWN: Well, we can go for a few more minutes.

KEEFER: I'm really interested in this, because I've already written about it -- do you remember the Presidential Review Memorandum 10 [PRM 10 - Comprehensive Net Assessment and Military Force Posture Review] and --

BROWN: Yes, I do.

KEEFER: Could you tell me what happened there? I can't really get a handle on what went wrong.

BROWN: You ought to talk to Lynn Davis about it, because she was in the thick of it. I had to pull her off it, not through any fault of hers, but because I think the Joint Staff just didn't like what we were saying, and the Germans didn't like what it was saying, because one piece of it had to do with strategy in Europe --

KEEFER: Yes, right.

BROWN: -- and the German position was, "You surely can't put a line of atomic demolition" -- the German problem was the border. Sensible military doctrine would say you don't stand and fight on the border but they didn't want to give up an inch of territory. This is all theoretical, because in a war, you do what you have to do. But they didn't want a doctrine that said, "Our plan is not to defend, from day one, every inch of German soil." On the other hand, we can't put ADMs [Atomic Demolitions Munitions] in, because that says there's a border, a more permanent border, and East Germany is part of Germany. So that was a piece of it, but I don't think it was the only piece.

KEEFER: Yes. Do you think that Lynn Davis was too young, too inexperienced, to get the rest of the DoD to go along with her study, the force structure study?

BROWN: Well, I'm too close a friend to say that, because I don't know. I don't know that that's it.

KEEFER: Literally everybody --

BROWN: I think they gunned for her but I think her position was actually more sensible.

KEEFER: Ironically, I don't know if you remember this, but it was the NSC [National Security Council] staff that said, "Don't get rid of these AIMS, these Alternate Integrated Military Strategies." The regular DoD wants to get rid of these things and their way of looking. So Lynn Davis got strong support in the NSC and the NSC staff and Brzezinski as well --

BROWN: Right.

KEEFER: -- although the study never really came to fruition, I don't think, did it?

BROWN: No.

KEEFER: It just got sort of overtaken by --

BROWN: It was overtaken by the--

KEEFER: By the PD [Presidential Directive] 18?

BROWN: Yes. No, I can't remember the details.

KEEFER: The details are mindboggling. There were eight AIMS, and were different strategies for Europe, for the homeland nuclear exchange for non-European conflicts. Davis was a political scientist, and I have a little bias against political scientist. It was very much of a political science approach to military planning.

BROWN: Well, she's good enough so that she subsequently taught Strategy at the War College, so she certainly had, even then, the intellectual heft to make a sensible case.

MAHAN: Maybe we should try to talk to her. Is she local?

KEEFER: I've got her on my list. I'll just mention there was one commentator that said that they would have thought that she was advocating [Mahatma] Gandhi's passive resistance.

BROWN: No, I think they were gunning for her, because she was a civilian. She was a woman. She was a professor. I think she's a first class -- well, she helped me with my first book more than anybody else. I have an enormously high opinion of her.

Okay, PD 59 [Presidential Directive 59 - Nuclear Weapons Employment Policy]. I have a lot clearer recollection of that because again, it's something that was misinterpreted as being a war winning strategy, whereas it really was a tweak on deterrence by asking what is it that the Soviet leadership most values, and how do we put that at risk so that they know, as we know, that nobody is going to win in a nuclear war? I think the idea -- of course, it was worked out largely by [Walter] Slocombe on one side and [Lieutenant General William] Odom on Brzezinski's staff. Brzezinski and Odom have written prolifically. Slocombe and I have not, so the existing literature is from their point of view, which isn't necessarily different from ours.

The principle difference will be in the judgment of who were the instigators, and who contributed most to the document. But setting that aside, as I said, I think that the general view of what it meant is wrong. It was not a way of winning a nuclear war. It was a way of saying to the Soviets, "Look, we're going to target things that will insure that, if you thought you were going to survive in control of a society, neither the society nor your control of it will survive. Now,

what did that mean? We couldn't be sure of targeting the Soviet leadership, because they might be on a train.

On the other hand, we could sever the links of communication that would enable them to control what was left, and what I'm about to say was a particular contribution of Brzezinski's. We could try to target things in a way that meant that the complex, multinational nature of the Soviet Union would not survive.

KEEFER: Wasn't that the famous, "We're going to kill only the Russians"? This is what Brzezinski was proported to have said. I don't know whether that's true.

BROWN: That may have been what he meant. I don't know that I ever heard him say it. But severing the links would do as well.

KEEFER: Yes, right.

BROWN: But like many things that happened during the Carter Administration, and others that I've been through since, what is reported of something in the media is at least as important as what it actually said.

KEEFER: Yes, and did you ever discover -- it was leaked by someone -- obviously by an opponent?

BROWN: You never know. Some of these things are leaked by people who think they are leaking a favorable opinion. Again, my favorite on this one -- I don't know whether I'll put it in my book. President Carter sent me a letter, handwritten, after there had been some pressure by military associations for higher pay, and it said, "When I was in the Navy, pay was not what was important. Why don't you do something about this [criticism]?"

BROWN: What I did was I put the letter in the safe and said, "Don't show this to anybody," [chuckle]. The next week, it appeared in the *Army Times, Navy Review,* and *Air Force Journal*, and I am, to this day, convinced that it was leaked by somebody in the White House, who thought they were doing the president a favor, and were sending out something that people would approve. Well, people in the military didn't approve.

KEEFER: No.

BROWN: So my point is that sometimes things are leaked by people who think it will be favorable to their cause to leak it, but it's not.

[The next question: Looking back on normalization of relations with China and especially your trip to Beijing in 1980, do you think the Chinese were interested in a military relationship with the United States?]

BROWN: All right, China.

KEEFER: You sort of answered this question, but I'm wondering did a real military relationship come out of that China trip or was it more just a sort of nascent relationship?

BROWN: Well [Admiral] Stan Turner had already been over there, and since the Chinese military intelligence people were involved, the work on the observation sites in Western China had already been done. I think the answer is yes, but it was on the materiel side. It is certainly true that, when we exchanged views during my trip on what the strategic situation was, they were very close. At one point I think I said to them we could have been reading from each others' talking points. But that was then, and that's not a relationship. That's a short-term coincidence of views.

As the two national securities and two societies and two economies have developed, that's changed a lot, and I would say that there is no military-to-military exchange of strategic views. I think the Chinese military has resisted that very strongly. The U.S. military wants it. But there was a different kind of military relationship that began then and has continued, that continued first for maybe ten or fifteen years and has now stopped for the same reason that the exchange of strategic views has stopped. They don't see that -- during the period I'm talking about, we were prepared to help them with military equipment, to varying degrees, depending on what the equipment was, because we did see them as an offset to the Soviets. As I said to the chiefs several times, that's 40 divisions of Soviet troops who could be in Europe. So we were prepared to help them. When our strategic relationship changed from one of cooperation to one of a potential adversarial nature, that stopped. But what happened in the meantime, where we did transfer technology to them, it did start with me.

KEEFER: That's right.

BROWN: "Do you think the Chinese were interested in a military relationship with the U.S.?" Well, the answer is yes, that kind of military relationship and a strategic relationship, so long as their strategic interest coincided. But the Soviet Union's gone. They're not a threat to the Chinese. The Chinese see us as the threat now. I'm beginning to run down.

MAHAN: Okay. Could we discuss Iran and the Hostage Crisis?

KEEFER: I wonder if we could save that for later, because I haven't really started my research of that.

BROWN: Okay.

KEEFER: The last question I would ask is: Was the stealth technology a factor in the discussion to cancel the B-1 bomber? You said it had started very early in the administration. You had an idea about it.

BROWN: I think the answer is it was far along but I don't think it was a big reason [for cancelling the B-1].

KEEFER: Yes, it wasn't, because Carter then says, maybe after the fact, "Well, we also had stealth technology,"

BROWN: We did. We did, but I don't think it was the big reason. I think if you did an analysis -- well look, to the extent that you regard the cruise missile as part of stealth technology because the cruise missile was a big part.

KEEFER: That was a factor.

BROWN: That was a big part.

KEEFER: Yes, right.

BROWN: But it's also true that the idea of a stealth bomber was not very far along. The stealth fighter existed.

KEEFER: There were a lot of congressmen who changed their votes, and I wondered if there was any briefing on the stealth?

BROWN: I think the cruise missile probably had a bigger effect. By July of '79, which was just before I revealed stealth technology, it was well along, but the B-1 decision was made in July of '77.

KEEFER: Right.

BROWN: And by that time, although the F-117 was clearly going to go ahead, it was not a substitute for the B-1 bomber, and we had just begun to think about a stealth bomber. So I would say, yes, it played a part, but it was not the predominate.

KEEFER: Well, thank you very much.

[End of Interview]