

**Matloff:** This is part V of an oral history interview with Mr. David O. Cooke, held in the Pentagon on December 20, 1989, at 3:00 p.m. Again representing the OSD Historical Office are Drs. Alfred Goldberg and Maurice Matloff.

Mr. Cooke, at our last session we talked about your service as Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Administration in the Rumsfeld era and had begun to discuss your service during the Brown period, January 1977 to January 1981. At the very end we talked about organizational changes introduced in that era, including formation of Washington Headquarters Services in October 1977 and your appointment as Director. In retrospect, Mr. Brown indicated that there were limits to effective reform, in a speech entitled "Managing the Defense Department--Why It Can't Be Done." He gave this speech at the University of Michigan in March 1981, soon after he left office. He stated, "Defense cannot be 'managed' like a business. But it can be led so as to preserve most effectively our national security interests." Can you explain what he meant and what led him to that conclusion? Did he ever discuss such thoughts with you?

**Cooke:** I am very familiar with the article, and have referred to it in my own speeches often. It is a little akin to Graham Allison's statement that "big government is like big business in all non-essential details." I had never discussed this specific article with Harold while he was Secretary of Defense. But he makes the point in the article that there are certain social or economic goals legitimately placed on executive departments, including the Department of Defense, "whose call is neither to efficiency nor economy." He had in mind such desirable goals as small business, affirmative action, competition, and the like. Another point is that unlike business, which has a somewhat simple bottom line of profit and loss statement, there is no one single factor which can determine exactly how well the DoD is being managed. Like all other secretaries, Harold found that in many respects decision-

making in the DoD is more akin to a legislative process than to the authoritarian decision-making from the top that the military organization is often pictured to be.

Matloff: During that talk, another point that he made was that the Department has to prepare for war.

Cooke: "And it would call in the things that are important to war and not in peace." Yes, I am familiar with that.

Matloff: Would you agree with the views offered in this talk?

Cooke: I think I recommended that other Secretaries of Defense coming in read that. I think it is a remarkably good statement of the problems faced by any Secretary of Defense.

Matloff: Is it any different from what Schlesinger had to say, "You cannot control a department of this size; you have to guide it." Do you find any conflict between them here?

Cooke: I don't think so. I think Jim and Harold had the same view. Every Secretary of Defense takes office--perhaps Harold didn't because of his prior service here--with the conviction that the Department of Defense is, if not like a small sports car, a little like a destroyer, and if the commanding officer says "hard right," the destroyer swings promptly and smartly to the right. A decision by of the Secretary of Defense takes a long time to percolate, much less to be implemented throughout the organization--not primarily because of resistance, although there is some of that in any organization, but simply because of the sheer size and complexity in dispersion of the Department of Defense.

Matloff: How close was Harold Brown with the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the successive chairmen, George Brown and David Jones? Did he prefer to deal with the Chairman rather than the Joint Chiefs as a corporate body?

Cooke: Parenthetically, I object to the characterization--I always have--of calling the Chiefs a corporate body. They were never a corporate body, because a corporation

has the power within itself to resolve differences in the corporation. The Board of Directors votes. The Chiefs could never do that. So "corporate," to a lawyer like me, is a complete misnomer.

**Goldberg:** But with the Secretary of Defense sitting there they become a corporate body, and he makes the decisions.

**Cooke:** But the Chiefs don't. Besides, a corporate body is the decision of the members of the corporation; the Secretary of Defense is the decision-maker. But going back, I think every Secretary, as a rule, preferred to deal with the chairman, not with the Chiefs as a group. That was certainly true in the days of Radford, and was certainly true in the days of Maxwell Taylor, McNamara, and so on down the line. In the case of Harold, he knew George well and had a large hand in picking Dave Jones. Come to think of it, Brown was appointed during Schlesinger's term.

**Goldberg:** Brown was appointed in July 1974.

**Matloff:** Did he have any problem getting information from the Joint Chiefs of Staff or the services, and if so, how did he get it?

**Cooke:** There are formal channels of communication in any hierarchical organization, not only in Defense, but in the Catholic Church and General Motors, which never tell the complete story, and there are informal channels. Every Secretary has used both. Some are more successful and some seek it more than others. Harold had many contacts and friends because of his prior service in the building. On the other hand, I can recall shortly after Jim Schlesinger took over when he called me in and asked me, "OK, Doc, tell me what's really going on." I think any Secretary uses a number of sources in and out of the building.

**Goldberg:** Do you think that there were instances in which the Joint Chiefs withheld information, by design?

**Cooke:** You can quibble about whether it is the affirmative act of withholding or of simply not telling everything. That's a close judgment call. My only answer is that I

suspect that there are times when the Chiefs indeed did that. As a matter of fact, I suspect there are times when you don't tell me everything completely that goes on.

Goldberg: It's because you don't have time. That could be their excuse, too.

Matloff: How did he see the role of the service secretaries?

Cooke: Under Harold they were Cliff Alexander, Army; Navy, Graham Claytor and Eddie Hidalgo; Air Force, John Stetson, followed by Hans Mark. Harold, of course, had been a service secretary, and was familiar with the role. I don't recall that he was particularly close to the service secretaries or used them in a way different from any other Secretary of Defense.

Matloff: Did he give them any greater role in participating in the budgetary process, or in the initiation of policy and programs? Some might give them more in this area than others.

Cooke: Cap Weinberger, to be precise, I suppose. Harold resurrected and increased the authority of PA&E, under Russ Murray, whom he had brought back, because he had worked with Russ when Russ was principal deputy in that organization, when Harold was Secretary of the Air Force. I don't think we returned to the so-called draft presidential memoranda, which never came out of draft and in most cases were never sent to the President in the McNamara days. But I think Harold tended to let the resource allocation program start at the OSD level.

Goldberg: Graham Claytor told us that he thought too much of this centralized power had been gathered into OSD, that the services had been diminished too much, and that more should have been left to the services.

Cooke: I suspect Graham thought that more as Secretary of the Navy than when he became Deputy.

Goldberg: He told us that just before he left as Deputy. He still believed it.

Matloff: Let's focus for a moment on Brown's relations with President Carter in the White House. Did he deal directly with him, or clear with the Assistant for National

Security Affairs, Brzezinski? Carter gave Brzezinski Cabinet status; did this complicate Brown's position in defense matters? Also, you had a president who in the early part of his administration was playing a strong personal role in defense decisions. Was this putting Brown in an uncomfortable position?

Cooke: It has been said that Harold was the right Secretary of Defense, but for the wrong President. The relationship with Brzezinski was complicated, I suspect, by the fact that Brzezinski's role model was undoubtedly Henry Kissinger. He was determined--at least from the standpoint of somebody not directly concerned in the apparatus--if you will, to out-Kissinger Kissinger. Brzezinski's main struggles early in the Carter administration were with my friend, Cy Vance. The result was, I suppose, foreordained. President Carter, a graduate of Annapolis who had served as a commissioned officer, thought, I suspect, that he knew a considerable amount of what defense was all about. In addition, by simply his personality and habits of working, President Carter was a man who loved and wallowed in exquisite detail. Much like not being able to see the forest for the trees. President Carter was focusing on the leaves, at times--scheduling the White House tennis courts, for example. To that extent, particularly in the beginning, I suspect Harold felt constrained or restricted in some degree with the Carter White House. That was probably compounded by the fact that as Ham Jordan said in effect, "we were not elected to bring back the same tired old people"--meaning, in fact, Cyrus Vance, among others. Jordan and Carter conceived themselves as outsiders running against the Washington establishment, much as a subsequent president did, much more successfully, in the years to come. On the other hand, I think President Carter grew to rely quite heavily on Harold, even in matters not directly related to the Department of Defense. Harold played an important role in the reaching of the Camp David Accords, although they were not what I would consider primarily defense business. He was successful in ultimately persuading the President to grant

some real increases in the Defense budget. The Defense budget bottomed out at that time, and in the last couple years of Carter's administration there was an upturn which foreshadowed the flood of the Reagan years.

Matloff: Would you go so far as to say that the increasing troubles for the Carter administration, particularly in its last years, gave Brown a freer hand to develop his program for defense?

Cooke: I wouldn't go that far with it, but the ill-fated situation in the embassy in Iran, I suspect, made it easier for the Secretary of Defense to argue for increases. On the other hand, even early in the game, the decisions on the B-1 and so forth were those pushed by Harold. So, on balance, although I don't know personally how close the relations were, I think he played a very key role, and eventually reached a modus operandi with Brzezinski.

Matloff: Did he have any channels that he set up for handling the White House contacts with the Pentagon? I go back always to the Laird example where he limited them. Laird wanted to know exactly who was touching base with whom in the White House. Was there anything like this going on in the Brown era?

Cooke: Sure. I think they were essentially about the same--in national security matters at the OSD level his senior special assistant, and then the relationship with State and the NSC staff of the about to be Under Secretary for Policy and the Assistant Secretary for ISA.

Matloff: How about Brown's dealings with Congress? How would you characterize his style, particularly in presenting and defending the Defense budget?

Cooke: Articulate, rational, unemotional; his knowledge was respected.

Matloff: How successful?

Cooke: I think quite successful, and he retained the respect of Congress. Harold wears pretty well. He was never an outgoing man in the sense of a Mel Laird. He is a

**Cooke:** I think quite successful, and he retained the respect of Congress. Harold wears pretty well. He was never an outgoing man in the sense of a Mel Laird. He is a private man with a wry sense of humor normally reserved for close associates and small groups.

**Matloff:** How serious a problem was interservice rivalry for him?

**Cooke:** That is an endemic problem in the Department of Defense. For that matter, it is a problem within a service, as between SAC and TAC in the Air Force, or the brown shoe-black shoe Navy, or combat arms and the rest of the Army. The problems of organizational rivalry, generally speaking, particularly since the rivalry is often couched in terms of roles and missions and, hence, over the very existence of our great republic, are in many respects the arguments over resources--who will get the dollars to run the programs. In the Brown administration--and we are pretty far afield from things of which I have any direct knowledge--I think the interservice rivalry, as far as weapons systems were concerned, was primarily between Navy and Air Force. For the Army the general complaint of Shy Meyer was that we had a hollow army and it was not getting enough resources. The problems between Navy and Air Force in roles and missions involved, first of all, strategic bombardment and nuclear weapons, the money spent for submarine-launched ballistic missiles vis-a-vis the Air Force, particularly the Air Force bomber fleet. Harold was able to get the President to approve the cancellation of the B-1 program, when, like a Phoenix from the ashes, it rose again.

**Matloff:** There is a problem in the literature on the B-1 program. In his memoirs, Carter quotes his diary for June 24, 1977, as saying, "Harold Brown has been very courageous to recommend that the B-1 not be built." There are some other sources that say that Brown personally favored continuing the B-1 program at a minimum production rate. Can you shed any light on what Brown's position was on the B-1?

**Cooke:** I always thought that he recommended against the continuation of the B-1.

**Goldberg**: Jones went along with him.

**Cooke**: For a variety of reasons.

**Goldberg**: Yes. And was denounced as a traitor; but he did it anyway.

**Matloff**: Do you have the impression that the President generally followed the recommendations of the Defense Department with reference to weapons acquisition and deployment in the Brown era?

**Cooke**: I have that impression, yes.

**Matloff**: In such things as not deploying the B-1 bomber; recommending the upgrading of the B-52; and then going ahead with the development of the stealth technology?

**Cooke**: Yes.

**Matloff**: President Carter decided, in connection with the DoD budget request of 1979, to cancel major weapons programs of the three services--such things as the Bradley armored personnel carrier, the nuclear cruiser, the FB-111 strategic bomber. Did this undermine Brown's influence with the military?

**Cooke**: Remember, Carter came in with what was then the newest buzzword in defense programming, ZBB--zero-based budgeting. It was something that he claimed to have tried successfully in Georgia, and other companies were proclaimed successful. Those who are now perhaps cloaked in the mantle of total quality management were zero-based budgeters in those days. It turned out that zero-based budgeting was never even going actually back to ground zero. But Carter came in saying that the defense budget could be reduced and he was going to do it. The B-1 was only one casualty. The Bradley was also, at that time, and there were others.

**Matloff**: Did it encourage "end runs" by the services to the Congress, and how did he deal with them?

witnesses and to examine with particularity the Executive Branch program. We cavil at the amount of detail that successive congresses are getting into, but the exercise of the right to appropriations and oversight is constitutional.

**Goldberg:** We're talking about hard lobbying.

**Cooke:** Yes. Having said that, like other problems, hard lobbying of the Congress went on in the Brown administration. The B-1 certainly is a good example in the Air Force. The Bradley vehicle had its supporters there. The typical iron triangle of the service--the committee chair, committee staff, and the contractor--existed in Harold's time, as it always does.

**Matloff:** You mentioned zero-based budgeting. How did this department react to introduction of that order of Carter?

**Cooke:** We largely resisted it, on the theory that, unlike other departments, we had a perfectly good and valid system called PPBS, so therefore we did not need the discipline or extra work of zero-based budgeting.

**Goldberg:** What they really needed was the Air Force's zero-defects program. That would have fixed things right. They could have teamed it go with ZBB --ZD to go with ZBB.

**Cooke:** You sound like you're snoring. I think on that score, as in the case of President Carter's reorganization plans, it was only after the President specifically directed Harold that we moved to do the three family studies that we did.

**Goldberg:** The President didn't direct the establishment of the Under Secretary positions, did he?

**Cooke:** No.

**Goldberg:** That was Brown's own idea.

**Cooke:** Our Machiavelli here--Gene Fubini, who knows. Gene was a very close advisor to Harold over the years. Gene, who is a delightful man, and in many respects a technological genius, thought he was a managerial genius. I differed

**Cooke**: Our Machiavelli here--Gene Fubini, who knows. Gene was a very close advisor to Harold over the years. Gene, who is a delightful man, and in many respects a technological genius, thought he was a managerial genius. I differed most of the time in that assessment with Gene. The merger of installations, the logistics function, and manpower was a Fubini special.

**Matloff**: Can you shed any light on two other issues which were controversial--the deployment of the MX missile and development of the neutron bomb?

**Cooke**: I cannot shed any light at all other than my memory of the newspapers and casual discussions.

**Matloff**: In his first annual report early in 1978 Brown pointed to the need for "clearer top management focus on NATO aspects of defense management at both OSD and Service levels." Did he feel that this was achieved? One of the changes that he made was the introduction of a Special Advisor on NATO Affairs.

**Cooke**: Indeed it was. Bob Komer.

**Goldberg**: Did he make for a clear focus?

**Cooke**: At least a very vocal focus. Bob may well have been the Bill Bennett of the Brown administration. You may use that line.

**Goldberg**: He wouldn't like it.

**Cooke**: No, he wouldn't.

**Matloff**: Was this clearer focus reflected in defense policies and dealings with NATO allies during the Brown administration?

**Cooke**: Yes, I think it was one of Harold's really significant contributions. He was convinced that the most important alliance in the world involved the European theater in NATO. He established the office in recognition of that. The office bridged not only the responsibilities heretofore assigned to ISA, but also many of those assigned to what became the Under Secretary for Research and Engineering, particularly with respect to interoperability, burdensharing, and the like. Harold

European countries who were now vying with us, and in some areas surpassing us, were not paying their appropriate shares. It was a familiar refrain over the years.

**Goldberg:** When Komer moved up to the Under Secretary position he just took that with him, and they didn't have the Special Assistant any more, did they?

**Cooke:** When Bob relieved Stan Resor, he, at least for a time being, had a three-star general as his deputy--Dick Groves, whose father, among other things, had built the Pentagon before he went on to unbuild Japan as the head of the Manhattan Project. By the way, there was a predecessor to Groves, a Lt. Gen., also an engineer. Komer wanted the significance of three stars working for him as a visual demonstration of the importance Harold placed on that organization. To go back to your question, the function moved up, and, at least until Dick had completed his normal tour, the office remained in what is now part of John Betti's office space and functioned as a separate entity apart from ISA and the Assistant and Deputy Under Secretary for Arms Control, Walt Slocum.

**Matloff:** You mentioned the Camp David Accords of September 1978. Do you recall the OSD reaction to those Accords at the time?

**Cooke:** No, that's out of my area of cognizance.

**Matloff:** Let's go to the hostage crisis, another key event after the fall of the Shah in January 1979. What lessons were being drawn by OSD from the handling of that crisis and the failure of the rescue attempt in April 1980?

**Cooke:** One lesson which we didn't learn very well, if Grenada is a subsequent example. The idea that all joint operations have to be divided among the services so each one can share in the glory is not a very good way to plan. The hostage crisis, also, was to a degree a humbling experience for the uniformed military and the Department of Defense, because there were many obvious errors, at least in retrospect, that could have been avoided.

**Matloff:** Were you aware of any drug-related problems in this connection?

Department of Defense, because there were many obvious errors, at least in retrospect, that could have been avoided.

**Matloff**: Were you aware of any drug-related problems in this connection?

**Cooke**: I don't follow you.

**Matloff**: Any hint of drug use among the service people involved?

**Cooke**: Not that came to my attention.

**Goldberg**: Any information about it since?

**Cooke**: As far as I know, nothing.

**Goldberg**: Allegations have been made.

**Cooke**: Was it your colleagues in history who are making these allegations?

**Matloff**: It's the first we've heard of it, too.

**Cooke**: What were they supposed to be on?

**Matloff**: It was not indicated. Secretary Brown did activate the Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force at MacDill Field in March 1980 in reaction to events in Iran and Afghanistan. Was your office consulted or did it play any role in the process of activating that force?

**Cooke**: I think we looked at some of the frames of reference for the assignment of missions; that's all. Bear in mind that when Harold was Secretary of the Air Force, Bob McNamara established CINCMEAFA, which was also down at MacDill and was a ready reaction force whose job it was, in addition to some residual responsibilities in the Near East, to train and equip emergency response teams. Harold was familiar with that, and that eventually became REDCOM. It was transmuted several times, but the specific task force was, in part, the reaction to perceived weaknesses and also a demonstration that we were taking the lessons to heart.

**Matloff**: The events of today remind us that Brown and the JCS played quite a role in getting the Senate approval of the treaties signed with Panama back in September of 1977. Did your office become involved with that in any way?

**Cooke**: No.

**Goldberg**: You are not involved in the current operations in Panama, I take it?

**Cooke**: What is going on today? No.

**Matloff**: In retrospect, how would you rate Brown's degree of success with the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the services, the Congress and the President? How effective was that administration?

**Cooke**: Let me say much higher than Dick Stubbing rated him. I thought Harold, in many areas, was the strongest Secretary of Defense we have had.

**Matloff**: What would you regard as his major achievements?

**Cooke**: Primarily the turning around of the budget resources; strengthening real improvements in the NATO arena; and the push in the stealth technology and the like.

**Goldberg**: Absence of major acquisitions scandals, too?

**Cooke**: That may be a matter of luck, more than anything else.

**Goldberg**: Carlucci said that Brown was an authentic genius.

**Cooke**: If you wanted to give the Stanford-Binet or any of the standard intelligence tests, I suspect Harold would come out on top, closely followed by Schlesinger, and McNamara down somewhat from that. I've always made the distinction between being intelligent and being smart. Mel Laird is an intelligent man, and he is also a very smart man.

**Goldberg**: Carlucci would finish high, too.

**Cooke**: Yes, in both ways. Carlucci was not the clone or shadow of Cap Weinberger at all. If you talk to Frank about Cap today, sometimes his criticisms are, if not acid, quite penetrating.

**Matloff**: Since we are talking about weapons acquisition, did Brown see any need for changes in the system by DoD?

**Cooke:** Every Secretary of Defense one way or another has wrestled with the tar baby of defense procurement and acquisition, and there are endemic problems. Some of them refer to the insistence by the Congress often on measures whose call is not to economy or efficiency. Some of the price competition we get forced into. Technical intelligence is pretty good for maybe three years, but when it takes eight to eleven years to bring a weapons system into being, as John Rubel used to say, the state of the art is the limiting factor, not technical intelligence. So when AWACS was completed, in my mind we had a weapons system looking for a mission. Now it's finally found an important mission but that was not the original purpose of the AWACS when it was being sold as something to be developed. That may be a good example of why you should develop under the state of the art and then you will find a use for it.

**Matloff:** Would you like to make any other comments on the Brown period before we move on to the Weinberger era?

**Cooke:** I recall a time when a luckless Air Force officer broke his nose in the swimming pool. Harold swam, as I did, and still do.

**Goldberg:** He broke Brown's nose?

**Cooke:** Yes. Either he kicked Harold, or Harold overtook him. The pool has only three lanes, and if three or four people are in it, it's a little like Shirley Highway. A typical Brown story comes to mind. We were swimming in the pool, and we both did about a half mile or thereabouts. I laboriously would count so many laps, and it turned out to be 36 lengths or 18 laps of the pool. Occasionally I would lose count, and I was never sure whether I had done a couple extra. I discussed this problem with Harold, and he looked at me like I was crazy. He said, "I know how fast I swim, so all I do is look at the time I go in and then I glance at the time and I can figure out when I have gone enough." That is a typical scientist's, rather than a lawyer's, approach to things. I am very fond of Harold. He has a wry sense of humor. When a

Secretary of Defense leaves, he holds farewells, and in Harold's case there were farewell dinners for his team, down in the mess. When a representative of the Brown team made the answering speech to thank him on one of these occasions, the representative inevitably was Bob Komer, by self-acclamation. Bob made the comment about how he was reminded of the French Revolution and the nobles (he being the nobles) and the tumbrels clattering up to the guillotine. Harold came in as if on cue, saying sotto voce, "It is a far, far better thing you've done, Komer, than you have ever done before."