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Interview with Alexander Haig, Jr  
Part III, May 2, 1996

Goldberg: This is Part III of a series of interviews with Alexander M. Haig, Jr., held in Washington on May 2, 1996. Representing the OSD Historical Office are Alfred Goldberg and Ronald Landa.

General Haig, last time we discussed some matters dealing with the Vietnam War. We'd like to move on now to a discussion of the conduct of the war, peace negotiations, and then other foreign problems. You have already discussed to some extent your view of the war and its conduct by Nixon and Kissinger. Some of the planning for the conduct of the war was done during your service on the NSC staff. What role did you play in connection with the conduct of the war--planning, and afterward?

Haig: I would describe myself as the expert for the President and Kissinger on whether or not the policies were succeeding. I made a number of survey trips to Southeast Asia.

Goldberg: Were there other military men in the White House who to any extent may have served in a similar capacity?

Haig: We had various members of the team accompany me.

Goldberg: But you were senior.

Haig: I was in charge of it. We had people like Larry Lynn, a systems analyst, and Ambassador John Negroponte. My assessment was that the way we were conducting the war was not succeeding. On the other hand, I never had any doubt, nor did my reports reflect, that we couldn't succeed if we wanted to. But the conviction that this was a struggle for hearts and minds and a struggle by the downtrodden for emancipation from a corrupt South Vietnam regime. This perception seemed to dominate the bureaucracy as well as the body politic.

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Goldberg: You say we could have succeeded; what would you have done to bring about a successful conclusion?

Haig: The only way success could be achieved, in my view, was to eliminate the distortions in America's strategic thinking which began with the Kennedy years, involving the so-called spectrum of conflict theory--nuclear, local nuclear, conventional, and insurgency.

Goldberg: Flexible response.

Haig: Yes--which, while intellectually sound, became a vehicle for deluding ourselves that we could win the hearts and minds struggle while avoiding the risks of superpower tensions. In reality the local insurgency had open-ended support from sanctuary, whether it be North Vietnam or Moscow. It was my conviction that they had to take on this sophistry, that it was very wrong-headed. And so long as we conducted the war restrained in the air and restrained in the scope of the battlefield and remained unwilling to apply the diplomatic pressure on Moscow that was catechist and logistician of this conflict, so long as we were confined by those constraints, we weren't going to be able to succeed. I had concluded that in 1964 and 1965. I made these points in my war college study in 1966. I also said this to Secretary McNamara in '65. Our study was chosen to be presented. Max Taylor was in the front row. I recall he got up and walked out. I offended him because I criticized what I called "inching escalation" and incremental conflict management. This concept can be assaulted from a number of perspectives. One is the one I just gave you. The other is, of course, that if you believe that you can achieve a negotiated solution by minuscularly applying power in order to show your determination, you usually achieve the opposite outcome, because your opponent can easily match what you do and will, and you are confronted with the very escalation of the conflict you are trying to terminate.

Landa: A prolongation.

Haig: Yes. That was all part of this War College study written by a committee which I chaired when I was a lieutenant colonel and was the result of impressions I developed in the Pentagon. I went to the War College after serving McNamara. That same year he asked me to come back to the Pentagon from the War College and become his military assistant. One of his military assistants, an Army senior brigadier general, had suddenly died of a heart attack. I told him no because I was going over and fight the war started by the administration. And I did. So when I was later assigned to the NSC I had quite a background on the Vietnam war, a year in combat at the division, battalion and brigade levels. I kept inserting in my NSC reports that we would have to do something more dramatic than we had been doing. This point was not particularly well received at the time. In all fairness, I have to say that politically, the opposition to the war in America and the prospect of escalation was absolutely solid. You know what happened to Westy [General William C. Westmoreland], after Tet in 1968. You can imagine what the opposition was by 1969-'70. Another thing that concerned me grievously was the state of readiness of our armed forces. It was at the point when drugs were running rampant; it was very serious. So I quickly became a strong proponent in NSC circles for taking the conflict to Hanoi without further delay and to mine, bomb, and to attack sanctuaries in Cambodia, and, if necessary, Laos. That was the character of my input during the three and a half years I was with the NSC staff as Deputy to Henry Kissinger. Many, of course, considered such an approach criminal. The really criminal action was turning the conflict into an endless meat grinder. It would have been far better not to have gone in in the first place.

Goldberg: Did you approve of the invasion and bombing of Cambodia?

Haig: I not only approved, I probably was a key person in the planning of it, working with the Joint Chiefs of Staff. I regretted that public opposition forced Nixon to terminate and limit the operation.

Goldberg: What about Secretary Laird and [Gen. Robert E.] Pursely? Was the White House putting pressure on them, or were you working with the Joint Chiefs?

Haig: They were aware of this. They probably didn't like it. Laird didn't like anything that worked against the concept of getting out of there as quickly as possible. He was far less concerned about getting out with honor than the President or we were. He never saw the war as part of a global struggle with the Soviets. He viewed it as an unpolitic act of a Democratic President that a Republican President shouldn't take the blame for. I can understand that point of view from a domestic politician. It was an approach that just didn't take full cognizance of what the conflict was all about.

Goldberg: Did you play a role in connection with negotiations for ending the war? Dealing in the first place with the South Vietnamese?

Haig: Yes, but you should keep in mind that President Nixon, Kissinger, I, and a few key insiders had to do it with carrots and sticks. The last great battle in Vietnam was the battle of my battalion at Apgu in 1967. I was then in command of the 26th Infantry of the First Infantry Division. Before that battle General Bill Depuy was relieved and shortly afterwards the orders to the commanders in Vietnam were to cool it. No more main force engagements, no more aggressive tactics; that's the simple fact of it. After that American units were basically in a holding pattern while we sought negotiated settlement and later executed the Vietnamization concept. There were some big battles fought afterwards that were forced on us because the enemy hit us, as at Khe Sanh. And Tet in '68, of course, was forced on us. But 1967 marked

the end of the aggressive American operations. Orders came right out of the Pentagon. I don't think the policy came out of the chief of staff of the Army, although he was a loyal subordinate. That's how the war began to deteriorate. From very early on, Kissinger had established contact with the North Vietnamese in order to meet and discuss things, in a covert manner, so that neither side had to be concerned with the political ramifications of the talks. This was after the '68 elections. A series of meetings began in Paris. There wasn't any doubt that Henry knew where I stood on the war. I was his in-house hawk. He was a hawk, too, despite all the raps he's taken to the contrary. However, his negotiating team did not include Al Haig. It included Winston Lord, Negroponte, Ambassador Sullivan, and a number of different players. I set the meetings up--the venues, travel, and communications with the President and Henry--and was the conveyer of the reports from the ground. I knew all of what was going on and became increasingly restive that these were sterile discussions; and they were. Actually, the talks were three sided--the Vietnamese and the U.S. in Paris, and the U.S. and the Soviets in Washington.

Goldberg: North and South Vietnamese?

Haig: Most of it was with North Vietnamese and Russians, and only when it looked like some movement was imminent did the South become involved. There wasn't any meaningful movement until the first mining and bombing of the North. That was in the spring of '72, as I recall, and the North suddenly wanted to sit down and talk seriously. That fall they made substantial concessions that looked very promising, only to be withdrawn at the last minute. I sat in on the meetings from that point forward because I think the President felt that Henry might stray a little. However, I would never have acted with the President behind Kissinger's back as has sometimes been rumored.

Goldberg: You sat in on the meetings in Paris?

Haig: Yes.

Goldberg: The last meetings.

Haig: Yes.

Landa: Beginning when, approximately?

Haig: The fall meetings.

Goldberg: October, November 1972.

Haig: Yes, and then in the follow-up meetings, following the sudden hardening of the N.

Vietnamese. I returned to Paris with Henry to reconfirm that the North had actually withdrawn their concessions and they had. It was then that I recommended to the President that he take the war to Hanoi, in no uncertain terms. Henry reluctantly concluded the same thing. He wasn't an advocate, but rather a supporter.

Goldberg: That resulted in the December bombing?

Haig: Right. In the spring, at the time of the first mining, everybody--the secretary of state and secretary of defense--told the President that if he did it, it would be the end of the dialogue with the Russians, the end of the summit. They all thought it was politically important for that summit to take place, which it was. I said, "You don't know your customer. The Russians aren't going to a summit because they want to settle Vietnam; they want it to go on for their own reasons. They are not going to terminate the summit no matter what we do in Vietnam." I was a lone voice, along with one other, John Connally of Texas. The President went ahead and did it, and there was no cancellation of the summit. Henry thought it would be the end. I don't mean to be critical, because he was otherwise a firm, steady force and a brilliant man. Later, when we restarted the bombing in December, all hell broke loose. The Congress was

in recess. We were getting letters threatening an impeachment vote the first day back after Christmas. Everybody blinked, even the tough guys. But I said, "Let them threaten impeachment. You should keep this bombing up until you get Hanoi's agreement to withdraw from the South." In fairness, it was easy for me, I didn't have to take the political rap. In the final analysis, Nixon caved to domestic pressure. Even then, he won, because before the halt we got a message from Hanoi and they were ready to talk. But if we had kept the bombing up for another two weeks to a month, we could have settled that conflict on terms that might have guaranteed success. As it was, they bought off on the earlier draft. At my request, I had returned to the Army by final agreement time but I had to come back temporarily to the White House and try to sell it to Thieu. I had had reservations about the agreements, and concerns about Vietnam were instrumental in my departing the NSC in the first place.

Goldberg: With reference to the negotiations, did OSD play any role, was it kept informed?

Did Laird know what was going on?

Haig: Henry would give him a report on the phone or in direct bilateral meetings. Laird didn't much care, in the sense of being involved in the esoteric aspects of the problem. In the meantime, he was withdrawing Americans at a rate that was mind-boggling. I am convinced that General Abrams, a loyal soldier who had to preside over this, was torn to pieces by it. He knew it was wrong. Nevertheless, when the agreement was concluded it had three important provisions. The one that made me the most uncomfortable was the continued presence of North Vietnamese forces in the South, although the North Vietnamese were to be relocated and assembled in theoretically "benign areas." I had no confidence in that. The two key ingredients that made the agreement a high risk but acceptable solution were, first, the determination of the President to resume the bombing if there were violations; this was

conveyed to both the North Vietnamese and Thieu; second, the commitment for a high level of support in terms of military equipment, supplies, economic support, etc. I suppose in hindsight the naiveté of those of us in the White House who painfully went along with this solution, was the fact that we didn't know what was going to happen with respect to both of these last two conditions. Never before in the history of the United States had we been saddled with an agreement that did not have the certainty and inevitability of sanctions should it be violated. What happened in the spring and summer of 1973 after I got called back to the White House as chief of staff was that Congress actually legislated a permanent termination of all bombing in Southeast Asia. That was a green light to Hanoi to do whatever they wanted. Then there was the slowdown of supplies to South Vietnam and ultimately a reduction in all levels of support. When the North Vietnamese offensive started during the Ford administration, when I was serving in NATO, the South didn't even have grenades to throw at the enemy units or ammo for their weapons to fire. That's how bad it had become. No agreement would have survived that congressional irresponsibility.

Goldberg: You weren't happy about the peace settlement.

Haig: No, but I recognized that there was very little that the President could do about it at that juncture. He'd lost the support of the country; he'd lost the support of the Congress. God knows, he never had support of the press while Kennedy and Johnson did. But not Nixon. When Vietnam collapsed in 1975 I was over in NATO. I can't tell you that urging President Thieu to accept the accords in 1973 was an easy or pleasurable project. It was very difficult and painful for me. I don't think he would ever have done it if I hadn't been simply the messenger. We had become trusted colleagues. In hindsight, he was right and we were wrong. Nevertheless no one anticipated the later congressional restraints.



Goldberg: Did he have any real choice?

Haig: Probably not, but remember, he had reassurance that we would resume bombing Hanoi if they violated this agreement, and that he would continue to have a full level of logistic and economic support.

Goldberg: But we didn't offer him that, did we?

Haig: Yes, we did.

Goldberg: That was the understanding that you conveyed to him?

Haig: The President conveyed it to him in a letter, and it was announced publicly by the White House. It was conveniently forgotten by the reconstructionists in Washington. But it's not true. It was always right up front. Why would any nation not insist on sanction rights if a treaty were violated? Unless you wanted Hanoi to win, and by that time there were many who did.

Certainly not any responsible official would give up the right to sanctions.

Goldberg: And you offered that in good faith?

Haig: Yes, and had President Nixon not been forced to resign, I continue to believe he would have done it regardless of the cost. I can say that without any reservation. Nixon would have restarted the bombing. Let me tell you what happened when the peace settlement took place. Henry didn't go to Paris. Bill Rogers went. Henry, however, got nominated for a peace prize. I was on my way, I thought, to resuming my Army career. However, I got called over from the Pentagon to do this last job on Thieu. I think we all believed we could continue to support Thieu and enforce the accords. What sovereign nation wouldn't?

Goldberg: And Kissinger also.

Haig: Kissinger believed this. By the time I was recalled to be C/S Watergate arrived.

Incidentally, I had decoupled from everything in the White House because I was rejoining an

Army at a time when the chief of staff, Gen. Abrams, had not been confirmed. There was no chief of staff for a good part of the time I was in the Pentagon as Army Vice Chief. Abrams's confirmation had been held up over the Cambodian bombing issue.

Goldberg: Who was acting chief during that time?

Haig: I was. During my first months over there, Abe's confirmation was held up and he couldn't sign the papers. We had a few little crises at that time, too, like the Wounded Knee crisis. I handled that during April. I'd go home at night and get odd telephone calls from Ron Ziegler telling me things in the White House were going to hell in a handbasket. In early May while visiting Fort Benning I got a call from Bob Haldeman (I knew the President was in the room) asking me to come back and replace him. First I refused, but they called me back, and I finally said I would do it, but only with Gen. Abrams's O.K. and also with the understanding that it would be temporary. Of course, Abe wasn't going to stop it. At that point, he might have welcomed it, because he didn't know yet whether I was up to being Vice Chief of the Army.

Goldberg: Had Schlesinger taken over by this time?

Haig: No.

Goldberg: Richardson was still there?

Haig: Yes. Imagine the people on the Army staff, especially the senior generals, seeing a man being made vice chief who had never even been a lieutenant general. There was a similar upheaval when Ike was given SHAPE; also when Abe was promoted, because he had been so close to Bobby Kennedy. Nevertheless, he earned it, but there was a lot of discomfiture among the older generals. That's certainly understandable.

I was called back on May 8 and all the conditions I put down were accepted. I wouldn't have to handle Watergate. But no one could quite understand the extent of the White House mess. It was extremely taxing. There were some 90 high level vacancies in high places in the Executive Branch, to include 2 or 3 Cabinet positions. Agency heads and Cabinet members were gone. My first task was filling key vacancies--Richardson to Justice, Schlesinger to Defense, Colby to CIA, Simon to Treasury, and Love to Energy. Harlow and Laird agreed to become counselors to the President and Kissinger was to replace Rogers, with Scowcroft replacing Kissinger.

Goldberg: To go back to negotiations for a minute; I presume that your position would be that it was better that Rogers and Laird were not involved particularly in the negotiations until the very end?

Haig: To tell you frankly, their only input would have been to further soften conditions. The President simply did not trust them. This process was not unusual, either. Today we have Richard Holbrook shuttling to Bosnia, not the Secretaries of State or Defense. In July, while in San Clemente, we got a press report that the House was about to legislate termination of all bombing in Southeast Asia. I became very alarmed and told President Nixon this would be the end. He immediately called Washington to find out who was behind the resolution. I ended up talking with Jerry Ford, the Republican leader of the House. I asked him not to let the legislation go through. He said it had been negotiated, for almost two weeks, by none other than the President's personal representative, Mel Laird! I rushed to the President and asked if he had given Mel Laird the authority to negotiate such a resolution. The President said he had not. He then called Jerry Ford directly and asked him not to support it. Ford said his name and credibility were on the line and he had to go through with it or resign. Jerry Ford

was a fine and a good man who was critical to the President as leader. That's the inside story of the bombing halt.

Goldberg: To go back a few years before that: do you remember the Pentagon Papers? How did you and Kissinger react at that time, 1971?

Haig: When it was revealed by the New York Times, I was not especially surprised. I knew those men were involved. I had been asked by Secretary McNamara earlier to help prepare the study that later became the Pentagon Papers. I suspected that study would sooner or later serve to discredit the war. I refused to serve on the team and they let me go on to West Point after returning from Vietnam. Many of these characters didn't agree with national policy and thought they had the right, if not the obligation, to use any tactics that were necessary to change it. I think that was Ellsberg's motivation. I guess I'd seen worse in my day. Henry, on the other hand, found it very upsetting. He was profoundly shaken by it.

Goldberg: Leaks really got to him, didn't they?

Haig: Yes, but they got to the President, too. They both suffered from mutually reinforcing paranoia. But who wouldn't during the Vietnam period, when so many young Americans were dying?

Goldberg: With all their experience in Washington, you would expect them to expect leaks.

Haig: Especially Henry, because he was a great leaker, himself.

Goldberg: But he didn't want other people doing it.

Haig: That's right, it had to be on his terms, but his leaks also sought to further official policy. But they got very upset about outside leaks. I think the President always suspected that the problem was in the staff that Henry Kissinger had assembled. And indeed some of it was.

(Mort Halperin was the key drafter of the study.)

Goldberg: You believed that too, didn't you?

Haig: Not really. Take the case of Mort Halperin. When Halperin was appointed to the staff, General Earl Wheeler and J. Edgar Hoover marched into the President's office and said, "You have a crypto communist and potential spy and you should not hire him." The President said, "What do you mean?" Hoover brought in Halperin's security file, which was quite thick. I was downstairs, not Henry's deputy yet, assigned to daily intelligence compilation. Henry came into my cubbyhole and said he had been told to fire Halperin. He asked me to go through his file and see if there was sufficient cause. I did. I spent two days combing that extensive file. There was stupid stuff, but certainly not espionage. For example, he might visit Russia and fail to report it. At that time visitors were under obligation to do that. In short, he didn't go and debrief the CIA as he should have.

Goldberg: But did he do it while he was an employee?

Haig: It made no difference.

Goldberg: Did he have an obligation to debrief the CIA? Did anybody who visited the Soviet Union have that responsibility?

Haig: When they got their visas or passports, the CIA wanted to know what they were going to do and expected them to report what they did afterward. That was during the height of the Cold War. His file was replete with such items. I told Henry I couldn't find anything disqualifying against Halperin and Henry went to a meeting with Hoover and the President and said there was nothing in Halperin's file to justify his disqualification. At that point, the problem was how Henry was going to protect his people against what was coming in from J. Edgar Hoover, in this case Earl Wheeler, an outstanding man who also complained. That's how the wiretapping started. In fairness to Henry, he went along primarily to protect his

people and affirm they weren't doing what they were being accused of. It turned out they did find one leaker. All I had to do was confront him, and he admitted it and quit. At first all the wiretaps were coming through Henry's office. I went to Henry and said we should not be handling this business and that that he should get out of it. This was lawyer's business. It took about ten months, but he finally got the President to shift the FBI reports to his senior counselor John Ehrlichman. By the time the Pentagon Papers thing broke, the President was suspicious of the NSC staff and looked to Ehrlichman for loyalty checks. That's when the so-called "plumbers" were formed, which Henry and I didn't know anything about until later. I recall we had the yeoman case that triggered the plumbers. That broke the back of confidence in Henry, as far as security was concerned. The President, Ehrlichman, and Haldeman were suspicious of Henry, anyway.

Goldberg: He didn't blame Moorer and his people, who put the yeoman up to spying on Henry?

Haig: Of course he did. But I've lived and worked in the Pentagon most of my adulthood, and I can tell you that bureaucratic espionage was always the name of the game. If you can find out what the chief of staff of the Air Force is going to throw in the tank today, you do it. If the major comes in and says he has information from his buddy up in the Air Staff, pat him on the back. But it is not an evil design to sabotage the country's interest, but rather to gain points with your boss. I wasn't nearly as upset about this yeoman as Henry and the White House staff were. However, it was a great embarrassment to me because I also was a Pentagon representative in that White House. What the man took, as best I was able to ascertain, were onionskins and messages typed back from Beijing and papers like that. The yeoman

apparently brought them in to the chairman. I suspect that that poor chairman didn't know exactly how the papers were obtained or maybe didn't want to ask because he knew.

Goldberg: One of his admirals was handling it.

Haig: Yes. But the thing that made it serious was that the yeoman subsequently started feeding the stuff to his Mormon colleague, Jack Anderson. That was wrong. Some of it got into the press. There was a big investigation and I don't think they ever found anything other than what I call bureaucratic mischief, and the yeoman was sent away. Again, Henry was embarrassed.

Goldberg: They transferred him out to the state of Washington.

Haig: But that did it, as far as the President was concerned. Ehrlichman, who hated Kissinger and was jealous of him, put the so-called "plumbers" together, and from that all kinds of evils sprang which had nothing to do with Kissinger or his NSC staff.

Goldberg: I won't ask you why the United States failed in Vietnam.

Haig: Let me bring you up to date on the last chapter of the Vietnam story. Soon after President Nixon resigned I went over to NATO. While in my SHAPE headquarters in early 1975 I got a call from Brussels, from the security adviser to President Thieu. He asked to see me in behalf of President Thieu. He came to my office and asked I had it to do all over again, would I advise President Thieu to sign the peace treaty? I said that was a difficult question, but continued that there was no alternative, politically, for the President of the United States at that time. After he left, I thought to myself that this must be the end for Thieu. I immediately called Kissinger on the secure line and asked him what was going on in Vietnam, and that I suspected Thieu was collapsing. Henry confirmed that he, too, was very worried. I told him to go to President Ford and get the bombing started right away, through a Truman-like speech

to a special session. He said the President probably wouldn't be willing. I said I would then ask to see him. I flew back to Washington and told the President that the Vietnamese situation was critical and that obviously the North was violating the terms of the agreement, and that he should pull a Harry Truman, go to the House and Senate, and demand authority to bomb Hanoi immediately. President Ford said he couldn't bring the burden of Vietnam back to the American people. I suggested to him if he lost Vietnam this way he would probably also lose the presidency as well.

Goldberg: What did he have on hand to do the bombing with?

Haig: We had B-52s.

Goldberg: But they were flying a long way to begin with.

Haig: But he could have moved them along with available carrier air, and even relocate fighter bombers. He still had facilities in Thailand and Guam. He could have done it after some build-up. It wasn't two months later that it all came apart. I think President Ford knows that if he had stood firm things would have been different. Every President gets tested. They never get full credit or blame for how they react because there is such a cushion of obfuscation between them and the facts. Reconstruction, or revisionism, is Washington's major industry.

Goldberg: It is a human tendency to put off making the decision in the hopes that the problem will go away.

Haig: Sometimes that reinforces it. That's also one of my personal leadership principles. Don't make a decision in haste, if you wait long enough the problem might go away! Frequently that happens.



Goldberg: Particularly Presidents who are confronted with these decisions all the time. How much do they know? Not a whole lot, most of the time. They don't have much time to devote to any particular problem.

Let's go on to China now. What was the origin of the China initiatives?

Haig: I remember when Nixon first raised China with Kissinger. Kissinger came down to my office and said, "the man has lost control of his senses. He wants to open up relations with China. He's crazy." In fairness to Henry, he then started thinking about it and quickly decided that Nixon was right.

Goldberg: What was your role in helping bring this about?

Haig: I was at the junction box of everything Henry did. That meant all of the covert approaches we made, the Minuet including Ping Pong diplomacy. It all came through me and I over-watched the execution, whether it was a talk in Poland, a talk in Rumania, or little signals on this or that. I became very heavily involved in it, including Henry's secret trip to China. I had to put most of the modalities in place and execute them.

Goldberg: What about the Department of Defense? Was Defense in any way informed about it?

Haig: No, I can only say "Thank God." It never would have happened. They would have leaked it and the fires on the Hill would have been begun immediately. The same applied to State.

Goldberg: Why would Laird have been opposed?

Haig: I don't know that he was. When he did learn about it he thought it was great. Of course, like anything else, success has many fathers.

Goldberg: But you would agree that it is possible that he would have been perfectly comfortable with it?

Haig: Yes, but it would have leaked, nevertheless. And had it gone to Bill Rogers at State, surely it would have leaked. I had to break the news to Bill Rogers as Henry was coming back from China that Henry had been there without the Secretary of State's foreknowledge, and just before it hit the press. Bill looked at me, dismayed. How he ever tolerated what he did is beyond me. Then again, some care too much about holding their jobs.

Goldberg: He had his job for a long time. How about the India/Pakistan business?

Haig: The only tough guys in that game were Henry, myself, and the NSC staff. Laird did everything he could to sabotage what we did to demonstrate to the Indians and the Russians our determination.

Goldberg: Why?

Haig: Because it entailed aggressive action and risks. Remember, Vietnam dissent was raging.

Goldberg: You make him sound like an isolationist.

Haig: He just might be, but he was also an experienced legislator who knew the climate on the Hill.

Goldberg: What about Nixon? I assume Nixon approved of the policy, too.

Haig: Yes, this was his policy. We had very secure intercepts that indicated that the Russians were egging the Indians on. There was no doubt about that. It was the President's conviction that he had to take some very demonstrative steps to indicate that we were not going to sit idly by and watch the Indians and Soviets dismember Pakistan.

Goldberg: So you and Kissinger were the prime movers in this one?

Haig: Yes, in behalf of the President. I mean to say that Henry had to bear the onus for that. I supported him fully, but I had little, if any, profile.

Goldberg: He was out front. How about the EC-121 shootdown off the coast of North Korea in April 1969?

Haig: In my view, that was the biggest mistake of the Nixon presidency; bigger than Watergate. Because Nixon had a window of opportunity in which he could have done what Eisenhower did in Korea--shut the Vietnam war down on reasonably honorable terms while demonstrating to Moscow that the U.S. would not tolerate Soviet inspired insurgencies or violations of international law. Let me explain. When that shootdown occurred, early in the administration, we had already gone through hundreds of options on Vietnam, what to do and how to do it. Mort Halperin was the one who wrote most of the early studies on Vietnam. He wasn't a softie, he could be a reasonably tough-minded guy. But when that shootdown occurred, I went in to Henry--I wasn't very high up on the pecking order at that point--and said, "They have given you what you are looking for--Moscow, that is--and you ought to do something very vigorous and you ought to draw the line on Vietnam in the process." Kissinger then formed two teams. One was a hawk team, under me, and the other a dove team. Mort was on my team. The hawk team wrote a scenario that involved a vigorous presidential speech, the mobilization of our forces here at home, rapid air strikes against the North Korean air fields from which the strikes against our planes had emerged, an ultimatum to the Soviet Union that we were prepared to settle this and Vietnam, and that if they were not prepared to do it with us, we would take the war straight to Hanoi. We included nationwide mobilization and we included all of the things we failed to do in 1966 before risking American

lives in Vietnam. We had speeches, press releases, the whole thing put together for the EC-121 crisis.

Goldberg: What did you think your chances were of getting it through at that time?

Haig: It was hard to say, because when you work on something and you think it is right, you come to believe more strongly that it is achievable.

Goldberg: Of course, you kept Laird informed all the way, that you were doing this?

Haig: Yes, he knew the issues and alternatives.

Goldberg: And what was his reaction?

Haig: Remember, he knew we had two task forces working on how we were to react--one, a vigorous response, the other a purely diplomatic response.

Goldberg: But he didn't know what the substance was.

Haig: Before the final Presidential review of the "two studies," the President ordered movement of the Seventh Fleet to a position off of North Korea's East coast, and through some inconceivable set of delays it just didn't happen. That's when the first crisis involving Adm. Moorer and Secretary Laird developed. The President called Moorer and asked him why the fleet was not moving. Moorer said he never got the order to move it. That was the first major setback to the President's assessment of Laird. I make Laird sound like an arch villain. I respected Laird at that time. If you are President and you accept what Moorer said and do nothing, you deserve what you get. I would not have accepted it. I would have had Laird in my office and, if necessary, fired him, right then and there. We finally got the fleet moving, but it took some real doing--Haig to Pursley, Pursley to Laird, Laird to Kissinger, back and forth--and plenty of tension. Bob Pursley is a fine man, whom I respected immensely; he was in a hell of a position. As I was. In any event, I remember Henry going up

to the President's office at zero hour to get the decision on which of the two courses would be approved. One was to do nothing, in effect, and, the other was to pull an Eisenhower.

Eisenhower settled the Korean war at the very outset of his presidency by threatening to use nuclear weapons. That's when the talks began. We weren't in as serious a crisis as that, but we were in a situation which involved the Soviets above all. There was a total unwillingness, which still exists today in this capital, to call a spade a spade when the Russians are involved.

Henry came back to the office and acted disappointed. The President decided to do the easy thing and work our problems in Vietnam separately from this crisis instead of using it as a solid pretext for ending the Vietnam war and drawing the line on Moscow. I think it was a huge mistake. Some years later in a personal conversation Nixon said to me, "Al, you probably don't recall this, but the worst mistake of my presidency was not to use that EC-121 shootdown as a pretext for settling the conflict in Vietnam and straightening the deck with the Russians. It was a tremendous mistake." Right or wrong, I agreed, both at the time and later. It wouldn't have been easy, but at that point he was a brand new president, with an overwhelming vote of confidence, many people thirsting for overdue leadership. I really believe the nation would have supported that kind of action.

Goldberg: Given the strong anti-Vietnam feeling that existed?

Haig: Yes. Here was a new president who could go in and settle the thing. Instead, he waited too long to settle it. In the first year of his presidency the prospects were better.

Remember, he did get support in the last year of his first term for bombing Hanoi at the risk of a summit with the Russians and everything else. The people were with him. The press and Congress were not.

Goldberg: We've done the EC-121. In Europe, NATO, how did you and Kissinger react to Brandt's Ostpolitik ploy?

Haig: We were very upset about it. We had a number of insights from intelligence sources and elsewhere that Willy was under the influence of some who themselves were under the influence of Moscow.

Goldberg: Brandt was under the influence of Moscow?

Haig: Some of the people who worked for him were dealing directly with the Soviets. This came out later on, but we had such reports at the time. Believe me, they were irrefutable. Willy Brandt, the record will show, was influenced by the Soviets. We knew it. We were always concerned about him. Henry used to deal with him in a rather tough way, as did President Nixon. Brandt's assistant, Igon Babr, was even more pro-Soviet and in close touch with them.

Goldberg: Of course, you had a lot to do with NATO, both before and after you went there. Was there anything in connection with Iran that was particularly important during the time you were with the NSC?

Haig: On NATO, I remember the President's first trip, when I was chief of staff for the President. We had a blockage of the Autobahn by the Russians, who were testing Nixon because they thought he was weakened. We reacted very vigorously. It never got into the press, but we moved forces, and the Russians backed down right away. That's one Berlin incident. About Iran, I can't think of anything in particular. I think the President saw the Shah as a loyal friend of the United States, however flawed. Most of those flaws were the result of direct pressure from us, usually from Democratic administrations, to reform at a pace which his society wasn't ready for. I happen to believe that was a major contributor to the uprising of

the Mullahs, i.e., land reform. They were not going to tolerate the land being taken from them. I went way back to that Twitchell trip to Iran in 1962 that I referred to earlier. I think we mishandled Iran. We certainly mishandled the Shah after he got in trouble. That was when I was in NATO, some years later during the Carter presidency.

Goldberg: In regard to Cuba; we had the crisis in autumn of 1970 over the construction of the Soviet naval base at Cienfuegos. Was that coordinated with Defense?

Haig: Yes, but the initial reaction to the crisis was not. Defense, of course, knew all about the photographs and the intelligence we had as early or earlier than we did. They knew there was a base being built, but didn't make any recommendation about what we should do. At that time we got clear confirmation that Henry and the President were on their way to a meeting with the French President, Pompidou. We received a new series of photographs that confirmed beyond a doubt that they were putting in submarine pens, barracks, soccer fields, the whole works. All this was known to Defense. Henry and the President instructed me to go over and see Ambassador Dobrynin and tell him in no uncertain terms that this was unacceptable. I went to see him and gave him the clear message: "Either you take those submarine pens out now, or we will take them out for you." He stood up and said, "Is this a threat to my government?" I said, "No, it is simply a statement of fact." I went back to the White House and wrote to Henry, who was still on the airplane with the President. The next thing I knew he called me on the open line from Air Force One, screaming, "You may have blown it all. Why did you speak that way?" I said, "Henry, because that's all those people understand." He said, "The President is outraged. He is right here with me." I said, "Why don't we wait and see what happens?" And in a matter of hours the Soviets started

dismantling the base. This is an interesting historic fact that may have contributed to Dobrynin's opinion that I am a bully!

Goldberg: What about SALT I? Did you get drawn into that?

Haig: Yes; Henry, the President, and the staff experts were in Moscow negotiating. General Ed Rowley was with them at my suggestion. I was working directly with Defense and the JCS to keep them informed of the progress in the talks. We got the first draft of the agreement in early evening. Tom Moorer and I were over in my office and he said, "We can't accept it." The two leaders had already initialed it. I sent a message to Kissinger in the Kremlin saying we couldn't do it. Not just because the JCS and Defense were worried, as was I, but because of leaks and the fact that within 24 hours Dick Perle would have it up in Senator Jackson's office and the next thing we would be in a major row with Senator Jackson. Because of my message Henry woke up the President and got the Russians back to the table, mad as hell, but I'm sure he didn't have a grasp of the seriousness of the thing. It had to do with submarines and related verification provisions. In the end they got a good agreement. Even so, when they returned we got into massive rows with the neo-cons, as they are called today. Do you know who they are?

Goldberg: The neo-conservatives?

Haig: They are former conservatives (Jackson Democrats) who today have become Republicans. They are the same people who now claim credit for making Ronald Reagan a tough guy, which enabled him to win the Cold War. Whatever the case, we had a lot of problems. You could make a case that we went too far with concessions to the Soviets, but you could also make a far more persuasive case that it was a long overdue dialogue with the Soviets and as a consequence we are reaping benefits even today. I believe that. The



dialogue has actually given us confidence over time and made its contribution to the collapse of the U.S.S.R.

Goldberg: You finished your service at NSC and became vice chief of staff. Was that the result of Nixon's action on your behalf?

Haig: Not really, because I wanted out of the NSC and to return to my profession. It was also associated with Vietnam. I went to Henry and told him I had to leave because I was not comfortable with Vietnam developments. At first he didn't like it, but then he agreed. The President was very upset about my leaving his staff. At that point I think Kissinger was suspicious that the President was dealing with me too much. Actually, that was not the case. Everything the President said to me I repeated to Henry. But in an environment like that everybody is paranoiac. You could hardly trust anybody. The White House is full of the most ambitious people in the world. It's always been that way. Anyhow, I wanted to go back to the Army. I didn't know where I was going, and didn't much care. The President wanted me to be chief of staff. Henry asked me, and I said no, and that it was only right and just that Abe should be chief of staff. It was too fast for me and unfair to him. So whatever happened, it had happened between the President, Henry, and Mel Laird. I simply wanted to get back to my profession.

Goldberg: How was your relationship with Laird? Was it a good one?

Haig: Yes. It still is to this day. He's certainly not a bad man, he's just a different breed of cat from me. If I were ever picking a secretary of defense, it would be someone who had some background in national security. Mel didn't have it. He was first and foremost a politician, and a highly partisan one.

Goldberg: He served on the House Military Affairs Committee for some years. That gave him some knowledge.

Haig: About military affairs, but not strategy. He was a politician first.

Goldberg: There have been other secretaries of defense who didn't know much about strategy, either. I can name half a dozen with no trouble.

Haig: So can I; some good ones and some bad ones. I think Don Rumsfeld was probably one of the best we've ever had. I worked under him, and he was a good man.

Cheney was another good one. But neither were strategists, and since we were not at war it wasn't necessary.

Goldberg: As vice chief of staff, what was the division of labor between you and Abrams?

Haig: After he was appointed there was a prolonged confirmation process. He wasn't around, because he was going through the controversy over Cambodia. But then I did what vice chiefs do: internal Army business, boards, the procurement process, systems procurements, training and staff coordination. Also anything the Chief wanted of me.

Goldberg: Did you have any impact on Vietnam policy and affairs during the time you were vice chief?

Haig: Not really, from the Army point of view.

Goldberg: Did you want to?

Haig: Probably, but I didn't. I don't think Abe had much, either, except as a member of the Joint Chiefs.

Goldberg: You were both pretty sick and tired of it by that time, probably.

Haig: No doubt about that. I'm sure that Abe was sicker of it than I was, and I think it actually killed him. I made 14 trips to Southeast Asia and watched his agony first hand.

Goldberg: As vice chief of staff, what kind of relations did you have with OSD, and with whom did you deal in the OSD staff when you had dealings there? There were Elliot Richardson and Schlesinger.

Haig: I didn't have to deal with Schlesinger at that time, but I did later, in NATO.

Goldberg: You didn't go to NATO until 1974, did you? Schlesinger took over in July 1973.

Haig: That's right. I actually asked President Nixon to make Schlesinger the Secretary of Defense. Sometimes you make good calls, sometimes you make bad ones. Jim and I are good friends. But he can be both arrogant and difficult.

Goldberg: Rumsfeld claims he saved him also.

Haig: I'll tell you that story. Schlesinger got fired from OMB by George Shultz. I liked him. I worked with him on funding defense systems. If you look back at who won the Cold War, you will find that a lot of decisions made under Richard Nixon, such as the advanced satellite cameras and modern missiles, were made during that period. The opposition was massive to any of it, on the Hill and within the administration. But I went to the President and asked him not to let Schlesinger go. So Schlesinger was given another job.

Goldberg: You were dealing then with Richardson, Schlesinger, and Clements, who was deputy secretary.

Haig: I had to be a shock absorber between Schlesinger and Clements. I was then White House chief of staff. They hated each other.

Goldberg: When did you become Army vice chief of staff?

Haig: October '72, but I went back to the White House in May '73. Bill Clements and I were good pals, and he hated Jim Schlesinger. He threatened to leave all the time, but never did. It was as White House chief of staff that all this fell on my plate, not as Army Vice Chief.

Goldberg: What was the source of the differences? Personalities?

Haig: Yes, personalities. Bill was a cocky bantam rooster, you know.

Goldberg: We're going to see him in Texas in a week or two.

Haig: He's a good man. He just couldn't tolerate Jim. Jim had an arrogant, thoughtless, supercilious air about him, not very well mannered. Nevertheless, we managed to control it when I was White House Chief, probably because I knew Jim so well.

Goldberg: When you were in the Pentagon as vice chief, presumably you still had some connections with the White House. They called you back early on on Vietnam. How about after that, did they continue to call on you?

Haig: Not really, except for the month of April '73, when I started getting calls at night from Ron Ziegler.

Goldberg: This was 1973. Were the secretary of defense and chief of staff of the army, Schlesinger and Abrams, aware of the continuing connection with the White House that you had?

Haig: Yes. Abe was aware of the calls. I did not deal with Schlesinger at that time. He was not Secretary of Defense at that time.

Goldberg: When you came in as vice chief of staff the Army was facing severe problems as the result of the Vietnam experience--what was happening in connection with the withdrawal, and so on. Presumably you were handling some of these problems. What were the major ones you were dealing with? Presumably these problems had top priority in your mind and your activities.

Haig: I don't want to overdramatize that. We had a worldwide army and the problems were equally bad in Europe. We were drawn down, forces and equipment had been sucked out of Europe.

Goldberg: It was certainly the beginnings of what came to be known as the hollow army.

Haig: Exactly right. It was a hollow army, but even worse, drugs and a lack of discipline were rampant. But we had problems of procurement, too. We needed modernization of the force structure that was largely living on developments of a much earlier period of time, except for the war itself. The involvement in Vietnam helped on one hand, and hurt on the other. The services got some \$28 billion or so that went into the Vietnam War at its height; most of that was operational money. We'd just buy helicopters and some other things, but we had a big backlog in overall modernization.

Goldberg: Do you think you and Abrams were successful in gaining acceptance of most of your programs at the OSD level?

Haig: Yes. I think Abe was very well respected and liked up at OSD. He was effective in the tank, he was a joint guy. I can't say I had any large degree of success. I was simply getting my arms around the problems when I was pulled out. I had other problems. I had to win that army staff over, and I think I did. That was before Abe was confirmed.

Goldberg: So there was resentment to your being imposed on them.

Haig: I think so, but I never found it to be unmanageable.

Goldberg: You were accepted.

Haig: I made a lot of decisions and was fairly fast at doing that. I think they understood that that's what was going to happen at my end and what resentment there was soon disappeared.

Goldberg: Did you encounter any interservice rivalry while you were serving as vice chief?

Haig: Always, but not paralyzing. I made a point of meeting my counterparts from the Navy and Air Force regularly and having sessions in which we tried to iron things out before we got into tank rows. I think it worked out pretty well.

Goldberg: How many months were you actually serving as vice chief?

Haig: I think from the end of October 1972 until May 1973, a very brief period.

Goldberg: I think you have discussed your return to the White House. When you came back in, how did this affect your relationship with Kissinger?

Haig: I know, post-mortem, that he was very upset about my coming back because it was inconceivable for Henry to see his former deputy become, in most respects, his boss.

Goldberg: If he were military, he would have recognized that it happens all the time.

Haig: Yes. However, I know he registered strong dissent to the President before I was appointed. After that we never had a problem. In fact, we worked together very closely.

Goldberg: How about your relationship with DoD then, with Schlesinger as secretary of defense?

Haig: I didn't have problems with Jim Schlesinger. I think he knew I asked the President to appoint him and he knew that I said what I meant and I meant what I said, and that he would do it or have some problems. What I didn't know about him at first was his running feud with Henry. At the end of the Watergate crisis--after Nixon resigned--we read newspaper stories that the President was perhaps going to try to execute a coup by having the Army step in to preserve his presidency. Of course, I would be the link to that, because I was from the Army. President Ford had just been sworn in and was infuriated. He had an investigation made, and it led straight to Jim Schlesinger. Some months later I got called back to the White House

from NATO. I went into the office and President Ford asked me to come back and be White House chief of staff again. My mind started to churn. There was a big folder on his desk entitled "Jim Schlesinger". I advised President Ford that it was best for him and the country for me to stay in NATO, and that's how Dick Cheney got the job as White House Chief. When I left his office I called Schlesinger and told him to mend his fences with the President. But I was too late, the next day he was fired.

Goldberg: You mentioned the poor relations between Kissinger and Schlesinger. What was the basis of that?

Haig: It's easy to have problems with Henry. He's one of the brightest men I've ever worked with; but he is also a competitor who likes to have his way. What appears to be self-serving is not, really. Schlesinger was wrong on too many issues. Of course, Kissinger has no tolerance for wrong-headedness. It's hard to call Jim Schlesinger stupid, because he is intellectually very erudite, well-read, experienced; but his judgment is frequently bad. An example is the Yom Kippur war. I was chief of staff of the White House. I called Henry and said we had to get approval to help Israel, that it was a much closer run thing than appeared on the surface. He agreed with me, but said he was having problems with Schlesinger. Schlesinger was saying we couldn't move supplies in U.S. aircraft because it wasn't an emergency. Since Israel had only a few planes, we couldn't move the tanks, guns, or things they needed. The Israelis were getting mauled because their force structure had gotten unbalanced. Their infantry couldn't move with their tanks and lacked mobility; they were losing tanks to Soviet-supplied shoulder-fired rockets; the Israeli aircraft were not properly configured for close support any more; there were a lot of problems. I went in to the President and said that we had to move with a greater sense of urgency. The President then called

Henry and Jim to the White House. He asked Henry what he recommended, and Henry recommended so many flights a day, and so many tons. The President said, "Double it." And he said to Jim Schlesinger, "If you don't agree with what I just said, resign today." Nixon actually saved Israel.

Goldberg: Are there other accounts of this?

Haig: Schlesinger has put out some accounts. What I read in Kissinger's book was pretty accurate, except that he took most of the credit. It belonged to Nixon.

Goldberg: Was he present for that meeting?

Haig: We called in Kissinger and Schlesinger and I was with the President.

Goldberg: I would like to have first-hand sources for that sort of thing.

You have already mentioned that you knew about Ford's feeling about Schlesinger.

There were a number of factors involved, obviously.

Haig: I am sure Henry was in there all the time complaining about Schlesinger. But the fundamental thing was that Ford never forgave Schlesinger for putting out that totally erroneous story about the U.S. military engaging in extra-constitutional activities. In my view it was and remains highly unlikely that it could ever happen in America.

Goldberg: Schlesinger denied that he put out that story.

Haig: Let me tell you. I saw the results of the investigation. There were approximately 40 reporters in that room when the story was put out. The majority of them confirmed that Schlesinger was the source.

Goldberg: Was it the Army that was going to instigate the coup or the Marines? It's was a Marine commandant, I thought.



Haig: That was a variation of the theme. By the time they got around to it 20 years later Oliver Stone had developed a movie script and had me whispering in the President's ear that "there's always the Army."

Goldberg: But Admiral Zumwalt pointed to the Marines.

Haig: I've never known a more self-serving bull so-called expert than that guy. Read his book. Talk to me about the Sixth Fleet when I arrived in the Mediterranean as NATO commander. During my first visit, I went down through ship after ship, and spent an extra day because I was so disturbed. They wouldn't let me go down into the engine rooms for fear I would get a knife in my ribs. That was the discipline of the Zumwalt Navy. Drugs on the ships, everything. It took me a year to get Jim Schlesinger to agree to urinalysis for our servicemen. He thought it was a violation of civil liberties. We had about a 30 percent addiction rate in the Army in Europe. Armed finally with urinalysis we were able to cope. Urinalysis, in my view, cured our services of the drug problem, at least in Europe.

Goldberg: Next comes Watergate and the end of your White House career. The way Schlesinger told it was that he had cautioned George Brown just before the resignation that no member of JCS was to respond to any orders from the White House involving the use of military forces without first informing the other chiefs and the secretary of defense.

Haig: Why would he say such a thing? It's an incredible proposition. Unless you are nuts or a mischief maker you would never say anything like that. Certainly not to reporters, although they said it was more explicit.

Goldberg: Is there evidence that he actually put any forces on alert at that time?

Haig: No, I didn't know that.

Goldberg: We don't know that he did. He didn't go that far.

Haig: That we would have known.

Goldberg: You already mentioned the Arab-Israeli war, the Yom Kippur War of 1973, the differences between Kissinger and Schlesinger. What about any other foreign area problems or crises during this period 1969-1974? Did you get drawn into or consulted on any others?

Haig: Actually, I was involved in all of them, given my jobs in the White House, except when I was Vice Chief. The most grievous, of course, was the Yom Kippur War. What happened was that we had increasing intelligence of the mobilization and pre-lift positioning of airborne divisions in the Caucasus and elsewhere. We had an ultimatum from the Russians. Ask Hal Sonnenfeldt about this. He and I sat down and looked at it. The Russians said they would like us to join them, and if we didn't they would do it on their own. That was the essence of their message. Henry wanted to hold a crisis meeting in the State Department. I wanted to hold it in the White House situation room because the President was still running the country. He reluctantly joined it, knowing that Nixon wouldn't preside and that I would have to do it for him.

Goldberg: Why wouldn't Nixon preside?

Haig: Because it hadn't gotten to the recommendation issue yet. So we had the Security Council assembled in the situation room and we all agreed to certain steps, including a lower defcom, knowing it would be picked up by the Soviets. We sent Sonnenfeldt to another room to type up a message in response to the Soviet ultimatum. He did it brilliantly, and we sent it. Before we sent it, however, I called the President and told him we all agreed on it and we were going to send it. The headline in the Washington Post the next day was that Nixon contrived a crisis to save himself from Watergate. That's the kind of reporting we had during that period. During the earlier war, when the Syrians invaded Jordan, we had to try to convince the Russians that we meant business. I remember sending a Cob airplane from the

fleet in the Med into Tel Aviv with staff aboard. We knew the Russians were trailing and watching everything and would fear we were going to join Israel. Shortly thereafter the Syrians withdrew.

You had to do those things. For example, you have a problem with the Chinese, they are dropping missiles north of Taiwan. The President gets up and says he's moving the fleet. Amateur hour, absolutely counterproductive. I was in China and they said to me, "He made it public, so we knew he doesn't mean it." What you do is do it quietly, not say anything about it, and let the intelligence feed it in and influence his decision making. This thing of going to the press and taking public credit for everything you do and playing your foreign policy as domestic policy is a disaster for this country.

Goldberg: How many Presidents have avoided doing that?

Haig: Probably none. But some do it every minute on every issue; they are wrong.

Goldberg: What were the circumstances of your appointment as SACEUR?

Haig: When Ford came over he brought a couple of hacks from his staff at the House. He had Hartman, Phil Buchen, Jack Marsh, and a number of other guys. The minute Ford got in he asked me to stay on as chief of staff. When Nixon and Ford discussed the transition, Nixon told Ford there were two things he advised--to keep Kissinger as secretary of state and keep me as chief of staff. Ford said "Right." The only part that survived in Henry's book was the part about keeping Kissinger on. So when Ford asked me to stay on, I said I would, at least until the transition was over.

Goldberg: When you were serving as chief of staff in the White House, what was your Army status--on extended leave, or active duty?

Haig: No. That was the saddest day of my life. After the tapes were discovered in June '72, it became clear to me that I couldn't keep an arm's length from Watergate and serve the President. Then some of the Democrats up on the Hill asked how a military man could preside over the evil palace. With all the trouble Nixon had, I just couldn't stay in uniform even though the law authorizes a four star White House chief of staff dating back to Roosevelt.

Goldberg: You resigned, or retired?

Haig: Retired. And it broke my heart. It wasn't what I wanted at all. Incidentally, Joseph Califano called me when I accepted the job and told me not to do it. I told him I didn't have the luxury of saying whether I would take the job or not. The commander in chief asked me to take the job; I had to do it. So when Ford asked me to stay on I did. When Ford took over the warfare started. The press had me refusing to do what the President wanted. I went to Ford and asked him if he wanted me, and he said he did. So I said I had to insist on hiring and firing privilege, and my first act would be to fire Hartman. They had been together for years. Ford said he would think about it. I came in on Monday morning and asked him if he had made his decision. He wanted me to stay but he would handle Hartman. I said he'd given me my answer. He asked me what I wanted to do and I said I wanted to go back into military service. So he talked about chief of staff of the Army. I said no. Abe had just taken over and he wasn't too well and it was not the time for that. The lawyers came in and worked with Ford and Kissinger and concluded that whatever they gave me it better not require confirmation. So they came up with NATO. That's how it happened.

Goldberg: And you were well satisfied with that.

Haig: I didn't know it at the time, but the more I got into the job the better I liked it. I soon thought it was ideal.

Goldberg: What about Goodpaster, what was his reaction?

Haig: That was, again, Jim Schlesinger. Not known to me, because I had to get out of there, Ford called Schlesinger and told him he wanted me over there before Christmas.

Schlesinger called Goodpaster and said that I wanted to go right away. Andy was preparing to retire and planned not to leave before spring. Goodpaster didn't like it. There wasn't anything I could do about it. He didn't show up at my command change, and his resentment leaked all over the press in Europe. He didn't even invite me or my wife to look at the quarters in Mons. It was not a happy change of command.

Goldberg: He's a very gentlemanly person.

Haig: I haven't anything against him. He doesn't like me one bit, however. He didn't like me, anyway, because he was part of the transition of the Nixon administration years ago and thought he was going to get a job, but didn't.

Goldberg: In 1969? He got SACEUR.

Haig: He went to Vietnam first.

Goldberg: That wasn't long. He took over SACEUR in 1969 from Lemnitzer.

Haig: He was very well taken care of, but I think he wanted something else.

Goldberg: You had about five years at NATO, then?

Haig: Five happy years.

Goldberg: You had a lot of problems to deal with during that time. What were the key things that you saw and worked on?

Haig: Andy was not a hands-on commander. When he left that headquarters it was for diplomatic things, he never saw the troops. I decided I wasn't going to be SACEUR unless I knew the state of our forces. I spent the first three months without saying a word to anybody,

visiting every unit in my command, regardless of nationality. The first visit I wanted to make was to the Bundeswehr. I was told I wasn't welcome, that no SACEUR had ever visited German units. I said I was going to do it. I called Helmut Schmidt and told him I was going to do it and if I were blocked he would have a big press problem. That was the end of that. I never had another problem with the Germans. As far as the command was concerned, I believed that we couldn't have fought our way out of a paper bag. There was no integration of command, no control, no communications, intelligence, or coordinated fire support, air or ground. It was a disaster, a gaggle of national enclaves across the front from Norway to Turkey. I started an integration program. We started with a broad-based program. I knew we couldn't hold on the northern flank of the central region.

Goldberg: The northern flank of the central region, or the northern flank? You don't mean Norway.

Haig: No, I mean the north German flank. So I said to the Germans that I wanted to put a U.S. brigade up there. That took six months of rowing and growling, but we got it done. Some years later, when they tried to kill me and the KGB controlled perpetrator was interviewed, they asked him why. He said they thought I was going to be President, and that I was strengthening the place they were going to go, the north German plain, and they realized they couldn't win a conventional war. That's an odd thing to come from a German terrorist. I really did the right thing on that occasion.

Goldberg: Would a brigade have made that much difference?

Haig: That was the precursor to a division, and we were not going to leave that to a thin British line. That's just one of many things. It was clear that nobody in Europe believed that the U.S. cared. We started exercising in earnest with multinational and cross attachments. It just

changed the whole dimension of the thing. I reduced the time for reinforcement from thirty days to substantially less. We then began to convince the Europeans that we meant business and would be there in force.

Goldberg: The Europeans have always been skeptical about mounting a conventional defense, haven't they? They always felt that they had to rely on a nuclear deterrent more than anything else. By your time they had been dragging their feet for 25 years.

Haig: Be careful, that's a Pentagon view, not a true view. We had, when I was there, from the Germans, a commitment of over 500,000 troops. Their divisions were well equipped and trained. The more I maneuvered and worked with them the better I saw they were. All of this was under what we called the three R Program: Readiness, Rationalization (integration), and Reinforcement.

Goldberg: How about the British and French?

Haig: The British were thin but good and competent. The French were a disaster. A French officer was not allowed in the SACEUR's office when I got there. All of the logistics training and lines that had existed when SHAPE was in Paris were gone. On one of my first trips I went to see General Mery, Chief of the French General Staff, and told him we had to be ready. By that time, the tone we were picking up from the Russians was not very encouraging. They were sending people in civilian trucks, looking at various routes of invasion all the way up to Bremerhaven, and we were picking that up. We started to carefully rebuild relations with the French. That included nuclear forces. We reinforced them, and I am happy to say that today it is better than ever, now they actually want to reintegrate their forces with NATO. The Brits were a special case. They were bled white, didn't have the wealth that they used to have. I wanted to keep them east of the Suez and in Bahrain, they were the experienced force for

stability there. The first month I was in SHAPE the prime minister, Callaghan, said he was going to withdraw the forces from east of Suez. I flew over to London to urge him not to do it. I suggested taking another brigade out of the north German plain. If he withdrew from east of Suez he would leave it up to U.S. diplomacy to solve the problems of the region. The English knew the region, they knew Iran. What happened? I could not get any backing on this from Washington. I called Kissinger, and told him to support them and if necessary give them money to support that force. If they really needed money we could reduce in the central region and we could make up for it elsewhere. It never happened. The next thing we knew, the Shah saw the British withdrawing, and saw that he would have to carry the security load himself, and the Americans were telling him the same thing. Billions of dollars of Iranian money went into sophisticated American military equipment, most of which rotted in warehouses. Again, no strategic or historic memory.

Goldberg: Why didn't Kissinger support that?

Haig: Because he said Bill Simon had to handle it, it was a money matter. I couldn't even get Bill Simon on the phone.

Goldberg: That was an evasion on Kissinger's part, wasn't it?

Haig: I think it was a mistake.

Goldberg: If he had really agreed with you, he would certainly have gotten enough pressure put on Simon to get what he wanted.

Haig: He could do it, but he had other problems. This is a diversion; back to NATO. We integrated air defense across the entire ACE front. We exercised command, control, and communications, C<sup>3</sup>. People were coming over from the Pentagon in droves. After Schlesinger left, I got even more real help from Rumsfeld. He understood NATO, as a former



ambassador there. Schlesinger wasn't all that bad, either, except it took me a year to get him to approve a drug test. He always was stubborn unless it was his idea.

Goldberg: By the time you left, did you feel that you could mount an effective conventional defense against a Soviet invasion?

Haig: It would depend a great deal on how many troops they threw into it. I also believe they were a lot weaker than many thought. But with nuclears it could be a closer call. I fought for modernization of our theater nuclear forces and I was right. We were watching SS-20s get deployed like they were going out of style. Later, I never agreed with the zero option. Had the Soviet Union not collapsed it would have been the worst mistake ever made by the Pentagon. God saved us from our own stupidity. The only time I have ever seen the Russians meet you half way is when they know you are going to meet them half way or more. Then they do it. They are not dumb and they knew our tendencies very well.

Goldberg: Did you feel that other than the Germans, the Europeans were pulling their weight, in conventional forces?

Haig: Some were, some weren't. The Belgians were a nightmare. The Dutch got a lot better but were still bad. The first instruction I had from Secretary General Joseph Luns, a Dutchman, was, "I can't stand the young soldiers of my country. They all have long hair; their weapons won't work; they are undisciplined. You must straighten that out. Order it, and order them to get their hair cut." I said, "Joe, if you want the opposite to happen, just go ahead and do what you just ordered. I'll take care of it my way." Then I would put on the most starched pair of fatigues I could find, get a close hair cut, have all my brass shined and visit the Dutch units looking like Mr. Spit and Polish, and I'd have a newspaper photographer following me. I would talk to the young soldiers, with their long hair and cigarettes. The bolts of their carbines

rattled when they were picked up. As we talked the photos were taken and we started putting them on the front page of the Dutch papers. In six months those kids straightened out. They didn't want to be compared to a general who was spic and span. They didn't want to look bad. That was the way to do it. They had to do a lot of that over there, with everything. I would go to Turkey at least once a month. I'll tell you, they were ready to fight, if they had only had enough equipment. They had problems with the Greeks, of course, but I got along with them; the Norwegians were wonderful but poorly supported. The United States Marine Corps never had a mission in Europe. I called the Pentagon and told them we needed the Marines over there, and the right place for them is the northern flank, so the Norwegians, Swedes, and Danes know that we're going to be there. We finally got them, they would come over and exercise. I remember General Gray coming over. He stood out as Mr. Muscle in shirt sleeves out there in the North Country. They loved it, they felt that they were going to be defended. Therefore, they got better at defending themselves. I think it was a worthwhile initiative.

Goldberg: What about the continual efforts on our part to increase burdensharing by the European countries? Did you push that?

Haig: It's like human rights. If you want the opposite, you go over there and start blackmailing and wagging your finger, and you will get nothing. We Americans need to get off our arrogant high horse and learn how to deal with friends abroad and stop making these things tests of honor. We should work this in subtle ways, then we will get the job done. Burdensharing? In the first place, it wasn't true that we did it all. I don't have all those statistics at my fingertips, but when you analyzed it, the Germans were doing a lot better than we were. And as a percentage of gross national product, even the weak British were spending more than we

were--over five percent. So were the Greeks and Turks and even the Italians. Most of my Central Region forces came from Europeans.

Goldberg: We were doing over five percent, also.

Haig: The other thing is that we never gave them any credit for the housing, training areas, and all the other things they were contributing at great political cost. The Germans were outspending us, really. Not in marks, but overall. The British were good. The French weren't part of it, so they we couldn't really calibrate them, but their forces were capable. Some of the others simply weren't doing their share. We get them by example not criticism.

Goldberg: They were spending money.

Haig: But they were spending money for nuclear, and we were helping them. The Turks were spending 14 or 15 percent of their gross national product on defense, the Greeks, 12 percent. We Americans, why are we over there? It was far cheaper to be defending ourselves over there than it was here. It's the same argument that President Jimmy Carter used in the Pacific to pull our troops out of Korea. He didn't know what he was talking about. Today look what the Japanese pay for the pittance number of Americans over there, well over \$40,000 a year per U.S. soldier, sailor and airman. Also, you know what would happen if we ever brought them home--they'd be gone. That's why the finest young officers in the Army today are leaving in droves. We will never get them back. They are leaving in droves from the Air Force. We will never get them back. Look at ROTC today. The big universities don't want it. And we now have to shut down those that do! We're down to community colleges. The quality of personnel--this may sound elitist--but if you don't get the cream of American society you don't have a good Army, Navy, or Air Force. We need a whole new look.

Goldberg: There had been proposals during the late 1960s and early '70s for withdrawal of at least a part of American forces in Europe. What was your position on that?

Haig: I opposed drawdown at that time--Mansfield amendments or any other drawdown proposals. Later this was an element of my strategy as SACEUR, to develop a massive rejuvenation program and put Europe back on the map. Part of that was public relations and other things, too. After that I don't recall having any pressure to reduce the size of our forces. We increased them when I was there. We not only increased the size of the forces deployed, but we increased substantially the forces that would reinforce. We developed airlift and sealift, and exercised it. I got CINCLANT to put together a team in which he had a finger on every vessel in the free world and could have harnessed and mobilized them in case of conflict. We didn't have that problem. I had that problem tremendously during my days in the Pentagon with Bob McNamara, who was urging and insisting on it. Dean Rusk saved our force posture in Europe. It's strange that a secretary of state has to do that, but he did because he knew those forces were the base of his diplomatic credibility.

Goldberg: It happened before. Dulles use to do the same thing during the 1950s.

Haig: Anybody who knows statecraft knows that deployed, credible forces are the fiber of diplomacy. They make us politically and, I may add, economically relevant.

Goldberg: But part of the pressure during that period in the late '50s and early '60s was economic; it wasn't strategic.

Haig: But if they had done the arithmetic, they would have found this the most cost effective. In fact, I would have done the precise opposite of our last Army chief of staff [General Gordon R. Sullivan]. His line was, "We are going to be a CONUS-based rapid reaction army." Why do we spend and sacrifice for our armed forces? To win a war, if, God forbid, we ever have

to fight one? Yes, but more important is to keep the peace and prevent war. That's a very different issue than how many war-fighting troops you have and where you can put them. That's a matter of effective diplomacy and American leadership. When I was in NATO Stan Turner came in and became CINCSOUTH. Within a month he asked for an urgent meeting. He came to my office with two aides and a lot of charts showing me the deployment of the Sixth Fleet and the Soviet threat, the missiles, and bombers. He said, "I recommend the immediate withdrawal of the Sixth Fleet from the Med and the positioning of them west of Gibraltar." I said, "What?" He said, "They won't survive if the balloon goes up. When the balloon goes up the missiles will come. Our carriers and small craft are vulnerable. Soviet aircraft will overwhelm our defenses." I said, "Why do you think we keep those forces there? I'll tell you. To keep the balloon from going up in the first place. That's why they are there. That's why you are there." He never quite understood that.

Goldberg: Do you think the Navy leadership in Washington would have gone along with him on that, or did go along with him on that?

Haig: Not at all.

Goldberg: They certainly did ten years later. They were talking then about being able to survive under any conditions in the Mediterranean.

Haig: The Navy strategically is pretty sound in its thinking. They have a very high quality of people. I want to keep the Army and the Air Force with the same high quality, but money is driving us down in quality. Picking leaders is also the key.

Goldberg: They will all be affected by that. What was your view of the future of NATO at that time? Did you see it as a fortress, a forum, an instrument of détente, or all of the above?

Haig: You may be surprised. One of the first speeches I gave to the North Atlantic Council PermReps was to the effect that the Soviet Union was in a state of advanced decay; it would collapse in our lifetime.

Goldberg: What year was this?

Haig: 1974, I recall. I said that all we had to do was stay strong and stay together and it would happen. Afterward two Permreps came up to me. One was a Danish fellow, who said, "You are SACEUR, you are not entitled to make a political statement of that kind; and it is wrong." I said, "I made it, I believe it, and you should investigate it yourself." Now it has happened. This is why I am writing an editorial. The Reagan people claim that they won the Cold War by building Star Wars, and breaking the Russians. The liberals are claiming that there never was a Cold War and all we had to do was not spend all that money; by doing it and confronting the Russians we kept them in power. Also wrong. The neo-cons are saying that they forced Ronald Reagan to take the offensive against the Russians. What could be further from the truth. That system collapsed of its own internal contradictions. But we are in Europe for many reasons, not just the Russian threat.

Goldberg: That's what Nixon said, too.

Haig: He got it from me.

Goldberg: Wherever he got it, this was his response to the argument about the Soviet collapse having been the result of the Reagan administration policies, SDI, and all that.

Haig: There wasn't a week that we didn't discuss that issue. That wasn't a criticism of Reagan, because Reagan reversed the mindless softness of Carter. It was very timely for him to rebuild our defenses and stand tall in Afghanistan.

Goldberg: Carter and Brown had started that in the last couple of years.

Haig: Yes, Carter did. Like everybody else he learned. And Harold and I got along very well. We had a very good relationship. You know, I was there for four years with Carter. But, he was wrong on Iran, and it isn't as though I didn't tell him. He was also wrong on the NATO nuclear weapon, the neutron bomb. I had to finally get on the phone with him. I said, "If you refuse to do this you are going to lose the Germans." Helmut Schmidt had just left my office; he said he had laid his political career on the line and now he was being undercut. I'll say this for Jimmy Carter. He said, "OK, you got your message through; I won't kill it." So he cut the baby in half but he wasn't Solomon!

Goldberg: What were your relations with OSD and the JCS from these positions you held in EUCCOM and SHAPE?

Haig: I couldn't have asked for better relationships with the JCS and Defense when I was in NATO. The only time it got a little nettling to me was when Bob Komer, self-serving, came over and wanted to rename everything we were doing in order to get credit for it. There wasn't a thing that he came up with that wasn't a parasite from programs we had underway. It caused a lot of hiccups and confusion among the Allies. On the other hand, Bob is a good guy and no dummy. It became very onerous, because it confused the system. The good part was that he brought resources.

Goldberg: You were pretty much synchronized with Washington, and Defense, then, weren't you, during this period?

Haig: Sometimes I had trouble, with Rumsfeld, for example, when we had the crisis in Lebanon. We had two separate force withdrawals. The first one was not well done, because Don sat in the command center, and micromanaged it. It was overmanaged, so a lot of hiccups developed in the withdrawal, and I wasn't proud of it. So I got on a plane the next time

and came back and sat in the sit-room in the Pentagon. Every time Don would issue an instruction I would exclaim, "Oh, my God." We were good friends. He closed his book and got up and walked out. He never came back and that thing went like greased lightning. I never had to say a word, because the system works if it's exercised properly and subordinates are properly trained. We always have problems like that. Had I been SACEUR, what happened to our Marines in Lebanon would never have happened. I would have walked that line the day they were put in there, which I did every time we ever did anything. I would never have accepted those rules of engagement that Cap Weinberger shoved down their throats. Who got the blame? Some poor Marine lieutenant colonel and some Marine regular. Did you ever see Defense's instructions to the Marines in Lebanon?

Goldberg: I think the Long report had them in it somewhere.

Haig: They didn't even have rounds in their breeches. They couldn't patrol outside their perimeter. It was an absolute disgrace.

Goldberg: What led to your resignation as SACEUR?

Haig: The Shah; but I also told my wife that five years was enough, it was time to get in new blood. In December, I had it in the back of my mind to leave. I had been to Iran in late spring, and when I got back I called Cy Vance and told him I was worried about the Shah, he wasn't well. I thought he was preoccupied and seemed to be under sedation. I spent hours with the man, and he was a bright man. I asked Vance to start working on a transition that would result in a favorable regime. That was my job. The next thing I know it hit the fan--the uprising in the streets. The Deputy Secretary called me, Brown was on the West Coast, and said that the President wanted me to send my deputy, Dutch Huyser, to Tehran. Dutch is a dear friend of mine. I asked the Deputy what were the President's terms of reference for Huyser to follow.



He said they didn't have any yet. The only reason I could see to send a military man over there would be to execute a coup in favor of the Shah or keep the troops in the barracks. I thought it was the latter. I said that it was a political job and I didn't want my deputy to do it. I asked him to get somebody else to do it. Two hours later I got a call from Dutch in Stuttgart. He had gotten a call directly from the Deputy ordering him to Tehran. I told him it was against my strong objections. I told him if his terms of reference were what I thought they would be, he would regret the mission. I immediately ordered my plane and flew back to Washington. Hal Brown saw me, he hadn't been there for all the details. I wanted to find out what was going on. I felt Carter's policies would end up destroying the Shah, the Iranian army, and everything that the West stood for. He told me to go see Brzezinski. So I did; he said we were going to have martial law. We would have the Army restore law and order. That wasn't what I heard in the Pentagon, or what Cy Vance wanted. He said Vance would be overruled. Of course, he never was. In the meantime I got the rules of engagement from Dutch. It was a complete and total cop out. Talk to some of the Iranian generals who survived it and got out. It was a disaster. I blame that on Jimmy Carter, and probably Cy Vance more than Carter. Carter, I found, was reasonably intelligent, if we could ever get to him and give him the facts. He was unfortunately very stubborn as well.

Goldberg: The next section is on the secretary of state. I think we will have to make that another session, if you are agreeable.

Haig: You must bring a crying towel for that.

Landa: I will bring that.

Goldberg: This has been very helpful.