

Matloff: This is part 2 of an oral history interview held with Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski in Washington, D.C., on February 25, 1987, at 2:30 p.m. Representing the OSD Historical Office are Dr. Roger Trask and Dr. Maurice Matloff.

Dr. Brzezinski, in our meeting on October 6, 1986, you discussed your appointment as Assistant for National Security Affairs in the Carter Administration, your conception of your role and priorities, your working relationships with the President and other official agencies in government, and your perceptions of the threat. We had begun to discuss strategic policy and planning, and talked about PD-18 at the very close. I want to go on from that point to other aspects of issues in national security during your service as National Security Advisor. In connection with PD-59, in your book Power and Principle, you've written that this was an important new step in American strategic thought. In some of Harold Brown's writing about PD-59 he has emphasized that it was not a new strategic doctrine, not a radical departure. Would you explain in what sense you regarded it as a new departure?

Brzezinski: It was clearly building from some of the steps taken by Secretary Schlesinger and the National Security Memorandum 242. It was, nonetheless, an innovation in that it went considerably further in providing for flexibility in war-fighting, and for the development of limited nuclear options, which were not pre-fixed, but were responses to developing situations. It also was designed to guide acquisition policy and thereby influence the overall strategic posture of the United States. More generally, it was a novel departure in that it

took the United States a very significant step away from the previous posture of relying essentially on an apocalyptic strike to deter nuclear war and towards the acquisition by the United States of the capacity for engaging in nuclear war-fighting at various levels of intensity. In that sense it was, in my judgment, a significant departure from the predominant mode of the previous two decades. Let me also add, without implying anything adverse, that I suspect that in part Secretary Brown's assessment of it was motivated by two considerations. The first is that he went on public record when the doctrine came out in stressing that it was not a departure for defense. That was desirable politically at the time because it would have been counterproductive to the President, particularly in terms of his Democratic constituency, for us to be moving overtly towards a war-fighting doctrine. His task publicly was, therefore, to maintain that this was merely a minor adjustment in our previous posture, in order to alleviate that political criticism. Secondly, and this is more speculative, I think it is a fact that the impetus for the adoption of the document, the initial drafts of the document, the bureaucratic pressure for its adoption, originated in my office and with me personally. And while he became a party to it, and made substantial contribution to the elaboration of the document, initially at least he was somewhat inclined not to move in this direction, and it took a certain amount of encouragement for him to become associated with it. I think that these two considerations together have in a sense resulted in the kind of public posture that you have ascribed to it.

Trask: What about the timing of it—July and August of 1980?

Brzezinski: It has been often alleged, and probably not unjustifiably, in the sense that it was election time, and we should have been more conscious of that. But, from our standpoint, it was not related to the election. Whether the President thought that he might get some political benefit from it, I do not know. He never said that he did. Whether he felt that, we'll never know. I can categorically state that in the case of the initiators of this effort it had nothing to do with it. It was the logical conclusion to a process which started earlier with PD-18, which resulted in several PDs numbered in the 40s sequence and the early 50s sequence, which enhanced invulnerability of government, continuity of government, civil defense, etc. It was also a logical follow-up to the adoption of the MX, which was the necessary strategic component of any war-fighting doctrine. You had to have a weapons system that this doctrine could then provide a framework for, and therefore was a combination of both.

Matloff: Was there any connection between the Carter Doctrine and PD-59?

Brzezinski: No. The Carter Doctrine was in response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. It was also a statement which I had a lot to do with; in fact, I drafted the wording. It was deliberately based on the Truman Doctrine for Greece and Turkey, and was designed to become a line which we wanted to make explicit to the Soviets and that they could not cross without a collision with us.

Matloff: You were drawn in on that, too?

Brzezinski: I wrote the statement, which was in the President's State of the Union message. Those were actually my words. They were subject of some contention. Secretary Vance wanted to dilute them. In fact, the argument over the wording went on almost into the evening of the delivery. The last final touch was made by me in the Portico of the White House on a copy being carried by Jody Powell to the President for delivery.

Matloff: Was interservice competition a serious problem for you, as well as for the Carter Administration?

Brzezinski: I suppose that it was for us indirectly, in that it is alleged, I don't know with how much validity, that the setback suffered in Desert I was in some degree related to interservice rivalry, in that each service wanted to be a participant in the mission. I don't know how true that is. I certainly was not particularly affected by interservice competition.

Matloff: I know that there must have been some effort by the President to draw you in on questions involving the Defense budget. How active a role did you get to play in this regard?

Brzezinski: Not as active as the President wanted me to, and I was never able to get into the budget process as deeply as he wanted me to be. First, because I didn't have any real affinity for it; it didn't grip me intellectually and was not something I felt drawn towards. Secondly, because the President wanted me essentially to be a source of leverage on Harold for reductions, whereas I was of the view that maximum increases were needed. Therefore, I was not

particularly inclined to play the role the President wanted me to play, which was to help the Bureau of the Budget fight the Defense Department in order to get the budget reduced. I did subscribe to the view that it ought to be increased. In fact, in the first year I was the one who defended the Defense budget more than Harold, and I told him that I was not going to keep doing that, because that was his job. I would back him if he took the lead on it, but I would not take the lead any more.

Matloff: What led to the departure of the Carter administration from its early emphasis on curtailing the Defense budget? Did you advise the President in the Fall of 1979 to support higher increases partly to placate the Senate, in connection with the approval of the SALT II treaty?

Brzezinski: I might have, but if I did, that would have been purely a tactical argument. Basically my view was that the toll of the Vietnamese War on our overall military preparedness was very destructive, that the sustained quality of the Soviet military buildup was giving the Soviet Union added leverage, and that we would not be able to maintain our geopolitical interests or negotiate effectively with the Soviets over arms control if we didn't develop a more sustained and energetic effort in the defense realm.

Matloff: On the question of the draft versus volunteer force, did you have a position?

Brzezinski: No.

Matloff: You did have some feelings about the Rapid Deployment Task Force, I remember.

Brzezinski: Again, the concept and initiative for the Rapid Deployment Force originated with my office.

Matloff: Out of the NSC office, rather than Defense?

Brzezinski: Initially it was entirely from the NSC, even the name.

Matloff: Did you believe in a balanced nuclear triad?

Brzezinski: I became convinced, in the course of getting more deeply involved in strategic matters, that the triad made sense.

Matloff: In general, did you follow the recommendations of the Defense Department with reference to weapons acquisition and deployment? For example, the decisions not to deploy the B-1 bomber, to upgrade the B-52, or to go ahead with the Stealth technology-- these are positions that Brown was taking.

Brzezinski: By and large, we worked in tandem. On the B-1, I suspect my office was a little more critical about the case for it than Harold might have been. He, I think, leaned against it, but in part because of his sensitivity to his own constituency he did not come out strongly against it. In this particular case my staff, doing a lot of analysis for the President, clearly produced inputs for the President which were strongly negative.

Matloff: How about on the decision to deploy the MX missile?

Brzezinski: That I think I have to take credit for. We set in motion the NSC staffing which produced NSC meetings on it and then ran

through the decision. So much so that the President told me face to face that I was pushing it down his throat.

Matloff: You felt that this was a necessary step?

Brzezinski: I thought that it was absolutely essential, 1) in a general strategic sense, and 2) particularly in relationship to SALT II, which was about to be concluded but where we still had to obtain some concessions from the Soviets; and also in anticipation of the ratification process. All of these considerations made me feel very strongly that that was the moment to get the MX. At the meetings of the NSC, surprisingly, Harold did not come through as strongly in favor of it-- by prearrangement we suspected—but Duncan and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs did.

Matloff: What about on the deployment of the neutron bomb? You touched on this slightly last time. You quoted the President as wishing he had never heard of it. How did you feel about it?

Brzezinski: I felt that it was necessary to deploy it. I was convinced that it was militarily desirable. I was even more convinced that it would be political disaster for the President to back out of it. On this, Harold, who I think was the strongest spokesman, Vance, and I stood together. I think that Harold was gutsy in talking to the President about it, because the President was very irritated. Vance and I backed him. It was the President who felt otherwise.

Matloff: On the U.S. efforts to foster and carry out the NATO decision of December 1979 to deploy modernized theater nuclear forces, what lessons did you draw from that whole episode? For one thing, the whole question of the figure always comes up—why 572 cruise missiles and Pershing II?

Brzezinski: Very simple. We had some estimates of what the Soviets would deploy. I forget exactly what they were, but they were somewhere in the realm of several hundred—lower than what they subsequently actually deployed. In relationship to that we had several proposals for different levels. ACDA, in the NSC meeting which I chaired, came in for the lowest, supported by State. Harold was for a kind of intermediate position. Only the JCS came in with 572. I remember saying to the meeting, "The President's overloaded. If we want to, we can go into the President with different numbers and let him pick, but I think it's our obligation to spare him that. Can't we agree here on a number?" I went on to say that I personally backed the JCS figure, which was the highest, largely because in my view we had to anticipate two stages in which reductions would have to be made. The first stage would be with our NATO allies, who before adopting the decision to deploy would probably want us to reduce the 572, and then once we deployed, we would probably have to negotiate with the Soviets about some ceiling on the reductions and again have to reduce. Therefore it would be better to go in with the highest number. The others then adopted that idea. I need not add that I was wrong, in terms of



the allies; they did not insist on a reduction, whereas with the Soviets I think we were lucky we went in with the higher number, because they deployed more than we expected.

Matloff: It was more than a question of just getting a credible response to the Soviet deployment of the SS-20s?

Brzezinski: I personally never felt that militarily we needed this deployment at all. I always felt that the SS-20, while a threat, wasn't really altering the strategic situation, but that this was a political problem that was created for us by our allies, to which we had to respond with a deployment. Therefore, I couldn't care less what the numbers were, but once we had a choice between different levels, for the reasons I've indicated, I felt it was best to opt for the highest.

Matloff: Then part of the motivation was bargaining leverage with the Soviets?

Brzezinski: Yes, and with the allies. I did not see any compelling military case for the figures that were given us, of which 572 was the highest, and I think somewhere in the 400s or high 300s was the lowest. I could not quite see the military case for any set of these numbers. Therefore my preference was entirely political.

Matloff: On the question of enhancing the allied capability for conventional warfare, to which Harold Brown devoted himself a good deal, did you regard that as equally important?

Brzezinski: I supported him. I did not think it was equally important. He took the lead on that. He deserves credit for whatever was

achieved. He also took the lead on the 3 percent increase in NATO defense budgets. That was his initiative, and we supported him.

Matloff: This is a good point to go into the question of area problems and crises. To what extent did you become involved with NATO policies, buildup, and strategy in the post of Assistant for National Security Affairs? Did you feel that NATO policies and strategy were realistic?

Brzezinski: Up to a point. I did feel, and still do, that a great deal of the emphasis for upgrading conventional capabilities was political in nature rather than military. Because my view then was, and still is, that if there is a major central war in the European theater, it will either escalate into a nuclear war or we'll have to stop fighting, or we'll lose. I don't think that has changed very much. So I always felt that the conventional aspect was a little bit of reassurance to the allies, a pacification of the antinuclear wing, etc.

Matloff: How did you view the problems of NATO--burdensharing, military integration, and the like? Did you feel the allies were doing enough?

Brzezinski: As a broad generalization, the answer would be no. But I was not deeply involved in it. I felt that it was being handled very well by Harold and company.

Matloff: Did you have any feeling that military integration within the alliance could go further than it had?

Brzezinski: Yes, but again, that was not something that I was deeply involved in.

Matloff: How about the whole question of the reduction of U.S. troops in Europe?

Brzezinski: That did not come up very much in our time except for something that was occasionally articulated on the Hill. Since then I have come to the view that some reduction of the American forces would be justified—not as a punitive step towards Europe, but simply as part of a global redeployment in the light of our strategic needs.

Matloff: I've been following some of your writings on this and I recognize your position. Did you view NATO as a permanent U.S. commitment?

Brzezinski: "Permanent" is a word I don't use, but as an enduring one, yes.

Matloff: If it ever were uncoupled, what do you think would be the last element in the United States arsenal that would go out of Europe?

Brzezinski: Probably the troops, because I don't think we would leave nuclear forces in Europe without our troops.

Matloff: On the question of NATO's progress and revitalization, the pledge to increase the individual spending for defense by the European nations by 3 percent, were you pleased with progress along that line by the time you left office?

Brzezinski: Not really, but I was pleased by the fact that the decision was taken and at least some partial efforts to implement it were being adopted.

Matloff: Were you surprised by the opposition that arose later on in some European countries to the TNF?

Brzezinski: No. If anything, I was surprised that we were able to put it all together. It wasn't ourselves; it was our successors.

Matloff: How did, or do, you see the future of NATO? Do you see it primarily as a fortress, a forum, an instrument of detente?

Brzezinski: I see it as a regional alliance, not a global alliance, which provides a framework of security not for the permanent division of Europe, but for a process of change in Europe, which the Soviets cannot decisively shape—which they might be able to do in the absence of NATO.

Matloff: What is your general attitude toward alliances? Did or do you feel that they are necessary or desirable?

Brzezinski: I'm not either against alliances on the grounds of their entanglements, nor am I for them in any schematic, legalistic way, and in the sense of we ought to have them everywhere, which was the attitude in the 50s. I think that the NATO alliance makes a great deal of sense. Our security arrangements in the Far East make sense, though more on a bilateral basis. I don't think that any single formula can be prescribed for our global interests.

Matloff: Let's focus for a while on China, Japan, and Korea. The question on China always comes up: What led President Carter to seek normalization of relations with China?

Brzezinski: I don't know whether I mentioned it to you or not, but at the outset of the administration I drew up a very sensitive document

which articulated the goals for the administration in the area of foreign policy. We had ten major goals. That document was at first reviewed by the President and me alone, and then with the Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, and the Vice President. Goal number 5, which the President approved, in approving the document, was the normalization of relations with China. The reasoning for it was that this is part, first of all, of our unfinished agenda; secondly, there would be an interest in any case to have a more normal relationship with China because of its weight in world affairs; and thirdly, of some importance particularly in '78, it would be a good counterweight to the Soviets, who were acting a little overassertive.

Matloff: You saw it as a security interest vis-a-vis the Soviet Union?

Brzezinski: Not only the Soviet Union, but a good relationship with China is desirable whether our relations with the Soviets are good or bad. But at that particular juncture, our relationship with the Soviets was not good, but neither were Soviet-Chinese relations. Therefore, an improvement in American-Chinese relations put more pressure on the Soviets.

Matloff: Aside from that original document, did you play any other role in this connection?

Brzezinski: I was sent by the President to China in 1978 in the wake of the earlier visit to China by the Secretary of State, which didn't work out very well. That was a disconnect, if you will, and it had negative repercussions. Then I went to China and had a long conversation with Deng Xiaoping and other Chinese leaders, in the course of which

we reached a secret agreement to start actual detailed negotiations with a timetable on the normalization of relations.

Matloff: Was Harold Brown along?

Brzezinski: No.

Matloff: You have a wonderful quote in your book, referring to Carter's advising you that in the process of normalization we "should not ass-kiss them the way Nixon and Kissinger did." What precisely do you think he had in mind when he said this?

Brzezinski: Prior to my going to China, and in preparing the President for the kind of dialogue I wanted to undertake with the Chinese leaders, I had the President read the memcons of Nixon's and Kissinger's conversations with the Chinese leaders, Mao Tse-tung and Chou En-lai. I was rather well impressed by these transcripts, and therefore I wanted the President to read them. What struck me much to my surprise was that the President was put off by them. He felt, as I quoted, that we were excessively deferential to the Chinese and did too much scraping and bowing in front of them. On rereading these transcripts, I think he was right, although that was not the main point. Therefore his injunction might have been well taken.

Matloff: I'm delighted you have just justified this project in oral history. This is not in your book, and nobody would know this. Were you and President Carter satisfied with the extent of the collaboration with the PRC in the security field by the time you and he left office?

Brzezinski: I was satisfied, and I felt we could have gone even further. I think that he was feeling that it was going too far.

Matloff: Why did the Carter Administration, particularly toward the end of his tenure, press Japan for a larger defense effort?

Brzezinski: It was just increasing with the proportion as to what everybody else was doing and with the emerging momentum of the Japanese export offensive. Our feeling was that we were in effect subsidizing Japan.

Matloff: Did you get drawn in on this? Brown apparently got drawn in.

Brzezinski: I was not very heavily involved in that. I think this is something that Harold had to do with.

Matloff: What about Korea? The Carter Administration apparently had a plan in 1977, at least was thinking in terms of a phased withdrawal of ground forces, and later on shelved the plan. What brought that on?

Brzezinski: I frankly don't know how to answer you. This was an idea that emerged in the course of the campaign, and you ought to ask President Carter who gave it to him, because I never asked him. I have no idea where it originated, or with whom. I have heard stories that it originated with a Brookings Study Group, in which Carter took part. I have heard that it was suggested to him by Philip Habib at one point. It's quite clear to me that Carter in '76 during the campaign was looking for a place from which we could somewhat disengage American forces, because that was very appealing in terms of the public mind. It was still the post-Vietnam era. Europe was clearly not the place, and Korea seemed like the logical place. It took about

two years to walk this electoral commitment back, so to speak. It was a difficult and awkward process.

Matloff: I'll have to go back and ask him that. He did leave the door open for us to do that, and you've given us a good opportunity to do that. How about the Middle East? We know the Camp David Accords of September '78 were a great landmark in the Carter administration, one of the highlights, and a good demonstration of the role the President as a peace negotiator. It paved the way for that first treaty between an Arab state and Israel in March 1979. How important did you and he see the accommodation between Egypt and Israel for U.S. security interests?

Brzezinski: We thought that it was terribly important in that it reduced dramatically the probability of another major Middle Eastern war. Israel could only be taken on by the Arabs if there was an alliance between the Arab states. Taking Egypt out of the alliance reduced the possibility of war. Reducing the possibility of war meant reducing the openings to the Soviets. That was strategically good for the United States, even though it did not meet our expectations, which were to promote a wider peace.

Matloff: Was President Carter satisfied with the operations of the national security apparatus during this peace process?

Brzezinski: I think the President felt that probably in that area we did the best we could.

Matloff: That's well supported. How much did he rely on Harold Brown and DoD in these negotiations?



Brzezinski: Not terribly much, except when it came to security arrangements—for example, what to do to compensate the Israelis for the airfields in the Sinai, etc. But Harold was not heavily involved. He came up once or twice to Camp David, for example, during the 13 days of negotiations, whereas Vance and I were there for the entire 13 days, day and night.

Matloff: You have a very good quote in Power and Principle that Carter did not want "Harold Brown wandering around the desert trying to figure out where to put the air fields for the Israelis, with us having to foot the bill." Would you elaborate on that?

Brzezinski: I think that it describes the President's attitude very well.

Matloff: Would the President and/or yourself have wanted to go further in that treaty than the Israelis, and how much further would you have gone?

Brzezinski: I would have liked, if not solve, at least to make very substantial progress on the West Bank issue, and we didn't.

Matloff: How about Iran? First, with reference to the fall of the Shah in January '79, regarded as the greatest setback of the Carter Administration politically. Could more, in retrospect, have been done on the American side, in your view?

Brzezinski: I feel now, and I felt then, that we should have tried a military coup.

Matloff: There's been some suggestion that until the crisis became very serious, your attention and that of other people involved were

riveted on other issues. Is this a flaw in the security system, possibly?

Brzezinski: Not really. I think it's a fact that there were other issues that were terribly important and that were preoccupying us. This issue in effect had to compete with them and could only gain our attention by becoming graver. I'm afraid there's no institutional solution for that.

Matloff: Some critics indicated that the Administration was slow in recognizing the seriousness of the crisis.

Brzezinski: That might be the case, but I don't know what the remedy to that is and what it would mean to say that we were quick in recognizing it. We would still have had the same problem, which was the Shah, who was not capable of dealing with it, not prepared to be decisive, or to pull out; and the President, on the other hand, was not prepared to stage a military coup.

Matloff: How good, from your vantage point, was U.S. intelligence during that crisis?

Brzezinski: Poor.

Matloff: That would have put you in a tough position, because, as I recall, in the SCC, covert intelligence and the like were coming to you.

Brzezinski: Yes, I was dissatisfied with that intelligence, and I was the one who prompted the President to write his famous note, to address to Stan, Cy, and me, that he was dissatisfied with the quality of political intelligence. I suggested he address it to all three of

us, so it didn't look like a public rebuke to Stan. But the purpose was to get the CIA to develop better quality of product.

Matloff: Did the President support you on the thought of a military coup, or did you support him on a possible coup?

Brzezinski: No, the President was not prepared to go for that.

Matloff: Then how do you explain the Huyser mission?

Brzezinski: The Huyser mission was to prevent the military from falling apart under Bakhtiar. Rather reluctantly, it would also give them option C, which was to prepare for the eventuality of a military coup, if no other option was possible. But the point is, the President was not prepared to accept the notion that some other option was no longer possible. Whereas I felt, as of January, that a military coup was our last possible salvation. I felt, prior to January, that the military government under the Shah was still the way to view the situation. I think the President was reluctant to have massive spilling of blood ascribed to the United States.

Matloff: I have not had a chance to read the Huyser book, have you?

Brzezinski: Yes, I read it.

Matloff: Is it an accurate account from your standpoint?

Brzezinski: Yes, basically.

Matloff: This is a very good point for future historians who will be looking at this material. On whom in the national security apparatus was the President relying the most in this crisis?

Brzezinski: The President always relied in these issues, not exclusively on anyone, but essentially on three people, not necessarily in order of importance--Vance, Brown, and myself.

Matloff: To come to the hostage crisis, November 1979-January 1981, the tail end of the story--was it the Coordinating Committee that was carrying the coordinating role in this issue?

Brzezinski: Yes.

Matloff: How did the President and you keep informed on the hostage crisis? Where was the intelligence coming from?

Brzezinski: From the CIA and State Department, mostly.

Matloff: Not the military side?

Brzezinski: No.

Matloff: What led to the decision to try to rescue the hostages by force?

Brzezinski: It seemed that nothing else was open. The negotiations were not leading anywhere, lives were in jeopardy, and the situation in Iran was getting worse. Last but not least, the feeling was that the military thought that the rescue mission had a reasonably high probability of success.

Matloff: This was a coordinated advice, or coming from any particular source?

Brzezinski: No, it was coordinated in the sense that there were extensive, prolonged meetings of a very small group developing the rescue option, which usually met in my office, involving just the JCS, Harold Brown, and myself, plus one or two officers. Then, from March on, there were extensive briefings of the top leadership--the President, Vice President, Secretary of State, Chief of Staff, Jody Powell--by the military on the details of the undertaking, including a very careful assessment of its chances of failure or success.

Matloff: Why was resort to a blockade or to a mining or other concurrent military tacks ruled out?

Brzezinski: Because our allies were very much against them. They would produce a collision between us and the allies, and we felt that in such a situation we would be applying pressure on different country heads by killing hostages one by one.

Matloff: How about the President's role, was he influenced in any way by the way Kennedy had handled the Bay of Pigs operation?

Brzezinski: Yes. That is to say, he refused, and rightly so, in my judgment, to micro-manage the minute details. He said, "I approved the operation, I assume responsibility for it." I think it developed as originally planned, but the micro-decision making and micro-commanding of it blew it in the military sense. This is the opposite of what Kennedy did.

Matloff: What lessons, in retrospect, did you draw from the handling of this crisis, including the way the national security apparatus worked, including intelligence, military operations, and the like?

Brzezinski: There are obvious areas for improvement, such as political intelligence. My view was that in the future any operation of this sort had to be blunter and less complex, and involve more intense application of force. That was one conclusion I drew; a second was that we shouldn't let ourselves be dragged into indefinite negotiations, which paralyzed our side.

Matloff: A word about Afghanistan. The year 1979 must have been a very rough year. On your reaction and that of the President to the

Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and its impact on U.S. security policy-- what did you or could you recommend under those circumstances?

Brzezinski: I recommended what in effect became the Carter Doctrine. My view was that, irrespective of what Soviet motives may have been, the objective consequences of Soviet domination of Afghanistan were to place the Soviets in a position to exert decisive influence on Iran and Pakistan, and thus potentially on the Persian Gulf. Therefore, this was a geopolitical challenge, and not just some localized affair.

Matloff: The Defense Department reacted with the activation of the Rapid Deployment Force. At this point, did you step in with your recommendation?

Brzezinski: What do you mean by activated?

Matloff: The Rapid Deployment Force was activated in Florida on 1 March, 1980.

Brzezinski: The headquarters, but that wasn't one of the specific steps taken to give it more oomph and meat. I don't remember whether we adopted that specifically in the wake of the invasion of Afghanistan per se, or later on. But that was part of the generals' effort to beef up the RDF.

Trask: Was there any consideration of any other reactions to Afghanistan?

Brzezinski: Yes, we adopted a whole lot of sanctions and everything else.

Trask: There wasn't any consideration of military action?

Brzezinski: Not directly, but we do provide, and have provided ever since the invasion, a considerable amount of help for the resistance.

I went to Pakistan to negotiate that, and I also negotiated with the Saudis and some other nations--which are still not in the public domain. We did that, but we did not contemplate direct military assistance, unless the Soviets moved toward the Persian Gulf, in which case, under the Carter Doctrine, there would be a collision between the United States and the Soviets.

Matloff: One more area problem--the Panama Canal--how important did you regard the treaty signed with Panama in September 1977 to U.S. national security?

Brzezinski: In a negative sense, that is to say, if we didn't have a treaty we would probably have a more volatile situation, perhaps even at some point physical danger to our assets and therefore a security problem.

Matloff: Apparently the Defense Department played a major role in these negotiations. Why did Carter assign the Defense Department a major role?

Brzezinski: Because the military played a major role in the Canal.

Matloff: Did you feel that Brown was effective in trying to get this treaty through the Senate?

Brzezinski: Yes, very much so. He had a lot of credibility and played a very important role.

Matloff: With reference to your perspectives on national security organization, on the basis of your experience and reflection--how

effective was the system in the Carter Administration—the NSC, DoD, among others?

Brzezinski: Obviously, I am terribly biased. But my theory is that the system was very effective in the sense that the DoD and State were very heavily involved always, and the principals were very heavily involved. I cannot think of any issue in which a major position was taken by the President without the involvement of the participants, and the flow of paper was extremely efficient and very rapid. The President knew, for example, if there was an important meeting without his participation, about the substance of that meeting, the positions taken by the people, and the different recommendations, within one day later. He reacted usually very fully. He would read the stuff; his directives were clear; they would then be communicated in writing to the principals. We also had an orderly process for meeting on a weekly basis—Vance, Brown, and myself, with weekly agenda and outputs provided to parties concerned. I think that the problem that arose was not in terms of the process, but in terms of the philosophy. The President had a different philosophical view of what the American national security required than I on some issues; and that even more importantly, there was a continuing split between me and the Secretary of State, which I think was damaging to the President, in retrospect, to a greater extent than I realized at the time.

Matloff: How do you see the difference between you and the Secretary of State?



Brzezinski: I felt that the Soviets were posing a global challenge to us, exploiting our Vietnamese malaise quite deliberately, and that if we were to structure a stable relationship with the Soviets, we had to respond in a manner that got the Soviets to desist in some important aspects, and only then we would stabilize the relationship. I think the Secretary of State felt that if we could reach an accommodation with the Soviets in the arms control area, with a SALT agreement, a lot of the other things would fall in place.

Matloff: Is this then a difference over the use of military power?

Brzezinski: You can call it use of power, or a question of linkage, I don't know how to characterize it.

Matloff: Were you closer in your thinking to Harold Brown in this respect?

Brzezinski: Yes, I think Harold Brown and I were quite close on this.

Matloff: Along the same line, how much did the President rely for advice and information on the formal apparatus of the national security system? Or did he go outside of it?

Brzezinski: He relied predominantly on the system.

Matloff: Was military advice and policy formulation at the level of the President adequate in your view?

Brzezinski: I would think so. I didn't feel it was not.

Matloff: Now to the question I ask everyone--how would you characterize the styles, personalities, and effectiveness of the various people with whom you were serving? For example, the Secretary of Defense?

Brzezinski: Let me simply refer you to my memoirs, because I have tried to summarize my impressions of these principals--their personalities, operational strengths and weaknesses, and I honestly don't think I can improve on what I said there.

Matloff: I don't recall whether you took it down to the level of the Joint Chiefs.

Brzezinski: No, and between you and me I wasn't overwhelmingly impressed, but I don't want to personalize it.

Matloff: Carter, in his speech at Notre Dame, made a point, saying, "I believe we can have a foreign policy that is democratic, that is based on fundamental values, and that uses power and influence, which we have, for humane purposes. We can also have a foreign policy that the American people both support and, for a change, know about and understand." The obvious question is, in retrospect, how successful do you feel the administration was in blending power and principle?

Brzezinski: Not too successful, because I think that our administration was too much composed of people who leaned one way or the other and thereby the divisions between them personalized the difficult dichotomy inherent in the relationship.

Matloff: How about the other aspect--how successful in gaining public understanding and support of this policy?

Brzezinski: Not successful, either, although probably more successful than, in retrospect, we would judge, because I think the Iranian setback so obscured public perception of Carter's foreign policy and made it so much more negative than otherwise would have been the case.

Matloff: I suspect the pendulum will swing the other way.

Brzezinski: It's beginning to swing already.

Matloff: What do you regard as your major achievements in the area of national security during the Carter presidency, and what disappointed you the most or perhaps was not completed?

Brzezinski: I think I would say that what I personally feel most gratified by was not only the normalization but also the development of a strategic relationship with China, the strategic renewal involving PD-59 and the MX, and then development of the RDF, the adoption of the Carter Doctrine as a landmark, and the deterrence of a Soviet invasion of Poland in 1980. The biggest disappointment, without a doubt, was the indecision on Iran during the Shah's fall, and very specifically, the failure of the rescue mission.

Matloff: Is there any question that I should have asked you and didn't?

Brzezinski: No, you really covered the waterfront very skillfully.

Matloff: Thank you for your cooperation.

Brzezinski: If anything comes up, don't hesitate to get in touch with me.