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**JIMMY CARTER**

**PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES, 1977-81**

**ATLANTA, GEORGIA**

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**INTERVIEWERS: MAURICE MATLOFF AND ALFRED GOLDBERG**

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This is an oral history interview with President Jimmy Carter held in Atlanta, Georgia, Emory University, Woodruff Library, on March 12, 1986, at 3:30 p.m. The interview is being recorded on tape and a copy of the transcript will be sent to President Carter for his review. Representing the OSD Historical Office are Dr. Alfred Goldberg and Dr. Maurice Matloff.

Matloff: Mr. President, as we indicated in our letter of November 6, 1985, we shall focus in this interview on your role in conducting national security affairs and on events and issues affecting national security during your presidential administration from 1977 to 1981. First, what problems in national security did you face when you assumed the presidency in January 1977? Did you have a detailed agenda for national security when you came to the White House?

Carter: I felt that too much damage had been inflicted on the Defense establishment, that is, on its image on a worldwide basis and within our country, as an aftermath of the Vietnam War. There was also an excessive degree of secrecy and sometimes misleading comments that had originated during that war, including the bombing and attacks on Cambodia. The revelations of the CIA involvement in alleged crimes was also a problem. So this was one of the major goals that I had. After the election was over and before the inauguration, I began to meet not only with the outgoing Secretary of Defense [Rumsfeld], and Secretary of State Kissinger, but also with the Joint Chiefs of Staff. We had several meetings of quite extensive scope across the street from the White House in a room that had been cleared for security, to analyze the potential of the future. I felt at that time that there needed to be a long-term understanding of Defense budget needs, with a predictability about it--an interrelationship with NATO allies and others, and a common understanding and commitment from the White House,

the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the National Security Adviser, and the Congress. So we initiated then a policy whereby matters that related to the budget would be worked out on a consensus basis between me and the Defense Department officials. It was quite a time-consuming process. But they knew each year that we would exceed the existing budgets by two or three percent above and beyond the inflation rate; and that, if they implemented a new weapons system, they had to phase out an equivalent costly, obsolescent weapons system. As a result, we had very enthusiastic support for our budgets submitted to the Congress. I don't think the budget was ever modified more than one-half of one percent.

Another very disturbing fact--and this is something that you probably ought to check on for security--is that the SIOP plan on how to handle a nuclear attack, for which I requested a series of instructions and then an active drill before I took over the role of President, I felt was not adequate in several structural ways. If you talk to Harold Brown, he has this study. The only point I'll make is that in the past the Vice President had not even been included in this process, and if something happened to the President, the Vice President would be responsible immediately for implementing any sort of nuclear response. So I ordered that Vice President Mondale be given the same instruction that I was. We clarified the procedure--we had fairly frequent drills on how the communications procedure would be handled, and so forth.

Another of my goals was to insure that the military leaders would be more intimately involved in the shaping of political policy. So subsequent to that time either Dr. Brzezinski, or one of his associates, or Secretary

Vance would go to the Pentagon on occasion to explain to the military leaders our plans on purely political international affairs and answer questions, sometimes for several hours. In addition to that, I would meet on a fairly regular basis at lunchtime with Harold Brown, the Secretary of Defense, all of the members of the Joint Chiefs, and Dr. Brzezinski, and we would have a free discussion during an extensive lunch. Another thing that we did was: as we negotiated the Panama Canal treaty, the normalization of relations with China, and the Mid-East peace agreement, I consulted very closely with the Joint Chiefs of Staff as a body, or with the Chairman. Every item that was put forward in nuclear arms negotiations leading to SALT II was directly approved by the Joint Chiefs before I or Secretary Vance negotiated in Washington, or our regular negotiating group in Europe. When I went to consummate the SALT II treaty in June 1979, I took Chairman David Jones along with us to sit at the table with me and be involved in that. We tried to make sure the Joint Chiefs knew what was going on, as we prepared to terminate our long-standing relationship with Taiwan and shift our emphasis to China, and as we concluded a new treaty with Panama. Those were some of the things that we had in mind.

Matloff: What influences had shaped your views of national security?

Possibly your service experience, something in your governorship years, or your participation in the Trilateral Commission?

Carter: At the beginning, if at the age of five years I had been asked, "What do you intend to do with your life?" the only answer that I would have known was, "I want to go to Annapolis." Neither my father nor his ancestors

ever had a chance to finish high school, much less go to college, and the only avenue that we saw during the depression years for me to get a college education was to go to a military college. That was my only ambition in life. I went to Annapolis, and I immersed myself not only in the studies but also in international affairs. After I graduated, I applied for a Rhodes Scholarship. I was not accepted, but I was one of the finalists. I served for seven more years, the last few under Admiral Rickover, and in some very exciting positions in the Navy, mostly on the forefront of technological progress. My first assignment was on an experimental gunnery and radar ship; my second was as the only officer on the first ship the Navy built after the Second World War, the USS K-1, a little anti-submarine submarine. I went from there to Admiral Rickover's group. So I had that background. Another thing was that my political hero and a close friend was Senator Dick Russell. When I was a midshipman, I would go over on rare occasions to watch, and I would always visit Senator Russell and listen to his exposition on defense matters. This gave me something of a background. I decided to run for president in 1972, four years before I was elected, and I embarked on an intensive study of the presidency, particularly of things that didn't relate to my duties as a governor--foreign policy and defense matters. The Trilateral Commission was obviously one of those opportunities where I worked with Brzezinski, Brown, Cy Vance, and others. So those were the things that I did to acquaint myself with some of the issues involved.

Matloff: In your previous reading or contemplation had you conceived of any previous president as a role model, anyone you particularly admired, particularly in the national security field?

Carter: My hero, during my lifetime, was Harry Truman. Although I made a fairly good study, within the limits of time available to me, of my predecessors in the White House, his being a favorite meant that I concentrated my study on him. What he had to accommodate in the rapid changes that took place in the military; the final agreement to use the atomic weapon; his emphasis on human rights; the rebuilding of Japan, Germany, and Italy after the Second World War, and not embarking on a punitive program because they had been adversaries--these kinds of things were very important to me.

Matloff: In Brzezinski's memoirs he makes the statement that on a number of occasions he advised that "You first have to be a Truman before you are a Wilson." Does that ring a bell?

Carter: Yes, it does.

Matloff: What he never says is whether or not you agreed.

Carter: I agreed, because of all the Presidents that affected my life and my philosophy, Truman was the most significant. I never did look on Truman as being a warlike character. I've never disagreed with his dropping of the nuclear weapon on Hiroshima. I have some doubt about whether it was necessary to drop the second one. I've been to Hiroshima and met with the people there, and I think it terminated the war and resulted in a net saving of life. The main thing that I saw in Truman was an element of generosity in dealing with vanquished foes, and also a strength in the face

of the inevitable unpopularity of demonstrating the power of civilian control of the military--for instance, when he fired MacArthur. Truman knew that the political fallout would be very severe against him. I privately cheered his action when that event occurred, and when I became president I could see the significance of it even more.

Goldberg: We cover that in our second volume. It will be out next year, and we will send you a copy.

Carter: I hope you will.

Matloff: In connection with reorganizing the national security structure, a number of changes were introduced both in the overall structure of the White House staff, the NSC, and the Department of Defense as well, during your administration. Were you satisfied with the state of the national security apparatus when you came into office?

Carter: No, I wasn't. I felt that readiness was very important. I also saw that operational efficiency was not being given adequate attention and too much emphasis was being placed by the Congress, and perhaps to some lesser degree by my predecessors, on the development of new weapon systems. We put a very strict discipline on Harold Brown and the Pentagon, which they resisted quite vociferously. We called it zero-based budgeting, and it meant that not only did we assess in every year's budget preparation the new proposals that they wanted to put forward, but they also had to reassess every previous decision that had been made that was costly to the government. That's why I said earlier that, when they proposed a new weapon system, they knew that they had to decommission an older weapon system, in order to comply

with the restraints. I think that this was one element of restructuring the budget process that was significant. The second one was that, as we sat around the Cabinet Room, adjacent to the Oval Office, we would have very tough discussions with the Office of Management and Budget leaders, the Joint Chiefs, Secretary Harold Brown, and his deputy. I tried to understand as well as I could the factors that went into budget priorities. If I wasn't familiar with a particular antitank weapon system, I wanted to know about it: how much does it cost? how long did it take? what's the lead time? what tests have been done? what does it replace? how much do we need it?--that sort of thing. We also were able over a period of time to try to compare our relationships with our NATO allies. We did two things here. First, all the NATO leaders, not only the defense chiefs but also the heads of nations, came to Washington, and we tried to evolve a fifteen-year program, to give us some structure so that each year we knew what we might anticipate in the future. Second, we got them to pledge (some of them didn't fulfill the pledge) a two or three percent increase per year above the inflation rate, primarily concentrating on conventional weapons. The third thing was to agree to share each other's weapon systems more than we had in the past. For instance, the Germans had a very effective tank, and the British had a vertical takeoff plane, and we wanted to respond to their complaints that they were not adequately considered when we chose a standard weapon for the alliance.

Goldberg: Do you think that your technical background, and that of Harold Brown, by comparison with your predecessors and their secretaries of defense, led to your views on the matter of initiating new weapon systems as against



getting rid of old ones, etc. Your predecessors did push a lot of weapon systems, and you did, too, as it turned out, naturally. It's inevitable, given the technological process taking place. Do you think that your background had something to do with your much closer view of the actual systems and review of those systems and your decisions on them, as compared with Nixon and Ford?

Carter: Yes, although I would have to give most of the credit on technical background to Harold Brown as a noted scientist and one with great experience within the Defense Department itself. Harold understood the cutting edge of technology; I didn't. But I'm an engineer by training and I think my attitude toward things like this is to make a list, compare, establish priorities, and cost-out things, and I thoroughly enjoyed that role. I only got immersed in things on which I had to make a decision.

Goldberg: Sounds like McNamara, too.

Carter: I think that, to some degree. And, of course, Harold had a deputy who had been president of the Coca Cola Company, and another one who had been president of Norfolk and Western Railroad. They were superb business managers. Harold was a scientist and a college president. So I tried to keep within the Defense Department not only Harold Brown, throughout the entire four years, but a deputy who was an expert on purchasing, sales, personnel management, and so on. A third thing was an intimate relationship--I think the Joint Chiefs would probably agree--with the members of the military leadership.

Matloff: While we are speaking about Secretary of Defense Brown, what were your working relationships with him, how close were you with him? How often did you see him? Did he have direct access to you, or did he have to go through the Assistant for National Security Affairs?

Carter: He had to go through nobody. Harold Brown, in a professional way, was intimate with me. We consulted frequently. He didn't have to make an appointment unless he wanted to, but almost always by courtesy he would. He was an early riser, and so was I. So, quite often, he would call me or come by to see me at 6:30 or 7:00 in the morning. He would go down and swim awhile and come over and see me. Then late in the afternoon, on occasion, Harold would call me. We had regular weekly meetings on Friday mornings at breakfast, again quite early, and the initial group was only a very few people--I, Brown, Vance, Brzezinski, and Mondale. We would spend an hour and one-half, strictly on business, while eating breakfast, and we would work out all the problems that anyone would raise. Then Brzezinski would keep notes and later issue kind of a memorandum to the whole group, to make sure that we had a compatible understanding. If Brzezinski had distorted anything inadvertently, then we would correct it the next Friday. In addition to that, on Wednesdays I directed Brzezinski, Brown, and Vance to get together for lunch, and they addressed matters that did not require my involvement, but did involve some interrelationship among the White House, the Defense Department, and the State Department. So every Wednesday they had a lunch at which they would discuss matters. And quite often the results of that Wednesday lunch showed up on the agenda on Friday morning.

Matloff: Did you have dealings with other officials in OSD, let's say the deputy secretaries, on occasion?

Carter: Yes. Ordinarily, Brown would bring his deputy with him to budget hearings and to matters that concerned our satellite deployment, for instance. This was a matter that concerned the CIA as well, so the director of the intelligence agencies would come along with his deputy. We would have the expert within OMB there; Dr. Brzezinski and his expert on electronics would be there; and Harold Brown and his experts. On matters concerning arms control, Brown would also bring along the specialists in that field. Matters concerning nuclear weaponry were a dual responsibility of the Energy Department and the Department of Defense. In those cases we would sometimes have four or five specialists sitting at the table representing those agencies, in addition to the Secretaries.

Matloff: I take it from what you said before that you used Secretary of Defense Brown on other than strictly military considerations.

Carter: Yes, we did. In fact, the Friday morning sessions were quite often devoted to international political matters. I don't ever recall an instance when Harold was excluded from those issues, no matter how sensitive they might be. One of the most sensitive things that we succeeded in keeping an absolute secret (which is a rare thing in Washington) was our normalization of relations with China. These negotiations were conducted directly between the White House and Beijing. We never sent a dispatch out of the State Department. Harold, Vance, and I, and our China specialist, Mike Oksenberg,

and Brzezinski would personally draft instructions to Leonard Woodcock in Beijing, when we got ready to move on this. Brown was always involved, just as though he were Secretary of State, because whatever we worked out with China would have a direct effect not only on strategic defense matters in the western Pacific, but also on our relationship with Taiwan. We wanted to shift our recognition to China but preserve the obligations that we had made to Taiwan.

Goldberg: Did you bring Jim Schlesinger in on any of this at any time?

Carter: Yes. Schlesinger had a special relationship with me. He came down to Plains when I was choosing my Cabinet. He preferred to be Secretary of State or Secretary of Defense--preferably Secretary of State. I wanted him to be Secretary of Energy. We didn't have an Energy Department then, but I was planning to build one. He and I agreed that eventually he would be Secretary of Energy. In the interim, before the creation of the new department, he would have an office within the White House (OMB) and he would have direct access to me, just like a cabinet officer. And on Saturday mornings he and I would share a cup of coffee and an hour or two of discussions that didn't relate to the Energy Department. This was a unique relationship. I liked him personally, I think he liked me, and we would discuss the gamut of political and defense matters just in a private fashion. The only times that he would be there on an official basis was when we were discussing weapon systems that involved nuclear matters, which, as you know, is a responsibility within the Energy Department.

Goldberg: That continued after he became Secretary?

Carter: Yes. After he became Secretary, he moved out of the White House, but we still enjoyed our early morning Saturday tête-a-tête, to which I looked forward.

Matloff: Did members of the Joint Chiefs have direct access to you, or did they have to go through either Brown and/or the National Security Adviser?

Carter: They had direct access. The only one they had to go through was my appointment secretary, to make sure that I was available. I don't think that they ever requested a meeting with me that they didn't get within 24 hours.

Matloff: When there were splits among them, did you encourage those splits to be brought to you, or did you want the Chairman or the Secretary of Defense to settle them before they came to your attention?

Carter: I preferred that they be settled, but on matters of budget requests, for instance, there were always differences of opinion. I might say that David Jones is one of the most extraordinary leaders I have ever known. He was not only a superb military man, but in the realms of political science, philosophy, ethics, and morality, he was superb. So quite often when David would come and make a report to me in private or in the presence of Harold Brown and others, he would describe to me very bluntly and succinctly that there was a difference of opinion among the Joint Chiefs. I generally deferred to his advice. I would say, "David, do you think that this is something that the Joint Chiefs would need to bring to me personally, or can you bring me the opposing positions and let me consult with Harold Brown and make a final decision?" Almost invariably, the choice would be the second option, but there were times when they would come and present their independent points of view.

Goldberg: Normally they would go to Harold Brown, wouldn't they?

Carter: Of course.

Matloff: How would you describe your usual procedure of making decisions in the national security area? Every account has paid tribute to the fact that you immersed yourself in the material and wanted to know what the facts were. Is there any other aspect to it that we should know? For example, how much reliance did you put on the formal machinery, the national security apparatus, and how much did you look for help to the outside--you mentioned Schlesinger--to consultants, elder statesmen, special commissions, or the like?

Carter: I began to evolve my character, I'm sure like everyone else does, as a fairly young man; at the Naval Academy; as a submarine officer; starting up a new business; running for governor; being elected governor; serving as governor; running for president; being elected president. In that process I evolved my method of management. What I decided to do then, and I've never seen any reason to depart from it, was to choose as few subjects for my absorption as possible--just those things where no one could make the ultimate decision but me. If there were things that could be decided by Schlesinger, Brown, Vance, or Muskie, I didn't want to get involved in them. I wanted to be kept informed, but not involved. When an issue came up where I felt I had to make the ultimate decisions, then I tried, as a matter of great challenge and enjoyment, to master the subject. One of those was Mid-East peace discussions; another was SALT II; another was normalized relations with China; another was the Panama Canal treaties. When I sat down at the negotiating table across from Gromyko, Dobrynin,

and later Ogarkov, Brezhnev, or Chernenko, I didn't have to turn around to Harold and say, "What is an MX missile?" or "What do you mean by Backfire?" or "Why do we need 1200 instead of 1300?" I had learned those things. The same thing applied to the negotiations at Camp David. I didn't have to ask Vance, "Where is the Sinai?" and "Where is Sharm-el-Sheikh, and why is it important?" I tried to learn, but concentrated on as few subjects as possible and with an adequate degree of study.

Goldberg: A few still added up to an awful lot, didn't they?

Carter: Yes, but I felt that this was a full-time job for me. It was not a part-time job. And it was the kind of thing that suits my nature. I wanted to learn about the Middle Eastern people, their background, history, and issues. The intricacies were very intriguing. Why was it that Johnson, Nixon, and Ford had not been successful in getting a Panama Canal treaty consummated? What could I do differently to bring it into being? Why had we gone since 1972 without following up on Nixon's Shanghai communiqué, wherein he said that there was one China, but didn't say which China? I wanted to overcome those kinds of problems. The Mid-East peace was another intransigent thing. I sought a lot of advice from congressional leaders. I had one disadvantage in going to Washington--I wouldn't have gone to Washington, had it not been for this disadvantage--I was not part of the Washington establishment. I was not a long-time U.S. Senator or member of Congress; I had never served in Washington, except briefly, while I was working under Rickover as a young officer. I didn't have that background of intimate friends, supporters, or the trust of the key news reporters, and

things of that kind. So, when I got there, I spent a lot of time with the key members of the Congress who were experts on the field and whom I trusted, people like Muskie, Sam Nunn, Hubert Humphrey, Scoop Jackson, and others, depending upon the subject. By the time we eventually developed an issue like the Panama Canal treaty, or the Defense budget, or whatever, we had a substantial amount of support on the Hill. There were a few people, like Clark Clifford and Lloyd Cutler, whom I called in to help me on occasion. Later on, I even brought in Hedley Donovan who had been head of Time magazine, just for public relations, particularly during the last year I was in office, when the hostages were being held and I needed to let the world know that the proper things had gone on, though not always successfully. I enjoyed those sessions with outside advisers, but primarily I depended on people within the administration. I deliberately chose--something like President Roosevelt had done--people who could present to me different points of view. I didn't want to be given a final package with, "Here's what we ought to do, is it OK or not?" I wanted to know the choices that I had. I enjoyed having Brzezinski on the one hand, and Vance on the other. Vance was loyal to the State Department--an enormous, lethargic bureaucracy, very cautious, very careful, very seldom a new or vivid idea. Brzezinski was always bringing out new approaches, new ideas, new suggestions. I could discount the ones that I didn't like. In that respect I liked to have a disparity of points of view. I think the final thing is that I made the final decisions, and I think that any of them would say that in any matter of significance concerning defense or foreign policy I made the decisions.



Matloff: How much of your time as President would you estimate you actually spent on national security affairs?

Carter: About one-fourth. I would say that I spent three-fourths of my time on domestic issues. The foreign policy and defense matters captured the headlines and they are the ones that are still best-remembered, by me and others, but the tedious negotiation with Congress on matters concerning budgets, taxation, energy policy, water projects, the Education Department, establishing an Energy Department, reorganization, things of that kind, were by far the most time-consuming. And a few of those I tried to master as well. That's a rough quantification, I wouldn't want anybody to check on it, but I would consider that ratio roughly correct.

Matloff: On the question of threat perception, what was your perception of the threat to American national security when you assumed office, and did your views change as a result of your experiences in the office?

Carter: It was obvious to me even before I took office that the most serious immediate threat was in Panama, of combat, and also of sabotage of the Canal. This was a festering problem that had originated a few weeks after Johnson became President late in 1963, and had continued to get worse. Every one of the members of the Organization of American States had publicly condemned the United States and this was giving a great deal of incentive to the more radical elements in Panama and also to the more responsible members of the National Guard. That was the most crucial threat to security, or to peace. There is no doubt that we could have defeated Panama, if we had gone to war--I don't mean that our nation was in danger--but we would have lost the Panama Canal. That was the most important and difficult political

issue I ever faced in my life, including getting elected President. I also had a feeling that the most likely origin for a super-power confrontation was not at all in Europe, but in the Middle East, with our unswerving support of Israel and with the Soviet ties to Syria and perhaps others there, and I tried to address this problem. In my own experience as a relatively young person, when somebody mentioned war to me, I thought immediately of the Pacific. My father would have thought only of Europe. But from Pearl Harbor through Hiroshima and Nagasaki, South Korea, and Vietnam, war to me meant the Pacific. I didn't see the likelihood of a threat to security, but I thought the potential still lay there. That's why I elevated a new relationship with China to such a high level. So I would say that those were the places that I saw the threats to security later.

Goldberg: What about Korea?

Carter: I didn't really feel that Korea was a likely place for a confrontation. At the beginning my ambition was to reduce American military forces in South Korea, and I began to work toward that goal in a very orderly and progressive way, turning over equipment and weapons to the South Koreans over a long term, to let them be more self-sufficient in their own defense. I felt that they had that potential, and still do. After I was in office for about two years, I got a totally different assessment from the Defense intelligence agencies and from the CIA of North Korean capabilities in defense. I have never been convinced of the total accuracy of that report, but I had to accept it. It showed that the North Korean capabilities were at least twice as high as we had thought originally. So I decided that we

should not any more contemplate reduction of our military presence in South Korea. But never during my administration did I think that our security was in danger from that realm. I also thought that a better relationship with China would likely reduce any potential threat of an altercation between North and South Korea. That was an additional motivation for our move toward China.

Matloff: As President, how much of a role did you play in the evolution of American strategic doctrine? I'm thinking, for example, in connection with PD-18 and PD-59. PD-18, which you signed August 24, 1977, directed that the United States maintain a strategic posture of "essential equivalence" in the nuclear competition with the Soviet Union. Would you amplify what you meant by that term and why did you not adopt the formulas that previous administrations had used--such things as "superiority," "parity," "sufficiency?"

Carter: I had by then been in office about 6 or 7 months, and I had personally, with very good teachers, made an assessment of the relative strength of American and Soviet forces. In my opinion, there was a rough equivalency. We had different strategic histories and aspirations. The Soviets had placed most of their emphasis on land-based silo missiles. We had pretty well split our emphasis on the land-based missiles, the submarine force, and bombers, along with the upcoming air-launched cruise missiles; but in general, when you assessed the strength of the two sides, there was rough equivalency. I wanted to let the Congress--the ones who were intensely interested--and the leaders in the Defense Department and the State Department and elsewhere know that we didn't have to have exact parallelism or equivalency in each type of strategic weapon, in order to conclude a successful agreement with the Soviet Union. It gave me, in my negotiations with the Defense

Department, and in my dealings with key members of the House and Senate, particularly the Senate, an ability to deal more flexibly. I could always have reserved that right for myself, personally, but it meant that people deep within the Defense Department or the Energy Department wouldn't have been guided by the same framework. So I wanted to remove this restraint on them. Some of this restraint had come from Senate action when SALT I was ratified. The so-called Jackson statement had required that in the future there not be granted to the Soviets superiority in any realm of strategic capability. I don't know the exact words--that's roughly what I interpret it to be. I wanted to make sure that everyone who gave me advice and who had worked up to the ultimate authority, which was I, would know that equivalency was adequate.

Matloff: How about PD-59, that you approved July 25, 1980. This was the official adoption of what's been called "countervailing strategy," which apparently Brown had been thinking about and had come to some conclusions by early 1979. Why was this adopted, and had you discussed this with Brown in detail?

Goldberg: Did you discuss that with Schlesinger, too? He had a lot of background on that.

Carter: I would guess that I did. I don't specifically recall the discussion. There were a couple of motivations for that. By then I had become familiar to some degree with specific targetting priorities, which is always a very sobering thing for the President, and had drawn some conclusions which I shared, I think, unanimously with Brzezinski, Brown, and Vance, about the need to depart from civilian targetting--how many people would be killed--to a more realistic priority of destroying the Soviet military capability and

military-industrial capability first. It gave us some means, if we had a limited attack coming in on us, to respond in a limited fashion to the most significant strategic centers in the Soviet Union. I might add that we never did contemplate launching a limited nuclear war--that's a very doubtful premise--but it did give us some flexibility in response. If the Soviets launched a thousand missiles against us, that element of PD-59 would have been relatively insignificant. If the Soviets launched ten missiles against us, I had to make a decision in a few minutes as to how to respond. That's one part. The other part was that we had changed our relationship with China. Prior to that, China was looked upon as a potential nuclear enemy--and with our new normalized relations with China that had to be modified. I don't believe that in the document PD-59 that was specifically spelled out, but that was part of the background of PD-59--how do you shift available nuclear capabilities away from China, where a part of it had been allocated, to more likely targets?

Goldberg: So from your standpoint, and that of Brown, the essence of that was really in terms of developing a strategic capability in the event that it might become needed rather than pursuing a specific strategic operational plan.

Carter: That's correct.

Matloff: It's very interesting that, among your advisers who have written on this since then, Brown calls it "not a new strategic doctrine; not a radical departure;" Brzezinski says that it is "an important new step" in American strategic thought.

Carter: I agree more with Brown, that it was an evolutionary step, a kind of fine tuning. Not to say this in a critical way, but I'm not sure that any of my predecessors took the time really to assess that circumstance. And I don't claim that I mastered it; it was a very complicated thing, as you know. But I thought it was my responsibility at least to understand it and to have some more definitive assessment of it, and PD-59 was kind of a result of that.

Goldberg: That was Schlesinger's *métier*, too; these were his views.

Carter: Yes.

Matloff: You raise an interesting point between playing the China card, as it were, and PD-59. Was there any relation between PD-59 and the Carter doctrine, in terms of the Persian Gulf?

Carter: I can't say that there was, but, of course, at the time those two were interrelated in my mind. Whether the wording of PD-59 was related to the Carter doctrine, I can't really remember. Brown may remember some discussions among him, Brzezinski, and others.

Matloff: They were within six months of each other.

Carter: I know they were. It was obvious that we were assessing our entire strategic response. What I told the Soviets in the so-called Carter doctrine was that we would respond strongly to their actions toward the south and west out of Afghanistan toward the Persian Gulf, and that our response need not be limited to that area of the world.

Matloff: In the State of the Union address of January 23, 1980, you specifically said "by any means, including military force"--it was very specifically spelled out.

Carter: That's correct. And in my public statements subsequently I made it clear that we weren't contemplating necessarily the sending of American troops to Iran or to Pakistan, but that our response would not be limited to any particular area of the world.

Goldberg: Was Bob Komer involved in developing this doctrine?

Carter: I can't say. That paragraph was personally drafted by me, and we had quite a bit of negotiation on exactly how to say it. My impression was that Brzezinski, Brown, and I wanted to be very specific, and that the State Department wanted to be a little more general in tone. It was finally made, I think, quite specific.

Matloff: Who set the budgetary ceilings for Defense in your administration, and how were the figures arrived at?

Carter: Harold Brown and I did, and I have to say that it was kind of an arbitrary thing.

Goldberg: It always has been, from Truman on.

Carter: And probably always will be. In the 8 years preceding me, there had been a substantial reduction in Defense budgets in real terms. This is not a criticism of Ford and Nixon, who had their proposed budgets reduced substantially by the Congress--it was a reaction against the experience in Vietnam. When I got there, I saw this as a problem. I wanted to make the Defense Department more efficient. I think that we saved a good deal of money on the efficiency measures, but in general I wanted the budget to be prepared in an organic, cooperative way, with me, OMB, NSC, Defense, and, to some degree, State and Energy. So Harold Brown and I would negotiate on a

personal basis whether the Defense budget for the next year would be increased three percent, four percent, two-and one-half percent--above and beyond the inflation rate, and what would be included in that formula. Eventually I would say, after consulting with OMB when Harold wasn't there, "OK, Harold, we can increase the Defense budget next year three percent." And he would say, "I think you ought to make it four percent." Anyhow, that word went to Harold Brown and he relayed it in a very stern and disciplined way to the entire department. I said, "I would prefer that you present to me a proposal with not more than a three percent increase in it. If you can't resolve those altercations among Navy, Air Force, Marines, and the Army, then I will make the decisions after consulting with Brzezinski and with the OMB director. But it would be better for you if it was made within the Pentagon." I think it might be interesting for you to check the records. I would guess that during the four-year period it was a rare thing for the Congress to modify those budgets more than one-half of one percent, because when the Joint Chiefs went to testify, they basically supported the budget that we had hammered out.

Matloff: Brzezinski writes that you tried to pull him into the budget business, and that he didn't want to get in on it if he could stay out.

Carter: He had a minimal involvement. In fact, Harold resisted very deeply the zero based budgeting concept--the fact that he had to resurrect old appropriations, old weapon systems, and let me reexamine them every year. But I insisted on it. That was what I had done during the four years that I was in the governor's office. There was also a very serious



reluctance on the part of, say, the Chief of Naval Operations, to accept voluntarily any substantial restraint on the Navy budget.

Goldberg: That's traditional.

Carter: Sure. And he didn't want to go back to his admirals and say, "I went to a meeting in the Cabinet Room and I agreed to accept this many dollars for the Navy." He wanted to say, "I fought to the last minute for \$35 billion; the President only gave me \$27 billion; we came up \$8 billion short; I did everything I could." They did not want to have the responsibility of saying, "This is what we need to do." And neither did the Chairman. I think that it worked out fairly well, and that Harold and David Jones would probably confirm what I've just told you.

Matloff: What led to the departure of your administration from its early emphasis on curtailing the Defense budget? In the earlier period the emphasis seemed to be on reducing it.

Carter: During the political campaign I had made a statement which may have been ill-advised, but I felt sincerely that in the Defense budget there was a considerable amount of waste. After consulting with a few people in the Congress who were supporting me, and with some advisers who had a previous background in the Defense Department and who wanted to see a Democratic person in the White House, we came up with a figure of about \$6 billion that we thought we could save by efficiencies in the Defense Department. That was the estimate or commitment I made to the American public. It's very hard to know how much we actually did save in better procedures for competitive bids, eliminating obsolete systems, that sort of thing. Harold and I pretty well agreed that we had saved that

much, but that didn't mean that we reduced the Defense budget that much. It meant that it made \$6 billion available for more needed items in the Defense budget to improve readiness. So, with things like the Rapid Deployment Forces, and some improvements that didn't cost much money at the time but that we knew would in the future, like the Stealth airplane concept, we thought that we were spending that saved money in a very effective way. Our promise to increase roughly three percent a year above the inflation rate was also put forward to inspire the NATO allies to do the same, because a lot of them were cutting back their Defense budgets.

Matloff: How about in the fall of 1979--here we have the other trend, at least according to some writings--did you agree at that time to support higher increases in the Defense budget, partly to placate the Senate opponents of SALT II?

Carter: Yes, that and the Iranian crisis. This was done not secretly, but openly. We had concluded the SALT II treaty, and we had been through the altercation of getting the Panama Canal treaties ratified, which was a horrible experience. Then we had embarked on a program of identifying all members of the Senate, how they stood on the SALT II treaty, whether or not they would support it. There were people like Nunn and Goldwater, for instance, whom I respected very much, who let me know that, in order for them to induce the other Senators whom they could influence to some degree to support the SALT II treaty, there had to be an assurance that we would not use a new SALT II treaty to cut back on the Defense budget. So at the urging of Harold Brown, and the Joint Chiefs in particular, I agreed to

some increase in the Defense budget, I think something like four or four and one-half percent--the numbers are in the record.

Matloff: Did you generally follow the recommendations of the Defense Department, basically Harold Brown in this case, and the NSC with reference to weapons acquisition and deployment, or did you have differences with them?

Carter: In general, I supported them. There were a few political things that came up. For instance, Harold and everybody knew that there were certain members of the Congress who would like to have an unnecessary commitment to A-10s or to F-18s. All of my advisers would say that we were spending too much money on such weapon systems but in order to get a certain congressman's vote on the Defense Appropriations Committee we've got to put them in. I would say, "Leave them out. Let's do what the country needs and fight it out with the congressmen when the time comes." We had a few differences of opinion like that. One of the most difficult decisions that we had to make was on the B-1 bomber. During the latter months of the Ford administration the Congress couldn't decide on the B-1 bomber--it was almost evenly divided. So it passed a resolution saying that no matter who was the next President in 1977, the President by June 1977 would make a recommendation to the Congress to build or not build the B-1. The Air Force wanted the B-1, and I had to turn to Harold Brown--with total confidence--to make this assessment. Harold spent an enormous amount of time analyzing the pros and cons of the B-1 bomber. We knew that we had, coming along, the air-launched cruise missiles that could be launched from a thousand miles off the shores of the Soviet Union. We knew the extraordinary expenditure that the Soviets had made on air defense systems against intruding

manned bombers. Later, we were beginning to get a glimpse of the potential of the stealth concept, at first primarily for air-launched cruise missiles, almost totally undetectable. After all the pros and cons were considered, Harold and I recommended that we not build the B-1 bomber--which I think was a very wise decision. That was not the end of it, unfortunately, but that was the kind of decision that Harold and I made. I would say that, in general, Harold would brief himself on the internal recommendations from the military chiefs and bring their recommendations to me. When there was a difference of opinion among the chiefs, Harold would describe that very readily, without any embarrassment or constraint. And, as I've said earlier, there were times when Harold thought that it was best to let the chiefs express themselves.

Matloff: How about the decision to deploy the MX missile--here's one that was taken even in the context of severe budget restraint--what was the rationalization for that decision?

Carter: Again, I think Harold could give you a better assessment, but I remember this as a major issue. We were negotiating the SALT II treaty and I felt that the existing strategic capability on land was becoming vulnerable. I wanted also to avoid a first-strike capability, if possible. We upgraded the Minuteman missiles with the Mark-12 warheads, but we also felt that there should be a shift over a period of time to more effective missiles, with perhaps ten warheads, deployed in such a way that they would not be an inviting target to a pre-emptive strike. We had a major debate about the size of this missile, which was called the MX--whether it should be 190 or so inches in diameter, or a smaller size, I can't remember exactly; and how many different kinds of optional sites it should be deployed in. We finally

arbitrarily said "23." That meant for each missile that the Soviets wanted to be sure to get at they would have to destroy 23 sites. This was also compatible with the negotiated SALT II treaty. We knew that we wanted to build MX, so we allowed not only for mobile missiles, that is, the MX, but we also allowed for one new missile on each side, which was what the Soviets accepted as well. Originally they wanted two new missiles on each side.

Goldberg: Was it also an earnest to the Congress that you would give them a substantial buildup in terms presumably for assistance in SALT II?

Carter: I think no, because the discussions of the MX came before we knew that we were going to get a SALT II treaty. But we had a need to keep our strategic forces modernized, and we had missiles that needed to be decommissioned at a very early date, and over a period of time we thought that our land-based part of the triad ought to be maintained in a modernized way. We had air-launched cruise missiles for air bomber strike, we had the Trident submarines and the Mark V missiles for sea based, and the MX was a logical progression on land-based.

Matloff: You believed in a balanced nuclear strategic triad.

Carter: Yes, I did.

Matloff: How about the reluctance to authorize the deployment of the neutron bomb? Brzezinski quotes you as saying at one point, "I wish I had never heard of this one."

Carter: That was a very difficult issue and one which I didn't handle well. There was an agreement in effect among the defense chiefs of NATO in Europe that we would go ahead with the neutron weapons, not only bombs but also shells. It may have been that I didn't do my homework, but I was down in Georgia on

a brief vacation with my family, and I read memoranda that informed me for the first time, clearly, that we were getting ready to approve the development and deployment of a neutron weapon, and that we didn't have anyone in Europe who had agreed to accept it. When I got back, I called Brzezinski on the phone and said, "I'm not going to go along with this." He said, "Mr. President, you've already agreed to do it, through Harold Brown's visit to Europe. I said, "If I did, I was not aware of it." We had quite an altercation about it. I did not think that the neutron weapon was needed, and as I began to consult with both Great Britain and Germany in particular, I couldn't get anyone to agree in a binding way to deploy it, if we developed it. So I decided, after consulting very closely with Jim Callaghan and Helmut Schmidt, that we would not develop and build the neutron weapon.

Matloff: You spoke about modernizing the nuclear forces--that brings me to the TNF issue. What lessons did you draw from the U.S. efforts to foster and carry out the NATO decision of December 1979 to deploy modernized theater nuclear forces?

Carter: I didn't really have to face too difficult a decision there. We went to a meeting in Martinique, just four of us--the leaders of Great Britain, France, Germany, and the U.S. Helmut Schmidt was very disturbed about the Soviet build-up of intermediate-range missiles in Europe, and in effect demanded that the NATO allies do something about it. I went back to Washington--Brzezinski and Vance were with me--and we discussed it at length, and decided that we probably needed to do it, because it was discussed at the summit meeting in Vienna and I felt that, if the intelligence that

the Soviets were having a massive build-up of the SS-20s was correct, then we needed to respond. In December I instructed Harold Brown, and maybe Vance went along, to go ahead and agree to deploy, after a three-year-interval, groundlaunched cruise missiles, and we got the NATO allies to agree, with a couple of caveats. Some said they would deploy them, if there was no progress made on negotiations, and that sort of thing. The only unpleasantness about that, subsequently, involved Helmut Schmidt, who was caught in a very difficult political campaign, and began to equivocate on whether Germany would continue to approve the deployment of these missiles. I really got angry about it and called Schmidt on the phone. He said that he didn't say it. I had our intelligence services give me a transcript of his speeches, and it was obvious that he was saying it. Helmut and I had a serious argument when we got to Venice for the 1980 Economic Summit Conference, and we eventually ironed it out. When I left office, there was no doubt that we would develop and deploy the Pershing II missiles and also the ground-launched cruise missiles. So, with the exception of that little altercation between me and Helmut, there was no real difficulty or uncertainty about it.

Matloff: I think that you want to stop at this point. Thank you very much.

Carter: I've enjoyed this; I think that we've covered your major points. I would put myself completely at the mercy of Harold Brown and David Jones. In your subsequent discussions, if there are a few questions that can only be resolved by me, if you would send them down to me in writing, then I can type out the answers and send them back to you. If it can be answered by the Secretary of Defense or the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, that would be my preference.



Administration

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301

September 24, 1986

Honorable Jimmy Carter  
Office of the President  
75 Spring Street, S.W.  
Suite 17  
Atlanta, Georgia 30303

Dear Mr. President:

Thank you for reviewing the transcript of your oral history interview with representatives of the OSD Historical Office and for returning it with your corrections. I am enclosing for your files a copy of the final version that incorporates your emendations.

As I indicated in my letter of August 25, 1986, the information contained in the transcript is intended primarily for use in the preparation of a history of OSD. We should appreciate learning your wishes in the matter of future access to your interview. Four categories are normally in use: Category 1--open; Category 2--permission of interviewee required to cite or quote; Category 3--open only to DoD historians; and Category 4--permission of OSD Historian required. A self-addressed envelope is provided for your convenience.

We appreciate very much your taking the time to review the transcript and your cooperation with the OSD historical program. Your recollections and observations will add a valuable contribution to the record.

Sincerely,

*Alfred Goldberg*

Alfred Goldberg  
OSD Historian

Enclosures  
As Stated

*Category 1-Open  
ok  
J Carter*