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Interview with William Perry  
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Welch: This interview with former secretary of defense William Perry is being held on 18 October 2004 at the Jefferson Hotel in Washington, D.C. Interviewers are Alfred Goldberg and Rebecca Welch.

Since our last interview with you about six years ago, you and Ashton Carter published *Preventive Defense*, in which you outlined your approach to national security. In what respect is preventive defense a departure from the Cold War deterrence strategy?

Perry: During the Cold War our security challenge was very difficult. It was easy to understand but difficult to meet. It was the challenge of keeping the world from blowing itself up with nuclear weapons and at the same time containing the Soviet Union. Those were the two side-by-side related missions. Every president from Truman on understood and articulated them and worked to carry out those missions. It was not a partisan issue. Both Republicans and Democrats understood what those missions were. The principal job of every secretary of defense was maintaining the deterrence aspect. The way we effected containment was primarily through nuclear deterrence, which was first stipulated by Truman. Some of Eisenhower's advisers, including his defense secretaries, urged him to build up our conventional military forces to equal in size those of the Soviet Union. If the Soviet Union was the threat and we were trying to contain them, we had to have armed forces the same size as theirs. Eisenhower concluded that this would break the bank. It would be a continuing drain on our economy. He and all other presidents saw the Cold War as being a long term affair. If

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we did this year after year for decades, it would crush our economy. So he explicitly rejected that proposal and instead made the primary component the deterrence of nuclear weapons. At the time we had a virtual monopoly on them. For the second component, the conventional component, we were not going to provide all the forces ourselves. Both Truman and then Eisenhower embraced NATO as the way of doing that, by having allies in Europe. The two components of containment were nuclear deterrence and NATO. They were established by Truman and Eisenhower and followed by every president after that during the Cold War.

Goldberg: As far as conventional versus strategic forces, they emphasized the strategic forces over the conventional, didn't they?

Perry: Yes, they did, strategic meaning nuclear. Nuclear had first priority and conventional forces were second in all aspects, particularly for budget resources. We simply accepted that the Soviet Union had three times the size army and equipment—tanks, even airplanes—in their conventional forces. But, we said, we still had an edge in strategic, or nuclear forces.

By the mid-'70s when Harold Brown became secretary and I was under secretary, that was being challenged. It was explicitly being challenged by a group called the Committee on the Present Danger, which was headed by Paul Nitze. He argued that there was a window of vulnerability for the United States. His argument was that the Soviet Union not only had a larger conventional force but a superior conventional force. Their tanks, artillery pieces, and armored personnel carriers were at least as good as those of the United States, maybe better, and they had three times as many of them. In the meantime, he said, our strategic advantage, the nuclear

advantage, had gone away, that by the mid-'70s the Soviets had caught up. If our deterrence was therefore weakened, the Soviets might be tempted to launch a first strike. That was the window of vulnerability he was talking about, the vulnerability to a first strike. He argued for a major increase in defense, a major buildup in our conventional forces as well as our nuclear forces. In particular, it was time to get ahead of them in the nuclear forces again.

President Carter and Harold Brown accepted the premise that there was a problem but rejected the solution. They asked me, as under secretary of research and engineering, to see if we could redress the conventional balance through technology to make qualitative improvements. They accepted Eisenhower's judgment that we could not triple the size of our army, so they said maybe our technology could make the difference. That's what led to accelerated development on stealth, smart weapons, and new intelligence systems. They concluded that if we put together a "system of systems"—stealth, smart weapons, and smart intelligence—we would improve the capability of our conventional forces so much that we could compete effectively with a force even three times the size of ours.

Goldberg: You made this point to us in 1981 just before you left office as under secretary.

Perry: I might not have pointed out at that time, but I later learned that the chief of the general staff of the Soviet Union was making the same argument at about the same time. We later found translated Russian papers that laid out that argument which had been going on in the '70s and early '80s in the Soviet Union. His arguments were rejected and the Soviet Union maintained their approach while we changed ours. The

results of that change were seen in Desert Storm about ten years later. Since then our military has never turned back. They embraced the idea of qualitative improvement, of exploiting stealth, smart weapons, and very good intelligence/communication systems. One footnote to that: when we evaluated this back in the late '70s and applied it in the late '80s and early '90s, we always understood that it applied to a certain kind of warfare—huge armies facing each other, tank armies, for example. It did not apply to insurgency operations, either jungle insurgencies such as we faced in Vietnam, or urban insurgencies such as we now face in Iraq.

Welch: How about the Bosnian situation?

Perry: We thought Bosnia was quite applicable. When we went into Bosnia we went in with the First Armored Division with a force about twice the size we felt was absolutely necessary, on the theory that we wanted to err on the side of too strong rather than too weak a force. We wanted to overpower the opposition so they never would attempt to compete with this force. In fact, they never did. People forget this today, but I testified before Congress many times before we went into Bosnia about how we were going to prepare for that operation. There were congressional statements made in public hearings saying that we would have dozens of body bags a week coming back from Bosnia and many dark references to how strong the Serb army was and that we would not be able to stand up to it, referring back to the World War II problem Hitler had with the Serb partisans. The forecast that some people were making for Bosnia was the same kind of problem we are now running into in Iraq. We took that seriously enough, as I said, so that we overpowered the situation. Before we went into Bosnia, every battalion we put in Bosnia was sent to two weeks of special training at our training camp

in Germany for the kind of scenarios we expected to run into in Bosnia—guerrilla operations, paramilitary operations, a whole set of problems which we thought we might have.

Goldberg: What were the proportions between the U.S. and NATO contributions?

Perry: The U.S. originally had one-third of the force in NATO. We had about twenty-plus thousand out of a 60,000 force. As time went on, that percentage went down. Not only did the overall NATO force decrease somewhat, but the U.S. contribution decreased quite a bit. I don't know what the number is today, but it's much less than one-third, probably more like fifteen to twenty percent. Parenthetically, when we went into Haiti, which was earlier than Bosnia, we went in with a pretty sizeable force, too, maybe fifteen or twenty thousand. But we also had other forces with us and within a year we had turned over that complete operation to the Canadians. Our exit strategy there was passing it on to our allies. The other comment about Bosnia is that we not only went in with overpowering force, we did special training, and after we got there we had special rules of engagement and protocol for how we operated. No soldier ever went out of his base without body armor, no Humvee ever went out without armor, and no soldier went out by himself, they went out with the minimum number of soldiers on patrol. Force protection was a very high priority at all times. At the end of that year, the First Armored Division went back to their base in Germany and I went to greet them and thank them for their service. General Nash, the commander of that division, made a very interesting comment to me. He said that during the year they were in Bosnia they had fewer casualties of all kinds than the previous year's in Germany. The difference, of course, was the number of soldiers killed in accidents on the autobahn. Nearly all the

accidents leading to serious casualties in Germany had some drinking associated with them. When they were in Bosnia, Nash did not allow any alcohol. Any time I went to Bosnia the main gripe from the soldiers was that they couldn't even have beer. Maybe he overdid it, but the net of that was that we had force protection that was very good.

Goldberg: Our original question goes to your shift in strategic policy after the fall of the Soviets. How would you describe that?

Perry: At the time I was at Stanford studying international security and working with Ash Carter, who was at Harvard. Both of us were working with Senators Nunn and Lugar. In my mind, the definitive meeting occurred in 1991 when Nunn and Lugar went on a visit to the former Soviet Union—to Russia, Ukraine and Belarus—and invited Carter and me to go along. They were mostly concerned with what was happening to the nuclear weapons. None of us liked what we saw, we were very concerned. It has since come to be called the “loose nukes” problem. Coming back from our trip, sitting in the lounge of the airplane, the four of us plus David Hamburg put our heads together and conceived what came to be called the Nunn–Lugar program. The legislation for that program was essentially drafted on that airplane on the way back. It reflected a view that Nunn, Lugar, Carter, Hamburg and I had, which was that the greatest threat in the wake of the Cold War was nuclear weapons, not that they would be fired in anger, but that they would get loose and a terrorist or a criminal element would get them and blow them up in our cities one at a time. That was an underlying thesis of preventive defense, that that was one of the greatest threats we faced, and laying out a course of action to prevent that crisis so we would not have to defend against it. The Nunn-Lugar program was the touchstone of preventive defense against the threat of those nukes.

But a funny thing happened to me a year or two after I helped write the legislation. I became first the deputy and then the secretary, with a primary task in the early years of that job to implement the Nunn-Lugar program. I probably spent one-fourth of my time in the first few years on the implementation of the Nunn-Lugar program, the specific goal of which during my term was to get dismantled the four thousand or so nuclear weapons called for by the START Treaty. It was one thing getting them dismantled, but safely stored was another. Secondly, we wanted to deal with the problem of the three new nuclear states—Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Belarus—to try to persuade them to give up their nuclear weapons. Those were the big objectives at that time, and they were all accomplished. There was a third objective, that was to do what we could to keep the nuclear secrets that were in scientists' and engineers' heads in the Soviet Union from leaking out, given that many of these scientists and engineers were now unemployed or under-employed. There were people from mid-east countries bidding for their services.

Implementation started off with getting the legislation, which was in place when I came into office. I found that while a lot of legislation was in place, it was authorizing legislation. There were no funds for it, no money had been appropriated. The previous administration had not done anything about it. Nothing had been done even though it had existed for a number of months, maybe a year prior.

Goldberg: Why do you think that was?

Perry: Because the Congress authorized but did not appropriate funds. The problem that gives the secretary is that if he wants to do something about it he has to go to the programs that have appropriated funds, cancel them, and do this instead. Of course

you have to get congressional approval to do that. Every time you cancel a program to do something else, you have opponents in Congress and elsewhere fighting to keep that from happening. It's a tough job; you have to be willing to spend a lot of political capital.

Goldberg: What do you think was Cheney's attitude at the time?

Perry: I don't know. I don't think he was ever negative about Nunn-Lugar, I think he just didn't see fit to take the actions to get the money appropriated. When I became the deputy, I took that as my first task, and within two or three months I had identified programs, gotten the money, gone to Congress, and gone through the battle to get the funds changed over. Of course, I had Nunn and Lugar working with me on that, but neither of them were appropriators. I had to get Ted Stevens and the people who were in charge of appropriations won over, and that took some doing.

Welch: What was Aspin's reaction to the fact that a major program for national defense strategy was articulated by you and two senators? He was so interested in working on policy himself.

Perry: He was always a strong proponent of Nunn-Lugar when he was in Congress and as secretary. Aspin gave me his full blessing and full encouragement. I had a number of problems with Les Aspin, but that was not one of them. He was very supportive. He basically said, "Go do it."

Goldberg: You didn't get money until 1994 or '95?

Perry: We got it in 1993, whatever the existing appropriation was, in the calendar year 1993, around the fall. I think we actually got some fiscal '93 money from Star Wars, and then I think we got it in the FY 1994 budget.



Goldberg: If you got '93 money, was it in the form of a supplemental?

Perry: No, it was in the form of reprogramming. We reprogrammed some '93 money to get started. Then in 1994 we actually had it in the appropriations. It was always a fight, as long as I was secretary, each year was a fight to get it. From there on in it was a fight to get it in the budget and get it to stay in the budget. Reprogramming is always harder than getting it in the budget in the first place. The first amount of money spent on Nunn-Lugar was reprogrammed money we took away from other programs.

Welch: The nuclear posture review that came out in 1994 didn't lower the levels of missiles in the arsenal.

Perry: Our emphasis was not only the overall levels of nuclear weapons, which we believed should be resolved through the previous START II Treaty, etc., but to safeguard the weapons that did exist. I was strongly in favor of reducing the numbers and always encouraged the deep cuts which were being contemplated. In fact, I favored deeper cuts than we eventually ended up getting. But that wasn't my job, my job was to safeguard the nuclear weapons that did exist in both the Soviet Union and the U.S. I was concerned also with fissile material. My first priority back in the '93-'94 timeframe was the weapons themselves.

Welch: You were less worried about Russia itself at that point.

Perry: I was more worried about Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan. There was turmoil in Russia, but there was even more turmoil in those other countries. We wanted to get all of the weapons out of those three countries, and by the end of my term they were all gone. I would say that was probably my most significant achievement as secretary of defense. In about three and one-half year's time we went from several thousand

nuclear weapons in those three countries to zero. Parallel to that we were working with Russia trying to safeguard the nuclear weapons and the nuclear know-how that existed in Russia. We always understood that a major part of this program, once we had all the weapons reduced or under safeguard, would be to deal with the question of fissile material. It was dealt with in a small way then, but in my judgment the biggest part of the problem today is dealing with the fissile material. Now we have to deal not only with nuclear powers but be concerned with people who have commercial nuclear reactors, because they can make bombs with that material as well.

Welch: What was the impact and utility of the QDR?

Perry: The QDR started in 1993, the first year I was there as deputy. We took it very seriously, we considered it a big deal. Secretary Aspin put a lot of his time and energy into it, and I did as well.

Goldberg: Powell did, also.

Perry: Yes, he did. Although it was imposed by Congress, we decided to embrace it as our own and get the benefit out of it. Looking back, I still think it is a good idea, and I will recommend, if John Kerry is elected president, that he give it very important emphasis, putting a major emphasis on a new QDR as the first task for his secretary of defense. The great advantage of it is that it not only forces you to vigorously examine your own thinking about what you want to do and why you want to do it and how you make judgments and establish priorities, but once you have done that carefully and thoughtfully and articulated it, then the secretary of defense, as the person who has done the QDR, can set the agenda for discussion on defense. Every criticism of "why don't you do this or that" can be referred to "we would do that, but we would have to

stop doing this.” It is all laid out in one package. Anybody wanting to add or subtract from a program has to deal with the architectural structure, which is the QDR. It gave us the ability to define the agenda on all discussions on national defense. If we had done it thoughtfully and carefully in the first place, that turned out to be a big advantage. Very quickly I became a proponent of this thing that had been foisted on the Defense Department. Basically we made it our own. Each year after that we did a budget ourselves that referred to it, so not only did it define the agenda for people outside the Department, but also for the people inside. The next year’s budget had to be referred back to the QDR. Was it consistent, and if not, why not? It helped guide our budgeting and programming process for the whole four-year period I was there, and Secretary Cohen picked it up after that. I think he took the same interest in it as well. So I had nothing to do with inventing it, but I was happy that it had been invented.

Welch: There was a period when we thought we would have a peace dividend and reduced levels of conflict. Given those assumptions, how did you think about the issue of when to apply force?

Perry: When I became secretary I was coming in with a fair amount of experience in defense to begin with, so I had some ideas about what my challenges would be and what I might do to meet them. From the beginning I had articulated the view that a major challenge would be dealing with the loose nukes, the nuclear legacy of the Cold War. A second priority was getting the budgeting and programming right, doing it seriously. I found the QDR to be a magnificent tool for doing that. A third priority had to do with morale and training forces. The fourth had to do with getting the use of force right. I had a lot I could base that on, because every secretary and every chairman had

thought about that and many had written about it. I basically picked up pieces from each of them. I started off with the belief that if we were going to use military force, it had to be a truly compelling national interest. There are many ways to apply coercion, political force, but if we were going to apply military force there had to be an overriding national interest at stake. That's not anything original. Almost everybody who talks about using force says that. Some of them don't mean it, though. I believe we ought to mean it.

Goldberg: Weinberger articulated that concept too.

Perry: Weinberger said exactly the same thing. Second, it was basically what Powell had expressed—if you are going to use force, don't go in on the cheap and, if you err, err on the heavy side. That is overly simplified, but basically the Powell doctrine was to go in strong. The third thing Powell said was if you are going in, have some idea of how you are going to come out. That's easier said than done. Having an exit strategy, to use the glib phrase, doesn't mean too much, because you have to deal with unknowns on the ground after you get there. But you at least have to have some idea of how to bring it to a resolution. The fourth was if you go in, have clear and explicit rules of engagement. I can talk a bit about the Bosnia experience. Basically in Bosnia we followed all those rules: we resisted going into Bosnia for the first year or so and, as I testified, we persuaded ourselves there was a compelling national interest to keep the Bosnian war from spreading. Secondly, when we went in, we went in heavy and with allies.

Goldberg: In retrospect, do you think we should have gone in earlier?

Perry: I think it would have been much better, but only if we had gotten our conditions met. I still think that the conditions we insisted on were the right ones. We wanted to go in not by assigning a brigade or division of UN forces, hoping for the best. In the beginning we said if we went in it would be as part of a NATO force. We couldn't get those conditions at first. When we got those conditions, we took the leadership of the force and went in.

Goldberg: The NATO countries resisted?

Perry: NATO countries did not want to abandon the UN effort until the UN effort had obviously and totally failed after Srebrenica. That was the turning point. Once it had failed, then the conditions existed for going in right. It would have been much better had we been able to get them to agree to that earlier, but we were not able to. All of that predated the Clinton administration, because the first decision about Bosnia was made by Bush I, which was not to get involved but let the UN handle it. The UN, as it turned out, was not capable of handling it with the rules of engagement and the mission statement that they had. When we finally went in, we went in with a NATO force and with totally different rules of engagement. It was not just a peacekeeping force, it was a peace enforcement force, and therefore very heavy with military. You may recall back in the days of the UN forces, the UN soldiers being captured by the Serbs, tied up and pictures taken of them. We did not want to be a part of anything like that. This is not a criticism of the UN, it's a criticism of the rules of engagement and the structure of the force they put together to go into Bosnia. It simply underestimated how difficult the problem was.

Goldberg: This has been a frequent UN experience, hasn't it?

Perry: Yes. The UN does not have a military force, it's a pick-up team. We did not want to be part of a pick-up team. We went in with a strong military force, strong rules of engagement, UN authorization, and a NATO mandate. That was the right way to do it. In retrospect, I wish we had done the same thing in Iraq. We could not have gone in at the time the president wanted to go in, it would have taken longer, but we could have built up that same sort of consensus and the same kind of military force and mandate. It would have been a very different situation in Iraq had they done that.

Welch: Another of the goals you just mentioned concerned morale and training. Could you elaborate on that?

Perry: When I was the under secretary, trying to deal with a great Soviet advantage, we ended up with what we called the "off-set" strategy. I have talked about that with you before. The critics at the time, and there were many of them, said that it would never work, that it worked fine in the laboratory but it wouldn't in the field. When you pressed them in the argument, it came down to thinking our soldiers were too dumb to operate the high-tech equipment. They wouldn't say that in public, but that's what they meant. Looking back at that time period, there was something to it. Our military forces in the '70s were not well trained. They did not have good discipline or morale. The post-Vietnam era was a very tough period in the U.S. military. Giving the critics credit, they were looking at the existing military and saying it couldn't handle the high-tech stuff. What they missed, and I did also, was that all the while they were making these arguments, the leaders of the military in general and the Army in particular were also dissatisfied with what they had and were working to correct it. During the late '70s and early '80s there was a transformation in the U.S. Army at least as important as the

technical transformation. It was a transformation in training, morale, and cohesion of the forces. It was particularly true in the Army, I think. By the time I became secretary in 1994, the first thing I noticed was that it was a different Army from what I saw as under secretary, really different. They were smarter, better trained, they had spirit, they had cohesion, morale, all these things. That was obvious to me in the first few months in office. It was not necessary for me to try to build it up, but to sustain it. We had the best trained, most capable Army in the world, and we had to sustain it. It had not come easily, and I had seen it when it was not that way, so I knew a major change had occurred. Upon study, I concluded that a set of colonels and generals in the Army after Vietnam had set about making the change. The key to that change was superior training. But in order to get the training you had to have people in the Army long enough to get the benefit of the training, not people who cycled in and out every two years, so it depended on an all-volunteer force.

Goldberg: What was your view of the other services?

Perry: They were not as far down in the depths as the Army to begin with, so the change was most dramatic in the Army. But all of them were doing the kind of training and attention to morale and discipline as the Army. I came from the Army, so I was able to relate to it better. Having come to that conclusion, I wanted to know what I could do to sustain it. The first thing was to be sure that in the annual budget exercise we did not stint the training. It's always tempting when you want to save billions to cut it out of training. I made it a firm rule that training would have first priority. That became very difficult when we went into Bosnia because we went in without appropriated funds. I had to go over and fight to get reprogramming money for the Bosnian operation

because otherwise it would all have been taken out of training. One of my great challenges in both the Haiti and Bosnia operations was to keep the cost of ongoing operations from crippling our training budget. I think I succeeded more or less well in doing that, but it was always a challenge.

Secondly, after I got in office, I concluded that while I talked all the time with the generals and occasionally with the colonels, the training was in fact being carried out by the NCOs. I needed to get to know more about them. At the time my military assistant was Paul Kern, now a four-star, a splendid officer. Kern asked why I didn't get to know the senior NCOs of each of the services on a personal basis. He went on to tell me war stories of how his NCOs had always pulled him through. So I called them down to my office for a meeting and was quite impressed with all of them. Out of those discussions came the idea of going every couple of months to a base with the senior NCOs and nobody else. I would get on my plane with up to five NCOs, because we decided to take the Coast Guard along too. Each one in turn would pick a base and we would go and spend a day there. We would be met by the commanding general, then he would exit and the senior NCO at that base would be in charge of the whole program for the day. We met nobody but enlisted personnel the whole day. We had lunch and dinner with them, talked with them, went out to training exercises. You might think that a corporal or master sergeant would tell the secretary of defense what he thinks the secretary wants to hear and not level with him. Not true. After the first few minutes of discussion I found I couldn't get them to stop telling me what they thought I needed to know. After a year and a half or two years, I became persuaded that the big issue, as



long as I could keep the training budget going, was doing something about quality-of-life.

Goldberg: The greatest asset, the strength of the German army in World War II, was the NCO. They were the people who made it the efficient fighting machine that it was.

Perry: Paul convinced me of that, I did not have that insight. Meeting with the senior NCOs convinced me, and the bases further convinced me. During that time I decided there were two things I could do as secretary, aside from showing the flag by visiting the bases, which showed people you cared. I could continue to protect the training budget and do something about the quality-of-life. Through a series of meetings with the senior NCOs we came up with a list of things we wanted to do, mainly oriented on housing. I went to the president and asked for a \$15 billion supplemental for quality-of-life for the military, over a three or four year period. When I told the senior NCOs to get a list together, they were pleased I was doing it but had no expectation that I would succeed. Strangely enough, I did. We had a big press conference to announce it and had the senior NCOs there. It had a transforming effect. Fifteen billion was, in some sense, a drop in the bucket to the needs, but it showed seriousness of purpose. The final question was how we would manage it. The cost of decent housing for every soldier in the military today is much more than \$15 billion. So we added one more initiative, the initiative of bringing private developers in to build houses on military bases on military land, and lease them to the soldiers. There were two requirements. One, that the monthly lease had to be no greater than the allowance we gave for housing, and two, the housing had to be of decent quality. We were not sending inspectors out, they

would do it their way. We ended up with half a dozen of those programs. I believe they will continue to be successful.

Goldberg: In the 1950s there were large-scale housing construction programs to build Wherry and Capehart housing off-base.

Perry: Some of these might have been off-base too, but we were prepared to give them government land if that was the best way to do it. I never got quite the push behind it that I wanted to, but we got the demonstration program done proving that it could work and was a good thing.

Welch: When you talked to the president, what was his reaction?

Perry: He resonated with it. This had a personal quality to it that he could understand and relate to. He was also a shrewd politician so he understood this could be good politics. We had all the forces aligned in the right direction. Those were the four things that I worked on during my tenure. Three of them I came into office thinking about, and the fourth I picked up in the first few months in office, with the help of General Kern leading me in that direction.

Welch: Going back to a question about broad-based policy, what did you think about the two-war strategy and its ramifications for force structure?

Perry: I got in trouble when I was still deputy secretary for telling the truth about that policy. I said it was a one-and-a-half-war policy, not a two-war policy. We don't have the forces to fight two wars simultaneously. We finally came up with win-hold-win, meaning we were only fighting one war at a time. It was true that we did have sufficient capability to hold the line on the second one until we won the first, then to come back and fight the second. My term for it was distressing because the opposition in Congress

picked this up as a weakening, when it was just calling it as it really was. Sometimes being clear and explicit about your capabilities isn't what is wanted.

Welch: Would you have preferred to jettison the concept had it been politically sound to do so?

Perry: No. I think the concern that we might get into regional war and if we did, it might create a temptation for one of the other regions to cause mischief, was a perfectly sound concern. The thought that we could fight both of those at the same time would simply require forces well beyond what we had or could expect to have. The strategy was to try to deal with that without going through the very great expense required to build up the forces to be able to fight two wars simultaneously. We ended up calling it win-hold-win instead of a one-and-a-half-war strategy, and that seemed to be OK.

Welch: So fundamentally it was a question of telling the world that we were prepared to fight at this maximum level, yet recognizing that we couldn't maintain a force structure to really do that.

Perry: That's true. It was not in my experience an academic consideration. I thought it was a very real problem. In June 1994 we faced a major crisis over the North Korea nuclear program. It was the only time when I was secretary that we were in serious danger of getting into a major regional war. We went through our force planning in case things went off the track and resulted in a war with Korea. I called in the regional commanders—CINCPAC, and Korea—for a complete and detailed review of the war plans. We had CINCPAC, the Korean commander, the transportation commander, all the forces we would need, and we spent two days reviewing the war plan in detail. All during that war planning I had the CENTCOM commander sitting in on it. As we were

making decisions the generals could tell us if we needed an extra division here or air support there, things that always came at the expense of something else. It was never academic to me; in the war planning we went through, we actually contemplated what forces we could use to win and what forces we had to retain to adequately hold. That's exactly what we would have had to do in real life.

Goldberg: Did you contemplate using nuclear weapons to hold, if necessary?

Perry: No, we never saw a situation where the use of nuclear weapons was either necessary or desirable. That's not saying you might not conceive of such a situation, but there was no situation with which I was ever confronted where I contemplated the use of nuclear weapons. We have always had them deployed as a deterrent but never contemplated using them.

Welch: We are presently interviewing a handful of people about transition issues.

Would you tell us about your experience with the transition to a new administration in 1992-93, and then when you turned over the reins in 1996-97 for the second term.

Perry: I have been through two transitions, one as under secretary and the other as secretary, two incoming and two outgoing transitions. Coming in as under secretary, I was coming from industry. I had never served in the government. The under secretary for research and engineering is a big job, managing billions of dollars for the government. It was all new to me, so I had a very complex transition phase. I resolved that problem by asking Mal Currie's principal deputy if he would stay on for a few months and essentially act as the under secretary while I was learning the ropes. He did agree to do that and was enormously helpful to me in getting to know the job while there was someone around who did know it and could teach me and make decisions

while I was coming up to speed. So that's one way of doing transitions. When I was leaving that job, Cap Weinberger asked me to stay on for a few months, as he did not have a new under secretary selected at the time. I agreed to do so. That did not work out so well because there was a view among some people on his team that anyone associated with the Carter administration must be a loser. I sat in the office and was available to help, but there was never any request for help. So after a month I realized I was wasting my time and left. I was anxious to get on with my life at the time, but did it as a favor to Cap. Cap had the good sense to ask for my help, but his staff didn't have the good sense to take advantage of it.

Welch: Did you ever speak to Secretary Weinberger about your experience?

Perry: No. Only in the sense that I told him after a month that I would only stay a couple more weeks and did not feel I was fulfilling a useful function. Jim Wade was there also, but he told me several times that it took him months before he was really accepted on the team because he was considered to be a traitor. The man who took the job that I had, Dick DeLauer, was in fact a good friend. It took a while to get him confirmed. When he finally got the job, he and I continued to have very close and cordial relations and he invited me to some of his meetings. Until such time as he was appointed, the team that was there was not interested in making any use of me.

Coming into the Clinton administration, it took me a few weeks to get confirmed. I don't think they made good use of the preceding team. The one person who stayed over in Defense was Dick Armitage. I met with him several times. He was quite willing to be useful, and I got some very good input from him. But I don't think we made good

use of his background as we might have. He was very able and experienced, and quite willing to be helpful.

Goldberg: In 1993, did Aspin appoint a transition team that reported to him?

Perry: I don't know who ran the Defense team because it takes a couple of months for the secretary to get appointed. There is always a period between the election and inauguration when the campaign has a team. In the case of my under secretary job, the Reagan defense transition team was headed by VanCleave. He had no dealings with the incumbents, even though they offered to be helpful. For example, I never talked with him. But he didn't have much to do with the Weinberger team either when it started coming in. Weinberger finally fired him. VanCleave's idea was that he was going to be the secretary of defense, so there was an ugly situation for a while.

Goldberg: He was about the most ideological person that Weinberger could have appointed. Perry: Weinberger didn't appoint him, somebody else did. Weinberger finally got him out of the picture when he discovered that he was undermining Carlucci, who was Weinberger's choice for deputy. That was about the worst transition period I have ever seen.

I was not there for the transition period of the Clinton team, so I cannot comment on that. I had no idea of being a part of his administration. I was cheering Aspin on from California, and some time in early January I got a call from him asking me to be his deputy. I think my first visit to Washington was around the time of the inauguration. Then the transition from Perry to Cohen was simple and straightforward, basically the same people, but bringing in new office staff for the secretary of defense.

Goldberg: Did Cohen spend much time with you before he took office?

Perry: Yes, we had several quite long discussions. I only offered advice on two points, although neither was accepted. Everyone has his own style of operating, so it is presumptuous to say, "You should do this and that." I told him about the special relationship I had established with the senior NCOs. I thought it was one of the most valuable things I had done as secretary and encouraged him to continue, but he did not. Either I was not persuasive enough on that point, or it was just too far removed from his view of the office. The other thing had to do with personnel assignments in the immediate office, but he had his own team. I picked out one or two I thought he ought to try to keep, because there was a corporate knowledge that could be useful to him. Sometimes the problem with a senator coming in is he brings his staff with him from the Senate to replace those who are there. That's OK, but you have a steeper learning curve that way.

Welch: To turn to organizational matters, in your *New Concept of Cooperative Security*, written before you came back as deputy, you talked about the need for some sort of integrative control program. Did DTRA serve that purpose well?

Perry: Generally, yes. It's pretty much a function of who heads it up and how much energy and political savvy he has. DTRA had some capable people, but no organization by itself can ensure that you are doing things you want to do. It's so much dependent on having a strong leader, somebody who can rally the troops to do what needs to be done. I think that happened in the case of DTRA, so I would say it was generally a success story. But I would not want to give a blanket endorsement that DTRA's the way to do things, because if it has a weak leader it will not be very effective.

Goldberg: You had good generals in there.

Perry: Yes, they were what made it successful, not the organization itself. Probably we could have done the same thing without that organization, with strong people leading it. A new organization was not required. As long as I was secretary and that was my top priority, there didn't need to be a special organization. A new secretary who comes along may not have that as his top priority, and therefore it helps to have an organization dedicated to it. But I was pleased that DTRA was set up and generally they assigned good people to it.

Welch: The report of the Commission on Roles and Missions that came out in 1995 didn't recommend any notable changes in approach. What did you think of that effort?

Perry: It was not memorable. I would have a hard time remembering anything that was done differently because of that commission. I think that means that we were more or less satisfied with the existing roles and missions. There were two things imposed on us by Congress. This commission was one, and the QDR was the other. The fact that they were imposed by Congress did not necessarily mean they were bad. We embraced the QDR, but not the commission. I couldn't see major changes coming out of the commission recommendations. I tend to be a bit of a natural skeptic on re-organization as the solution to problems.

Welch: To what extent did you rely on your Policy team? It sounds like you really ran the policy operation yourself.

Perry: Different secretaries have different things they emphasize. I came in with a background of having run the acquisition system, so people thought I would be spending all of my time on technical things. Instead I got Paul Kaminski, in whom I had complete confidence, to run it while I spent most of my time and energy on policy.



Goldberg: How about Deutch?

Perry: He managed the Pentagon. First he was acquisition, but then he became the deputy and Paul Kaminski was acquisition. Deutch was a consummate manager. I was sort of Mr. Outside and he was sort of Mr. Inside while I was the secretary. John White also did that job and he also was a consummate manager.

Welch: How much did you rely on the ISA staff?

Perry: Very much. I worked very closely with Ash Carter in all things dealing with nuclear proliferation. He had the point on that but since I was interested in it I spent a lot of time with him. He would suit me up to go to Russia, or Ukraine, or wherever, because it helped him get his job done. So we did a lot of things together.

Welch: Freeman and Nye were both Asia specialists, weren't they?

Perry: Freeman was only there a year or so. Nye took over the job and became focused on Asia because somebody else was focusing on Europe. He did an outstanding job. On Japan he put together the renewal of the Japanese treaty, a big deal. He wrote a white paper on Japan that to this day is considered the guidance on security issues in the Western Pacific. Nye did a really outstanding job.

Goldberg: What was the problem with Freeman? He was let go.

Perry: His inability to work with other people, I think. I had no problem with him. I worked with him then, and I work with him now. I like him a lot. Each one of the assistant secretaries, to be successful, has to work effectively with his counterparts in the Joint Chiefs. He did not work well with the military or with his counterparts in Policy, whereas Nye was outstanding in both regards. Freeman is a brilliant man, but Nye is just as brilliant and works well with people, too.

Goldberg: You changed the whole Policy organization once you took over. Aspin had gone overboard on it, apparently, and you decided it was too much.

Perry: They were getting in each others' way. Basically, I eliminated three assistant secretaries and things worked much better after that. The remaining secretaries had more responsibility and clean lines of responsibility, and they did much better.

Goldberg: Did you make the determination about which ones stayed and which ones went?

Perry: I had been the deputy for a year, so I had a chance to see this close at hand and knew what the problems were. That enabled me to do something that ordinarily the secretary cannot do, to make a clean surgical personnel change right off the bat, the first month I was in office. It was painful personally, for me and the people, but the results were a dramatic improvement within weeks.

Goldberg: They had been contending too much with each other, hadn't they?

Perry: They had overlapping responsibilities. Some managers like to have the teams contending with each other so he can be the adjudicator. I like to have clear lines of responsibility so I can let a person do his job. If he has the ability and energy to do the job, I like to encourage and support him instead of adjudicating between him and another person.

Welch: To what extent did you rely on Bill Lynn in PA&E?

Perry: Mostly Bill, and Alice Maroni in a different job, were responsible for keeping us honest on the budget, making sure the numbers worked out right. It's a big job, a difficult job, and one I would rather not do. You want to get competent people to do the

jobs and just depend on them. In the case of Lynn and Maroni we had two such people. They were great.

Welch: John Hamre was comptroller then.

Perry: As the comptroller, John Hamre's job was to do the impossible, which was to straighten out the financial system in the Pentagon. It was then, and is now, hopeless. No industry could survive long with the way we have the financial system. I think it's probably beyond fixing. John and I both set out with clear intentions of fixing the financial system in the Pentagon, and as I left office I chalked it up as a good experience but not fixable.

Goldberg: No industry has four military services to contend with.

Perry: And 535 members on the board of directors.

Welch: What about Emmett Paige, C4I?

Perry: A good guy with good instincts for the job, but not a good manager. He had the military background, which gave him a feeling and understanding for the job, which was good.

Goldberg: He had some technical background.

Perry: Yes. But the job also requires a certain amount of management skill, and that didn't come naturally to him. If you look at any one of the people you work with, there are pluses and minuses. He had a couple of pluses and one big minus.

Welch: Ken Bacon was there for a long time.

Perry: Yes. I inherited a different public affairs person from Les, who was pretty good but not my style. I knew Ken Bacon from my earlier role as under secretary. He worked for the *Wall Street Journal* and I thought he was the best defense correspondent I knew.

I called him up and asked him if he was willing to do the job, and he was interested and we made a quick change. He was great, I liked him very much. He was one of the people who stayed on in the same job for Bill Cohen.

Goldberg: Did you pay much attention to Andy Marshall?

Perry: Andy was writing about transformation, reform of defense. I spent my whole career as under secretary doing that. It wasn't that I had a problem with Andy, but the gospel he was preaching I was already converted to. I was already determined to do the reforms and did not need to be inspired to do them, the question was how to implement them. Andy is great at conceptualizing them, but I already had that concept and I was focusing on how to implement it.

Goldberg: How did you find Doc Cooke as a manager?

Perry: He was very efficient and effective. If you asked him to do something, it got done. Would I have hired him for the job? No, but given that he was in the job, I used him very effectively.

Goldberg: Why do you say you would not have hired him?

Perry: A younger person would use more modern management techniques. Doc did things the old-fashioned way, but he knew the system well enough that it worked. So why knock it if it works. I got good use out of him.

Goldberg: We have a younger management-oriented man now who is making a lot of changes.

Perry: Being young is not a sufficient condition for success. You need a kind of mayor of the Pentagon, and that's the role that Doc had assumed through the years. For my money, he was doing it adequately.

Welch: We are almost at your deadline, so let's stop at this point. We hope you will favor us with some more of your time again.