



The Historical Office
Office of the Secretary of Defense

Presents a Roundtable Discussion on

*Harold Brown: Offsetting the Soviet
Military Challenge, 1977–1981*



March 5, 2018

12:00 p.m. to 1:30 p.m.

William G. McGowan Theater
National Archives, Washington, DC

About the Book

In this ninth volume of the Secretaries of Defense Historical Series, author Edward Keefer describes how Secretary of Defense Harold Brown worked to counter the Soviet Union's growing military strength during the administration of President Jimmy Carter. Flush with cash from the development of oil and natural gas resources in an era of high energy costs, the Soviet Union of the Carter years came closest to matching the United States in strategic power than at any other point in the Cold War. By most reckonings, the Kremlin also surpassed the West in conventional arms and forces in Central Europe. To offset this threat, Brown—a nuclear physicist who had served three presidents—advocated more technologically advanced weapon systems but faced Carter's efforts to reign in the defense budget. As one of the leaders of a group of like-minded policy advisers that included National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and key members of Congress such as Senator Sam Nunn (D-GA), Brown persuaded a reluctant Carter to increase the Defense budget for the last two years of his term and bring to an end a decade that had been marked by a decline in defense spending. Brown and Under Secretary of Defense for Research and Engineering William Perry championed the development and production of new weapons such as stealth aircraft, precision-guided bombs, and cruise missiles. They applied modern digital electronics, global positioning, and other advanced technologies to weapon systems. Brown helped persuade the president to approve the MX missile to augment the nation's vulnerable Minuteman missile force and lobbied North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) members to accept cruise and Pershing II missiles on European soil to offset Soviet SS-20 missiles. Brown and his point man for NATO, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Robert Komer, spearheaded a campaign to upgrade NATO's conventional forces. Brown helped establish a new security framework for the Persian Gulf region, backstopped by the incipient Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force, and supported Afghan resistance to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. These initiatives laid a solid foundation for the much-acclaimed Ronald Reagan defense revolution. Although presidential candidate Reagan and his surrogates in 1980 emphasized the differences in defense policy between Reagan and Carter, there was much more continuity than contrast between the two. In fact, the Reagan defense revolution began with Brown and Carter.



Sequence of Events

Welcome and Introduction

The Honorable David Ferriero
Archivist of the United States

Welcome and Panel Introduction

Dr. Erin Mahan
Chief Historian, Office of the Secretary of Defense

Comments

The Honorable Harold Brown
14th Secretary of Defense

The Honorable William Perry
19th Secretary of Defense

Dr. Edward Keefer
Author, *Harold Brown: Offsetting the Soviet Military Challenge, 1977–1981*

The Honorable Robert Work
32nd Deputy Secretary of Defense

Questions from the Audience

About the Participants

The Honorable Harold Brown was the fourteenth Secretary of Defense, serving from January 1977 to January 1981. He served as Director of Defense Research and Engineering (1961–65), Secretary of the Air Force (1965–69), and President of the California Institute of Technology (1969–77). Among his many honors, Dr. Brown was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1981 and the Fermi Award in 1993. He was a Lecturer in Physics at Columbia University, Stevens Institute of Technology, and the University of California (1947–52). He then served as Group Leader, Division Leader, and later as the Director of the Radiation Laboratory at Livermore, University of California (1952–61). He was a member of the Polaris Steering Committee (1956–58), a member of the Air Force Scientific Advisory Board (1956–61), and consultant to, and then member of, the President’s Science Advisory Committee (1958–61). He was senior science adviser at the Conference on the Discontinuance of Nuclear Tests (1958–59) and a delegate to the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks in Helsinki, Vienna, and Geneva from 1969 to 1977. He was chairman of the Foreign Policy Institute at the Johns Hopkins University’s School of Advanced International Studies (1981–84) and a Distinguished Visiting Professor. He is currently a Counselor at the Center for Strategic & International Studies. Dr. Brown graduated from Columbia University with an A.B. degree in 1945, an A.M. degree in 1946, and a Ph.D. in physics in 1949. He has also received 12 honorary degrees.

Dr. Edward Keefer spent 34 years as an editor of the U.S. Department of State’s official documentary series, *Foreign Relations of the United States*. During that time he edited 25 *Foreign Relations* volumes, many of which documented U.S. policy during the Vietnam War. After 2002 he was the General Editor of the series until his retirement in 2009, when he joined the Historical Office of the Secretary of Defense. He has written articles and contributed to books on U.S. policy in East and Southeast Asia and taught courses on 19th- and 20th-century British military and political figures for the Smithsonian Associates program. Dr. Keefer received a B.A. from McGill University in 1967 and a Ph.D. in history from Michigan State University in 1974.

Dr. Erin Mahan has been Chief Historian for the Office of the Secretary of Defense since 2010 and Director of the Pentagon’s History and Library Directorate since 2014. Previously she worked in the Center for the Study of Weapons of Mass Destruction at the National Defense University and in the Historian’s Office at the U.S. Department of State, where she was an editor of the *Foreign Relations of the United States* series. Dr. Mahan received a Ph.D. from the University of Virginia.

The Honorable William Perry was the nineteenth Secretary of Defense, serving from February 1994 to January 1997. He previously served as Deputy Secretary of Defense (1993–94) and as Under Secretary of Defense for Research and Engineering (1977–81). Dr. Perry currently serves on the Defense Policy Board, the International Security Advisory Board, and the Secretary of Energy Advisory Board. He is on the board of directors of Covant, Fabrinet, LGS Bell Labs Innovations, and several emerging high-tech companies. He is currently a Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution and the Freeman Spogli Institute of International Studies. He is the Michael and Barbara Berberian Professor at Stanford University and serves as codirector of the Nuclear Risk Reduction initiative and the Preventive Defense Project. He is an expert in U.S. foreign policy, national security, and arms control. He was the codirector of the Center for International Security and Cooperation at Stanford University from 1988 to 1993. Dr. Perry received a B.S. and M.S. from Stanford, and a Ph.D. from Pennsylvania State University.

The Honorable Robert Work, President and Owner of TeamWork, LLC, was the thirty-second Deputy Secretary of Defense, serving for three Secretaries of Defense from May 2014 to July 2017. He previously served as Under Secretary of the Navy (2009–2013). He spent 27 years on active duty in the United States Marine Corps, retiring as a Colonel in 2001. He subsequently was a Senior Fellow and Vice President and Director of Studies at the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, and Chief Executive Officer for the Center for a New American Security (CNAS). He is now back at CNAS as Senior Counselor for Defense; is a Senior Counselor at Telemus Group, LLC, a strategic consulting firm specializing in defense issues; and a Senior Fellow at the Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory. He is on the board of directors of the Raytheon Corporation and on the boards of advisors for several small technology firms. Mr. Work received a B.S. from the University of Illinois, an M.S. from the University of Southern California, an M.S. from the Naval Postgraduate School, and an M.I.P.P. from the Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies.
