GEORGE H.W. BUSH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

FINAL EDITED TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW WITH COLIN POWELL

December 16, 2011
Alexandria, Virginia

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University of Virginia

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Riley: This is the Colin Powell interview, as part of the George H.W. Bush Oral History Project. Thank you very much for your time. I want to begin by asking about your relationship with George Bush when he was Vice President and you were National Security Advisor, and if you could talk a little bit about what you were finding out about the man, his temperament and his operating style in that earlier era, particularly as it cast any light on what you would see of him later as President.

Powell: Obviously I had the opportunity to observe then Vice President Bush throughout the '80s when I worked with [Caspar] Cap Weinberger, but I didn't really know him. Then suddenly I was plucked out of command of my Corps in Germany to become Deputy National Security Advisor during the time of the Iran-Contra crisis as we were trying, frankly, to stabilize the administration in that post-Iran-Contra period.

I reported for duty the first working day in 1987. The Deputy National Security Advisor's office is a tiny little cubicle compared to my Corps Commander's suite, and I'm in my new place of business trying to figure out how I can fit into this tiny little room when suddenly I heard this boisterous voice coming down the hall: "Is he in there? Is he in there?" It was Vice President Bush, and he came in and gave me a warm welcome. "Great to have you here. Glad that you were able to accept the job." That was the beginning of our relationship.

For most of the next year, I was still the Deputy National Security Advisor, and then I became the National Security Advisor in November of '87, but we became very close during this period. One, we shared the same bathroom, which will dictate a certain degree of familiarity.

Riley: I'm not going to ask you to elaborate.

Powell: Well, I think it's obvious. The suites are connected to each other. The Vice President does not have his own private bathroom, which was a little unusual, but it's a very tight White House. In any event, we ran into each other all the time, but the thing that really drew us closer together is that he saw that we were able to sort of stabilize things, to create a new National Security Council system that was very accountable. We knew everything that was going on. We documented everything. There were no surprises. I got the mission of looking at all of our covert action programs after Iran-Contra, to satisfy ourselves that each one of them rested on the basis of law, that they made sense, and could stand the test of a *Washington Post* revelation. We did all of that and I think that impressed President [Ronald] Reagan, of course, and Vice President Bush, so he was very comfortable with the [Frank] Carlucci–Powell National Security Team.

But he was already starting to run for President at that point, so one of my principal tasks when I became National Security Advisor for November and December of '87, and throughout all of the spring and summer and early fall of 1988, was to keep him up to date as to what was going on. He had his own National Security Advisor, Don Gregg, but they were traveling all the time. I was there in the White House with the President, with the rest of the team—George Shultz, Frank Carlucci—and I made sure that he was never caught by surprise about anything we were doing back in the White House. He was the Vice President, second in charge of all of this, and he was running for office. It was through that interaction that he would call me constantly: "Colin, what's going on? What happened in Panama? What's going on with the re-flagging?" Things of that nature, and we formed a very tight bond during that period, much tighter than I might have expected.

He's such a friendly guy. You can't help but be a friend of George Bush. He won't let you be anything but a friend. I also became close to Mrs. Bush, dear Barbara. I'll never forget the day that we sat next to each other at a luncheon. I think it was the French Embassy, someplace like that, fancy. Well, I'm a Corps Commander. I'm an Infantry Officer; I don't know anything about this kind of stuff. I was sitting next to Mrs. Bush as the luncheon began, and I said, "How do you do, Mrs. Bush? I'm very pleased to be with you." She said, "Call me Barbara." I said, "No, I can't do that." She said, "What do you mean, you can't do that?" I said, "You're the Vice President's wife, ma'am. I can't call you Barbara." She said, "Call me Barbara." I said, "My mother would kill me." She said, "If you don't call me Barbara, *I'll* kill you." And that settled that. From then on, it was always Barbara and Colin when we were alone or in tight surroundings, and, needless to say, we became very close.

When he won the election I was happy as could be because now I could get out of there and go back to the Army, if the Army wanted me. It wasn't clear that they would want me back after what I'd been doing in recent years.

Riley: Sure.

Powell: I'm sure you've seen it in the documentation—He offered me several jobs. I was very flattered but didn't give them a great deal of thought. I thought about them overnight, or a day or so, and said I'd talk them over with my wife. You have to do that when a President-elect asks you to consider something, but I really wanted to go back to the Army. It was just typical of his graciousness to feel that he should offer me something after the two years we had just gone through, a very successful two years. He said, "You can stay National Security Advisor for a while, but we want to suit up Brent [Scowcroft] to be National Security Advisor again." That was very sweet of him, but he wanted Brent right away; he didn't want me to hang around. But it's just the graciousness that he brings to everything that he does.

They offered me a job at CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] as a deputy or director—I don't even remember now, and Deputy Secretary of State. But I had come in from the Army and I wanted to leave from the Army, so I went to see my boss in the Army, General [Carl E.] Vuono, and said, "Carl, I've been doing these strange things for a couple of years, and if you want me to retire, just do this and I'm gone. No hard feelings. I loved my time in the Army, and I really would like to come back to the Army if you've got anything for me. But if it's awkward, don't

worry about it; I've got options outside." He said, "No, we've been talking about you and we want you back, and we're going to give you Command of Forces Command."

I'll never forget the next morning when I went into the Oval Office for the morning briefing, and Bush and Reagan were there. I had already told Mr. Bush, I think, that I was going to go back to the Army. I specifically and very carefully did not want either Bush or Reagan involved in that decision. That was between me and the Army. I didn't want anybody in the White House calling and saying, "Get this guy a job." So I said to President Reagan, "Mr. President, I'm going back to the Army and I'm going to be Commander of Forces Command." He said, "Oh, is that a promotion?" I said, "Yes, Mr. President, it will be." He said, "Oh good, good." And that was it. Even though I then left, I kept in touch with now President Bush and Mrs. Bush. And Brent and I, of course, are old, old friends. I went off to Atlanta, Georgia to become the Forces Command Commander, but that didn't last long.

Riley: Did you have an occasion to see Vice President Bush and President Reagan interact, to get a sense about—when Bush was still Vice President? I'm just wondering if you had any observations about their relationship or their interactions.

Powell: Vice President Bush was always careful never to say anything or do anything in the presence of President Reagan that would suggest anything but complete loyalty and support of his programs. They had their private lunch during the week—I think it was on Thursday, if my memory serves me correctly—and heaven knows what he told him then, but he was absolutely loyal. His fidelity to President Reagan and to the President's policies was complete.

The only time I remember that we had something of a flap, where this just did not turn out to be the case, was over [Manuel] Manny Noriega, my good friend down in Panama. George Shultz and I were trying to ease Noriega out. We weren't looking for a conflict; it just was time for him to leave. It sounds very familiar to current events. It was time for him to leave, and we couldn't cut the deal. We had an indictment on him, which might not have been the brightest thing in the world to do, because it makes it harder for him to want to leave, but we were trying to use that indictment to get him to step down out of power. If he had done that, we might have been able to deal with the indictment going away. But General Noriega didn't want to do that, and we were having difficulty with this.

Vice President Bush was out on the campaign trail and he gets word from some of the people he's talking to, some folks out in California, who said to him, "This is terrible. This guy is indicted. He's a criminal. You can't let him off the hook; you've got to speak up and stand tall on this." So we had to have a big meeting in the White House between President Reagan and Vice President Bush, upstairs in the residence. I'm there, George Shultz is there, and some others. Vice President Bush makes his case. "Mr. President, we can't do this. We can't let this guy out. We've got to stick with this. We've got to be tough on this." Reagan listens to him and asks a few pointed questions of him and then asks us a few pointed questions. I had learned a lot about Reagan by now and I could tell that he was very sensitive to what the Vice President was saying to him and wanted to be helpful, but he wasn't going to do what the Vice President wanted. In that very typical Reagan manner, he listened very carefully to the Vice President and said, "Well, thank you, George, but that's not what I'm going to do." And that was the end of that.

Riley: Okay.

Powell: It was okay for the Vice President. He had made the case. He had tried, and he could tell anybody who was asking him, "Well, that's what I wanted to do, but the President is the President." We took care of Manny later the next year.

Strong: But there was publicity about that difference between the two.

Powell: There was. Yes, there was publicity about the difference, which served the Vice President's purpose very well. If there had been no publicity about it, then he would have not been faithful to the people who were telling him he should object to this. We saw all that and it didn't cause any problems.

Strong: People who write about that and presume to know what the motives are behind these kinds of actions actually say that that may have been calculated by the campaign strategist, to show some independence, to have the Vice President stepping out of the shadow and announcing his own.…

Powell: One could speculate that that is correct.

Strong: But you didn't see anything?

Powell: Of course I did. [*laughter*] It came off the campaign trail. The call came from California. "The Vice President is not happy with this and he wants to see the President." Well, okay, he's unhappy on a substantive basis but he's running for office. He is getting the anti-drug, anti-dictator concern coming from the party, and he has to be tough on this. Both of you know this better than I do: There is always a political calculation in everything. Sometimes it's 10 percent of the calculation; sometimes it's 95 percent of the calculation. Of course we knew, and the President knew it, and so the President heard him out, listened to him patiently. You know, "I understand, George. That does make a lot of sense, but the answer is no." Both of them got their political interests served.

Now whether somebody in the campaign staff, a Fred Malek or somebody, said, "You've got to do this.…" As I recall, it was a sheriff. You probably have it. I don't. I think it was a sheriff in California, or the police chief, or something like that, in L.A. or somewhere like that, that suddenly lit this match and set the Vice President off.

Strong: Is that one of those cases where what happens in the campaign makes it harder when you get into the White House? Because, given what had been said, for Bush to negotiate a Noriega exit would have been harder to do had he not taken that stance.

Powell: I suspect that is the case, but I've been around long enough to know that campaign rhetoric does not always cross the river into the 18 acres and survive. I've seen it in every Presidency. It's one thing to campaign; it's something else to govern.

Strong: And of course President Bush, on one of the most important promises he makes—

Powell: "No new taxes. Read my lips."

Strong: Right.

Powell: I think this is what makes him such a significant figure and such a good President, in that he knew the difference between campaigning and governing. When he had to go out to Andrews Air Force Base with these guys and deal with the issue of what to do to stabilize the economy and get this place going, he was ready to overlook that and eat his campaign words from the previous campaign, with full knowledge, I'm sure, that this was going to hurt him in the next campaign. And it did.

Strong: Is it fair to say he's one of those Presidents who liked governing much more than campaigning?

Powell: I think any human being with an IQ over 40, who is a mammal, loves governing more than campaigning. There are differences, I mean, there are some—We need not go into other Presidents. I think he showed more clearly in the second campaign than in the first that he would prefer to be governing in the White House than running around doing campaign speeches. I will say this, and I alluded to this in my book, he was not as effective in the second campaign, and I'm not sure how well he was when all this was going on.

Strong: You said that you wondered about the Graves [disease].

Powell: Yes. And the more I think about it, my confidence in the judgment that I touched on in my book is higher. I think he was not feeling up to it, not feeling well.

Strong: I don't want to get way ahead of the chronology, but while we're on that point, was there something you saw in that last year that contributes to that conclusion?

Powell: He didn't seem as engaged or as sharp on the issues of the day and things that were going on. And from my vantage point now, as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff over in the Pentagon, working for Dick Cheney, a political figure who had been a Chief of Staff, who had been the Minority Whip—Dick and I would talk about it. We were pretty close and we would talk late at night and I'd say, "Dick, there are things happening in the campaign that he's just not fixing." The campaign was not going well and it was pretty clear it was not going well, and on a couple of occasions I said to Dick, "When are you going to leave here and go over there?" Well, it didn't happen, and I don't think Dick had any enthusiasm for that. He enjoyed his job as Secretary of Defense. They finally got [James A., III] Jim Baker, but it was late.

Riley: Again, just following the train of thought, were there instances on the governing side where you felt like the sharpness wasn't quite there, or was there a sense of being distracted by the campaign, on issues that you were having to deal with?

Powell: None that I can immediately think of. No, I don't see that. It was just what you have to do in the campaign—the travel and, frankly, putting up with the fundraising. He just didn't seem to have the same energy and passion for that that he had in the first campaign.

Riley: There was a lot of talk about whether you might one day run for President of the United States. Did this experience have an effect on the way you thought about your own prospects?

Powell: No, I never connected the two. Briefly, because of all the attention that was given to my book—I was not a politician before then, and with all the attention I was receiving and all the advice that people were trying to give to me, I had to take time to look at it. It became very apparent in about four weeks time. We all had to live through this. It was a miserable period. It was about as miserable a period as I've ever had in my life. I can usually handle problems and I can usually handle stress, but I was losing weight.

It was a bad time, and I finally realized: What are you going through this for? You know it isn't you. You never woke up a single morning in the last month wanting to do this, so why are you continuing to pump the handle? Then I woke up one morning and I said, "We've got to get out of this." And my wife simply said, "What took you so long?" Because she wasn't going. She said, "You may want to go, but I'm not going." It was clear that it's just not me. I get asked about it every single day.

Riley: I bet.

Powell: Every day for the last 16 years, I get the question. I get letters. Letters are coming in now. People forget how old I am. I say, "See my sell-by date?"

Cifrino: Read his Facebook fan page. All they say is, "Please run and save us." Every comment. I delete, delete.

Powell: For me it was the correct thing. For my family it was certainly the correct thing. I would probably be okay at governing. I would not have been good at campaigning.

Strong: Can we go back to 1989? I want to follow up on Panama with a couple of questions. In your book you mentioned a couple of times that you were the first Chairman of the Joint Chiefs who was Goldwater-Nichols [Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986].

Powell: *Fully* Goldwater-Nichols. [William J.] Crowe had it for a couple of years.

Strong: You were potentially put in a position where you might be giving your own advice, as opposed to coordinating with other Chiefs.

Powell: Not quite. I'll fix that. Go ahead.

Strong: Fix that, please. You say, in connection with Panama, that you were very pleased that in that first important incident all of you were in line with what should be done.

Powell: Yes.

Strong: I want to ask a couple questions about that. You mention it later in terms of other incidents, where you were worried that you may have overstepped and done something before fully talking to the other Chiefs, or managing that relationship. Help us with that bigger question of managing that relationship. Also, I want to come back and ask some more questions about the Panama decision.

Powell: The law put me in that position.

Strong: Right.

Powell: Goldwater-Nichols said that the Chairman is the principal military advisor to the four people involved, in the law. The National Security Council is who I advised, and then President, Vice President, Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense, and I took that very seriously, that I was the Secretary of State's military advisor, as well as the Vice President and the Secretary of Defense and the President. The law did not give me any authority over anybody. I'm a staff officer as Chairman. But the law also said that the other Chiefs are military advisors to the same four people, and it's just that as principal military advisor I can give my advice in my own right, in my own standing, whether they agree with me or not, whereas previously what we used to do, and I lived through this, the Chiefs would take an official position that the Chairman had to present as the Chiefs' position. But the Chairman would always sneak in and tell the Secretary and the President what he thought, which tended to have more bite to it than, say, the collective group.

Along comes Goldwater-Nichols and now I can give advice in my own right. It's the law. But I almost never did it without checking with the Chiefs and saying, "Hey, guys, what do you think?" We spent a lot of time in my office, just the six of us, nobody else, and that's when I really got answers from them because they weren't then trapped with their staff watching them: Are you defending the Army? Are you defending the Navy? In my book, I said there was one time where I went ahead and didn't fully check it all with the Chiefs, and they nailed me. "Hey, boss," or "Hey, Chairman," "Hey, Colin, remember the—?" I said, "I've got it, guys. I'm sorry, I won't do it again." And I don't think I ever did. We used to get strange questions, like the Congress would ask me, "What was the Chiefs' vote on this?" I said, "You passed the law, guys. There ain't no vote."

I wanted to make the Vice Chairman a member of the Chiefs. That was not originally in the law. They didn't give him standing as a Chief, and I wanted the law fixed, because it makes sense. People objected and said, "Well, if he's a Navy Officer—He was an Admiral—and the CNO [Chief of Naval Operations], that gives the Navy plus the Marine Corps three votes." I said, "There ain't no votes. They get no votes. I say what I want and they can say what they want. Any time they don't like what I say, they can always go to see the President themselves and I'll make the appointment for them."

In my four years as Chairman, I don't think a Chief ever, in writing, went to the Secretary or the President to disagree with a judgment I had made, except for one time where I needed to get some information in and I didn't check with him. In the heat of battle, I don't think I've ever had to go in and say to the President, "The Chiefs don't agree with me," or, "There's a disagreement here."

There were some programmatic issues where we had disagreements. The one I had the most fun with was nuclear weapons. I felt that we were wasting a lot of money on nuclear weapons. We really didn't need any more. The Army did not need to have nuclear weapons. We could make the rubble bounce everywhere now. I was pushing Secretary Cheney to eliminate nuclear weapons in the Army. The Marine Corps was already getting rid of them and some of the Air Force weapons and all of the tactical nuclear weapons aboard the ships, not the boomers. Cheney

is more conservative than I am on these sorts of matters. There's always a Soviet Union lurking somewhere. Even if it's going away, it's lurking somewhere.

So the Army decided to fight me on it and they got the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, General [John R.] Galvin, my dear friend, to say we've got to have these things. They finessed me by getting not only the Chiefs to agree—the Army Chief went and got all the other Chiefs to agree with him, a brilliant piece of work and I missed it—and then they got Galvin, one of the CINCs [Commander in Chief], the SACEUR [Supreme Allied Commander Europe], to come in and say he needed it. We had a big meeting in Cheney's office and we discussed it, and then his staff, Paul Wolfowitz and company, agreed with that point of view.

I kind of enjoyed it because it was good to be overruled. I can say to people, "Oh, they overruled me. I was overruled." I still remember saying to Secretary Cheney, Dick, as it was happening, "Okay, agreed, done. But we'll be right back here in about a year or two, making this decision." And we were. Right after President Bush said we've got to respond to [Mikhail] Gorbachev and company, I said, "I've got an idea."

We did it with a stack of eight-by-ten slides. There was no paper. There was no memo. I don't think you can find a memo. We sat at the President's desk one afternoon and I said, "Mr. President, I've talked to the Chiefs, and they all agree with this." I showed him the charts. CNO agrees, even the Chief of Staff of the Army agrees—surprise, surprise. In ten minutes he approved the elimination of all of our tactical nuclear weapons, except for the number we kept in the Air Force for fighter-bomber delivery. The strategic forces were an entirely different issue, but it was good. Now, coming back to Panama.

Strong: Can I stop you right there?

Powell: Yes, go right ahead.

Strong: I want to follow up with a question about the President. Lots of people observe that his big picture vision of what was happening at the end of the Cold War was very good. It was an earlier recognition of what could be accomplished in Germany. It was an appropriate sensitivity to what we needed to do to help Gorbachev, who was periodically in trouble, and on the question you just raised, he was willing to take bold steps on arms control, having recognized what was going on and what was changing. Is that assessment of him fair, that he really did see that big picture? I'm trying to put the right words on it. He saw it clearly, and that vision made a difference in how things played out.

Powell: My point of view is that he saw it clearly, after a while.

Strong: Okay.

Powell: It didn't start out quite that clear. There was still a little Vaseline there, and the reason for it, which is entirely understandable, is that President Reagan was so forward-leaning on these issues: *Let's get rid of all nuclear weapons*.

Strong: Right.

Powell: President-elect Bush, with Scowcroft—They were cautious about it. The pivotal meeting was on Governors Island when Gorbachev decided at the last minute to come to New York, at the UN [United Nations], and announce reductions. He wanted to see Ronald Reagan one more time, and get a chance to meet Vice President Bush, or start to bond with him. The Vice President did not want this meeting. He did not want to find himself in a room with Gorbachev and get committed, even before he had become President, to some policies or whatnot. There was nervousness about this. I'm in an awkward position because I am still the National Security Advisor while all of this is going on, and I will become the Chairman later. We've got to back up a little. This is in December of '88.

The day comes, and Gorbachev comes over from the UN after making these important announcements. Before he arrives, Vice President Bush and I are in one of the rooms in the Commandant's house at Governors Island and he says, "I'm not going to get pinned by this guy. I do not want to be hoodwinked by this guy." I said, "Mr. Vice President, we've talked to the Soviets and made it clear to them that this is a courtesy meeting; it is not a summit. We went out of our way to tell everybody it is not a summit, it is a meeting. Goodbye, Ronnie. Hello, George. How are you doing, Misha? That's it, and there will be no announcements, pronouncements, or anything like that, so it's okay." He said, "All right." But he was very uneasy about it, as was Brent.

The meeting comes, and it's very pleasant. I think there's a picture of it in my book, and there are many pictures of us chitchatting over the table. There's a famous line that is in my book, you all know the line where he says to Gorbachev, "Well, how do you think it's all going to turn out?" And Gorbachev says, "Not even Jesus Christ knows." Whereupon, I start to fall because Reagan is going to say, "I *told* you he was a Christian." No, he's not a Christian. [*laughter*] It's idiomatic with them. It's not religion. It's idiomatic. It's cultural. It's history. It's not religion. You know, I could just see Reagan. So that kind of stopped that right there.

Riley: Right.

Powell: But for the first few months of President Bush's administration, it was a little difficult to sort of get it into them that this really is fundamental. It isn't some Soviet trick. They're not going to go backwards. I was particularly of this point of view. I guess I'm still at FORSCOM [U.S. Army Forces Command] but about to become Chairman. I was of this view and would talk to people from my headquarters in Atlanta. And I was more strongly of this view than any of the others—Cheney, Bush, Scowcroft and the rest of them—because I had been in all these summit meetings with Gorbachev. I had spent time with [Sergei] Akhromeyev and the rest of the generals, and this game is over.

I recount in my book the speech I gave to the Army Generals when I was FORSCOM Commander. They said, "You knew all about this stuff. You just came out of the White House. Tell us what's going on." I said, "I'll tell you what's going on. We've got to start thinking about a new world." A line I used was, "If you opened NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organisation] tomorrow to all the Warsaw Pact countries, they would all apply within 24 hours. Do you know what this means to us? It means that everything we've done for 40 years has to change." The article got published, which caused a little bit of controversy, but not much, that I was still the

FORSCOM Commander and I was talking to an internal audience and it was published in a magazine. It took a while for President Bush to realize, *This is for real. These guys are going.*

Riley: Could you sort of sketch out where each of the major players were on the continuum on this? If you were in a very forward leaning position—

Powell: I now have to go to my being Chairman. The lineup was pretty straightforward. Bush was intellectual. He was open-minded. He was prepared to see a different future. And he had watched Reagan for eight years, so he kind of knew what was transpiring in this relationship, especially from the days of Gorbachev and '85 on. Cheney was very conservative and cautious, as we tried to work our way through how the Pentagon should respond to this change. We finally came to agreement as to what we should do, but Mr. Cheney would always say, "I want to make sure there's an off-ramp in case it really isn't going to the destination that we hope. We've got to have exit ramps so as we draw down, if we draw down—I don't want to be trapped if suddenly the Soviets come back."

Riley: I see.

Powell: He always kind of had a view that Gorbachev would fail, but he always saw him failing from the right; whereas, I said he's going to fail from the left. So Mr. Cheney and I would have this discussion, debate. And his civilian staff was more toward that inclination. If you know the characters, the persona on his civilian staff, you can understand that they tended to be more conservative than I was, whereas my staff did what I told them. The Chiefs themselves, as a collective group, were also cautious, but at the same time they could see the handwriting on the wall. Congress was beating us up for a peace dividend. *Gee, if they're going away, why do we need all this stuff?* The answer was, we don't. Scowcroft initially was quite conservative, and I think he restrained the new President Bush, but it wasn't because he didn't see what was happening. He just didn't want to jump in as quickly as he might have been able to, because they wanted to make their own mark and not just be a continuation of the Reagan Administration.

Riley: What about State or CIA?

Powell: The CIA—Go talk to the CIA. You know, the Russians were always coming.

Strong: And Bob Gates was on the Cheney side.

Powell: Bob Gates famously—You know the story between Gates and Shultz, where Shultz said, "I don't want to hear anything more from these people." Shultz and I, we watched it. We were there. The CIA was not there. They were busy pumping out stuff about how much money is going to defense and how the economy's doing, and it wasn't.

Riley: Okay.

Powell: Baker was okay. He was good. He saw it happening. I don't remember Jim being as cautious as say Dick or the others.

Strong: Well, I just want one more follow-up there. How would you evaluate—

Powell: Did you want to talk about Panama?

Strong: Panama later. Let's stick with this for one more question. That pause, as it's called, that takes place in the first six to nine months of the administration when they are trying to work out: What are we going to do with Gorbachev? What's happening in the big picture? Did that do any harm? Did we miss opportunities? Or, were we fortunate that during that period lots of good things were happening in Eastern Europe? Lots of risks that Gorbachev might have had, he finessed and got around. Should we be very critical of the President or his team for taking so long to reach their decision on the Soviet Union, or was it okay?

Powell: No, I don't think you should be critical of the President and his team. Every new President and team don't want to just follow in the mold of those who went before, even if they are of their own party, and if it's another party, then it's even more dramatic. President Bush is a cautious individual. I think he did see the big picture, but he really wanted to make sure he understood it fully.

One of the things I remember most vividly about the President is that when we had an issue to deal with, or we were debating something, or there was a little problem in front of us, he was always very thoughtful in thinking about it. I don't know if I wrote it in the book or not, but he would let us argue in front of him. We were all old friends. We had all worked with each other in different capacities, so we knew each other. This was a gang of professional killer angels. We all knew each other, we knew what each one of us thought, we knew our strengths and weaknesses, and Bush would let us argue in front of him.

I've even told the story that if I disagreed with Mr. Cheney about something, Dick would present the Defense Department position. "This is what the Defense Department thinks." Then he would say, "But Colin doesn't agree with everything. Colin, tell the President what you don't like." That was very professional and mature. The President would listen carefully, not necessarily taking a long time, but he would listen carefully, [snaps fingers] and then he'd be very decisive. I really liked that, because he wanted to hear all the arguments and he was internalizing it slowly, kind of chewing his lower lip a little bit and just sitting there with a slight tilt forward as he absorbed all of this. Only after we had finished beating up each other and disagreeing with one another would he start to ask questions.

I used to compare it to [John F.] Jack Kennedy, who used to let Bobby [Robert Kennedy] do all of this kind of stuff, and he wasn't even in the room, and then Bobby would tell him what happened. In this case, Bush was in the room, but at the same time he wasn't in the room. He was also fortunate in having a bunch of people—Among us there was not a "yes" person in the room, so he didn't have to be out of the room for us to be candid with each other. As a result, he could sit there, almost as a distant figure initially, letting us argue in front of him and present him all the points of view. Then when he'd heard enough he'd ask some questions and then he'd decide.

Strong: That is kind of a transition to get us back to Panama, because you describe that as slightly different. It's the meeting on a Sunday, when you go to see him shortly after the killing at the roadblock. You say that at the end of the meeting, "We had the decision to go," and it was kind of remarkable how quickly, decisively, he did that.

Powell: But that doesn't mean he didn't think it through.

Strong: Had he thought it through before you got there? Had he already made his call about what he was going to do?

Powell: Only he can answer that. I wouldn't presume to tell you when he decided, but we were mightily annoyed with Noriega, and as the year went on, it was becoming embarrassing. You remember the famous—It was the day after I was sworn in.

Strong: The coup.

Powell: The coup, which we got beat up by Sam Nunn and the whole Congress. *Oh, you guys missed a chance.* We didn't miss anything.

Strong: Right.

Powell: That was a goat-rope—excuse my language. The guy who thought he was going to take out Noriega was just another Noriega. He wasn't going to even exile the guy or kill him. He was just going to let him go home. So this was not for real. But by then, a new Chairman, a new Commander in Panama, Max Thurman—We're like this, and have been for years—We didn't think the plans that had been prepared to deal with Noriega, "Blue Spoon," and the rest of those, which were essentially, *Let's go get Noriega and get rid of him, move him out and put him in the jail*—That left the same crowd in charge. They would love to get rid of Noriega, and I get the job.

So we started redoing it. Cheney knew we were redoing the plan, and I think the President might have known we were updating the plan, but he had no idea, in my recollection, and I'm not sure even Dick had an idea, of how much we had reviewed the plan. Max and I, and General Carl Stiner, General [William W.] Hartzog, Wayne Downing, and a lot of other folks had been working on what we're going to do. What we decided we would do is take the whole thing out. If it requires going after Noriega before, because of his actions, then let's not just get Noriega; let's get the whole PDF [Panamanian Defense Forces], the whole government. Remember, we now have a President who has been elected, who is in hiding in Panama, [Guillermo] Endara.

The precipitating event takes place on that Saturday night, and one of our people is killed, some other people are abused, and some females are rudely dealt with, and it all came flooding into the Pentagon. Max and I are talking in the course of the evening, and the next morning, the President wants to see us about it, with recommendations about what to do. I start the day by having the Chiefs come to my house at quarters at Fort Myer, so that I don't go to the Pentagon, so nobody knows that we're meeting.

They come to the house, we sit in the living room and the dining room, and we talk it through. What I say to them is—They weren't even that familiar with the plan. The Army might have been, but the others weren't—"Max and I have been working on this plan and here's what Max has sent up, and I wanted you guys to be aware of it and get your input on it and see if you buy it, because this is what I would recommend to Secretary Cheney and to the President." I can't remember if I saw Cheney before or after the Chiefs. The book might say. We talked about it, and the only comment was from General [Alfred M., Jr.] Gray, the Marine Commandant, who

said, “Well, what are you talking about? How soon?” I said, “In a few days.” “Maybe we ought to wait longer and get a Marine amphibious group down there.” I said, “No, Al. We’re not going to wait for *[USS] Tarawa*.” But that was it. Then he bought it. They all bought it.

So when I went over to see Cheney and then the President, I had the Chiefs all onboard. The meeting was in the residence upstairs. We went around the room, got an assessment of the situation, and then I presented the plan. There’s a picture somewhere of me against the wall talking to the President. He’s in his usual style. When I was through with what we wanted to do, a *coup de main*, as they say in the military—take it all out—just drop 24,000 guys, half of whom were already there—the President asked some questions. Scowcroft pointed out some of the upsides and downsides, as did Jim. Everybody is going to be mad at us. The UN is not going to like this. OAS [Organization of American States] is probably going to condemn us: big ugly Americans doing something like this once again.

The President asks some questions about it, and all the while he’s thinking it through. After he has analyzed it and asked a few questions and gotten the answers back from his diplomatic and political folks, he said, “Let’s do it.” That was it. I went across the river and we started doing it, and then we had an ice storm. That was a hairy night. The planes couldn’t take off from Pope Air Force Base, with the 82nd, but it cleared up. You know the rest of that story. It’s not inconsistent with what I described earlier. It just was compressed in time.

Strong: It was compressed, right.

Powell: I’ve just written a chapter about it for my new book. It says you have to have a process of thinking through a problem. It doesn’t mean it takes three days, but if you have four days then take three days. If you have four minutes, take three minutes, but go through the same mental process of coming to an answer. Bush would always do that.

Strong: There’s one observation in the recently released transcripts, from Bob Gates, who talks about that meeting and says it was when [Tom] Kelly was doing his briefing on what had happened—There was new detail about the abuse that had taken place. The Navy Lieutenant and his wife.

Powell: The wife, yes.

Strong: He reports that that seemed to really have an impact, because the shooting incident had been known for a day-and-a-half or a day.

Powell: No. That had all happened the night before.

Strong: The night before. That one had been—They knew about that.

Powell: That was the precipitating—That was why we were meeting.

Strong: They didn’t know, or maybe were hearing it for the first time, about those details, and that seemed to make a difference. Is that a fair…?

Powell: I think it's fair. I don't know if it was the deciding factor, but here we have this classical man, this man of New England sensitivities and sensibilities. It had an impact on all of us. "They did *what?*" You know? "Well, did they rape her?" Well, no but.… That kind of pushed anybody who was hesitating over the edge. *Let's get this done*. Remember, he had never seen this plan before. He didn't even know it existed. He was thinking "Blue Spoon" still. Then we had to come up with a name for it.

Strong: That was a good job in your administration, thinking of names for operations.

Powell: We were good at it.

Strong: You were really good.

Powell: Well, names in military bureaucracy are supposed to hide what you're doing. *Blue Spoon*—What the hell is a "Blue Spoon"?

Cifrino: I still don't know.

Powell: You're not supposed to know.

Powell: "Overlord"—that was another thing. Once we launched this thing and Max and I were kicking it around, and my staff and I were kicking it around—I forget exactly the details. It might be in my book. But, "Just Cause." I said, "I love it, because even our severest critics, when attacking us, will have to say 'just cause.' Let them scream. As long as they say 'just cause,' that's what the American people will hear." That's why we did it.

Riley: Exactly.

Powell: "Desert Shield," "Desert Storm." We were good at it. We got very good at it. "Provide Comfort."

Strong: "Restore Hope." Those were good.

Riley: Panama provides a template for the way business is done, from there on after?

Powell: Yes.

Riley: You used that as kind of a model.

Powell: Nobody even remembers the Panama War. You don't ever hear of it. We lost a couple dozen kids, which is about what we told Cheney we'd lose. I think we lost 28 and I told him we'd probably lose two dozen.

The opening of the operation, with the rescue of that world's worst spy, was a story in itself, but I viewed it as the template of how we should do things. The CINC is empowered, and the Chiefs support the CINC. Each Chief makes sure that his troops are ready for what the CINC wants to do. The line of communications—and I use the word communications carefully—is from the CINC to the Secretary, through me, and the law says that the line of communications goes

through me only if the Secretary has decided that it goes through me. The law doesn't say they have to come through me; it's if the Secretary so chooses. If the Secretary said, "I don't want you to talk to the Chairman," I'd be just sitting there giving advice to the moon.

Cheney, as previously when Goldwater–Nichols—Crowe had the same authority. So they would come through me and I would issue orders of Cheney's through them. I had no authority to issue an order. The only orders I could issue are those that the Secretary had approved, and we were faithful to this. I would not take anything up there that did not begin with the words: "The Secretary of Defense has directed…" Only then would I sign it, as the releaser of the message, not as the guy authorizing it. The Secretary of Defense has directed every single operational order. Not administrative stuff, but if it's sending troops into battle or to get ready for battle, it had to start with "The Secretary of Defense has directed," even though Cheney made it clear that he wanted everything to go through me.

We had a nice clean system, but I also made it clear to the CINCs, "You work for him; you don't work for me, so any time you're in town, go up and see him. I don't have to be there. Just go up and see him, but you had better come right back down here and tell me what you told him." We were all professionals. We were all contemporaries. We knew each other. They would never do anything up there without letting us know what they were doing, and it worked fine.

Riley: My next question is a more general process question: The President had a very close relationship with Brent Scowcroft—

Powell: Yes.

Riley: And there are a couple of instances, both in your book and in the accounts that we get through Bob Woodward's book, in which you're attributed as a source, where there is some frustration expressed with how Brent was going about doing business as the National Security Advisor. I wonder if you could talk more generally about the President's relationship with his National Security Advisor, and since you had that position, sort of compare and contrast how you did the job with how Brent did the job.

Powell: That I won't do.

Riley: Okay.

Powell: The President and Brent were very close, professionally and personally. I mean it was like family, and that was good. But in the first eight or nine months of the new administration, there was some frustration within the team, that we were not reacting—that we were not responding fast enough to what was happening in the Soviet Union and in Europe, which comes back to your point. But finally they got their sea legs. Malta was when they started to realize, *This guy is for real.* That's the first meeting he had with—all of them seasick—that's the first real meeting where he was not with Reagan, where he was eyeball to eyeball, and he came back from that saying—this is my account—"I'm not just carrying on Reagan's policies."

From that point on, we started to operate on the same harmonic. Until then, we were not quite in the same harmonic. Some of us wanted to move faster than others. Dick was more reluctant. I was pushing because I saw what was going on during my time as National Security Advisor, but

at this point I'm anxious to get a concept of what we're going to do with the Armed Forces, because Congress is going to start ripping us apart.

Riley: Yes.

Powell: We will either design our future and march to that future, or Congress will do it for us, and that will not be pretty. And that's what we did. We cut the military 25 percent. People ask me about it now, how we did it, but that's another story.

Riley: So the early concerns about Scowcroft were almost entirely based on…?

Powell: It wasn't anything personal with Brent. It was, you know, we've got to move more quickly. I think we picked up speed and got our sea legs. Frankly, I have witnessed this in almost every one of the four administrations, not Reagan so much, but in the [William J.] Clinton and the two Bush administrations, there's always that sort of, We are not the guys who were here last week. We're new and we've got to get our sea legs. It's not only a matter of, we're now governing—*Oh, my god, I'm the President*. Nothing ever prepares you to be the President, fully, until the day you take it over. For a guy like Bush, it was perhaps easier than for Clinton or [George W. Bush] 43, because he had been the Vice President for eight years and had seen it all, and because he had been Director of the CIA, emissary to China, Congressman, UN Ambassador. Nobody has ever come to that office as equipped in terms of policy and positions as George Bush 41.

Strong: I want to follow up on your earlier observation, which lots of people make, that the National Security Team this administration put together was unusual, professional, people who had long associations, close associations, with far less backstabbing.

Powell: And deep experience in government.

Strong: Deep experience in government, and a President who had much more international experience than we typically would have, and particularly the Vice Presidency. The story is, that's just a dream team. You don't get that very often, and we were really lucky to have it then. I want to push that story a little bit and ask: What did the President do to keep you all together or to keep you all working well in that fashion? Are there things we should look to in his behavior and performance that kept that group at its high level? I have some ideas about what some of those things might be.

Powell: I'm sure you do.

Strong: Let me just put one out, because it does involve you. Is it the loyalty he shows to some of those team members when they are in trouble in the press or when they're being criticized? Is that an important factor?

Powell: Mm-hmm.

Strong: Are there other things he was doing that we should pay attention to in the team's success?

Powell: Let me add one little factoid to your beginning, and that is, you also have to remember that the team—I think I can take credit for this and Frank can take credit for it—The team that he took it over from, that Brent took over from—We had done a pretty good job for two years. I would submit to you that a lot of what was done in the last two years of the Reagan Administration: cleaning up the NSC [National Security Council], documenting all decisions, reviewing the entire covert action procedures—Frank and I left a process and a team in place that Brent and 41 could build on.

Now, Brent made some changes to it. He wanted a smaller staff—They all grow back in due course—and they changed some of the names of the committees that we had. In one case, it took him a while to come back to create a Deputies Committee. We had one but they let it go into disuse, and then suddenly they realized they had to bring it back, and they called it the Deputies Committee. We call it the Policy Review Group. They were building on a solid foundation, but even then they wanted to make changes, which is what you expect from a new team.

Bush had unerring loyalty to all of us, and when I would get in trouble on an occasional basis, the one I would usually get a call from, not expected, but I would usually get a call from the President. Not Cheney, not Baker, not Scowcroft. We're all big boys. You get in trouble; you get yourself out of it. It would be Bush who would say, "Colin, you know I read that. Don't worry about that. That's nothing." And that was it. "Yes, Mr. President. Thank you." It meant a lot to me. It meant a lot to me to know that even if I had screwed up, or if I hadn't screwed up but they accused me of screwing up, I always had him in my corner. I'm sure there were times when he was unhappy with what I had done. There had to be. When I announced the 25 percent reduction of the Armed Forces, it was not a happy morning. But he would never dump on you, and you always knew that the next day, we're back to normal.

The other thing was that we not only were experienced in this, but we had all worked with each other in different capacities—Jim as Chief of Staff, Brent as the former National Security Advisor. I was with Weinberger, and when I was with Weinberger I got to know all of these folks. I had to work with Dick Cheney. He visited me when I was a Corps Commander, which is where he really first got to know me. I think that had a lot to do with my becoming Chairman. He was in Frankfurt with a delegation, and he came into my Corps headquarters and we talked about changes that were taking place. That's the first time, other than perhaps a hearing at some point, where he got to see me in my environment. That would have been in the fall of '86. So we were a band of brothers and we all were philosophically similar.

The contrast you're asking about is what would happen later. In 43's administration, we were not philosophically close enough to each other. The differences were too severe. A lot of things have changed. But this is not about 43; it's about 41. In 41's administration, we were all pretty much philosophically together. If anyone was a little bit more conservative than anyone else it was Cheney. But Cheney had to deal with Baker, Scowcroft, [J. Danforth] Dan Quayle, the President, and me, who was an advisor not only to him but to Baker and the others. Even then, with that one little exception, we were a very close band of brothers.

Riley: Could you talk about the President's relationship with the rank and file military?

Powell: He loved it. He loved visiting the troops. The picture I have in my home that is my favorite of the pictures I have with him is at his retirement, at his final parade at the gymnasium at Fort Myer. He and Barbara are out there and we're giving him awards and medals. I spoke and Cheney spoke, and there was pass in review and all the rest of that stuff. He was beside himself. He wrote me a note on that picture that said, "This has got to be one of the best days of my life." And he meant it.

He had a particular affection for troops and their families and the sacrifices they made. Casualties would always be on his mind, especially as he was getting ready for Desert Storm and people were shouting, "You're going to lose 10,000! You're going to lose 20,000." All these experts we have in Washington. Norm [Schwarzkopf] and I had much different ideas. We thought the numbers would be in the thousands, but the low thousands. It turned out to be in the hundreds, low hundreds. Yes, he had a very close relationship with the troops, and I think one of the reasons for that is that he was a troop. He served.

Riley: Is there something to be lost in the Presidency by not having Presidents who have served?

Powell: It depends on the President. If the President is able to surround himself with people who will inoculate him with the culture, then I think it's not essential. If he has people in whom he is confident in their military ability—I think it's desirable. It's always desirable, but it's not essential. President [Barack] Obama—As you saw yesterday, he's a rock star when he goes out among the troops. They feel he's taking care of them. Clinton started off very rocky. Unfortunately, we had to go through that whole "Don't Ask Don't Tell" period, but once we got past that, he enjoyed visiting troops. Troops are teenagers. They like to see rock stars. I've got to remind everybody, these are teenagers with guns.

Strong: Did you get a lot of those personal notes from the President?

Powell: Yes.

Strong: He's famous for writing them.

Powell: Yes. I don't have them all; I wish I did.

Strong: Some people at the time and since have been critical that this is evidence that maybe he wasn't doing the most serious work. He had a habit of writing these notes that was kind of unusual or quaint or old-fashioned or whatever. I suspect they helped him a great deal. And they matter.

Powell: Of course they did.

Strong: He was always talking to people on the phone, not just to senior staff, but to foreign leaders, very often with personal conversation, not substantive conversation, keeping up those relationships. The question I'm trying to come around to is, how much of Washington is really about those kinds of personal relationship, rather than the philosophical policy questions you were talking about earlier?

Powell: A lot of it, and most of it, and we're losing it here in Washington now because of the way in which our body politic has transformed itself in the last 20 years, helped along by media that bears no responsibility for what they have helped create with talk shows, radio, go for the gotcha, focus on the trivia, don't wait for this to be verified, just go with it. It's getting worse and worse and worse and worse. I speak about it all the time.

Coming back to the notes: I'm kind of smiling because I do the same thing, constant note writing. I picked it up, Weinberger, Reagan. Reagan was a little different but Weinberger and Bush were the two who used to do it all the time. I have my little four-by-six cards. It's a paragraph in my standard speech, the point I make, and the point I made at the State Department when I took over. It was my way of doing it at FORSCOM, my Corps, everything. I'm not just the President's foreign policy advisor; I am the leader and manager and commander of an organization, and part of my responsibility has to be to take care of the organization.

When Peggy [Cifrino] was there with me for the whole four years, we redid the information system. I personally swore in between 145 and 150 Ambassadors, Assistant Secretaries, junior officer classes. You name it; I swore it in. I don't think anyone is ever going to match that record. The reason I did it was I wanted them to know how much I valued what their service was and what they were going to be doing. Every Ambassador had to have a laying on of hands. This is the most important day of their life for many of them. I want the Ben Franklin Room full. I want all their families there. I want the kids coming up. I felt that was a very important part of my job. The only time I didn't swear somebody in is if I wasn't around and my Deputy, Rich [Armitage], had to do it. On very rare occasions, one of the other senior officers would do it because it had to be done.

That's part of what you're talking about. You have to create these kinds of bonds with your subordinates and with your fellow leaders, your co-equals. That's what 41 was so good at. The little notes sometimes were just cute and humorous things. Something he'd read in a newspaper an article he clipped out. They said, "He's my guy." You know? Yes, that's an important part of leadership, an important part of management.

Riley: We don't have time, obviously, to go into all of the policy questions. Is there any piece of the Desert Storm, Desert Shield story that's out there that is a misunderstanding, or that's wrong, or that you think is overemphasized? Or are there lessons from that experience that you think are important, that we ought to be focused on?

Powell: Well, the most controversial one that has been banged about all the time is the day the war ended.

Riley: Right.

Powell: Mine is the most accurate, and I'm not saying that in a self-serving way. It was a very important morning and a very important day, and I wrote it down when I got back to my office. It's also consistent with what President Bush and Scowcroft have in their books. The reality was that we had been saying this is going splendidly, it's moving rapidly. We've got the "Highway of Death" and all the rest of the stuff going on.

The morning that we made the decision, I had briefed Cheney earlier in the morning, as I always did before we went over to the White House. Then we went over to the White House and I put up my maps and took out my little laser pointer, which used to drive him crazy. That was in the days when laser pointers were something new and wonderful. I would write notes to him also, but he didn't like my notes, because it said "Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff," and it had a purple boundary, which suggests joint-ness: I'm not Army or Navy, blue or green; I'm purple. He kept saying, "That's not purple." I said, "Sir?" "That color is not purple." "What is it, sir? "It's more like lavender." I said, "It looks purple to me." He said, "No, it isn't!" I said, "Well, I'll try to find other notes then. I won't send you any more lavender, purple, or whatever you think they are." About a week later, a box shows up, of purple notes. He had them made up.

Riley: No kidding?

Powell: Yes. He said, "These are the ones I want. These are purple." I said, "Yes, sir, Mr. President." Excuse that diversion, but it just shows you the kind of guy he was.

Riley: Sure.

Powell: Why would the President of the United States worry about the color of my notes? He just was having fun with me, and then he fixed me.

I had briefed Cheney and said, "It's coming to an end. We're going to have to make a decision in the next 24 to 48 hours. I'm waiting to talk to Norm." I talked to Norm that morning, and we went in and I got my map up and I started to brief the "Gang of Eight" about the situation, and where the troops were, and how it was performing, and how, within the next 24 hours, I expected that I'd be coming back there with a recommendation to do something different, cease hostilities or whatever.

Riley: Right.

Powell: And he suddenly blurted out, it was almost a blurt out, "Well, if that's the case, why don't we do it now?" It was not a recommendation to him. He came up with the thought and I said, "Well, I'll have to talk to Norm and talk to the Chiefs." He said, "Let's call Norm." I called Norm, and Norm was busy giving an interview at about the same time, over in his headquarters in Riyadh, saying we beat the hell of them and we're just waiting for orders to stop. If you check, you'll find that's what he said. I didn't know he was saying that at the same time the President is saying, "Why don't we do it?"

So we go through that and I wait to hear back from Norm. I'm thinking about it, and I called over to Admiral [David E.] Jeremiah, my Deputy, my Vice Chairman, and said, "Go get the Chiefs and tell the Chiefs this is what's happening." He did. I don't know how much time they spent on it, but the Chiefs came back and said it was okay. There was no reason for it not to be okay. People think, you know, the Highway of Death influenced you so much. Well, you can't look at something like that and not have it have an effect. And to your point about Panama, how he was outraged by the female aspect to it, he kind of got the same sort of feeling. *I'm not looking at this moment like a generous victor. We're bombing these people.* I think that also affected him a little.

Riley: Sure.

Powell: He was also looking at the political and public relations aspect of this highway that was on television. We did the go-around on it, and Norm came back and said okay, and we then picked a time, midnight. That gave Norm another three-quarters of a day to tidy up his battlefield and see what was going on. The President made the decision and I think it was the correct decision. We're talking about young kids getting killed on both sides. More of them were getting killed than us getting killed, but these are the children of people.

Then the question became, shouldn't you have gone to Baghdad? Powell didn't want to go to Baghdad; that was the problem. Nobody wanted to go to Baghdad. With never a single discussion about going beyond the mission that had been set by the President and approved by the UN, approved by Congress, that allowed us to put a coalition together that included a Syrian division. Can you imagine that? And an Egyptian division and Russian support, although Gorbachev got a little wobbly on us that weekend, which we took care of. So there was never any question of going to Baghdad. That's a bad hit.

The second hit that came was, you should have continued to destroy the Republican Guard. That's a legitimate criticism. It's not a legitimate criticism to say we should have gone to Baghdad. It is a legitimate criticism to say, or a debatable criticism to say, you should have kept beating up on the Republican Guard. We weren't quite sure where they were. The situation got a little muddled. In any event, more of them got out than perhaps should have been the case. I have to remind people, we did not want to destroy the Iraqi Army. There was something called Iran right next door, that they had fought for eight years. We're going to hand it to Iran because these guys don't have the capacity to defend themselves.

The third issue is more confused for me in my mind, in that the President said some things about the Shias in the south, hoping that they would rise up. Then of course Saddam [Hussein] attacked them. People say the helicopters did it all. Well, if there were no helicopters, then I assure you, he had other ways of killing all those Shias. But there was no likelihood, looking at it then and now, that these Marsh Arabs coming up out of the south part of the country would have had any capacity to organize themselves and march on Baghdad. He still had Republican Guard that he had never committed. He was still firmly in control. But the President had said some things that people say encouraged the Marsh Arabs to expect relief. Brent and he don't seem to have the same take on it. I don't remember that vividly. I was doing other things. But he said some things that at least people claim were his call for uprising. You guys have talked to them about that. I'm not sure. What is the right answer?

Strong: Actually, I think that is one of those problematic areas where media reporting on what was said exaggerate what underlies that.

Powell: Unfortunately, a lot of people on our team subsequently made a big point out of this.

Strong: Right.

Powell: The names are well-known to you.

Strong: I wanted to ask—This is speculative and it's always unfair to ask those kinds of questions.

Powell: It's unfair to answer them. But go ahead.

Strong: Okay. Was there a lot of conversation or thought about how differently that war would have progressed and ended if Saddam Hussein had not taken seriously the warnings that were given, and had used chemical or biological weapons?

Powell: A good question. I've got a chapter on it in my new book. It's not a political memoir but kind of lessons in life and leadership, but I did talk about this a little bit. My own view, pretty much then and now, is that we had given him sufficient warnings. Jim Baker had delivered warnings to Tariq [Aziz].

I had written a memo to be sent to Hussein, but at the last minute we didn't need it. My memo essentially said, "You're about to get yourself in trouble. A war is about to start and we're coming after you and your army. We're going to fight by the conventional, acceptable rules of warfare. If, however, you choose to use any unconventional weapons of this, that and the other, gas, we will respond in an asymmetrical way." I think I even had in the memo, "All we have to do is blow the bridges and the dams on the Tigris and Euphrates River and make Baghdad a lake." Well, I didn't send that, but we had given him enough signals to suggest that, *You don't want to try this.*

It was also my view that we could handle chemical weapons. You just drive through it. They're not weapons of mass destruction; that's nonsense. We've got them all confused. Our troops, MOPP 4 [Mission-Oriented Protective Posture] masks, chemicals go off, drive out of it. You don't stay there and inhale it. You move. Our kids knew this. It wasn't a problem. I never thought he had nuclear weapons. I had never seen any evidence of that. Biological weapons are weapons of mass destruction, but the ability to actually deliver these things is not a simple matter. We even tried to develop aerial ways of delivering biological weapons years ago. It couldn't work. You know, you need the right temperature, the right this. You're more worried about killing your own people loading the stuff than you would be in delivering it.

So we were worried about all that stuff, but I was quite confident it would give us hysterical problems around the world. There would be outrage, and people would be saying, "Oh, my god, our sons are getting gassed," but it really wasn't a significant military problem for us.

Riley: Was there much attention given to figuring out how to get Saddam out after Desert Storm?

Powell: Not on the military part. I don't know what the Agency might have been doing, and I'm sure you can talk to Bob [Gates] and others about it. We would have loved to have gotten him out. The Saudis always kept promising they could get him out, both in the First Gulf War and the Second Gulf War, and they couldn't. Bush believed, so did we all hope, that he couldn't survive this catastrophic loss, but he did. And then he pushed all the Kurds up into the mountains, because they thought they were going to see a change, and we had to deal with that. But this guy had staying power. He was rough.

Riley: Did you have a sense, as a result of this experience—and we'll isolate it to the time of 41—about the quality of the intelligence you were getting, whether it was military intelligence or CIA intelligence? Did the experience in the Gulf at that time give you increased confidence that we had a good fix on what was going on there, or a diminished confidence?

Powell: I had a very good idea of what was going on, on the ground, of what his capabilities were. We could watch movement. At the very beginning, before the war started, I was saying, "Is this an exercise or are they going to attack?" I remember telling my staff, "Let me know if they start moving up logistics trains," because that's an attack; that's not an exercise. And they said to me the night of the attack, "The trains are moving," meaning fuel, ammunition, food. That's when I thought, *Jesus, this is for real*. The intelligence was pretty good.

There's one story in my book, and I've used it elsewhere, where the CIA said, "Schwarzkopf isn't killing as many tanks as he says he is." Bill Webster went and told this to 41 one morning in the CIA briefings, which I always used to be nervous about. Brent comes running out of the Oval Office, saying, "The CIA says you're not doing what you're doing." I said, "What?" So I called Norm and he goes [Indecipherable sound], which was not hard to make him do. We have a big meeting in Brent's office later that afternoon with Cheney, myself, Brent and some CIA guys. Webster, who had really gotten cut short by taking this in to the President, has his photo guy there, so we were questioning him. "What did you see? What are you seeing that's different from Norm?" "Well, we're looking at satellite, da-da-da." But the satellite is like looking down a soda straw. You're only seeing a part of the battlefield at the moment the satellite took the picture. It's not synoptic coverage like we have now.

Riley: Right.

Powell: It was a shot at a time. Meanwhile, Norm has got pilots who are flying over the place looking at everything, so Norm has a better picture of the battlefield than just photo interpreters. And there's another CIA guy there in the room, that Webster brought with him, and we turned to him and he said, "Yes, I agree with Schwarzkopf." What the hell are we doing here? Webster had been set up by the photo guys—not set up, but he didn't know enough to say, "Hey, wait a minute, let's see what the difference is before I go running to the President with this stuff."

Otherwise, I knew where the Iraqi divisions were. I knew where they were putting in the minefields. I knew where the fire trenches were going. It became so obvious within a few weeks that they had trapped themselves. They had trapped themselves. They would not be able to disengage when the war started. We were going to kick them right where they were. And the guys in the three divisions along the coast—Al Gray once again wanted to invade them, and I said, "No, you just keep sailing out there, Al, and that will fix them. We'll cut them off. We don't have to go across the beach." He was very unhappy with that. The Marines did a brilliant job. The Marines are the ones who took Kuwait City, because two young Marines went under the wire, and when it all started, they were already through. It was beautiful.

Strong: We're almost out of time and there are lots of things we'd like to ask.

Powell: I've done a lot of these now and I've got hundreds of pages of my own oral history.

Riley: The book itself is a fabulous—

Powell: I don't think I've added anything that you haven't read there.

Strong: Yes, I think that's right. It is a very good book. Our audience for these is the people who are going to go to the President's library and maybe start with this set of interviews, before they start digging in the archives. So one of the things we like to ask is what's your advice to the future historian who is finally going to have access to almost everything in the Bush archive? Are there issues that are hidden, that they should be looking for? Are there things that haven't gotten as much attention as they deserve? Are there directions you would give to that group of historians—after they have read your book, of course—about what other things they should be paying attention to?

Powell: This war, Desert Storm especially, even Panama, was covered more extensively in contemporary writing than just about anything else. There was no censorship. Woodward made a career—He became famous as a result of this. So did a lot of other guys, the Rick Atkinsons of the world and [Bernard E.] Mick Trainors of the world.

I would say to future historians, read all of that but take all of it with a grain of salt. Try to get beyond, especially, the headlines of the newspapers. There is a body of newspaper reporting that goes along with this that I don't think you've ever seen in any other war. And television commentaries—the first television war—I've written about this as well. It fundamentally changed the way in which you can run a war. Everybody is watching. It was the first CNN [Cable News Network] war, although the CNN reporters really were not videoing out of Baghdad that night. But if you ask anybody, "Oh, yes, I remember CNN covering…." No, they didn't. They were underneath a bed. [Bernard] Bernie Shaw was terrified. One of the three guys is dead now. I forget which one died. Everybody thought they saw it on television. They didn't. They saw still shots with some bombs going off, but it wasn't CNN. It was CNN, but it was a couple days before they put cameras in. It fundamentally changed the way in which you do things.

I learned in Panama that while listening to Norm and going into my command center, I had to watch television. The one funny story I have in there is when Max Thurman kept telling me one thing and I said, "Max, I'm watching it on television. That is not what's happening." He busted into somebody's embassy and he said, "No, we didn't do it." It was the Cuban Embassy. I said, "Max, Max baby, this is Colin. I'm looking at the scratches that your tank made on the curb in front of the Cuban Embassy." He said, "You are, huh?" I said, "Yes, Max. Turn off the music. Everybody thinks it's goofy for you to be blasting the Papal Nuncio's house with music." "Ah, you guys don't understand anything up there." Right. "Okay, Max. Just turn it off."

Scowcroft was making me crazy. They started to get deeply involved in Panama, and because of the press we had to sort of say, "Guys, take a deep breath. Don't call me every time you see something on television or a reporter calls you. Give us some time."

The Gulf War: When the air war was about to be joined with the ground war, I went up to see Cheney, because I didn't know whether it was going to happen, but I'm an infantry officer. I said, "Dick, so far you've been seeing a nice air war. It's clean, it's neat, pilots fly, then come back. They all look like Steve Canyon. If you lose a plane, you lose one guy. If you lose a two-

seater, you lose two guys." The worst problem he had was when they shot down the AC-130 that lingered too long in daylight and it got whacked, and we lost 20.

I said, "When the ground war starts, ground war ain't air war. It's ugly, it's dirty, and you're liable to see pictures coming out of some kid laying halfway outside of a tank on fire. He's burning. It's very ugly. You and the President and Baker and Brent all need to understand that the nature of the war is changing and the coverage is going to be different, and you've got to give us time. You can't respond to everything that somebody sees on television, so don't start asking me for how many people got killed or how many people got wounded. You've got to give us some time." Cheney understood it beautifully and in fact, he held the press off for a while, until it became too hard to do, and when it was going so well and we weren't seeing these kinds of images, I said, "Go for it."

We understood—Your question was about intelligence. We had a pretty good picture of what these guys looked like and what they could do. We learned later, something I suspected at the time, these Iraqi commanders did not know how to use chemical weapons, for the most part. It was one thing to gas a bunch of people up in Kurdistan by just flying over them. It was something else to use them in combat, in a fast-moving situation. As soon as you fire the first one of these things, you know American airplanes are coming after it. I don't think they were equipped, and some of the out-briefings of captured Iraqi generals said, "We didn't know how to use this stuff." So it wasn't as big a deal.

The whole thing of WMD [Weapons of Mass Destruction] has become impossible now. It's become a hysterical acronym. *Oh, my god, weapons of mass destruction*. Chemicals are not a weapon of mass destruction unless you can get a whole bunch of people in an enclosed place. Biological weapons are the worst, but they're probably the most difficult to use. Nukes are of course a weapon of mass destruction, but I can list as many countries that have given them up as those who have tried to pursue them. But in every article you will read, the term will always be a "rapidly proliferating threat" of nuclear weapons. I will ask some of my friends, "Who is proliferating, and is it rapid?" It's the same guys I screwed with ten, fifteen years ago. South Africa gave it up. Even Libya gave it up, and Chile. They all abandoned it. And Iran and North Korea. They can't be used. It would be suicidal.

Strong: So the contemporary historical record, because of news-gathering, is richer, but it also distorts in a bigger way.

Powell: It's distorting. You need historians who understand how contemporary coverage can distort something, and who can sweep away what [Carl von] Clausewitz called "the vividness of transient impressions." Not bad, huh?

Strong: That's a good phrase.

Powell: Because the transient impression is not necessarily reality, and it is transient. We all live now in a transient world. I've been speaking about this recently. Every night from 5:00 in the evening, roughly, to about midnight, we listen to babblers. Every cable—It's cheap programming and they're not there to give you the news. They're there to comment on commentators' commentary. They are all interested, not in educating the public, although that may be a by-

product; they're interested in market share. Why does Anderson Cooper now have three shows? Not one. He's got three shows because he's popular, because he gets market share. I've been watching some of his latest stuff. Come on, Anderson, get back to serious work. Andrea Mitchell, our beloved friend, now has two shows and she's also on *Morning Joe* a lot of the time. Andrea, when are you doing reporting? When are you out getting information? And Brian Williams now has something with Chelsea Clinton. Isn't that Brian and Chelsea?

Cifrino: Chelsea is new. Brian is involved in that new night show. What is called? I just went blank. It just launched.

Powell: It's like *30 Rock* but it's not *30 Rock*. It might as well be *30 Rock*. It's something having to do with NBC [National Broadcasting Corporation]. But it really is troubling, and it's going to be troubling for historians because you don't have to listen to the news any more. All you have to do is listen to the commentators who feel the way you do.

Riley: Yes.

Powell: All the right-wingers listen to right-wing commentary, and all the left-wingers listen to left-wing commentary, and the channels play to it. You go in the evening and you listen in a row to—Let's start with Chris Matthews and then Larry O'Donnell and then Rachel Maddow, and you will have all of your leftist instincts dealt with. If you go to Fox, you get Sean Hannity, who I used to be interviewed by all the time. Sean Hannity and the rest of them. You're going to hear something that reinforces your beliefs. Then you have the radio guys, starting with Rush [Limbaugh] in the morning, who always is calling—Everything I do has a racial overtone to it, and I get letters that essentially reflect what Rush says about me. This is troubling. I compare it to when I was a kid, which was long before you were a kid.

Strong: Somewhat.

Powell: Trust me. [*laughter*]

Cifrino: He uses that line on me, too.

Powell: In the evening, on the three networks, you got either 15 or 30 minutes of news, from people who gave you news: Walter Cronkite, [Chet] Huntley–[David] Brinkley. Serious news, not commentary. On Sunday, you got *Meet the Press*, with some serious people having serious discussions, and that was it. During the day—Do you ever remember watching television news during the day? No. You read a newspaper.

The story I love to tell my audiences, because you have to be close to my age to understand this story—I said, when I grew up, at 11:00 every night, suddenly they played the National Anthem on television.

Cifrino: I remember that.

Strong: Yes, I do.

Riley: I don't remember it at 11:00.

Powell: It was at 11:00. Trust me. They played the National Anthem. They showed film footage of the flag, and at the end of the National Anthem, there was a flyover of jets, and as soon as the jets flew over the flag and the last note of the National Anthem played, the test pattern came on and we all went to bed. [*laughter*] And the world was a better place.

Riley: I agree. Bob, do you have anything else?

Powell: I've got to get to the White House.

Strong: Maybe this is unfair, but when you're serving as Secretary of State, what communication are you having with the elder President Bush? Is it infrequent? Is it personal?

Powell: Occasional.

Strong: Not substantive?

Powell: No. When I'd see him, it would be Colin and the President, and Colin and Barbara are very close. Between my assignments, when I was a private citizen in the mid-'90s, we used to go on cruises together with the whole family, in the Aegean.

Cifrino: Forty-one would call here and he'd say, "Peggy, it's 41. Tell the General to think cruise." So I'd relay the message.

Powell: Myself, my wife and all the Bush kids, grandkids, and Barbara, and George 41. Forty-three was governing, so he seldom went with us, but Laura [Bush] did, and Laura's daughters, and Marvin's [Bush] kids, and Neil's [Bush] kids. All of us are on the boat for a week at a time. It wasn't that much of a vacation, because every morning he wanted to go do something. You know, we've got to go walk. "Colin, are you ready? We're going to go walk."

Cifrino: I had shirts for everybody.

Powell: We'd walk across these Aegean islands and this isn't a vacation. I just wanted to sit in the back of the boat and read my book. So we were very close then. When I became Secretary of State, we stayed in touch, but I'm not one to go calling my bosses just to schmooze. As you well know, and this is a subject you will be dealing with in due course, it wasn't the same relationship.

Riley: We're already dealing with it.

Powell: Good luck.

Riley: We began about a year ago doing the 43 interviews, and we're about a year into a five-year program there. So I'll plant the seed now that you've been very generous with your time this morning—

Powell: Well, I could have given you a lot more, but you'd be surprised how many of these things come along.

Riley: I'm sure.

Powell: I covered what you needed.

Riley: We've got a terrific archive on 41, but we do hope that you'll be receptive when the invitation comes to—

Powell: Let me know if you find anybody who can explain it.

Riley: It's a mosaic, that's what I like to say, so we like to get as many pieces as we can.

Powell: The memoirs have not been helpful.

Riley: Is that right?

Powell: I don't think so.

Strong: I think that's right.

Powell: Reinventing history. I mean there are things there that simply are wrong, and are known to be wrong, and they were being written with eight researchers.

Riley: Well, this is why we have to come back and sit down and have a longer conversation with the people who—

Powell: That's one I might want to do, but I may not be able to explain it.

Riley: Thank you so much. All we need is your side of it.