WILLIAM J. CLINTON PRESIDENTIAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH WARREN CHRISTOPHER AND STROBE TALBOTT

April 15-16, 2002
Charlottesville, Virginia

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TRANSCRIPT

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Young: I think we're ready to begin. We're very pleased to have this oral history interview for the Clinton Presidential Oral History Project with Secretary Warren Christopher and Deputy Secretary Strobe Talbott. I've asked both these gentlemen how they should be addressed and Strobe Talbott suggested "His Excellency." Mr. Christopher suggested "Chris," if it serves our purposes. Our purpose is informality and candor. So, the deference and respect is still there even though the first name is used.

In our little get together before the meeting, we did go over the ground rules. Just let me repeat that everybody in this room understands our policies in this project, which means that nothing said in this room goes out of the room until such time as each of the respondents has a chance to review the transcript, edit it to his satisfaction, and make such stipulations as he wishes concerning the time of its release.

We also discussed generally what we'd like to cover in the interview. Chris and Strobe are both flexible. We like to have free-flowing discussion, but we have to start someplace. I have asked Strobe about the possibility of a further interview concentrating on areas that will not get covered here, and he is agreeable to our working that out at a convenient time for him. We'll see how far we go today in this duo.

If you'd like to say a few words at the beginning, I think we'll dispense with the voice ID, we'll get that sooner or later, I think. If you'd like to start with how you got connected with the Clinton administration. We've read your accounts in the book, which seem pretty complete, but there may be something you'd like to add to that. We can start there or you can start way back to your entry into politics.

Christopher: Jim, I guess your question raises a question in my mind, that is, if something is said in the book, it's not necessary for me to say it here?

Young: Yes, I think you can assume we have read what's in the book so you needn't recount it, except those points you wish to give special emphasis to or add something to.

Christopher: My involvement with the Clinton administration came, as so many things in my life, as a surprise, an unexpected development in my life. I had no idea I'd become so deeply

involved in the Clinton administration. As I do recount in the book, my friend Mickey Kantor asked me if I would introduce then-Governor Clinton at a fundraising endeavor in California, and because I'd been convinced over the prior three months that Governor Clinton was the best of the available candidates, I agreed to introduce him. So much flowed from that particular evening that came as an unexpected surprise. It surprised me that growing out of my very brief contacts with Governor Clinton at an event at Kantor's house, coupled with that evening, they asked me to become involved in, and ultimately to head, the search for the Vice President.

So, as I say, Jim, my involvement was unexpected and a surprise, and the depth of it came to surprise me, and it does even in retrospect.

Young: Do you have any clue as to why Clinton would have chosen you for the Vice Presidential vetting?

Christopher: Probably a large factor was Mickey Kantor's recommendation. Kantor and I had just finished working on the very large study called the Independent Commission on the Los Angeles Police Department following the Rodney King episode, and I think Clinton also liked the time we spent together in Los Angeles. I understood he liked my introduction at the fund-raiser and he and I spent about an hour talking in the afternoon in which he, in his usual way, drained me dry of all the memories I had about working for other Presidents.

Young: Was he easy to get to know or difficult, just for these first contacts?

Christopher: He is one of the easiest people to be with that you can possibly imagine. He has all the skills of a very expert and experienced politician coupled with a kind of personal grace that always makes you feel, when you're talking to him, like you are the most important person in the world.

Riley: Could you tell us a little bit about your relationship with Mickey Kantor and how did you first come to know him and to develop confidence in his sense of Clinton's suitability to be President?

Christopher: Mickey Kantor and I were fellow lawyers in Los Angeles and had been involved together in various aspects of Los Angeles civic life. He and I were both informal advisors to Tom Bradley, the five-term mayor of Los Angeles, really a gigantic figure in Los Angeles. I came to know Mickey Kantor in the way that you probably do your close colleagues, somebody you work with and over time come to admire. We were not intimate friends, but we were good friends and had worked together in enough causes so that I had quite a lot of confidence in him. His background in public interest law was impressive to me.

But I would have to say that my opinion of Clinton was not primarily dependent upon Mickey Kantor, but my own evaluation as it grew toward the end of 1991 and into 1992. In addition, I agreed to introduce him because I felt in a sense obligated to Kantor for the support he'd given me in connection with the Independent Commission. That was a very tough struggle. Mickey's help to me in obtaining unanimous commission support for the reforms we recommended and for the removal of Chief [Daryl F.] Gates was something that I felt very warm about, and so when he

asked me to do this introduction, it was not entirely a sense of my political judgment but also sense of personal obligation.

Oberdorfer: You and Bill Clinton were almost like opposite figures. I mean, in a sense, here's a young, untested Governor from Arkansas who is sort of meteor-like on the national stage, although a lot of people did know him but didn't know him very well. You'd been through all the Washington wars, with the Justice Department, with Cy [Cyrus] Vance and all the rest. Your ages were very dissimilar at this particular time. Did you have a sense—I don't want to ask you to psychoanalyze the President, maybe Strobe has got an idea about this—that he was kind of consciously maybe or unconsciously seeking to align himself with some establishment figure who had all of the credentials and so forth that he did not have at that particular time?

Christopher: Well, as you implied, Don, we were, and are, quite different people. So it was a source of some surprise and amazement to me that we hit it off as well as we did. I think our working relationship was primarily established in connection with the search for the Vice President. I had watched Vice Presidents in the time that I had in government before. I watched the progression from the very distant relationship between [John F.] Kennedy and [Lyndon] Johnson, which I didn't know nearly as well. I was not close to Kennedy. But I nevertheless observed it when I was working with Undersecretary of State George Ball.

Then I observed the difficult relationship between Johnson and [Hubert] Humphrey. It was perhaps less distant than the relationship between Johnson and Kennedy, that is, the relationship between Johnson and Humphrey blew hot and cold. But then, I've also observed the relationship between [Jimmy] Carter and [Walter] Mondale, which was light-years different. Carter gave Mondale an office in the White House and brought him into the councils of government to a much greater degree than Humphrey had been, but not, I thought, to what I would regard as the ideal partnership, working relationship. And so, in my conversations with Governor Clinton in trying to describe the process we would go about and how he should formulate the criteria for a running mate, I was aided by having observed these progressions of closer and closer relationships and thinking it had not reached its epitome by any means, had still some distance to go. And I think that was helpful in my discussions.

I remember one night as we were fairly far into it, Governor Clinton asked me if I would, at our next meeting, describe to him what I thought the ideal relationship between the President and the Vice President should be, and I did that at the next meeting. I can perhaps sum it up by saying, I thought it should be Mondale plus.

Oberdorfer: So do you think that that discussion set the tone in the relationship between the two of you from then on?

Christopher: Yes, the first meeting I had with President Clinton, with Governor Clinton on the subject of the Vice Presidency took place in Tallahassee, Florida, when Kantor and I flew down to meet with him at breakfast after he had come in from a run and after a preceding day and night of campaigning. At that time, I outlined what I thought should be the procedure and we then discussed who should be on the list of people to be interviewed. I think that meeting, as much as anything, Don, set the tone for how we would operate in the future. He listened very intently,

very carefully, to how I thought the procedure should work, and then we turned to names. We had a list of names and he added and subtracted.

I found in that meeting a willingness on his part to listen, to make changes, to make adjustments, but then to give me a fairly broad degree of discretion within the parameters that he had laid out. That meeting set a tone for our subsequent relationship. I found out that I could have confidence that if he once blessed a general process that he would stick by it and that he would follow it carefully. He'd listen to all my reports, subsequently, with great care but he didn't try to micromanage the process once he had signed off.

Young: This is somewhat of a diversion, but could you compare that with President Carter, the delegation? You were managing the hostage crisis, the hostage release negotiations. Was that a similar relationship where he would delegate and give you a fairly free hand and listen intently? Was Bill Clinton very different in this respect, just from this one little incident?

Christopher: Jim, I felt I had broad discretion within parameters on the hostage crisis as well. Negotiations were moving very rapidly, especially in those last 13 days in Algiers, and the whole approach was changed in the last week. I felt confident that President Carter would adjust to a difference in the approach. So I would not make a differentiation between the degree of delegation in that particular instance, but I would say that in general President Carter was considerably more detail oriented than President Clinton was.

Young: That helps. Did the idea—was it Governor Clinton's idea—did he propose to you or suggest to you the Vice Presidential assignment, or did you propose it to him, or suggest to him that this was something you would need to address? How did it start? At his initiative or at your prompting?

Christopher: It was certainly not at my prompting. I think it was a combination of Mickey Kantor talking to him about it and then Mickey's relaying to me Governor Clinton's desire that I proceed and that we come to Tallahassee and lay out the project.

Oberdorfer: What about the next step? I mean, you did the transition, did it just sort of logically flow out of the Vice Presidential thing, or was that a surprise as well? Now you knew him a bit better.

Christopher: Well, the Vice Presidential selection went on over a period of time, as you know. We formed this list, I think of 38 people, and the narrower list was a list of 15 on whom detailed memoranda were done. I reported to President Clinton as we went along on how those memoranda were coming, the development of them as well as the interviews, so by the time we reached that decision, we'd spent quite a lot of time together.

In connection with the transition, I was in Little Rock for the last week before the election itself, when there was a growing confidence as to how the election might come out. But at that time there had been no decision made as to who would head the transition. Mickey Kantor had enlisted the general counsel of Occidental Petroleum to take a leave to begin the planning of the transition, and he had done a lot of good work, his name was Gerald Stern. I was there in Little

Rock basically to consult on general transition matters. As you know, at that time the leadership of the transition became controversial—as in many campaigns, there are controversies within the campaign. So it was a surprise to me when after the President was elected he resolved the contention between his staff members by moving outside of the staff and asking Vernon Jordan and me to head the transition.

That came about unexpectedly and again, as the product, I think, of Governor Clinton, then President-elect Clinton, being hesitant to move in the direction of either one of his staff persons.

Riley: Could we focus, before getting completely into the transition a little more, on the Vice Presidential selection process. You said that there were 38, thirty-some-odd people that were on the original list. Do you recall being surprised by either the way the list was put together or any individual names on that list? And I guess the same question would hold true for the more refined list of 15 or so.

Christopher: Well, it was an intensely interesting experience for me to sit there that morning in Tallahassee with President Clinton and two or three of his key traveling party and Mickey Kantor. Mickey and I had formed sort of a checklist of names to be considered. We weren't presumptuous enough to want to make that "the" list, but rather we suggested here are some names that ought to be considered. So the strike-ons and strike-offs were very interesting. I would say, Russell, that the principal additions to the list were people outside of my ken, people who the Governor had known in politics or people in minority groups who he wanted to make sure were interviewed during that period. So it was a real educational process for me.

But without too much self congratulation here, I think the key names on the list and the list of the 15 didn't involve very many surprises. I'd looked at all of the names that had been mentioned. You know many people had their name mentioned as possible, in this magazine or that magazine. I tried to assess what the most likely names were in the period before I went to Tallahassee. So we were pretty well centered on those who were the greatest possibilities.

I want to ask, as we stand here, if Strobe Talbott remembers anything about that period and the Vice Presidential selection process from his friendship with Governor Clinton.

Talbott: No, Chris, quite simply I don't, for the simple reason that I was almost hermetically sealed off. In due course, probably when we have our own free-standing discussion, I'll give you the kind of counterpart answers to the ones you heard from Chris about my own association with the President, which goes back much earlier.

But during the '92 experience, I was recused from being involved in the campaign because I was still functioning as a journalist and had an understanding with Governor Clinton that we would talk from time to time, but not about politics or the campaign. We made exceptions once or twice when the subject was Russia and we can come to that in due course. Also, my wife was working full time for Hillary's [Clinton] part of the campaign. But I had absolutely no interchange with him or indeed with anybody else on all of that.

Oberdorfer: Chris, one thing you said a minute ago made me sit up in my chair, when you mentioned people who had been mentioned by magazines and so forth. There is in Washington, as Strobe knows, what we call the "great mentioner" as to who gets mentioned. I never thought that it had any effect at all, but it seems like it had some effect in putting these people on a list.

Christopher: Well if the "great mentioner" mentioned somebody, I didn't want Governor Clinton to think I hadn't done my homework, so if the "great mentioner" had mentioned somebody I would say to him, "Do you want him on or off the list?"

Oberdorfer: Did you all have somebody, some student or aide or somebody compile who had been mentioned by different publications?

Christopher: What is this "some student or aide"? I was doing this myself. [*laughter*]

Oberdorfer: So you had to go through, or you went through magazines and newspapers and clipped out who—

Christopher: Sure. One likes to get prepared. If I was going into a meeting that was, you know, going to be part of history, I burned a little midnight oil.

Riley: Did you, in preparation for this, consult with others who had been responsible for Vice Presidential selection in the past?

Christopher: Yes, I benefited greatly from talking with the lawyer who had been advisor to Governor [Michael] Dukakis and he was generous to share with me the process that he had gone through. And I read some books on the Vice Presidential selection process as well.

Young: Do you think Clinton was looking for somebody in the Vice Presidency with Washington experience? Was that very important to him, did you think? Not the only factor, but a factor that weighed since he himself had no Washington connection?

Christopher: He regarded it as a plus, but he never laid that down as an absolute criterion.

Knott: You mentioned in your book that you defied conventional wisdom by selecting—you know, you have a presidential candidate from Arkansas, a Vice Presidential candidate from Tennessee—did you wrestle with that one? So far as the lack of any regional balance?

Christopher: You know, we have a pronoun problem here. I didn't make those decisions, the Governor made them, but I recommended to him that I thought factor had been overweighed in prior times, that I regarded an attempt to balance the ticket as "old think." Especially with the advent of television in which a candidate becomes known almost instantaneously. The important thing is to have the right ingredients there when they become known and not try to make either geographical or ideological balance the principal criterion, or a principal criterion.

Naftali: When did you meet Hillary Clinton?

Christopher: Well, if you talk about formally meeting Hillary Clinton, I can't say, but I first met with her in a working relationship when we began the Cabinet selection process. I had formerly met with her, no, of course that's not true—obviously we'll correct this record, I met with her first in connection with the Vice Presidential selection.

Naftali: That's what I was—

Christopher: In which she was in one or two of the meetings and was in around the edges at least of the final evening where the running-mate choice was made. So I had met her then.

Naftali: Did you talk with her about this, or again was she just simply in the room, perhaps adding a comment here and there?

Christopher: It was a group discussion in which she participated, but I would say in quite a reserved way. I always assumed that she had other opportunities to make her point.

Riley: There were other members of a committee, or co-chairs. Did the other two co-chairs play a role similar to your own, or—?

Young: That was Vernon Jordan and Madeleine Kunin.

Christopher: They played the role of advisors and played a very strong supportive role, but I interviewed every one of the potential candidates with one exception. Vernon Jordan interviewed Colin Powell. From my days as a trial lawyer, litigation lawyer, I had developed a strong sense of wanting to see face-to-face, go eyeball-to-eyeball with the people who I would be recommending to the President-elect. So I really wanted to do that myself and I did, and I shared with Vernon and Madeleine the results of those interviews as we went along. So the Governor always had the benefit of their views through me and probably separately as well. On at least one occasion Vernon and I flew to a city where the Governor was campaigning to give our report to him.

You know, it's hard to remember how intense the time pressures are in campaigns and how little time the candidate has even for an important thing as Vice Presidential selection. So my reports to him were made usually at the end of a long day of campaigning when he would set aside some time to meet with me and I would go to wherever he was on the campaign trail. And Vernon, I recall, at one time did that. So they were heavily involved as members of the committee, but wanting to do the interviews myself, I did.

Riley: Do you have any recollections of any historically important information from those conversations that you had that would be important to get on the record? I know you had brief characterizations in your book, but I didn't know whether there were some things that you thought at the time you might not want to publish that now would be the appropriate time to talk about. Any candidates reluctant to proceed? Conversations that you had about their sense about the viability of the campaign? Things of that nature.

Christopher: [long silence] I believe that I have recorded most of the things that I would be prepared to say now. I was disappointed, as I think you can see from the book, by Bill Bradley's reaction and his reluctance to have it known that he was going to be interviewed and his considerable hesitation to become involved in the process. Now, with the advantage of some more years of development, I think you can see that he has assayed a number one position for himself, which is not to be criticized, and that he was trying to evaluate whether this might be a step forward or not for him. It also, I think, bore out that the sense of his being somebody who felt comfortable in being a loner.

The hesitance of Senator [Jay] Rockefeller to participate I thought was quite a different category. He thought that he had family obligations that precluded his running, but he was quite open in wrestling with it and being a very helpful advisor on the whole process. And I recorded the conversations I had with Governor [Mario] Cuomo, which indicated his reluctance to have any further analysis made of his own record.

Naftali: Let me ask—

Young: Go ahead, Tim.

Naftali: Before we move on to Cabinet selection, I'd like to ask you a bit about that early conversation with the Governor where he drained you of your historical knowledge. It's always interesting to know the lessons that leaders derive from their predecessors and I was wondering—what kinds of historical questions was he interested in? What were his concerns? As he was thinking about the presidency, which he might or might not win—he's a reader and he has quite a strong interest in history. So what was he interested in? What was he asking about?

Christopher: Well, he was particularly interested in President Johnson and how it was to work for President Johnson, how President Johnson had achieved the legislative victories that he had. You know, President Clinton, as Strobe can tell you in much more graphic detail than I can, President Clinton absorbs information and you quite often don't know what purpose he's absorbing it for. Part of it is just his tremendous curiosity, but also he's taking it on board. So he asked me about the working relationship that I had with Johnson, whether there were difficult times and how Johnson approached legislative issues. How Johnson felt about the riots. So we went over the working relationship. He seemed particularly curious about that. More curious than he was about Carter.

Naftali: Did he ask about Vietnam at all? About foreign policy and how that affects Presidents?

Christopher: We did not talk about specific issues. It was talking about style and attitudes and approach to the presidency.

Riley: Strobe, in your conversations with him was he asking you questions about historical knowledge of the presidency also? Were your conversations completely family matters and things of that nature?

Talbott: Aside from personal connections, he associated me with one issue and one country and that was Russia, and it was really only on that subject that he ever got below the surface.

Riley: Okay.

Talbott: He was always interested in basically two aspects of whatever the Russia issue of the day was. One was what was the trend, was the move away from the Soviet Union reversible or not? He was interested in that for both historical reasons and also because it had a direct bearing on the viability of his own campaign. And second, how the administration of the day was handling it, which is to say he was interested in my assessment of the Bush administration's response.

But I want to stress that really, these were exceptions that prove the no-substance rule, and the only two that I recall were, one, even before he announced his candidacy, which was in August '91—shortly before he announced his candidacy when the attempted coup took place in Moscow, and the second was in October. No, actually there were three. The second was in late March, early April of '92, when the question was how should he use a speech he was going to be giving in New York on aid to Russia where he sensed both that there was a strategic opportunity with Russia and a political opportunity vis-à-vis Bush. And the third was in October of '92 when he was getting wind that there might be an October surprise: the Bush administration would pull off a strategic arms reduction agreement that would furnish Bush with his credentials as a foreign policy President. So one topic.

Riley: Okay.

Young: So let's get back to the transition, turn back. Here's a new President without much Washington experience on his own account, who has a short amount of time to form a government, so to speak, and your role in that, but also your observations of that transition, because Cabinet selection isn't the whole story of forming a government. There's also the question of your own staff and the policy preparation.

The reputation, of course, among many analysts is that it was a pretty chaotic transition as a way of forming a government, and a lot of mistakes were made, not in forming a Cabinet but in other aspects of it. So, let's start with your piece of that action and make sure that we've got that straight. Is it correct to say that your charter, in terms of advising him about the forming of this Cabinet, was more or less the same, and the relationship was more or less the same, as your charter to do the advising and investigating for the Vice Presidential selection?

Christopher: Well, it had some similarities, Jim, but there were some important differences. In the Vice Presidential selection search we started with a finite number of people and did a lot of research on them and then narrowed the list and perhaps added a few as we went along, but very few. And that was quite a different process than was followed for the Cabinet selection. President Clinton did say, when he asked me to undertake that process, that he wanted the same kind of in-depth evaluation as had been applied to the Vice President—adapted, not applied, but adapted—to the search for the Cabinet. So as I've recorded, every Cabinet position was in effect a mini-search of a kind. The names were drawn from a half-day-long meeting, or a day-long

meeting we would have on each Cabinet department, at which I would be the focal point in terms of taking notes. But the discussion would come from the President-elect and the Vice President-elect and other key advisors who were around the table in the den of the mansion in Little Rock.

And so, in each instance we would get together a list of I would say between six and ten names and then apply in-depth research from the public record about those six to ten as a way of narrowing the list. So it had some similarities to the process of the Vice President, but nevertheless it was a process recreated for each Cabinet, each Cabinet list. It isn't as if there was a pool of, say, a hundred names for all Cabinet positions. There was a separate list for each one.

Young: And the consultative part of this with Clinton and with [Albert, Jr.] Gore? They were both involved?

Christopher: They were both involved and attended religiously. The meetings wouldn't happen unless they were there. There were others who were in those meetings, as I reported, but they were the key people. And Hillary attended many of those meetings as well.

Riley: Can you elaborate on the internal competition? This is something you touched on in the book about who would be the controlling force during the transition process, the Little Rock group and then others.

Young: Is this with reference to the Cabinet selection?

Riley: Yes, with the Cabinet selection and the overall formation of the government. With [George] Stephanopoulos and [James] Carville pushing one kind of agenda in competition with others. How were you dealing with that and how was that being manifest at this particular time?

Christopher: First of all, I was not in the campaign, as I've indicated to you. So I was blessedly saved from knowing first-hand all the internal strife and what camps were involved and who was up and who was down. So I might see things like that reflected, but I couldn't say that I could perceive that in the Cabinet selection on a day-to-day basis. It clearly had been apparent in the decision of the President to ask Vernon Jordan and me from outside to head the transition rather than going with one or the other of the campaign staff. It was also apparent in the selection of the Chief of Staff of the White House and in the postponement of that selection, which as I recorded, I thought was one of the things that led to the criticism that you've mentioned, Jim, of the difficult start-up that he had. But it did not seem to affect the day-to-day discussions of choices of Cabinet members. As far as I could tell, there wasn't a Stephanopoulos list of Cabinet members and somebody else's list.

Riley: You also touch on the fact—I think you touched on this. It may be that I'm confusing this with another of the readings, but the concern among some that there was a kind of allergy to people who had served in the Carter administration. Did you see much of that in the discussions that you were making? Did there seem to be a sense that at the Cabinet level, they wanted to move beyond that?

Christopher: There was an interesting tension on that subject. There was a reluctance, I think, to overpopulate the Cabinet with people who had been, as you say, Jim, retreads. On the other hand, that's where the experience lay. And so you always had to balance those two factors and I saw people almost consciously balancing those factors and thinking there had to be some new and creative ideas, but nevertheless hoping for somebody that would bring the experience of the earlier time.

Oberdorfer: When the job of Secretary of State—what you've written sort of suggests, at least in my reading of it, that it seemed like you're talking, you present all these people and suddenly he turns to you and says, "No—" like Uncle Sam— "I want you." But did you have any kind of idea beforehand from some comment he dropped, or just from knowing the general situation, that it might end up with you as the person?

Christopher: Well, I was certainly surprised at the way it came about. I can't honestly say that it never crossed my mind, but when I began the process of helping on the Cabinet I thought I had taken myself out of the Cabinet derby.

Oberdorfer: How did you do that?

Christopher: Well, I said to the press that—or at least I have said since then, and said to the President-elect—that I could conduct this operation for him only if I wasn't a candidate because I thought it might import a kind of a bias that went along the course of the process. He didn't challenge that at the time that I first said it, but when he came to make the decision, he thought that was not something that should bind him.

Oberdorfer: Did you think that you might want the job, or not? Did you ever ponder that question?

Christopher: Well, I certainly wasn't ready for the question when he posed it, but one tries in this kind of an oral history not to try to dupe history, and having been Deputy Secretary of State and having been disappointed once before, I can't say that the thought never crossed my mind. It would be a little disingenuous for me to say that.

Young: Looking at it more or less superficially and in retrospect, it almost seems halfway predictable that because there was a logical progression from the Vice Presidential search to the Cabinet search, to instill a new charter with the President—

Christopher: It didn't seem so to me at the time. [*laughter*] If you look at the list of people who were under consideration, it was a formidable list of people. It's the best appointed job in the world, and there are quite a few people who would have been willing to do it.

Young: I'm sure of that, but did Clinton or Gore know any of them? Or Clinton, as in the sense that he had come to know you and the nature of your work and the way you went about doing things.

Christopher: I think he knew many of them better than he knew me.

Young: Let's look at the list here.

Christopher: That's what I'm getting—

Oberdorfer: Where are we here?

Young: We're looking at *Chances of a Lifetime.*

Oberdorfer: I know that, what pages are—

Christopher: We're in the 170s.

Naftali: 172.

Young: [Samuel] Nunn wanted it, I understand.

Naftali: Nunn, [Les] Aspin, [David] McCurdy, then McCurdy played the dirty trick.

Christopher: Then on page 175, the list included Colin Powell, whom he knew but not well; Lee Hamilton, who he knew quite well; Bill Bradley, who he knew less well; Paul Sarbanes, who he knew from Congress; David Boren, who he knew quite well; and Sam Nunn, who he knew very well from being in the Democratic, what is that, the new conservative—

Talbott: The Democratic Leadership Council?

Christopher: Yes.

Young: DLC.

Christopher: He knew me in a fairly narrow relationship, as someone who helped search for a Vice President.

Young: But he did have a working relationship with you, which he may not have had with some of the others.

Oberdorfer: You said here you spent a sleepless night thinking about the whole thing. What was the—what did you have to ponder, what was so difficult about it?

Christopher: I suppose it's the nature of my personality, that however obvious a decision would be I would think I would have to go through it very carefully to reach it. Maybe it was obvious from the first moment that he asked that I would say yes, but I've been in government a lot, I'd imposed on my family a lot. I was far from a wealthy person, and I was—I had a rather settled pattern of life in California, so I had some weighty personal considerations to take into account.

Young: But it was an exciting prospect.

Christopher: It was a very exciting prospect.

Young: Very exciting, the first post-Cold War—okay.

Naftali: I just wanted to ask another personality question. At that time did you talk to Cyrus Vance as you were thinking about this? Were you in touch with him at this time?

Christopher: I talked only to my family. I didn't feel that—I didn't talk to anybody other than my family. It was a fairly sensitive piece of information.

Naftali: No question.

Oberdorfer: That leads into another question and I don't know if you want to move to this, but actually, from Tim's question, when you're thinking about the job, not only before it, but as you're undertaking it, one usually has some kind of models as to what the job should be or how you should do it. You had been Cy Vance's deputy and you saw him operate in the job for four years, or until he left and [Edmund] Muskie came in. Do you think that that was a model that was in your mind? Or, when you thought about how you were going to do the job as Secretary of State, was there some other way you were thinking of how to accomplish this important task?

Young: Could I interrupt at this point and ask that question to stay right there for a moment and go back to the transition for a moment. You did record and did say in your books, that you felt it was a mistake that the selection of the White House—at least the Chief of Staff—was so long delayed, and that apparently the delay in the selection of the Chief of Staff or certain senior staff people in the White House was an impediment to a good start. Do you want to elaborate on that a little bit and explain why, why there was that delay? Did the President decide, "I need a Cabinet before I need anybody else," or did he have problems selecting the White House staff? Was it a tactic, a strategy, or a dilemma for him?

Christopher: Well, let me tell you first, Jim, why I think it's important that the Chief of Staff be selected first. We have a unique system in our country, in which there is no continuing staff in the White House on a policy level. The President comes in and the offices are all vacant, the desks are clean, so the White House has to be staffed from the ground up. The time between election and inauguration, which was shortened for good reasons, doesn't give the President and the Chief of Staff very much time to organize the White House and to get things running, so I think the President ought to choose the Chief of Staff as soon as possible, to start filling those offices and getting some papers on the desk so he can get his administration underway when January 20th comes. So every day that the Chief of Staff of the White House is not named is a big loss.

Now, contrast that with the departments. The State Department, for example, is a continuing bureaucracy of not only size but talent. Any Secretary of State is going to rely very heavily on the Foreign Service and is going to find most of the offices filled and most of the desks heavy with paper except for the seventh floor. So I think the lead time is so much more easily managed in the departments than it is in the White House. There is a fundamental policy reason there now.

The reason for the delay, and maybe you can ask President Clinton about this some time, but I think was primarily because of a delay in his formulating what kind of a structure he wanted in the White House and then who would be the key person.

There was a good deal of discussion at that time as to whether there should be any one Chief of Staff or whether he should try to operate on a kind of a roundtable system, like Franklin Roosevelt apparently did in an earlier day, or whether he should identify a Chief of Staff. That was fairly briskly resolved, I think, that there should be one. But then he had a great deal of difficulty coming to a decision and I think there was—at least as I viewed it from the outside in many conversations about it—some tension between wanting somebody who he knew well and was comfortable with on the one hand, and on the other hand somebody who had a lot of Washington experience and who could bring to it not so much personal familiarity with him as familiarity with the issues and personalities in Washington.

There was, in addition to that, the problem that when he made the decision for Chief of Staff he was making probably one person reasonably happy and also reasonably miserable, and several people unhappy for not having been chosen, or not having their nominee chosen.

Riley: Did he ask your opinion about these general structural matters, this sort of round table versus Chief of Staff?

Christopher: Everything was open, except the choice of the person he held pretty closely.

Riley: Right. And you advised him—can you tell us what your advice to him was on the general structural issue?

Christopher: I thought that there should be a single person, a single focal point. That's primarily on the domestic side. There should—obviously, one person should be in charge of running the White House.

Young: In many administrations, his was no exception, there appears to be a competition within the campaign staff—I remember Carter's quite well, Jack Watson versus Ham [Hamilton] Jordan. And the attempt to recruit people with Washington experience sometimes gets in the way of people who feel deserving, that they deserve it, that they were loyal in the campaign. And it is—I'm just trying to get your take on Clinton's own thinking about that, as to whether he had a model or was up in the air about it for a while.

Christopher: I think he was up in the air about it. But ultimately he made the choice of somebody who he had a working relationship with, was comfortable with.

Young: There was also a tremendous turnover, looking ahead in the staff, in the White House staff. Very few long-term servers in there. Okay—

Riley: I wanted to ask about a couple of the appointments—

Young: We're going to get back to Don's question—

Oberdorfer: That's all right

Riley: This is still transition.

Young: Still transition?

Riley: So it's before that, if—There are two or three items, one is—There was a question about Mickey Kantor's appointment as Trade Rep, which you say was an inspired choice, and yet—

Christopher: I think I answered yes—

Riley: I didn't realize my questioning was that awful. It's not the first time I've cleared a room, by the way.

[COFFEE BREAK[

Christopher: The question on the floor had to do with Mickey Kantor.

Riley: Right, thanks. Don, forgive me for dialing back and I promise we'll come back to this, but the question about Mickey Kantor was, from the outside, it's a little surprising that Clinton didn't find a position for Kantor that would have placed him in more direct—I wouldn't say greater responsibility, but maybe even a White House position, given how he had relied on Kantor, at least through your testimony, at certain key intervals during the campaign. I'm wondering if you would care to comment on that? Is it the case that the importance that he perceived NAFTA [North American Free Trade Agreement] would have meant that he considered this a crucial appointment from his perspective, or—

Christopher: Reputations in campaigns and in a time of tension like that tend to wane and wax and for reasons that I never fully understood, Mickey's reputation was waning at that time. Carville and the others from that wing had become dominant in the last month of the campaign, and when Mickey was not made director of transition, a post with which he had some earlier identification, it was probably some indication that his reputation was at that point on the wane. So as we went through the Cabinet selection process, I was surprised to find that his name was not more prominently mentioned, but it wasn't.

He might have been a candidate for Attorney General but it soon became clear to me that that position had been essentially committed intellectually to being a woman. So I was pleased and relieved when his name came up for Trade Representative; but it was more in the sense of matching his skills with the desire that he be in the Cabinet in an important position, rather than, I think, some evaluation as to the long term significance of the role of TR, Trade Representative.

Riley: Okay, you touched on the Attorney General appointment. One of the things that really is striking in looking at your discussion of what had happened, before even the Zoë Baird situation arose, is the extent to which the administration was having a tough time, as it were, pitching that position to some other prospective candidates. Could you comment on why it was so difficult for

the administration to find someone who was interested in what, from the outside, would appear to be one of the plum positions of an administration?

Christopher: My understanding was that Vernon Jordan, who would have been quite a clear and obvious choice, reached the conclusion that he did not want to come into the Cabinet and communicated that. After that had been communicated, the field was narrowed to women. Trying to find a leading Democratic woman who had experience at that level proved to be difficult. It was not so much that it was difficult to interest people in the position, but it was difficult finding people who met the qualifications.

Riley: This is on 164 of *Chances of a Lifetime*, if I could probe, as you're looking.

Christopher: You go ahead and ask your question.

Riley: The follow-up question was about Vernon Jordan's decision that he didn't want to be under consideration. Was that, do you know if that was a personal decision based on concerns about something like confirmation, or—

Christopher: I never knew exactly why Vernon took himself out. I think he felt that the entire process was such that he did not want to subject himself to it at that stage in his life. I was going to say, maybe here is a little piece of follow up for history if not of great importance, but I record on page 164 that Court of Appeals Justice Pat [Patricia] Wald was sounded out for the job and indicated a hesitance about it and concern about her retirement rights and sent word she wanted to be drafted. She, after my book came out, wrote me to say that that was not her attitude about it, saying in a not very aggressive or sharp way that it didn't reflect her views.

That caused me to go back and look at my notes, and indeed I found I had received a call from someone who purported to speak on her behalf, taking exactly the position that I set forth on page 164. And when I wrote her that at some length, she wrote back courteously and pleasantly saying it's amazing what people will say on your behalf. She didn't disclaim the fact that this person, who had been quite an advocate of hers, had overstated her views. So I think it's fair to her to say, and it's not a very big point, that some of these things on page 164 didn't reflect her views although she unquestionably was concerned about her retirement rights and wanted to have a special statute enacted.

Now, she has had a very distinguished career both before and since. She wrote me from the Hague tribunal where she performed with great distinction as well, but it was difficult to match the great opportunities and responsibility of the job with women, Democratic women, who were available. The Zoë Baird situation, I had put her name forward as a possible White House counsel because she had served in that office under Lloyd Cutler and both Lloyd and I recommended her for that role. When there was difficulty finding the right candidate for Attorney General, suddenly her name was moved over from one list to the next. I think the public perception is she became my candidate for Attorney General and that's wrong, at least by that one nuance.

Knott: You mentioned earlier that, I believe you were referring to the President being intellectually committed to having a woman as Attorney General. Were there other instances of that? I know he wanted the Cabinet to "look like America." Were there other specific positions that you felt had to be filled either by a woman or a member—

Christopher: No, it was just in the air that the Attorney General ought to be a woman. Can't say that anybody announced that as a criterion, but non-women candidates didn't get nearly as much attention as the women candidates.

Riley: I think it was in Elizabeth Drew's characterization of the transition that she does make claims that Hillary Clinton had a fairly sizable role there. Did you witness this in the transition period?

Christopher: That she had a sizable role in the transition?

Riley: Yes, and in staffing in particular, and possibly even the Attorney General's position.

Christopher: She was in many of the meetings in the den in the mansion in Little Rock, and occasionally would express her views, and when she did they were always very pointed and cogent, but she did not seek to play a dominant role by any means. As I say, she probably had other ways to make her views known. But I would characterize her as playing a very prominent and helpful role. She knew a lot of people in the United States. She contributed to those meetings and I would say she was in more than half of them.

Riley: I have only one more transition question, I promise we can go on to more interesting things. That is, with respect to the economic summit. There was—some people voiced concerns that the President was, that there was an awful lot of energy invested in that particular enterprise at a time when the energy might have been better invested in the appointments process itself. Did you have a view at the time about the desirability of diverting energy into that particular exercise?

Christopher: I regarded that as above my pay grade. Basically the President had been elected to do something about the economy and if I had been asked I certainly would not have objected to his spending his time that way. Mickey Kantor organized that. I thought he did an excellent job. I heard those, and I read those concerns, but I think it was time well spent. I think that the public saw the President operating effectively and showing his capacity as a listener, so I regard those criticisms as being understandable but not solidly based.

Since we're talking about the economic side, if you don't mind my diverting for a moment here, I think the assembling of the economic team is an unappreciated aspect of the transition period. A great deal of time was spent on it and I think that the team that he assembled was really quite extraordinary in its depth and competence. Having persuaded Lloyd Bentsen to become Secretary of the Treasury was an important step in the President obtaining credibility. Having persuaded Bob Rubin to become first head of the National Economic Council meant the President had somebody who Lloyd Bentsen was prepared to work with in the White House who could be right next to him constantly. And then having persuaded—

Riley: Laura Tyson?

Young: Was Laura Tyson the original—

Naftali: Gene Sperling—

Christopher: I'm on the deputy OMB [Office of Management and Budget]—

Naftali: Alice Rivlin—

Christopher: Having persuaded Alice Rivlin, who was passed over for being head of OMB but then to become deputy head and then to serve so well in subsequent positions, and having persuaded, as you say Laura Tyson to come in, he had a first rate economic team that served him very well and enabled him to make what I think was the crucial decision of the first year and that was to deal with the deficit.

That was important not just domestically, but it was very important internationally. It's hard to overestimate the degree of credibility the President gained internationally by taking steps to balance the budget, and I think he owed that to both his own determination but the presence of Lloyd Bentsen and Bob Rubin and Leon Panetta steeled him to make that very difficult decision and changed the whole course of the administration, I think, and put it on a much sounder track. I hope historians will pay more attention to that series of choices and that decision in the first year.

Young: Was there any, I shouldn't say comparable, was there any thought in the selection of Cabinet as to how the Cabinet member in a certain area, Secretary of State, would relate to people in the White House? Was there any thinking about what a foreign policy team would look like, like there was an economic team?

Christopher: I think there was a concern to make sure you had people who could work in a harmonious relationship. It was not so much policy-based as it was personality based, in the foreign policy team. The economic team was built more around strength than it was around a particular policy. For example, we didn't sit in the den in Little Rock and say, "We have to get through a bill to deal with the deficit." But he wanted people who would have the strength to make the difficult decisions and carry them out.

Young: Were there discussions also about the foreign policy team based on strength?

Christopher: Yes, I think there were discussions based upon experience and knowledge in the relevant areas. The most difficult decision, because one was made easier by the President's precipitous action toward me, the most difficult remaining decision was Secretary of Defense, where, for some reason, the list seemed very thin, especially since evidently Sam Nunn was unwilling to do that. I say evidently because I was screened off from some of the Clinton-Nunn conversations because Nunn, speaking in retrospect, apparently wanted to be Secretary of State.

Young: They were looking for Democrats with relevant experience and it was thin because there weren't many, beyond Nunn, were there?

Christopher: That's correct. The Democrats had been out of office for a long time. You had the four years of Carter, but that goes back to that tension I mentioned before, that interesting tension of not wanting too many retreads. As a result, the only place where you could find people with real experience was the Congress—and that led people to look to Capitol Hill. Sam Nunn was an obvious choice and didn't want it, and I don't mean that Les Aspin was not a well-established figure in the field, but you get beyond Les and there were not very many outstanding candidates.

Knott: Was David McCurdy in play then?

Christopher: Yes, McCurdy was in play. I think—

Young: You mentioned that—

Christopher: That a junior Congressman was under consideration very seriously for Secretary of Defense is an indication that the bench was not very deep. Then as I report in the book, McCurdy made a very fundamental mistake by launching what appeared to be a campaign against Les Aspin, not attacking Les directly but by raising questions about who would succeed him as chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, saying that he (the probable successor) was an unpredictable, or unreliable person. You have to be careful what arguments you make, especially in Washington, because it proved to be a very serious setback for McCurdy.

Oberdorfer: I'm quite sure it was an African-American.

Naftali: [Ron] Dellums? Was it Dellums?

Christopher: And McCurdy was unwilling to be, for reasons that have never been clear to me, to be head of the CIA. He had single shotted Secretary of Defense.

Naftali: He was offered the job of CIA?

Christopher: I don't know whether McCurdy was ever formally offered it but certainly he'd have been high on that list.

Young: There wasn't anyone from the private sector, corporate experience or defense, that was a Democrat or had the relevant experience? Eisenhower used to recruit his people from General Motors, or GE or something like that. I just wondered if that was a consideration, a head of a big organization.

Christopher: Yes, that was certainly given consideration and one person was talked to and he wanted to find a way to preserve his stock options, but we couldn't find any way to do that.

Naftali: Was there any consideration given to choosing a Republican? I mean later a Republican would actually have the job.

Christopher: You know, flowing through all the Cabinet discussions was the possibility of choosing a Republican, which President-elect Clinton certainly would not have ruled out on an a priori basis, but it never seemed to bubble beyond the generality.

Naftali: You mentioned something very interesting about General Powell, that he was considered for the Cabinet and he felt it would be an act of disloyalty to his President to agree. Were you one of the ones who had a conversation with the general?

Christopher: No, those were conducted by Vernon Jordan. He reported back that General Powell still had eight months to serve as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs. The report that I remember was that he thought it would be inconsistent with his obligation to the troops, which is always a major consideration for Colin Powell, as well as to the President who had put him in that position.

It's perhaps easier to understand that now, in retrospect of his identifying himself so as a Republican.

Riley: Forgive me for raising this and having not been in the room when the question was asked, but were there other Republicans—

Young: Yes.

Christopher: I think the person, the stock option, the person who was concerned about his stock options was a Republican. He was considered for other Cabinet positions, but he would also have been quite qualified for this one.

Young: And was there any thinking before you actually took office, or went into the confirmation process, about how the Secretary of State and the National Security Advisor would relate to each other, or any sense of which strengths, what kind of strengths you need in each post? Or was that thinking compartmented, separate thinking about those two posts?

Christopher: Well, someone has alluded to this earlier, there was no doubt that we were all focused on the difficulty between [Zbigniew] Brzezinski and Vance, and determined to avoid that kind of a public display of an adversarial character. And in a sense, Jim, there didn't have to be much discussion. Tony Lake was a likely choice for being National Security Advisor, long before I—not long before, but I guess some time before I had any relationship with President Clinton—Tony Lake had been his National Security Advisor during the campaign along with Sandy Berger. That was a relationship that was quite in place when I arrived on the scene. I had known Tony, of course, from the Carter days, and it was an unspoken and then a spoken premise of our relationship that we would not have a messy public difference of opinion. Strobe, do you, can you comment on that aspect of it, the choice of Tony? Any discussions you might have had with the President about that?

Talbott: Any discussions I had came several years later when the issue arose of what to do with that post in the second term. They don't change, either the content or direction of what Chris has told you. There is something that is more than rumor but less than something that I know first-hand, which I'm sure you all have come across, and that is that Sandy Berger, who had a more long-standing relationship with Governor Clinton, had been part of the small group of friends that tried to urge him to run in '88, deferred on the job himself and strongly recommended to Governor Clinton that he go with Tony, who was somebody who had a bit more visibility. Sandy, of course, had been Tony's deputy on the policy planning staff in the Carter administration. Nothing I've ever heard from Tony or Sandy, who I know better, is an iron-clad confirmation of that, but certainly doesn't disabuse me of thinking that's the case.

Naftali: I recall that one foreign policy specialist who was associated with Governor Clinton in the election was Michael Mandelbaum. He didn't end up on the team. I just recall that he was someone who—no one spoke for the Governor, of course—but was associated with the Governor during the campaign but didn't turn up in the national security team. Is there a story to that?

Talbott: You want me to do that one, Chris?

Chris: Yes, we know the details on that, yes, why don't you do that.

Talbott: This is, I should put on the record I guess here, I don't know what you call it, a point of personal interest. Mike Mandelbaum was, at the time, and had been for quite a number of years, an extremely close friend of mine, one of my very closest. We had known each other since we were undergraduates at Yale. We both went to graduate school in England, although different universities. We had collaborated on articles and even on a book for the Council on Foreign Relations, and we saw a great deal of each other during the campaign in which he was actively involved and I was not, although I did suspend my recusal to write an article for *Time* magazine about Clinton's difficulties with the draft, because I had personal knowledge of that episode unlike anybody else's and I wanted to put it on the record. Mike worked with me on that.

To make a long and for me painful story short, he had high hopes that he would be given a very senior job in the White House close to the President, probably national security advisor. Secretary Christopher offered him a job that I at least don't consider to be chopped liver, which was the directorship of the policy planning staff, and that was at the same time that Secretary Christopher was talking to me about what became the New Independent States job. I saw a lot of Mike during that period and he was more than disappointed at only being offered a job in the State Department, and didn't want that or anything else, except what he had felt might be his due, and therefore chose to stay out.

In fact, there was an opportunity later to have brought him in, once again on the policy planning staff. He still wanted to stay out and of course he not only stayed out, but became a fairly vocal critic of administration policy on a number of fronts.

Christopher: Tim, I offered him the job as head of policy planning which I thought, and think, is one of the best jobs in the State Department, with pretty high hopes and some expectation that

he would take it. I was surprised and disappointed when he turned it down. That's kind of the end of that story. He'd been very active before and I'm puzzled by what developed since then.

Naftali: Thanks.

Oberdorfer: Well, going back to the previous question. Did you have a model? Before you took the job. As Strobe knows, and I'm sure you know, there are different ways to operate the job of Secretary of State and practically everybody who has been in the job in recent years has done it a little bit differently. Some of it depends on the circumstances, but also it depends on the kind of prior experience and ideas that people bring to it as to how they want to do the job. So I guess the question is, did you have a model and if so, what was it?

Christopher: Well, Cy Vance will always be a model for me, both personally and professionally. I greatly admired his personal style, or maybe I should say lack of style, admired the way he conducted himself in relation to others. So that affected me. Looking further back, I have great admiration for the way [Dean] Acheson conducted the State Department and before him [George C.] Marshall, so that the Marshall-Acheson duo is the one that I focused on very extensively. I've written that Acheson's experience of combining both a career in the law and a career as Secretary of State is one that energized me from the time of law school.

Oberdorfer: As I think you refer to in the book, Acheson wrote a memoir called *Present at the Creation*, the creation of the Cold War policy, and here you are, the first—I guess you could say Jim Baker, but he was in the process of liquidating the Cold War—the first real post-Cold War President, Cold War Secretary of State. Other than just throwing that label out for us guys, the ink-stained wretches in the press, was that really something you thought about, the fact that we're in a different situation now with respect to US activities in the world after the Cold War? Is it something that made any difference as far as you were concerned?

Christopher: Absolutely. There seemed to me, and the President, that there was a new family of problems that we needed to address. There were problems like epidemics—AIDS as an example; like environmental problems; like economic chaos; like terrorism. A family of problems that could only be addressed through international action, where the capacity of any one country, even as powerful a country as the United States, was likely to be inadequate. So I think that that caused us to say in the post-Cold War period, which is really a mouthful, that we needed to concentrate on those structures, that kind of architecture which would enable us to address the family of problems that was likely to be the central core of the issues before us in the forthcoming years.

So it was not accidental that one of the first foreign policy steps that the President took was to convene a meeting of the Asia-Pacific leaders for the first time it had ever met at that level, at Vancouver. He took a number of other steps, and I don't want to prolong these answers by making speeches, but he took a number of steps, I think, which indicated that he understood that there was a new interdependence of nations in addressing the family of problems that would beset us in the time of our super power dominance. So the architecture of the Clinton administration needs to be seen in those terms as we moved to more and more structures that recognize the interdependence of nations.

Oberdorfer: What do you mean by architecture?

Christopher: What I mean by architecture is the many international organizations that the President pressed for. In Europe he pressed for the expansion of NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization], which sought to carry out his dream of a unified Europe. In Asia he pressed for the annual meeting of the leaders of Asia and the ASEAN [Association of Southeast Asian Nations] regional forum. In the trade area, the pressure for the completion of the Uruguay round, which looking back, is something that has not gotten the attention I think it deserved. In this hemisphere the effort to achieve the ratification of NAFTA, which was a big fight in our time, the summit of the Americas, which tried to bring together the democracies in Latin America—many, many examples of a new architecture that emphasized the importance of international collaboration and cooperation in addressing this new family of problems. That's what I mean by architecture. Strobe, maybe you can add to some—

Talbott: At some point perhaps, Jim, when you're more into the summing up or looking back stage, I think that what Chris has sketched out can be elaborated, about NAFTA. I would just add one anecdotal point to this question of Acheson looking over our shoulder. When Chris moved into the Secretary's office, he, like all Secretaries, had the option of selecting which portraits of his predecessors would hang on the walls. He had Cy Vance's picture and Dean Acheson's. Did you also have General Marshall?

Christopher: No.

Talbott: Who was the—

Christopher: Only those two.

Talbott: And I can remember, I know that Acheson was there and it stands to reason obviously from what Chris has said and what you know that Vance's would be there. I can remember, on a number of occasions, sitting in Chris's outer office, you know the—

Christopher: The ceremonial office.

Talbott: And sitting next to Peter Tarnoff, the Under Secretary for Political Affairs, and we had a kind of running joke between us that we wondered what Acheson was thinking. It's a wonderful portrait; it captures a kind of severity and sardonic look on his face. What was he thinking as he watched us deal with the problems at hand? We characterized those problems and our role in them as being "present at the recreation."

Young: And he smiled.

Riley: What kind of a smile?

Talbott: Well, it was hard to tell. What kind of a smile was the question.

Young: Well, there are a number of ways we can go from here. Did you feel the need—did you consult with Cy Vance after you got the job?

Christopher: Yes, I consulted with him from time to time about personnel decisions. There came to pass, as they say in the Bible, the only point of disagreement there has ever been in my relationship with Cy Vance and that was over the Vance-Owen plan for Bosnia. If you recall Vance and [Lord David] Owen had recommended a plan that would divide Bosnia into ten enclaves. Very elaborate governing structure with respect to those ten enclaves. The conclusion of our administration was that, admirable as that effort was, the plan was not workable, and it fell to me from time to time to make that point. It wasn't that we didn't support the general idea of finding a solution, but we did not support the plan because of its complexity and we were at that point not prepared to commit troops to the effectuation and implementation of that plan. I think in subsequent times Cy and I repaired our relationship, although unhappily Cy not too long thereafter drifted into the terrible illness called Alzheimer's disease.

Young: Getting back to starting up. You were asking about models. What about staffing? Were you given a pretty free hand in choosing your people? I'm thinking of the under Secretary, was it Clifton Wharton—

Christopher: Deputy.

Young: And others.

Christopher: I advocated within the administration that the Cabinet Secretaries should not be entirely free to select their own subordinates. I'd seen that model at work and it has a nice ring to it, but it doesn't work out very well if you find subordinates with greater loyalty to the Cabinet officer than to the President, or subordinates that feel that they can criticize the White House with some impunity. So I urged and I think it was really carried out, that it be a joint responsibility between the Cabinet officer and the White House. Dick Riley, who was basically responsible for sub-Cabinet appointments, the interviews for them and so forth, in Washington, carried that out.

In my own case, my choices for the positions other than deputy were almost completely free from outside influence. Cliff Wharton was somebody under consideration for various positions in the government and I was strongly encouraged to take him as deputy, and did. But except for that one example, and maybe two or three other times when in the course of the four years I was urged by the White House to bring somebody in, never over my strenuous objection, I was given quite a free hand to—I always went through the process of explaining, justifying, clearing the choices with the White House because I thought that was the right thing to do.

Oberdorfer: One of the things that I think is a disaster for the US government in staffing the administration is now the incredible time it takes between identifying somebody—not the Secretary of State, but almost everybody below that—and getting them in the job. It seems to have increased greatly, even in the Clinton administration, because of the White House counsel's office and all this regal nonsense and Congress and Zoë Baird and you name it. So now it's become—even today there are people who are not confirmed. And it's not all the Congress. I

mean, a lot of it is also the administration's slowness and all this sort of thing. I'm sure you must have been frustrated by this in part. Was there any attempt to cut through this somehow?

Christopher: Don, that's one of the real problems of our democracy at the present time, the length of time it takes, but also the discouragement of able candidates because of the gap and the lead time and the process. Many people simply don't want to subject themselves to the burden and the risks of the process in which a single issue can derail a nomination, or a single flaw in a person's background, almost a blemish, seems to be enough to do it. And yes, there are dozens of efforts to streamline the process and to make it more efficient, and none of them so far are successful.

You know, one little thing that would be a great help is to have a common application so that you don't have to fill out separate lengthy applications for Congress and for the White House and for the FBI. I think it all could be computerized and much more effectively done. Just to take one simple idea. Brookings I think has had a study of this.

Talbott: Paul Light has got something called the Presidential Appointment Initiative.

Oberdorfer: [Al] Kamen keeps referring to it in his column. I thought, you know, if there was one—we'll discuss this at lunch because it has nothing to do with your oral history.

Young: We'll go on to your next question then.

Oberdorfer: Well, you know, one of the things, I speak now as a former journalist and Strobe is sitting next to me as a former journalist, we all know that the crucial question for the Secretary of State is how is his interaction with the President of the United States. It's shot down, some Secretaries of State, such as Alexander Haig, and others, it's limited what they're able to do or want to do. You have, as Secretary—we all write Secretary Christopher did this or Secretary Vance or Secretary Shultz did x, y, and z, but we know intellectually somehow, that that represents some kind of agreement or interaction within the government in which you have the President, you have to have him on board. Then you have a whole bunch of other influences, you're not a free agent in the sense that you could just decide one morning what you want to do. In your case, how did you operate your relationship with the President, and other people at the White House who represent him, to maximize the possibility that you could get clearance or backing for the things that you thought should be done?

Christopher: Well, I was determined to work within the system and respect my other Cabinet colleagues. So basically foreign policy decisions were reached through the structure set up in the White House, through the National Security Council, in meetings of the NSC or of the subgroups of the NSC, and importantly through the regular meetings between the key members of the foreign policy team: the National Security Adviser, the Secretary of Defense, the head of the CIA and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. We met weekly and we would hash through most of the difficult decisions in those weekly meetings.

There would also be meetings for example, subject matter meetings. The meetings on Haiti began down in Little Rock and continued through 1994 and thereafter. Those would be meetings

in the "sit" [situation] room. I wrote fairly regular night notes to President Clinton and there were sometimes actions taken on those, although I tried to respect the process by not asking for decisions on night notes except on rather rare instances, but used them to inform the President as to directions I thought we ought to take, or where we might be going.

My relationships with the President were always very easy and cordial. I'm sure he has—I credit the reports that he has a temper but I've never had it displayed toward me. Don, one of the ways the Secretary of State frequently works is in connection with the meeting of foreign leaders. Once, twice, three times a week, the President meets with a foreign leader and Secretary of State is a key person in the preparation for those meetings, as well as at those meetings, and I would frequently stay after. He'd ask me to stay after and we'd discuss either the meeting or something else. That whole congeries of approaches to decision making, but by and large I would say we respected the process and worked through the process, the NSC process, and decisions came out of that process. Strobe, you went through it all with me—

Talbott: Really I can't think of much to add. Clinton is a funny combination of a guy who likes to interact personally with people but also, as has been noted earlier, a voracious reader and Chris's night notes to him often came back with barely decipherable proof that the President had read them and reacted to them.

Oberdorfer: There's a perception that early on in the administration he wasn't paying much attention. This is David Gergen's book. He says "In the Cold War, presidents typically spent at least 60% of their time on foreign affairs, with Bush—" meaning the first Bush "—the figure could rise to 75%. Clinton early on reversed the tables. Domestic affairs probably consumed 75% of his time, foreign affairs less than a quarter. Foreign embassies were outraged that the heads of government could not get on Clinton's calendar. When a small plane crashed on the White House lawn, people joked it was the CIA Director, Jim Woolsey, trying to get an appointment. No President for more than half the century was so cavalier toward the larger world."

Then it says that "now he was in trouble—" this was written in about 1993, I mean, it is about 1993 "—Clinton listened more carefully to his National Security Advisor, Tony Lake, and Secretary of State Christopher. They told him he had the capacity to be a strong foreign policy President, but he had to engage, stop flitting in and out. Each day should begin with a thorough briefing. Regularly he should meet with his whole NSC. Once a week he should sit down privately with his Secretary of State. Schedules should include foreign policy, etc. Clinton accepted some of their recommendations." I don't know if you recognize that. Was it really Clinton, or this is from a guy who was partly—he was not on the inside then, but he was on the inside within a few months after that.

Christopher: When did he actually come in?

Oberdorfer: I think it was some time in the late spring of '93.

Talbott: Sounds too early.

Riley: Sounds too early, I don't think it was—let's check a little bit.

Oberdorfer: Anyway, whenever it was, he came in at some point and that's what he was—that's his book, his retrospective.

Christopher: Don, I think it's not an apt characterization of the President. There's no doubt that in the early months he did emphasize domestic issues, as he very well should have. As I said earlier, I regarded one of the most important foreign policy issues was getting our domestic house in order. When I took my first trip around the world to various capitals, I was being besieged in one capital after another: "Are you going to get your economic house in order?" Indeed, it is kind of ironic to think that one of the places I got that lecture the most was in Japan, in view of the fact that recently we've been trying to get them to improve their economic performance. In 1993 people thought the United States was going down the tubes, that we were going to be beaten out economically by Japan and by other countries and that we were receding as a great power. So I embraced the President's idea of spending maybe a predominant amount of his time on domestic affairs.

The complaints from foreign ambassadors that they couldn't get their chief of state in to see the President, those complaints will exist every single year of every presidency. If the President devoted 90% of his time to foreign policy, you'd still have ambassadors complaining they couldn't get their chief of state in. After all, the President can only see so many of the 150 members of the United Nations in any given year. One visit a week is about as much as the President can do in any kind of a substantial meeting, maybe two.

For myself, I understood the President was focused on domestic matters in the first year or so, but I think inattention to important issues of foreign policy is something I would never attribute to him. Strobe, what was your experience?

Talbott: Yes, I have a view on this. I think the paragraph in Gergen's book that you read is complete and total crap and when I get a chance to look at the transcript I will redact that and make it read "not an apt characterization."

Young: That's what we heard.

Oberdorfer: It was the conventional wisdom, pretty much.

Talbott: Yes, but this is presumably history that we're—

Young: This is exactly one of the reasons why, because those things—

Talbott: Just as—I'll leave it to Chris whether the law is sometimes a fool, but conventional wisdom is sometimes crap, and that's certainly the case here. I was working, on Chris's behalf, on one issue which was a rather important issue, and that is the former Soviet Union.

The consistent intensity of Clinton's interest in and involvement in that issue was stunning and it went back to the transition. Clinton and I re-engaged substantively after Chris had called me and

asked if I would come in the State Department. Even though Clinton was in the process of putting together a government, presiding over the economic summit in Little Rock and all that kind of thing, he was fascinated by what was going on in Russia, which was a lot. He was getting regular intelligence briefings in Little Rock and was calling me up at all times of day or night, particularly night, unfortunately for me, to ask about what was up with [Boris] Yeltsin. When I saw him on New Year's at the Renaissance Weekend it was all he wanted to talk about. And it wasn't just idle curiosity. It was: what do we do about this?

Early on, which is to say February, when Richard Nixon—and this actually might be a theme that at some point you'll want to come back to, the kind of strange affinity that developed between the two of them—when Richard Nixon came through and wanted to get some advice to Clinton, Clinton called me to ask about my own conversation with Nixon, talked to him directly. As we prepared for the Vancouver Summit, which was on the third or fourth of April of that year, we started months in advance obviously and one of the key questions was what to do about assistance for Russia and the other countries, but it was primarily Russia. Clinton—Chris, you remember, he presided over at least two meetings in the Cabinet or the Roosevelt Room. Those meetings went overtime. He was pumping us with questions and he was pumping us with exhortations to do more than we had recommended.

You know, Chris emphasized earlier the importance of dealing with the deficit as THE job to be done in the first administration, and doing a lot more in the way of assistance for Russia and the former Soviet Union obviously cut against the priority of eliminating the deficit, and yet Clinton wanted to do it. Sometimes there were objections from Stephanopoulos and others, you know, "Don't even talk about this because first of all it is politically controversial and secondly it would be fiscally damaging to what you're trying to do in the budget," and Clinton basically blew them off, made a case for the strategic importance of it.

I don't entirely understand why the impression came about that he was disengaged from foreign policy. Partly because people alleged it. Partly it was a kind of misunderstanding on the part of a lot of those who traffic in conventional wisdom, including in Gergen's case, somebody who came in after the fact. Misunderstanding of his style. I mean, it had kind of a—what shall I say?—kind of a casual, unstructured quality to it. To wit, he would call up at 11 o'clock or midnight to talk something through. That didn't go through the Chief of Staff's office and therefore maybe in some sense it doesn't exist in terms of the record. But it was stunning how on top of all that he was, both for informational purposes and also for driving the policy process.

Riley: Could I ask a follow up, oh I'm sorry, please—

Young: You're looking at—

Christopher: I'm looking—Strobe, I was trying to remember the time when Yeltsin dissolved the Parliament, March 12, 1993.

Talbott: And the weekend we spent in the White House.

Christopher: Here was an issue in which the President had to make a decision. Would he support Yeltsin despite his dissolving the Parliament and taking some actions that on the surface seemed to be anti-democratic? And the President spent an enormous amount of time on that issue and the follow up to that issue. Really, I think it undercuts the notion that he wasn't involved in those issues. Nineteen ninety-three was a pretty important year as far as Yeltsin's survival was concerned.

Talbott: Yes, and as for foreign leaders, you can either discount or qualify, whatever way you see fit, the importance of that region of the world, but we wanted to get several leaders from the non-Russian former republics to the Oval Office, because we were trying to send a strong signal that it wasn't a "Russia only" policy and we were interested in promoting the independence of all fifteen former republics. Stanislav Shushkevich, the President of Belarus, and Eduard Shevardnadze are just two that come to mind. I'm sure if we go back over the record there were others. Now, we had some difficulty with the scheduling office, just as we had some difficulty with both the domestic political advisors and the economic people on the assistance package for Russia. But even the Russia wonks undershot how much money we as a government should put on the barrelhead in order to stimulate the G7 to do more during the Tokyo Summit. Clinton pushed us up to whatever the final figure was, 1.2 billion dollars, I think.

Naftali: Can we probe that just for a minute, that's—I believe the administration had Richard Nixon lobby for it on Capitol Hill, lobby for the assistance package.

Talbott: Well we didn't need to ask him. The Clinton-Nixon relationship obviously had its complications in its origins, but even during the '92 campaign, when one of the very few foreign policy issues on which Clinton decided it was politically prudent as well as responsible to go after Bush—one of course was Bosnia, but the other was on aid to Russia. And the fact that Nixon was criticizing Bush for doing too little came up a number of times, I remember. So I'm not sure that they were talking to each other then, but they certainly started talking to each other in February 1993 and I have no doubt, in fact I think I remember that Nixon did talk to Bob Dole and others about the importance of supporting the administration's Russia aid package. I don't think it was so much at Clinton's prodding though.

Riley: I wanted to ask a question that is something we probably would want to get into in much greater detail with you in another session, but it relates very much to this, and that's about your judgment of Clinton's native interest in foreign affairs as he's coming into the White House. You've known him for a long time. Was he somebody that you felt had a kind of cultivated interest in foreign affairs? Or sort of—again, the conventional wisdom on this is Clinton was primarily somebody for whom domestic politics was his all-consuming passion.

Talbott: Well, Jim, if you feel it's in order, I'll do a short version on that now and then we—

Young: All right.

Christopher: And I'd also like—

Young: Yes, Chris's take on that too.

Talbott: You want to go first?

Christopher: Well, I think it's basically a canard. Clinton's interest in foreign matters goes back to his days as a student at Oxford and his travels in Europe. It is certainly true that his 12 years as Governor of Arkansas meant that he dealt in the context of his day-to-day life with domestic issues, and few Presidents will ever come into office with more knowledge about domestic matters than Clinton. But the nature of the man is that there is nothing that goes on that doesn't interest him, and whenever he is confronted with a new area, suddenly he becomes very interested in it and reads about it and assembles his information in a way that is not sort of IBM orderliness, but nevertheless I found he took an interest in every foreign policy issue that came up.

In addition to that, he seemed to have insights about the politics of countries that were just amazing. I read about Secretaries of State who wanted to keep the President out of their matters so that he didn't mess it up. Well, I never felt that way about Clinton. I always was anxious to get him into any matter because I knew that he would add an extra 15 or 20% to whatever the bureaucracy and I would provide for him. So I just think it's a canard that he wasn't interested in foreign affairs. He did have a priority in 1993, but that priority was frequently interrupted by things like the March events that we've talked about in Russia as well as the October events when you may remember basically the effort to take over the Russian Parliament by [Aleksandr Vladimirovich] Rutskoi, is that right?

Naftali: [Ruslan] Khasbulatov.

Christopher: And that dramatic scene there. When those things came along he dealt with them and not impatiently.

Naftali: Can I ask, before Strobe, you want to—

Talbott: Let me just, if I could just tag on something to what Chris has said. As long as I've known him, which was since September 1968, it's been clear that Jack Kennedy was his model. He was hoping to emulate Kennedy in many ways. He was with me, and I think with others, interested in the full range of Kennedy's presidency, but particularly Kennedy as a foreign policy President and how Kennedy dealt with the Cold War and with [Nikita] Khrushchev. His mentor on the Hill of course was J. William Fulbright, who was chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, and he's a graduate of the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown. His curricular interest at Oxford in the PP & E [Politics, Philosophy and Economics] program was to write a thesis on the USSR [Union of Soviet Socialist Republics] and alternative futures for the USSR—by the way, an essay that should somehow be included in the record that you're putting together. I know it's in the Clinton library.

His reading interests were particularly 19th century British history and especially Robert Blake's biography of [Benjamin] Disraeli. As Governor of Arkansas, and I saw quite a bit of him during that period, his overarching intellectual passion, almost, was how you could elevate a poor, backward, remote southern state by plugging it into the global economy. So, I think again, all of

that is by way of background of what he brought to his presidency—there was a lot of momentum behind what he brought into the presidency in terms of interest in the outside world.

Young: Was this evident to you also in your early conversations with him on foreign policy?

Christopher: I never had any doubt of his great interest in this. I also never had any doubt that his first priority, in the first year, was to do something about the economy, as I said—

Young: But not to the exclusion.

Christopher: By no means, not the exclusion.

Naftali: One of the interesting challenges for any biographer, presidential biographer, is to see how Presidents learn and how their ideas change with time and experience. When you had those initial conversations, Mr. Secretary, with President-elect Clinton, about becoming Secretary of State, did he express any cardinal principles, any set of objectives that he hoped foreign policy under his administration would achieve?

Christopher: You know, it's difficult for me to remember how those things evolved. There was nothing very formal about our conversation of my becoming Secretary of State. He didn't give me a thirty-minute exposé of what he wanted to accomplish. But as we moved into the period of my working out the first message that I would give to the Congress when I had my confirmation hearings, I began then to see evolve this importance of international architecture, the importance of international organizations, the growing interdependence, coupled with a sense that he had, I think, of the importance of improving relations with each of the major powers. It was a very, very inclusive sense of importance, which was reflected in, as I say, in my confirmation testimony, as we begin to work through the issues. There were some foreign policy issues that came up during the transition period in which people would come down from Washington to brief us on those and that had occasioned some of the earlier conversations as well.

Talbott: The first face-to-face conversation I had with him after Secretary Christopher had tapped me for a job in the administration was in South Carolina at this Renaissance weekend, and he had a five-point set of instructions basically, a plan of how he wanted to approach Russia, the former Soviet Union. It doesn't stand up all that badly by the way, if you look at it eight years later.

I mean, he had thought it through and knew—and by the way, it was kind of an interesting intersect between what Chris was saying about his overall priority and his plan for Russia. The model was "it's the economy, stupid." Whatever else we do, we have to work on the issue of the Russian post-Soviet economy.

Young: Your talk, your testimony, your opening statement at your confirmation hearing—my question is, was the preparation of that statement the result of some conversations that you had with Clinton? And rather than ask if he had some cardinal principles to give you, did you understand what he resonated with, what his aspirations and ambitions were for the United States in the world that gave you significant clues?

Christopher: Yes, when I formulated that testimony I had very much in mind the conversations we'd had in Little Rock and the general themes that I thought he'd want to emphasize. After a passage of, I guess now almost a decade, I can't point to which conversation it was in Little Rock that—one gets from President Clinton a general sense of things that doesn't always translate very well into a—it's not like a box to be checked on a decision paper, but just a general mood.

Young: That's what I'm trying to get at, what many people have missed, I think.

Christopher: The mood about the unification of Europe, which is a predominant theme for him and illuminated so much about the expansion of NATO, and trying to include Russia within the West and bring Russia into the big eight, making it the big eight rather than seven. All of those things flow from his dream that Europe would, at some time in his time or soon thereafter, not have these contentious blocs, not have the central corridor of nations that has given rise to so many wars, but be a unified set of countries with common economic goals and much interchange between the two. An awful lot that I saw in his reactions about Europe trace back to that, including the risks he was prepared to take in Bosnia.

Oberdorfer: Getting back to the Gergen thing—he alleges, and it was commonly written at the time—I retired in April of '93 so I wasn't writing it, thank goodness—that there were very few meetings of the foreign policy principals either as an NSC or with the principals in which he actually participated and that there was a lot of frustration by his senior advisors of getting him deeply engaged. Maybe, I don't know if Russia came up. Did you feel that at all, Chris, or is this just coming out of some nowheresville?

Christopher: I think it's all part of what became sort of a common allegation that the President was not as deeply involved in foreign policy as the sixty people that write columns in Washington think he ought to be. You're never going to quite feed that columnist machine an adequate amount. It is certainly probably accurate that there were not very many formal meetings of the National Security Council, but he met, as I said, once or twice a week with the foreign policy team, in advance of, and in connection with a foreign visitor. Those often became broader meetings, and he received regular reports from the meeting of the foreign policy principals.

Young: Excuse me, those were the weekly meetings you referred to earlier?

Christopher: The weekly meetings, and he also received many memos from Tony Lake, which were the result of things that worked their way up through the process at the deputies' meeting and so forth. And there's no doubt that a good many more or less routine foreign policy decisions came to him on paper and he checked off the box on that. But there's no doubt there was a common allegation that the White House was not being run in as orderly a way as it should have been. I think that was one of the things that resulted in the change of Chiefs of Staff, Don, but that was an endemic problem. It wasn't primarily focused on foreign policy, it was a problem of operating style that did need some correction, and I think it was corrected.

Oberdorfer: During your four years there did the operating style develop, change, or was it pretty much what it was in the first year?

Christopher: No, it certainly tightened up. The number of people in meetings decreased. The regularity of meetings was improved—in the sense that meetings would start on time and end on time. Leon Panetta did a lot to improve those, although you have to deal with the personality of a very curious President who was not prepared to end meetings if his curiosity had not been satisfied.

Oberdorfer: One heard—

Christopher: That's one of the things you earn when you're President.

Oberdorfer: I heard secondhand, sometimes third hand, this is off of what you said, of meetings that they had about some foreign policy issue in which it would be like, it was described to me like a graduate seminar or something like this, the President being the guy asking the questions, or the center obviously of attention, and they'd go on and on for a long period of time, and at the end there didn't seem to be any decision out of it. It was kind of frustrating to people that—the usual model, I guess it's the Eisenhower model, the decisive general, where you'd have the discussion and he'd say, "We're going to do X or Y." But, particularly early, there are these reports. I don't know how true they are.

Christopher: Well, there were certainly meetings that went on too long, but I would really challenge the notion that there was anything wrong with it, with the President saying, "I'm going to step back from this and think about it," and then make his decision afterward, perhaps on paper or after he had the national security staff narrow down the options. I was never troubled by his not reaching a decision in a meeting and I just underscored the fact that if there was a fault about meetings that went on too long, or rambled too much, it was by no means exclusive to the foreign policy establishment. I think it was much more likely to have been in domestic affairs, where his knowledge and curiosity is so enormous.

Oberdorfer: In a sense there's a contradiction between the idea that he didn't spend any time on it, and that his meetings went on too long.

Talbott: Colin Powell I think uses—one of the most quoted passages from Colin Powell's book is the line about graduate bull sessions.

Christopher: Right, clearly those two had different operating styles. The Pentagon has a different operating style than the White House has.

Riley: But you seem to be a very ordered, organized person too. You didn't find yourself frustrated by disorder?

Christopher: Anybody who has served in government as long as I have and said he was never frustrated is not telling you the truth.

Riley: So nothing out of the ordinary.

Christopher: Nothing out of the ordinary. One of the requirements of being able to serve in government at high levels is being able to stand frustration.

Talbott: Let me just throw in one other thought here. Chris has already said, "The President is the President, he gets to decide what the style is," and Secretaries of State and Chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, they've got to get used to it. But the other thing is, Clinton likes to ask questions. He likes to impersonate the critics of a policy option. So there's a kind of a—there's a Clinton version of the Socratic approach in these meetings where he would—you know the expression "the murder board"? He got to be the murder board, and the people presenting the policy options had to defend it. And I saw over and over again where first of all the degree of coherence, cogency and persuasiveness of the answers tilted his decision in a way that the advocates would want. And then second, when Clinton, on whose desk the buck stopped, had to go public and explain the decision and defend the decision, he did a hell of a good job, and one reason is because he'd already had the experience of being able to say, "Yeah, but what about this," and "critics are saying that," and saw how his own people were responding to it.

Riley: Exactly.

Talbott: So okay, maybe it wasn't out of the Kennedy School or what the Harvard Business School would say, but it worked for him.

Naftali: Do you think that—

Riley: There would have been cases, I suppose, where the critics would say the President's style didn't work or maybe that it went to an excess. I don't know whether there are particular—

Talbott: I'm sure critics would say that and I'm sure they're right in some cases.

Riley: Thus the question would be, who? And I suppose the change in the Chief of Staff was one piece of evidence about a recognition that there needed to be a kind of ringmaster, so to speak, to come in and add some discipline to the process.

Young: Well, it sounds like, to me, we're hearing a lot of testimony about how the President educated himself and prepared himself to make a decision and the fact that a meeting did not have a conclusive result is not very satisfactory in a bureaucratic sense to the parties who prepared for it, but—Tim?

Naftali: I was just concerned whether one of the unintended consequences of that kind of style is the creation of a sense of indecision though. If you're—I'm very interested in what appears to be the chasm between conventional wisdom and what was actually going on, and one of the things that always seemed to bubble up into the newspaper and into other areas of journalism was that Clinton was just indecisive about foreign policy, that not only was he not that interested but that when he had to make a decision, he just—he couldn't. And perhaps, was that perhaps one of the unintended consequences of this seminar-style that fed that view of indecision?

Christopher: Well, you're going to have to do it issue by issue. On the whole he made decisions well and quickly. I would have to say that none of us were able to come to a decision on Bosnia as early as we should have. And that, you know, that's something that I regret, but nevertheless we did finally come to a decision. That's a very hard problem. So I can't say that we were totally free of that, but I will say that the President's willingness to see the other side, and articulate the other side, is a very important kind of discipline. You see it on personnel matters as well.

When I came in with a recommendation, the President would frequently worry me greatly by saying all the reasons why it was the wrong decision, and then at the end of the meeting, or the next day, confirm the recommendation. But he would have thought through all the defects, all the problems, all the things that might emerge. "Won't the press say this," or "Won't the Hill say that," or "Won't we have trouble with this constituency?" So that was his way of intellectualizing it and I sometimes would think, *Oh my God, we're losing him on this one,* and then he'd come back and accept the recommendation. So, as I say, I would not pretend there were not cases where the decision-making process should not have moved more quickly. On Bosnia, should we have discounted the European views, as we ultimately had to truly discern a bit earlier? Probably.

Young: We'll can also get into that later. Lunch is served. Do you have one quickie?

Talbott: No, I'm hungry.

[BREAK FOR LUNCH]

Young: I talked with Chris a bit at lunch, after lunch, and urged him to lecture us on matters he thought required enlightenment, not necessarily for us but for the people who will study this presidency in the future, and we'll see what comes of that. I'd like to start with just a question by Steve and then you have the agenda control if you wish.

Knott: This morning Don read that brief excerpt from the David Gergen book and there was the tale of the plane landing on the White House lawn and the joke circulating that that was James Woolsey trying to get in to see the President. I realize this doesn't fall directly under your purview, but that allegation that the President was not particularly interested in intelligence and had a distant relationship with the CIA, perhaps particularly under Woolsey, could you just tell us anything, any reflections you may have on that allegation?

Christopher: It seems to me to be a chemistry issue, a personal chemistry issue between those two people. Woolsey was nominated without the President knowing him very well and Woolsey came into controversy with Colin Powell early in the meetings in the White House, and that was very tough competition because Colin is a past master in bureaucratic arguments. It was especially a devastating overmatch when Jim Woolsey began to express views on the operation of the Pentagon. I think that created a distance between the two that made it difficult for the President to naturally reach out to Jim Woolsey. Those things get going in an administration and somehow they don't heal, but they tend sometimes to get worse. So I think it was just a relationship that wasn't destined to be very effective from the beginning. It was quite aggravated

by the conduct within high level meetings at which there was a controversy between the two and it never got repaired, in my judgment.

So I think the President was not disinterested in intelligence matters but relied on the sieve of Tony Lake and Sandy Berger. Strobe, I hope you might illuminate that question.

Talbott: I think in addition to what Chris says, there were one or two other things. I have heard the President talk about intelligence and I would characterize it as a healthy respect for the product combined with admiration for all that goes into getting it, but not being in awe of it. I've heard him make remarks from time to time that it was nice to have the intelligence but it wasn't all that often that the supersensitive stuff came either as a revelation or added, in a way that was politically useful—that is, useful in policy terms—to what his sense of the world was based on open sources. This is something I've seen in other colleagues at other levels.

Some find there is something especially riveting about the red stripe stuff and anything that is that secret must be especially good, whereas other colleagues, and the President was in this category, say, "Well, it's interesting to know that that's what they think, but—" And I think Jim had a tendency to oversell. He also had a tendency to over-advocate and the President, I think, tended to be more interested in what the intelligence community could tell him by way of information as opposed to what he ought to do or not do. There was one issue in particular that was, I think, attributed to a problem Chris mentions and that is that Woolsey had a real bee in his bonnet about Haiti and [Jean-Bertrand] Aristide. There were a lot of pressures building indicating that we really had to do something about the horror developing on Haiti, and Woolsey's message was, "You know, you can't do it, it's trouble, don't touch that thing, don't touch that guy." That was the centerpiece of it.

Oberdorfer: If I could piggyback on that question that you asked, Steve, as Strobe I'm sure remembers, Secretary Shultz became very disaffected from intelligence, particularly about Russia. He felt they were all wrong and he lost confidence, I think, in what the intelligence community was telling him. What was your own view of the intelligence you were getting, the same stuff I presume that the President was getting? How much attention did you pay to it, and did you think it was good? Did it figure importantly in your concept of policy-making or not?

Christopher: I think I put myself more in the President's camp than in those who were really in awe of it. I always found it useful to have, but one soon learns that there are deeply engaged views within the agency, and no Director can rise above those views. Those views just don't go away. So you soon learn that the Agency, which I'm sure wants to say they have no bias, has biases, and I think you have to read the intelligence with those biases in mind, about X is a bad country, or X is providing information. There are always enough fragments that they can reinforce those theses if they have them deeply ingrained. So I think intelligence needs to be viewed with respect but skepticism. Strobe, what would you say about intelligence on Russia?

Talbott: Intelligence falls into three categories. I mean, intelligence as in the Director of Central Intelligence, leaving aside covert operations. Explaining what has happened, explaining what is happening, and predicting what will happen. My general observation is that the intelligence

community was no better than—and perhaps in some ways not as good as—others in predicting, which of course is what policy makers would particularly like to have available: prediction.

The other thing is that the product depended a lot on the quality of the analysts at the top. And they had pretty good people on Russia. Not quite so good on the periphery, but on Russia proper, we—Chris had me set up an interagency team that did the day-to-day, week-to-week stuff on the former Soviet Union and we had two people from the intelligence community on that team, and they were very good. They'd spent their whole life on it and they were—one of the things that made them good was that they were modest about their predictive abilities. So I would say, not bad. Some other parts of the world, I mean Haiti was just—it was a hotbed. The intelligence product kept getting in the way of clear thinking because of these deep, deep biases there. And not least because the intelligence community was heavily invested in the old regime there, and that we saw in another context as well.

Riley: That was the source of the bias you were talking about?

Talbott: I think it was a contributing factor.

Oberdorfer: You mentioned how Haiti was something that started—you mean that discussions of Haiti had started even in the transitional period and the whole question of what to do about Aristide, bring him back or not bring him back and so forth—as you look back on it, do you have any reflections on how those decisions were made, whether they were, in the light of other events, likely to do now?

Christopher: I think the Haiti exercise is a positive achievement of the term where I was involved. We came into office finding a freely elected President had been thrown out of office by a military junta of the worst character. We used the United Nations process, perhaps used it for too long, but nevertheless gave it every opportunity to function. We then began to put pressure onto the junta to leave, and they gave one excuse after another trying to delay the date, and finally we concluded in September of 1994 that if they didn't leave we would engage the country to reestablish democracy.

We always knew that Aristide was a controversial figure, but he was certainly a lot better than [Raoul] Cedras and gang, and we did take action to restore him to power. We had some assistance from Carter and Powell and Senator Nunn, who were there, but I think they would never have been successful in their negotiations with Cedras without the fact that the 82nd Airborne was on its way to Haiti. We did reestablish the elected President and we gave Haiti the chance that they deserved to do something with their country. They by and large had forfeited that, but for those who claim that we never had the nerve to try to undo a calamity or a genocide or a violation of human rights, I'd say that Haiti is a counter case to that, and that we took the action that was justified under the circumstances. And it was an action in our own hemisphere that was having adverse side effects on the United States in many ways.

Haiti is, maybe it is not a vital American interest, but it comes much closer to it than some other areas. I regard it as a positive endeavor and the fact that the people of Haiti have not grasped the democratic process, and did not produce a new economic regime, or economic prosperity, is

tragic for the people of that country. But I think we did what we had to do in the interest of promoting democracy. Strobe, both before I was in office and afterwards, had a key role in the Haiti situation, so I'd like to have him speak on the subject. But I don't regard Haiti as a failure of American policy, I regard it as a success.

Talbott: I can add a punctuation point to that. I think that's right.

Knott: There were some reports at the time of some tension between the Clinton White House and foreign policy team and former President Carter. Was there anything to those reports and if so, were you involved?

Christopher: Yes. As you know I served under President Carter and he'd always been very generous to me and I had a wonderful relationship with him. During the time I was Secretary of State he was very anxious to play a very considerable role in U. S. foreign policy and that's always difficult for a former President when he's dealing with Cabinet officers of a new and different President who wants to be his own President and have his own style. So I think there were some natural tensions that arose. President Carter has a particular ability to deal with rogues, political leaders who the rest of the world regards as unacceptable. I think he feels like he can understand them. So he went down and developed a relationship with Cedras and became a spokesman in a way for him. When he went down on the last weekend before Cedras left, he was basically dealing with Cedras. The moment of tension came when President Clinton ordered the 82nd Airborne to go in and return Aristide to power. Carter and Nunn and Powell were there in Haiti when the 82nd Airborne was on its way down. At that very time, President Carter was asking for an extension of time to stay there longer and make further efforts at persuasion.

It got to the point where the President couldn't grant it, and he had to ask President Carter to leave because he was afraid for his safety if he stayed. In the middle of that afternoon, Carter, Nunn, and Powell proposed a solution to the Cedras problem, which I think was totally unacceptable and would be unacceptable on the historic record. The proposal put the decision as to when Cedras would leave in the hands of, if I recall correctly, the Haitian Parliament. President Clinton rejected the proposal, so there was that moment of tension. But I think it arises from the very natural problems when a former President as strong-willed as President Carter is wants to be active in the foreign affairs field.

Young: Strobe, do you have anything?

Talbott: Nothing to add. There were, at least superficially, comparable incidents that occurred in the Bosnia episode and North Korea.

Riley: My question is about the same area. From the outside, we're always interested in the relationship between domestic politics and foreign policy-making, and this was an area where it was a domestic constituency that seemed to be very much interested in what was going on down there. And I'm wondering if you have any observations about, in this particular instance, the role that domestic politics might have played in the administration's thinking, where that gets imported into the decision-making process, and whether there were any other instances you care to comment on with respect to that particular relationship between domestic and foreign policies.

Christopher: It's a continuing, I think quite appropriate, factor to be considered in foreign policy. We are a democracy and the constituent elements of the country are entitled to have their say. Domestic politics intruded on Haiti in various ways. The Black Caucus was very anxious to have Aristide returned. He was a symbol of their race who had been forced from power in a way they regarded as despotic, and it was. So that was a strong force, and we brought William Gray, a former Congressman, in to be an advisor on that subject and he was very helpful. There was another aspect of it, of course, and that was the immigration aspect in Florida and other southern states, who were concerned about being inundated by Haitian boat people, especially if the problem wasn't solved. So that was a pressure to try to resolve the problem.

I would say, though, that the thing that moved the President and moved me was the need to try to restore democracy in one of the few non-democratic countries in the hemisphere. I've always admired one thing that Aristide said, one day at the State Department. He was there talking and he said, "You know, it isn't the first election that's important in a country that is moving towards democracy, it's the second." And I thought it was quite impressive of him to make that statement when their constitution provided that he couldn't run in a second, and he didn't run. Now there is another side to that story, of course. Aristide did not conduct himself very well in the period after he didn't run, but nevertheless it's a very important lesson. It isn't the first election, it's the second one that's important.

In my view, domestic politics always need to be taken into account. The line is not that clear between the two. I've always liked dealing with people in Congress, always liked to hear their views and get the impression as to how people in the country really feel about it. Sometimes the constituency is narrow and seems to be inappropriately driven, like maybe the Cubans in south Florida, but nevertheless, I think quite legitimate, we will bump into it in various other places as we go through here.

Young: Do you want to pick up with some stories? I expect—

Christopher: One of the things that I think has been undervalued, at least so far, in the Clinton foreign policy is his role in the very issue we talked about at lunch, with such distress. That is, the Israeli-Palestinian, or the Middle East. From almost the first day I was in office, President Clinton directed me to give priority attention to the Middle East. He helped make that possible for me.

My relationship was with [Yitzhak] Rabin, who I had enormous respect for, but my relationship frankly was made possible by the peer relationship that Clinton developed with Rabin right from the first. My first trip abroad was taken to try to defuse the deportees crisis and to get back to negotiations, a situation that has some overtones of the present crisis. The situation is much worse now, but in 1993 the deportee issue—that is, those who were deported from Israel and kept incarcerated in Lebanon—was so important that you could not restart substantive negotiations until that issue was resolved. Cutting across the scene at the same time was the problem of Hezbollah attacking northern Israel with rockets. That had to be resolved. Throughout that period, Clinton was really a steady, overarching force in my relationships in the Middle East. He was always, always there to assist me or to guide me and to have the

overarching relationships that made what I was doing possible. Ultimately I think a good deal was achieved.

The peace between Jordan and Israel would never have been possible without support from the United States for Jordan in tangible things like a 700 million dollar loan or forgiveness of debt, and basically admitting Jordan back into the good graces of the United States.

Young: After the Gulf—

Christopher: After the Gulf, right. Clinton's ceremony on the White House lawn that launched the Oslo process, and much was achieved under the Oslo process, including the fact that Gaza and Jericho and the nine cities on the West Bank were returned to Palestinian control. All of that just makes it heartbreaking to see how much has been rolled back in the current environment. But I think that Clinton deserves, and I think probably will receive, in the long view of history, and maybe you can help that, credit for doing many positive things in connection with the Middle East.

After, for example, after the bombings in Israel in 1996, rather than just lamenting it, Clinton called for the summit at Sharm El-Sheikh and organized a response to that from leading countries around the world, including the Arab countries. I regard that as an underestimated accomplishment of the Clinton administration.

Young: How did the personal relationship between him and Rabin develop?

Christopher: It developed with Rabin's first trip to the United States. They had one-on-one sessions. There would always be the large sessions and then they'd go off on a one-on-one session and they generally lasted about twice as long as they were supposed to last. They were quite different people. Rabin, who is so taciturn and flinty, and, you know, the old tank commander. And Clinton, who is a contrast in so many respects, but nevertheless they developed a very close relationship. As I look back on it, the assassination of Rabin was a decisive turning point in the wrong direction in the Middle East.

Oberdorfer: Did you have that feeling at the time, that it might be something, I mean, here was a radical—in this case radical Jew—element coming in, and as you say, opened up the whole thing. But to what extent did you have some kind of foreboding then it was going to be very bad—

Christopher: Oh I had, on the flight back I had a deep foreboding that not only had we lost a friend, but there had been a big setback for peace. It was more serious than I knew. I had thought that [Shimon] Peres would be able to carry on more effectively than he did. I didn't think that Peres would be defeated in the election, and he was.

Oberdorfer: Do you think, in reflection, that there was something more or something different that the United States could have done at that point, or, if it couldn't right that second, but at some time after that point, that could have helped to avert what we've come to now?

Christopher: Well, Don, I don't think this is the answer that you're expecting, but we certainly could have helped to avert it by urging the new Bush administration to continue the policy of engagement from the very beginning. But you're probably asking an earlier question.

Oberdorfer: Well, yes, I was thinking in terms of what you all were doing.

Christopher: I suppose we could have given better advice to Peres's campaign, which was not very well run against [Benjamin] Netanyahu, who ran a campaign solely on the security issues. But I think the view in Israel probably is pretty fixed about Shimon Peres and not likely to change. He's lost a lot of elections there.

Knott: Could you talk a little bit about Yasser Arafat? He is very much in the news as we speak today, but my guess is for future generations who hopefully will read this interview, what was your assessment of Arafat and his willingness to work for peace?

Christopher: I was struck by reading the paper, I guess yesterday, or hearing that when Colin Powell had lunch with him, that Arafat talked for an hour in Arabic. There's nothing surprising about his talking in Arabic. That's his native language. He can communicate in English but not very well and I've come to understand how much people like to talk in their native language, God knows I would. The first time I met with Arafat was in Europe. He was quite often in Europe and we arranged a meeting in Europe. He spent the first half hour just shouting at me, and he does have a litany of grievances, and the Palestinians do have grievances. But I said to him, "You know, Mr. Chairman, you and I can either have a decent relationship in which we talk to each other, or you can shout at me and I'll do my best to be forbearing about it, but it won't accomplish very much." And he calmed down after that and we never had another shouting match.

I found him to be a very good interlocutor. He's a very intelligent man and you can talk with him. Now he has several bad habits of a guerilla—a lifetime guerilla. First, he tends to play his advisors off against each other and take the advice of the most extreme of his advisors. He'll ask their views and then press the case of the most extreme advisor. It's almost impossible for him to come to a decision. He always keeps looking for just one more thing. You think you've got him in a place where he decided, and he says, "Just one more thing." So he's very frustrating in that regard. We were able to reach decisions with him on Gaza and Jericho and ultimately then on the nine cities and a number of other minor issues. He's an authentic figure, a hero to the people that he has worked for.

He has bad traits, including not having much fiscal discipline—but we shouldn't be surprised by that. He's lived most of his life on handouts from other rich people in the Middle East, so that's the way he lives. Nobody asked him to account for the things that the princes gave him in the Middle East. It doesn't mean we should accept him, but, you get just about what you might expect from his background. I'm amazed he's still alive. His health is fragile and he lives precariously, keeping terrible hours. He really prefers the night time, though he isn't the only Arab who prefers the night time. But he's still alive and there's just nobody else to deal with at the present time.

The only question I have in my mind, and I don't know that the intelligence analysts are much help on this, is how much authority he has to deal with the terrorists right now. I mean, if he made a 110% effort, could he stop it all? Probably not. Particularly right now, because there are a lot of very angry people on the West Bank for whom living doesn't have much hope. My constant approach to him was to try to keep before him enough hope so that he could try to talk to his colleagues and followers about there being some hope out there.

Young: Did you feel at that time in negotiations with him, or attempts to make an agreement, that his political position was somewhat precarious?

Christopher: Not really. Of course, I was only there until 1996. He was in a pretty strong position. I remember when Hannah Ashwari, who we've spoken of here earlier, felt aggrieved and basically separated herself for a time from the entourage, he didn't miss a beat. The same thing with Abu Mazen. Abu Mazen, who was number two for so much of the time, became disaffected and left for eight or ten months, and Arafat just went right on. So I think his position was quite strong then. Of course, during the period when I was there, he was elected President with 70% of the votes, or an even larger number. There was an election, and he got a very high percentage of the vote.

Young: So playing off the bad habit, playing off advisors and taking the advice of the most extreme, was not the play of an insecure person, but a secure one.

Christopher: A secure one and they were old habits.

Oberdorfer: As you've mentioned, President Clinton had what seems to have been an unusually close rapport with Rabin, two guys who appreciated each other a lot. What was your observation of Clinton's approach to some of these other Middle East leaders, whether it was Arafat or [Hosny] Mubarak or Hafiz al-Assad, who I think he met once?

Christopher: There was always a danger that somebody who has been a friend and a Cabinet officer for a President would seem to be bugling, but one thing I observed is that President Clinton can do is get along with nearly anybody in the world. He really has a capacity to get along with people. And so he had good relationships with most of them, better with some than others of course, but he has the capacity to sense what people wanted to accomplish and to help them accomplish it.

So I think he had a very good relationship with Mubarak, much better than I could ever have with Mubarak, but I was not Mubarak's equal, for example. He had a wonderful relationship with King Hussein [bin Talal], they spoke very much the same language. With Assad, they only had two meetings and neither one was very successful, but I wouldn't say it was for the lack of Clinton's trying, it was just for the obtuseness of Assad, and there wasn't much of a relationship there. But you can go around the world, and I'd like to have Strobe speak to this too, there are darn few people that he wanted to get along with, or damn few foreign leaders whether he wanted to get along with them or not, who he didn't impress and the second time around, as he got further into the administration, I think he knew he could play in that league.

Talbott: Yes, I mean we can talk about specifics, but he could also make the transition from, I'm thinking, [Helmut] Kohl to [Gerhard] Schroeder. He and Kohl were just buddies. I mean, they had this terrific bond, more than just they love pasta. And yet when Kohl lost out to Schroeder, I guess Clinton never quite matched the rapport with Schroeder that he had with Kohl, but he made a good stab at it, and I agree with what Chris says.

Oberdorfer: I want to go back for one second to Assad. You had something like twenty-four or twenty-five meetings with Assad, if I'm not mistaken.

Christopher: It was more than twenty.

Oberdorfer: I mean, you were running out there and seeing him. I remember being with Vance and others when they went out, it was always the same drill, I think you mentioned it in your book. You meet this guy, get in his car and you go and you see his room, and somebody says one thing, you could almost—who was the guy who had that, instead of telling the joke you just say, it's number four and you laugh, and whatever. But that must have been—well, I'll put it, was this frustrating? What did you feel like? You were going back and back and back and you just don't get anywhere.

Christopher: Well, I thought I was dealing with an area where the President had asked me to give priority, that I wanted personally to give priority to, so I didn't, I really didn't object to the amount of time. I've been criticized for it, but I think I'd probably do it again because we had a real opportunity to make peace with Syria. It would have done so much to avoid the encirclement of Israel, if Assad had just recognized the opportunity he had with Rabin. I was concerned that my own persuasion somehow was inadequate, and so I would go there again with Dennis Ross, and we'd be received and we would try again.

Assad is a very complex figure for American politicians. Almost everybody who has dealt with him finds him to be ironically engaging when you're in his presence. He has a quick wit—maybe more sardonic—but he's not unpleasant to be with, because of his quickness. You can engage with him, although it takes a lot of time, and meetings were always four hours at a minimum. But Assad was given an opportunity by me, authorized by Rabin, which was a historic opportunity for Syria, and I could never get him to understand how big the opportunity was, or at least *apparently* could never get him to understand. And we had various other business to do with him.

I thought it was a justified expenditure of time, first when, before Oslo, Rabin really gave me authority to tell him he could get the Golan back, a really big deal, if he would agree to some quite reasonable conditions. And then, after we had the Oslo Agreement in place, Rabin authorized me to go back, encouraged me to go back and to try again, so that would have accounted for some of the trips.

And then after Rabin's death, Shimon Peres said we should make another try. Shimon would have gone even further than Rabin would go, but for some reason Assad did not want to make that deal, maybe because he sensed the political weakness of Shimon Peres. Maybe he understood more quickly than we did that Peres would not have staying power. Assad was a

great student of Israeli politics, listened to Israeli radio all the time, watched Israeli television when he could. Got lots of reports on Israel, knew the Israeli Knesset pretty well.

Oberdorfer: Did you have the feeling, maybe even in retrospect, that they just thought it was too dangerous to make any deal with Israel?

Christopher: I think Assad's hostility and paranoia about Israel kept him from seeing the positive effects, the positive aspects of what was being offered. As a negotiator I always try to look for the positive aspects in a deal to make sure you don't underestimate them and see only the problems. All Assad ever saw was the problems. He has a very deep paranoia—or he had, a very deep paranoia about Israel.

Naftali: I'm just wondering if we could clarify the chronology a bit, the chronology of Rabin's offers. In August, I believe, of 1993, and you wrote about this in your book, there is one offer, and then it seems, I've learned that in July of '94 there was another offer. In the very beginning was Rabin—it wasn't an offer, it was actually a hypothetical question, but was Rabin talking about a full withdrawal to the June '67 border, or was it just to the 1923 international border between the French and British empires? I've seen it argued that the full withdrawal was actually not really in the air until your 1994 visit.

Christopher: Well, you're certainly right, it was not clarified in 1993 as to what border they were talking about. Now the difference is quite minute in terms of the size of the Golan as a whole. But nevertheless it was important, perhaps water rights connected with that. In 1994, perhaps as a way of keeping the negotiation from coming to climax, Assad began raising the questions about what line you were talking about.

Naftali: And were you able to, in your careful way, clarify that in the summer of 1994?

Christopher: Never to Assad's satisfaction. But I never thought that that difference was what kept the parties from getting together. I don't to this day. The big ostensible problem at least was that Assad wanted the settlements removed within six months and Rabin wanted first five years, and I think he would have settled for four, perhaps three years, which I thought was very reasonable. You know, in removing the settlements, you're uprooting people, you're having to find a place for them to move to. Heaven knows. Suppose the Israelis today were to say, "We'd remove the settlements from the West Bank in three years."

Naftali: Just one last question on this point, was it frustrating to the State Department, to you, that there were bilateral negotiations between the Syrian Chief of Staff and Ehud Barach in Washington on this question of Syrian–Israeli peace treaty, and Barach at least in his instructions, was not told that withdrawal was on the table, a full withdrawal was on the table? So that these negotiations, which occurred I think in 1994, just sort of didn't go anywhere.

Christopher: Well, I of course was there, I was involved in those discussions, or in launching them. I thought it was a positive thing to get the two Chiefs of Staff together. It didn't work out very well because the Syrians wouldn't shake hands and they wouldn't eat with the Israelis or really negotiate with them. And as far as the instructions that [Ehud] Barak had, I tried not to

intrude on the relationships between Rabin and his Chief of Staff but I don't think that was a problem. I can see how a historian might regard that as a problem, but the problems were so much deeper. The Syrian Chief of Staff was under such rigid instructions from Assad that he couldn't move at all, so we never got to the issues about how much the withdrawal was. Assad knew that Rabin was prepared to move, whether or not others knew. If Barak was only given partial instructions, or only given partial green light, Assad's guy had a total red light.

Young: So that effective negotiations could only take place at a higher—within—

Christopher: I thought there was some virtue to trying to get the Chiefs of Staff together, they'd be more pragmatic. It turned out not to be a helpful direction. You know, it made so much sense for the military leaders to discuss how far you'd have to pull back from the various borders, or where the lookout points would be. It seemed to make so much practical sense to get them together. But until they were given full authority and a green light, it wasn't productive, unfortunately.

Young: Of course the denouement to this occurs in the second Clinton administration in a sense, that Barak, Clinton and Arafat try to come to some sort of workable compromise. Were you ever involved after that, after Madeleine Albright became Secretary of State? Were you called upon for any advice, on that continuing problem, or—

Christopher: I was kept pretty fully informed by Dennis Ross, but one of the things I tried to be disciplined about was not sticking my nose into—

Young: Not doing a Carter.

[short break]

Christopher: Why don't you go ahead, Jim, I've taken us down—

Young: Well, you've mentioned the Middle East as one thing that ought to be paid attention to from the viewpoint of Clinton's own role of engagement in it. Were there others of that sort that you think you have something to point us in the direction of that would not be obvious?

Christopher: Well, we've talked about the economic dimension of foreign policy but I don't think we've probed that in as much depth as it ought to have from a historian's standpoint, because the President was deeply engaged in every aspect of that, understood it well, pursued it aggressively.

One good illustration of that is the time of the Mexican meltdown, the meltdown at the end of 1994. That all came at the time of probably the weakest point in President Clinton's eight years. He had just lost both houses of Congress, much to everyone's surprise. We'd had the problem in Somalia, his Secretary of the Treasury had just announced his intention to resign.

He had had promises of support on the approach to Mexico from both [Robert] Dole, the majority leader, and the Speaker of the House, Newt Gingrich—Promises they found they couldn't keep.

So the President was confronted with a desperate Mexican situation and there was lots of hostility towards Mexico on Capitol Hill, especially in the new leadership, the new Republican leadership. Nevertheless, confronted with all that, the President decided to gamble 25 billion dollars of America's treasury in order to try to prop up the Mexican economy and keep there from being a run on the Mexican treasury in the very broadest sense of the word. And he did it on the basis of advice from Bob Rubin, another member of his national security team. He went ahead, even though Rubin was saying to him that he didn't know whether 50 billion dollars would be enough—that is, our 25 and 25 from the IMF [International Monetary Fund]. Rubin thought there was about a 65/35 chance that it would be enough and would succeed. The President took that risk, and went ahead, knowing he didn't have support from the new leadership of the House and Senate.

Now, you can't do history in the subjunctive mode, but it is interesting to speculate as what would have happened if he'd not taken the risk. I think that Mexico would be a much weaker place, a much more dangerous neighbor than it now is. That took a lot of presidential courage to do that. He took similar action, though not quite as dramatic, with respect to a possible meltdown in Brazil. As to the President's activity in getting NAFTA passed, I remember sitting in meetings in the White House where some—they will be nameless—White House advisors were saying, "You can't possibly do it, the House of Representatives will never pass it." And the President worked at that and got it, one vote, by one vote, and finally was able to get NAFTA passed. And that set the stage for the approval of the World Trade Organization, the so-called Uruguay round.

Now each one of those, I think, are part of his broader vision of globalization, which, as Strobe says, comes from—much of it comes from his experience as Governor of Arkansas, and seeing how important it was for Arkansas to have an outreach to other markets and get other countries to make use of the manufacturing capabilities in Arkansas. But that whole package of economic issues, and they continued right through his administration, is something that I think in the long term will mean a lot, and meant a lot to our prosperity, sustained our prosperity in that period. The Halifax Summit started a sequence of actions that provided some ultimate reform of the IMF but also more assistance to countries on the verge of chaos. Those things helped us avert a serious international crisis when there were problems in the Far East, in Asia.

I think that more attention should be given to that from the standpoint of history. It played into one of Clinton's great strengths, and that is his understanding of economics. It also played into his reliance on very good advisors, whom we've spoken about here, Bob Rubin in particular. But Gene Sperling and Leon Panetta and other people on whom he relied. Strobe, you want to say anything?

Talbott: Agreed, and I suspect because the point is general manifestations, it will come up in other contexts.

Oberdorfer: I want to ask you about one particular economic thing that sort of puzzled me at the time. That is, with Japan, early on, how there was great frustration with the Japanese. As you mentioned I think this morning, it looked like Japan was about to take over America, bought Rockefeller Center and all the rest and America's going to go down the tubes. One acre of land in Tokyo was supposed to be worth as much as all of California or some such as that.

Christopher: Not California.

Oberdorfer: At any rate, I guess it was the first one of the administration because I remember very well, it was in April of '93, Prime Minister [Kiichi] Miyazawa came to Washington, the first senior Japanese leader to come during the Clinton administration. We invited him to the *[Washington] Post* and he wouldn't come, he had come in the past. I invited him just to meet Kay Graham and myself and he declined to do that. But he said he'd see me because it was my last day before I retired, and he'd just come from the White House. They had a press conference, which I attended. He kept saying he had such a good meeting with the President. The President he saw, I don't know how he said a wonderful meeting. And he had this press conference and Clinton got up, and—we'll have to cut it out of this transcript, I'd say—kicked the hell out of Japan. He recited a whole long list of things that the Japanese were either doing wrong or hadn't done and then threw it in Miyazawa's lap.

And then the National Economic Council gave a briefing in which they brought up the thing that then became the sticking point with the Japanese that they had to do—I forget what the word was, you may remember, it's verifiable results or something like that—in terms of imports of American material and so forth. And Miyazawa kept saying to me, "We told him, we're never going to, we can't, we're not going to have managed trade, we're not going to do this. You may as well forget about it because it's never going to happen."

And sure enough, in some months, all that went away. We never heard any more about whatever that phrase was, which I can't remember. Partly it was obviously that the Japanese economy went into a more difficult period. The American economy came back. But there was the perception that the National Economic Council had sort of taken over foreign policy toward Japan because what they were saying might make economic sense, but it didn't really make—it wasn't possible, it wasn't a possibility, and it really cut across our general relations with the Japanese.

Now that's a kind of particular thing. I'm not sure whether you recall that period or whether you and the Department of State were that much involved in this basically economic diplomacy with the Japanese early on.

Christopher: Well, we felt from the very first that the Japanese had to take some steps within their own economy. They were constantly lecturing us and we basically lectured back saying you have to open up your markets, you have to deregulate your industries, you have to have a more transparent society. So we were pressing them just as they were pressing us.

As you rightly observed, Don, the Japanese falling economy in some ways resolved that problem, or they began to see some reason themselves for doing those things. I don't remember

that particular press conference. It's not beyond my ability to imagine that that happened and there was pressure. There was a great deal of pressure at that time for the Japanese to open their still not very much open economy, and the question was to try to be able to measure the results of when they opened it up.

And Miyazawa's argument—"we can't control our economy, we can't do that"—they seem able to control it in virtually any way that they wanted to. They controlled foreign investment through the Department of Finance as you know, and they seemed to have the ability, enormous ability to influence their own economy. You know, I observed this from my time in private life, to see how much guidance came from MITI [Ministry of International Trade and Industry] to all of their industries. It isn't that I disbelieve Miyazawa, probably formally he was correct, they didn't control their economy. But they guided it, they instructed it, they could have done a lot.

Talbott: Also the Japanese had the chairmanship of the G7 that year, which was real important in a number of other issues that were going on. I wasn't directly involved in those issues either in an economic or the U.S.-Japan bilateral, but G7 was very important to what we were doing with Russia that year and I remember there was a lot of frustration about how much leadership they were really going to be able to show at the Tokyo Summit with these trends that were reversible. I mean the notion of Miyazawa complaining, about being outraged of the notion of managed trade.

Oberdorfer: Did the President, in your observation, find it easier to have a cordial relationship with a guy when the door was closed and then speak more candidly, if you want to use that word, in public? Most people go the other way. I mean, more often leaders are more candid in private and then when they get up in public they try to smooth over any disputes that they have with the particular foreign leader. Was he different in public and private? And which way did it go usually?

Christopher: I guess you're raising a kind of insincerity issue.

Oberdorfer: I don't know insincerity, you know, people don't want to embarrass another—

Christopher: Well, I guess I would say, Don, Japan was a special case. There was so much hostility to the Japanese, so much concern about the Japanese, just as you put it, taking over our country, that he probably felt it was necessary to say the things publicly that he said, but I think he also wanted to establish a personal rapport with Miyazawa. On the whole I found that the President if he had to say something unpleasant to somebody would signal it very clearly in private, and sometimes did what you said, and that is, be tougher in private and try to put the best face on it publicly. So I guess I would say that the Japanese case was a special case in that regard.

I remember one thing that Miyazawa did that I think was very clever. There was a really weird episode that happened when the President was meeting with the Russians. Was that in Vancouver?

Oberdorfer: With the translator's thing?

Christopher: Yes, when the President said to the Russians, "Sometimes the Japanese say yes when they mean no." This was a comment made to the Russians, and the Russian note taker left his or her notes on the table—

Talbott: On the dinner table.

Christopher: And it was picked up by a waiter, who gave it to a Vancouver paper and it created a mini-incident, and the papers were playing it up, especially those who enjoyed making a little fun of the United States. I was in Japan at that time. I met with Miyazawa and we came out and did a press conference and somebody asked him whether this issue bothered him and he said, "No." He said, "The favorite American song in Japan is 'Yes, I have no Bananas.'" It completely defused the issue, I thought. I really enjoyed it.

Talbott: The last time any translator's notes were left around, too. It was clear there were precautions taken.

Oberdorfer: What would he do, just instruct the note taker, "Be sure you've got them, pick them up"?

Naftali: There's a sort of tradition of American delegations leaving classified notes in Canada and the Canadians jumping on them. John F. Kennedy's—Walt Rostow left notes regarding the Canadian Prime Minster in Ottawa, much to the chagrin of the Canadian Prime Minister.

Christopher: He left Russian notes, not ours.

Naftali: I know. But they were somehow able to get somebody to translate them.

Riley: Were there any foreign leaders that the President found particularly opaque or he found unable to figure out what made them tick?

Talbott: I've got one.

Christopher: You go ahead.

Talbott: [Atal Bihari] Vajpayee.

Naftali: The Indian—

Talbott: He had a lot of trouble.

Young: Who was that?

Naftali: The Indian.

Talbott: The Prime Minister of India. I mean that was partly, it was really not substantive, it was much more that Vajpayee has an incredibly slow, soporific, laconic style and Clinton was always kind of trying to kick start him. Opaque? Let's see, Chris, who did he, you saw him with the Chinese.

Christopher: It was a bad first meeting with—

Talbott: Jiang Zemin.

Christopher: Jiang Zemin, yes. Jiang Zemin dealt almost completely in aphorisms and poems and Chinese sayings—

Oberdorfer: This is the APEC [Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation] Summit? Would that have been?

Christopher: Yes. The relationship certainly greatly improved by the time I got out of office, but Clinton found that arming rather than disarming, the fact that Jiang Zemin never would get down to the substance. Now Jiang Zemin was relatively new at that time himself, but that first meeting certainly did not go well. There were shadings. The Balkan trio that I dealt with so much, [Alija] Izetbegovic, [Slobodan] Milosevic, and [Franjo] Tudjman, those were inherently people that— frankly they were not—their level of sophistication was not comparable to what the President would bring to the meeting. They just dealt at a different level and the President found that quite frustrating. Strobe, I don't know if you had any experience with him in dealing with—

Talbott: In those, yes. Well, of course the issues were so impacted too, it's a little hard to separate—I'm trying to think. It is hard to come up with, he was almost in the Will Rogers camp. Almost, not quite.

Riley: Anybody in Europe?

Naftali: What about [François] Mitterrand or [Jacques] Chirac? How do they—

Talbott: Actually, the bilateral relationship between France and the United States wasn't very good, but he and Chirac did okay, it was my impression. It was one of those cases where the personal chemistry was a lot better than the national chemistry.

Naftali: And [John] Major?

Talbott: Major was [inaudible]. He liked Tony Blair better, obviously.

Christopher: Well, Major basically having supported Bush during the campaign pretty openly, I thought with that background the relationship was reasonably good.

Oberdorfer: I wanted to ask you about China, you mentioned Jiang Zemin. The President came in, Clinton campaigned against the "butchers of Beijing" if you remember, very critical of Bush

Sr. for the aftermath of Tiananmen, sending over [Brent] Scowcroft and all the rest. And then early on in the spring of '93 I guess, had this policy regarding MFN [Most Favored Nation]. We'd approve it for one year but next year they have to meet these, make compromises and meet these various conditions, and then they didn't meet the conditions and then the United States went ahead anyway, it's generally thought because of our tremendous economic interest or the economic interests of lots of corporations in China. It certainly looked like a policy reversal, which is not unheard of in American government, but what was your own sense of how that went, stake out this territory and then you move on to something else a year later?

Christopher: Strobe, did you want to say something there?

Talbott: No, no, do you want me to come in on this or, because I missed the—

Christopher: Don, I think that's essentially right, there was a policy reversal and I was caught in the middle of it. In 1993 we agreed to extend MFN, as you say, based upon the conditions, five factors and two required conditions, and by 1994 the question was whether they had complied with the conditions, and it was my responsibility to find out whether or not they had. I made a trip to Japan and told them that I thought they needed to do more.

Oberdorfer: China or Japan?

Christopher: China. Did I say Japan? And that's recounted pretty fully in my book. And the Chinese did not budge. They gave me a very hard time, very tough reception. And when I returned to the United States, I think the policy of conditioning MFN on human rights improvement no longer had any support. The business community had convinced the President that trade for America was a higher value, or perhaps to put it more charitably, that nothing would be accomplished in the field of human rights by denial of trade, and so that became the basic policy. We did not relent on our pointing out problems in the human rights area, which still continue to this day, but nevertheless we did say that we'd no longer condition MFN on the specific improvements.

I would say my own role in that was twofold. First, I declined to, and was not pressured to, find progress where there had not been enough progress, and second, I insisted that we not try to avoid saying that there had been a reversal of policy. I thought it was much better for us to be candid. I made a speech right after the decision was made, saying we no longer would be relying on this conditioning or this coercion to advance the policy, and that we'd try to continue to advance human rights, but not on that basis. And that's the policy that continues to this day.

The Congress every year had had the great drill, as you know, as to whether or not we would continue MFN for China. There are always threats that it would be denied, that the right and the left would coalesce and there would be this evil conspiracy of the left and the right and it would go down to defeat—but MFN for China never came within a hundred votes of being defeated. So there was always some indication as to what the popular view was, if the House of Representatives is a fair litmus test for American public opinion. It's not a bad test; it will do until something else comes along, where you have a well-debated issue. But there certainly was a

switch in our policy. It just did not appear that the Chinese were going to be influenced at all by our own trade policy.

I remember meeting with Li Peng, one of the most difficult meetings I ever had, in which he basically said, he dared us, "Go ahead and deny us MFN and then we'll see who they say lost China."

Oberdorfer: This is a case, this brings up a slightly more generic issue, where at least on its surface it appears that a campaign statement, it wasn't a campaign promise really, because I don't think he ever said anything about exactly what you'd do with MFN, but the whole attitude about the Chinese in the campaign was then adopted in the early days of the administration on this MFN issue. And then later, because of realities, political realities and others, had to be changed. Can you think of other situations where you went from something that was said in the campaign for President and then it got translated into policy and caused difficulties later?

Christopher: Who did you say picked up on that example, at the beginning of the comment you said—

Talbott: It was in the party platform, I think, at the convention.

Christopher: But, Don, I thought you said that somebody picked up on this—

Oberdorfer: No, no, I just said that it, this view about China, the primacy of the human rights issue, whether or not they said tied in at the MFN I don't remember. Strobe, you seem to think it was in the platform, but whatever, something that was a campaign situation before taking office and then got moved without much change into the administration and then turned out not to be workable basically in reality. Were there other instances, I wondered, of this kind of thing.

Young: In foreign policy?

Oberdorfer: Yes, yes.

Young: Or in domestic.

Christopher: Well, the one that I remember—I'm sorry, but I can't accumulate all the evidence for you—arose in connection with Haiti. During the campaign the President, I think, made it fairly clear that he would not stop the boats from Haiti from coming to the United States, and that he regarded it as improper to send them back. Then just after we came into office, or maybe even before we came into office, we had reports from the CIA that there would be as many as 200,000 people coming to the United States in boats if we had the policy of accepting them. So at that point Clinton at least temporarily went back to the Bush policy, despite having criticized it in the campaign.

Young: Was that difficult for Clinton to do, once he was in possession of the facts?

Christopher: Yes, it invoked a big debate.

Young: It was very much in the papers.

Christopher: It was difficult to do. There were some very highly publicized protesters that—I'm trying to remember if that was the subject of Randall Robinson's—

Talbott: Hunger strike.

Christopher: Hunger strike. We had to take various steps to ameliorate the effect of our preventing the people from coming in their boats. It was a very genuine safety issue, how many would have been killed if they all tried to come. But nevertheless, that was a policy reversal and it came despite the strong advocacy of a number of the minority interest groups.

Naftali: I was going to redirect to—I wanted to ask Chris whether you would reflect on Rwanda for a moment. It's not in your book and it would be nice for the record to have your reflections on that tragedy.

Young: Also I think beyond that, on Africa in general.

Christopher: I'd like to have Strobe supplement what I have to say here on Rwanda. I begin by associating myself with what President Clinton said in Africa, that looking back, we all regret that we didn't more fully understand the facts at the time and didn't act more effectively on them at the time. That loss of life is one which, of course, is a deeply tragic one, and as an administration we see that as something that is a matter of regret for us—and since the President said it, I am very glad to associate myself with that same view. I don't mean to depart from that, but the situation was extremely cloudy at the time that that happened.

As I look back on it, it was filled with uncertainty both as to what the facts were and as to whether we could do anything about it. The clarity that people now bring to that issue is the clarity of absolute hindsight. First, this was the fall of 1994. Can anybody help me with the exact dates of that? Anybody have that?

Oberdorfer: I have this long article by Samantha Power, which you may have read. She dug up all kinds of—

Talbott: The key date was the shoot down of the—

Oberdorfer: Of the plane, that was in April, I believe. The two Presidents. Let me check, but I believe that was in April '94.

Young: We have the date now.

Riley: No we don't, it's not in the time line.

Christopher: In any event, I'd like to give you a little picture of—

Young: Please—

Oberdorfer: April 6, 1994.

Christopher: A little picture of what was going on in America at that time. We were deep in the Haiti crisis and we were being pressured constantly to take some action in Haiti, pressured by ourselves and by external events. We were, as always, engaged in the Middle East. We were just coming out of the problems elsewhere in the world, especially in Bosnia, which was a very serious overhang from the prior administration. As far as Rwanda itself, we had evacuated our embassy: Ambassador [David] Rawson, a very brave young ambassador, led his staff out of Rwanda overland, much to our relief. Shortly after April, we'd had a task force operating in the State Department for weeks on end, and we were tremendously relieved to get all of our people out.

We were quite heavily reliant on both the French and the Belgians, thinking that those who had been there for a long time knew that issue best. It turned out that reliance was, as so often happened with our reliance on the Europeans, misplaced. The information that flowed in indicated that there was very intense fighting, but it was hard for us to picture who the fighting was between. Was it between the Hutus and the Tutsis or was it between various elements of the Hutus? And so it was far from clear to us.

We had, during that period as you probably remember, put in, I think, around 2,000 troops and water purification equipment. That mission was accomplished and then pulled out by the Department of Defense, thinking that we had done all the things for which we had a distinct comparative advantage. Thereafter, we really didn't have any moment of decision, at least as far as I was concerned. The fact was that if we sent troops in we would have had some effect, but the Pentagon was never enthusiastic about such an operation and they estimated that a large number of troops would be necessary.

Looking back, I think what I would want to convey is a sense as to how confused and confusing the situation was. The clarity that now comes from people saying, "If we'd sent in 5,000 troops we could have saved X hundred thousand people," was just a non-concept at that time as far as I was concerned. As I was saying to Strobe in another connection, Chip Bohlen had a comment that there is hindsight and then there is hind myopia, and hind myopia occurs when people looking back on a situation fail to realize how complicated and confusing it was at the time. And I think Rwanda, not departing from the regret that I have that we didn't do more, nevertheless, it's a classic case of hind myopia and whether we could have done anything, even if we had been very prescient and tried. Strobe, why don't you—

Talbott: Awfully hard to add to that. I think all the people, even without Samantha Power's help, have thought a lot about that. Speaking only for myself, even anguished about it. I guess I'd make three points, all supplementary to what Chris has said. One is that the Pentagon, generally speaking, and certainly under Bill Perry and John Shalikashvili, deserves huge credit for having made the transition from the Cold War to the post-Cold War, from dealing with the Soviet threat to dealing with the new agenda issues.

It's in the context of that admiration that I would say with respect to Rwanda that the Pentagon was real clear that they didn't want anything to do with intervention in Africa in general and that part of Africa in particular. That was partly because we were less than a year, depending on what time frame we're using for up to the fall, a year away from the Mogadishu debacle and Mogadishu—within 24 hours, Mogadishu had become not a place name, but sort of like Srebrenica it had become a code word for terrible stuff and particularly humiliating and murderous defeat of American soldiers. There was that.

And not unrelated to that, there was in the other part of the world where we were dealing with genocide, i.e. Europe, southeastern Europe, in particular the Balkans, there was a kind of network of nesting, overlapping institutions—local, regional, trans-regional, even global institutions—whose resources and energies could be brought to bear on the problem, which is to say OSCE [Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe], Council of Europe, and of course NATO and its attendant organizations. There was nothing like that in Africa. Chris talked earlier in the conversation about what I agree with him is maybe the single most important, most strategic objective of the Clinton foreign policy, and the most important achievement of the Clinton foreign policy, and that was to help put in place an architecture appropriate to the post-Cold War world. And the part of the world most deficient with regard to structures was Africa. So there was really very little to get your hands on.

Now you add to that a point that Samantha and others make, and that is that Africa tends to be treated in a lot of American thinking as beyond the furthest imaginable perimeter of American vital interests, and you have a situation that is just unfortunately a set-up of what happened. Chris makes the point about the difficulty we had knowing either what was happening or what was likely to happen. He sent me out to Africa, including a brief stop in Bujumbura in November of that year with George Moose (Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs), and I've got to tell you, I had the benefit of an on-the-scene look at the situation and I sure didn't grasp it at the time. I just plain didn't.

Oberdorfer: You mean the killing that had taken place?

Talbott: And what was still going to take place in the future. And there are two ironies here that I guess President Clinton and the rest of us have to live with. One is that I don't think there has ever been a President who was more committed to the notion, sort of the anti-Robert Kaplan view of the world, not to see Africa as the ends of the earth, but to see Africa as part of a community that we're part of, and bringing Africa in. And second, a President who used his presidency to do something about genocide. He deployed NATO to stop genocide, and yet there it is, Rwanda. What can anybody say?

Naftali: Did Kofi Annan play a real role in shaping our approach?

Talbott: He was only—

Naftali: He wasn't Secretary—

Talbott: He was Assistant Secretary General for Peace Keeping.

Christopher: Well he had his own *mea culpa* on this issue. I wouldn't, I certainly wouldn't charge him with having created the problem, it may have been that various people both in our government and out who had some responsibility for Africa might have called attention a little bit more aggressively to that than they did, but I wouldn't—we had our own faults there. Let me put it in a somewhat broader context and say that I think it will always be among the hardest questions, maybe the hardest question for a President and a Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense, which is "What is the test for an interest so vital to us that we will risk American lives for it?"

We were arguing that for a long time. Now, after 9/11 it's easy. Obviously we were invaded, 9/11 is like Pearl Harbor. But when you get out to the far reaches of central Africa, by almost nobody's definition a vital interest except a humanitarian interest, it's very hard to make the case for risking American lives and the case for overriding the Pentagon's resistance to it. This won't be the last time that a President struggles with a humanitarian crisis abroad where it doesn't seem to engage our vital interest except the humanitarian interest, and it's regrettable when we're not able to do everything around the world.

Talbott: Just to tie it in by the way to a contemporary point, look at the adamance of what is coming out of the Bush administration with the regard to the deployment of American troops in the Middle East. Right now, I mean, they're saying almost every 24 hours "never!" But I think that there is a fairly good chance that they're going to get to the point where they have to grasp—

Christopher: Or Afghanistan—

Talbott: Yes, or even more.

Christopher: In Afghanistan, there is resistance to the deployment of American troops, and an understandable resistance.

Naftali: But I understand from your explanation that it wasn't simply a matter of resistance, it was also a matter of imagination or—it was too cloudy to understand. It wasn't simply that you all understood. I mean, if I understood you, it wasn't that you understood what was going on and you just decided that this is not a place where the United States—

There's also that other—no, no, of course not, but the point is, there are two elements to this story. There was this cloudiness. I was wondering, you're speaking for future scholars, and materials will be declassified by then, one would hope, because I suspect that this will be an issue that people will return to when they study this period later on. They want to understand that, the nature of the cloudiness. What should they look for in the record later on? Help them out.

Young: One question there, what was your intelligence like on that? What was going on?

Christopher: Well, it was scattered, and we lacked an embassy there. This is a diversion. What people in the policy-making positions read, among other things, is something called the National

Intelligence Daily, you all know that, it's called the NID. More than 50—I made a study of this once—more than 50% of the items in the NID in the month I studied came from State Department reporting, not from the Agency. So when you're deprived of State Department reporting from an area, things you really trust, it's a big deprivation. We didn't have any State Department reporting, we didn't have an ambassador there who would demystify all of that for us.

And I don't know how to answer your questions. I suppose that people will examine the documentary record, but it's pretty well all out there now and you know, the people who want to make the case point to this dispatch from a *Washington Post* reporter who said he had observed this terrible thing happening, and somebody else said they'd observed it. So there's a lot of data out there that very bad things were happening. I don't know that historians are going to find a lot more there, or to resolve this quite difficult proposition of how you overcome the historic resistance to use American troops in a situation where the facts appear to be cloudy. That's really the issue there. The resistance increases with the cloudiness of the facts.

Talbott: I would add one thought. Africa, alas, is in a uniquely disadvantaged position vis-à-vis American strategic thinking and American expertise. There are several reasons for that, but as a result of that fact, and if it's interesting spending another minute on we can go back over what those reasons are, a couple of unfortunate things happen. One is that there is a core of experts on Africa who actually understand what the difference between a Hutu and a Tutsi is, and boy, I wouldn't want to have to face an oral exam on that question, even after having read Samantha's book. But, they don't tend to be treated as inhabiting the first tier, the second tier or even the third tier of those working on vital American interests. It's considered, I think still, although I'd like to think that in the course of our administration we did something to improve this, but it's considered to be still a little bit of an exotic.

Second, the American historical experience of Africa has also tended to be rather on the fringes of our overall national experience. There are some exceptions to that—the Congo, Angola maybe you could say—but it's no accident that any exceptions you mention were side shows or manifestations of the Cold War. The Hutu, Tutsi, Burundi, Rwanda nexus had nothing to do with the Cold War, and therefore it has been kind of off the scope. So if something, if blips begin to appear on that part of the scope, there are people, very, very good people in the African bureau of the Department of State, which is something of a special category there, and at the CIA, even at the Pentagon—but they're not the sort of people who are likely to run into the vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, or an Under Secretary or Deputy Secretary of State at the water cooler.

Whereas if something similar were happening in Europe, East Asia, even India, Pakistan, especially once you get nuclear weapons into the mix, or Latin America, then it's much more likely to get to the top, and people like Chris, even I, who were saying, "How do we stop genocide in Bosnia? How do we complete the Operation Restore Democracy in Haiti?" are more likely to say, "Okay, that's a lot of work and we're spending 26 hours a day on it, but now we also have to worry about this other thing." Because it's where it was, it was all the more likely to get treated in the way it was.

Oberdorfer: I want to pick up on something that you said earlier, Strobe, in discussing this, in which you mentioned Somalia.

Talbott: You mean Mogadishu?

Oberdorfer: Yes, Mogadishu. There is a belief—and I'd like to ask you both to tell me how much of it is true, how much of it is myth or what you think about it—that the deadly results of what—we now we have a whole movie about this about downing of the helicopter, Black Hawk Down, that horrible day in Mogadishu—was a very formative thing in terms of foreign policy. First place, the shock of it caused the United States to turn around rather rapidly in Somalia. Then there was the incident in Haiti in which the ship, the name of which I don't remember now—

Talbott: The Harlan County.

Oberdorfer: Harlan County.

Talbott: Believe us, we remember.

Oberdorfer: Then there was the sense that for a certain period of time, and maybe a long time, it was the belief that whatever happened, if a single American shoulder was in harm's way it was almost a bar to the United States taking action, because of the emotional reaction to what had happened in Mogadishu—which, I think, I don't want to go into it, but which we all agree was a kind of special circumstance in itself. That as a result of that, there was for a long time a sense of we can't, or won't, do anything involving military force in any peripheral area. Now I don't know if that's true, but again, that's one of those "conventional wisdoms" that the impact of that event on other events down the road from there, including this one, was great. Now is it true or not?

Christopher: I don't think it's true, Don. It certainly had a pervasive effect, but it didn't prevent us from going into Haiti. It didn't prevent us from putting troops in Bosnia. It didn't prevent us from putting troops in Kosovo. So it certainly had its effect. It had a very adverse effect on Les Aspin's career and it lived in the memories of people, but it washed itself out after a time. Now we have, we've gotten ourselves in the frame of mind about antiseptic wars. We conducted Kosovo with almost no loss of American life and we've had the same good luck in Afghanistan. Partly it's good luck, but also it is very careful planning by the Pentagon, much to be admired. I read back to World War II and I think of President Roosevelt having to see maybe 3,000 casualties a day, or some days, 30,000, I don't know how he weathered it. I guess censorship is a partial answer to that.

Oberdorfer: They didn't have television either.

Christopher: I don't underestimate the effect of Mogadishu, but I would also say that it did not stay our hand, it did not paralyze us for the rest of the Clinton administration, and to think that it did is overstating.

Riley: Given the influence of the movie, it's important to have that kind of information on the record because it will loom larger in successive years than it has previously probably.

Christopher: You know, I think I would say Strobe's last point in a little different way, that Africa is a highly specialized place that does not have the resources devoted to it that other places in the world do. And probably that's wrong, and we probably ought to change it, but Africa doesn't have the economic significance as other places, and the economic bureau was not all charged up about Africa. And so I think we depend enormously on the people in the African bureau to alert us to problems there. It's our fault if we don't pay more attention to those problems, but inevitably a Secretary of State or even a President depends very highly on the specialists in a given area and people who have staked out that territory. If the warning bells don't go off or if they do go off and we don't hear them because of our preoccupation with other areas, then tragedies like this happen.

Maybe, Tim, one of the things that historians might examine more carefully in the future is whether the warnings were sounded or if they were sounded and we didn't pay enough attention to them. Despite some of the popular writing on the subject, I feel great regret in the long run on Rwanda, but I don't have any present sense that it was brought to my attention and I didn't act on it. I feel that way somewhat with respect to Bosnia. I should have pressed harder for immediate action and not trusted the Europeans who tried to own the territory for such a long time. I wish I had been a little bit more purposeful early on. But I, for some reason, I don't have that same sense. Maybe historians will be able to clarify that record.

Talbott: Another thing is, in the case of Bosnia, the critics can justifiably say, "You should have done X and you should have done it in time frame Y." And what we did was, we did X, but we did it in time frame Y plus whatever. I think that's what Chris is saying. As I listen to Samantha and others who have worked themselves into considerable righteous passion about this, it is not entirely clear to me exactly what they are saying or scribbling. That is, with their 20-20 or other hindsight, what should we have done when. And I think it might be an interesting exercise for somebody to go back and see, either on his own as an academic analyst or canvassing the critics, come up with an answer to that.

My guess is, it would have been a whole lot earlier that something would have had to be done and would have had to involve a whole lot of troops in the absence of any regional structure to make that possible. What would the political reaction have been in the region? Would there have been a request for this help from sovereign governments? For regional states? What would the position of the SADC [Southern African Development Community] countries have been, Mozambique and South Africa and so forth and so on? And believe me, I'm not trying to make excuses for what we failed to do, and therefore what in a sense we along with others allowed to happen. But it's not a no brainer, exactly what would have been required in order to head this off responsibly.

Oberdorfer: She, going back again to the, not that incident per se, but the backlash of Mogadishu, she makes a lot of it, and I've heard other people mention it, PDD-25 [Presidential Decision Directive], whatever, issued in the aftermath of Mogadishu, which set the conditions, all the conditions for use of American military force, and it is depicted anyway as these sets of

conditions are like [Caspar] Weinberger's conditions, are virtually impossible to meet. They were drawn up—

Christopher: The trouble with that argument is that those conditions were there at the time we did Haiti, they were there the time we did Bosnia, they were there the time we did Kosovo.
Oberdorfer: Did you ignore them or did you find they weren't as constricting as it seems?

Christopher: The latter.

Talbott: Which is, again, Chris is putting it more politely. I don't remember ever sitting in the sit room when we were up against it on Haiti, Bosnia or Kosovo later and having somebody say, "Wait a minute, PDD-25 says here that, you know, you have to have those criteria in place, therefore we can't—"

Oberdorfer: Did they ever bring it up or did they just—

Talbott: Do you remember?

Christopher: I don't remember, no.

Talbott: The PDD ever being invoked?

Young: Well, there's the underlying dilemma, which both Strobe and Chris talked about, which is, even if you have all the facts, you still have a problem about a genocide policy, because of the various factors you mentioned. Under what conditions is it acceptable to overlay the situation with American force? To what extent would force even be effective? I think, Russell, when you say this issue is going to come up again, because we haven't seen the last of genocide, the experience of this administration will be studied a lot, for the lessons it teaches also. Steve?

Knott: Yes, could I just throw out—Don mentioned Mogadishu and the impact that that may or maybe did not have on your thinking about the use of force, but also part of the conventional wisdom that first year or two was that there was just a bit of a frosty relationship between the Clinton White House and the military. I realize this is outside of your particular area, but did you ever see any evidence of this having an impact on President Clinton? Was it something he was concerned about? There was the gays in the military issue. There was supposedly some incident with a young White House aide who insulted a general, or something along those lines. All of these things were in the press at that time. Could you, do you have any comments on that, was it something that bothered the President?

Christopher: Well, you covered a lot of background with a very well informed question. I would say that as long as Colin Powell was in office—that is, the first eight months—that he had a dominant effect on the relationship. He had so much experience, he was so highly respected and he was such a big force in the situation room. His position was consistently against the use of American troops. And, you know, the slogan "We fight only large wars" is not one attributed to him, but it's a fair reflection of his attitude.

Now when [John M.] Shalikashvili came in and Bill Perry soon thereafter, I think the relationships with the Pentagon were greatly improved and we all worked with Shalikashvili in a very friendly teamwork attitude. I can't speak to the relationship between the White House and other members of the Armed Forces, but I certainly can speak to regular meetings with Shali once a week, and with people who would sit in for him occasionally when he wasn't there, including people like Joe Ralston, and I did not find a hostility that some in the press wrote about coming off the gays in the military. I am sure there were military officers, just as human beings and as people who did not vote for him, coming off the draft issues and so forth, who had a lot of skepticism, but I did not see it affecting the relationships at the level where I dealt.

I had a military advisor on every one of the umpteen trips I took, a senior military officer. One of them is currently chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who was my military advisor and traveled with me and jogged with me, and those people could not have been more constructive, helpful and friendly. So I just have to exempt myself from the press writing about the tensions between Clinton and the military.

Talbott: Me too. I never encountered what you're describing. I had, at my level, smaller airplanes, sometimes commercial airplanes, but I also traveled with military guys and saw the same thing Chris is describing: total support and cooperation.

Riley: I want to ask one follow up about Rwanda. It seems to me that one of the places where the alarm bells sometimes go off that tell you what has risen in the national interest is public reaction in the United States at a given time. Were those alarm bells were going off with respect to Haiti? You mentioned Randall Robinson—I don't recall that kind of reaction developing with respect to Rwanda and I thought I would throw the question out. Was there any kind of organized effort within the civil rights community or among places where you might usually get those kind of signals? If not, that seems to be a focal piece of evidence about the difficulties of getting something that complex to get presidential attention.

Christopher: Not that I know of, Russell. It may be, on Tim's question, maybe somebody will research that. I never felt any pressure from Capitol Hill, for example, that we ought to send American troops. The public still probably haven't sorted out the Hutus from the Tutsis, much less that it was a particular element of the Hutus who were responsible for this, and that we couldn't identify it with all the Hutus. So I guess the answer to that as far as I was concerned, that pressure was not coming and there was none of the rapid fire CNN every night leading the evening news. Now I'm sure people can go back and pick out fragments from *Washington Post* reporting, a good reporter here, a good reporter there, ringing the bell and stringing that together, but in the broad context of the reporting, I don't remember it.

Somebody wanted to talk about Africa more generally and I wanted to make this point, Jim, we found the architecture inadequate in Africa. The OAU [Organization of African Unity] is a relatively weak organization and remains so, and so we developed a new concept, toward the end of the Clinton administration, under the urging of Tony Lake, who has always taken a special interest in Africa. He has taken an interest in Africa, and even after he got out of office, he has taken a special interest in Africa. He urged the creation of an Africa Rapid Reaction Force. This would be a force whose logistics and funding would come from the United States and the West,

but the soldier power would come from African countries, thinking that was the only way to really make it acceptable. And when I made my trip to Africa in 1996, I had as one of the principal purposes, in every country, to probe their willingness to join, or interest in an Africa Rapid Reaction Force. Frankly I found the reaction quite disappointing. First, there remained—this is in 1996 and I think there's been some recent improvement—but each country had a sovereignty policy and they were not about to get involved in some other country in Africa. If there were problems in the next door neighbor, well those were problems for the next door neighbor to deal with.

I was surprised to get to South Africa and meet with [Nelson] Mandela and have Mandela say, "You know, we can consider the idea but it would be much better if it came from the United Nations, and that it would be a United Nations force." And he did not suggest the idea of having an Africa Rapid Reaction Force. So we still don't have an Africa Rapid Reaction Force, and before we can get American troops to Africa and trained to do something, an awful lot of deaths could occur. So we don't yet have the architecture in Africa that we need and it's not for want of trying.

That may not be the perfect idea. There may be some better idea, but the idea of the logistics and the funding coming from the West, that is the United States and Europe, and the personnel coming from various African countries, is still, I think, probably the generally right idea for an Africa Rapid Reaction Force.

Another thing I would say about Africa is the importance of disaggregating it. People sometimes asserted to me, which was true, that I had not made as many trips to Africa as I should have and I plead guilty on that. It's for the same reason that we've discussed here in other contexts. On the other hand, if I was just wanting to play statistical games, I probably went to Africa twenty times if you count north Africa. So the notion of thinking that you can compare Algeria, and Egypt and Morocco with sub-Saharan Africa is just a very misleading concept. We have to get our thinking better about that. It's clear that sub-Saharan Africa and the AIDS issue, which I alluded to in one of my earlier remarks, is one of the great endemic problems of the world and needs to be addressed in those terms.

Young: Should we talk about Bosnia?

Christopher: Fine.

Young: There's another sticky one, where action was taken, though there was a delay.

Christopher: Right.

Young: You're saying that some action should have been taken earlier. Is this an example of an issue that involves genocide that is manageable, in part, because there is something of an architecture in place? Though I read your emphasis on depending on the Europeans, hoping the Europeans would take a larger role and then discovering that they were not going to. And also your words that this was the kind of issue that could not be resolved without the United States

participation. Do you want to tell us about that? Is that well understood in the press, in the reports, or is there more disconnect between conventional wisdom and reality?

Christopher: When we came into office, we came with a concern about Bosnia but if you recall, it had been identified by our predecessor as a place where they didn't have a dog in the fight. And I think that Congress either generally speaking felt that way or felt that the risks were great of our getting bogged down in a quagmire—the Vietnam syndrome—

Young: Vietnam—

Christopher: The Vietnam syndrome was really in play. The Balkans became almost a swear word for quagmire. As you know, I made a trip to Europe in May of 1993 in which we had a proposal for the Europeans, which was summarized in shorthand as "lift and strike." Lift the arms embargo so we could arm the Bosnians, and if somebody tried to take advantage of the lifting to take action before the Bosnians could be armed, we would use air power. I consulted with the Europeans on that and was told that they were either strongly against it or just against it. That was about the range of opinion. Now, that was a trip that widely had been criticized and perhaps with some justification.

The trip was haunted by the fact that the day I took off there was announced an agreement, the Vance-Owen people announced an agreement under which there would be elections permitted and the problem could somehow be resolved and the Serbs would agree to resolve it. We never had much confidence in that proposed agreement, but nevertheless, wherever I went in Europe they would say, "Well, we're against your idea," and I'll tell you why they were against it in a minute. But they would also say, "Look, we're on the verge of an agreement in Bosnia." Whether the trip would have been different now—the reasons the Europeans were against it quite often boiled down to the fact that we have troops there in a peacekeeping role, and if you start striking, those troops are going to be turned into hostages. And that was a theme that we heard repeated over and over again to us. Our troops are there—parenthetically, they weren't doing very much—but nevertheless, if you begin striking in this lift-and-strike proposal, that they'll become hostages.

Other opposition simply was from the British, who were really in principle opposed to the use of force in the settlement of that issue. So I came back and reported to the President and the Vice President, on a Saturday morning meeting that I shall not soon forget, that the reaction in Europe was negative and the only way that it could be turned around was for the President to announce he was going to do it and say basically get on board and follow me.

There had been a sea change in the atmosphere in Washington from the time I'd left, to the time that I returned. In the course of one week attitudes had shifted. The people who in the "sit" room had favored the lift-and-strike course did not speak up. I assumed that meant that the President had sent a different signal by that point. But our attitude at that point changed from pursuing this lift-and-strike idea, which, as I say, could only have been done by the use of a lot of presidential currency. The attitude now was once again to try to rely on negotiations and to try to contain the struggle to Bosnia, not let it spread to the rest of Europe. And so, as we relied on the Europeans and their peacekeeping role, over time that became less and less palatable, less and less—

Young: When you returned and gave this Saturday morning report which you shall not forget, the President and Vice President were in on that meeting, and there was a pretty clear—

Christopher: Nobody supported lift-and-strike—I said that I thought we should stay the course, but I emphasized that what it would take was the kind of presidential commitment—

Young: Why do you suppose there was that reaction, negative reaction to that?

Christopher: That gets into psychoanalysis, I don't—There have been various things rumored and reported about that. There is also Les Aspin's report that our policy was going south. I really don't know what had happened, but clearly something had happened and we turned once again to reliance on the peacekeeping forces and on making those more effective. We went through this process of a contact group in Europe, long meetings that didn't seem to go anyplace until finally the dramatic events in Srebrenica caused us to say that whatever the cost, however much we might anger our allies, we could no longer depend upon them, that we were going to get it done either with or without them. They had finally reached the point where they were prepared to go along with that, and that resulted in the extensive bombings in September of 1995, followed by Dayton.

After Srebrenica, there was that series of events in which we committed ourselves in the London conference to provide substantial and effective bombing if there were an attack on any of the safe areas, a completely new and different policy, one in which there would be no U.N. trigger to pull, only the U.S., only the NATO trigger, and NATO was prepared to pull it and did pull it. But, Jim, you may have some more precise questions as to how we got through that period.

Young: The U.N. trigger wasn't reliable, was it?

Christopher: Well, it was only reliable in the sense that they would never pull it. We had a couple of instances of pinprick bombing, but that's all that [Boutros] Boutros-Ghali and NATO officials would agree to and they would not agree to the additional use of force within Bosnia itself, non-air power force.

Riley: One of the things that historians will be trying to untangle during this period is the relationship of this to the ongoing process of union building in Europe and the expansion of European institutions. I'm sure that this is something that you've taken an interest in, Strobe, and I wonder if you could comment on the complexities of trying to encourage effectively European expansion with Russia off to one side and then the problem that we've got in the heart of Europe, southern Europe, with this particular conflict and our lack of unity with Europe over the way we'd respond to that particular challenge.

Talbott: A couple of big issues there. One goes back to our earlier discussion about institutions, their missions and their functions. I think Chris has, both in print and what he said here today, gone not only as far as he should go, but I think maybe farther than he should go in taking on, acknowledging that we could have done more sooner. The issue of hindsight myopia comes up again here.

As I put my own mind back to that period, what strikes me is that we were really moving into terra incognita, strategically and geopolitically. We had a region of the world that was undergoing a profound transformation, much of it for better—the collapse of Communism—but some of it for worse—collapse of countries into violence. We had institutions, the most important of which was NATO, and we understood in theory that NATO, in order to justify its continued existence, needed to adjust itself to doing entirely new kinds of missions not imagined by Dean Acheson when he was present at the creation.

But all of a sudden we had a situation that required us to make that abstraction practical on the ground in real time, and I guess what may sound like a defensive or cynical thing to say, but I mean it more descriptively, is no wonder it took two years. In any event, we did it.

As for the connection between the two enlargements, that is, the European enlargement and the NATO enlargement, they were both based upon the same premise, which is that this thing called Europe was actually always itself a kind of abstraction, and during the Cold War—you know, if we had five days rather than a couple of hours, we could talk about what Europe has meant down through the ages going back to the myth of Europa—but in the Cold War, Europe essentially meant western Europe as a big hunk of real estate where Renaissance and Enlightenment ideals and ideas had been put into practice and government structures. Then there was eastern Europe, which was captured and imprisoned.

Then the idea was that with the collapse of communism, Europe could be Europe again, a broader geographical scope that would include—and here it gets a little bit debatable—Russia, but certainly include central Europe and even the Balkans. And yet, there was something going on in the Balkans which was atavistic, took us back to the worst mass killing since World War II and so forth and so on. The European Union, if it was going to expand, would bring into its bosom countries that had been marginalized and brutalized and deprived of all of these positive influences for the fifty years, if not longer, of being under one totalitarian regime or another. But it was quite clear in the minds of the principal European leaders, first and foremost Helmut Kohl, that that wasn't going to happen. That is, central Europe wasn't going to be brought into Europe and the EU wasn't going to expand unless NATO expanded. And NATO wasn't going to expand unless the United States made it expand. Basically said, going back to what Chris said earlier in another context, "This is what's going to happen, come on everybody, let's get together and make this happen."

So that was one linkage. NATO had to expand for the EU to expand and that was necessary if the fissioning of old, unworkable, communist states into ethnic microstates that were going to be at each other's throats was going to give way to positive integration of the kind that's going on in the Iberian peninsula and elsewhere in western Europe.

The second thing had to do, of course, with Russia. There was another abstraction out there in the late '80s, or certainly in the early '90s, and that is that Russia was no longer the enemy of NATO, it was a partner of NATO. Russia and NATO could work together in dealing with post-Cold War challenges and guess what? Sooner than any of us would have liked, and more acutely

and more dangerously than any of us would have liked, we had an opportunity to prove that proposition in the Balkans.

So, to wrap it up, I see the three issues—the deteriorating security situation in the Balkans, the strategic rationale for the expansion of Europe to include southeastern Europe, and the need to develop a partnership between NATO and Russia—all coming together with the Balkans as both the incentive and as the test case for success.

Christopher: Strobe, I might add to that by saying that along the way, Russia was unhelpful in connection with Bosnia. They were having troubles internally and those internal problems would only be aggravated if the people who were loyal to the Serbs within Russia felt that Russia was being associated with the Bosnian cause. And so, in the contact group meetings where [Andrei] Kozyrev and his colleagues represented Russia, they were a constant thorn. They were never supportive of the use of force until the very end, when of course, Bosnia provided a mechanism for Russia and the United States to show that they could work together.

So it was not only the faintheartedness of the Europeans, their unwillingness to put their troops at greater risk, but the resistance and opposition of Russia who, for other reasons, we wanted to try to include, that was an impediment to moving along this process.

One thing, gentlemen, maybe you have some more questions on Bosnia. I want to change the subject, but only slightly.

Young: Please do, because we're getting close to the time where it's time for you to take a walk.

Christopher: I wanted to say that I think the historical record ought to give Clinton a lot of credit for NATO expansion. It would not have happened without him, and it would not have happened nearly as rapidly without his pushing for it. It's hard to remember how strongly aligned the intellectual forces on the eastern seaboard were in opposition to the expansion of NATO, starting with [George] Kennan, but down through the newspapers in the East. They all thought that NATO could not be expanded without disrupting the US-Russian relationship, and they thought that was the higher value. Clinton would not be deterred. He saw, his goal, as I said earlier, was the unification of Europe and he thought that moving to the center of Europe with NATO was essential and that did not need to cause an eruption in Russia.

Now I think we can thank Clinton's relations with Yeltsin, which were bought at such high cost in terms of time and disruptiveness, nevertheless made possible the expansion of NATO. When I brought Dick Holbrooke back to be Assistant Secretary for European Affairs, feeling that our European affairs needed a more aggressive approach, I brought him back with two thoughts in mind. One was Bosnia to be sure, but the second was NATO, and Dick deserves a lot of credit in his way for taking a very aggressive role in pressing for the expansion of NATO and getting it on the agenda for the semiannual meetings of the NATO council and just driving forward the timetable that meant by the end of 1996 we were clearly on track for an expansion of NATO and an expansion in a way that permitted an overarching relationship with Russia. So I think in the broad strokes, Clinton's role in expanding NATO and giving it a new mission, or a new sense of

mission, preventing it from decaying, is something that ought to go down in the record for his historical achievements.

Young: I remember very well the parade of Eastern anti's on this, and that year at the Miller Center, many of them were coming out here to give forums and it was just talk after talk, "NATO: should it be expanded?" The vote was overwhelmingly no in all of these, in most of these forums and seminars by visitors that were coming here. I don't want to prolong this because I know it's time for us to take a stretch. Also at various points during this period I had the unpleasant experience of hearing Clinton interpreted through foreign broadcasts in foreign countries, largely through CNN or something like that, and a constant theme, no matter what he did, the Bosnia figure here and other things as well, is that everything is driven by his domestic policy, his domestic political interests. It was truly amazing. What was a subtext of many of the American press was the main theme I was hearing wherever I went in China, or elsewhere, that's what we were hearing from CNN and others. It really was quite extraordinary.

Christopher: Jim, on that point, I think quite often the role that Clinton played in expanding NATO is discounted here in that he was being a toad toward the Polish vote or Hungarian vote or whatever vote you might want to say. I say, we should never discount domestic factors in decisions, I think they play an entirely proper role, but I never saw any signs of that. The first time I ever talked to Clinton about the expansion in NATO, which was in 1993, he was crystal clear that he saw it in terms of the unification of Europe and as a vital step toward the unification of Europe.

Young: This was a comment on how some conventional wisdom, overseas version, might get started.

Talbott: Yes, but it's not just overseas. It persists to this day and I suppose it can't be dislodged at least in the near term.

Young: Well—

Naftali: Can I just—on that point, there is one element to the anti-argument that proved to be wrong, but one point they made was that there would be an effect on Russian domestic politics, and that Russia was an unstable weak state and that this might have an effect that would be deleterious to the development of democracy in Russia. It proved not to be the case. Was that luck? Or had they just misjudged the nature of Russian domestic politics at that point?

Talbott: I think much more the latter. I mean, you know the old adage in Washington folk wisdom, "where you stand is where you sit." And during the year in question, Chris had me sitting in an office that was responsible for primarily Russia. Therefore I was particularly sensitive to the concern, the danger, that NATO enlargement would jeopardize something of immense strategic importance to the US and the world, which was that Russia would stay on course. And the Russians, of course, picked up on this as a powerful argument being used by the anti-enlargement people and did everything they could to affirm it and amplify it and so forth and so on.

And I just have to tell you, I never found it persuasive for several reasons. Well, actually, let's start with the right thing. It never struck any of us working on this, as justifiable to give Russia a veto, as it were, over something, if it was otherwise the right thing to do. And by the way, there are every bit as many people living in Central Europe and in that band of countries that stood to get into NATO someday as in Russia itself, and eventually there will be more people there because the Russian population is declining.

But on the practical merits or demerits of that argument, there was a lot of evidence, including some that came from confidential sources, i.e. intelligence sources, that this issue of NATO enlargement did not have a whole lot of resonance or valency outside of the Moscow political arena. There was a good deal of polling that showed that in fact this was not a big deal for the average Russian. They weren't going to vote for [Vladimir] Zhirinovsky or [Gennady] Zyuganov against Yeltsin or [Yegor] Gaidar on the basis of whether NATO enlargement was going forward, they had a lot of other issues that mattered much, much more to them.

Second, there was the question, the Russians could turn it into a self-fulfilling problem. That is, if they continued to do what they were doing a lot of in '93, which is, "if you don't do what we want, we'll blow our brains out." And that argument got to them after a while. You know, we spent a lot of time—Chris did it with Kozyrev, Clinton did it with Yeltsin—basically saying, "You can set the tone of this thing, we're not going to." And we did slow the process down, by the way, we deliberately held off the enlargement of NATO until after Yeltsin was safely reelected, but making it absolutely clear that it was going to happen and it was going to happen early in the second term to both guys, so let's work together to put it into a framework which emphasizes the cooperative and de-emphasizes the dangers associated with it.

Young: Thank you very much, it's time for a rest. We'll have dinner—

April 16, 2002

Young: … the final session of the Warren Christopher-Strobe Talbott oral history interview. Here is what we'd like to do, the respondents consenting. Don has a couple of questions on specific issues, one concerning Taiwan, one concerning Korea. We thought we'd proceed after that to a broader brush portrait or picture of your term in the Clinton presidency, the Clinton presidency itself.

Specifically, we'd like to hear more about the Secretary's relations with Congress, or the State Department's relations with Congress. How that changed or didn't change much with the '94 elections and the Republican ascendancy in Congress, some observations on relations with the press. And then finally, some guidance for future researchers and scholars about what they should pay attention to in trying to understand and figure out this presidency. And not least, your own reflections on your tenure as one of those many chances of a lifetime that you mention in

your book. Your greatest satisfactions, your greatest disappointments, and so on. So if that's okay we'll begin with Don.

Oberdorfer: Let me first say I found in your book, *Chances of a Lifetime,* the most gripping part of it for me was the 1978 visit to Taiwan and that harrowing experience in a car when you were bringing—not the bearer of bad news, but having to officially present the bad news about the normalization.

You mentioned in the book, and I don't know that you might have mentioned it glancingly yesterday, the situation in the Taiwan strait in which the United States sent in two air craft carriers, battle groups, when the PRC [Peoples' Republic of China] was sending cheating missiles around Batwar but one of the points of my interest, I guess because I wrote about it after I retired from the *Post*, was what led to it, which was the visa to the United States by Lee Teng-hui, the Taiwan leader, over the great objections of the People's Republic.

Just—I'm sure you have this all in mind, but just to refresh your memory, at the time they were anxious to push Lee Teng-hui and then somebody, I'm sure way below your pay grade, made a decision in May, 1994, that he couldn't leave his airliner in Honolulu on a transit stop, which infuriated the Taiwanese and their friends in Congress. They applied for the visa, as I understand it, you made it clear that the United States was not disposed to grant the visa. That Congress—after the 1994 election, there was all kinds of push, they hired Jody Powell's law firm and there was a big push to get the visa granted. And in the end my impression, and the impression of at least some, was that Clinton, who had visited Taiwan as Governor, more than any other place on earth other than the United States, was not averse to granting this visa, and he sort of liked the idea. Anyway, that's the situation and I don't know, I'd like to just ask you what you recall of all this and how difficult it was to have an administration policy on the one hand and then this almost unanimous push from the newly elected Republican Congress on the other. And the President, I don't know where he was, somewhere in between.

Christopher: Well, you begin by having to understand that Taiwan is the most neuralgic issue of all for the Chinese, even more than human rights. The Chinese are supersensitive to Taiwan. And however good the relationships with China might be on other fronts, Taiwan is always a very sore point. The obligations of the United States under the Taiwan Relations Act, which was passed shortly after normalization, create a sort of continuing tension and pressure, especially because of the Taiwan Relations Act commitment on the part of the United States to supply arms to Taiwan, defensive arms to be sure.

On the other hand, the dichotomy between unofficial relations with Taiwan and official relations with China seems to have worked very well from a practical standpoint. The economy of Taiwan has greatly benefited from that and the relationship has strengthened. Nonetheless, there has been continuing strong support in the Congress for Taiwan and for United States support for Taiwan. In part this, I think, results from a very, very efficient public affairs and lobbying campaign by Taiwan. Since I've been out of office, I've been struck by how comprehensive their lobbying effort is. If I make a speech around the country, it's regularly attended by one or two representatives from Taiwan who come up and very politely introduce themselves. They're all

over the map. I can imagine if you're somebody in Congress, how attentive they are to your needs and wishes.

So although the pressures from Congress increased after the infamous 1994 election, the pressure was always there, even before the 1994 election, and it took the form in this instance of very strong pressure to allow the President to leave Taiwan to attend his college reunion at Cornell. That puts it in the most generous, palatable form. That issue came up to us. Up to that time we had permitted President Lee to make transit stops, with some unevenness, but not to make official visits to the United States or to see officials of the United States when he came here. This request for a visa to attend his college reunion was presented, a visit in its most attractive form, that is, when somebody says they're coming back for a private purpose that was quite fundamental but easy to understand, and Congress expressed its views in no uncertain terms on that subject. Congress, by overwhelming votes, I think it was 98 to 1 in the Senate and three hundred and something to almost zero in the House of Representatives, urging the administration to—

Oberdorfer: 396 to zero.

Christopher: 396 to zero. Overwhelming in both Houses. And so we confronted that issue and I very well recall the day at the foreign policy breakfast that this issue was discussed—that was some indication as to how high it got on the radar screen that it was discussed at one of the meetings between the foreign policy team, that is the Secretary of Defense, the National Security Advisor and so forth. The Ambassador to the U.N. also attended those meetings, I should have mentioned yesterday.

I also recall that it was discussed between Lake and Perry and myself and all of us felt that this was an appropriate visit because of the private and sentimental nature of it, and so recommended it to the President. I don't think we were trying to—I wasn't trying to second guess or anticipate what the President would do, we simply thought that the visit was appropriate in those terms. And then things started getting off the track very badly. In particular because President Lee violated the strict terms of the visit. We had prescribed it as a private visit in which he was not to make public speeches and not to try to use or misuse the visit. From the very start he did.

First he took a little extra time, he lingered a little longer than he should have. Second, he made a very public speech at his reunion, a highly political speech. He used it to say a lot of talismanic words about the independence or near independence of Taiwan, and quite predictably the Chinese erupted. But they erupted much more severely than we'd anticipated and I think that that was something—we had misjudged the reaction, although perhaps not misjudged it if the visit had been limited the way we tried to limit it. So we had (A) the granting of the visit; (B) the abuse of the conditions; and (C) a very strong, or stronger than anticipated, Chinese reaction, in which they called their Ambassador home and kept him home for some time over this.

It was an unfortunate chapter that we had to try to set about resolving. After the Chinese withdrew their Ambassador, I made a speech which re-stated, reinforced, the basic principles of the Shanghai communiqué and indicated that this visit did nothing to change our basic sense of the "one China" policy.

I was planning to meet with Qian Qichen, the Chinese foreign minister, at a meeting of foreign ministers that was taking place in Brunei, and I did not look forward to the meeting. But when the meeting came about, it turned out that Qian Qichen had not only read the speech that I had made reinforcing the "one China" policy but he had seen a video of it, and that at least in his mind, had defused the issue. We did not have the difficult meeting that I had anticipated over it. Indeed we turned to substantive issues and so the matter was defused, although not completely resolved. It was some time, however, before their Ambassador returned.

There's a footnote to this that I've mentioned before and should mention again. Prior to the time of the visit, I had met with the Chinese foreign minister, Qian Qichen, and we had discussed this visit and there arose in that conversation a misunderstanding of what the Chinese regarded as a misleading statement by me. I had said to Qian Qichen that we did not intend to change our basic policies or our policies on visits, but that he had to understand that Congress played an important role in our country and that there seemed to be mounting pressure in Congress to do this. I didn't say this, but in my own mind I was concerned that if we denied the visa that Congress might do what they sometimes do and that is take an even sharper action and the President might have had great difficulty in vetoing it.

In any event, Qian Qichen heard the first part of my statement, that we didn't intend to change our policy, and didn't register—or I didn't fully communicate—the second part, that we always had to take into account, in our tripartite government, the influence of Congress. And he felt that—he never quite said it directly, but the Chinese seemed to feel that they had been misled by my statements. So when I met with him, I think we got that behind us and it never interfered with our personal relationship after it. But I think it's a good example of how careful American Secretaries have to be to communicate with great precision, and also how difficult it is for foreign governments to understand our tripartite governmental structure. In so many countries of the world, the executive is the be-all and end-all, and this isn't the first time I've confronted this problem

It was very hard for the Algerians in the hostage rescue, the hostage situation, to understand the importance of the judiciary, why we couldn't do certain things, that the Courts might step in and prevent us from doing things. There is a persistent misunderstanding around the world that our executive is not all powerful.

Oberdorfer: In the Taiwan case, State Department officials, according to a less than brilliant article by me, in October 1995, had heard rumors that Clinton was unhappy about denying the visa. Then the thing came out because Chuck [Charles] Robb had a meeting with the President—and it wasn't on this subject, I guess it was a round robin or some typical type meeting at the White House—and he raised the issue with Clinton and said that we ought not to deny this visa. And it became clear in the conversation that Clinton agreed with him and then he went out and said this and the whole thing kind of took off from there. But what was Clinton's role in this? Did he have any role in it, and do you think he had any particular views about Taiwan, having visited Taiwan so much before he was President?

Christopher: Well, that evokes several thoughts on my part. First, the President certainly did have a role in it and a recommendation went forward to him from Lake, Perry and myself to grant the visa with these conditions that were then abused. But that was an easy call for the President at that point. There was no dispute among his advisors, and so he didn't have to weigh in and overrule us or didn't have to send the signal that—at least from my standpoint, there was no signaling. Maybe there was to somebody else, but not to me.

Second, on the meeting with Senator Robb, he wouldn't be the first person who has come out of a meeting with President Clinton thinking the President agreed with him when perhaps something short of that was actually the fact. President Clinton had a great quality, the quality of empathy. I didn't know in advance how he felt about it, although I do think that the President had been friendly, concerned about Taiwan. On the other hand, when it came to the crunch on something that was really substantive and important, he was as determined to send a signal to Taiwan to stop agitating as he was to China to stop threatening.

Strobe, do you have any insights into the President's view on Taiwan?

Talbott: Nothing that would add to what you've said.

Christopher: I suppose the President was subject to the same skillful lobbying efforts of the Taiwanese as I was and everybody else in Washington, and I suppose especially people who were elected officials.

Oberdorfer: Let me ask you—

Young: You had a question on Korea?

Oberdorfer: Korea, yes. It is evident in my book and Secretary Perry has said it many times since then, it appears that we came close to military conflict with North Korea in 1994 before Jimmy Carter stepped in. Not because the United States was going to attack North Korea, I mean that's around but I think—my own view is that's wrong. But we were just about, if you remember, to send a huge amount of reinforcements out to that area because the North Koreans had said—at the U.N. sanctions are equivalent to war and our military had taken it seriously and was sending aircraft carriers, battle groups and planes and everything else. You all are sitting there in the Cabinet room when he's about to sign off presumably on this big military move, when Carter calls in from Pyongyang and says that he has talked to Kim Il-sung and Kim Il-sung has agreed to inspections and everything else.

From your standpoint, how close do you think we came to some kind of conflict with North Korea? And do you have any reflections, this was the end of a year of back and forth with North Korea over their nuclear inspections, inspections of their nuclear facilities at Pyongyang, do you have any reflections on that whole situation that developed and how it was handled by the United States?

Christopher: Don, I would not characterize us as being close to war, but Secretary Perry was clear that if the North Koreans went ahead with their plutonium program, that he would have to

recommend a considerable deployment of American assets, which of course is within the discretion of the Secretary of Defense, and he would have set about doing it. So those things that you mentioned, such as deploying fighter squadrons from Japan, or two of them from Japan, were one aspect of that.

I think that critical importance needs to be placed on negotiations that went forward under Bob Gallucci's leadership, and the role that those played, and the role that we played in the National Security Council in directing those negotiations. President Carter's intervention there was essentially an introduction to the negotiations, not a resolution of the problem. I think that the foreign policy team gave consistently sound directions to Bob Gallucci and I think the resulting agreement, or points of agreement, with North Korea was a very important step forward.

There was an interesting aspect of that, and that is the consistent Republican criticism of that agreement but never to the point of wanting to overturn it. I testified in Congress, I suppose three or four times on that subject and was severely berated by the Republicans, especially Senator [Addison Mitchell] McConnell, about the agreement, insisting what an abrogation of our responsibilities it was. But when it came to the end of the day, the Republicans were never prepared to take any steps to overturn it. They enjoyed criticizing it, and to this day, that same situation seems to exist. That agreement, so much damned and condemned, has survived and I think the most recent information is that President Bush has said that negotiations for a rapprochement between North and South Korea could proceed on the basis of that agreement continuing in effect. I may have the latter fact slightly inaccurate, but generally speaking I think that's—

Talbott: That's exactly what Secretary Powell said at the session of the trilateral commission I mentioned to you coming down.

Christopher: Interesting. Strobe, why don't you spell out—

Talbott: Just exactly that: their having come into office early on and in effect said rather defiantly that they were going to pull the plug on this set of arrangements, they have now come around to a position that is in substance one of continuity. Now there were some intervening developments including former President Bush having Don Gregg send a memo to new President Bush. Secretary Powell pointed to this fact that Chris just mentioned as evidence that the North Koreans were getting over their upset at being made a member of the "axis of evil," but of course the subtext was it was a reaffirmation on the part of the Bush administration for continuity with Kim Jong Il.

Oberdorfer: What they did recently was that the President said that he could not certify, as he's required to do under the Congressional legislation involved with this, that North Korea is meeting its obligations under this agreement. But then, in the next breath, he said that he would use his waiver, national security waiver, which is also written in the law that he doesn't have to certify. So he took a position but then, in the next breath, took away the force of that position by using his national security waiver. So it's sort of like what you are talking about. Rhetorically, in a sense, he's condemning it, or saying he can't certify that they're meeting their obligations but saying we'll continue it because we're going to use our national security waiver to do it. So it's a

kind of two—how do you account for this two-level response on the part of those who were critics?

Christopher: You're asking me to explain somebody else's actions and I—

Oberdorfer: But how do you interpret that?

Christopher: I interpret it as they enjoy the political advantage of denouncing the agreement but nevertheless thought that it had enough merit that they didn't want to take responsibility for overthrowing it. On its face the agreement can be portrayed in a politically disadvantageous way to those who negotiated the agreement, which basically says that we will furnish them two light water reactors if they discontinue their plutonium program, and which has an element of a payoff for stopping their plutonium program. However, it has a very rational basis in that it substitutes a safer form of technology for a less safe form of technology and is a good investment on our part.

But it was a tremendous frustration for me and I think my colleagues in the administration as to how difficult Congress made it for us to provide a very small contribution to the program. These light water reactors will be paid for largely by South Korea and Japan, and the United States contribution was really quite modest. But Congress put us through painful hoops in order to get these very small contributions, which were sums like 25 and 40 million dollars a year in a project that was costing billions of dollars. But, as so often happens, the United States' part in that was crucial to getting other countries to go along. If we wouldn't do these very small things, Japan and South Korea would probably not have been able politically to go along.

Oberdorfer: This gets to what Jim was talking about before, in terms of the change in Congress. The agreement was reached in late October of 1994 and in early November there was the election, which was generally called a landslide, but I don't know a big Republican—Congress turned from Democratic to Republican with huge Republican majorities, and their attitudes changed substantially. I mean, I know it was a problem but how do you view that?

Young: This is a more general question about what kinds of difference did it make and where you experienced it most acutely.

Christopher: I was in South Korea at the time of that election and was to make a speech to the South Korean parliament the next day, and the election returns came in showing we lost first one house and then two houses. That is, "we" meaning the Democratic party. I remember staying up that night revamping my speech, rewriting it in the early hours of the morning because I felt I needed to give reassurance to the South Koreans that even though there had been an overturn in the Democratic majority of both House and Senate, nevertheless American foreign policy would continue. And I'd given them the assurance, the best assurance that I could, that there wasn't going to be a major change in American foreign policy.

The 1994 Congress I think will be seen by historians as the high water mark of the Republican isolationist tendencies in this period. It brought into Congress a number of people who were really anti-foreign involvement. The stories are, I don't know, maybe are caricatures, I think a third of the new members had never had passports and when queried about it said that's the way

they wanted to keep it. The way it impacted me most, Jim, was in connection with the budget. These new members, and some of the old members, made it plain that they didn't know or care anything about foreign policy except that they knew and cared that the budget numbers ought to be cut, that is, the budget support for the State Department and foreign aid ought to be cut.

I remember dealing with the chairman of a House subcommittee who was negotiating our budget. We negotiated right down to the end and then he told me one night that—in a very friendly way—that he was going to have to take another billion dollars out of our budget because his constituents demanded it. And the new Congress demanded it. I regarded that as a "no nothing" approach to it—that after you finish the negotiation and you've done all the rational approach, discussion and cutting, and there was a lot of cutting involved, then to say, well we have to take another billion dollars out because of the new era we're in. That kind of sentiment was across the board. One place after another you found that close committee votes would go the other way because of the addition of a few new members. It was coupled, maybe more significantly, with the mood that was created by the 1994 election of fear of foreign involvement. Those members, some of them are still in Congress, but if you look back, and it would be interesting for historians to make this study, to see how many people elected in 1994 have since been replaced or displaced.

I must say American business had an important role in diminishing the effect of the 1994 Congress by going into the districts of some of those Congressmen, by using their investments in those districts and their clients in those districts to try to educate the people in Congress about the importance of international involvement, the importance of international trade to those companies. So the 1994 election was countered somewhat. You can see that influence on the vote on China; normal trade relations with China. Every year that vote was a kind of a litmus test as to how effective the international block was.

As I said earlier in my comments, that international block always carried the day whenever that came to a vote, by substantial margins.

Talbott: May I perhaps make a comment. If you have a line to continue—

Young: I'll come back to it, go ahead.

Talbott: You sure?

Young: Yes.

Talbott: It perhaps predictably concerns Russia and the impact of the '94 election on Russian policy. And Jim, if at some point before the end of the morning I could be given two or three minutes just to turn more generally to the question of Russia. While I do feel that the agenda and the outline have been wonderfully broad and deep, we may not yet have done full justice to what I consider to be very important, not only to the Clinton initiative but a Warren Christopher initiative.

On ’94, Chris will long remember and has recorded in both of these books one of several disagreeable experiences he had dealing with the Russians, which was in early December of ’94 when he went to Brussels hoping that one of his more problematic counterparts, Andrei Kozyrev, was going to sign the documents that would bring Russia into the partnership for peace. Kozyrev didn’t do so and he basically blew up the meeting. Then subsequently two days later Yeltsin did the same thing to Clinton, a meeting in Budapest, which Clinton had attended over the objection of almost all of his advisors, and very much against the advice of his domestic political advisors, and was ultimately sorry he came.

In trying to reconstruct, do you remember the episode or do I need to—

Young: Not in detail, but I knew—

Talbott: We had been working since September ’94 when Yeltsin came to Washington to lay the ground for a reconciliation of NATO enlargement and the NATO-Russia partnership, and one of the key steps in that was that before NATO brought new members in, it would consummate a partnership with Russia and as a preceding step to that, Russia would come into the Partnership for Peace. And we had worked painstakingly on that, arguably not painstakingly enough.

In any event, the Russians balked and pulled an unpleasant surprise on us in two parts. One was what Kozyrev did to Chris and the other NATO foreign ministers in Brussels, and then second what Yeltsin did to Clinton at the OSCE Summit in Budapest a couple of days later. I spent some time trying to figure out what the hell happened there, and part of the answer—and I think a larger part of the answer than I realized at the time—was that the Russians were aghast at the results of the ’94 election. The Republicans, which is to say Newt Gingrich and company, had made an issue of very few foreign policy issues in the Contract with America, so called. One of the very few that they highlighted was accelerated, without apologies, enlargement of NATO as quickly as possible.

And the Russians concluded, or at least feared, that they were no longer dealing merely with Clinton, but that it was all but lame ducked by the ’94 elections and that they now had to contend with Bob Dole, who was already positioned to be Clinton’s opponent in ’96 and with Newt Gingrich and those guys. And the immensely complicating, not to mention unpleasant, set of experiences we had in December of that year, which required the Vice President to basically go in and try to limit damage and rescue the situation at the end of December, was a direct result of the ’94 elections.

Young: This does bear very much, and you’ll have more than two or three minutes. I think it might be best, Tim will be rejoining us, about 11 o’clock I think, and if we could defer your Russian section here until then, since that’s very much his interest.

Talbott: You can defer it until I come back on my own.

Young: No, we—

Talbott: Because the things I wanted to say—

Young: We'll do that.

Talbott: In this guy's presence.

Young: We'll do that, very well.

Oberdorfer: Could I just ask one follow up question—

Young: I just want to seize upon this because it does relate to a point that you made earlier, Chris, the difficulties of explaining the tripartite separation of powers, that the President's power was limited. On the other hand, the difficulty I believe you mentioned of communicating the understanding that Congress did matter—

Christopher: Right.

Young: And that you had to pay attention to Congressional sentiment. Then your account, in which the power of Congress is perhaps even overestimated, I don't know, I'm trying to—

Christopher: That's interesting.

Young: How is American government understood? Is it different in every country? Because both of these are evidences that it does matter a great deal.

Christopher: You go ahead, Strobe.

Talbott: Well, the worst example of the, or the most troublesome case, of the devil makes us do it—having to point over our shoulder and say, "Do X and Y with us because otherwise you're going to get Z from those people." By the way, an argument that I always hated using. It offended me civically, intellectually and in other respects, and I tried if at all possible never to do it. Never to blame Congress for something that the executive branch was doing. I thought it was bad tactics, bad strategically. But sometimes, objectively, unavoidable.

But the worst case had to do with the Russia-Iran technological relationship, which began in the first term when Chris was Secretary but got much, much worse in the second term. So maybe that's one that we could put off for another time. But that was certainly, just to preview it or summarize it, that was a case where we really had no choice but to say, "You must make a particular accommodation with us, otherwise we will have thrust down our throats and will have to thrust down yours, sanctions, particularly unpalatable kind of sanctions."

Christopher: Jim, the way I would reconcile those two interesting matters you pointed to, is our foreign friends frequently misunderstand the role of Congress, sometimes overestimating it and sometimes underestimating it. The Chinese, who in many ways portray a kind of isolation from some American trends and customs, they underestimated it, or I didn't communicate it adequately. And the Russians are quite capable of overestimating it, especially with Kozyrev as foreign minister, who thought he knew the United States so well and was so westernized. He

may have overestimated the effect of the arrival of Gingrich and company in 1994 and made it even more difficult for us than it actually was. In the field of foreign policy, as you know, the President has great, but by no means unlimited powers, especially where it concerns the budget, and that was something that did worry the Russians.

Talbott: Except there was one other piece, I think, to the Kozyrev problem that Chris dealt with. I know we're going to come back to this when Tim's here, and that was that Kozyrev was mirror imaging. He was under immense pressure and from your very first meeting with him in Geneva, whenever that was, February of '93, he was saying, "We—the Russian executive, and I, the Russian foreign minister—are being pushed around by our Duma." And he almost seized upon us being in the same situation, or the perception or the misperception that we were in the same situation as a way of reinforcing his sense of some sort of parity.

Young: This was more than just game playing. I mean it's sometimes very convenient to present the fragility of one's position so if you don't give in—I understand this can happen on both sides. What both of you are saying is beyond that, there is a genuine issue here that you have to pay attention to in communicating appropriate understandings of the realities of the President's power.

Christopher: And just to philosophize for a moment. That risk is at its maximum where the President is in a kind of veto-proof situation. The Iran case is a good case there. If Congress enacts restrictions or sanctions against Iran, it's probably going to be very difficult for the President to veto that. So the power of Congress is at its maximum in situations where public opinion makes a veto almost impossible.

Oberdorfer: I wanted to ask just one follow up question to what you said earlier. When a subcommittee chairman told you that they were going to cut a billion dollars more out of the State Department budget, what did you say? Were you able to do anything about it? Did you have any backing from the White House? What happened?

Christopher: The billion dollars came out of the budget.

Oberdorfer: Did you say anything to this guy?

Christopher: Of course, I remonstrated. But he was—subcommittee chairs are very powerful on budgetary issues and he just had the power to make it stick.

Riley: Did you find yourself, other than the Korea example, in the wake of the '94 elections, having gently to communicate to people elsewhere that there was continuity, that the President was still a powerful figure, dealing with a different kind of context? Did you take that kind of educational role elsewhere?

Christopher: Repeatedly if I thought it necessary. I went from Seoul, Korea, to Jakarta for a meeting of the, I believe it was the APEC [Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation] foreign ministers meeting. That was a multilateral meeting, and the President was there as well and it was a low point for him and thus by transference for me. You may remember that was at about the time

when he said the presidency is still relevant and that was seized on as a very weak thing for the President to have said. And during that meeting I think both he and I had to stress and give a bit of an education on the American Constitution about the powers of the President in the field of foreign policy and that we maintained those powers and thought that on key issues we'd have Republican support. So, Russell, to answer your question, yes, over and over again we had to emphasize that our powers remained, if somewhat singed a little bit, nevertheless in full force and effect.

Riley: This APEC meeting was the first time you'd seen the President since the election?

Christopher: Yes.

Riley: Could you tell us anything about your meetings with him at that point? Did you have private discussions about what this new context meant and—

Christopher: We had several discussions at that time and I would say the President was grasping for a full explanation of the loss of Congress. He had not settled down in what he thought the explanation for the loss was. It was a period of reflection and introspection about it and I can't say I left Indonesia with a clear sense as to what he thought the solution was. Strobe, did he talk to you at that time? I suspect he probably did.

Talbott: I was actually in the Oval Office on election day, Tuesday, November 4, 1994, or something, and I'll remember it for a long time. I was there because Chris was overseas and the President was receiving what was in effect a courtesy call by the President of Finland, Martti Ahtisaari, and the Vice President was sitting in the meeting as well, and they were clearly concerned. This was fairly early in the day. At least by his standards—10:30.

Riley: Before noon.

Talbott: And there was a definite air of distraction and apprehension during the pre-brief, before the Ahtisaari visit. And Derek [N. Shearer] was there because he's the Ambassador, of course.

Christopher: This is Derek Shearer who was our Ambassador, who is Strobe's brother-in-law—

Talbott: Who was our Ambassador in Helsinki at the time.

Christopher: Just don't want the record to be—

Riley: I'll research that, thank you in advance for the clarification.

Talbott: And I both thank Chris and apologize to the group. Anyway, my point is that you could tell that there was something on the President's mind. I mean, obviously there had been some preliminary indications. But during the course of the session with Ahtisaari, aides kept coming in with little pieces of paper and handing them to the President and you know, he blanched. And finally, after the third or fourth such interruption he turned to Ahtisaari and said something like,

this isn't a direct quote but it certainly captures it, "We're getting creamed, you know, this is turning out to be a very big setback for my party."

And then it was sort of a classic Clinton moment. He began analyzing it, explaining it to his visitor and in a way that wasn't exactly sanguine, but certainly wasn't apocalyptic. So he was kind of walking out, saying here's what's going on and it's an inevitable backlash against some things that I felt I had to do during the first term. And Ahtisaari was very sympathetic and didn't resist at all when the meeting came to a close a little earlier than it might have otherwise, because Clinton really liked Ahtisaari, and then Ahtisaari expressed his political condolences and left.

The President kept a couple of us behind for a few minutes. He didn't vent or tear his hair out. He was clearly very worried, but he was trying to intellectualize it. He was trying to bring all of his skills, not just as a politician, but as a political analyst, to bear on the situation, but he clearly was just beginning.

Riley: One of the things that sort of emerges in the literature and in the portraits of Clinton is somebody who, when he goes into a damage control mode, has a unique ability to focus—compartmentalize is a word that's used, and I wonder if this isn't an illustration.

Talbott: Absolutely, that's exactly right. He [snapping fingers] he almost seamlessly, he moved into the mode of "okay, this has happened, why did it happen, how do we manage it, how do we get beyond it?" There was no element of what would certainly be my reaction. And by the way, I might say, this is not the only example during eight years I can think of where I saw him in this mode, that's another lunch that maybe we won't have. But in any event, no despair or primal scream response. It was all highly analytical.

Riley: Well, I'm sure one of the things that we're going to want to do during the course of the project is to focus on the aftermath of the '94 elections and I guess it's fascinating for us to try to get a picture of what the foreign policy-making community was attempting to do at this time, how the message was being communicated, how people were actually—the process that you were going through to assimilate this information, and I'm guessing that you must have been talking with one another. Were you also consulting with the domestic political people to get their sense, or were you just sort of picking this stuff up from the newspapers and making your own surmises about what was going to happen as a result of this transition?

Talbott: Well, Chris was far away at the time, of course. I was there in Washington. I made a point of not consulting with White House domestic political people, in general, on principle. I did talk to Wendy Sherman, who was Chris's Assistant Secretary for Congressional Relations and who is no slouch as a hard-headed analyst of these things, later in the day and in the days that followed. Chris did you have any—

Christopher: As I say, I was out of the country. If you study this, you might look at the remarks I made to the Korean parliament, which were basically the product of my own thinking and that of whoever might have been on the trip with me. I then left there, as I said, and went and joined the President in Jakarta. Externally he had shifted gears and was his usual confident self, but in

our private sessions it was clear that he was still seeking a full understanding of what had gone on and why.

Riley: One more follow up. Did you have conversations fairly soon thereafter with the Republican leadership in the Senate and the House?

Christopher: I can't remember the timing, but certainly in January I met with Speaker Gingrich on the subject. This is perhaps an excursion, but I offered then and several times thereafter to get together with the freshmen Congressmen and Gingrich always thought that was a good idea but it never happened. I wanted to get together and brief the freshmen Congressmen but somehow those meetings could not be put together. I can't remember when I first offered that, but I soon met with Speaker Gingrich and tried to gain his support. He was a complex figure in the foreign affairs field because he talked the talk of an internationalist but quite often didn't perform that way.

And of course, this was about the time of the Mexican crisis. One of the things to do is to step back from this moment, and realize how much is going on at the same time. A specialist in one field will look at this moment and say, "This happened, why wasn't X, Y and Z done?" But when you see the full panoply of things, you understand better why X, Y and Z wasn't done. This is the same time we were dealing with the Mexican meltdown, and the same time that Gingrich was unable to perform on his commitment to help, which I don't take to be in bad faith. He simply found the troops would not follow him in supporting the President's desire to help Mexico.

So these things are all converging at the same time and I think that's really a problem for historians because you so often have people who are one-issue experts that don't see the interaction.

Young: There can't be too few reminders that in real time life is not Congressional relations and focus on that, it's all of these events, a stream of events going on, a stream of problems, a stream of issues going on—

Talbott: A stream of history.

Young: A stream of history in which you're swimming quite fast.

Talbott: If you want one other example, Bill Clinton as a foreign policy President in times of domestic adversity, just come back to the Budapest thing again. After the debacle of the '94 elections, the opponents of his going to Budapest came back at him again hammer and tongs, and said, "Now you have another reason not to be able to go, it will look like you're trying to change the subject." They had deliberately scheduled a reception, Chris you may remember this, on a Sunday night, the same day he was supposed to be in Budapest, for, I guess, the Congressional Democratic delegation. Not a very happy group of campers at that point.

So he spent a total of six hours on the ground in Budapest but did not cancel the trip. He flew overnight, spent six hours on the ground, maybe less than that, got back on Air Force One, flew back to Washington to go into a session where he basically had to calm down his troops.

Young: Steve, you had a question.

Knott: Yes, I have a question. It's a little bit off the track we've been on, but hopefully not too far off. We've been talking about your relationship with Congress, particularly the Republican Congress that came in in '94, but I wanted to ask you about a story that's in your book, about your trip to China in March 1994, I believe it was, where the issue of human rights—it was a very tense visit—

Christopher: Right.

Knott: You said there was a scuffle between your security detail and some of the Chinese. It did not go well, and after the trip you suggest in the book that perhaps you did not get the support from the White House that you expected. If I'm not reading this correctly please straighten me out, but was that an unusual occurrence? If I am reading it correctly, were there other instances where you felt that the White House, perhaps the political folks in the White House, were undercutting your work?

Christopher: It was a rare instance and thus notable to me. I had been out there on a three-day visit or a two-and-a-half day visit to China. The first day went very badly, the second day went a little better and the third day was kind of neutral but nevertheless the Chinese portrayed the trip as being a failure, that I had not accomplished much—because it was the purpose of the Chinese to portray the trip in that way. I thought—in the way that one has sort of travel euphoria, you think that everything is going well because you are there and doing it—I thought I had effectively carried the American flag and especially the human rights flag in very difficult discussions, especially with Li Peng, who was a hard interlocutor. I had hoped that the White House would be weighing in in support of my presentations, but the only thing that was said at the White House was that the trip was a disappointment and they didn't amend that or elaborate that. That single word might have conveyed it was a disappointment from the standpoint of how the Chinese had treated me, although there's another way to interpret it as well.

In any event, it was the failure of the White House to follow up with a supportive statement, which clearly said to me that I had been caught in a policy change. You know, that's a problem a Secretary can find when you're out of Washington. Unless you have excellent sources there, you may not know that you are in the midst of a policy change. That's probably what also happened when I made that trip to Europe in May of 1993. But it was rare. I had splendid support from the White House consistently and those occasions stick out in my mind because of their being exceptions.

Knott: Did you voice any—did you raise this at all with President Clinton after the fact?

Christopher: I guess one of my precepts is "don't be a whiner." I knew what had happened to me. No point in whining about it.

Young: Well, not all would be that way, I'm sure.

Knott: I would like to ask one other question concerning China again, but it does involve Congress as well. You mentioned the isolationist streak in the '94 Republican class that came in. Were there any issues—it's also my impression that there were quite a few Democrats, particularly on international trade issues, but also on China, who were opposed to a kind of free trade policy. Could you comment on the difficulties you may have had with some Congressional Democrats particularly on this international economic issue.

Christopher: Oh absolutely. The left wing of the Democratic party joined with the right wing of the Republican party in regularly denouncing trade with China. If you think of it in two spheres, you have the left wing of the Democratic party and the right wing of the Republican party meeting up at the top and forming a vocal, rhetorically very powerful group. I felt it personally in a sense because Nancy Pelosi, the outstanding Congresswoman from California, who is now the third ranking Democrat in the House, the highest woman ranking I think in history, was an ardent anti-China-trade person and very vocal. So there was a group of Democrats who were opposed to that, and many of the trade unionists were opposed as well. This wasn't bipartisan in a sense that they were a majority, but there were very strong, vocal, rhetorically powerful groups in both parties opposed to China trade.

Young: You had considerable, there was considerable business support though.

Christopher: The business support ultimately overwhelmed—

Young: Overwhelmed the other.

Christopher: The center of both parties supported—

Young: Are you finished with that?

Knott: Yes.

Young: I'm going back, this is a detail, but—when they were finding another billion to take out of your budget after the negotiation, you had mentioned that during that time there were businesses who were, had investments in some of the districts, that were helping in this. My question is, a more general question, did you have any allies? Was there an attempt to organize any outside support? I know it's a difficult issue when it's a State Department budget, but was there any effort to mobilize support outside Congress to influence the process, an organized effort?

Christopher: You're going to have to be careful here because there are legal prohibitions on certain organized efforts to lobby members of Congress, trying to get support in that way, but generally speaking, American business is much more likely to be helpful on specific issues that concern it rather than on broad issues such as foreign aid. Because much of that aid is actually

spent in the United States, there are elements of American business that are supportive of aid and there are probably elements, I'm sure there are elements, that are supportive on principle.

Nevertheless, there are some very strong allies on foreign aid and interestingly enough, one of the most potent is the so-called Israeli lobby. The reason for that is because the largest aid beneficiary is Israel, and so I think the supporters of Israel, who are very numerous in Congress and with whom I have much rapport, much sympathy, were wise enough to understand that unless there was some aid for other countries, there would not be these large appropriations for Israel.

I suppose that could be argued the other way, that dollars for other countries deprived Israel of more dollars, but I think they were wise enough to see that that was not the likely result, and so among the strongest supporters of American foreign aide budget generally were the supporters of Israel.

Young: Was security at the embassies—this became of course a very public issue later on—was there any sympathy in Congress for that? Or any anticipated planning for potential terrorist attacks on embassies?

Christopher: You know, I would want to fully refresh myself in order to answer that very well, but there was a constant issue in Congress over the construction of new and better protected embassies, and in this period there was the construction of a number of new embassies around the world that were basically fortresses inside the host countries. At the time that was much criticized by some foreign service officers for a good reason, that they didn't like to be so separated from the host country. On the other hand in retrospect, there is lots of justification for the security.

Take our embassy in Islamabad, which is one of those newly constructed embassies on the outskirts of the city, with a substantial perimeter of protection. I'm sure in many ways we're glad to have that protection there these days. But every budget cycle there was always an intense discussion with Congress as to how much should be devoted to the construction of new embassies and embassy security, and I'm sad to say that quite often in the final hours of negotiation, that was the money that came out, as was the money for technological upgrades. You know, we desperately needed technological upgrades and as I say, that money usually got canceled out in the last hours.

Talbott: Just a historical footnote, the fortification, relocation fortification of the embassies initially came after the Beirut attacks. What was that, '83?

Riley: Yes.

Talbott: As a result of the creation of the [Bobby] Inman panel, in fact, they are often called Inman embassies. And a couple of people, including colleagues of ours like Wendy Sherman, pointed out that there was kind of perverse ill fortune there because the need to spend more money on security and rebuilding of embassies, which was immensely expensive, coincided with the end of the Cold War and the consequent falloff in support for the function, just the account in

general. So in a bizarre way, the State Department and the international affairs budget took a double hit.

Oberdorfer: The way in which President Clinton got out of this political corner in a number of ways, one was of course the Republicans overplayed their hand and we all remember. But another one was he brought in this fellow, Dick Morris, as his advisor to do all these small things politically. Did Morris operate at all in the foreign policy area? Did you know he was even there? Did you have any—was he suggesting things to Clinton? Did he do international affairs or was he sticking strictly to the domestic side of things?

Christopher: A lot of different questions you've asked there. I knew he was there. I don't know what he suggested to Clinton although my guess is he suggested things in the foreign affairs field and he never got in. With one exception?

Talbott: With one exception that I know of. You and Leon Panetta became aware, around the time of President Clinton's trip to St. Petersburg, that would have been in, I can check the date, that Morris had been basically mainlining information about Yeltsin's reelection campaign. This was I guess in early '96.

Christopher: "Mainlining" meaning?

Talbott: That he, Morris, had associates who were advising the Yeltsin presidential campaign and were working specifically for Yeltsin's daughter. One reason I think it's important to clarify and correct this on the record is because *Time* magazine wrote a cover story about the Kremlin-American connection before the Yeltsin election and I forget exactly how—Chris, you may remember, you and Panetta—I think it may have been because the President mentioned it in your presence, that he had been getting information from Dickie Morris, so called, and you came down on that arrangement like a ton of bricks and thought you had gotten it turned off. It came back from the dead a little bit, not long after, and you basically drove another stake through its heart and that was the last we heard. Does that jog your memory?

Oberdorfer: Why were you upset about his getting information from Morris?

Christopher: Well, it was not only getting information, but I just didn't want Morris intruding on the foreign affairs function. There were associates of Morris who were purporting to advise Yeltsin and then bringing information back of uncertain reliability, upsetting the President, concerning the President, in areas where I thought Morris had no expertise.

Talbott: Morris also associated himself with a particular cockamamie scheme whereby the Saudis would forgive some Russian debt in a way that might go down to the benefit of the Yeltsin campaign.

Oberdorfer: So he did play around in foreign affairs. But is this the only case that you know of?

Christopher: It's the only case that I know of, but I certainly would not be at all surprised to hear that he had urged the President to do various things. But he was not involved in, he did not

come over to the department, he did not sit in on meetings there and did not, I did not see his hand—it was made clear to Leon Panetta that his intrusion in our affairs would not be welcomed.

Oberdorfer: When you say it was made clear, you made it clear to him? You told him—

Christopher: I think more than one person made it clear.

Talbott: He asked to come and see me at one point to talk about some of this stuff, and I checked with Secretary Christopher, who told me in no uncertain terms to be busy.

Riley: As the re-election year approached, and I guess this would be a question for the entire period, '95, '96, after the mid-term elections, were there significant changes in tack in United States foreign policy to account for the domestic realities? Or were there certain ways that you modified your approach or your salesmanship to account for the new realities at home?

Christopher: I thought the best thing I could do for the President was to try to keep a steady course in foreign policy and try to ensure that there were no international episodes that would be diverting. At least, I analyzed the matter in a way that didn't make it necessary for me to make any adjustments. I thought that and I still think that the best thing a Secretary of State to do for a President is to keep a steady course and a steady hand. I suppose the last thing a President wants is some event that will divert attention from a carefully worked out campaign plan.

Talbott: There's one point in the negative, which is to say a decision not to do something in a time frame that would have confirmed the impression, or fanned the suspicion, that some important aspect of foreign policy was being dictated by domestic politics, and that was NATO enlargement, which Secretary Christopher talked about yesterday. There was some pleading and the pressure from some quarters—the obvious ones, the general neighborhood of Pittsburgh, Milwaukee and Chicago—to do NATO enlargement before the '96 election. And it was decided, for reasons having to do both with Russian domestic politics and American domestic politics, not to do it in 1996.

Young: But to slow it rather than to kill absolutely—

Christopher: It wasn't ready for various reasons and we didn't accelerate it like—we didn't deliberately slow it but—

Young: Well, I don't know whether Don has to recuse himself from this section—

Oberdorfer: Discussing the media? I was retired by then. Three months after Secretary Christopher—

Young: Well, I'm a retired professor too, but I'm here. Your reflections and methods and approach to dealing with the press and the media. You made quite a point in the early part of your book about the importance of speeches and statecraft, and the importance of words carefully chosen in public addresses as a way of formulating and communicating policy. That

implies, I'm not sure, let me ask you first, I'm not sure that all Secretaries of State share that view, is that correct?

Christopher: I think all Secretaries of State, sooner or later, come to appreciate how important precision is because your views are analyzed much around the world and with instant communication you can't expect to say anything that isn't—

Young: That's true.

Christopher: That isn't fully analyzed around the world. I think if Secretaries don't know that when they begin, they soon learn it.

Young: But it does seem to me that the collection of speeches in the narrative, in the stream of history that you give, these—and you're pointing the readers' attention and the historians' attention to particular speeches in each area of major concern and they are very well crafted speeches. This raises the question about your dealing with some of the interlocutors of the press, the interpreters of these speeches, the editorialists, and the reporters who are always there to receive the background on the—not only background, information and explanation. You have a cadre of course, right there, at the Department, always watching, always waiting, always being briefed.

Christopher: Very expert.

Young: Yes.

Christopher: And the question is?

Young: The question is, give us your reflections on the importance of the press and the kinds of problems or benefits that you experience with that.

Christopher: Well, first, on the subject of speeches, which is an intriguing subject for me and was the focus of the first book in many ways, the kind of speeches I make are basically oral essays. I am not a good platform speaker and I used the speeches to try to communicate in an understated way views I wanted to express. Each one of the speeches was carefully considered: whether it should be made, where it should be made, when it should be made, by a team which was headed by my Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs, Tom Donilon, who went through a very considerable process every time a speech was to be made, as I say, deciding whether and when or where, and then a lot of emphasis on the content of them. I thought that was a vital way to try to communicate to the broader world.

These speeches certainly lacked the drama that would come from somebody who was a fine platform speaker who was using speeches to make pronunciamientos. I didn't use them for that purpose or I didn't try to use them for a strident political purpose, which—I think you could argue that both ways. It may be that using them as a kind of "bully pulpit" would be certainly, might be more successful internally in the United States, but I felt that every one of the speeches

was designed to, whether it accomplished it or not, advance American foreign policy in some respect.

The Secretary of State has, I think, a special burden—not just me but any of them—by reason of the fact that there are so many people who are following him. The columnists have a particular fascination with foreign policy, there are probably sixty people writing columns on a daily basis and about half of them are writing foreign affairs columns. And columns that are critical are a lot more interesting than columns that are praiseworthy. Indeed, there has grown up in the new press—shortly after Don Oberdorfer left, it became quite unfashionable to say anything good about a public official. Your colleagues would make fun of you if you were caught praising a public official. I think that is a particular burden for Secretaries of State.

Then you have a foreign press that is watching, always from the vantage point of either the region or the country they are from, but analyzing what you say in a particularly sensitive way. This is not to complain about it, it is just the reality of being the American Secretary of State and the power that America has.

Of course, television adds a dimension to it that changes things quite completely. Virtually every day I did some sort of a brief stand-up on television, usually on the departure of a foreign visitor. There is a stream of foreign visitors that comes into the Secretary of State's office and the foreign visitor almost always welcomes a few minutes with the press, the State Department press afterwards, hoping that he'll get a question that enables him to say something back home that will resound. And about 80% of the time they are disappointed because all the questions are about the news of the day, not about what's happening in Ecuador, or what he and the Secretary talked about. But that adds a dimension in tension. And then there are Sunday news shows which are a regular part of the diet of any American public official. You see it now in the competition for public officials.

There was a piece in the *New York Times* just this week about the competition between the outlets for the voice of public officials. Cable has added to that. Now you have CNN and Fox in addition to the big three networks competing, so it's a regular fact of life that one has to get used to and also has to get prepared for.

Young: Did you find it useful or a chore?

Christopher: I found it largely a burden. I'm not naturally good at television appearances and the preparation time tended to take most Saturday afternoons and Sunday mornings.

Young: Prepared and very conscientious.

Christopher: Prepared conscientiously.

Young: Very much so.

Oberdorfer: A lot has been said in journalism circles and others about the effect of what is known as the 24-hour news cycle, the fact that it used to be, you know, these news operations,

they only operated, maybe not 9 to 5 but maybe 9 to 10 or whatever. Now with the cable channels and CNN it's all around the clock, all the time. Did that in any way, the development of that, which came between the time you were Deputy Secretary before and the time you were Secretary of State more recently, have any effect? Did it strike you at all?

Christopher: Don, I think it's part and parcel to how nothing really prepares a Secretary of State for the pressure on him. The Deputy escapes that to a considerable extent and the 24-hour news cycle only aggravates that and especially the pressure to get out and answer within the same news cycle or in the second news cycle. Quite often foreign affairs issues don't lend themselves very well. It's not like a political answer, which can be given kind of automatically. Sometimes, trying to get into the next news cycle causes trouble by premature reactions. You can certainly see that in the Venezuela situation where it looked to me like the State Department probably reacted without taking time to see the situation settle down. I don't pass judgment on that, but that seems to me to be a risk.

So that's always the problem you're in. Something has happened overseas. Can you take the time to fully understand what has happened and to formulate a sensible position, or do you have to react very rapidly? And of course, the press is doing their job. They're always there and sometimes when I went out with a foreign minister, the press would know something even my careful briefers had not told me, something that was happening in real time. Have you heard about the plane that is going down in X? Or have a report about the coup in country Y? It adds a lot of pressure.

Young: You referred to speeches as being of several types: conceptual, strategic, bureaucratic, and tactical. Again, which indicates to me quite a considerable amount of thought to which, when you give the speech. How did you select? What was the process by which you would select a topic, or type of speech and event for the speech?

Christopher: It was a fairly well organized considered process within the department. It began with Tom Donilon, the Assistant Secretary, and my Chief of Staff sitting down with me and saying, "Chris, I think you ought to be out there again." Or "We ought to be making a speech on subject X and let me meet with my group and "staff it out" and see if there's agreement on that, and then we'll come back to you and let you know if there's agreement on that." Then we would talk about the general theme of the speech. If we decided it would be a speech on the Middle East, we'd talk about the various themes we would use and then he would go back with the speechwriters and try to effectuate those themes. But it was, I guess deliberate is the right word, as far as I was concerned, a very deliberate process and sometimes it was so obvious that you had to make a speech.

For example, right after we decided we would no longer use human rights as a condition for China trade, it seemed to me I wanted to explain that without delay. The same thing, to take another China example, I wanted to make a speech reassuring China that there had been no fundamental change in our policy. So those were some rather obvious speeches. Other speeches could have been given almost any time, for example, the speech on the environment, but I was nearing the end of my term and I didn't want it to end without giving a speech on environment.

The same thing is true of terrorism. There's a speech in there on terrorism, and I felt I wanted to have such a speech during the course of time I was there. Not because there was any particular moment about it, but because the issue was important enough to justify a speech.

Young: One of the questions that people in the future are certainly going to search the historical record for is the subject of terrorism, dialing back from 9/11 to see how this now recognized by all, this phenomenon developed and was responded to. You did mention in one of your speeches that this was a phenomenon that in the new world, that one had to deal with. So it was recognized but what beyond recognition of it, beyond the simple recognition of it, occurred during your watch?

Christopher: Well, there was established a, I guess what's called a terrorism czar in the White House to try to coordinate the response because clearly terrorism is not a single department issue. And we instructed our embassies around the world to be sensitive to this for their own protection, as well as to try to resolve the problem. My own feeling about it is that in the long run terrorism is going to yield to intelligence and diplomacy probably more than military action. Military action may be necessary at some points, but in order to head it off in the future, intelligence and diplomacy are the foundational needs, and we began preparing for that near the end of my term.

I was the first senior American present at the bombing in Khobar Towers. There's a chapter in *Chances of a Lifetime* on that subject, which crystallized, I think for me, the dangers or the tragedy of terrorism, and also identified that the new form of terrorism—we talked a lot in the early part of my term about state-sponsored terrorism and we identified Iran with state-sponsored terrorism, but Khobar Towers made it clear that we were having terrorism from non-state subjects. That was a change in that phenomenon that really needed to be taken into account. The subject of terrorism was growing in importance in my term and certainly accelerated in the immediate time thereafter as far as it concerned the United States, but there was a growing organization within the government to deal with it, headed by the terrorism czar in the White House.

Young: Who was that?

Christopher: Dick Clarke, Richard Clarke. Who continued after I left, and who the Bush administration has continued, but in a slightly different role. I think he is now in charge of the electronic aspects of it.

Talbott: Cyber-terrorism information.

Knott: Was Bin Laden's name floating around? Was his group, Al-Qaida, on your radar screen at this point or did that come later?

Christopher: It really comes later. He was certainly around in that period and he was, we had the problems of terrorism in the Sudan. I remember difficult discussions as to whether we would maintain an embassy, re-open an embassy in Sudan, at that time. Bin Laden was there in the Sudan but I have to say, from my own standpoint, he really was not on the radar screen in nearly

the sense that he was in 1998 after the bombing of the two embassies. He was definitely associated with that. I never heard him associated, for example, with Khobar Towers. That I thought at the time, and continue to think, was probably some Iranian group that was working with a group internally in Saudi Arabia.

Talbott: He was seen before August 1998 as more of a financier of terrorist activity and terrorist groups, as opposed to a kingpin and instigator.

Knott: How do you react in general to some of the stories that are circulating in the media today since 9/11, and maybe being put forward by people in the current administration that the administration that you served in was not vigilant enough about this issue, or could have done more? Granted, I realize a lot of this would have occurred after your watch.

Christopher: I suppose it's only natural that people, after an event as dramatic as 9/11, tried to trace back to the beginnings of it. If you're going to do that, I think it would be worthwhile to go even further back than our administration. Ending the Gulf War without taking out Hussein, and without trying to rebuild the society in Afghanistan that we had essentially torn down, would have to be traced back to the beginnings of these problems.

A great deal was done in the second term of the Clinton administration, and a great many things were prevented. The bombings of the tunnels in New York and the United Nations building, and to bring one place close to home, the bombing of—close to home for me—the bombing of Los Angeles International Airport at the time of the millennium—was prevented. This is not like baseball, you don't get credit for saves. Obviously not enough was done to prevent 9/11, which of course occurred after our watch, but I think a careful examination of what was done in the second Clinton administration, and no doubt that will be made, will show a tremendous amount was done, many things were prevented or avoided during that period of time.

I remember after the bombings of the two embassies, the Clinton administration, with the President's full authority, made the attacks in Afghanistan in the hope of catching Al-Qaida or catching Osama bin Laden himself in a rain of bombs, and "he was missed by an hour," at least that's the commonplace—and a lot of fun was made of the fact that he was missed by an hour. That doesn't seem quite so odd right now when we've been in Afghanistan now for six or seven months with many troops there and we haven't been able to find him. So the fact that we missed him by an hour during the Clinton administration doesn't seem such an amusing event as it did.

Young: In fact, the name has virtually disappeared.

Christopher: He's disappeared and the name has disappeared.

Young: He's no longer in—

Christopher: So I think in a way, a careful analysis that would be perspective in character would be useful—how we can prevent it—but I think a search for scapegoats will not be a very rewarding endeavor.

Oberdorfer: One episode that did happen on your watch was in June of '93 when U.S. fired tomahawk missiles against Iraq because of the assassination attempt on the President, George Bush. I don't know the extent to which you—I mean, I'm sure you were involved in some way, but could you tell us about that particular thing?

Christopher: That's treated in *Chances of a Lifetime*. I don't want to expend too much time on it, Don, but we got reports from intelligence circles that the Kuwaitis had prevented this attack, and that they had been able to arrest several people who came across the border in a pick-up truck intending to bomb former President Bush, when he was in the country. That story seemed quite open to skepticism when it came. Our intelligence officials and all of us who looked at it said it was just a little too pat. So the President ordered the intelligence agencies, both the FBI and the CIA, to go back and look at that, examine the Kuwaiti report. And lo and behold, the reports were exactly accurate. This group had come across with the support of Iraqi intelligence, or intelligence officers from Iraq, intending to do just that and it was a rather ham-handed effort. Even the Kuwaitis had apprehended them. But we then, after this secret report by the CIA and the FBI now public confirmed this report, we had the question as to what to do.

President Bush had not been killed, but I regarded the attack on him as basically an attack on the United States. I felt that we could not fail to respond in some way, and after lengthy discussions it was decided in meetings of the national security team, with the President, that the most appropriate response was to bomb the Iraqi intelligence headquarters which had been the source of these plans, according to the best information we had. And so after two long late night meetings at the White House, the President ordered this to be done. In a compassionate attempt he tried to have it done when the buildings would be less occupied than they would be during the daytime, but probably not unoccupied, and the cruise missiles were sent from battleships in the Persian Gulf, something we've gotten quite accustomed to now with Afghanistan, but which was an extraordinary event at that time.

I can't remember the exact numbers, but a high percentage of them hit their targets and those who missed their targets landed in the same compound and only a couple went completely astray. Now, we did a substantial amount of damage. Some innocent people were killed. But it was the kind of damage that could, in time, be repaired and probably was. That was the response we made. You could probably argue a long time whether it was proportionate or disproportionate, whether more should have been done. Perhaps looking back you can argue several different ways. But it was done very deliberately. President Clinton had no hesitation in regarding this attack on a former President, even though it was unsuccessful, as being something that required a firm, definite response.

Young: Could we take a few minutes' break and then go into our final thing. I imagine Tim will be here in a few minutes.

[BREAK]

Christopher: I think it's desirable when you consider the whole Clinton presidency, to think of the important role that press secretaries have played. I was fortunate enough to hire Mike McCurry as my initial press secretary after some hesitation from the White House because he had been press secretary for one of the other candidates. Mike is an extraordinary representative with the press and he turned out to be a little bit too good for my role, because he was seen and after two years taken to the White House. But I had also a good advantage, not only with Mike McCurry but Ton Donilon who was my Chief of Staff and finally a whole subset—an important role that press secretaries and press assistants play.

I'm not sure if either Donilon or McCurry ought to be blamed for my failures, because I'm sure I would have done a lot worse without their help. But, in the modern era, the press secretary becomes an actor in the play, not just some offstage figure, and I think deserves some special attention as one writes, tries to write the history of the time. Mike McCurry's story, of course, is all wrapped up in other historical events in the second Clinton term.

Talbott: I might, if I could just add a point-and-a-half, when Mike was kidnapped by the White House, Chris and Tom came up with what I thought was really an imaginative and very unorthodox idea of bringing Nick Burns over from the—I guess he was at the NSC at the time, correct? He was a foreign service officer, now our ambassador to NATO, and not somebody who had come up with a public affairs background. Don't you agree, Chris, that he, in his own way, not least because he was a foreign service officer and brought along credibility, the earlier discussion about Chris's speeches made me want to put something on the record.

As somebody who used to make his living with the written word and who has read a lot of secretarial speeches over the years, I think Chris is in a very small subgroup of Secretaries of State—really the only two other inhabitants of that subgroup that I can think of are Dean Acheson and Henry Kissinger—whose speeches, because of the way in which they were prepared and because of Chris's own attachment to the importance of clear writing as part of clear thinking and clear policy-making, speeches ought to be studied more by historians than other Secretaries of State because they really do, I think, track the way in which one mind grappled with the problems at hand. I saw a lot of evidence of that. I think at various points in your exercise it might be more than in the case of other Secretaries, if you look, going back, to see what was actually produced at the time, probably because it didn't just come out of a speechwriting shop.

Oberdorfer: You made a point earlier, yesterday, mentioning, in terms of written word, your night notes to President Clinton. And Strobe, I think in your book you mentioned that you and Secretary Christopher were often exchanging ideas on paper, rather than—even though you had access to each other face-to-face, you sometimes preferred to write it down. That struck me as—I know that Vance used to send these night notes from time to time. Is this something you inherited, did Secretaries of State do that, and how often did you do it? And did you find that as your principal means of communication with the President back and forth?

Christopher: You've got to get back in the journalistic mode and only ask one question at a time. [*laughter*] Yes, it's something that I had inherited and learned from Vance and when Vance was out of town, which was about a third of the time, I sent night notes to President Carter and

they would come back marked up in his very clear handwriting and the smallest detail corrected if it was wrong. So I—spellings usually.

Young: Well, he won the spelling bees consistently at Plains High School.

Christopher: That was before spell check—

Christopher: So I started the same practice with President Clinton and no, it was not the principal way I communicated with him and I didn't do it nightly, but I would do it two or three times a week, and especially if I was traveling, it was the way I communicated with him. It had the great advantage of being less formal than a telegram.

If I sent a telegram it would go to 60 places in the State Department unless I marked it a particular way. I could send a night note to him and it would only go, it came to you (Strobe), didn't it? My night notes came to you and to the President in the White House.

Oberdorfer: It was a telegram though, right? It came in as a telegram, but restricted? Or was it—

Talbott: It went as a secure fax to him.

Oberdorfer: In your handwriting?

Christopher: Oh no, no, it was always typed. And I got back more substantive comments from President Clinton.

Talbott: And less legible.

Christopher: Less legible and fewer spelling corrections.

Oberdorfer: What about the written exchange between the two of you?

Christopher: That's something that Strobe initiated and I began to call them "Strobegrams." They came regularly and were exceedingly helpful. Both Strobe and I think that forcing yourself to write something down tends to improve the clarity of thinking. You can even be sloppy on paper, but it's a little more difficult. But he was a great help to me in sending in Strobegrams, sometimes six or seven pages long, that would spell out his thinking on an area and then he welcomed my notations in the margin or sending back in notes to him. It was a very good way for us to communicate. It was a more thoughtful way than even sitting across the table because he could communicate when it was convenient for him—early riser, types rapidly—and I could receive them at a time when I could reflect on them.

Oberdorfer: How did you send it in?

Talbott: Through Chris's secretary.

Christopher: It was just a walk down the hall. One copy only.

Young: You have fifteen more minutes left so I'd like to cover basically two subjects here first. Your own reflections on your time as Secretary of State, including what you felt you accomplished, the highlights of your accomplishments, those that you felt were most satisfying, those in which you take the greatest pride; and your disappointments. And also some of the difficulties you might have experienced that might have led you to think, *should I stay here or should I go?*

Talbott: And you did promise me ten minutes—

Young: I did, I did, more than ten.

Christopher: Hello, Tim.

Naftali: Hello, Chris.

Christopher: Jim, I have rigorously avoided talking about my accomplishments. It's just uncomfortable for me to talk about, I don't like the word pride very well, I never talk about what I'm proud of. I think that's a concept that I'm just not very comfortable with. I'm quite willing to say, or I'm willing to speculate about what Clinton's accomplishments were, or seemed to be, and the role I might have played in that. I think he, as I have foreshadowed, will be seen to have made great accomplishments in the field of economic foreign policy. That historians will not only note those areas, those things that he accomplished, but will see a connection between those and the long continued prosperity in the United States. The fact that he left the country in a much better economic condition than he found it when he came in in 1992.

Second, I think he will be known for having made significant architectural improvements, and I've mentioned some of those. In some I played a larger role than others. For example, in the architectural improvements in Asia, I think the State Department and I played a key role in the APEC summit meetings and the development of the of the ASEAN beyond the narrow focus there and broadening it into having political and military overtones as well as economic overtones.

One of his great architectural achievements, I think, had to do with Europe and the expansion of NATO as a step toward the reunification of Europe. I took part in, and played a crucial role in that initiative. The expansion of NATO was not only teed up but it was assured by the time I left and I think that will be seen, not just in terms of the expansion from 16 to 19, but expansion in terms of missions and goals and making NATO relevant to the current period. In the economic field, the architecture of NAFTA and the architecture of the World Trade Organizations were things in which I was less directly involved but nevertheless I think played a significant role in the Senate approval of NAFTA and in the approval of the World Trade Organization. And in the latter I think the State Department role was to emphasize to the countries that this was not just a trade issue, that they'd have to understand the significance of it beyond that.

I think the President will be remembered, perhaps increasingly so, for the significant role he played in preserving peace during this period in the Middle East and advancing the forces of conciliation there with the Israeli-Jordanian treaty, which as I've said before could never have happened without the support of the United States. And the steps between Israel and Palestine, many of which unfortunately we see reversing today, but the Oslo agreement, in Palestinian administrative control in Gaza and Jericho and the nine cities and the outlines of what inevitably has to be the long term resolution of the issue. When people get back to negotiations they'll find most of the substructure is all there. Despite the fact that some people may regret that the last steps were not taken, nevertheless I think that will be seen as a plus for the Clinton administration.

I also think that the President will be seen to have established excellent relations or improved relations with other major powers in the world—China, Russia, Germany, the European Union, generally speaking—the President improved our relations through his personal skills and through the help of the State Department with each of them. So those are the areas in which the President made great progress. He basically made the right choices. I think he made the right choice in Russia. As difficult as the relations with Yeltsin were, the patience that it took for him to nurse Russia along in the direction of democracy and free markets, those are things that I think will be seen as part of his legacy.

Young: Strobe, did you want to say something?

Talbott: On the Russian point? Yes, and obviously, if we do have a follow-up meeting with me in the hot seat, we can go into all of this in more detail, but I thought that it would be important for me to put on the record in what is Chris's session, my own perspective on Chris with regard to our Russia policy.

The context here goes back to Clinton himself and his own view of the opportunity and challenges that he knew he would have if he won the presidency in '92. And that is a subject that I talked to him about for some years, since it had been apparent for quite some years what his career ambitions were, and, especially as we got into the '80s and the late '80s and it became apparent that the Soviet Union was going to go out of business and that the Cold War would come to an end. He attached, I would say, cardinal importance to the coincidence of what was likely to be his presidency and the end of the Cold War, and that he would be the first President elected after the end of the Cold War. Parenthetically, he, and much less importantly, I, gave George Bush a lot of credit for his handling of the end of the Cold War and the way in which Bush and his administration had kind of talked [Mikhail] Gorbachev down to a soft landing, because there were other ends of the Cold War that were very imaginable, to put it mildly.

In any event, the handling of Russia after the end of the Cold War, he believed, would be as important, in many ways, as the handling of the Soviet Union during the Cold War. And earlier Presidents have all had their own structural and personnel ways of dealing with the Soviet account as it then was, and earlier Secretaries of State had done as well. And I just wanted to offer a couple of observations about the way President Clinton and Secretary Christopher handled it.

Bringing me in was, to put it mildly, out of the ordinary. Other secretaries of State had had Soviet experts, Tommy Thompson, Chip [Charles E] Bohlen, George Kennan going back to Acheson, Marshall Shulman in the case of Secretary Vance. But none of those were working-stiff reporters. I obviously came with the additional credential of being a friend of the President. Nonetheless, it was highly unusual and it was actually Secretary Christopher who made the call on a Sunday afternoon in December of '92, suggesting I come into the Department. President Clinton had asked me if I was interested in going to Moscow as ambassador right after the election, and I wasn't able to do that for family reasons.

But when Chris made this proposal, he not only suggested that I join his team in the Department, but he instructed that I work with Peter Tarnoff to set up what was a bureaucratically unique arrangement. In fact, it was doubly unique, both within the Department of State and within the interagency process. He created, within the State Department structure, what was the functional equivalent of a regional assistant secretary-led bureau, and actually more than that in that I reported directly to him, whereas the other regional assistant secretaries reported to him through the Undersecretary for Political Affairs. This was the so-called SNS bureau, which was posited on the very simple premise that Russia was not like other countries and the former Soviet Union was not like other clusters of countries and required special attention.

I think there was a lot of benefit in terms of the efficiency of the policy-making process that resulted from that decision. Then second, Secretary Christopher worked with Tony Lake and Sandy Berger to arrange that I chair a newly created interagency process called the Policy Steering Group, which was kind of an affiliate or offshoot of the regular NSC process, although it reported to the National Security Council and through that to the President. The way in which that played out in real life we can talk about on other occasions, but I think it helped streamline the decision-making process at a time when we needed to respond very quickly and ensured the kind of high-level attention that was necessary to get things done and to maintain high degree of consistency.

The other thing is, speaking of architecture, what Chris did, on the evolution of NATO. He—you recount this, I guess in *Chances of a Lifetime,* the Athens meeting, and it was Chris's idea to basically put the January 1994 Brussels summit of NATO on the President's schedule. It became a critical decision-forcing event and got us to get our act together, I would say just in the nick of time, but we did get it together in time to set forth for the allies and for the Russians and others what our long term strategy would be. Then in October of '93, he made the recommendation which carried the day on how we were going to get right the question of pacing, sequencing, of NATO enlargement with the development of the partnership for peace and the partnership with Russia.

I guess the last thing I would say, unless you want to take it any further, is his counterparts on the Russian side. They were two very problematic characters in very different ways. Andrei Kozyrev did not have Chris's inhibition against whining. He was one of God's original whiners. But, he was also a true westernizer and his successor, [Yevgeny] Primakov, was not a whiner. He was an old-style, you know, Soviet operator, and a mischief maker. And he made a lot of his mischief at Chris's expense. Yet Chris found a way of handling each of these guys.

I mean, we used the phrase yesterday, I forget exactly what the context was, "adult supervision." Adult supervision is what was required for dealing with Kozyrev and a certain kind of Christopher variant of hardball was what was required for dealing with Primakov. I think that perhaps—not entirely objectively—that having our cake and eating it too with regard to NATO enlargement and the NATO-Russian partnership was one of the important accomplishments of the Clinton presidency. And while it was consummated after Chris had left the office, which is to say in the Spring of '97, it was all set up in the '93, '94, '95, '96 time frame, and was a classic example of how personalities matter and the management of personal relations is the essence of statecraft.

I guess there is actually one other thing, and that is Bosnia. Chris mentioned in passing yesterday that having the Russians in the tent with us was sometimes a little bit like having the famous incontinent camel in the tent with you: it makes for a messy tent. But it sure beat having the Russians outside the tent. The mechanism for that was the contact group, which existed for only one reason, and that was to have something that the Russians could belong to as equals. And despite the fact that they were absolute pains in the butt to deal with, at every point of the way, they still dealt with us, and we got them where we needed to get them at the end of the day and I think that was a combination of personal and structural—

Young: Yes, I would wish for a former Secretary of State who wasn't so modest and retiring, but I respect that this is very much your way. Maybe you could say a word about what the Christopher version of hardball was.

Talbott: It was to say to Primakov when required—or actually to Kozyrev as well, but it was particularly necessary for Primakov—a version of what Chris famously said to Jesse Helms, which was Primakov should not mistake his excess of courtesy for lack of resolve, or whatever the exact quotation was, which was a polite way of saying "knock it off or you'll bear the following cost" with whatever it was, whether it was trying to blow up the Sharm El-Sheikh terrorism summit by having Yeltsin not come, or changing the rules that had already been agreed on how we were going to handle sequencing of Partnership for Peace. Now Primakov didn't come into play until very late in the game in the first term, I think it was the last year, January '96, but it was a very eventful year.

And Primakov also tried to keep Chris—since we're into candor, and me having to perform one of my functions with Chris, which was to compensate for his modesty—Primakov tried to ace Secretary Christopher out of the play a couple of times, using me as a foil to do that. Chris would make the distinction between how important it was to get the job done through whatever channel, including perhaps me instead of him, as opposed to him having actually having to do it. As far as I can judge, he always made the right call. There were a couple of cases where he let Yeltsin summon me, one case in particular, to the Kremlin, when Yeltsin should have been summoning the Secretary of State, because we needed to get something done in the very short term. And then there was another case where only Chris could deliver the message, part of which was "don't pull the plug on the election," which Yeltsin was tempted to do at one point in '96. That message had to come from the Secretary of State and did come from the Secretary of State.

Oberdorfer: And you say he tried to manipulate around Secretary Christopher by doing what, by saying you were the person to come to this meeting, or what?

Talbott: Yes, basically. I suppose, Chris, you can take this as a compliment to you. Chris had the reputation of being the bad cop on the American side, associated with the anti-Russian elements—whereas I was the good guy, which didn't do my reputation any good by the way, back in Washington. And we basically, between the two of us, figured out how to play that back at them. You know, there were times when we said, okay, I'll be the good cop and go and get their message, but I'll also deliver our message. And there were other times when we said, no, we have to close ranks.

Naftali: How did you bring the President in, because obviously the President understood this dynamic. What role did he play in this?

Christopher: Oh, he generally knew what was going on. He usually didn't have to intervene on this, we usually would settle this between ourselves. Why Strobe was going to do that, or why I was going to do it. This also emerged in the Middle East where Primakov thought that he had a certain primacy and experience and tried to push me out of relations in the Middle East and he was totally unsuccessful in that. For example, he tried to push me out of negotiations in Syria because he thought he had greater experience with the Syrians, and parenthetically the Syrians owed the Russians more money. But Primakov was a very skillful, experienced, relentless actor, and he had to be dealt with several times, even though he was in office only a year that I was in office.

Naftali: On that point—he was also problematic with regard to his relationship with Iraq, wasn't he?

Christopher: Yes.

Naftali: Didn't he complicate the containment of Iraq?

Christopher: He had, if you recall, at the time of the Gulf War, had an effort to try to resolve the matter in advance, which I think earned him the permanent skepticism or enmity of a lot of American leaders. And then during his time as foreign minister he made every effort to prevent the implementation of sanctions against Iraq, tried to disturb the coalition. But he is knowledgeable about the Middle East and he regarded that as being his and Russia's province, which it was no longer.

Young: You mentioned a number of areas where Clinton will stand out in history, and those in which the State Department as you put it played some role. I'd like to hear a little bit more. We are learning, and we have just begun to learn from those who knew and worked with President Clinton, something about his way of governing, his way of thinking, his way of acting as President. It seemed to me, and something I've never understood and I'm not so sure it will be easy to understand in the future, that almost from the beginning, there was a "get Clinton" movement.

I remember, even soon after the election, bumper stickers appearing on some vehicles around Charlottesville, saying "Impeach Clinton" or some version of that. And that's—you have spoken about Clinton's presence, his magnetism, his popularity, his—and yet there was this other thing going on all the time, and it's a very puzzling thing to us. I don't know that there is any explanation to it, and one wonders how the President himself went ahead with this subtext of animosity or whatever it was, I don't know what it was. Can you cast any light on that?

Christopher: It's clear that Clinton has a group of detractors that have just more than normal animosity toward him. Politics is a rough business and anybody who is in it knows that it's, in many ways, a very hardball business. But there's something about President Clinton that takes it beyond, for a number of his detractors. I think we've all asked ourselves "why" and have not found a fully adequate answer.

One thing I think has to do with his "southern-ness" and the fact that he came from a state that's not very highly regarded nationally, and to many well-educated people in the East and the Midwest he's a kind of southern phenomenon in whom they sort of bundle up their resentment against ambitious people from the South. I don't know why that should be, but there is an element of that.

There's another element, I think, that probably makes people very angry about him, and that is the ease with which he does things. He makes a lot of things look easy that for other people are very, very difficult to achieve. His Rhodes scholarship, his six terms as Governor as a very young man, his getting to the presidency at a time that many people thought was premature in terms of age. So I think that built up this sense of animosity toward him.

Then he has some—I think he seems to appeal to a level of people in the country, or perhaps a group of people in the country, who are not highly regarded in the most elite sources. This is very difficult to explain without beginning to sound either racist or reverse racist, but I think the fact that Clinton is so appealing to African-Americans and other minorities has a spin that was resented on the other end of that. I don't have much—it would take much more of a psychoanalyst than I to understand why it is, but it is certainly true that he does gather antagonism that's beyond the normal political range. And some of his personal qualities or his personal failings aggravate that to a very high degree. This is a subject on which I am diffident to talk in Strobe's presence, because he has observed him for a lot longer than I have.

Talbott: Chris, you might, and I'll take a crack at that in a second, but you might add a word or two about the equally unique degree of affection and admiration that he generated abroad. I think, your constituency as it were, don't you? I found this. It just was unbelievable, whether you're talking about crowds or individual leaders.

Christopher: No question about that. He is much more popular abroad, right now, and was all during the term. Also in the Middle East, he is enormously popular in Arab countries as well as in Israel. He'd command audiences there, because he has become, to use an overused term, larger than life. In Fitzgerald terms he is a personage. He was that when he was a young President and it got better as it went along. He seemed to communicate to people abroad a kind

of empathy about their situation, whatever it was, however bad it was. He said, "I understand how you feel."

Talbott: I'll just say two things. I guess the personal comment I would make as somebody who was a friend of his long before I was his employee, and will be a friend of his long after and as long as I live, is that the personal failings and the behavior in his personal life that brought anguish to him personally and to his family and to the country, will always be as puzzling to me as they are painful. In a peculiar way, to know him well is to understand it even less, but I cannot elaborate on that, and don't want to.

As for why he inspires such anger and animosity, I think part of that—and Chris, I hope you won't mind my putting it this way—maybe it's easier, maybe I can say it because I do feel such loyalty and affection for him. There is something in most clichés that is true, or has enough legitimacy to explain how they get to be clichés. "Slick Willy" was not entirely a fabrication of his detractors—it was a dimension of his persona and his affect. That is the kind of less neutral description of what Chris says, described very generously, but I think also legitimately is this ease of doing.

The other thing is, if there is one word that sums up his approach towards life it is reconciliation. He's a great "come let us bring our people together" and in that respect he runs contrary to the adversarial strain in American politics, which are institutionalized in our two party system. But I think it's that capacity for reconciliation that allowed him to prevail over those who were bent on destroying him.

I can remember seeing him the day after he had met with Newt Gingrich, who said, "We are going to run your ass out of this town." And what Clinton was thinking about was, *How can I turn that around?* He didn't quite say, "and run *his* ass out of town," but that's of course what ultimately happened. But he was always looking for a way to sublimate or get beyond the hostile dynamics of an interpersonal situation or of a state-to-state confrontation, and that I think explains, you know, the ferocity of commitment that he brought to things like the Ireland negotiations and the Middle East.

The two examples that I saw firsthand of his capacity to not just wow foreign audiences with his charisma, but to really make them feel that he empathized with them and that he could turn over a new leaf in a relationship, was his trip to Bucharest right after the Madrid summit in 1997. Rumania had been an applicant for membership to NATO and had been turned down, and it was an American decision that led to them being turned down. Clinton got on a plane after they were not accepted in NATO in Madrid, flew to Bucharest, and turned this crowd into chanting, "USA," "NATO," "We're still with you," "Help us next time." It was just a transformational moment.

The other was his trip to India in '99 and his appearance before the Parliament there where in one public appearance he essentially put fifty years of estranged democracy, the estrangement between the two countries, behind him and the U.S. And again, he did it with this kind of all-embracing approach.

Young: Maybe I asked the wrong question. I asked the question about what explains the anti-Clinton passion. Maybe I should have asked what explains the Clinton passion.

Christopher: Well, you got both answers.

Young: And I'm getting both answers. You speak of his way with large audiences. Was it the same way, was it the same persona, the same electricity that he communicated in hardball dealings with other leaders? Was he equally adept? Did he have any magic going there, or was it—

Christopher: He got along with a lot of foreign leaders who came in thinking they would play hardball and found him irresistible. It's not a universal phenomenon, but it's a higher batting average than anybody I've ever seen. There are some who, at least as I said yesterday, Lech Walesa was a little beyond his pale because he talked for 44 minutes in a 45 minute meeting, but nevertheless, on the whole, he made friends, not just in large audiences but in small.

One, relevant to today's events, I remember going with him into the Jordanian Parliament, having just come from Israel, which is always a tough spot for anybody, and he absolutely captivated the Parliament in Jordan with his, "We're supportive of Islam and we're not opposed to Islam." That's a hard role for a President who is as popular as he is in Israel. But we need some more of that kind of communication around right now.

Oberdorfer: In your very first, not very first hour, maybe first half-hour, I don't remember, discussing him, you said something that really struck me. I circled it in my own notes here, that if he ever blessed a general process he would stick by it. That's very important, I think, in a chief executive who doesn't change the signals in the middle of the stream, even though you were reciting some situations where you had to shift directions because of external circumstances. But that seems to me to—talk about a kind of determination factor, it would be pretty darn important.

Christopher: It was certainly true in the Middle East. He gave me my marching orders in January of 1993 and we never really—I mean, I never felt I needed to ask him about whether I should take a trip to the Middle East, go to Syria or pursue things in the Middle East. I had my marching orders and he never changed them. I always felt, within the envelope of the general idea of pursuing peace, I didn't call him up and say, "Mr. President, I'm debating in my mind whether I can leave Washington at the present time, whether I should go and pursue this or whether I should stay here." He basically let me make decisions like that, and the fact that I went to the Middle East as often as I did—I felt authorized, not only authorized but very empowered to pursue that as long as I thought it was promising. It was never more than promising, but as long as I thought it was promising.

Young: There's another strain of observations, the determination to see it through and the sticking with it that, in my recollection, the public image of Carter or the interpretations were very heavy with the opposite.

Christopher: Of Clinton, you mean.

Young: With Clinton, were the opposite, that he blows with the wind, listens to opinion polls and that kind of thing. I just take that as an example of a form of negativism that gets to be conventional wisdom that—

Christopher: That's a very interesting point you extracted from—that came up very often in the Russian context. There were a lot of reasons day to day or week to week why we might turn our back on Yeltsin, who would give you a reason on many occasions. And President Clinton would always come back to the fact that with all his imperfections, he is an exponent of democracy and free markets and we need to support him through thick and thin. There are many occasions like that on other issues as well where he went back to his basic premises, to illuminate a short term decision or to resist shifting in the short term.

Naftali: Since this again is an oral history for people who are yet to be born, will be writing about President Clinton a long time from now, as you think about the documentary record that you've left, and that will I assume be available, can you give people some assistance in what kinds of paper mattered to you, what paper didn't matter to you, what they should look for, whether you were accustomed to writing a series of memoranda to the President which would be interesting and useful for us to look at, for future generations to look at, to really understand

how you, Mr. Secretary of State, teed up issues for the President, a busy man.

Young: While you were gone we referred a little bit to that, night notes and ways of communicating but—

Naftali: I'm sorry.

Christopher: I might add to that by mentioning action memos that were prepared for the President's decision; sometimes those were formalities, other times they were very important in making decisions, action memos. They tended to be papers drafted in the NSC but then where the State Department would add its own position to the memoranda. Those paper deserve attention because frequently they were the vehicle for the President expressing his decision by checking boxes, but there was quite a lot of process in getting those papers ready.

Naftali: Did the President like to use the telephone?

Young: [*Chuckling*]

Christopher: Just like he likes vanilla ice cream. [*laughter*]

Riley: Can you tell us why you decided not to stay on?

Christopher: Those decisions tend to be instinctual. You can make a long list of pros and cons. In the final analysis it had a lot to do with my age and with my concern that I might be fooling myself that I hadn't lost my edge, and that I would find myself where I wasn't able to perform as well as I should and maybe I would be kidding myself. I also had a sense that, if I was going to leave, Russell, it was the right time to leave, and I think I proved to be right. It was tempting to

stay on a year. There are always some things you want to finish up, I'd have liked to see the NATO entry. But I think if I had stayed on it would have been very hard for me to have left at a later time. Somehow I knew that in advance.

I think it was primarily a sense of age. I was feeling good at that time because things were going well in 1996, so it wasn't a sense—there are two kinds of fatigue, there's fatigue when you're tired and won, and there's fatigue when you're tired and lost, and the second kind is much worse. I was feeling just fine but I was afraid—71 is not young, and I thought that sometime in the next four years I might embarrass the President and might embarrass myself and so now was a good time to leave.

Young: Well, we've gotten a very rich and thoughtful account, and a very authentic picture that I don't think we could have gotten in any other way except by this. We're very grateful for this but I think there will be a lot more people who will be very grateful in the future when they come to read this record. This was a very important chapter in the Clinton History Project.

Christopher: Well, thanks to you, Jim, and all those around the table. You know the things—inevitably there are a lot of things that we have left out of enormous importance. For example, Ireland passed Strobe's lips, that's an important achievement that we didn't talk about. There are a lot of Irelands of great importance. The summary that you gave me of things, I would think, my God did I do that? Did I make that speech? Did I say that? And I had. So there are big lacuna in any process like this.

Young: There are indeed.

Christopher: But I've enjoyed it a lot and it has been very stimulating.

Young: Well, it certainly has been for us.