



## **WILLIAM J. CLINTON PRESIDENTIAL HISTORY PROJECT**

### **INTERVIEW WITH JOHN SHALIKASHVILI**

May 24, 2007  
Steilacoom, Washington

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**Also present**  
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To cite an interview, please use the following general format: [name of interviewee] Interview, [date of interview], William J. Clinton Presidential History Project, Miller Center, University of Virginia.

# WILLIAM J. CLINTON PRESIDENTIAL HISTORY PROJECT

## TRANSCRIPT

### INTERVIEW WITH JOHN SHALIKASHVILI

May 24, 2007

**Knott:** Thank you again, General. Basically the way this works is in a few months you'll receive a transcript of your interview, and at that time you can make any changes you'd like. If it's something you forgot that you'd like to insert, or something that you have second thoughts about and would like to pull out, you can do that. You control the transcript until we get the clearance from you. That's how it works.

I'm thinking perhaps the best place to start, if you don't mind—we know you had a tremendous career in the American military prior to working with President Clinton, which, of course, is the focus of this interview. But could you quickly give us a little background on your own military career leading up to the Clinton administration?

**Shalikashvili:** Sure. I met President Clinton for the first time when I interviewed with him for the job of being the next Chairman.

**Knott:** Any impressions from that first meeting? Anything you took away from that meeting that stands out to you?

**Shalikashvili:** I was very impressed by him. The longer I worked with him, the more that initial impression was strengthened.

**Knott:** Can you give us some sense of what characteristics of President Clinton particularly impressed you?

**Shalikashvili:** How smart he is, and no matter how complex the issue, how quickly he caught on to the core issue and how perceptive his questions were.

**Knott:** General, I'm sure you're aware there was a lot of sentiment, perhaps, in some quarters of the military and a certain amount of resentment toward President Clinton for not serving in the Vietnam War. Did you pick up any of this during this particular period, the attitude of your fellow officers toward President Clinton?

**Shalikashvili:** Very much so. Let me address that issue, President Clinton and the U.S. military.

**Knott:** Great.

**Shalikashvili:** I finished my tour as Chairman with a totally different impression, and two instances stand out. One was right after Somalia. We arranged a meeting between President Clinton and a group of sergeants. I didn't know how that would go.

**Knott:** Sure.

**Shalikashvili:** We invited about four or five sergeants who had come out of the incident of Black Hawk Down. The meeting went very well.

**Knott:** So there were no negative reactions on their part?

**Shalikashvili:** He felt very at ease and those sergeants did too. Each one of them brought a coin with them to give to President Clinton. It was totally different from the general perception that existed. We met in the Oval Office and you had these sergeants sitting on the floor and talking to him, and he was asking them to describe to him what really happened in Mogadishu. You would not have been able to detect at all any kind of animosity between them and him.

The second incident that comes to mind is when we finished the operation in Haiti, he wanted to meet with some of the soldiers who had participated and were now out, those from the 10<sup>th</sup> Division. So we flew up to 10<sup>th</sup> and there they had the soldiers and their wives in a gymnasium. He walked in. You would have thought that this was an election campaign. There was lots of spontaneous applause and wives sticking their babies into his arms so they could take a picture of their children with the President. Then he talked to all of them, but only after he had gone through a group of soldiers and their wives to the next group. He wanted to know how it was for the soldiers to be in Haiti and then how it was for the wives to be back here.

**Knott:** General, did President Clinton ever talk to you about this issue? Did he ever have a conversation with you where he expressed his concerns about his reputation within the military?

**Shalikashvili:** Yes. The gist of that conversation was that he felt it would be very difficult for him. But he also knew that there was nothing he could do. There was nothing that he could say that would change the view. But I told him not to worry about it because the view against him existed more in the minds of the senior officers and not so much among the soldiers.

**Knott:** Interesting. General, did you get the sense that it was worse in one particular branch of the services than any other, or was it across the board?

**Shalikashvili:** No, I just remember instances where this would bubble up to the surface was usually among general officers, senior colonels, and so on, very seldom among the privates and sergeants. Certainly after going to Fort Drum it was clear that among the families and the wives there was no such feeling. One of the reasons—you surely must have met him.

**Knott:** Yes.

**Shalikashvili:** It's impossible to sit with him and talk with him and not become convinced that he's probably as good a people person as you'll ever meet.

**Knott:** Yes, very true. Can you tell us a little bit about your relationship with Colin Powell and how well the transition between you and General Powell took place?

**Shalikashvili:** General Powell and I had known each other for many years. When I commanded the Ninth Division here—

**Knott:** Here in Washington?

**Shalikashvili:** Fort Lewis. He was then the Commander of all Army Forces in the United States. He commanded Forces Command. When I left here I was on orders to go to Europe to become the Deputy Commander of the U.S. Army in Europe. I called him and said, “Colin, tell me, is the Army—are you guys sending me a message?” He said, “Don’t worry about it, just shut up and go.” I went. The next time I met him was when he came to visit me when I was running an operation that became known as “Provide Comfort.” That was when Saddam Hussein turned his vengeance against the Kurds up north. In those days [Richard] Cheney was the Secretary of Defense and [George H.W.] Bush the elder was the President. They were just getting too much heat because of the CNN [Cable News Network] factor. So they decided they needed to do something about it. They needed to.

So President Bush turned to Colin Powell and said, “Find someone to run this operation.” I was appointed to go. When I left Europe to go to eastern Turkey and northern Iraq, I had no idea what a Kurd was, but I went there.

The man I worked with was [Jalal] Talabani, who is now the President of Iraq. He was a very urbane man who had studied at Oxford. But the Kurds were not like that at all. They were tough mountain people and they were not a united group. There was the faction that was run by Talabani and then there was the faction that was run by a man named [Massoud] Barzani. Barzani’s father and Talabani, I am told, were very much opposed to each other, not only in politics, but also personally didn’t get along. Barzani was a very different man from Talabani. Barzani was much more the kind of man who liked to sit around the fire at night and talk about the mountain life.

I don’t know what Barzani’s doing now. But my feeling was then and is today that Barzani probably took off and went to Iran. I wouldn’t be surprised at all if Barzani didn’t live in Iran right now.

**Knott:** I wonder if you might discuss your impressions or recollections of some of the Secretaries of Defense during your tenure as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, starting with Les Aspin. I’m not sure how much you overlapped with Secretary Aspin; I think it was fairly brief.

**Shalikashvili:** Very brief.

**Knott:** Do you have any impressions of him that you’d like to put on the record?

**Shalikashvili:** He was totally out of his element as Secretary. I’m sure he was superb as Chairman of the House—what was then known as the Armed Services Committee—but as the Secretary, having to meet foreign dignitaries and entertain them, Les was just not the right guy.

**Knott:** I believe his successor was William Perry; I'm sure you got to know him fairly well.

**Shalikashvili:** Yes, I got to know him very well and still know him today. As a matter of fact, when I was retiring he called me up and said, "Why don't you come to Stanford and lecture here?" So I did that for the first three or four years after I retired. But I am convinced that he was, by all means, one of the better Secretaries of Defense.

**Knott:** Why would you say that?

**Shalikashvili:** He just had a feel for soldiers and soldiering. He understood the importance of building bridges to other NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] countries.

**Knott:** He was more comfortable dealing with the ceremonial aspects that you said Aspin had some trouble with?

**Shalikashvili:** Yes.

**Knott:** He's also a defense policy intellectual, I think you could call him, is that accurate?

**Shalikashvili:** Well, the relationship between Bill Perry as the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of State was superb. And of course he was replaced by Bill Cohen, who again was very different.

**Knott:** In what way?

**Shalikashvili:** Cohen knew the business very well. He understood the responsibilities of not just the military things but what it meant to run a \$300-400,000-billion-dollar business like defense, which Les Aspin didn't understand. Les Aspin understood the politics, making the decisions, but didn't understand the business aspect of running the Defense Department.

**Knott:** I see.

**Shalikashvili:** It was only later when I read Colin Powell's book that I learned that Colin Powell and Dick Cheney didn't get along that well. But I'm a great fan of Colin Powell's.

**Knott:** You are, why so?

**Shalikashvili:** I think that he's my generation's superb soldier-diplomat. It hurt me to watch him struggle with being a Secretary of State because I don't think he did very well at all the environment in which he had to work. I never understood, and I don't understand still today, why he didn't throw in the towel and leave. I have not talked to anyone who knew him well who understands why it is that Colin Powell didn't sense early enough that the deck was stacked against him.

**Knott:** Maybe he thought he could make a difference.

**Shalikashvili:** When I asked him why did you stay, he said, "Can you imagine what it would have been like if I had not been here?"

**Knott:** True. Good answer. Could I get you to talk a little bit about some of the other members of the Clinton foreign policy and national security team, starting off with any assessment or recollections you may have of Warren Christopher?

**Shalikashvili:** The strength of Christopher was the relationship that he built with Bill Perry.

**Knott:** I see.

**Shalikashvili:** I think that was a real team effort. I never understood why he didn't put his foot down and tell Bill Perry, "Get out of the foreign policy business. That's my domain." But early on those two men had agreed that they would not replicate what had happened during the [Ronald] Reagan years when [Caspar] Weinberger and [George] Shultz were continually at war with each other. They agreed they were not going to repeat that. Then, as Chairman, I knew that if the Secretary of Defense wanted to have a good relationship with State, I had to have a good relationship with State. I think we did very well in that.

**Knott:** There was not the same level of conflict that you saw in some of these other administrations.

**Shalikashvili:** Even under Bush the elder there was quite a bit of conflict between Jim Baker and Cheney. When I was the Assistant to the Chairman, after coming back from northern Iraq, Powell told me that I was going to be his outside man, that is, work the issues with the White House and the State Department, and the Director of the Joint Staff was going to be the inside guy. So whenever the Secretary of State would travel somewhere where the issue could come up which would involve the military, Powell told me, "I want you to be there and represent my interest." That really came to the forefront during the negotiations about how to settle the Bosnia conflict.

**Knott:** Right.

**Shalikashvili:** I asked Wes Clark, who was then my J5, to travel with Dick Holbrooke so that whatever agreement they reached, whatever the military annex was going to be to the Dayton Agreements, Wes and I would have a big part in writing it, because in the end, the military was going to have to implement it. So I wanted to make sure that everything that was put in there was implementable from a military point of view.

**Knott:** Sure.

**Shalikashvili:** Wes did a superb job doing that and keeping me in the loop. We had a traveling team. It was Paul Wolfowitz representing Cheney, and Wolfowitz was then the Undersecretary for policy. The guy who is now the National Security Advisor—

**Knott:** Stephen Hadley.

**Shalikashvili:** Steve Hadley. So Paul and Steve representing the Secretary and me representing the Chairman. We made countless trips to Russia together, mostly nuclear reduction talks.

**Knott:** Did you have any interaction personally with Boris Yeltsin? Any impressions of him? He just passed away recently.

**Shalikashvili:** This traveling circus that I described, we went to Russia to say goodbye to [Mikhail] Gorbachev and to introduce ourselves to Yeltsin. It was a very memorable trip because we met with both of them in the Kremlin.

The second time I met with Yeltsin was in New York when he came here for a UN [United Nations] meeting. I remember I was at a cocktail party before the meeting started. He stuck his finger in my chest and said, "You, General, if you don't take care of your submarines, we're going to have trouble between our two countries." Because on a previous trip we were in Moscow and Steve Hadley and I received a message from the Pentagon that one of our submarines had just collided with a Russian submarine. So we woke up Jim Baker and I said, "Mr. Secretary, you have to tell President Yeltsin that this happened." So Baker made a few calls, and then that afternoon we had a meeting with him. Baker said, "Okay, Shali, tell the President what just happened."

So I told him, and he said, "Thank you very much because my Navy has not yet notified me that this incident happened." That's why that remark in New York.

The last time I think I met with Yeltsin was in Finland when we went up there to talk to him about nuclear reduction. Clinton was in his glory. I'd given him a very short briefing on what our position was and what the Russians wanted from us. He had absorbed that very quickly and articulated it very well.

**Knott:** He was able to master detail. I wonder if I could ask you to reflect on some of the other members of President Clinton's foreign policy team. That would be National Security Advisor Tony Lake.

**Shalikashvili:** He's a good friend of mine, but that said, what used to frustrate me about Tony Lake was his inability to discipline the process. We would go for a meeting and it would just go on like a college bull session.

**Knott:** He was still very much an academic. Did this have a serious impact in terms of implementation of policy?

**Shalikashvili:** No, but it had an impact in wasting lots of time. But Clinton was a man to whom time did not matter. So I don't think there was any problem between Tony Lake and President Clinton. I remember if we had a meeting at nine o'clock, we would normally leave the Pentagon around 8:30 to get there by nine. Towards the end of that time at 8:30 I would call Secretary Perry and say, "Mr. Secretary, we need to leave." He'd say, "Don't worry, no one is going to be there." So we started leaving later and later and arriving later and later for meetings with the President.

**Knott:** That bothered you?

**Shalikashvili:** That bothered me; that bothered Perry.

**Knott:** Did your tenure as Chairman overlap with Sandy Berger?

**Shalikashvili:** Yes.

**Knott:** Did Sandy run a different—

**Shalikashvili:** Very different.

**Knott:** More disciplined?

**Shalikashvili:** Yes, very much so.

**Knott:** Meetings started on time and ended on time. General, how much do you recall the issue of terrorism being an issue of concern to people within the Clinton national security team?

**Shalikashvili:** I think very much so. I'm sure that this area has been plowed over many times. I don't know all the details.

**Knott:** Did you have a lot of interactions with Madeleine Albright?

**Shalikashvili:** Yes.

**Knott:** Could you give us your impressions of her, your recollections of her?

**Shalikashvili:** She was a very disciplined and tough woman. There was a way to take the soft approach to solving a problem or a tough one, she'd be the first one to choose the tough way. I thought she was a good Secretary of State. She was a better Ambassador to the United Nations.

**Knott:** Why do you think she was better at the UN than at State?

**Shalikashvili:** Because at State you have to develop your own—we would have breakfast together once a week. I don't remember now if it was Mondays or Tuesdays—the Secretary of Defense, Secretary of State, the United Nations Ambassador, and the Director of the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency]. The purpose of these meetings was to make sure that we would all understand the problems facing us. If it was a problem that was in your domain, you had the benefit of the wisdom of the others on the foreign policy team. Madeleine's strength was that she understood the problems. But she was not that good at finding solutions to those problems, thinking those through. As Secretary of State you need to do that. You need to be the driver of the foreign policy, to deal with those challenges, and that was not her strength.

**Knott:** There was some criticism of her at the time that she was quick to want to resort to force as a possible solution to some of these problems. Did you see that?

**Shalikashvili:** Yes. There is this famous statement by her to Colin Powell. "Colin, we're spending so much money on this wonderful military that you're running, but you're so reluctant to use it. So when are you going to advise that we use the military to solve some of the problems?" I think she and our current President would have gotten along famously.



**Knott:** A little while back, you mentioned the Director of the CIA. I wonder if you have any recollection of either Director [James] Woolsey or John Deutch and what kind of a relationship you may have had with those two in your position as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs.

**Shalikashvili:** I've had very good relations with both Woolsey and John Deutch, but I think John Deutch was very much out of his element as Director of the CIA, and Woolsey was a professional in that business. So those issues came much more naturally to him.

**Knott:** Was Deutch more of an academic? Is that what you meant when you say he was over his head?

**Shalikashvili:** No, I don't think he knew the ins and outs of the CIA business.

**Knott:** General, it was reported at the time that President Clinton—again this was in the media so God knows whether it was true or not—but that President Clinton had kept CIA Director Woolsey at a distance and that the CIA had been sort of sidelined, for lack of a better word. Do you think there's anything to that? That there was a kind of downplaying in terms of the importance of intelligence and the role it plays during the Clinton years?

**Shalikashvili:** I don't think so. I think Sandy Berger might have had something to do with that because he was a great believer that intelligence and policy should not mix.

**Knott:** Did you overlap at all with George Tenet?

**Shalikashvili:** [*Nods*]

**Knott:** What were your impressions of Tenet as DCI [Director of Central Intelligence]?

**Shalikashvili:** A very solid guy. Very well respected in the intelligence family. But I don't know what the personal relationship was between him and President Clinton. My guess is that it was very good.

**Knott:** I wonder if you might talk a little bit about Vice President [Albert] Gore and the interactions you may have had with him. Perhaps any foreign travel you may have engaged with him, whatever stands out in your mind regarding Vice President Gore's role in terms of foreign policy and national security.

**Shalikashvili:** I am a great fan of Vice President Gore. Whenever we had a meeting with the President, each one of us said our thing. At the end of it Gore would sum it up and restate the problem and what each one of us had said, how one should approach the problem. I think he was a major player on the Clinton team. He always had done his homework. I would characterize him as one of the heavyweights.

**Knott:** From what you could see he had a good relationship with the President?

**Shalikashvili:** Very much so. The President would never make a decision without first turning to Gore and asking him to make a recommendation. I think they had a very good relationship.

**Knott:** Can I get you to back up to—you had mentioned Bosnia earlier, which was perhaps one of the biggest issues you had to deal with during your tenure. Am I accurate in saying that this was one of the biggest issues you had to deal with during your time as Chairman?

**Shalikashvili:** I did, but not as Chairman, as Supreme Allied Commander, Europe. Bosnia had become a big issue in Europe. The Secretary General of NATO in those days was a German, Manfred Woerner, who used to be the Minister of Defense of Germany before he became Secretary General of NATO. There was a period we went through when in Europe the saying was, “Out of Bosnia and out of business.” If the Europeans in a serious way don’t get involved in Bosnia, then NATO is going to be out of business.

So there was a period when Manfred Woerner and I would run around Europe giving speeches about the importance of Europe getting serious about Bosnia. By the time I got to Washington the issue was very different here in the United States than it was in Europe.

**Knott:** How so?

**Shalikashvili:** Here it was a tactical problem to be solved. In Europe it was a core issue of the future of the alliance. So it was a much more strategic issue than here in the United States. Here we argued about how can we get the Serbs from killing the Muslims, the Bosniaks, and how can we capture the war criminals who were finding a safe haven in Serbia. In Europe it was how can we get NATO involved in a serious way to rescue the alliance. It was becoming marginalized by discontinuing the series of continuing casualties—not ours, but the Europeans, the British, the French. It didn’t terribly matter here, but I have a feeling that the experience they had in Bosnia had very much an effect on the Europeans when we went to them for help. I’m sure they said, “Where were you when we needed help?” But I remember early on Jim Baker going to Bosnia and coming back and saying, “We don’t have a dog in this fight.” I think the Europeans answered that, “We don’t have a dog in the Iraqi fight.”

**Knott:** I know that President Clinton as a candidate in ’92 had criticized Bush the elder for his inaction on Bosnia. Then some of that criticism came back to haunt President Clinton, because it took a while for the U.S. position to gel, for lack of a better term. What were the kinds of conversations that you were having with the President, with his foreign policy team, about what you thought should be done with this problem?

**Shalikashvili:** Again, my discussions with him were much more tactical issues. Who are we going to bomb so that they stop firing mortars into the marketplace in Sarajevo? Fortunately we had a very good commander in Bosnia. The guy who replaced me as Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, George Joulwan. That’s a great guy who thinks both tactically and strategically. So he can fashion the big picture and then tell you the little pieces that need to be put in place to achieve the big picture. It’s not easy to find people like that.

**Knott:** Sure.

**Shalikashvili:** But George was right in his element. Then, when the Dayton Agreements were signed—and there were many people in Washington. Our view was for the Dayton Agreements to work, you have to make the Serbs understand that if they don’t sign up to it and abide by it, they will have to pay a price. So we started bombing, both in Bosnia and in Serbia. For me the

issue was not like it was in Europe, where we were trying to figure out how to fashion the big picture.

**[BREAK]**

**Shalikashvili:** Have you ever been here in the Northwest before?

**Knott:** This is my first visit. I grew up in Massachusetts. I lived in Colorado for a time. I taught at the Air Force Academy for seven years and I moved to Virginia, where I am now. Been to California a number of times, but never up in the Northwest.

**Shalikashvili:** It's a wonderful place.

**Knott:** Beautiful.

**Shalikashvili:** Before I had my stroke I really enjoyed the winters here to go skiing. One of the goals I set myself is that by the time this winter is over, I'm going to go skiing.

**Knott:** Excellent. It's a spectacular place. The fort that is nearby here, you spent time here at some point in your career?

**Shalikashvili:** Three times.

**Knott:** That's why you chose to settle here?

**Shalikashvili:** My wife is from Portland, Oregon. Our son was then living in the Seattle area.

**Knott:** General, what about the decision to deploy troops to Haiti? Again, what we're trying to do here is just whatever recollections you have of that decision being made and some of the difficulties that you might have encountered. All of that would be helpful for the historical record. I know that's a big question.

**Shalikashvili:** I think that the Haiti operation, like most of those things, was fairly complex. On the one side there was President [Jean-Bertrand] Aristide, who had sort of a checkered past in Haiti. The other one is the last time we went into Haiti, we had a hell of a time getting out of there. All of those things were post-Mogadishu, so that complicated that problem also. But in the end—in the beginning I guess, on our way to the end, we made a tragic mistake. We sent an insufficient number of troops to Haiti. They had to leave.

**Knott:** General, are you referring to the ship that was turned around at the dock?

**Shalikashvili:** Yes.

**Knott:** The *Harlan County*.

**Shalikashvili:** Yes.

**Knott:** How did that come about, that incident at the dock?

**Shalikashvili:** I don't know; I wasn't here yet. I was in Europe. So I don't know if it was something that Colin Powell did or Admiral Dave Jeremiah, who then took over from Powell. But somewhere in there the decision was made to send troops to Haiti. It was kind of a half-hearted effort.

**Knott:** How often would you meet with the President during, let's say, a typical week? Maybe a typical day would be a better question. Or maybe there was never a typical day. We're trying to get a feel for your position.

**Shalikashvili:** I think it depended on what the issues were, how often we would meet. I would generally meet with him on business a couple of times a week. When something like Haiti would come along, there would be a period of time when I would go over there and brief him and the National Security Advisor and the Vice President several times a week and update him. To give you a more accurate answer I would have to go upstairs and look at my calendar for that period.

**Knott:** That's okay. When you came in as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, did you decide to do anything different in terms of the structure of your command than your predecessor had? Did you make any of those kinds of changes? Was there any agenda that you had in terms of changing things?

**Shalikashvili:** No. But remember, I was Colin Powell's assistant, so I knew very well how the system operated and how it interfaced with the rest of the government. I felt very comfortable with just continuing that system. There were a couple of things that I did that Powell had not done. One of them is that part of the [Barry] Goldwater-[William] Nichols law says that the Chairman provides strategic direction to the Armed Forces. I couldn't find a way in which that was ever being done. But each service had its own system of developing that strategic direction. That was, first of all, try to describe what the world is going to look like in whatever period you were interested in. I decided then to publish something I called Joint Vision 2010. It would sort of give each service a nail on the wall that they needed to fasten the service in war fighting, in doctrine, in education. To be able to deal with those kinds of threats that were going to exist.

I always said, "I don't care if you guys agree with what I have written. I want you to agree with the need to have it." You cannot have the Air Force picturing a different kind of battlefield challenge than the Army. We all need to have that same start point and end point.

**Knott:** Do you think this was a successful initiative?

**Shalikashvili:** I think so. We still have Joint Vision 2020 now. What they didn't agree with me on was picking a period ten years out. They wanted to pick a period further out, 20 years out. But I've had experience. When I was on the Army staff, one of my tasks was to do long-range planning. I found out then that the biggest pitfall of long-range planning is if you plan something outside of the five-year defense plan. Because then there are no funds against it. In Washington, if you cannot fund something, you cannot do it.

**Knott:** Do you recall, General, any discussions with President Clinton about any expectations that he may have had regarding you as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs?

**Shalikashvili:** The only discussion I had with him about that was when I came in and interviewed with him. He told me what it was he wanted to do. Then at the end of the discussion I said, “I really appreciate it, Mr. President, but I want you to know I don’t want to come here. I think you don’t have anyone that can do in Europe what I can do for you because of my European background.”

**Knott:** Right.

**Shalikashvili:** He said, “I’m glad you told me that. Now tell me why it is that you don’t want to do this.” I said, “There are a couple of reasons. One is that I don’t want to replace Colin Powell because people will say, ‘He’s all right, but he’s no Colin Powell.’” [*Knott laughs.*] But the overriding reason is if you take me out of Europe now you’ll leave yourself a big hole there.

**Mrs. Shalikashvili:** That was true too. When they asked him to take over the SACEUR [Supreme Allied Commander Europe], they have to have it approved by the 15 countries that are in NATO. He’d worked with 13 of them and Provide Comfort and they knew it. And they trusted him. Because no matter what kind of background you’ve had, if you’re born in Europe, you’re a European to them. Regardless of being born here and having lived over there and everything, it makes a big difference to them.

**Knott:** I can imagine.

**Mrs. Shalikashvili:** It really did. In fact John is, right now, collaborating with four retired European generals on a pamphlet that they’re going to be doing which is I think absolutely unheard of. I mean four four-star generals—five of them from five different countries would get together and do this. I didn’t mean to do this—

**Knott:** No, it’s perfectly fine. We like everyone to chime in.

[BREAK]

**Knott:** General, how much of your time was spent as Chairman dealing with or interacting with Congress?

**Shalikashvili:** Too much.

**Knott:** [*laughs*] Somehow I expected that would be the response. I’ll let you characterize the impact that Congressional testimony has on the ability for you to do your job.

**Shalikashvili:** If there was one thing that kept me from staying on, it’s the interaction with Congress.

**Knott:** You caught it at a particularly difficult time with the Republican takeover in '94. That complicated things, I would assume.

**Shalikashvili:** It did very much, particularly in the House. Newt Gingrich was a tough nut to deal with. In the Senate Armed Services Committee, Strom Thurmond.

**Knott:** So did you find yourself constantly having to defend whatever administration position was under attack that day? Because of Mr. Clinton's fair or not reputation on military matters, that probably made you even more high profile in terms of dealing with these issues.

**Shalikashvili:** I wasn't smart enough to know how some of those issues would come back and bite me.

**Knott:** Can you give me an example of where it came back to bite you?

**Shalikashvili:** Bosnia.

**Knott:** Why especially Bosnia?

**Shalikashvili:** It had to do with how long we were going to stay there. The issue was, someone invented the words "exit strategy." So guys like [John] McCain and others would say, "Shali, what's the exit strategy?" I said, "Do you think that anyone ever asked [Dwight] Eisenhower what his exit strategy was from Europe?" Fifty years later we're still there.

**Knott:** Did it surprise you Republicans during the Cold War tended to be very hawkish, pro-military, generally pro use of force? Now you've got a Democratic President with a Republican-controlled Congress that seems to be hesitant about using force. Did that surprise you at all?

**Shalikashvili:** Yes. It surprises me not only as a collective, but as individuals. The other thing I will tell you is Newt Gingrich and Clinton got along famously as individuals.

**Knott:** Really? They were both interested in ideas? They liked to banter with each other over policy proposals?

**Shalikashvili:** Yes. Let me return to Bosnia for a minute.

**Knott:** Please.

**Shalikashvili:** The question posed to me was how much time does the military need to be able to pull out of there. I said everything we want to do we can get done in one year. So the question was, "Are you saying that we can withdraw from Bosnia after one year?" I said, "No, I didn't. I said that everything needs to be done, which is separate the two parties and establish procedures, we can get done in one year." Obviously it didn't get done in one year. So the next hearing I attended McCain had the room pasted with posters that said, "Out in one year." By that time we had two or three years behind us.

The other thing was in Rwanda. I was very much against going into Rwanda.

**Knott:** You were. You've been criticized for that.

**Shalikashvili:** I could just see if you brought back one soldier who had been hacked up with a machete what the outcry would be.

**Knott:** In the United States. Was there anyone within the administration who was pushing for an intervention in Rwanda?

**Shalikashvili:** Madeleine Albright.

**Knott:** What would you say to those critics to this day who say it wouldn't have taken too much to have stopped the genocide in Rwanda?

**Shalikashvili:** I would say, "Where were you when people were complaining about Mogadishu?"

**Knott:** It didn't appear that there was a consensus in the United States that we should intervene. I know the Congressional Black Caucus was urging that we do so. I think President Clinton later apologized, if I remember correctly, for not intervening.

**Shalikashvili:** I don't know. He has apologized for so many things, including slavery.

**Knott:** That's true. Can you just give me—that was a fairly intense debate whether to intervene or not, or was it sort of on the sidelines?

**Shalikashvili:** While it was ongoing it was a very intense debate.

**Knott:** Did Mrs. Albright have any allies anywhere else within the administration who thought—

**Shalikashvili:** Tony Lake.

**Knott:** Ultimately the President said no. Did you get the sense that your advice was a critical part of his decision to say no?

**Shalikashvili:** I don't know.

**Knott:** How would he make a decision? Could you give us some sense of his decision-making style? Is it possible to do that?

**Shalikashvili:** Very much participatory. He would like everyone to participate in the discussion, and then Gore, as I told you, would summarize what the various positions were.

**Knott:** Would he tend to leave the room and make his decision? Or would he—

**Shalikashvili:** No, right there.

**Knott:** You mentioned before this was not a White House that was particularly devoted to keeping things running on time. I hate to ask you a question like this, because you've said some

very positive things about President Clinton, but were there other aspects of his style that bothered you, other weaknesses that you saw in the way he approached his job as President?

**Shalikashvili:** No.

**Knott:** Tell me again then, what was it that impressed you so much about this man?

**Shalikashvili:** His intellect, his desire to be given as much information about an issue as possible and let him stew through it. You'd kind of guide him. There was another issue that came up like that, and that was doing away with land mines. I was very much against it. I had gone to each one of the combatant commanders and said, "If we do away with land mines will you be able to do your job?" The guy in Korea said, "I can't. I can't stop the North Koreans without land mines."

Later on the President told me, "One of the things I really wanted to do was do away with land mines, and you kept me from doing that." Because I said, "I could say yes, but you've got a whole Congress there that we would not be able to roll on that issue. I'm not even sure I can deliver the service chiefs on that." So in the end he was not able to do that.

**Knott:** General, one of the criticisms of President Clinton at the time, in some quarters, was that he was more concerned about domestic issues, perhaps domestic politics, than he was about national security or certain foreign policy issues. Do you have any comment on that? Does that sound like an accurate description to you? Was this somebody who preferred to deal with welfare reform or tax reform or Social Security reform over defense questions or security-related questions?

**Shalikashvili:** I would not agree with that unless you could show me examples.

**Brent Shalikashvili:** How would you characterize—if you would say that he didn't have more concerns on domestic affairs, do you think he was balanced? Is there an area that you thought either that he was more passionate about or was a stronger suit for him?

**Shalikashvili:** I don't know. I think these kinds of views come from his statements like, "It's the economy, stupid."

**Knott:** He had to focus like a laser beam on the economy.

**Brent Shalikashvili:** I think for me, the impression I always got is that an area that he and his wife at the time, in particular—I think both of them have evolved, but when they first came in, I got the feeling that they were decidedly more domestic-focused. Not to say that they didn't have a pretty good grasp of international, but the Clintons as a team were really—

**Knott:** Healthcare.

**Brent Shalikashvili:** Overhauling healthcare, dealing with a number of things, gays in the military. It wasn't about the military so much as the domestic issue of gays in our society.

**Knott:** Right.



**Brent Shalikashvili:** There were so many things in their initial agenda that were domestically focused.

**Knott:** Right. I think that's where these stories come from.

**Brent Shalikashvili:** I don't know that my impression—like I say, I think it was their focus, but I think by the time that President Clinton left office, you couldn't have looked at the beginning and the end and said that he started and finished as the same person. But I was on the outside and you were on the inside, what was your impression? And I was just a kid. Mostly I just wanted someone to have to listen to my voice on tape.

**Knott:** *[laughs]* You're now preserved for history.

**Brent Shalikashvili:** Exactly.

**Shalikashvili:** I think that's a very good measure. Did you end up the same person as you started out? I don't know anybody who can go into a position like being President of a country like the United States and come out the same as he went in.

**Knott:** I would think.

**Brent Shalikashvili:** How do you see Clinton? How do you see his evolution? Where do you think he started, where do you think he finished, and what do you think gave him more gray hair? Because God knows he got a lot of it during this time. You were there. Who is the person who convinced you to become Chairman? Who was that person and who was the person who was there when you retired?

**Shalikashvili:** He convinced me.

**Brent Shalikashvili:** What was it about the things that he thought were important and how he thought you could help? You see what I'm asking. If he did change over time, who was he in the beginning and who was he—?

**Shalikashvili:** I think his strength in the beginning and at the end—he was a superb people person and is still today. His strength is dealing with people and convincing them what needs to be done.

**Brent Shalikashvili:** Would you say that his was more a perception of people or perception of the issues or some mix of both?

**Shalikashvili:** Some mix of both.

**Knott:** Does he strike you as a strong person? Again, one of the criticisms at the time was he would flip positions based on the polls. Was this a guy who once he made a decision stuck to his guns and made sure it was carried out? Trying to get a feel for the character of the man.

**Shalikashvili:** I think yes. I'm thinking of examples. I think he showed his strength in Bosnia.

**Knott:** I think that's true. The easier thing to do in terms of domestic sentiment would have been to do nothing.

**Shalikashvili:** Yes.

**Knott:** How much of your job as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs was spent in a kind of diplomatic role, foreign travel?

**Shalikashvili:** Quite a bit.

**Knott:** Did that part of the job appeal to you, or did you see that as a distraction from what you were really supposed to be doing?

**Shalikashvili:** No, it appealed to me.

**Brent Shalikashvili:** One of the outcomes of that was the group my mom was mentioning earlier, the four of them who are working on this paper. One of the outcroppings of that was your time doing that international travel and really connecting with the various chiefs.

**Knott:** Can I ask you who are the coauthors of this piece?

**Shalikashvili:** It is Field Marshal Lord [Peter] Inge in the UK [United Kingdom] and Admiral Jacques Lanxade of France and Klaus Naumann of Germany.

**Knott:** When will we see this? Or will we?

**Shalikashvili:** You will, but I don't know when.

**Brent Shalikashvili:** I don't remember the timeline on the project. They're all fairly centrally located, so they're doing a lot of the work and then handing stuff off, draft reviews and other stuff in our direction.

**Knott:** I see. Were there some foreign military leaders that you were particularly close to? Maybe it was just the individuals you just named. But did you have a particularly good relationship with—

**Shalikashvili:** With the UK.

**Knott:** Were there some that were not so good?

**Shalikashvili:** Russia.

**Knott:** Were they particularly suspicious of you because of your background?

**Shalikashvili:** I don't know, but I had better relations with the Chinese than with the Russians.

**Brent Shalikashvili:** What was your relationship like with the Chinese military leaders?

**Shalikashvili:** Very good. My counterpart was General Fu Quanyou and the defense minister.

**Brent Shalikashvili:** It seems odd at that time to have a strong relationship with the Chinese military leadership. What was it that brought that about?

**Shalikashvili:** We had just won Desert Storm and they wanted to know how we did it. So they assembled a whole bunch of Chinese general officer equivalents and I spoke to them. I and Bill Perry did.

**Brent Shalikashvili:** Maybe they were thinking for something similar regarding Taiwan.

**Shalikashvili:** I'm sure.

**Brent Shalikashvili:** I just found it interesting that we had decent relations not just with China but with the Chinese military, of all things. It's something I probably would have expected a little bit more reaching out on both sides in recent years, but not during that time.

**Knott:** Were there any of our allies that we had maybe not as good a relationship as might have been thought from a distance?

**Shalikashvili:** No, but we had much better relations with the French than we think.

**Brent Shalikashvili:** I've always been intrigued by that relationship, because they've always been a pretty strong ally throughout our history. But it's never quite been the way that we think of an ally. We seem to think of an ally as somebody who whenever we say yes always says yes, whenever we say no always says no. That has definitely not been the relationship with the French.

**Knott:** Absolutely. General, do you have anything that you consider to be one of your greatest accomplishments during your tenure as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, something you're particularly proud of?

**Shalikashvili:** Something called the Partnership for Peace.

**Knott:** Could you talk a little bit about that?

**Shalikashvili:** We had never thought about what would happen if the Cold War ended. Clearly the big issue was how do we integrate the states of the former Soviet Union into the alliance. You cannot make them members of NATO, because then you take on the responsibility of coming to their defense. So it occurred to us that what we ought to do is develop a different participation than Article VI, which gives every NATO member a guarantee that we would come to their defense. So we needed to develop a new set of rules for NATO.

One was that in order to go into Bosnia or someplace like that you need to have a partnership, and everyone has to agree to participate. Everyone has to participate in the decision that NATO is going to take on that task. But once you made that decision it doesn't mean that everyone has to participate in that operation. So we came up with the term "Partnership for Peace." It's a non-Article VI operation. It was really mostly for Russia, because we had to figure out a way to make them part of us without taking on the burden of defending them.

I had thought for a long time that we would have peace in Europe if we ever convinced Russia that they must not think of defense against us, the West. The best way to do that is to embrace them as forcefully as possible so they would have no reason to think of their defense against us, but think of their defense in partnership with us. So it was at first convincing the Europeans that that is in their best interests too. You cannot have as big a nation as Russia standing on the outside. And then convince the United States. Henry Kissinger once told me, “Shali, you’re nuts; can’t be done.” I said, “Mr. Secretary, it can be and it will be done.”

**Knott:** If you feel that that was your greatest accomplishment, did you have any great disappointment, something that you hoped to do during your time as Chairman that somehow just didn’t come to pass?

**Shalikashvili:** Persuade the United States to do away with nuclear weapons. Because until we do we have very little chance of reaching the day of nuclear nonproliferation. Because people will say that if the most capable military power on the face of this earth feels it needs nuclear weapons, then why should we, Pakistan, do away with them, or Iran?

**Knott:** How widespread is that feeling that you just expressed about the need to do away with nuclear weapons? My impression would be that you were very much in the minority within military circles. Is that accurate?

**Shalikashvili:** I’ve been in the minority so often that it doesn’t scare me or deter me from going on.

**Knott:** One area we did not touch on was Iraq during your time. Where was that in terms of being on the front burner or the back burner? The no-fly zone enforcement, I guess.

**Shalikashvili:** It was continually on the front burner, but not in a way that ended up—I don’t understand the Chairman, why he agreed to this operation.

**Knott:** General [Richard] Myers?

**Shalikashvili:** I would never have agreed to it.

**Knott:** Why?

**Shalikashvili:** Because anyone who knows the Middle East should have been able to forecast that the outcome would be just what happened. The friction always there has been between Arabs and Persians, and if Iraq was building nuclear weapons, it was to defend themselves against Iran, and if Iran is building nuclear weapons it is to defend themselves against the Israeli and Iraqi. I’m amazed that neither Colin Powell nor Condi [Condoleezza] Rice understood that. We now act like we’re surprised that Iran is meddling in Iraq.

**Knott:** I’m taking you a little off track here, but do you think we’re moving toward a conflict with Iran?

**Shalikashvili:** No, I don't think so. I don't think we have the capacity, although others would say sure, we can just eliminate Iran with nuclear weapons. But we cannot engage in a conventional conflict with Iran.

**Knott:** We don't have the capacity?

**Shalikashvili:** We don't have the capacity to do that, particularly when over the horizon there is the issue of North Korea.

**Brent Shalikashvili:** The current horizon is still trying to deal with what we have, and we're stretched without any additional conflict. Heck, if we have a flu epidemic in the military, we have a problem, or a concern at least. I'm trying to remember back to your testimony before we went into Iraq this time you testified, because if I recall correctly, Congress was asking you and Bill Perry, and I don't remember who else was testifying with you, about the state of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. You were able to speak to the time when you had departed as Chairman and what was known at that time. I don't remember what their response was. That's working back into the Clinton time frame. If we're talking about the Iraq of today—when you departed as Chairman, what was your perception?

**Shalikashvili:** That the Iraqis had nuclear weapons from Desert Storm and that they were proceeding full speed in building new ones.

**Brent Shalikashvili:** This was a known fact when you departed?

**Shalikashvili:** Yes.

**Brent Shalikashvili:** Was it a concern?

**Shalikashvili:** Sure, but no one was certain enough to go to war over it.

**Knott:** General, I just want to clarify nuclear weapons.

**Brent Shalikashvili:** Was it a large, well-developed nuclear program? The other question being, was this nuclear material with delivery system or without delivery system?

**Shalikashvili:** The issue about delivery was that Iraq had such good relations with al Qaeda that it would easily pass those things off to al Qaeda and they would put it on a ship and deliver it to New York. Now we know that they didn't have any.

**Brent Shalikashvili:** But the perception at that time was that they probably had something?

**Shalikashvili:** Yes.

**Knott:** Osama bin Laden—was this a name that you would have recognized ten or twelve years ago?

**Shalikashvili:** No.

**Knott:** When the Khobar Towers bombing occurred, was the term al Qaeda associated with it?

**Shalikashvili:** No. The name associated with that was Iran. We all believed that Iran had done this, and our feeling was it would get in the press and we would have to then take military action against Iran. So there was no thought that this was a terrorist organization.

**Knott:** How would you rate President Clinton as a strategic thinker, as someone who could look over the horizon and have a sense perhaps of what lies ahead? Was this someone who was into doing that and capable of doing that?

**Shalikashvili:** Both. The important question now is how good is Hillary Clinton as a strategic thinker? I have no idea.

**Knott:** Did you get to know her at all?

**Shalikashvili:** [*Nods*]

**Knott:** Were your interactions with her mostly social, or would there occasionally be an issue of concern to her that dealt with your interests in your portfolio?

**Shalikashvili:** I don't ever remember her in a conversation about defense issues. So I don't have a feel at all.

**Knott:** Do you have a sense of her relationship, her role as First Lady, in terms of advising the President on policy? Any sense of that? Any indication?

**Shalikashvili:** No.

**Knott:** Did you have a lot of interactions with the White House Chief of Staff? There were maybe two or three during your time? Maybe [Thomas] Mack McLarty, Leon Panetta perhaps?

**Shalikashvili:** Panetta mostly.

**Knott:** Was he an important player or was he simply someone who tried to keep the trains running on time?

**Shalikashvili:** I think he was a very important player. I wouldn't say the same thing about McLarty.

**Knott:** You mentioned President Clinton's strength in people skills. How would he treat you? Would he treat you fairly formally since you were—I think you were in uniform when dealing with him. Would he joke around with you? Were there some inside jokes that the two of you shared? Was it a warm relationship, or was it a somewhat formal, businesslike relationship?

**Shalikashvili:** It was not a formal businesslike relationship.

**Knott:** Did he refer to you by your first name or your title?

**Shalikashvili:** I think everybody called me Shali.

**Knott:** I should have known that. Did you ever get a chance to meet him?

**Brent Shalikashvili:** I met him on a couple of occasions, talked to him. When Dad told you about going to the White House and somehow being arm-twisted into taking the job—well, when the arm twisting was complete and the decision was made, “Okay, let’s just saunter outside and announce to the press that this is what we’re doing.” Of course the President wants to have a husband and wife team there. So the White House tried to figure out where the heck my mom is.

At this point I’m in college. I’m actually enrolled at Washington State University out here. We were passing through from Belgium. I’d been home for the summer or whatever, and was coming back through D.C., and my mom was flying out with me to drop me off at school. She’s from Portland, so she was coming out here. So a call comes in to my dad’s aide’s pager. He’s driving, so he hands me the pager and his cell phone and says, “Return this call for me.” I returned the call, not paying attention to what I’m dialing. I dial and get the White House switchboard and they’re like, “Hold for the President.”

I’m thinking to myself, wait a minute, what has happened? The next thing I know, it’s his voice. The only thing I can think of to say was something along the lines of, “Hold on a second, I’ll give you my mom.” But I have talked to him on a few occasions since then. I spoke to him probably for five or ten minutes on the phone not long after dad had his stroke. He called up to the hospital to check on my dad. I was the one who was there, so he talked to me for a while before he got to speak with my father.

The first time I met him in person, it was the same thing. I always tell people this way. I met him and Hillary at my dad’s retirement. That’s where I actually met them for the first time. I was impressed by the fact that neither of them even blinks.

**Knott:** They stare right through you.

**Brent Shalikashvili:** It’s very disconcerting when you’re talking to somebody and they’re very engaged, they’re staring at you. Some people when you talk to them, you can see them staring at the door behind you. It stopped right about your ears; they don’t look any further back than that. I was very impressed. When you talk about—there’s mention of them being, or him being a people person, and really being able to read people, the thing that I’m impressed with.

You can point out Presidential do’s and don’ts that he crossed over. You can point out where he may have had personal failings. You can point out his humanity, anything you want. The one thing I was truly always struck with is how genuine the interest in whoever it was he was addressing, whether it be an individual or an entire parade field full of soldiers. I could be completely off base with him—I never got the impression that he put on airs that he was trying to convince somebody that he cared about an issue.

Oftentimes he cared about an issue to a fault, as with what turned out to be the “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy. He desperately wanted to do what he felt was the right thing, in my opinion. He cared so much about it that he lost sight of the practical reality that there wasn’t a snowball’s chance in hell of it happening at that time. But like I say, I get that very genuine impression. When he says that he cares about something, I get the sense that he cares about it. I get the sense that the things he’s passionate about, he’s not passionate about because someone told him he should be passionate about it.

Now, whether he made choices during his Presidency because the polls said he should or not, I can't say. But when he comes out and tells you, "I care a great deal about X," I believe he does. He does not strike me as somebody who lies about that. I've just never gotten that impression, either in my personal interactions with him where, like I say, there were infinitely more important people in every room that he could walk into than me. But when he talks to me, he talks to me. That is an impressive quality in any person.

**Knott:** Anything to add to that, General?

**Shalikashvili:** No, I fully agree with him.

**Knott:** Do you have a sense—somebody might be reading this transcript 50 to 100 years from now, some student interested in history or perhaps a scholar trying to write a book and get a feel for the Clinton years.

**Brent Shalikashvili:** I'll read this manuscript shortly, as dad and I are going to do a book.

**Knott:** There you go. You are going to be doing a book?

**Brent Shalikashvili:** I'm hoping. There have been a billion interviews and things about my father over the years, but we haven't really been able to compile anything into his story. So I'm hoping to use a lot of these interviews—because the U.S. Army War College did one about his career, his life. Other interviews in newspapers were done over the years, and so we're trying to compile it into something. That's why, some of the questions I asked—it may suit your purposes, but there are some that I want to know.

**Knott:** I hope this briefing book helps as well.

**Brent Shalikashvili:** It helps greatly. Back to Clinton.

**Knott:** I'm just wondering if there's something you want to make sure that future generations, long after all of us in this room may be gone, understand about that Presidency and appreciate. We may have already covered it, in which case that's fine, but I always like to give people the chance—

**Shalikashvili:** Who else have you interviewed for this?

**Knott:** We've done probably 80 or 90 interviews. Madeleine Albright, all the major—Tony Lake, Sandy Berger, Warren Christopher. I think Bill Perry. All the main—the White House Chiefs of Staff, some of the deputies, press secretaries, campaign folks, major Cabinet officers. It's an extensive project. It has been underway since 2002. So it will be quite a collection. The interviews will probably stop sometime next year, 2008. Hopefully the materials would be open in the next year or two. It's an arrangement between the Clinton Presidential Library in Little Rock and the University of Virginia. So the Clinton Library will have all the transcripts stored there, and hopefully they'll be posted online. Quite a resource. We've done this for Bush the elder, and for Reagan and for [Jimmy] Carter.



**Brent Shalikashvili:** I think the thing that impressed me the most, and a lot of it is my awareness of it because my dad was in the midst, was during the time that my father was Chairman and Bill Perry was Secretary of Defense. I really think a number of the people who were in State and Defense during that time frame still worked together and collaborated on amazing projects, dialogues with the Chinese and North Koreans, and a number of issues that are still extraordinarily important today. A huge subset of that team that worked at State and Defense at the time still collaborates.

It seems to me that prior to that, our biggest concerns involved the Cold War. There was a large stalemate look at the world. People thought, *Let's do everything we can to keep everything in perfect balance*. You're looking at that guy across the table from you, he's looking at you, and that was it. Relatively simple view of global politics. Given what I've seen from the time my dad was Chairman and moving forward, I really think that under Perry, that particular window between Clinton as President and his Cabinet and senior leadership really set a strong baseline for how the military and civilian sides of government can collaborate to provide a really strong national defense.

I don't think we were under nearly the amount of immediate threat that we are today, and supposedly we have a stronger military today. But the actual way that it operated, the way that the entire mechanism, not just the soldiers and their weapons, the entire mechanism of the government leadership and the military leadership I think worked in such a special way. It's the long term, but I think that that really set the baseline for 50 to 100 years from now, how we should think about interacting.

**Knott:** Of course you know there was this criticism of the military during the Clinton years for engaging, as some of the neoconservatives put it, in social work. I'm wondering if that elicits any response from you, General.

**Shalikashvili:** I wish that this team now had thought a little bit more about "social work." We wouldn't be in the mess right now that we are.

**Brent Shalikashvili:** That dovetails with what I'm thinking, the holistic approach. It's not just whether the soldiers have the right guns and they know how to shoot them; it's whether the entire policy is created, because the military is a tool for enforcement of foreign policy. That's it.

In my view of the world, they're a tool for enforcement of foreign policy, which requires taking into account what is involved there as well as what resources it has for enforcement. At that time, for better or worse, they had in place the right processes and the right mindset to be willing to consider the full spectrum, willing to consider we need to talk about this. We need to talk for X amount of time. At this point we actually have to start shooting. At this point we have to put down our guns and pull out Band-Aids and start fixing the problem. There seemed to be a far more holistic approach than there was before because there wasn't a need for it, or since. Everybody has been so loathe to bring back Clinton, psychologically. None of the Republicans. "No, we can't do it that way because Bill Clinton did it."

**Knott:** Exactly.

**Brent Shalikashvili:** Even if it was right. Right or wrong. But even if it was right, even if there was something that he did do right, nobody since would do it because they didn't want to be like him. They were afraid that somehow the stigma might rub off, and I'm not really sure the stigma is all bad. The short-term perception of it might have a little weird aftertaste, but I'm not really sure that if you looked 100 years from now back at the Clinton Presidency—it's not quite the evil empire some would try to deem it.

**Knott:** We're interviewing General [Hugh] Shelton next week. Do you have any comments on General Shelton? Any recollections?

**Shalikashvili:** I do. I picked him as my Assistant to the Chairman.

**Knott:** Good choice, bad choice?

**Shalikashvili:** Good choice. I like Hugh. He was a good travel companion for Madeleine Albright.

**Brent Shalikashvili:** Was he a good Assistant in your capacity?

**Shalikashvili:** Yes.

**Brent Shalikashvili:** What made him effective in that position?

**Shalikashvili:** I think you have to know your business, to be able to think on your feet.

**Knott:** General, was there any aspect of being Chairman of the Joint Chiefs that you did not enjoy? You mentioned having to testify repeatedly up on the Hill. Was there anything other than that? I'm trying to get an assessment of the pros and cons of being Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

**Brent Shalikashvili:** I think one of the high points was his getting to speak at my graduation, but that's just me.

**Knott:** When was that?

**Brent Shalikashvili:** Ninety-five, I graduated from college. He was the keynote speaker. It was good and bad. The bad news was he got to meet the chief of police of the town and the campus, and for some reason I had a file of trouble.

**Knott:** I hope that didn't come up.

**Brent Shalikashvili:** It did, at breakfast I think. Water under the bridge; I've been a good boy since.

**Knott:** That's great. I saw you speak at the Air Force Academy. I was there from 1994 until 2001. It might have been '95 or '96.

**Brent Shalikashvili:** There was also your reaction the same morning. The Spokane paper knew my dad was coming up, so the Spokane people interviewed me for an article that was going to

come out graduation morning. During that interview, I evidently referred to the headquarters of the U.S. military, our beloved Pentagon, as a cross between a hospital and a penitentiary. I remember waking up the morning of graduation and walking down the hall towards my parents' room in the hotel. I had moved out of my apartment. We were all staying at the hotel. An aide comes out and is shaking his head and looking at me, muttering something to the effect of, "What the hell were you thinking?" Dad shrugged it off with a good laugh, but they are a few of my more classic recollections.

**Knott:** When we send this transcript there will probably be a deed in there for you, as you are now officially on the record here.

**Shalikashvili:** General [Creighton W.] Abrams, one of our former Chiefs of Staff of the Army, had a favorite saying: "Don't ever miss the opportunity to keep your mouth shut." [laughter]

**Brent Shalikashvili:** Words I've not been living by.

**Knott:** Did you ever get burned by the press, General? You feel they treated you fairly? The Pentagon reporters covered you fairly and accurately?

**Shalikashvili:** Yes.

**Brent Shalikashvili:** I remember early on when you became Chairman you were telling me about sometimes when—of course as soon as you get into a position, the media always wants to talk to you and ask your thoughts on all of these huge topics. I remember—correct me if I'm wrong—Dad telling me about this and his response to his public affairs people was, "I'm studying." To me and to his public affairs people, the message was, "I just got here, going over the job. I'm getting briefed on it. I'm reading. Give me some time to understand the issues before I come back and tell you something. As soon as I have something to say, I'll tell you."

I recall the media being amazingly forgiving, which you wouldn't expect. He just said essentially, "No comment," and they didn't crucify him. It seems like there was something aligned in the stars at that time when they accepted a rational answer and the rational answer was, "I don't know. Anything I told you today I'd be making up. Give me a few minutes."

**Knott:** Right.

**Brent Shalikashvili:** I've read a trillion articles that were written when he was there. I think the only unfair characterization or anything that I can really recall that was really, really off the mark was during the confirmation hearings, when some reporter dug up the thing about the Waffen SS [Schutzstaffel] and all of that chatter. But it struck me, especially during the early period, that there was a healthy respect between the Chairman's office and the media. At least that was my impression.

Of course there was always the occasional thing where I'd watch Congressional testimony and I thought that one of the Congressmen was being a twit. But I think in the media I don't recall anything being—

**Knott:** Did that bother you when your father was dragged into that?

**Brent Shalikashvili:** Oh, God.

**Knott:** You're nodding yes.

**Shalikashvili:** Yes.

**Brent Shalikashvili:** That was huge. My father is not somebody I have ever considered to be prone to emotion, display sadness or anger. I think that was probably as close to anything that I could recall as infuriating him.

**Shalikashvili:** You know who came to my assistance very quickly? Paul Wolfowitz. He immediately called all of his buddies in the Jewish community.

**Knott:** That's interesting. And they rallied to your defense.

**Shalikashvili:** Yes.

**Brent Shalikashvili:** I remember that as the single lowest low point in his interaction with the media. It was squashed quickly. It was dismissed by Congress, the media—nobody picked it up and tried to run with anything or dig into that. That was really the one time that I thought that the media was off base and wasn't trying to be fair. That one sticks in my head because of the reaction.

**Knott:** Pardon me for not knowing this, but was your father still alive at this time or not?

**Shalikashvili:** No.

**Brent Shalikashvili:** My grandfather passed away when I was six years old. It was particularly the idea that he wasn't alive, wasn't able to defend himself. If the reporter had done his research, he would have understood more of the picture, and it was obviously somebody trying to make a name.

**Knott:** General, is there anything that I failed to ask you that you'd like to get on the record?

**Shalikashvili:** I can't think of anything. We covered pretty much.

**Knott:** Again, when you do get the transcript, feel free to write in anything and we'll make sure that becomes part of the official transcript. I want to thank you for giving me this time. I can tell you that the Clinton project is all the better for it. So thank you so much, both of you.

**Brent Shalikashvili:** Likewise, as you were saying—as you're looking back, if there's something you don't feel was captured and you have further questions, you know where to find us.

**Knott:** Thanks. I appreciate it.

**Brent Shalikashvili:** You can set up a phone interview or e-mail questions. We can work that out. But I know that we might look at it and say, "Hang on, there was something else that needs

to be captured in here.” But if you do as well, or anyone on your team, let us know and we’ll be more than happy to help make this record as complete as possible.

**Knott:** Thank you so much, both of you.