Thirteen

Show #702

**WNET/Thirteen:** 356 West 58th Street, New York, N.Y. 10019
**Transcripts:** Bill Moyers' Journal Campaign Report, Box 900, New York, N.Y. 10101
**Press contact:** Sara Reitz (212) 560-2039

BILL MOYERS' JOURNAL

# A Conversation with Zbigniew Brzezinski

Executive Producer ..... JOAN KONNER
Executive Editor ..... BILL MOYERS
Producer ..... BETSY McCARTHY

*This program is made possible by a grant from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.*

WNET/Thirteen

PBS Air Date: November 14, 1980



**TRANSCRIPT CHARGES:**
One to ten copies, $2.00 each; additional copies, $1.00 each. Be sure to indicate air date and subject or participants. Send order with payment to Bill Moyers' Journal, Box 900, New York, N.Y. 10101. All orders must be prepaid. Make checks payable to Bill Moyers' Journal. PLEASE DO NOT SEND CASH OR STAMPS.

CANADIAN VIEWERS: Canadian checks are not acceptable due to excessive bank clearance charges. Please send U.S. funds. Thank you.

Transcript produced by Journal Graphics, Inc., New York, N.Y.

**BILL MOYERS' JOURNAL** **Air Date:** November 14, 1980

# A Conversation With Zbigniew Brzezinski

*[Tease — Interior, Executive Office Building, Washington, D.C.]*

**ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI:** I think we did very well — and I'm trying to be objective about it and not self-serving — in shaping the beginnings of truly significant structural responses. I think the electoral outcome clearly shows that we did not do as well in communicating to the public why we need to head the way we were headed, why we need to stick to that course, why nostalgia and escapism no longer will suffice. Now obviously, that's a judgment and I don't want it to be interpreted as a political slam at the other party. Maybe their prescriptions will be better than ours. I hope their prescriptions are premised on a recognition of the extent to which the world really has changed. I hope they're not derived from the hope that somehow the conditions of the '50s can be recreated. Because they won't be.

**BILL MOYERS** *[voice-over]*: Tonight, a conversation with President Carter's national security advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski. I'm Bill Moyers.

*[Bill Moyers' Journal opening]*

**MOYERS:** Dr. Brzezinski, what were your thoughts on election night, seeing it all come down to defeat?

**BRZEZINSKI:** Well, I must confess that by election night, I knew what would happen. I had a sense of what would happen by Tuesday morning, perhaps even by Monday night. So in that sense, I already digested some of the evidence of defeat. But, of course, there was a sense of disappointment. There was a sense that something very important — not only in my life but in the life of the country — was coming to an end, and the feeling which, of course, is highly subjective, that the president deserved better, that the president who initiated some major changes — basic changes — in our domestic affairs, in our foreign policy, deserved better — deserved what I think he will get from history: a recognition of the fact that he undertook some very major assignments which it might have been wiser politically to shrink. In that sense, I felt sorry but I do have fundamental faith not only in the democratic process but particularly in the vitality of this country.

**MOYERS:** Many pollsters saw a great river of votes streaming away from the president in the last 48 hours before the election and they saw that as the result of the dam finally breaking again on frustration over the hostages. What credence do you give to that opinion?

**BRZEZINSKI:** I am not the best person to make a judgment on this. I'm not an expert on voting behavior. So all I can give you is my generalized impression of what happened in the elections. The analogy that I use to explain it to myself or to my children is that of a boxing fight. The president first went into the ring to spar with a partner, Senator Kennedy. And Senator Kennedy wore fighting gloves, and the president didn't and he pummelled away at the midriff, which is the national economy and inflation. And he softened the president up. And then the president went into the ring with his opponent for the championship fight. And he again punched away at the midriff — the economy, inflation — where the president was already softened up by Kennedy. And he lost some of his basic support there. And then Iran came up — the weekend. It revived every bitter memory of the last year. And that permitted the knockout blow — the blow which really made for the margin in the elections. We were going into the elections that weekend either even or slightly ahead. Something happened during that weekend that made for a change. And I suspect it's a revival of the public's memories of the difficulties, the humiliations, the frustrations of the preceding year insofar as the hostages are concerned.

**MOYERS:** I don't think there's any question about that to a reporter being out in the country over the course of the last three months trying to cover the campaign. And I was wondering if you and the president did fully realize to what extent the hostages had become the symbol of America's impotence in general, and Jimmy Carter's impotence in particular.

**BRZEZINSKI:** I think the president did. I certainly did. We also realized that we had an obligation to be responsible — to be responsible to the genuine national interest of this country, responsible to the well-being of the hostages and that we couldn't demogague it.

**MOYERS:** Some of your colleagues have told me that Mr. Carter would like nothing more than to have the hostages back before he leaves office in January. What are the odds that that will happen?

**BRZEZINSKI:** I think, Bill, I still cannot give you any odds for two reasons: 1) They really would be a wild guess; 2) I'm still a senior official in the government. We are negotiating this. We are in touch, as we all know, with the

Algerians and others. I think any guess that I would make could be counterproductive, could be hurtful.

**MOYERS:** Of course, the one event that fundamentally dealt a blow to the president, to the country, and changed the balance of power in the Middle East, was the overthrow of the Shah by the fundamentalist Muslims. And several questions still today cry out for illumination. First there was that famous — or infamous — toast, depending on how you look at it, that the president gave in New Years, 1978. Domestic unrest was already taking place in Iran and the President trumpeted Iran as "the island of stability in one of the more troubled areas of the world." Was the decision to play down our intelligence report and hope that such a public endorsement would steady the Shah's regime realistic? Was our intelligence out of touch? Or was the president, like other presidents we've both known and which I've served, did the president's tendency to hyperbole get out of hand?

**BRZEZINSKI:** Well, first of all, you have to make allowance for southern politeness, the tradition of being very generous, hospitable in welcoming guests, gracious when being a guest. And I think this is just part of a cultural tradition. That has its charms but also occasionally some liabilities, if you want to be analytically precise. I don't think a toast should be passed for analytical precision. I'm sure we all say things in toasts or in greetings which perhaps we wouldn't say if we were trying to render a very precise historical judgment.

**MOYERS:** But most of us are not presidents and the recipient of the toast is not the Shah of Iran.

**BRZEZINSKI:** But in this particular case, the president was delivering the toast and the recipient was the Shah. So that has to be registered. Now, insofar as intelligence is concerned, I believe at the time we visited Iran, the overwhelming consensus of the diplomatic community, of the intelligence community, was that the Shah was stable, that the regime was stable and that it would continue as such. Such analyses continued to be the predominant ones until early fall of the year when things surfaced and became more critical. But even then, there was some division of opinion. The fact of the matter is that when you deal with complicated political social change which is generated by modernization, it's not easy to predict how it will express itself politically. Critical events, such as the theater fire — I believe in August — which killed hundreds of people, then the demonstrations, then how you handle them, become decisive to the outcome. I don't believe that revolutions are inevitable until after they have happened.

**MOYERS:** But it was true before you came to office and after you came to office, that our intelligence people were under instructions not to have any dealings with the revolutionaries or at least to have only minimum dealings with the revolutionaries. Even Former Ambassador William Sullivan, whom I know has some differences with you, quotes the Shah as asking how the U.S. could expect to influence events there if we didn't deal with "these people." But during this period you're talking about, our intelligence agents— agencies were not trying to establish contacts with the revolutionaries.

**BRZEZINSKI:** No, that's not precisely correct. It's— it's a different— a different way of putting it. Obviously, we avoided developing extensive political contacts with the opposition of a type that could be construed as encouraging that opposition. Because it clearly wasn't in our interest to magnify political difficulties for a government that was friendly to us. This doesn't mean that political officers — and particularly intelligence officers — were prevented from maintaining the kind of contacts they need to make reasonable judgments. I think that's a very subtle but important difference between the two. The notion that we totally isolated ourselves from the different currents in the country is wrong. I know a number of officials, both there and— who managed the Iranian affairs of state who were frequently in touch with the opposition in order to know what is going on.

**MOYERS:** Are you saying, then, that events just simply overran our capacity to interpret them quickly or to make those contacts — between the toast and the fall?

**BRZEZINSKI:** I think— yes, I think the intensity of the change and also the way that change was managed — particularly by the Shah — was such that it transformed social unrest produced by modernization without any political framework for it, into a much more difficult-to-control revolutionary process that eventually prevailed. Now, we never know at a given moment in a revolutionary situation whether the revolution will succeed or not. We know this much better in retrospect. Some people back in '78 were of the view that the fall of the Shah was inevitable. Some people were of the view that it can be avoided either by repression or by reforms or by a combination of the two. At the time, you're never in a position of knowing with certainty what will happen. You make best possible contingent judgments. And last but not least, the people in power there presumably should be in a position to know what's in their best interest. Because after all, their own heads are at stake. I think we make a mistake in looking at history retrospectively and always seeing it as some sort of a clear, straight line projection. History is a very contingent and uncertain process. And acts of will, psychological well-being, specific incidents influence the outcome of events.

**MOYERS:** "Acts of will" — interesting term. Do you think that had we had the will then to prop the Shah up — to keep the Shah in power — we could have done so?

**BRZEZINSKI:** We will never know. But we do know that the Shah had a large bureaucracy and a large, well-trained army which — until some point, at least, in time and precisely when — was both disciplined and loyal. And we do know that he, himself — and his memoirs confirm this — hesitated insofar as how he should best respond. And in the situation like this, I think it's not unfair to say that he who hesitates, loses. We were not in a position to dictate in a very precise manner how he ought to behave. After all, he was the ruler of some 40 million people. He was not some appointed governer of ours. So we were not in a position to tell him, specifically, what he should do. Ultimately, the responsibility for saving his throne was his. Clearly, from our strategic standpoint, Iran was very important. Iran was a close ally. It stood by us and by Israel in the '73 war. It was the pivot of a security zone which sealed off the Persian Gulf from a possible adversary. And therefore an outcome which guaranteed stability and friendship was obviously in our interest.

**MOYERS:** Was it in our interest to try to keep him in power?

**BRZEZINSKI:** I don't want to at this stage — with the hostage issue being so sensitive — to speculate too far. But quite clearly, a friendly Iran allied to us is in our strategic interest. I would say, also, that it is in Iran's national interest.

**MOYERS:** There's one other— and this will strike you probably as irrevelant. But if you were on the campaign trail, as I was this fall, and you were asking questions about the president's perception as a leader, I kept being hit — you would have been hit as I was — with this incident: the decision to allow the Shah — the former Shah — into the country for medical treatment. Now, I happen to know that the president went against his instincts in making that decision. The foreign service officers in Teheran were warning of dire consequences if the Shah were allowed in. I know that the president was opposed initially to that decision. And I also know that he yielded only under enormous pressure from Henry Kissinger, David Rockefeller and John McCloy. Do you think the president— what the public wants to know is, even this much later, is why the president listened to them instead of following his own instincts.

**BRZEZINSKI:** Let me merely say this. There are certain principles involved also. We have always been a country that's open — that's open to refugees, that's open to friends. There are certain principles which guide our conduct. To deny someone who had been a friend of ours — whatever his faults or limitations may have been — who stood by us for some 25 years — to deny him not only asylum but the opportunity to get medical treatment when he was genuinely gravely ill, would have meant compromising a very fundamental principle and would have meant compromising it under duress. That's not an easy thing for any president, for any honorable person, to acquiesce to.

**MOYERS:** As an old friend of David Rockefeller's and as a colleague, in a sense, of Henry Kissinger — sometimes a competitor — did you resent the pressure that was being brought in the Shah's behalf by his powerful friends?

**BRZEZINSKI:** No, I did not. I felt that they were motivated by genuinely patriotic considerations when they expressed their views. One doesn't need to agree with them. One could feel that there are problems or dimensions of the issue, that they were not taking into account, that we had additional responsibilities that they didn't. But throughout, I felt that their motives were correct and I did not feel that they were subjecting us to unfair pressures in registering their views.

**MOYERS:** The general feeling in the political community where I spend much of my time is that one reason the president lost is that he could not convince the country that he had mastered this job. In foreign policy, for example, the criticism is he could never seem to chart a consistent course of dealing with the Soviets on the one hand and holding the allegiance of our allies on the other. Why do you think that the president never could assimilate, convincingly manage, resolve the contradictions enough to hold a constituency in the country?

**BRZEZINSKI:** Oh, there are many reasons for the difficulty. I'm not sure I would entirely accept your conclusions, but you certainly put your finger on the difficulty. I think, first of all, the president had the very difficult task of convincing the public that America today lives in a world of very complex change in which our foreign policy has to operate on several planes at the same time.

**MOYERS:** I agree with you that it's very difficult to do. And I agree with you that it didn't happen. Because I think if it had happened, Mr. Reagan would not have won by as convincing a margin as he did. In fact, when I did an interview with Governor Reagan last year, he said, "I know I'm going to win for one simple reason." And I said, "Why?" And he said, "Because Jimmy Carter's not in command and the American people want somebody in command."

**BRZEZINSKI:** He was very much in command. I often marvelled in the course of the last four years, how much in command he was.

**MOYERS:** Why didn't the people see that?

**BRZEZINSKI:** But the problem was one of perception. And here what I have to say is that it seems to me all of us did not adequately emphasize the importance of formal speeches, broadly conceptual-type statements which would convey to the American public on a continuing basis the sense of direction, the meaning of the policies that were pursued.

**MOYERS:** Are you saying it was a public relations failure?

**BRZEZINSKI:** Yes, and I have to fault the public media as well — the mass media. There is a problem today, it seems to me, in American mass media, with the way they approach the news. They're not interested in trends, in deeper relationships. They're interested in the latest event, in the latest news. I would often try to get the president to give a broadly conceptual speech. I would give some myself. I would talk to newspapermen about them. They would immediately say, "What is new in it?" And if you told them, "Well, this is an attempt to explain what is the meaning of America's position in the world; this is an attempt to emphasize certain continuities," they would ignore it. The president gave a very important speech this year in Philadelphia in May, which was a doctrinal speech designed to outline his broad priorities, put in a wider context what he was doing in foreign affairs, indicate how there would be consistency and continuity in the months ahead or perhaps in the years ahead if he was re-elected. It was a very important speech. The European press wrote it up enormously. Do you know what was reported in the American press? What was reported were some off-hand remarks he made the same day, two hours later, about Mr. Vance and Mr. Muskie. This was right after the switcheroo where he made some comments about the two of them and how he compared them. And that was all that the press reported. Because that was fascinating. That was gossipy.

**MOYERS:** Would it have been easier for the American people to understand if the management of foreign policy were not divided between a national security advisor and the secretary of state? You know, I've worked in the White House — four years back in the '60s — and it seems to me that the problem with strong White House national security advisors is that they get a vested interest in their own advice. And because they have a proximity to the president, they almost always get the last word.

**BRZEZINSKI:** Well, it would be also a good idea to go back to the days of a simple world, to the days of a president who is not deeply involved in foreign affairs. To put it differently, every system of decision-making ultimately reflects the personality and the style of the president himself. There is no such thing as an ideal arrangement insofar as foreign policy is concerned, in regards to State, N.S.C. or Defense and ultimately the president, himself.

**MOYERS:** I realize that but this position you hold—

**BRZEZINSKI:** It flows from the top down.

**MOYERS:** But this position you hold has grown steadily under four— five separate presidents.

**BRZEZINSKI:** Yes, and one has to ask oneself, why did it grow that way? Is it because it was occupied by extraordinarily talented, energetic, assertive, powerful, brilliant, Machiavellian individuals?

**MOYERS:** Why, of course. *[Laughter]*

**BRZEZINSKI:** That's perhaps one of the answers, and of course, a lot of people like to put it that way including perhaps even some incumbents. Or did it develop that way because the thrust of world events increasingly did two things: 1) made the president the inevitable center of decision-making. He could no longer delegate that responsibility to a remote secretary of state but had to be deeply involved especially because of the connection between foreign policy and domestic affairs. And that connection immediately limits the ability of a single individual and department to provide leadership. And secondly, did the connection between foreign policy and defense issues in effect create a cluster of security problems — dilemmas — which need to be coordinated? Try to deal with a lot of the problems we face today — for example, in the Persian Gulf area, where I have been deeply involved in trying to shape a regional security framework — on the basis of a single department making the key decisions. If it's Defense, it would be secured one way. If it's State, it will be secured another way. And neither will abide by coordination by the other. There has to be someone next to a strong president who provides that coordination. And last but not least, strong presidents, in addition to making decisions themselves, don't want to be prisoners of particular departmental perspectives. They want someone against whom to test ideas and recommendations.

**MOYERS:** All right. But look at the practical implications of that. This past April, when *U.S. News & World Report* made its annual survey of who runs America, you came in ahead of the secretary of state. Indeed, you were third only behind the president and the chairman of the Federal Reserve. Now, having worked in the White House, I know what kind of message that sends to the government. It has to build your ego. It has to embarrass or at least weaken the

secretary of state. And it brings up the very practical consideration: how can anyone argue that a strong staff assistant — no matter how necessary he is, given the complication of this world — be perceived as more influential than the secretary of state without affecting the way business gets done?

**BRZEZINSKI:** It probably affects how business is done. In this particular case, I suspect it had something to do with my academic background and therefore my inclination to try to put things together and to explain them and to use the mass media in order to provide such explanations, in contrast to a certain disinclination by otherwise extraordinarily able and successful secretaries of state — as both Vance and Muskie have been — to engage in a great deal of public education. I think a great deal of the public perception of my role — and I suspect some exaggeration of my influence — I say some because I don't want to denegrate it entirely — is due to the fact that I was in a position to perform the function at a time when it wasn't being very actively performed by others. And after all, a great deal of foreign policy making in a democracy is also the generation of support and understanding of foreign policy objectives. And if I was helpful in that regard, well, that's all to the good.

**MOYERS:** But there is another practical example. I remember in the Spring of 1977 when Secretary Vance, surprisingly, took to Moscow new proposals for a SALT accord. The intriguing thing to me was an article that appeared in *The New York Times* saying, "At the White House, officials indicated that they did not expect the mission to accomplish much and some questioned whether Mr. Vance and his advisors would take a firm enough line in discussions with the Kremlin." Now, the practical question is that it was obvious to anybody around town that that came from your office. And didn't that undercut the State Department in such a way that from the very beginning Secretary Vance's turf had been claimed — or at least part of it had been claimed — by an alternative center of power, namely your office.

**BRZEZINSKI:** The fact of the matter is that he went to Moscow with two proposals, one of which said to the Soviets, "A new administration's in town, deeply committed to arms control. Let's seize this opportunity and not only have an agreement based on Vladivostok, but let's go beyond that. Let's have deep cuts." At the same time, he had another proposal with him which he also laid on the table before the Soviets. And it said essentially the following: "If you cannot buy that, then let's sign immediately an agreement on the basis of Vladivostok, setting aside the issues under which there was no resolution" — and that particularly involved the cruise missiles — "and let's quickly conclude that in agreement and go on to SALT III, aiming for deeper cuts." The Soviets rejected both. As far as the gossip that came from the White House regarding the secretary's mission is concerned, all I can say — and I say it in all honesty — is that I regret it. If it had come from my shop and if I knew who said it, I would have fired them. I think that throughout my tenure, throughout Cy Vance's tenure, we both made efforts to stop such gossip. I think if you were to look through newspaper clippings, you would find much more directed at me from State than directed at Secretary Vance from N.S.C. I think if you put them in piles, one would be very high, one would be very small. But then my staff is much smaller. So—

**MOYERS:** But aren't you confirming the concern that I expressed which is that when there are these two rival power centers in the foreign policy establishment, you're going to have the very kind of confusion and inconsistency—

**BRZEZINSKI:** No.

**MOYERS:** —that became an issue in this campaign?

**BRZEZINSKI:** I don't agree with you because I don't conceive of them as rival power centers. One is an integrated role and every president has private advisors — every president. You know, you talk as if the N.S.C. was developed ever since Bundy occupied that job.

**MOYERS:** No, no. It goes back. I know that. To Clark Clifford, in fact.

**BRZEZINSKI:** Well, not only Clark Clifford; don't forget Colonel Haas; don't forget Harry Hopkins.

**MOYERS:** But they really were private advisors and by your own admission a minute ago, you've filled a public void—

**BRZEZINSKI:** Well—

**MOYERS:** —you became a public communicator.

**BRZEZINSKI:** Yes, in part because there was the need to articulate and to explain. And I was filling the role. I was not thrusting myself into it. Every time I spoke, I spoke with approval of the president and the White House, very frequently coordinating it in advance with Cy as to what I would say and so forth. But the point I want to make which I think is true and it is not just a self-serving point — and I think you'll confirm it because you've lived in Washington

— is that there is an absolutely morbid preoccupation in the Washington press corps with personal relationships.

**MOYERS:** I can't deny that.

**BRZEZINSKI:** And the desire to stimulate conflict because the press corps feeds upon it.

**MOYERS:** Power in this town is personality.

**BRZEZINSKI:** When I came to Washington, the prediction was the Vance and I would have a knockout and a dragout. For about a year and a half, not only was there no conflict but there was a love fest. It is true that over the nearly four years in which we both served the president, we had some disagreements and notably on two issues: 1) how to handle Iran; and how to handle this complex relationship between Soviet expansionism and arms control.

**MOYERS:** How would you define—

**BRZEZINSKI:** In both cases, we had the same objective in mind. We agreed on objectives. We disagreed on means. I believe, for example, that Vance, Brown and I — and then Muskie — collaborated really very well. Never once did Vance do anything with the president behind my back. He was meticulous in informing me. Never once was there a piece of paper of any importance that went to the president that I did not make certain that the secretary of state saw. And a couple of times the president went to meet the secretary of state at the airport to demonstrate his friendship for him. It just so happens that I was the one who went to the president and said, "It would be a nice gesture if you went and greeted Cy at the airport." I think on a personal level, the relationship was good. There were times when we had some serious policy disagreements which the president resolved. But in that context, the institutional pressure to make it into a larger conflict, to talk to newspapermen, to snipe at each other, is very strong from both sides.

**MOYERS:** How could such a nice man be booed at the Democratic National Convention?

**BRZEZINSKI:** Well, you remember that even a nicer man — a much more decent man — was also booed at one point. When the president spoke of registration, he was booed. I stand for certain things which a certain segment of the Democratic Party, particularly that segment which is rooted in the '72 political experience—

**MOYERS:** The McGovern people?

**BRZEZINSKI:** Yes, and which is still strongly reacting to the Vietnamese War, simply finds abhorrent. My view is that in addition to being responsive to the new political realities of the world, in addition to being guided by moral concerns, we have to recognize the continuing relevance of power — be strong, be strategically innovative, take tough decisions involving expansionism and respond to them. And that is not popular in certain segments of the party. And when I was booed, predominantly by two delegations — one from Massachusetts and one from Pennsylvania — I was booed because I stand for things which a certain segment of the party finds difficult to digest and which I believe the party has to face up to if it is to be a relevant political force in the conditions of the '80s.

**MOYERS:** What do you mean?

**BRZEZINSKI:** If the Democratic Party is to be a vital force, it has to combine not only economic realism with social compassion at home, but commitment to principle and morality with a recognition of the continued relevance of power abroad. There is no dichotomy between these two.

**MOYERS:** You mean, we should be willing to use our power?

**BRZEZINSKI:** Yes. We have to because power is still a relevant facet of world affairs and Americans' self-abstention is a contribution to greater instability, growing conflict and thus, in my judgment, ultimately is even immoral.

**MOYERS:** And yet this administration has been roundly criticized by its rivals and in the press, as well, for not using power, for being vacillating, for being unable or unwilling to insert itself militarily.

**BRZEZINSKI:** Yes, we've been criticized naturally by our critics and, as you said earlier, a certain segment of the party booed me for instead insisting on alternative policies. The fact of the matter is that we started doing a great deal. You know, it is this president who in peace time, for the first time, increased the defense budget. It is this president who has modernized NATO. It is this president who accepted the recommendation to develop a rapid deployment force. It is this president who decided on the deployment of the MX. It is this president who has engaged himself in shaping a regional security framework for the Persian Gulf. These were all important undertakings which reflect a recognition of the importance of American power, and of its essential contribution to global stability.

**MOYERS:** Then why did he lose the election?

**BRZEZINSKI:** The domestic problems, first of all, were overriding. I think the combination of inflation with a

general sense of social unease about our social economic condition was very damaging. I think the impact on traditional Democratic constituencies of the very sustained, indeed even aggressive, Kennedy campaign should not be underestimated. And then, of course, the bitter frustration of the one year-long hostage tragedy. All of that contributed to defeat in addition to whatever shortcomings we, as individuals, may be guilty of. Perhaps we didn't articulate our approach well enough. Perhaps we didn't make it clear enough to the public how many fundamentally important things were done by this administration in foreign policy. Let me just tick them off in a few seconds: Panama Canal treaties and a new relationship with Latin America; majority rule in Africa and therefore a new relationship with Africans who, four years ago, were hostile to us; the Camp David process and the first peace treaty ever between Israel and an Arab country; a new relationship with the Arabs, moderate Arabs, and the effort to build a regional security framework for the Persian Gulf; recognition of China and the normalization of relations with the most powerful — potentially powerful — and certainly most populated country in the world, a new relationship which for the first time in 80 years gives us good relations with China and Japan simultaneously; an opening to the Third World; NATO restoration; a policy of differentiation towards Eastern Europe; finally, a negotiated but non-ratified SALT agreement. This is a series of very impressive accomplishments for an administration of only four years.

**MOYERS:** And yet, there is so much unease in the country and when I come to Washington today I hear people for the first time in a long time talking about the possibility of war with the Soviet Union, the possibility of confrontation in the Middle East, the failure to get the SALT accord now meaning that it's not only badly wounded but perhaps probably terminally wounded. There is a sense of apprehension and concern in the world that belies the record that you quite rightly point to as what President Carter has tried to accomplish. How do you account for this dis-ease and fear that I sense?

**BRZEZINSKI:** We now live in a world from which we cannot disengage but which we can no longer dominate — a world whose problems are becoming our problems. We have been a nation for 200 years. It's only in the last 30 or 40 years that the problems of the external world became truly vital to our own security. More recently, the problems of our— of the outside world have become central to our own internal socio-economic well-being. We have never had that condition before. Therefore, we are now compelled, in dealing with our own domestic problems, to try to influence world events over which we have less and less control. That's a new circumstance for Americans. How do you react to it? I think it's only natural to the basic instinct — the instant instinct — this nostalgia, escapism. Let's find a formula which restores the more comfortable past. It's much more difficult intellectually to assimilate, understand the reality of change and then to respond to it. Perhaps this is where the president erred, because he, in a responsible and rational fashion, tried to guide the nation towards a recognition of what's new and what's so terribly difficult. When he said the energy problem is the moral equivalent of war, he said something very true. But the public found it very difficult to understand.

**MOYERS:** Yes. There is this yearning out there, Dr. Brzezinski, by millions of people who feel that we've been sand-bagged by the Russians, humiliated by the Iranians and out-traded by the Datsuns — a yearning to see the United States restored to its former status, as you call it, of a great and rich and respected world power. Do I hear you saying that yearning is unrealistic? That no one can be number one any longer?

**BRZEZINSKI:** I think in many respects we are still number one and for a long time, we'll remain number one. But being number one means something different today than it did 30 years ago. Because then everybody else was weak or passive: Europe was still recovering; Japan was barely beginning to; the Soviet Union was still suffering from the wounds inflicted upon it in World War II; and the rest of the world was just beginning to be decolonialized. Today, the world is very different. There are new centers of power: the Soviet Union militarily is co-equal with us; Europe is economically co-equal or stronger than we; Japan is outdoing us in trade; and the Third World is becoming organized, as for example the OPEC experience shows. We may be still number one but it's a number one in a league of many more powerful teams, some of which can gang up against us. It's this reality which it is so difficult for the public to comprehend. And the task of leadership in this context is to shape policies that are responsive to it and to educate the public to understand the necessity for these politics, for these decisions, for these new policies. I think we did very well — and I'm trying to be objective about it, not self-serving — in shaping the beginnings of truly significant structural responses. I think the electoral outcome clearly shows that we did not do as well in communicating to the public why we need to head the way we were headed; why we need to stick to that course; why nostalgia and escapism no longer will suffice. Now, obviously, that's a judgment. And I don't want it to be interpreted as a political slam at the other party. Maybe their prescriptions will be better than ours. I hope their prescriptions are premised on a recognition of the extent to which the world really has changed. I hope they're not

derived from the hope that somehow the conditions of the '50s can be recreated. Because they won't be.

**MOYERS:** If you could leave a small wager of advice to them as they walk into your office, and you leave, what would you say to them?

**BRZEZINSKI:** Oh, I could say a great deal. If you only let me say one sentence or two, I would say that no one-dimensional policy, no one-dimensional solution is the way to deal with the problems of a world which is now politically awakened across-the-board and in which there are profound and enduring demands for a redistribution of global political and economic power. I believe we're moving into a historical era in which the idea of freedom is becoming the genuine historical inevitability of our times. Because as people become more educated, more self-assertive, they are less and less inclined to accept the bondage of tradition or of governments that are authoritarian and arbitrary. We are identified with that idea. And I think we have a great deal to contribute as a society. But we musn't do it in the sense of dictating specific arrangements, imposing specific prescriptions, demanding that specific rules ordained by us be mindlessly followed. It's in this area that I find American role to be continuingly very important, even though we musn't have the simplistic notion that we can shape the world in our image or that our power can solve every problem.

**MOYERS:** Let's try to make that doctrine or that philosophy applicable to a very specific case, now. Stay with the Middle East for just a minute. When the president committed us to defend the Persian Gulf from Soviet aggression, his message was widely perceived to carry the threat of nuclear force. And there were from the administration a number of signals in the days after that that, in fact, we had shifted our thinking to include the possibility that if we intervened in the Middle East, nuclear— tactical nuclear weapons were implicitly a consideration. Just take this fact. If the president were to inject the Marines into the Middle East against Soviet troops and they were to do badly, wouldn't we have to consider using tactical nuclear weapons?

**BRZEZINSKI:** No, we would not have to consider using them, necessarily. Although our opponents would have to consider the possibility of us using them. In other words, that is a deterrent. Take another example. For many years, we have felt strongly that a free Berlin is important to the freedom of western Europe and notably to West Germany's commitment to the Atlantic Alliance. We have 4,500 American soldiers in Berlin. Do you for a minute consider that that is enough to defend West Berlin if the Soviets decided to take it? Clearly not. But their presence there means that the Soviet Union would know — and it knows — that an effort to take West Berlin would engage it with the United States and that a variety of consequences might follow — not necessarily nuclear war but not, certainly, totally excluding the possibility, either. If our vital interests in the Persian Gulf region were threatened — and the president said last January that the United States would be engaged and, if necessary, arms would be used — but where they would be used, how would they be used, whether there would be vertical escalation in the sense of the kinds of weapons that are used, or horizontal escalation in the sense that we may choose to respond elsewhere in a manner that is equally punitive to Soviet interests — is a decision which the president would then reach in the light of the nature of the challenge.

**MOYERS:** And is the purpose to keep the Soviets guessing?

**BRZEZINSKI:** The purpose is to make certain that the Soviets know that we would do what is necessary in a manner that's most effective, to protect our interests in that part of the world.

**MOYERS:** Whether it is because of that commitment in the Middle East or whatever, you can't come to town today without hearing this talk of war. *Fortune* magazine this month quotes one military expert in your administration almost casually estimating a 50/50 chance of a shoot-out between Soviet and American troops somewhere in the world in this decade. Do you think we're closer to war?

**BRZEZINSKI:** No, I don't. I believe that if we pursue the mix of policies that we have tried to undertake, namely, on the one hand develop a more meaningful relationship between the United States and the newly-awakened political forces — the new nations in the world — and if, on the other hand, we maintain the efforts to sustain the strategic balance of the Soviet Union, to contain Soviet expansionism, then I think we stand as good a chance to create a system of deterrence as our predecessors did in the '40s and in the '50s when they undertook a similar task in regards to western Europe and the Far East. This, in my mind, is the new compelling challenge of the '80s.

**MOYERS:** Risky.

**BRZEZINSKI:** Not risky. I think it would be risky not to respond to it.

**MOYERS:** Expensive?

**BRZEZINSKI:** Expensive, yes. Expensive, yes. I agree with that. It's going to be expensive. And the country will

have to face up to it. And that's another problem that anyone who's president will have to face.

**MOYERS:** That picture looking over the Khyber Pass with the Soviet— with the Chinese weapon that got such prominent attention not only here but in Moscow and Peking as well.

**BRZEZINSKI:** Sure.

**MOYERS:** What was the message?

**BRZEZINSKI:** Well, actually, there was no message. It's again one of those incidents which assumes a life and an importance of its own far beyond what transpired and sometimes even distorting what transpired. What happened there was very simple. I was visiting a Pakistani outpost and the Pakistani officer in charge of it held out the submachine gun, showed it to me, handed it to me and said, "Look, this is a Chinese copy of a Soviet machine gun." And I held it, looked at it, looking down at the ground with it. And that was photographed. And then it was portrayed — in accounts — as not only holding it but as pointing it towards Afghanistan, in some accounts as even firing it towards Afghanistan and so forth. No, it's one of those things which happens which is then used in political dialogue or conflict against you, and you just have to live with it. There was no special message intended in the action. It was totally fortuitous. It wasn't planned. And I suppose, had I simply shied back, held my hands back and said, "No, I'll never touch it," that would have been a message of sorts, too.

**MOYERS:** What does it say? Both the picture at the Khyber Pass, the booing at the Democratic Convention, these contradictions you've been talking about — what does all of this say about being in public life today, about governing, about communicating, about trying to make a democratic society understand the nature of the world? What does all this say about governing?

**BRZEZINSKI:** I think it says that it's an extremely difficult process; that it is a process which you should engage yourself in knowing that it has enormous personal satisfactions as well as personal costs; that it is a process in which you're likely to be given at times excessive credit and excessive acclaim and at times excessive abuse and unwarranted criticism — that you have be prepared for both — that you have to be prepared to discount both. You have to be very careful, first of all, to discount excessive acclaim. Because it can easily go to your head, make you lose your sense of proportion, make you very unprepared for a return to private life—

**MOYERS:** For defeat.

**BRZEZINSKI:** And for defeat, that's right. Perhaps a tempered defeat but a defeat nonetheless. And at the same time, you have to be prepared to discount criticism — not to be hurt by it and not to be influenced by it. Because after all, some of it is motivated by the desire to have alternative policies. Some of it is part of what might be called legitimate political contest. A lot of it is an expression of the most fundamental human emotions of which envy is the strongest one. It's not an accident, I think, that the strongest and most malicious critics of Henry Kissinger and of myself have been our fellow academics. Why? I strongly suspect because underneath a lot of that criticism is the strongest emotion of all — the overriding, the irresistible desire to have been in our shoes.

**MOYERS:** If there is one thing you could redo of the last four years, what would it be?

**BRZEZINSKI:** Well, that's a very hard question question to answer. I think, perhaps — and I'm not sure if this is a mistake and I'm not even sure I could have done it differently — I think it probably was politically counter-productive, insofar as I am concerned, for me to have become so much identified and in some respects, inaccurately, as the front man on the Middle Eastern issue. It's an issue of enormous complexity and one charged with a great deal of emotion — an issue about which people feel very deeply and rightly so. I came to be viewed very quickly as some sort of a spearhead, whereas in fact, the question was far more complicated than that. I remember reading all sorts of articles violently attacking me for engineering the American-Soviet declaration in the Middle East whereas, in fact, I was far from its author. I was its conveyor and that was all, insofar as my role is concerned. But for a variety of reasons, perhaps in part connected with what we discussed earlier, namely my role in explaining policies, I came to be viewed as the front man, the spark plug, and thus became the lightning rod. And this I think had a lot to do with some of the difficulties that at times I encountered and some of the hostility that developed.

**MOYERS:** I detect a sense of hurt.

**BRZEZINSKI:** No, well, you're wrong if you're detecting that, because it isn't. I happen to feel that — maybe it's my historical background — that it is important for what really transpired to be known by others, that it is wrong for people to live on myths and illusions. And I accept that in the political process you have to shoulder some of that because somebody has to. And one of the prices for proximity to the president for the role that you play, inevitably, in seeing him many times a day, in being able to give him ideas, to comment on the views of others, is that you become

the lightning rod. That's a trade-off. It's a trade-off which I made very gladly. When I came to Washington, there was widespread speculation — and I can speak about this now without any ulterior motive and therefore I hope I'll be believed because I wasn't believed during the last four years — there was widespread speculation that I wanted to be secretary of state. And that my goal was to be secretary of state. I can tell you now what I've said to many people before — and it's as true now as it was then — I never wanted to be secretary of state. I did want — and I'm not shy in admitting it — to be what I was. Because I thought that this was a place where I could do more, given my talents and my limitations, I wanted to be in a place from which I could direct the coordination for the president of our national security policy, in other words, the integration of defense and intelligence and diplomacy into some meaningful expression. And, secondly, I wanted to head the president's think tank, to be the source of innovation for the president. Because I strongly believed that with a creative, intelligent, ambitious and assertive individual like Jimmy Carter, it will be the presidency that will be the point of departure for national policy. And therefore, I wanted the post that I had.

**MOYERS:** You got it.

**BRZEZINSKI:** And I got it. And therefore, there is no sense of hurt or regret in my comments about the past four years. I'm trying to be detached in giving you a sense of how I portray them. And when you ask me what I might have done differently, I think it probably is true that the Middle Eastern issue created problems because it is so domestically emotional.

**MOYERS:** Because of the large Jewish population?

**BRZEZINSKI:** Not only Jewish. I think there's just a great deal of emotion on the subject of the Middle East and Israel and the Palestinians and so forth. I don't disassociate myself in the least from the policies we pursued. There were bound to be moments in which deeply felt passions were aroused. And in some respects, maybe the role I played — maybe, in part, my own background — made me the logical target. I'm Polish-born. I'm a Roman Catholic. It is very easy, therefore, to say, "He disagrees with Israel. He's antisemitic." Some people inevitably — and sometimes even subconsciously — made that connection. It wasn't fair. It wasn't right. But it had political effect. Now, again, I couldn't avoid it. People said the same thing about my views on the Soviet Union. I read repeatedly in the columns of newspapers or of major columnists, "He's Polish. He's therefore anti-Soviet." They never explained why, in that case, some of my views were identical, let's say, occasionally and more recently, with the views of Henry Kissinger on the subject of the Soviet Union, or of someone else, who doesn't happen to be of Polish origin — or, for that matter, with the 75 percent of the American people who believe that we should have a tougher policy on the Soviet Union — most of whom are not Polish-American. But these connections are often drawn and there's nothing I can do about them.

**MOYERS:** Are you glad that it's all going to now be in somebody else's hands? Are you relieved?

**BRZEZINSKI:** No. I'm not overwhelmed with delight. I do recognize that in all of this — and I'm serious now — in all of this, there are certain cycles of creativity and then of routine. I don't know what the exactly right cycle of creativity is, whether it's four years or three or six. But there's no doubt that there's also revitalization involved in a change of the guard. My own preference would have been that it had happened at an eight-year interval rather than at a four. But I will say this: when I came into this office, at one point I had the naive idea that I should quit after two years. Because after two years, I will have used up my intellectual arsenal and it would be good to have a change. After two years, I was involved in a sufficiently large number of issues that I thought were important. I was engaged in some important policy debates that I felt it was premature for me to step aside. I've considered, had we been re-elected and had I been asked to stay on, the possibility of making a firm commitment not to stay on beyond two more years and to quit after six. But I have to confess to you that perhaps by the time the sixth year would have rolled around, I would have been only too easily pursuaded that it still is premature.

**MOYERS:** It's germane to the human being, which is why we have elections.

**BRZEZINSKI:** That's right. And, you know, as I look back on the four years, not only am I very proud of the president's record, which I've tried to summarize in our discussion, but I'm proud of the number of things I did, myself. I believe that — to some degree, at least — I played not an irrelevant role in achieving the U.S./Chinese normalization but particularly the expansion of the relationship after normalization and that this will have lasting historical significance. I think I played a role in initiating a broadly gauged program of strategic modernization, particularly on the conceptual strategic level — rethinking the basic premises of our strategic posture in the world and that this was long overdue and that this would be important in the '80s. And I was deeply involved in trying to shape the regional security framework for the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean. These three things come to my mind most

of all. There were a number of other things I was deeply involved in but these three things have given me a great deal of profound satisfaction. And even though I will be gone after four years. I believe that in different ways. all three of these will continue because they are so clearly in the national interest. And I have confidence that whoever follows in my shoes will be very responsible in trying to move these forward.

**MOYERS** *[voice-over]*: From Washington. this has been a conversation with Zbigniew Brzezinski. I'm Bill Moyers.

**FIRST CLASS MAIL**

BILL MOYERS' JOURNAL
Box 900
New York, N.Y. 10101

**#702 – A Conversation with Zbigniew Brzezinski**