Knott: If we could go around the room and everyone identify themselves and state your affiliation; this is for the transcriber. My name is Stephen Knott; I’m with the Miller Center, University of Virginia.

Chidester: Jeff Chidester, project assistant for the Presidential Oral History Program, University of Virginia.

Erickson: Kelly Erickson, graduate research assistant with the Miller Center.

Strong: Bob Strong, a professor at Washington and Lee University

Adelman: Ken Adelman, the subject, the victim. [laughter]

Knott: We’re very pleased to have Mr. Adelman with us today for the Ronald Reagan Oral History Project. I think the best place to start would be to simply ask you to tell us a little bit about how you began your government service.

Adelman: It was all by happenstance and a series of mistakes. I came to Washington in ’67 to go to Georgetown University graduate school from Grinnell College. Then in 1970, in my second job in the Government, I joined the Office of Economic Opportunity. There was an ex-Congressman, Donald Rumsfeld, who took over, and another fellow named Dick Cheney was his 28- or 29-year-old special assistant. Frank Carlucci was Director of Operations. Bill Bradley was there for a summer. Christie Todd Whitman was there for a summer. Jim Leach was there. And so it was a very odd situation because we were only together about 18 months. We went off to Africa, Rumsfeld went off to Belgium, Dick stayed in town and then later went to Wyoming. Jim went back to New Jersey. Anyway, we were only together 18 months and yet we remained friends for the rest of our lives and have been interlocking lives ever since.

I’ve worked for Rumsfeld three times in my life and I’m very good friends with him—Dick and Lynne Cheney’s daughter worked for my wife for three years. We’ve just grown up together in this town. It’s a really unique situation.

I became interested in and involved in foreign affairs because we lived in Africa from ’72 to ’75, where I was a dependent husband. My wife was in the Foreign Service. We visited Rumsfeld when we were there. He was in Belgium as NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization]
Ambassador, and then, the day we actually came back, which was in April of ’75, Dick and Lynne Cheney gave us a lunch welcoming us back in the White House. He was Deputy Chief of Staff at that time. I remember trying to get in the White House; we’d forgotten our passports at home. I didn’t have a driver’s license. I was in Africa for two and a half years. I didn’t have a front door key; I didn’t have anything.

They couldn’t believe that there was somebody without a key or any identification, no credit cards, nothing. But we got in the Ford White House at the end, then Rumsfeld asked me to join him at the Pentagon the whole time he was there.

**Knott:** Could I just ask you a little bit about OEO [Office of Economic Opportunity]? Was this during the time of the Nixon administration trying to shut the agency down?

**Adelman:** Not really. It later became that way, but when I was there, there was no, zero, funding for it. That happened later under Howard Phillips. But what Rumsfeld wanted to do was to bring in innovations to try government experimentally and then have these programs work and then show them to the departments themselves. It didn’t work very well, but it was a clever idea.

I remember one of those big ideas we had and tried it out and we were going to shove it off to HEW [Health, Education, and Welfare], the whole idea of school vouchers, now called the choice system, but then we called it school vouchers. It was started in Wisconsin, funded by OEO. Thought it was absolutely a brilliant idea, that HEW would grab it in a minute and it would be the answer to education problems. Here we are, 30 years later, and everybody is still arguing about school choice vouchers. So it didn’t work all that well.

**Knott:** Just to get this on the record, since we’ve been intrigued by this, did you really serve as a translator for Muhammad Ali?

**Adelman:** Yes, I did very odd things in Zaire. I was doing my dissertation—that probably was the oddest—but I was there and a guy called me up from NBC [National Broadcast Corporation] to do the fight, the “rumble in the jungle,” and so I started helping them by studying up on the fight and finding the TerraCom equipment. I didn’t even know what it was, but in Zaire everything was kind of chaotic. Ali was there for another few weeks because [George] Foreman had cut his eye before the fight, so it didn’t go on as scheduled, the end of September of ’74.

Ali needed somebody to schlep him around town and I knew some French. My French was better than his English, let me say that. So whatever he said to me, I understood a little bit, and whatever I said to the Zairians in French, they understood a little bit, so everyone was quite happy with it. So I bummed around with him for a few weeks and then later on went down the Congo River on the hundredth anniversary of [Henry] Stanley’s trip. That was with the British Zaire River Expedition.

Then we went to Angola and I wrote an article for *Foreign Affairs* magazine about the coming civil war of Angola. We had a great time in Africa. As you can see all around the house we have African art everywhere. I collected African art.
If you want to do an interview on Ali, I’m happy to do that. I’m not sure your funders would want four hours of transcript on Muhammad Ali.

**Knott:** We can talk about Ali at lunch. You returned to government service in the Department of Defense working for Rumsfeld in ’75. Could you tell us about that?

**Adelman:** Yes. One day in the fall of ’75 the telephone rang and it was Don Rumsfeld and he said, “Ken, what are you doing?” and I said, “I’m eating a kosher hot dog, to tell the truth.” He said, “Well, aside from that. Come over tomorrow morning and see me here.” He had just been sworn in. I said, “All right, where are you?” He said, “Grab a pencil and paper: 3E 820,” or 860, I can’t remember. “Go to the Pentagon, show someone that. That’s where I am.”

I go in the Pentagon, some Colonel’s there and I said, “Excuse me, where’s this?” He looks at the number and looks at me, looks at the number, looks at me. He says, “You’re going there?” I said, “Yes.” He said, “That’s the high-rent district. I’ll take you there.” He was very excited about this. We scuttled over and there was Rumsfeld’s office, 8 o’clock in the morning, and there on the corner of the desk he had a big pile of papers. “Ken, do this,” “Ken, do that,” typical Rumsfeld directions. “Take this and your office is right across the hall and you can start.” I had no idea what the title was, I had no idea what the job was, I had no idea what the salary was. I had no idea where I was or what I was doing, but I was going to work on those papers, so I did that for him.

My job actually was traditionally called “speechwriter.” I called it “themist.” If you want, I’ll show you downstairs, I have the complete works of Don Rumsfeld as Secretary of Defense the first time out. I’ve been schlepping them around now for 25 years. I’ve tried to give them to Rumsfeld at various times and Joyce [Rumsfeld] always tells me, “Please, we’ve got enough.” But I did find all the stuff that came out of his office.

**Knott:** It’s our impression that you came to the attention of Richard Allen through a piece that you wrote for *Foreign Policy*?

**Adelman:** Richard Allen called me because of the *Foreign Policy* piece, “The Great White Hope, Now the Great Black Hope,” about Julius Nyerere and the future of South Africa. But I’d known Jeane Kirkpatrick from Georgetown University. I was always conservative. I campaigned for Barry Goldwater—handed out brochures—when I was at Grinnell College. I was, I think, the only conservative to ever go to Grinnell College in its 180-year history. [laughter]. I was a fish out of water there. But I was always conservative, not a neocon in the sense of a convert, I felt very comfortable with Rumsfeld and Cheney, who were always conservative as well.

I was kind of hanging around foreign policy conservative circles. Dick Allen called me up out of the blue and met me for lunch and included me on stuff. I had been in the government twice before so I thought it was interesting, but I wasn’t dying for—a lot of people in Washington between administrations, Republicans and Democrats, are just dying for a job back in. I didn’t feel that great burning. But I knew Jeane very well. I obviously knew Rumsfeld and Cheney very well. I was getting to know Dick Allen very well, and he included me on more and more things.
For example, during April 1980, when Desert One happened. You know about that episode; he wrote about it. I got a call at 5 o’clock in the morning from Dick Allen: Can I meet him for breakfast at 7:30? Because they had to write some directions to Reagan on what to say that morning. This was during primary season. So it was Dick Allen and John Lehman, who later became Secretary of the Navy, and I at breakfast at the Mayflower Hotel downtown. I remember Dick was all upset about it.

**Knott:** Just for the record, this is the Iranian hostage—

**Adelman:** Right, Desert One. John Lehman suggested everything that Reagan had been saying about [Jimmy] Carter foreign policy; It was weak, chaotic, undetermined. It was just unprofessional; it was terrible. I remember saying to Dick, “I wouldn’t do that at all.” He said, “Why is that?” I said, “Because I don’t think it’s a time to get angry. I think it’s a time to show love.” He said, “What would you have Reagan say?” I said, “I’d have Reagan say, ‘Boy I wish you had succeeded. It was courageous of him to do it and God bless him for doing it and anytime he tries to rescue our boys and women in Iran, I’ll be behind him.’”

Then they sent, I guess, two or three versions to Reagan and Reagan came out and said essentially [inaudible] because that was Reagan. I did stuff like that. I always appreciated Dick asking me.

**Knott:** You became a member of the executive board of the Committee on the Present Danger?

**Adelman:** That I was before, and I got to know Dick before that time actually, especially [Eugene] Rostow and [Richard] Pipes and [Paul] Nitze, and that was because I had written a bunch of stuff for the *Wall Street Journal* pretty regularly, conservative foreign policy stuff.

**Knott:** There are some accounts that say that that was an incredibly influential group. You’re viewing it from the inside.

**Adelman:** It was incredibly influential because like every administration, you come, you decide who staffs it up, and the easiest way to staff it up is to take out a piece of paper that has everybody’s name that you want. The Committee on the Present Danger did that for Dick Allen and others, just gave everybody a listing of who you want to call right away so you didn’t have to look around. That was pretty good. It did some wonderful work. Dick Allen was there, but it had a lot of Democrats in there.

The odd thing about the Reagan administration, which is very different from this administration and other administrations I’ve seen, is that it didn’t care very much about party affiliation. It cared enormously about ideology. But when the Reagan administration started, Gene Rostow was prominent, Paul Nitze was prominent, Jeane Kirkpatrick was prominent, Richard Perle—all Democrats—in the White House. He never minded; it wasn’t an issue. This administration, none of the four would have passed.

**Erickson:** Speculating, do you think that’s because of Reagan’s shift from the Democratic Party to the Republican Party? Top-down phenomenon, or was it bottom-up?
Adelman: No, it was partly that and partly the idea that ideology trumped party, that there were a lot of squishy Republicans. The last thing in the world that Dick Allen or any of us really wanted were [Nelson] Rockefeller Republicans. It was so much better getting a Jeane Kirkpatrick, or Richard Perle or Paul Nitze from the Democratic Party. We could talk to them. A Rockefeller Republican, what do you have in common? Nothing. Seriously.

Erickson: When you gave the advice for the speech after the failure of Desert One—

Adelman: It wasn’t the speech—

Erickson: I mean the comments, the talking points. Did you do this because you knew it fit Reagan’s personality, or was this purely your own advice?

Adelman: I thought it was the right thing to do, but I had never met Reagan. He was thought to be a right-wing wild cowboy, but the more I read about him, the more there was a real humanity about him. But I wasn’t trying to fit in. Dick Allen asked me what would be a good statement, and that struck me as a really nice statement.

Knott: You mentioned that you were always a conservative. Your parents were conservatives?

Adelman: No, they were typical Jewish Democratic liberals.

Knott: What happened to you?

Adelman: My grandfather was conservative. He was a doctor in Chicago. I don’t know. People have asked me that. Partly it was living in Africa. It’s hard to come out of Africa thinking you’re all liberal because everything you believed about poverty, imperialism, colonialism, was all proven wrong. I mean it’s the corruption there, the hypocrisy. Our beloved [Joseph] Mobutu in Zaire would give hysterical speeches against South Africa and you’d go in a store and all the goods were South African. They had a total embargo against South Africa but the biggest traders in all east African countries were—the hypocrisy was just outrageous. So that reinforced it.

I saw what was happening, but that was after the OEO days. I thought what the guys were trying to do in OEO was a good thing. I always thought a lot of the Government money was wasted, conservative stuff.

Knott: At a certain point Richard Allen asks you to start submitting position papers and memos for the Reagan campaign. According to Kelly’s research, this begins in 1978. Does that ring a bell?

Adelman: Yes, I did some of that. I never believed in position papers on a campaign. What you needed was, the morning of Desert One, what was the candidate going to say? The future of U.S.-China ties, during a transition or even during a campaign, A) if you’re a candidate, you have to have a few things to say about issues but not much, and B) if you’re really trying to look
at forward planning, no one coming into the job who’s going to be responsible is going to read all this stuff, so it just doesn’t make much sense.

I was happy to do articles reinforcing things, and I did a bunch in the *Wall Street Journal* and all that. I was happy to do something on demand. But these groups gin up enormous papers, and foreign policy advisors for Reagan under [William] Van Cleave and Charlie Kupperman and Dave did all this, but all of that is a waste of paper. You just don’t have time during the hustle-bustle of a campaign to look at what our future with China is going to be like in 40 years and whoever’s going to help decide that is going to be in the job and they’re going to decide that when they get in the job basically from their own experience. So I thought it was a waste of time. I didn’t participate very much in that.

**Strong:** Were you involved in the public campaign against ratification of SALT II [Strategic Arms Limitation Talks]?  

**Adelman:** Yes, I was involved in that in several ways. I went out to Chicago and helped Rumsfeld do his testimony and that was in ’78. I spent two days with him and we did a long testimony. I had good reasons for that, I wrote against it in the *Wall Street Journal* op-ed several times, and I can’t remember—well the Committee on the Present Danger was against it and did some stuff.

**Strong:** Did they want you to go out speaking?  

**Adelman:** I don’t think so. I don’t think there’s that much demand for speaking.

**Knott:** Any other recollections from the 1980 campaign? Anything that stands out in your mind, as we’re sitting here, hopefully speaking to future generations who are interested in the Reagan Presidency?

**Adelman:** I guess on the campaign itself it is, one, how open it was to Democrats as well as Republicans, and two, how non-vicious it was. The meanest thing Reagan said was, “There he goes again.” He’d get very angry over issues, but never very angry over people. That was a wonderful lesson that all of us could learn from Reagan about politics. He was instinctively nice to people. It was hard to budge him off anything like that.

**Strong:** Did you contribute anything to the debate preparation?  

**Adelman:** No I didn’t, because it wasn’t long on substance, and by that time Reagan had just a few things he had to say on foreign policy and vulnerability and against SALT II. Foreign policy was I think a big issue in 1980 because of Afghanistan, the Iranian hostage thing, the idea of weakness, but it was a confusing issue because all of a sudden Carter had started to turn around with the 5 percent increase in defense spending and boycotting the Olympics and that kind of stuff.

So while everybody knew Reagan was more conservative than Carter, it wasn’t something that was a wedge issue so much because Carter basically turned conservative.
Knott: You do play a role in the transition, is that correct?

Adelman: Yes, I did a lot on the transition.

Knott: Can you tell us about that?

Adelman: Yes, that was really fun. The first thing I did was, I was in the State Department, assigned for Asia, which was probably the one area in which I was least confident. I have no idea why that took place. Richard Holbrooke was Assistant Secretary for Asia at that time. Michael Armacost and Mort Abramowitz were deputies there. I remember going to talk to them and saying, “You know, when all is said and done I’m not going to do a big report because I believe that whoever is going to come in is not going to listen to my report, and I don’t know that much to do a big report,” which is the normal thing to do, a great think piece. I said, “I think that the way I could help most is, what issues are coming up between now and January 20th that absolutely have to be decided? The President isn’t really anxious to decide anything during that time.” So if none, that’s fine, doesn’t matter. Otherwise there’s just one President, one administration.

The two big memories I do have of that time were, one, the State Department stuff. Dick Allen asked me, or I informed Dick Allen, that Kim Dae-jung of Korea was scheduled to be killed and that was an Asian kind of thing. Dick had heard about it in other ways. Dick worked that problem so that the Koreans sent somebody to the Reagan White House early on in the term and he had all kinds of dealings with Dick and they basically saved the life of Kim Dae-jung. So that was worthwhile doing, and that would have happened before the 20th of January.

The other thing is, I was asked to do an awesome task that I totally failed, which was to keep Imelda Marcos from President-elect Ronald Reagan. The President-elect and Mrs. Ronald Reagan were going up to New York to watch son Ronnie in some ballet on the stage. I was told that Imelda Marcos would be in New York at the same time. So I dealt with all kinds of Secret Service. “He’s not receiving any foreign leaders, Imelda Marcos is almost unstoppable, and you’ve got to be resourceful.”

So I called the Secret Service. I got it airtight and felt good about it. Anyway, the Reagans get on the elevator at the Waldorf Astoria Towers and they’re going up to their suite and the elevator operator turns to him and says to the President-elect, “You’ll never guess who is in this hotel.” “Who’s that?” he says. “Imelda Marcos, and she’d love to see you, Mr. President.” And Ron says, “Oh don’t you remember, Nancy? She met us in the Philippines and hosted us and she was so nice.” And so the elevator operator said, “Oh, so she can see you?” This guy must have retired the day after.

You know, Ronald Reagan being Ronald Reagan said, “Oh yes, that would be great, Nancy. Let’s have her for tea. It’ll be great to see her again.” Monday morning, checking in somewhere, Dick says, “What the hell happened? I gave you one assignment and you couldn’t even do that.” So that was a total failure. Then the State Department picked—I mean Al Haig got appointed. The first meeting of the State Department transition team he fired everybody on the team, which
had gotten very unwieldy. Actually, he was a very good friend. But then there were several of us
asked back.

Bud McFarlane was always close to Haig and so he helped on that; he was critical. Paul
Wolfowitz, Rick Burt, and I handled the backup of the hostage situation. What we did on that
was just keep track of the situation and inform the new team about what was happening—
basically keep up with that. We had this room and one of the three of us was on duty most of the
time. I worked very close to Paul Wolfowitz during that time and he did a wonderful job.

Knott: One of the pieces that Kelly came across referred to some infighting that occurred during
this transition period, especially regarding Frank Carlucci’s nomination as deputy—

Adelman: Oh yes, we had gobs of infighting on everything. Frank Carlucci’s nomination was
because the conservatives thought he was a wimp. He’d worked for Stansfield Turner at the CIA
[Central Intelligence Agency]. I called a bunch of people and said I knew Frank for many years
and he was a good fellow. If [Caspar] Weinberger wanted him, that was great. We got into a big
snit with Frank actually and Richard Perle because he would hear these horrendous stories about
Richard Perle and he would call me up every few hours, I guess, to say, “Oh my God, I heard
that, does that sound right?” I’d say, “It does sound right. That would be Richard.”

He’d say, “Oh, can’t have anything like that.” I’d say, “He’s worth the trouble to put up with
something.” Then the next day, “Ken, I just heard this about Richard.” I’d say, “What did you
hear?” He’d tell me the story. I’d say, “Yes, that sounds about right.” “Oh my God we can’t have
that.” “He’s worth the trouble.” All new administrations are a taffy tug, but this was really
ferocious.

I remember the night of the inauguration I was doing the backup for the hostage situation and we
had a breakthrough in the negotiations that were taking place in Algeria. What’s his name
became Secretary of State—[Warren] Christopher was doing the negotiations. So we were
looking at all that and I wrote a memo one Saturday to President-elect Reagan about how it
seemed these negotiations were really getting somewhere. So I submitted that. Then I read in the
paper on Sunday morning that Reagan was in town and he was going to go to church that
morning. Reagan at that time had a habit, when he went to his butcher in California he’d pass a
lot of journalists as President-elect, and he’d say who was going to get Interior Secretary or— It
was an odd situation when all of a sudden on the way to the butcher he mentioned three Cabinet
appointments.

It was my firm belief that was not shared by others in the transition team—Haig and I had a big
argument about this—that it would be best if Reagan wasn’t seen as following the negotiations at
all. Why was that? Because he had the reputation of the wild cowboy. I thought that that was the
best reputation that he could have when he came in trying to solve the hostage situation. I didn’t
want to make it seem like he was a normal diplomat who followed these kinds of things. I liked
the wild cowboy routine. This became a big issue when there was an agreement at the end of the
transition and whether the new administration would adhere to the new agreement or not. I was
very firm. I said not, Haig said, yes, we have to say we would.
I remember seeing that Reagan was going into church on Sunday morning, so I called up Jim Brady with whom I roomed when the two of us were working for Rumsfeld on all the foreign trips. Jim was a very good friend, and he was taking care of Reagan at that time, going to be press spokesman. He’d come over from the campaign of John Connally. So I called up Jim and said, “Jimbo, are you taking care of Reagan this morning?” He said, “Yes.” I said, “Just do me a favor. Would you call the Secret Service and make sure that the car leaves him off right in the middle of the church so he doesn’t go through reporters to get there?”

He said, “Why?” and I said, “Because we wrote him a memo last night that something’s happened, and I don’t want him to give the impression that he knows anything that’s happened. Once you shove him in the church there are not going to be direct quotes. But if he walks through a bunch of people and the only thing on their minds is the hostage situation, it’s going to be very bad.” So he said, “Okay.”

Then Haig came in later that morning and I was running through things with him and I said one of the things I did was call Brady and Haig said, “You did what?” I said, “I called Brady.” He said, “I was home. You could have called me. I don’t want you talking to them in any case.” He was furious. I said, “Well, I didn’t think this was an issue of great state urgency that a future Secretary of State should be involved in—how close the limousine comes to the church.” At that moment I knew that I really didn’t want to work for Haig, that was for sure. He was just out of control, kind of goofy to me.

Knott: So is this why you turned down some of those—

Adelman: Yes, I turned down Haig, he asked me to be Assistant Secretary for Latin America, which was actually a very good job because everything in Latin America was now a number one issue in foreign affairs at that time—Cuba, El Salvador, Nicaragua. I knew I didn’t want to work with Haig because I didn’t want him shouting at me, to tell you the truth, and I felt I could never accept a job I couldn’t do well. I knew nothing about Latin America. He said, “Well you can ask the right questions. We need some answers.” I said, “No, I’m not going to do it.” So he had a little campaign trying to convince me, but it was ridiculous. Never take a job you can’t do.

Knott: Haig was the one who was pushing you for this position?

Adelman: Oh yes, he was put out that I wouldn’t take the job. Called me in his office and I said, “I know nothing about Latin America.” He said, “Oh no, you’ll ask the right questions.” That was stupid.

Strong: Was there a job you would have accepted?

Adelman: Well, Jeane asked me to be her deputy and I said no on that, probably because I wasn’t excited about the UN. I don’t know, I didn’t kick it about all that much. Gene Rostow actually asked me to be, I was thinking about being deputy at ACDA [Arms Control & Disarmament Agency]. I imagine the answer to that was yes, but I really wasn’t angling around for anything in particular. In fact, the night of the inauguration, I went to Wiesbaden with Jimmy Carter.
Knott: Yes, I want to ask you about that.

Adelman: The only reason was that there were three of us who were in the backup. Paul was going to become Policy and Plans, Rick Burt was going to become Political, Military Affairs, so I was the dispensable one. I wasn’t going to be anything. So I went. That really was a great event because we gave a black tie dinner, which we do at every good inaugural occasion, and we also had the Cheneys and the Rumsfelds and the Carluccis and Jeane Kirkpatrick was with us and George Will and the Quayles and all that. It was really neat because—and my parents were coming in, and my brother and Mrs. Fernloff. It was really neat because everybody was at my house, black tie, and I had to leave in the middle of the dinner to go with Jimmy Carter on Air Force One to Wiesbaden. It was really neat to leave your own dinner with everybody sitting around in black tie and getting up to go to Wiesbaden. I was polite enough with Carter to take off my tux, and when I got on the plane I wouldn’t tell him, “We just had a great party celebrating the inauguration.”

Knott: Any other memories from that trip to Wiesbaden?

Adelman: Yes, it was quite a startling event. The emotion in the room against Carter was quite severe. Boy, they were just angry at him. It never spilled over to be really rude, but boy they were just festering anger. I do remember that before we went in the room, there were groups standing in a circle. I was part of it. Hamilton Jordan and Jody Powell were there. The CIA doctor was talking about how many of the 54 felt battered. Some had been beaten and they were in bad shape. He was quite dismal about their condition. All of us were really, really surprised on hearing this. Carter asked the singular question, “Didn’t they know that this was wrong to do?” The doctor said, “What do you mean?” He said, “They know that this was wrong to do.” He says to the Iranian, and the doctor says, “Mr. President I don’t know. I’m an American doctor taking care of business for sick Americans. I don’t know what the Iranians are free to do.”

It was such a profoundly imbecilic question to me that it just represented everything I didn’t like about Carter and his views. Later on, by a very odd circumstance, I briefed the President on one of his first National Security Council meetings on the hostage situation and I came within this close of telling that story. I decided I was not going to do it because if [Mike] Deaver, [Ed] Meese, and all the people who were running the world—Baker right there—it would have leaked out. It just didn’t seem right to me, so I didn’t tell it.

Knott: Did you have any other exchanges with Carter?

Adelman: Yes, afterwards Carter was very nice. He gave me a champagne glass because all of us drank champagne on the way back. There’s Jody Powell, there’s [Walter] Mondale, there’s Lloyd Cutler. That was going back, I don’t know where the champagne glass is, it used to be around here, I think it’s broken. I remember that Carter didn’t feel the battering that I felt when he came into the room after making that comment. There were just a few of us and coming back, we had all this dispute about whether the new administration was going to honor the agreement. Carter said at one point—he got a little high from the champagne—“I’m not sure that this
agreement is really a good agreement,” or something like that. Mondale grabbed me afterward and said, “I don’t know why Carter said anything like that; it’s a great agreement.”

I said to Mondale, “Maybe it was just his natural sense of humor coming out.” He said, “What?” He looked at me like I was absolutely out of my mind. So he was at one point skeptical there. I think it was just fishtailing, to tell you the truth. Then there was the big argument back whether we were in agreement or if they wanted to go along with it.

Knott: When you returned, you’re working at Stanford Research?

Adelman: Yes SRI [Stanford Research Institute]. I was doing writing and stuff like that. Two days after I returned, I was vacuuming the living room and got a call. “What’s your social security number?” I told my social security number and date of birth and they said, “You’re coming to a meeting at the White House Sunday at 10 o’clock in the morning.” I said, “Oh? I am? I’m not in the Government or anything.” “No, but you’re on my list,” So I said, “Okay.” Then I put in a call to Haig, who was with David Rockefeller down in Florida.

His secretary called me back and I said, “I’m supposed to go to a meeting at the White House and I don’t know anything about the meeting. Can I talk to him and find out I what the hell this meeting is about?” And they said, “Well, he’s awfully busy. The meeting starts at 10 o’clock in the White House; why doesn’t he meet you there at a quarter to ten and you can talk to him.” I thought, that’s as good as it gets. So, obviously Haig was late and so it’s now ten to ten, seven to ten in the morning, and I said, “What’s this? I have no idea.” He said, “It’s about the mental and physical health of the hostages. The President is having a meeting on it.” I said, “Okay. Who’s doing the briefing?” He looked at me and said, “Alex Trebek.”

So I said, “I am?” He said, “You went over there.” I said, “Okay, seems to me that you should make three points to start off, and then I’ll make some.” I gave him some points to make. I just thought it was an odd subject because he wasn’t going to do anything about it. I don’t know why it was ever done. Maybe Reagan asked about it or something like that. So anyway, he did his points and I made my points, and then everybody around the table started coming in.

After I left Wiesbaden, one of the CIA doctors said to me, “Oh, can I call you and give you an update how people are doing?” and this, that, and the other thing. I said, “The answer to that is yes. Here’s my phone number. But let me just tell you, I’m at Stanford Research. I’m here because there are three of us doing the backup. The other two are important and I’m the least important. So you can call me, that’s fine, but it’s not going to do any good.” But he called me every night from the time I got back. “Here’s the status of this, and here’s that.” So, thank God he did because I actually knew what I was talking about, or at least knew more than I would have going into that meeting.

What struck me about that meeting was typical of Reagan, that he went and then Meese would say something, Deaver would say something, then, little by little—I was sitting right across, next to Haig but across from Reagan. Reagan would then lean forward and start to say something and somebody else would say something to him, and Reagan would go back and say—“No, it isn’t.”
I used to talk to myself, *Can you imagine this taking place in front of LBJ [Lyndon Baines Johnson] or Richard Nixon?* Reagan would be very congenial, then he would say, “Bletch!” Then someone else would say, “Oh, no,” and I was dying; this is the President of the United States. How could this take place? After that happened twice, I just couldn’t stand it anymore. When I finished I said, “Mr. President,” kind of calling on him. Everybody shut up and let the President talk.

Then Reagan turned and says, “Ken, I really don’t know how to ask you this, but gee whiz, I just feel I have to ask you.” When he did that my whole world flashed before me, I thought, *Oh shit,* what’s going to happen now? *The President of the United States is asking me a question; I don’t know that much about what we’re doing. I don’t feel bad fooling all these other people but—* Reagan made a bunch of other little apologies and I thought, *Please, do it already.* He says to me, “Well, Ken, what about the ladies? I want to know…” He couldn’t actually ask the question. So I said, “Mr. President, if you’re talking about sexual abuse, as I understand it there was not more than four women among the 54. I think I talked to all four of them and one, her name was Swift, she was treated badly but nothing was sexual…”

He looked at me and said, “Oh, God, really have to ask Nancy about this, I know she—” It was kind of like *The Great Gatsby,* like the ’20s, the ladies, and stuff like that. It was very endearing and wonderful. I could answer the question honestly; I was quite happy about that.

**Strong:** Would that have been the first time you were in a meeting with Ronald Reagan?

**Adelman:** No, some of the transition time with Rich Allen’s group, but that was pretty pat. This was the only time—maybe there was one other time I remember speaking to him—yes, he came up and there was some meeting and he said, “You know what, I’ve been thinking about this hostage thing,” this was when we were backing up in the hostage thing. “And I came up with this idea I want to try on you guys.” He said, “You have the UN there. The UN is supposed to deal with diplomats and law, isn’t it? Why don’t we tell them to just do that, just deal with it? If they can’t deal with it, get out of here.” That was his original idea. [Kurt] Waldheim was Secretary-General then. Solve it or get the hell out of there.

**Strong:** I think you say at one point in your book that Reagan lacked curiosity.

**Adelman:** Yes.

**Strong:** What was it like to brief him in the transition period? Did he have lots of questions or was he—

**Adelman:** No, he wouldn’t ask lots of questions, but I always found Reagan was a good listener. He would not initiate “tell me about this,” but he’d listen and get back to you. It was pretty impressive how much he would retain.

**Strong:** Then did you hear things you were presenting in these briefings later, at press conferences?
Adelman: Yes, and it was both good and bad. You tried to knock things out of his mind and he would listen, but if he believed it, it would come bouncing back at you. Otherwise, he just would learn about things.

He started an INF [Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces] meeting and said that he was just thinking—Reagan had a very original and creative mind, and the idea of telling Waldheim to just solve it or get out of here, that was not what he read in the op-ed piece. It may be wacky or something like that but he said it. He came up during the INF dispute and he started at an NSC [National Security Council] meeting and said, “I was thinking about this, guys. We have the Soviets, we have the Pershing II and the GLCMs [Ground-Launched Cruise Missile] and our allies in Europe. They have their INF missiles and their allies in Europe. Why don’t we just tell them to get the missiles out of our allies’ countries?” Weinberger says, “This is just a great idea.” I said, “Hold on, Mr. President, I don’t think that’s right.” They don’t have any INF systems in their allies’ positions. Certainly they may have SS-4s, I don’t know about that, but they certainly don’t have SS-20s in there, so it’s just not right.”

You’d never hear of it again, even though this was obviously something that had been working on his mind, so you did have to worry about that.

Doing away with all nuclear weapons, he was unstoppable. The idea that INF could stop nuclear weapons as opposed to missiles, it was just—you could tell him 50 times; he wasn’t going to change on that. The idea of sharing SDI [Strategic Defense Initiative]—he wasn’t going to have anything to do with that. If he had a deal, it was just going to come out. Reagan had a very creative mind and he was always delightful to listen to.

Chidester: Going back to that briefing, was that the first time that you’d seen up close this kind of deferential attitude by Reagan? Also the caring attitude for the women. Was that the first time you saw that side of him?

Adelman: Oh yes, it was just like something out of The Great Gatsby. It was a morality that you think it’s nice but you never see it these days, anymore, and from a President. He mentioned Nancy and he could not mention the word “sexual abuse.” It was just going too far for him. It was just great.

Chidester: Did it affect your view of Reagan as President?

Adelman: It affected the view that this was somebody from a different morality than you see today. A throwback to something. Our Town, Thornton Wilder, or something like that. Just a different era.

Knott: Maybe this is the time to ask a Shakespeare question?

Strong: I was going to ask something else.

Knott: Go ahead.
Strong: There’s a story from the campaign that Martin Anderson tells about the trip to NORAD [North American Air Defense Command] when he discovers that there are no defenses.

Adelman: Right.

Chidester: Do you find that a plausible story?

Adelman: Oh yes, I do find that plausible. It was going around in conservative circles about defense, and one thing I noticed that I didn’t see in your background check is that I wrote a piece for the Heritage Foundation, called “Policy Review.” I think it was the end of ’79 or could be ’80, right in there, about the future of the AVM [Antivehicle Mines] treaty and that defensive systems may come along to actually make the AVM treaty obsolete. This was before the inauguration. So this was Iran—not saying I thought about Iran or anything like that, but I was convinced that it was an interesting argument.

But that story Marty Anderson tells has a very practical side and that would be typical Reagan. He talked very practically and all this “gee whiz” equipment at NORAD, which was fabulous; I visited it with Rumsfeld in ’75 or ’76 and it was wonderful. But the question is, what do you do when all the red lights are on? What you do is call Mom and say good-bye. That’s all you can do. Only Reagan would have said, “So why do we do all this and then have nothing to do about it?” I shouldn’t say “only Reagan.” But that was a very natural reaction of Reagan’s.

Knott: Is he learning for the first time that we did not have any defenses?

Adelman: Yes.

Knott: He really is? He thought prior to that that we could somehow knock these things down?

Adelman: Yes, I believe that. I think you’d have to ask Marty, but that’s the impression I got.

Knott: To take you back, you’re about to get an offer from Jeane Kirkpatrick to join her at the UN delegation. Could you tell us how that happened and why you changed your mind this time?

Adelman: Yes. Jeane talked to me the first time and I said no, I didn’t really like the UN, the girls were here, Carol was doing her dissertation and all that. A few months later Jeane called me out of the blue and said that she hired a deputy and a Foreign Service officer and it wasn’t working out very well and would I come up the next day with Carol and go around? Had I ever been to the UN? I said I’d never been there.

The next day we went up and spent the day with Jeane. She had a dinner for us at the Waldorf that night. I remember the dinner very well. We were laughing all through dinner; it was a wonderful group. Then Jeane got into her slippers and I think her bathrobe and sat on the couch at the Waldorf and said something like, in the words of Mahalia Jackson, “Is you is, or is you ain’t?”
I said, “I’m game, ask Carol.” And Carol said, “I think it would be kind of fun.” So it all happened very quickly and we said okay. It seemed out of the box and unusual and we were the type to go off to Africa and do that kind of stuff. We really liked Jeane and we really liked the people around the table, and Carol was willing to do her dissertation from New York rather than from here.

**Knott:** What kind of issues, or what was your—?

**Adelman:** My bag was disarmament, what was known as the first committee in the UN, and I was principal deputy for Jeane. So, you know, the usual stuff when she was out of town. In that capacity I went to a lot of National Security Council meetings because Jeane was out of town and she was invited—

**Knott:** You came by the nickname of “the hit man”?

**Adelman:** I never heard that, but I saw it in your briefing book.

**Strong:** Just curious; I only came across a couple of references.

**Adelman:** I don’t know, I never heard that.

**Strong:** I mean, I would think at the UN one could take pride in that.

**Adelman:** I didn’t know what I was hitting—we felt that we were hitting pillows, stuffed at that. It wasn’t a very mean place, I’ll tell you.

**Knott:** Did your impression of the UN improve or decline during your—

**Adelman:** I thought it was very frustrating. Our enemies were obviously Russia and the Communists. The UN is a bureaucracy. I do remember one of the great things we did. I suggested and Jeane immediately bought it—that after the nonaligned nations signed this letter criticizing the United States we would send a letter back to all the signatories who were recipients of U.S. foreign aid saying in essence, “I would never say that about your country, and I resent—”

So we actually did that letter and it was great. It ended up on the front page of newspapers in the countries—and ended up on the front page of the *New York Times*. Haig objected; this was hurting our relationships and Jeane Kirkpatrick then went to a National Security Council meeting and Reagan said, “Boy, that letter was just great.” He loved that. Reagan always had the same expression for Jeane, “You’re taking off that big sign that we used to wear that said ‘kick me.’” So it got a rise out of Haig, but we did things like that. I remember saying to Jeane one time in the middle of a battle we were in, “Jeane, you know all of our pleasures are perverse.” She looked at me and she said, “Yes, but they all are pleasures.”

So we were like Davy Crockett at the Alamo swinging Old Betsy around. It was always a crisis.
Knot: Could you talk a little bit about the relationship between Secretary Haig and Jeane Kirkpatrick?

Adelman: Yes. It started off bad and got worse over time. It started off bad because Haig was a difficult person. Jeane was absolutely adored by the President. Haig wanted to be the vicar of foreign policy and could just go crazy like he did with me, whether the limo goes next to the church, or with Jim Brady. I remember one time early on; he was going to New Zealand. I don’t know why New Zealand. Jeane had something in the newspaper; it might have been the letter that we wrote to the nonaligned nations. I got a call from Burt in New Zealand that Haig was absolutely furious, livid.

I told Jeane and she said “Oh my Gosh.” I said, “Don’t be so disturbed. Haig is often furious, so that will pass, too.” He was always erupting. He was a difficult guy. I don’t know if he became more difficult after his heart attack—people tell me—heart transplant or whatever he got. But he just shouted too much, he was just difficult. His outlook was different from Jeane’s.

Strong: How did the President mediate between them?

Adelman: He didn’t. Reagan never mediated. He was constitutionally unable to say, “Okay, what are your differences?” and things like that. He just liked people and let it go. Then, when he had enough, which was generally too long, he just stopped it. You can see that’s a pattern of Ronald Reagan. You just take things, take them, and take them, and then enough of this. And you could see that during the crazy convention in 1980 when you had these negotiations on the co-Presidency. Stupidest thing in the world.

I was there with Rumsfeld because I had done the speech with him. Jerome was from one of Rumsfeld’s [inaudible] to Detroit and Dick and Lynn Cheney were with us and the place was all abuzz about the co-Presidency, and Gerald Ford, Kissinger, and Greenspan were negotiating on behalf of Gerald Ford. Reagan let it go and let it go and Meese went downstairs and upstairs and finally Reagan said, “No, we’re not doing that.” Done. Then he called [George H. W.] Bush and—he let it go. With Haig he let it go too long, then he said, “I’ve had enough.”

I was sitting next to Haig at the National Security Council meeting the day that Reagan dismissed him. At the end of the meeting he said, “Al, can I have a word with you after this?” Haig was giving me a ride back to the State Department and he said, “One minute, meet me right out there.” I went in and I’m standing in the hallway, and Haig came out 15 minutes later and was uncommonly nice on the way back to the State Department and then asked me to come into his office.

He talked to me for a few minutes in his office and then as he walked me out he said, I guess to Muriel, his secretary, “Get Pat,” his wife, on the phone. I broke up the conversation. I said, “Mr. Secretary, I’ve got to go to New York and do some work.” He never mentioned he’d been fired. He was just very friendly. I took the shuttle up to New York, got off the plane, and in the airport at LaGuardia heard Al Haig was just fired. He wasn’t fired when I left, I didn’t think. Then I called Jeane Kirkpatrick, who was actually in Africa at the time.
Knott: Did you witness any interactions between Haig and Weinberger? What kind of relationship did they have that you were aware of?

Adelman: No, I didn’t remember—

Knott: Did the President seem comfortable around Haig?

Adelman: Reagan was always comfortable in his skin. The meeting I really recall very well was on the Law of the Sea treaty. Haig was saying, “Mr. President, this is not a treaty that any of us would want. It was negotiated by 150 countries over the last nine years, but let me just tell you it has to be revised, amended, in thirteen ways, and let me tell you three alternatives for each of the thirteen ways.” He started to do this.

I remember looking around the room thinking, *This is the most ridiculous thing in the world. No one knows what the hell*—He’s reading from a GS 11, 12, briefing paper. Here we are with all the people running the world, the President, the Vice President, the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, the NSC, and Reagan interrupts him and says, “Excuse me, Al.” Haig didn’t really like—Reagan says what he wants. Reagan says, “Al, I think that’s what the whole thing was all about.” And Haig says, “What do you mean, Mr. Reagan?” And Reagan says, “I think that’s what the whole thing is all about our being here. That’s what it’s all about, not going along with something stupid just because 150 countries have done it in the last nine years.”

With that, Haig, much to his credit, closes up his book and says, “Mr. President, if you want to get out of this treaty—” Reagan pops up in his chair and says, “Al, I think that’s what the whole thing—” Generally a meeting with the President is an hour long, 50 minutes, not an hour and ten minutes, an hour long. This is minute 18. The Filipino stewards weren’t around or anything like that and Reagan was on his feet and going, and he’s walking toward the door by himself. He grabs that door that leads into the hallway between the Cabinet Room and the Oval Office and as he’s pulling the door, kind of says to the doorknob, the door, no one else, he says, “I think that’s all we’ll do with Ron. I have fallen in line today.” That was a stunning moment in my relationship with Ronald Reagan. I thought it was just funny.

Strong: Was it a rare occasion for a National Security Council meeting to produce a decision?

Adelman: Oh yes.

Strong: They normally are what?

Adelman: Normally you wash around in the NSC or the NSDD [National Security Decision Directive], what each administration will pop out. At times you can tell where the President’s heading, but very often you can’t. So they just wash around it doing some, you win some—everyone keeps fighting. That was the Reagan administration. This administration is more disciplined. I think almost any administration is going to be more disciplined than the Reagan administration on almost any issue, and even after the President decided, you went back at it. So it was really free flowing. In terms of U.S. foreign policy decision-making, the Reagan administration was the messiest I’ve ever seen.
Reagan wasn’t going to discipline people. I mean, David Stockman’s one-page article in the *Atlantic* about his empire, the budget, and what bullshit it was that the deficits would be there and everybody’s absolutely livid, he’s undercutting everything about supply-side economics. They told Reagan, “You have to take him to the woodshed.” So Reagan invites him to lunch, which is by any definition really getting balled out, and at the end of the lunch Reagan says, “You know, David, a lot of people are kind of, I don’t know, ticked off about this.” That was the punishment. I mean, thank you, I get lunch alone with the President? Reagan just couldn’t do that. So in terms of U.S. foreign policy decision-making, it was wild.

**Strong:** Who would force a decision? The National Security Advisor? Al Haig?

**Adelman:** Yes, as much as they could get it.

**Strong:** And they’d do it on pieces of paper?

**Adelman:** Yes, NSDDs. They’d come out. The arms control business, over five-plus years I was there, you didn’t have an NSDD, but you know that was kind of like a contract with the Chinese. You know, once you have a contract, that’s the start of the fight or at least at round two, you go back at it. It doesn’t settle the argument; it’s just another stage in the argument.

**Knott:** Was Ambassador Kirkpatrick able to circumvent Haig’s instructions?

**Adelman:** Yes. She would do what she wanted to do a lot. Sometimes she got into a holy mess when she gave one vote on an Israeli issue, I can’t remember what it was, at the Security Council, and then within an hour had to say that it was the wrong vote. She had said yes and had to abstain, or something like that. That kind of stuff was sloppy, but so be it.

She had a very good relationship with the President, which Haig never did. Haig had a legitimate claim, was absolutely right, that he had to be at least number one in foreign policy and shouldn’t have a UN Ambassador voting for things he didn’t believe in. That was legitimate, but just never got resolved.

**Knott:** What about your own relationship with Kirkpatrick? There were some press reports at the time that you two were at odds and you were not particularly happy.

**Adelman:** I never understood that at all. I love Jeane and she’s still a very close friend. We spend holidays over here and the girls love her and Jeane has really become part of our family. I never understood that.

I think it came from Chuck Lichtenstein, who was with us, and Chuck died a few months ago. He’d been very close to Jeane. He’d never been married. He was very protective of Jeane and he was basically jealous of people there and he wasn’t deputy, I was deputy. There was no great love lost between the two of us, although I never said a negative thing about Chuck. He was a great conservative and served Jeane very well. But he just didn’t like me there. I think when my
nomination came up; he was very close to the *Time* magazine people. You can see the coverage in *Time* magazine was very negative.

**Strong:** Did Kirkpatrick have any difficulty getting clearance for things she wanted to say?

**Adelman:** No, because she generally didn’t get clearance, so there was no problem on that. We gave “right of reply” to the Swedish Foreign Minister right after he finished. And you know, “right of reply” was meant for the Russians, the Bulgarians, the Cubans, the Vietnamese, the vicious enemies. But this guy was just so outrageous in his views. I gave a right of reply right afterwards and everything went—Swedish relations in 50 years. It was the number one story in Sweden for a week how I, after the Foreign Minister, was all-protective of the Government. But no, we wouldn’t think of doing it.

This right of reply is done right afterwards, so I couldn’t get clearance on this. One argument was, it was totally without precedent to give a right of reply to a neutral “friend” of the United States, and certainly the most vicious things—

**Knott:** What had he said, and what did you say?

**Adelman:** What he had said criticized the United States on the Contras, number one. He had criticized the United States on military build-up, number two. And he had never mentioned—this is where we got him with this, this is great—he never mentioned the Russian ships that were hung up on Swedish waters. It just happened the week before. So he was talking about all the outrages of the world. Our dealing in Latin America wasn’t a Swedish issue, number one, but the Soviet subs that trespassed in Swedish waters never came up in the discussion. There was just a tirade against the United States and a vicious one. We really had fun with the “whiskey on the rocks” because the Russian submarine was called the *Whiskey* and so we immediately had a great time on that. There was an explosion on that. Jeane thought it was just fine.

**Knott:** Think you were successful? Did you have some impact on the UN and the other members?

**Adelman:** I think we were successful in infusing a little responsibility, in treating them like adults and getting the idea that the United States was no longer open season; they couldn’t shoot at us without repercussions. One of the main things we did, which was a great idea, and never really implemented very well, was to have a voter tabulation on UN votes. How many voted with us, how many voted against us, opposition on critical votes, and then feed that into the foreign aid recipient list. We spent a lot of time. I was in charge of that project. It was straight out of political science, a behavioral approach.

You look at what Congressman votes with other Congressmen; you know the whole story on that. You can do it very nicely on computers. It wasn’t very hard. We had a whole system to do that. When Egypt votes with the Soviets 80 percent of the time, with us 20 percent of the time, and gets $2 billion a year from us, you say, “Hey, what’s wrong with this picture?” That happened constantly.
We ginned it up during the two years I was there. Never had the impact that I wanted to have, but it was a great idea. Aside from that, we loved our time at the UN. Met wonderful people, the countries care enough to send the very best. They really do have wonderful Ambassadors and deputies there. We’ve just done a great job. I love Jeane. We had an adjoining room. And we laughed a lot.

I guess one of my great accomplishments was that the first time Reagan came up to the UN—this was one of my real accomplishments at the UN. Jeane asked me to be in charge of the Presidential visit, and Mike Deaver came up there to see where Reagan would go. It was the first time in my life I’d been involved in a Presidential advance, and I had never heard before of an elevator manifest, which is who gets in the elevator and where they stand, which are in the first and second floor of the UN. Not a long voyage, but apparently important enough to have an elevator manifest to it.

Anyway, the damnedest thing. We were in the General Assembly, where Reagan was going to speak. Now it’s customary for the President to speak every year at the UN; then it was not. Deaver said, “Where does he come from?” And we told him, “here,” and he walked through the whole thing. We worked all this out the week before; it’s been announced. As we’re there, I’m standing at the podium, and I said, “Mike, there’s one other issue.” He said, “What is it?” You won’t believe this, because before that time, Libya had put out a death notice on members of the U.S. government, and Jeane Kirkpatrick, for the first time I’d noticed, had a lot of security because of the Libyan threat. Haig’s security went up. Libya—this was after Reagan shut down his [inaudible], which was the summer of ’81. Before the September General Assembly.

Anyway, Libyans were on the warpath and I went. As we’re standing there at the podium at the UN, I said, “You know, the damnedest thing, the start of every General Assembly, somebody draws a country’s name out of a hat. That country is the far left first desk of the General Assembly, and then it goes alphabetically so that Albania, or whatever is the first, then—but no one ever sits in the same seats. So every General Assembly is different.”

I said, “By chance, whoever drew this drew it so that the country right in front of the podium is Libya. I mean the first country right in front of him.” Deaver says to me, “Oh don’t worry about that, Ken, we’ll put an electronic hoop to go into the General Assembly.”

I said, “No, you’re wrong.” He said, “Why?” I said, “Because this is UN territory and some of the Ambassadors come armed. He said, “What?” I said, “Yes. The Mexican Ambassador has a pistol in his boots. [Yasser] Arafat a few years ago addressed the General Assembly and he had a rifle and a pistol on his hip.” So he says, “So I can’t put a hoop there?” I said, “No, this is UN territory, they won’t let you.” He says, “And the Libyans are right there?” I said, “The Libyans are right there.” He said, “I can’t have Reagan come up.” I said, “But we announced it a week beforehand.” We were just fit to be tied.

Finally I had an inspiration. I said, “I know. Libya shares a table, there are two countries at each table, six chairs for each country. Libya shares a table with Liechtenstein. Why don’t I go to the Liechtenstein Ambassador and say, ‘You have six places—three in front, three in back—at the
table. I really want to get three places from you and we’ll put Secret Service guys there.”’”
They’ll sit at the table and watch the Libyans.

Deaver said, “Oh, you can do that.” So I call up the Liechtenstein Ambassador and say, “I’d like
to see you.” The Liechtenstein embassy doesn’t get that many phone calls. I said, “I’ll come over
to see you.” “I’ll be happy to see you.” Spent 20 minutes talking about that. And I schlepped
over to the Liechtenstein place and probably I was the first foreign visitor in the year. The
American Ambassador coming there—so I asked him, after having some coffee, “We want three
chairs from your delegation to watch the Libyans when Reagan’s there.”

The Liechtenstein Ambassador says, “Could I have a picture with Reagan?” I said, “Sure, yes,
that will be fine, but I need those three chairs.” “Fine, you can have those.” So if you ever look at
a picture there, unfortunately the Secret Service guy is a black guy. Liechtenstein had gnarled old
men, 4’8” and 4’10” gnomes. Then you have these absolutely magnificent three specimens with
things in their ears, looking at the Libyans the whole time. You say, “They’re from
Liechtenstein?”

When I look back at my diplomacy, that was really the high point. Then after that the
Liechtenstein Ambassador—I saw him, I was so happy—we were going up to have lunch with
Waldheim and all that and I saw him, just kind of like a little puppy dog and I said, “Come here.”
I said, “Mr. President, would you do me a favor? This man has been extremely helpful.” This is
very bad form because once you start doing that the President gets absolutely trapped and
everybody wants a picture with him. So Haig got out of there, the two of them talked for a
minute, he got the picture. Then Deaver said, “What the hell are you doing?” I said, “I’ll tell you
later. This is the guy who gave us the three positions.” And everybody said, “Let’s get over here
for pictures with the President.”

So anyway it was a triumph. There’s one other incident, and that was when the President of the
General Assembly, a guy named [Ismat] Kittani, who was the Ambassador from Iraq, of all
places, and was looking for [Saddam] Hussein obviously, and he and I had gotten to know each
other very well. He was a wonderful, wonderful man. Actually then later on, I think he’s dead
now, but I think he broke with Saddam Hussein; I’m not sure about that. Anyway, he’s working
as Saddam Hussein’s Ambassador to the UN and just a wonderful guy. He was elected over our
vicious opposition as President of the General Assembly. Our vicious opposition probably
helped him get the job. We campaigned against him like crazy, but he was there. Reagan was
going against him in the General Assembly.

About two days before, Kittani calls me up and he says, “Ken, would you do me a favor? We’re
having this lunch with Waldheim at the UN—” and why don’t I talk to Reagan about it? So I
said, “Let me see Reagan. I don’t think Iraq would be objective enough, and the Middle East and
the UN, I don’t think it would work.

Then it struck me that I went to Grinnell and Kittani’s telling me he went to Knox College. So I
called him up and said, “I remember you went to Knox College?” He said, “Yes.” I said,
knows Galesburg.” He said, “Oh, you’re kidding me,” and he talked about the drug store and hardware store, the fire station and everything like that.

In the next scene, I’m sitting in the back at the lunch with the French Ambassador and a bunch of others and Jeane is there, Kittani is there, Waldheim is there, Reagan is there, and Reagan is talking, his arms are flying, Kittani’s arms are flying, and the Ambassador says, “What do you think they’re talking about?”

I said, “I’m sure it’s the Middle East and the future of the UN.” [laughter] Kittani sent me a bouquet of roses afterwards and said it was the best—oh, do you remember the movie house? Oh yes, we went to the movie house. Reagan lit up, told him the old stories, Galesburg, Illinois. Kittani knew exactly what he was talking about. So it really was a triumph. Those are my two diplomatic contributions.

**Strong:** Reagan’s appearance at the UN, would you or Kirkpatrick have seen the speech in advance?

**Adelman:** We would have made some contributions to it and seen it in advance. There was generally a tight hold and it was pretty ordinary, it wasn’t exceptional. But we would go over it, especially the parts that he talked about the UN, so we would have contributed.

[BREAK]

**Knott:** Unless you have any further comments about your tenure at the UN or anything that you can recall that might be of interest to future scholars or—

**Adelman:** I would say that future scholars shouldn’t concentrate on the time at the UN.

**Knott:** Okay.

**Adelman:** It’s not a scholarly subject.

**Knott:** Well, let’s talk then about your joining the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency. Was that a difficult decision for you to make when you were first approached?

**Adelman:** No, I thought it would be terribly exciting. Bill Clark sounded me out. Sven Kraemer, who worked for him, sounded me out. I had no idea that they were going to can Gene Rostow. The first time it really occurred to me that all of this had been poked around a little bit and it was pretty obscure, I was at a breakfast with [James] Chace from the Council on Foreign Relations at the time. We were at one of these leisurely breakfasts because the General Assembly was not in session. There was no Security Council meeting then.

Then I got back to the office about 10 o’clock and I had three phone messages from Bill Clark, the National Security Advisor. I called him back, and he said, “Oh good, I’m glad. I was waiting for you to come in, Ken. What about the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency?”
I said, “Bill, before you go on a lot longer, Gene Rostow asked me to be his deputy before, and I said it’s not anything I want to do. I’m quite happy here.” He said, “Before you go on a lot longer, I’m not talking about deputy. I’m talking about Director.” I said, “Well yes, Gene Rostow holds that.” He said, “I know, but Gene Rostow’s not going to be there, he’s on his way out.” I said, “Well, that’s a hard thing.” He said, “I know, we haven’t announced it yet.” I said, “Then maybe I’ll think this over. I’m not sure I really want to do something like that.” He said, “Ken, that’s not the question. The question is, the President wants you. Will you do it or won’t you?” I said, “If that’s the question, then the answer is yes.”

Then he said, “Okay, good. We’d like to announce it at noon today.” It is now 10:30. He said, “I have one other question to ask you. Is there anything in your background that would embarrass the President? Tell me now.” “There’s nothing.” He said, “Okay, we’re going to announce it at 12.” I called up Carol, said, “I guess I’ve agreed to it already.” I scooted into Jeane’s office. She was out of town or something and I got a hold of her and said, “I was asked to do this and I said yes. I know it’s unfair to you to say yes, but he told me he wanted to announce it at 12:00. I didn’t feel comfortable saying, ‘give me a chance to run the rapids.’ I’m going to do it. I said yes.” Then all hell broke loose.

It broke loose because, this would be of interest to maybe scholars of the confirmation process. There are more horrible stories than mine. But everything happened wrong. I mean the first person to have a press conference about this was Jesse Helms. He said, “Oh, this is wonderful.” God, the worst thing in the world you ever want to happen. And then [Paul] Tsongas got it into his brain that he was going to be the most beloved Senator by opposing me and dropping everything else. Then it became a free-for-all.

**Knott:** [Alan] Cranston as well, I think.

**Adelman:** Cranston took it real big because he was running for something at that time and he was ferocious about it.

**Strong:** Re-election as Senator from California.

**Adelman:** That’s right, he was running for that in 1982.

**Knott:** So how do you prepare for this?

**Adelman:** I did poorly, and we had murder board and I got the constant advice that “You’re not in the job, you’re at the UN, so if they ask you all kinds of questions that you don’t know or you’re not sure, just say you don’t know, that’s fine.” It was an unbelievable case study in journalism that I know is taught at Columbia for years.

I’ll tell you what was most interesting about it. The first hearing, because there was controversy even before the first hearing, was done I think in the caucus room with the Foreign Relations Committee. There were probably ten, fifteen, full-time press reporters there. They spent all day looking at the hearing.
They wrote up the hearings for the *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, and *Wall Street Journal*. In none of their writing was there ever a mention that I didn’t know this or I didn’t know that. All the press reports were “It’s controversial. He’s a conservative. He’s too young,” which I always thought was the fault of my parents, not mine. “He shouldn’t be nominated”; this is the most critical thing. Reagan was the first President since Chester Arthur not to have a summit with the Soviets and this is just a travesty, this right-wing Republican.

So all those articles, none of them mentioned the “don’t know.” Watching television the night of the hearing, the news broadcasts clipped the don’t-knows from the whole day. Then the press reports from the two and three and four days after that, the thing was that here was somebody who didn’t know. So the people who sat there watching the hearing all day didn’t come across with that, not one of them, but once they saw it on television, that became more important than what they had seen that day and that became the thing. Then it was a series of disasters. We had [Edward] Rowny’s memo leak. Someone asked me about African art and this and that.

**Knott:** What was the African art?

**Adelman:** The legality of taking African art. This was done by Claiborne Pell, whose entire house has fabulous Belgian art. At one point I felt like, but I was even more intemperate than I am now, saying “Show me your papers for your Belgian art sequestered in your house.” Anyway, it was a gigantic issue. Everything was a gigantic issue.

What was wonderful about it was that Ronald Reagan never wavered. I know that Jim Baker went to him to say, “We should drop this nomination.” I know lots of people—“Oh no, we can’t do that.” No question that Reagan was behind it and was always going to be on it.

**Strong:** Did he ever talk to you during the process?

**Adelman:** No, he did not. All I know is that every time there was a fork in the road—Bill Clark told me this—that someone went to Reagan, telephoned, “You know this is going to cost ’em.” He said, “No, it isn’t.”

**Strong:** Sometimes in those confirmation battles, the nominee becomes a surrogate for policy dispute that members of the Congress can’t otherwise—the issue wasn’t so much his confidence, it was, what’s the direction?

**Adelman:** Absolutely.

**Strong:** That became a big fight and sometimes oddly personal and sometimes almost impossible to remember.

Once there are serious policies—for the members of the Senate, this was a way to make some headway on arms control.
Adelman: Absolutely, that was the thing. I’m not saying I was blameless. I was too young, I was too conservative for the job, according to the reports, but there’s no question that Ronald Reagan was not seen as somebody who cares that much about arms control. This was two years into the administration that he had proclaimed the zero option that was unnegotiable. The Russians would never even consider that the START [Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty] would keep reductions of nuclear weapons on the START, being the throw-weight, the SS-18s. The Soviets would kind of throw in that. That was non-negotiable. This was just another thing, refusing to have summits because [Leonid] Brezhnev was sick and then died, and then [Yuri] Andropov died, then [Konstantin] Chernenko died. So we were seen to have the biggest vulnerability—

Strong: And some members of Congress were trying to legislate arms control negotiation—anti-satellite—

Adelman: Yes. [Larry] Pressler was big on the ASAT [anti-satellite], and others were. But generally speaking the Democrats were very hostile about Reagan on arms control. So I figured, perfect; I was a great poster boy for that, because I was young, I was 36 years old, and I was conservative.

They said I didn’t know anything about it, but then the Wall Street Journal ran a full page and showed that I had written five articles about SALT and various arms control issues. I had written quite a bit before that. I had dealt with it for two years at the UN and not that that’s real stuff, but at least it’s some stuff.

Knott: Who was assisting you in your confirmation effort? Was it the Congressional Liaison Office?

Adelman: Yes, and they did a bad job. Ken Duberstein was in charge of the White House on that and he was bad. Generally speaking in bed with the Congressmen and the Senators and when something disruptive comes along, they don’t care all that much, especially if they think that it’s not a very good appointment to start with, and they tend to be very territorial. Right away Richard Perle was helping. Obviously because he was a good friend. We had a dinner at his house with [Henry] “Scoop” Jackson. Scoop Jackson says, “Let’s have a breakfast where you can talk to Democratic Senators.” I said, “Oh gosh, that would be so nice of you.”

So I talked to the White House about that the next day. They said, “Oh no, don’t do that, that would just ruin everything.” So I said, “Why not? I think it makes sense.” Scoop Jackson was pissed off. Obviously thought, I’m not going to help him anymore. And I don’t think he did much of anything on my nomination. He was furious about that. Bennett Johnston and [Daniel Patrick] Moynihan, whom I knew, were helpful with the Democrats. I’m not going to bunk with the other Democrats, but generally speaking the White House liaison people had big deals to do and they think these kinds of things—

Strong: In the middle of all of that the President has his speech to the nation about Star Wars.

When was the first time you saw that language?
Adelman: Right at the speech. He didn’t share that with anybody before that. I know that [George] Shultz was kind of blindsided by it, Weinberger, they may have had two days notice or something like that. But it was stunning, stunning.

Knott: Your reaction to it?

Adelman: My reaction to it, because I wrote the speech in policy review, was, Oh my God, this is really something new and terrific. It’s going to be a whole new ball game. I didn’t realize the extent of how new it was going to be. I didn’t realize that the Soviets were going to go ape shit about it. I did not realize how big a deal it was. It really was the main contribution of the Reagan foreign policy I think.

Knott: As part of your confirmation hearing—

Adelman: A little bit. The confirmation pretty much stayed focused on me and these other kinds of issues, the Rowny memo and the African art and the “sham” and “shame,” all that stuff. It was total bullshit.

We had some wonderful things, and for the record I want to say two days after I was nominated, Dick Cheney sent out a letter, “Dear colleagues, this is a great appointment and this is a great guy.” Don Rumsfeld, Joyce flew in, Joyce Rumsfeld flew in for each of the hearings, Don did for one or—and called up every three days, “What can I do to help?” “Who do I talk to?” Just wonderful, wonderful friends. We stayed out with the Rumsfelds at one point during this time. He was always very close to Chuck Percy, and in fact, when one of Percy’s twin daughters was murdered, he asked Rumsfeld to handle everything for him. So they were really, really close. Percy was a well-meaning soul, but screwed up almost everything on my confirmation hearing. Rumsfeld got awfully mad at him—and saw some scenes, but Rumsfeld was just a great, great friend, just terrific. The whole family was, Joyce too.

Knott: You lose the vote in committee—

Adelman: Yes, because [Larry] Pressler wanted the President to come out for his birthday party in North Dakota and Reagan said he wasn’t going to do that and Pressler says, “I’m going to vote against Ken on that.” So we had the Pressler birthday party issue. We had a guy from Maryland, [Charles] Mack Mathias, who was there posturing, said, “… question of the right thing versus the right wing,” and all these little things that came out. Then the Democrats found a great issue. The only Democrats that supported me were the only ones that knew me, so—

Knott: Was there a point where you thought this is just not worth it?

Adelman: No, I never thought that this wasn’t worth it. I thought it was worth it. Once I was in I was certainly going to win it. I was worried, obviously, that the President was going to cave. I knew that Jim Baker—you know I’m a pragmatist, I knew we were going to be not very excited about this. There could be a point where it’s not worth it, and that happens all the time. I was worried less about that. At no point did I think, I’m going to give up. I’m going to win this thing,
Knott: Was Michael Deaver one of the persons saying this is getting too costly?

Adelman: I’m sure he was. I’m good friends with him now and work with him and see him all the time and I’m sure he did, but I haven’t asked him. But that was his kind of thing.

Knott: You win on the floor; you win confirmation.

Adelman: Yes we won the fight 46 to 54, something like that. There was one funny little recollection. The first time I appeared and the Senator from Minnesota—Rudy Boschwitz was against, I couldn’t figure out where Rudy Boschwitz came in, and finally I talked to somebody who knew him very well and the fellow who owned the Baltimore baseball team, who was that? I forget. I’ll figure out his name. Anyway, he talked to Rudy Boschwitz. He was very close to him.

Sunday night at about 11 o’clock, we were up in New York and Rudy Boschwitz comes up and he says, “Ken?” I said, “Yeah.” He said, “I read in your résumé that you were one of the founders of the Sherlock Holmes Club.” I said, “Yes, Senator.” He said, “Who was Sherlock’s housekeeper?” I said, “You mean Mrs. Hudson?” He said, “Yeah.” “Who was Sherlock’s brother?” “You mean Mycroft?” He said, “Yes.” And that changed our relationship.

He had loved Sherlock Holmes all his life. He had thought that this was just bullshit that I put up there. So after his queries on Sherlock Holmes, he became a great partisan. You learn something about politics in episodes like that, and what you may not throw away, what’s taken for granted, what’s the foremost issue.

Strong: Did that affect in any way your relationship with Meese, related to the confirmation?

Adelman: Yes, I wrote an op-ed piece.

Strong: Tower or—

Adelman: Well, with Tower it was a difficult thing. I wrote an op-ed piece in the Washington Post on my reflections from confirmation, an open letter, Dear Ed. I made the point that you made just a minute ago, that when you look at it, most times Senators don’t have much say on anything. You know, legislation comes along and a few times every session they can vote on something and make a difference, but generally thinking confirmation is one time they can really hold something up, they can make a difference, one or two of them. You just have to realize this, it’s kind of the height of power, and slog through it.

With Tower I got into a terrible problem because Dan Quayle was Vice President then. He was a dear friend then and I had dealt with Tower because he had been the head of the START negotiations and to tell you the truth I liked him, but I couldn’t stand the way that he was separated from his wife, who was kind of crazy. He was taking a member of the delegation, a young woman who was from the State Department PM [Permanent Mission] office, Director of Military Affairs, and when he would travel around Europe he would travel with her. I said at the time, “This is terrible.” The delegation is a very tight organization, they’re in the bubble, in the
secure room all the time, and for the head of the delegation to have is an open affair with one of the members I thought was terrible.

I made my views known about it and then when Tower’s nomination came up, by chance someone asked me about it. I said I wasn’t very excited, not because he wasn’t knowledgeable; I didn’t like the character. So that became a big hullabaloo. My next-door neighbor in the blue house, right next door to me. I was out at a conference in California with our two daughters because Dick Cheney invited me to go along with him. So we were there, the three of us, our two daughters.

Quayle put out an all-points notice to call me on this. I was kind of stiffing him for a few days because I knew what he wanted and then [David] Broder said the Washington Post was looking for me everywhere because he was at the conference with me and it bothered me because I didn’t want, in the first ten minutes of the new [George H. W.] Bush administration, to go and screw the Bush administration. Quayle was furious at me about Tower.

At a conference after Broder told me there was an all-points alert for me on this because I had broken with the team I wrote a little note to Dick and said, “Will you take a walk with me?” So to explain the situation, I’ve got questions when he was with Ford in the White House with Tower and that was my experience and that was my database. He had similar experiences with Tower and he made me feel a lot better. Then as it happens, Tower goes down in flames and the President has to ask Dick Cheney. So Tower I was proven right.

Knott: Were you able to patch things up with members of the—

Adelman: Well, it was a funny thing. I called all of them the morning of the vote and right after the vote, within an hour, I had personally called every member of the committee and said, “I’d like to work with you.” And most of them said, “That’s wonderful.” Everybody answered. I said, “I’d be happy to come over to your office next week and plan all this out.” Most of them said, “That’s very kind and we’ll work closely; the vote is one thing and working together is something else.” Basically a lot of them said don’t come, they’re not that interested. Tsongas was absolutely amazed that I called him. He could not get over it. He said, “Ken, I have spent the last three months doing nothing else but trying to subvert your confirmation.” I said, “I didn’t notice that, but I’ll take your word for that, Senator.” He has absolutely no sense of humor. He said, “You didn’t notice that? Yes, I’d like for you to come over.”

So I came over. What Tsongas did—I didn’t mind him spending time on me being hysterical. What really got me—People magazine wanted to interview me and I didn’t do many interviews at that time. When I said no, they went to Tsongas. Someone showed it to me and they shouldn’t have, because the story on Tsongas said that when he was tucking his two daughters in bed, Stephanie and Tiffany, one of them looked up with dreamy eyes and said, “Daddy, if Ken Adelman becomes Director of the Arms Control Agency will we ever make it to kindergarten?” or something. I later asked him about this and he didn’t seem to have the same kind of feelings for the future of his daughter. I read that and boy, I mean, it was something else.
Then he had a national press conference where he called me a liar about a memo I had written about personnel issues. It was the goofiest issue in the world. Said I wasn’t going to do any personnel because I wasn’t in the job. I was getting letters from Senators and people that had to be answered. So I asked my friend Robin West, I said, “I’m going to shove all the personnel issues to you and you handle it.”

I testified in front of the committee that I had done nothing on personnel and I would do nothing on personnel. Tsongas found out that I had written this memo to Robin saying to him I was shoving all the files—so I had done something on personnel. Hello? So I was a liar. Clearly, here’s my memo saying, “Robin, take it all over, I don’t want anything to do with all this stuff.” I had done something on personnel and I said I had done nothing on personnel.

Anyway, we visited Tsongas’ office and he had protest all on his wall signed by everybody about the non-proliferation treaty, the test ban treaty, or something like that, a freeze. We sat down, and I said, “Nice to meet you, Senator.” We’d seen each other in hearings, a courtesy call before, and I said, “I want to talk to you for just one minute alone before we talk about our business, so I’m going to ask Tom Graham to leave.” He said, “Oh no, I share everything with Tom.” I said, “I know, I share everything with Tom. But Tom wants to get out. I just want to be alone with the Senator for one minute.”

So he was scared out of his mind and I said, “Senator, I just want to tell you that I hope that I’ll get along with you, but what you said in People magazine and my relationship with your daughters I thought was despicable. Very poorly reviewed, and having said something like that, you should never do that in politics.” I opened the door and said, “Come on Billy, come on Tom, now let’s talk about START.” He looked at me like—Here we are 25 years later and I’m still very happy I did that.

We got over that. When I retired he gave a speech, I know Pressler gave a big speech, sent me glasses, and said it was a big mistake. Tsongas sent me a letter, said this was the greatest job—But you know, you have to take that, there was a little bit of fear—

**Strong:** You mentioned the freeze, to get back to the arms control mood of the country just as you’re coming in. Reagan’s been elected partly on the claim that many thought out, which doesn’t have a lot of national leadership.

**Adelman:** Cranston, Tsongas.

**Strong:** He didn’t really initiate it, but sought it to their advantage. Then the Star Wars speech. Did that speech help? And the promise that there might be a technological way of really addressing the dangers of nuclear war. Did that diffuse the peace movement in any significant way?

**Adelman:** No, I think it accelerated it. The height of the freeze movement, as I remember it was ’82, then it became—

**Strong:** —demonstration in New York.
Adelman: Right. That was because of Reagan being the wild cowboy, that was because of that. Also ’83 became quite momentous. You had Star Wars, the Evil Empire, you had KAL 007.

Strong: You had missiles in Europe.

Adelman: The missiles in Europe was the real thing that got the crowds in the street because we were deploying missiles in Europe. The freeze was starting to build, but it was mostly an anti-Reagan, anti-right wing kind of cry from them. SDI did not help us one bit because immediately those who saw it were saying that it showed Reagan’s ignorance rather than vision. There’s no way to do anything like that, that this was a militarization of space. You mentioned ASAT before, and Pressler was big on that.

Strong: I don’t mean so much in the community of arms control and national security. Because that’s exactly what happened. He got ridiculed.

Adelman: Right, right.

Strong: I mean really the public mood.

Adelman: The public mood was never turned on by SDI because you ask the public about having protection against ballistic missiles and their one reaction is overwhelming: “You mean we don’t? Hold it, what have you guys been doing? We don’t have protection?” So they all assumed we had, we were invulnerable. So Reagan says we’re going to have a program to get us invulnerable and I said, “Oh, my God.” I feel worse. It’s really remarkable the number, the percentage of people who thought we had protection against incoming ballistic missiles, very high, about 60 as I remember.

Strong: So the tide sort of turned by crossing those thresholds, the actual placement of missiles in Europe.

Adelman: Yes, the ramp-up and the protests in Europe. Then [Walter] Mondale starts the campaign. He says “You’re the first President since Chester Arthur not to meet with the Soviet leader.” The only time that Reagan really got mad was with [Pierre] Trudeau at the Economic Eight, or whatever it’s called, and Trudeau says, “You haven’t met with the leader of the Soviet Union.” Reagan looked at him; he couldn’t stand him. And he says, “You’re the first one—” goes at him again. Reagan had enough and he puts down his glass. You know he’s mad and he says, “Well, Pierre,” the worst thing you could call him, “Pierre, they keep dying on me. You want me to meet the dead ones?” Then Trudeau went on.

Strong: On entering the administration, did you already have a position?

Adelman: Yes, I was against continuing hearings, the SALT II, and I was consistently against it, I thought it was a bad mistake. It was a bad mistake because Reagan had run against SALT II and should be consistent. Also, it was going to bind us and not bind them. There was enormous controversy over that. Boy, it shows you the wonderful subject and philosophy of epistemology.
How do you know anything? The President of the United States says, “Under the limits of SALT II do we have to destroy anything that we would want to keep otherwise and not destroy?”

I’m telling you, once you’re asked that question it’s a free-for-all; it can’t be done. The answer is you don’t know. Yes, the Soviets had to dismantle things, but then the argument is they would dismantle a lot more if it weren’t for SALT II. They’re keeping the numbers up and we had to destroy real things—that was the conservative view on that—that we wouldn’t have to give up otherwise. The counter argument to that is, “Well, they’ve been scheduled to be destroyed, so they couldn’t have been very valuable.” The counter argument is, “Of course they had, because people had planned for four years to stay in SALT II and now you’re telling it’s off, they’d be happier.”

**Strong:** All of this debate was taking place under caps that were certainly high.

**Adelman:** Very high.

**Strong:** It’s hard to see any great advantage.

**Adelman:** I know, but you don’t understand arms control. Arms control thinking drives out sound thinking. When you are at 8,000 numbers, if it’s 8,054, then that’s different than 8,000. You just—

**Strong:** And at confirmation you also already had a clear position on Soviet violation of previous weapons programs.

**Adelman:** Oh yes, that seemed very clear.

**Strong:** And that didn’t change once you entered that audit and saw more of the—

**Adelman:** No, and we had an outside group—I think it was started before I was Arms Control Director, but anyway we had Rumsfeld on it and we had Judge [Larry] Silverman on it and others who were the advisory committee and they went through all kinds of documentation on cheating.

The counter argument to that was that cheating was not material, was not any big stuff, the Krasnoyarsk radar is dip-shit stuff.

**Strong:** Did that relate to the Kennedy School study that had been done—

**Adelman:** Right, I brought them in to look at that and it was done by Al Carnesale. That was my idea and I actually contracted—I wanted someone neutral who wasn’t in one of these camps, so they’d go and look at, not just Soviet cheating but a larger issue of what was the value from the national security point of view of arms control over the years. Carnesale was respected by everybody who was a liberal Democrat up at Kennedy. He’s now president at UCLA in California and I gave him some money to do the study and his argument came out that it didn’t
have much of an impact at all. And everybody didn’t care about the study results. They went back to fighting.

Far more important than defense planning and real budget in your defense was the arms control numbers. That’s what everybody focused on. That was just an easy distortion of what mattered and what didn’t matter.

**Strong:** So was the outlook that arms control really wasn’t likely to go very far in a year in which we get the Evil Empire speech, we get Tower’s initiative, the established record of Soviet violation, too much expectation that the arms control agenda—

**Adelman:** And it had a lot of anticipation that it would be very active; I didn’t think it would be very productive.

**Strong:** Active in terms of public debate?

**Adelman:** Oh, public debate and Congressional hearings and importance to the administration and articles and the usual stuff of government.

**Strong:** Did you have any inkling that the zero option would ever become a treaty?

**Adelman:** I certainly was convinced that it was the best approach, but I didn’t think that the Soviets would go along with getting rid of all their SS-20s that they had built there, but I thought there was no question that it was better than a number. I liked the idea of a build-down, and that meant that you had at the time of the U.S. deployment in ’83, I forgot how many, maybe 120 or something like that, SS-20s, whatever it was that the Soviets, on their way to some number that I knew I would never forget in my lifetime. My thought was, if they went from that number and just held at that number, we would build up to that number. If they built down from that number we would go down, so it was a build-up, build-down kind of approach and I proposed that during my confirmation time, not publicly but inside, and I talked to Rumsfeld about it.

I remember he called one day. I said, “Listen, before we talk about this, here’s my idea. How do you like this build-up, build-down?” Rumsfeld said, “You’re awfully healthy if you’re thinking about this during the—Your life’s not near the end? I’ve never seen a guy like you.” I said, “Thank you, that’s very nice.” He went around telling everybody about that. If you ask him today he’ll still recall that conversation.

**Knott:** What percentage of your job was devoted to the public aspect in terms of speaking, testifying—

**Adelman:** As opposed to what the policy was?

**Knott:** Yes.

**Adelman:** About 80/20, 90/10. This was a public issue and it was very important to the President, it was very important to the opposition; it was very important to our allies. The first
two years there weren’t many issues to discuss because the Soviets weren’t going to go. We had a lot of meetings. But gee, we did do something on the chemical weapons treaty, and I broke with the Pentagon on that, very firmly. Cap Weinberger got furious with me on that. I made some contribution. That was ’83, I believe.

What happened on that was we were coming up with the chemical weapons ban and I said that the Pentagon was firmly against [inaudible] and Perle and [inaudible] and all that as unverifiable and all the usual arguments. Shultz wanted a treaty that was locked and more hype than I wanted. But anyway, I did support having a treaty. I thought standards, even if violated, were better than no standards at all. If we’re not going to have chemical weapons, I certainly didn’t want others to have it, and we were going to destroy our chemical weapons.

Then I pulled a very clever ploy, which was to see Vice President Bush. Because we had had two NSC meetings about this. Shultz was for, Weinberger was firmly against, the Joint Chiefs were on both sides firmly, and Reagan didn’t know what to do. So we had another meeting. I think there were two full NSC meetings, which was really ridiculous. To have an NSC meeting, even one of them. There wasn’t even one about the future of the Navy for some years. Anyway, this was arms control; it drove out every other issue.

Before the second meeting I went to see Vice President Bush. Bush would never take a stand on it. I said, “On this provision, Mr. Vice President, you know what would be neat, if the President decides to go ahead, would you present the draft treaty in Geneva?” I felt Bush was looking for things. He said, “That would be nice, what would I do?” I said, “All you’d do is read a speech and present it there and support the number on disarmament.”

So I pulled a fast one. What happened was the same replay of what happened at the other NSC meeting. I would probably start talking and his eyes rolled, “here we go again kind of thing.” Then I said, 20 minutes into the meeting, “Mr. President, if you decide to go ahead with the treaty, I suggest that Vice President Bush present our draft treaty in New York.” Bush says, “I’ll do anything,” looking proud like a school kid, and Reagan says, “George, would you do something like that?” And Bush said, “Well if you want me to, Mr. President.” He said, “Well, when would you leave, George?” “Whenever you say.” Oh boy, and what would you do?

They were absolutely into the let’s-pack-for-George kind of routine and you could just see Reagan punch out the account on this thing and it would be something George would really like. George was actually I would say thrilled with the whole thing, so the whole issue of whether to have a treaty or not got absolutely canned because then you had to supply George with what he’s going to take in his briefcase on his way to Geneva. So that was at least done on that. That was a great triumph. The only reason we had that happen was because Bush was dying to go over there and do something like that. So you do have that.

I spent a lot of time working on that. We’d do the annual reports on the violations all the time, but in terms of what are we going to propose next year to the Soviets, were they doing anything there, and they were done and walked out in the spring of ’83. Then you had to just deal with their walkout and say okay. Reagan wasn’t very disturbed on their walkout, everybody else was. Reagan said, “When they want to come back, they’ll come back.”
Knott: Did you make appearances, for instance on a college campus, where you might get some pretty heated opposition from the—

Adelman: Yes, I never minded that.

Knott: You did have some experience where there were people trying to shout you down or—

Adelman: Sure.

Knott: Anything that stands out in your mind?

Adelman: The only thing I really objected to were people I thought were kind of dishonest. I just wouldn’t debate with them again. There was a guy from the Center for Defense Information, Admiral [Gene] La Rocque, and he said things that not only were not true but I mentioned this just wasn’t true after the show. “You know,” he said, “you have to say something like that.” Every time I was asked to appear with La Rocque I’d say, “No, I’m not going to do it.”

Otherwise I would appear at places. I’d always tell people you can disagree without being disagreeable. That’s fine, I understand it, I respect your views, and it’s important for everybody in a democracy to get their views across and let me just tell you what my views are. I always had this view though that there was a fundamental difference, that the Soviets were not like us. That we didn’t have to think that they dreamed the same dream and had the same aspirations for the world. Like Cyrus Vance said during the summit. “I always thought, going into the room with the Soviets, as much as I talked to Victor Karpov and [Yuliy] Kvicinskiy and that whole scene, and liked some of them personally. I always thought, in my mind, that if it were up to them I’d be in the Gulag. When you think of that all the time you have a very different attitude on how chummy—I wasn’t seeking new friends in life, I had enough friends. I wasn’t looking for approval from them. I wanted to get a job done. It was a lot of responsibility. But in terms of buddying up, drinking with them, or admiring them, I didn’t. I find them a despicable group. So that tempered everything I did or said.

Strong: Who in the administration would agree with that perception?

Adelman: Well, certainly Weinberger and Perle and the traditional crowd in the State Department who were always wanting more. “If we only got our way, if we only communicated enough, if we only saw eye-to-eye.” I always thought that the more I communicated, at least in the two years I was at the UN, the more I understood them, the less I liked them, and the more we disagreed. I thought it was much better keeping our disagreements and ignorance than learning a lot about our disagreements. I always felt they were the Evil Empire. It makes it very personal when you think going into a meeting that if it were up to them I’d be in the Gulag.

Strong: That concept in the State of the Union speech and the trouble with—not the trouble, in dispute with anybody in the administration?
**Adelman:** I saw Shultz all the time and they were always trying to work out things and iron out things and my view was if we can, we can; if we can’t, we can’t. I wasn’t going to be the Arms Control Director who decided myself whether I was going to do a good job or a bad job on the basis of whether I had a treaty or not. My objective was to get a good treaty if we could do it, and if we didn’t have a treaty at the end of four years, then we didn’t. I didn’t need a treaty; the United States didn’t need a treaty. Maybe the President’s political guys needed a treaty, but if they did, they’d need someone else to get them a treaty.

I thought SALT II was a bad thing. It was better not to have it than to have it. I thought the INF was better to have than not to have. If you asked Colin Powell did this defend? He’d say to me, “Adelman was Arms Control Director, he didn’t believe in arms control.” It used to infuriate me although I loved Colin, and he would say it all the time. There were the Joint Chiefs, and friends, I’d go over there and have lunch with him. He’d say it today. I’d get pissed off a few times and I said, “Yes, you were Chairman of the Joint Chiefs and you didn’t like war.” Sometimes you have to do it. I mean, I liked some arms control agreements, I didn’t like other arms control agreements. I didn’t think arms control was going to solve the world’s problems. It certainly has done a lot better than I ever thought it would do.

I never thought we’d get an INF treaty, I think that’s wonderful. I think other treaties have served us well, better than I thought when I took the job. But, you know, I wasn’t opposed to an arms control agreement, and it was totally unfair that Colin believes that to this day.

**Strong:** Did you believe at that time that increased accuracy was in fact contributing to less stability?

**Adelman:** Oh yes, the SS-20s were terrible. Never believed Haig’s view that the United States had to deploy weapons and Pershing IIs in Europe regardless of the SS-20s because of the attachment that they had. That’s why [Brent] Scowcroft and Haig were really against the INF treaty.

**Strong:** Just briefly, back to your evaluation of the Soviet team. I inferred from your book that there might have been a little more grudging respect from Marshal [Sergei] Akhromeyev on INF.

**Adelman:** Akhromeyev was terrific.

**Strong:** Do you still hold pretty much the same view, and maybe in a larger context besides the personal relationship, do you find negotiating with the Soviet military folks a little bit better than with those more politbureautized?

**Adelman:** I never negotiated with the Soviet military types. They were on our delegation, but they were just whipped into shape, and so Akhromeyev was the only one I negotiated with. That was at Reykjavik and that was the all-night session. There were two or three propagandists with him whom I’d known very well over the years, and starting at 8 o’clock at night, at 8:10 we’d tell them they had to shut up. He’d say, “That will be enough.” He just wanted to see what could be done and what couldn’t be done.
The day after the Soviet Union fell I saw Akhromeyev once. After Reykjavik, aside from the Reagan administration, I went over there for some kind of meeting in Moscow and asked to see him. He was working with [Mikhail] Gorbachev then as a kind of special advisor. The morning he committed suicide, I saw it in the Washington Post and I thought, Oh my God—

I don’t know what date this was, it was in the first administration—and I called up Colin Powell. His secretary said, “Oh, he’s in a top staff meeting right now and he’ll get back to you.” Then she said, “Wait one minute.” Apparently she told him I was on the phone. Without saying, “Hello, Ken,” he said, “I was thinking of the same thing.” I said, “What?” And he said, “Akhromeyev’s death, it’s astonishing, isn’t it?” I said, “Yes. Do you remember the dinner we had in Geneva together with Akhromeyev?” That was a phenomenal evening of my life. Akhromeyev told us about the story of his involvement in World War II. This was at a dinner we had with Shultz, [Eduard] Shevardnadze, Colin, myself, Akhromeyev, Karpov, and a few others.

Shultz kept wanting to talk about SLCMs [Sea Launched Cruise Missiles] and GLCMs and all this stuff. We’d done it all day long and Shultz didn’t know that much about it. Shevardnadze certainly didn’t know that much about it. We tried as far as we could to move it along and the dinner went on. Then all of a sudden about, oh I’d say 45 minutes into the dinner, I said, “Marshal Akhromeyev, I read from the intelligence report that you’re the last active-duty soldier from World War II and you were the only five-star marshal in the Soviet Union. What did you do in World War II?”

The guy basically was in charge of an armor, artillery, battalion tank or something and he was told to protect this one road. The Nazis were coming through and he protected the road. He was there for 18 months and he never went inside a building. He was protecting the road at this time. It was something like 20 degrees below zero. It was just incredible.

I’d give anything to have had a tape recorder that evening. Colin was sitting next to me. It was great stuff. He was the kind of guy who was absolutely straight, no flourishes at all. I was just breathless on this story. Shultz interrupted him and said, “Oh, Marshal, that just shows your great devotion, how you love your country. All that schmaltzy stuff, it was nice to say; you shouldn’t be critical, but it was Shultz being—

Akhromeyev looked at him and said, “Mr. Secretary, there was that, but I knew that if I had left that road, [Joseph] Stalin would have me shot.” [laughter] Colin laughed and looked at me and punched me—you know all that schmaltzy stuff. There’s nothing like having a dictator with a gun at your head to bolster your patriotism. Akhromeyev said, “That was what kept me on the god-damn road. I would have been shot by Stalin otherwise.” It was just a great evening. But the answer to your question, a long-winded one, is that Akhromeyev was a terrific person.

Knott: The freeze movement—we’re kind of jumping around here, I hope you don’t mind, but the freeze movement certainly happened, it had pretty raw emotions and I remember the airing of that television film, The Day After, and there was all that almost panic sense that the end was near. I guess I’m just trying to give future generations a sense of how you responded to that kind of emotional outburst on the part of the freeze-out kids and—
Adelman: I did a Meet the Press show right after that and I was asked the first question—I said, “I’m more worried about the day before, and the day before is whether we can solve this problem.” So then I went to the shtick of what we were trying to do to eliminate a whole class of weapons systems in Europe.

Until I got in the arms control business in a serious way, I did not realize how antinuclear Ronald Reagan was. I thought he supported the MX, he supported all our nuclear build-up on that, the B-1 bomber, and everything else that we had going. The fact was he couldn’t stand nuclear weapons; he wanted to get rid of nuclear weapons. So as much as the antinuclear wave was going around, Ronald Reagan would have been right in the movement. He thought the way to do it was SDI. But Reagan was just very antinuclear. Like The Day After, it would exactly represent Reagan’s view. I’d never met an antinuclear hawk before in my life. It was just part of Reagan’s make-up.

Strong: Do you think it was always part of his make-up? I mean, there are people who have gone back and seen bits of that in speeches he gave in ’76 and even earlier; was it always part of him?

Adelman: I can’t tell you. I can just tell you from the time I knew him, everything that popped out of his mouth was antinuclear, and then it was doing away with nuclear weapons. All of us who were conservative thought that when Carter said, “I want to eliminate nuclear weapons,” that was the stupidest thing we’d ever heard. We all made fun of it, and then we have our hero who says things really more extreme than Carter ever does, and he’s unstoppable on doing it. He was just antinuclear.

Strong: Did that have any effect on your negotiating or your goals as far as arms control?

Adelman: Two things were very clear from the policy point of view and Reagan’s antinuclear stand. One is that both INF and in START we were going to have deproductions. We were not going to have lids on the existing systems, or a build-up to that. He would just never consider anything like that. So that the tradition of nuclear offensive weaponry, then in SALT II, both Republican and Democratic numbers and then Carter taking us to the SALT II, were caps, either where you are now or caps where you’re going to be because the number is going up.

Strong: Except for Carter’s first proposal.

Adelman: Yes, that lasted three months—

Strong: The serious proposal to reduce and evacuate—

Adelman: And evacuate, Cyrus Vance and Moscow [inaudible]. Reagan wasn’t going to put up with that at all. He wanted real reductions and that’s when we changed the name of it. That’s why when the zero options came in from INF he thought that was true options, and he thought that was great. And the second, on arms control itself. The other thing was of course SDI. He could not get it into his head there were nuclear weapons aside from ballistic missiles. And SDI could not protect against artillery shells, could not protect against short range, could not protect
him in bomber, you know, nuclear weapons, GLCMs. He would say, “Oh yes, that’s true, we’ll also deal with that.” Then ten minutes later he’d say SDI is going to eliminate all that.

**Strong:** How should we understand that?

**Adelman:** I don’t know.

**Strong:** He clearly understood the reality that there were bombers and bombs—

**Adelman:** I guess rationally he would say, “Well, we’re all getting air defense. The main problem is the ballistic missiles.” I talked to Reagan about eliminating nuclear weapons and how it is a little hard to defend and—

**Strong:** How did he respond to the arguments people would always make, “Well, if you could get rid of them it would be a dangerous world because—” What was his response to those?

**Adelman:** Then we’d have SDI, so nobody would ever do that. There’s no incentive to do that if you have protection. You and I can see lots of holes in that; Reagan did not. He said, “I won’t give up SDI because someone might have an incentive to change the rules, so with SDI we’ll be protected. There’s no polio around the world. If you want a Salk vaccine you make sure there’s not polio that comes about.

**Strong:** How did you and some of your colleagues see Reagan’s ultimate goal? Did people see it as a good, ambitious goal, or was it just foolish?

**Adelman:** I thought it was foolish. I thought it was nice to try to eliminate as many nuclear weapons as you could, but I’m more tolerant of all that. The President has said in the history, and this is getting off on all SDI arguments, “Well, you want to eliminate ballistic missile tracker,” or something like that.

I’ll show you a President who every month of his Presidency says, “I want to eliminate poverty in America, I want to eliminate illiteracy, I want to eliminate inflation.” No one criticizes them for saying all this stuff. No one says, “Oh, you’re not going to have zero inflation, you’re not going to have zero poverty, you’re not going to have zero homelessness.” All these things are always goals, they’re nice goals and you work the best you can toward the goals, and that’s how I figured about SDI. Reagan had a totally naïve view against nuclear weapons, which I saw time and again. Secondly, he thought that the agreement to outlaw war, the Kellogg-Briand Pact, was a great idea. He’d tell us in private and I would say, “Mr. President, it didn’t work out at all.” But Reagan knew the Soviets broke arms agreements and he had no problem with that. In fact, there’s a great book that I read right away. Reagan loved this book. He must have mentioned it in his radio broadcast about violations on that. He knew the violations but he just wanted nuclear arms control. He was a creative thinker; he was not [inaudible].

**Knott:** What kind of reception did you get from the active bureaucracy when you showed up?
Adelman: Well, they obviously were mortified, and I don’t blame them. I mean going from Paul Warnke to me was—Rostow was an intermediate, but he was older and Rostow, once he got in Government, which was actually Bill Clark’s problem with him, was very much responsive to the bureaucracy and changed his views somewhat. My views were bad and I like to think that they thought my willingness to listen, my willingness to be open, my sharing my thoughts and giving clear direction—I think they liked that. I had substantive problems, but not personally. Always had an open kind of place where people could argue and was very honest with people.

Knott: So you could trust the quality—

Adelman: Yes, the quality was very good. I thought that they were mostly liberal Democrats myself, but they were knowledgeable, they were dedicated, and I thought they were terrific. I stood by lots of them when they got in trouble, ideological people, say this, that, and the other thing. There were charges about loyalty to the administration and basically I said they did a very good job in making the policy, and boy they were first rate. They were not of my view, but I knew that. I mean, we had the same thing in OEO [Office of Economic Opportunity] and the same thing in the UN. There was something about me that the three main jobs I had in government were all these left-wing kinds of organizations: poverty program, the UN where all these world federalists, and all of a sudden I’m in the middle of arms control and I didn’t fit into any of them.

Knott: You’ve yet to find your home.

Adelman: Yes, I should be. My only comfort zone was with Rumsfeld in the Defense Department, but otherwise, I was in these places where they have these left-wing—

Knott: I think this afternoon we’ll talk about the major players and some general questions about Reagan as leader.

[BREAK]

Knott: I would like to get your reflections, recollections, of some of the major players in the Reagan administration. We mentioned most of them, but perhaps we can go into a little more detail on some of them. If we could start with Jim Baker who was the Chief of Staff, at least for the first few years that you were in the Reagan administration.

Adelman: Baker, whom I got to know better after the years, was very efficient, very quick. He certainly could run the White House better than Meese or anybody else. He had a great contribution in that he really cared more about day-to-day operations, how to get out of problems, how to avoid problems. He was never big on ideology. He was a very good fit with Reagan because Reagan wouldn’t know how to operate well but he certainly would know what he wanted to do and ideology. Baker didn’t care all that much, although he was kind of conservative on ideology, but he just wanted to get things running.
You see the difference one day at the end of an NSC meeting. Baker said, “While we have everybody here, Mr. President, let me tell you that the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Chuck Percy, has just written you a letter saying he is going to hold up this treaty—or that nomination or whatever he was threatening to do—“unless you ratify the Threshold Test Ban Treaty.” That was his hobbyhorse.

We had had a meeting about this early in the Reagan administration, and everybody talked about the Threshold Test Ban Treaty. I made the one comment, “Mr. President, let me just remind you that Jimmy Carter never ratified the treaty for four years in the White House, so if you want to ratify a treaty that wasn’t good enough for Carter, that’s what you’ll be doing.” Well, that ended the discussion, and anytime anybody would mention the TTBT he’d kind of look at me and say, “Is this the one that Carter didn’t want?” I’d say, “It wasn’t good enough for Carter, but you may feel it’s good enough for you.” That’s all you needed to do on that.

So Baker said, “Mr. President, this letter came and said all this on the TTBT.” Reagan looked at me and didn’t say anything on that point. He said, “Jim, where did this come from?” And Baker says, “Oh, this is a letter.” He said, “Letter to you?” “No, a letter to you, Mr. President.” He said, “Where was it addressed?” Everyone is wondering, What is Reagan talking about? Baker said, “It was addressed here at the White House,” getting impatient. Reagan looks at him and says, “Well Jim, why don’t you just take that letter and stamp it ‘address unknown’ and send it back to him.” Reagan laughs and stands up and he goes back to the Oval Office.

That was not Jim Baker’s cup of tea. He wanted an operation, what do we do about this big problem? Reagan let everybody know exactly what he felt about the letter, what he felt about Percy, what he felt about the whole thing, under coercion, they’re turning these things up. He laughed himself silly going back to the office, ‘Stamp it address unknown.’ All of us just laughed; when the President laughed, a lot of other people laughed, but Baker was just steaming, you could see. That was the difference in Baker.

Knott: What about William Clark?

Adelman: Bill Clark is a lovely, lovely person. I think he was a very good National Security Advisor, as everybody says who has commented on it since. He was not knowledgeable about foreign affairs, but he was knowledgeable about Ronald Reagan. He knew how to keep Ronald Reagan out of trouble and the hostage situation in Iran would have never happened had Clark been there. He knew how to work things so that Reagan had alternatives there to the State Department view.

Nancy never liked him very much, and certainly the more pragmatist Deaver and others were out. Shultz thought he was too ideological, so he didn’t really last all that long. He didn’t have enough knowledge himself to bolster his position. But I think he did a wonderful job and I think his was a great contribution. I’m very high on him. A man of real integrity, selflessness, and would never, unlike everybody else in the White House that I could see, would never leak things, never self-promoted. I mean Deaver, Meese, and Baker spent about half their day every day with the press either talking badly about the other two or telling them about their influence with
Reagan, and Clark never did any of that stuff. Consequently he got bad press, but consequently he was a man of great integrity and dedication.

**Knott:** Robert McFarlane?

**Adelman:** Bud, I liked personally. He’s wonderful. He should never have been National Security Advisor. He’s a good staff guy; he would have been fine as he was Staff Director for Powell and the Armed Services Committee. He’s a good kind of advisor. He did not have a crisp mind.

He was very dedicated and selfless, which is a wonderful trait, but he had these meetings endlessly on arms control, which we called the SACPG [Senior Arms Control Policy Group], which is an unfortunate name. People would talk and talk and we would sit there. We’d go on an hour and a half about an issue that had really no consequence in the world, and he was National Security Advisor. It was just not a good use of time. It was great for guy like me because you’re right there in the middle of the situation room. It was an hour and a half, getting to see the President all night. But in terms of, “All right, let’s decide what we have to decide and let’s not decide what we don’t have to decide and let’s get ready—” But Bud was not like that.

Of course he got all caught up, as we know, in the Iran hostage situation. It was too clever by half. When I think of Bud, I think of him fondly personally, and I think it was a shame that he was taken and made into a position that he couldn’t do well.

**Knott:** And his successor, John Poindexter?

**Adelman:** Poindexter had absolutely no appetite or patience for politics, was smart technically, a great submarine driver and skipper and first in his class, I guess at the U.S. Naval Academy. Obviously bright, but he really had no sense of international relations, of foreign policy. He was a mistake in that. Remember, he had a meeting one time before [Mohammad] Zia [ul-Hag] was coming in, the President of Pakistan, and for some reason I was invited to the NSC meeting the day before Zia was in. He started out and said, “Mr. President, you know Pakistan and India have been at each other’s throats for many years, but there are signs now that they are really getting along well and what we have to encourage is this period of tremendous progress in Indian-Pakistani affairs. I think that their problems of the past are now gone.”

I said, “Where is this coming from, what the hell is he talking about?” This is so far from anything that is real, I don’t know what the hell—he must have read some cable and some interior minister said something nice about some minister in India or something. But it was so far-fetched from anything that was real. It was unbelievable.

At Reykjavik he didn’t really play a role. I thought that was okay. Otherwise he was hardworking, dedicated, but he had no sense for policy. He certainly couldn’t stand dealing with the Congress and didn’t like anybody in the Congress and made that very clear. He was always shutting doors, always suspicious of anybody in the White House admittedly. Someone said about Bud before, he was always kind of having intrigues or something. With Ronald Reagan you didn’t have that many intrigues. For a National Security Advisor it’s always better to be open and peaceful, and European members, all this intriguing stuff, but he did that.
Knott: Secretary of State Shultz.

Adelman: Shultz came in and he didn’t know about arms control. He knew a lot about subjects generally in international economics. He had a wonderful ability of paying a lot of attention to what his boss wanted. He had succeeded in Government in probably four Cabinet positions and for Secretary of State because he had really had an antenna and thought about what his boss would have wanted. That’s a great trait, a rare trait in Washington. Most people don’t care all that much what the President wants; it’s what they want when they come in.

And by and large he had a nice manner. I got along very well. I was very appreciative of him in his help on the confirmation. He was dedicated, he was sincere, and was wonderful, and I will be always indebted for that. He and I differ in two respects; I was far more conservative than he was and he resented the fact that I was in his building in the State Department, supposedly with a dotted line to him and a dotted line to the President because it is a crazy situation. Sometimes we agreed, but I sided more with the Pentagon. Even when I didn’t, like the Chemical Weapons Treaty, he felt that that should be normal and he didn’t even like that.

So I was more conservative and he resented it. I would give my views very frankly and he resented that. Then I got bothered because in 1984 while the Russians were still walked out, I decided to do an article for Foreign Affairs called “Arms Control, With or Without Agreement,” and that was basically giving the point that a lot of the arms control policy keeps the numbers way too high. If you didn’t have arms control you’d have high numbers because everybody wants to keep going up in the totals and you don’t want to destroy anything before the negotiations are settled so you could use that as part of your bargaining. It just seemed crazy to me, kind of letting this logic or theology of arms control make for a more dangerous world.

My view was, “Let’s do arms control by example and what we don’t need basically do it.” So I talked to Shultz about that. He didn’t know that much about it and he felt that was a fine idea. What really got my goat is that he went over the article, and line by line gave amendments and revisions and corrections. I thought it was incredibly kind of him to do that.

Then when the article came out, he had a shit fit. He denounced it to his top people, talked to Les Gelb, who was national security correspondent then for the New York Times, who did a big article saying that Shultz had never been so upset with anybody. It’s one thing to get upset about this crazy right-winger who’s doing an article for Foreign Affairs against government policy—that’s legitimate. But not when he went over the article; not when he spent all that time doing revisions. Not when he told me, “Yes, that’s a good article.” And then, guess what? The article for Foreign Affairs is in Foreign Affairs, denying your own part in it. I don’t know; it made no sense to me. I didn’t understand, never talked to him about it, but I felt that was not very fitting.

Then, you know, we went on a daily basis, and when I first got into office I said, “Mr. Secretary, let me give you my view that this is going to be one of the most important things you do as Secretary of State. I don’t want this to be demeaning in any sense, but you have so many areas of expertise that you know about. This is not one that most people know about. What I propose is the following: A half-hour every week I would like to come and talk to you about an issue of
arms control. I promise you this, in a totally neutral manner. I will not give you my views. I will give you arguments on both sides. I won’t try to convince you of my views at all. I’ll talk about ballistic missiles, I’ll talk about throw-weights, I’ll talk about SLCMs, what I consider a big issue, and just for knowledge, and lay it out.”

He said, “God, that would be wonderful.” So I prepared that, a one-pager, before I got there. He’d always read it; he asked me a bunch of questions, does that mean that, does that mean that? Is that like that? I thought it was a super idea. He kept the schedule, or would call me up every week.

Then it turned out, to tell you the truth, I didn’t see that there was much system learning there. Maybe it wasn’t a good way to do it. Then he got too bitter on my more conservative views. But anyway, we all came together on the INF when it was done and I was very much for the treaty. We got the Arms Control Agency to do an enormous amount of work on all the nits and nats that you need for a treaty, especially verification at the end, and he seemed appreciative about that. But personally there’s no love lost between us. I always thought he did a very nice job as Secretary of State, and say so anytime I’m asked.

We’ve always had this bond because Rumsfeld has always been close to Shultz and he understood and talked to Shultz about me.

**Knott:** You talked about this, as have plenty of other writers, about this Shultz–Weinberger feud. I don’t know if there’s anything new or if it’s been completely exhausted.

**Adelman:** It really was childish and some of the time Reagan should not have put up with it. Each brought out the worst in the other and brought out the worst in Reagan in terms of Reagan being ten miles above the controversy. At times in the situation room Shultz would propose something, and Weinberger would say, “That’s what we’re supposed to be doing.” I don’t know, they made stupid comments to each other, like they were juveniles.

I remember one time we had one of those typical situation-room meetings and they were going at each other about some issue, I can’t remember. I was over talking to somebody, it could have been Frank Carlucci, who was National Security Advisor then, and Colin Powell looks in the room as I’m talking to Frank and he says, “It’s going to be a long two years at the NSC.” I said, “Hold on, Colin.” Colin was always fun, he was always making jokes and it was going to be a long two years.

**Strong:** If you were a scholar who was going to write a book about Ronald Reagan and you had access to a full set of the oral history, everybody who was senior in the White House, who would you read first?

**Adelman:** Hmm.

**Strong:** I guess what I’m really getting at, who among these people had both access and insight to Ronald Reagan?
Adelman: I think Bill Clark did during the years he was there, but those are not the most important years of Reagan’s history, although in some respects they were, if you accept the common knowledge. Hold the course, hold the line, and steady-as-she-goes kind of thing. After that on foreign policy it would have to be Shultz because he did a lot of the real nitty-gritty that you needed for these kinds of summits. But Reagan—no one was close to Reagan.

Reagan was a man who was the most personable guy you’d ever want to meet in your life and then he didn’t have any friends, he didn’t share anything. Strange combination. I remember when we went to the dinner at the White House—we didn’t go all the time, there were some rare events. We were on the Truman balcony there, this must have been in ’84, something like that, and all of a sudden Carol, my wife, came up to me. She had a startled look in her face, and she doesn’t get startled very much. One of the Marine social escorts at that dinner went up to her and said, “Mrs. Adelman, you’ll be sitting at the table with the President.” She said, “Oh my God, I’m going to be with the President. What do I talk about?” He said, “You don’t have to worry about it, Ronald Reagan’s a talker and he’s very comfortable.”

I sat next to Nancy, she sat next to the President at another table, and you know it was fine. He laughed, he was a wonderful, warm human being, but there was something impenetrable about him. Really, he wouldn’t share—some views were out there, but otherwise he just went to a different drummer—a strange person.

Strong: What about Bill Casey?

Adelman: Reagan loved Bill Casey. Casey was another who was stunning to me because of his curiosity, unlike Reagan, and his age and his willingness to do something at that very old age. Bill Casey had a terrible habit of not really caring what he looked like or what was really going on in the real world which was a virtue for a CIA Director. But he would take flights when he was still in the campaign and run into airports and have not five dollars to go to a motel or for a taxi. He would write all these IOUs out to taxicab drivers. I’m sure the guy was worth many millions of dollars.

He’d call me up every few months to have lunch. He always called me up at 12 o’clock to come on over, have lunch at Langley. I’d go to lunch; I loved being with Bill Casey. He was really an intellectual oddity, always. Bill Casey would shovel things in his mouth and not care what stayed in his mouth or not, it was all over, it was sickening to look at, but he was just wonderful to listen to. He was asking about Angola, he’d ask about this, he’d ask about American history and [General Charles] Cornwallis and I mean it was just—very active. When you saw him with Reagan, they liked each other, it was quite clear.

Casey did something at NSC meetings that—he would come up with solutions to problems, which I thought was totally improper for a DCI [Director of Central Intelligence], but most of the time they were pretty good solutions. They weren’t the most conservative positions. On SALT II he had all kinds of very good suggestions on how to state it and adhere to SALT II but don’t put the Russians, the Soviets on warning. He’d just say that and Reagan would like what he said. Casey was always close to Jeane Kirkpatrick, so that was another really tight connection. But I thought he was a wonderful, wonderful person.
Never for the life of me could I understand how he could have gone along with Ollie North and the Iran-Contra thing. I have no idea what he knew. It seemed such bad judgment and I can’t believe that Bill Casey would have done something like that, but maybe he did. I never understood if he knew why he wouldn’t tell Reagan, because everybody likes to tell the President good news. All that is a mystery to me about Casey, but I feel very affectionate toward him.

Knott: You told the story at lunch about President Reagan and Casey being ill.

Adelman: Yes, it was just at an NSC meeting, it must have been at the end of ’86 because Iran-Contra had broken and he had a stroke at that time and he was in GW [George Washington University] Hospital. At the end of the meeting Bob Gates, who was acting DCI, deputy to Bill Casey said, “Mr. President, I just saw Bill Casey at the hospital and he’s resting comfortably—” kind of thing. Reagan looked and shook his head and he said, “Now listen, if any of you fellows are going to say a prayer this afternoon,” then he paused very dramatically, “just remember Bill, will you?” Very poignant, just a lovely thing, and typical Reagan, oddly worded and quite moving.

Knott: What was your impression of Donald Regan, Chief of Staff?

Adelman: Regan I mixed with mostly at Reykjavik, where he was a combination of staying out of substantive things, which was a very big benefit to us because he didn’t know anything. Then when we got back and Reykjavik became a hullabaloo, Regan actually totally mixed up the Soviet position and our position in a way that was almost uncanny. So he got the blue and the red wrong every time he talked about it. You’d think that one person, Chief of Staff of the White House, would know what side ours was and what side theirs was. He knew so little about the substance that he took the Russian position saying Reagan had done that. It was unintelligible.

But anyway, he and I got along fine. He didn’t have anything to do substantively on arms control. The only time we had a real spat was when Frank Carlucci became National Security Advisor and asked me to staff the NSC, which was the worst job I ever had in my life—to fire one-third of the people at the NSC while they were singing Christmas carols in the hall in ’86, “Peace on earth, good will to men” while everyone’s being fired.

The day Frank Carlucci was announced Bill Casey was in the middle of calling me and telling me what was happening and Carlucci asked me to do the transition for him. The day Reagan announced it, at noon, I was having lunch with Carlucci and suggested that Colin Powell be his deputy because we had both worked with Colin. Frank said, “Well, we’ll have to think about this, there are other people I was thinking about.” I knew with Frank it’s better to lock it down and leave it go because something can change. So I volunteered at this restaurant, the Hyatt on Capitol Hill, that I would go and call Colin.

He said, “You know the number?” I said, “I don’t know the number, but the White House switchboard knows the number.” He was away in Germany. Frank said, “It’s kind of late there.” I said, “I know, but we can wake him up, it’s okay.” I left the table, got Colin on the phone, and
said, “Frank wants you to be deputy, I just want to lock it in.” Frank says, “Okay, I guess that will be it.” Colin said, “All right.”

Then Don Regan delayed the announcement, delayed the announcement. Colin kept calling me, “What the hell is going on?” I said, “I don’t know.” I went over to the White House to see Regan and said, “Carlucci was told he could hire whoever he wanted. He wants to hire Powell.” My feeling was always that Don Regan had his own candidate. One of Reagan’s little guys we called “the mice” said to me, “This is a problem; we can’t have the President call Colin Powell because you haven’t filled out a Presidential telephone request form.”

I said, “You know we’ve been talking about this for three days. I called you 14 times, I never heard of the damn form before, what are you talking about?” “Oh it’s a form, I’ll send it over.” I said, “Give it to me right now.” So I made him give it to me. I went to his hallway, there’s a nice girl typing on one of the Selectric typewriters. I said, “Excuse me, can I give you a buck and you go get me some coffee?” She said, “Why?” I said, “I need to use your typewriter.”

I guess she’d heard that before. I sat down, rolled it up, I typed out a Presidential request form, the request from Ken Adelman, Supervising Officer Ken Adelman, Authorizing Officer Ken Adelman. I was all four layers, because there was just me. To call Colin Powell and tell him this and to get on with it. I said, “There’s your form, now what else do you need before the President calls Colin Powell?” Colin asked me all the time to get it done. So anyway, we got that done. I think Regan very much objected to that because he had his own candidate in mind to squash Colin Powell and bring in some guy.

Aside from that, he didn’t interfere much, and right after Reykjavik in fact, I first heard of the hostage situation on the plane going back, when the Syrian newspaper or something leaked the story that they’d been talking to Iran. I said, “I just don’t believe it, you can’t—”

**Strong:** What about Paul Nitze?

**Adelman:** Paul was a real patriot who had served both Republican and Democratic administrations. Paul’s strong points were his dedication, his mastery of the subject. It was just wonderful in terms of knowledge. His experience was vast. His dedication, for somebody who was richer than God, was just terrific. Paul had really no feel of politics. I don’t mean partisan politics, I mean the way things worked.

For example, [Helmut] Kohl was running in 1983 for a Chancellorship, and INF was the biggest issue there. Kohl’s whole position was on the basis of supporting Reagan with the deployment of missiles and GLCMs and the Pershing II. Then Paul in the middle of the negotiations goes on his walk in the woods with Kvičinský in which they—Paul—come up with the idea that we really don’t need Pershing IIs and we’ll just do GLCMs and they’ll do something else. Kohl’s idea could have been a great idea. I personally don’t think it was, but it could have been. There’s an argument to be made.

Right in the middle of Kohl’s campaign, states in his claim that we need the Pershing IIs, so the whole history of the negotiations, to have the U.S. negotiator propose that there be no Pershing
IIs—the U.S. suggestion totally undercut Kohl, who almost lost an election. It was ridiculous. Paul was far more willing to come up with a deal somehow, the best deal you can get kind of approach, than I was. But having said that, he did overall a wonderful job.

Knott: It was said at the time that Nancy Reagan exerted a great influence on her husband in terms of pulling him toward a more conciliatory position regarding the Soviets. Did you see this? Hear this? Hear it through the grapevine?

Adelman: I heard it through the grapevine and I certainly thought that that was true; that was her approach. I think that Reagan was very loving, solicitous, and adoring of Nancy Reagan. I think he just totally didn’t give her the time of day in terms of her policy positions. He cared enormously what she said and didn’t care about the substance of what she said. So I think he just handled it as any great husband would, “Honey, that’s just wonderful and I love you to death,” then go about doing what he wanted to do.

Obviously his inclination was always that it was an Evil Empire and that they will reform because it is so against human nature that they have this Evil Empire. People like me were just fit to be tied, arguing how silly and naïve that was. I made the point to Reagan many times that in the history of the 20th century there were lots of countries that went from capitalist to communist and no countries that went from communist to capitalist. It seemed like a one-way wrench, it just goes one way, and it just isn’t true. And he said, “Thank you, Ken, that’s just wonderful.” He had his own cycle, knows so much history. Then he’d go out and say it again, that this is all just going to change because people can’t be like that.

There’s a wonderful phrase from *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* that they apprehend more than we can ever comprehend, and Reagan was like that. He somehow apprehended more than all of us experts comprehended. Then he’d just drop it.

Strong: Where did that come from? How do you classify people who have that capacity?

Adelman: It’s enormous optimism that people everywhere are going to be free because that’s human nature. It’s a spirit, even though negative against communism. I think communism was the only thing that Reagan actually hated. It was hard to hate anybody else or anything else in his life. Somehow that wasn’t mean. He had his thumb held down on unions. It seems in this day and age, I guess especially the last century, that to be totalitarian is normal; to be free was unique. But that’s not the way Reagan saw it. You couldn’t be a human being without being free and therefore it was a temporary thing to be oppressed. People are going to rise up and be free. He was just uncanny.

Knott: Did you ever see any evidence of his religious beliefs influencing his—

Adelman: Yes I did. He always talked about how—did you fellows know? I remember hearing about this, Chernobyl, you know, the word Chernobyl was Ukrainian for Armageddon. I never asked any Ukrainian what the Ukrainian word for Armageddon was. He was convinced it was Chernobyl. Okay?
Then he would sometimes talk about Armageddon, you know, “The whole world’s going to blow up.” Some say that’s not a good thing to talk about, but he did sometimes. I believe that after his shooting March 30th of ’81 that he felt he was on a mission. The first mission was the revitalization of the economy, then the mission was the Soviet Union and the attack on communism. That’s why he’s here on earth, to do that.

But in meetings he wouldn’t talk about God wants him to do this, or God wants him to do that. He would not, like George W. Bush does, start our Cabinet meetings with a prayer. He was always criticized for not going to church, but that was quite odd because he had always gone to church before the Presidency. Right after he left the Presidency he went to church a lot. People always asked him about that and he said, “I didn’t want to inconvenience people.”

So that was the President. Reagan was extremely deferential. I mean, he was always, “Oh, I’m sorry to ask you this, I’m sorry to do this.” I remember one time, just a little stop in the Oval Office, he was standing there and we were talking and he had his note cards. The note cards fell, and I bent down to pick them up, “Oh, no, no Ken.” What do you mean, you know, 72 years old right then, he was a taller guy, I have less ground to cover to pick up his note cards. “No, no, don’t bother.” He didn’t want to bother you. He was just that way. “Oh my gosh, I’m sorry to bother you.” He did that constantly.

At Jeane Kirkpatrick’s going away party one week in the Roosevelt Room, we were all there. The President walked in the room and the conversation stops and he comes in, “Oh no, I’m sorry—just so terrible—you seem like you’re having a good time here.” “Well, you’re the President, you know. You’re the one we want to look at. Even if you don’t do anything, we want to look at you. There’s nothing else more interesting going on here. But he always said, “Oh I’m sorry—” I think in church he felt that he was disruptive.

Strong: You mentioned his sense of humor. Was it just enjoyment of a good joke—

Adelman: No, it was telling a good joke.

Strong: Was it frequently to make a point?

Adelman: It was often used in that way. Sometimes it was just to tell a joke and have everybody laugh. It was hard to have a meeting with Reagan where he didn’t end it with a joke. He had everybody laughing when he walked out.

Strong: He planned those in advance?

Adelman: Those he probably did plan, but otherwise it was very spontaneous. There’s the grand apocryphal story that someone says to him, “Mr. President, I noticed that you start work at 9 o’clock and end at noon.” He worked out in the afternoon, he was very proud about his chest expanding. “Then you kind of knock off at 4:30. Well, Mr. President, hard work never killed anybody.” President Reagan looked at him and said, “I know, but why take a chance?”
Reagan not only had the sense of humor, the great jokes. I remember one time in the Oval Office he was looking out and there was a bunch of people chopping things and the forest rangers standing out on the South Lawn, and Clark says, “Mr. President, Ken’s here to take you to the Situation Room” or something. We were getting ready for the next round or summit or whatever it was. Reagan keeps looking out and this sound gets louder and he says, “I hear you, Bill. Just wish I was doing what those fellows are doing instead of going to all these stupid meetings hours at a time.”

I thought to myself, in the history of the United States, 200 years, we’ve had forest rangers who imagined themselves as President, but I can’t imagine a President imagining himself as a forest ranger before. Here he was, dying to be a forest ranger. Reagan was like that.

The one thing that people miss, he was a great book reader. He’d read these books—he told me about a book on arms control and treaty violations that he made me read. But the first time I ever heard the name Tom Clancy was because he came to some meeting kind of blurry-eyed and someone said, “How are you, Mr. President?” He said, “Oh, I’m tired.” “A grueling jog?” He said, “Oh no, I was up until four o’clock in the morning reading this book.” They said, “What book was it?” He said, “The Hunt for Red October.” It was a great story. You’d like it.”

At that time, at Pennsylvania and 17th there was a bookstore, now there isn’t. I walked in the bookstore and said, “I’d like The Hunt for Red October.” The man said, “Oh, I don’t have it but let me look—Oh, that’s a technical book published by the Center for Naval Analysis and they only do technical Navy books and stuff like that.”

I said, “I don’t think so. Could you look?” “Clancy is the name?” I said yes. He said, “It’s published by the Center for Naval Analysis and they only do technical Navy books.” Then the fellow turned to me and said, “How’d you hear about this?” I said, “A guy recommended it.” He said, “Is he technical?” I said, “No, he’s really not technical.” He said, “Well, they do military books; is he in the military?” I said, “No, well, he’s kind of in the military, a little bit in the military. It wouldn’t be a technical military book.”

“Listen,” he said, “I’ll order it for you, I’m just telling you what kind of book it is.” The first Clancy book was published by the Center for Naval Analysis, which had never done a nontechnical book before, but I heard about it from Ronald Reagan. He told us one time he was really tired again because he read this book about the submarine. He was very taken with that and everybody should read that. He liked talking about books.

**Knott:** Margaret Thatcher. I think there’s a story here somewhere?

**Adelman:** There are lots of stories. Thatcher came to the White House for the first time; I remember Jim Brady said he had to use a crowbar to get them apart. But Thatcher, one time, we had an arms control seminar for some reason. I don’t know whoever thought of it. Anyway, it was after SDI so we were all in the White House, I forget what room. Thatcher says, “Mr. President, let me tell you my views on that.” To her left was Geoffrey Howe and to the right was Michael Hazeltine. Geoffrey Howe is Foreign Minister and Hazeltine was Minister [inaudible]. So she’d go on about 20 minutes, then Howe who was a perfectly lovely man would say,
“Madam Prime Minister.” She’d turn and say, “Geoffrey, I’m not finished yet.” And she would go on, and then about ten minutes later Hazeltine would say, “Yes, but we’re deploying it.”
“Michael, I’m not finished yet.”

Then Reagan says, “Maggie, I was thinking—” and then Thatcher says, “Ronnie, let me finish.” I walked out with Reagan afterwards and Reagan said to me, he said, “Boy, she’s a great talker, she’s not a great listener,” or something like that. But the greatest story happened—I wasn’t in the room, but Mike Deaver was—and that was right after the Falkland Islands—after Grenada. He got a call from Thatcher and Mike Deaver was the note taker in there and he was in the Oval Office, on the phone. She started talking with Reagan and Reagan was listening way too much, to the point where Deaver was going to break in and say, “Madam Prime Minister, this is the President of the United States you’re talking to, you know. You can’t treat him like that.”

He’s all ready to do that and Reagan covered up the end of the phone and put it up in the air, looked over across the Oval Office at Deaver and says, “Isn’t she marvelous?” [laughter] “Shows such spunk, just marvelous.”

We actually had a dinner here by chance. I had gone over and talked to foreign relations, the foreign affairs committee in Parliament and had a bunch of Parliamentarians here. We had Quayle and Senator Pete Wilson, [Malcolm] Wallop, and [John] Warner came over and the head of the committee at that time told me that he’d been sent by Thatcher to talk to Reagan about Grenada because she couldn’t get anywhere. He was in our house right afterwards and I said, “Oh my God, what happened here? This is the damnest meeting I ever had.”

They gave me 15 minutes and I was going in there and I said, “Mr. President, Foreign Minister asked to see you.” “Yes, I know, I saw you at the meeting. We’d like to know how are you are on Grenada?” Reagan says, “Well, we did the right thing.” And he says, “Yes, but Thatcher was your best friend in Europe.” “Oh yes, Mrs. Thatcher.” “And you know England is your closest ally.” “Oh, I know.” “Well, why didn’t you go and warn her ahead of time?” Reagan let that stand.

The committee chairman goes on and says, “You could have told her ahead of time.” Reagan just looks at him and kind of smiles in typical Reagan way. Finally the guy is getting absolutely nowhere, he has nothing to tell Thatcher about this meeting, and so he has to do something. He says, “Mr. President, I hate to do this, but tell me, why didn’t you call her and just ask her advice and give her notice ahead of time?” He’s got to get something from this guy before we get out of there in a few minutes. Reagan looks at him and says, “Because I didn’t want her to say no.” He said, “Oh, okay.” So he’s sitting right over here afterwards and told us that story and I said, “What was your reaction?”

He said, “I think it’s a fabulous argument. I don’t know what the hell I’ll tell the Prime Minister.” It’s best not to ask someone’s advice if you disagree with it. Then she’d either have to say no. Or she’d have to say, “Let me think about it a few days,” which he was not willing to do and he was all ready to go, so he didn’t—but that was typical Reagan. It was not on the cards, but that’s just the real Reagan.
Knott: I want to ask you about the summits unless anybody has anything else. We’re sort of
drawing near the end. Any reflections, observations, starting with Geneva?

Adelman: It was uncanny how Reagan, every time he got in the room with Gorbachev, and I
saw it three times, Geneva, Reykjavik, and the Washington summit, it was such a contrast.
Gorbachev was a generation younger, Gorbachev is about ten times more knowledgeable on the
issues, Gorbachev is far more vigorous, and obviously better SAT [Scholastic Aptitude Test]
scores, smarter in that sense, and every single time Reagan took him to the cleaners. Not only
that, but Gorbachev ended the summit knowing that Reagan had bettered him, taken him to the
cleaners.

It was partly the determination that Reagan had, it was partly the charm that Reagan had, it was
partly that Reagan had worked out all the answers to the questions and just knew what he wanted
to say. It was absolute ease and conviction in his own ideology. The first time I was startled by
this was at Geneva, when I just about had a shit fit going over to Geneva and read the briefing
book, when the President was supposed to talk to Gorbachev about Afghanistan and there’s some
foreign troops in Afghanistan that have caused some problems, this kind of State Department-
es, diplomatic-ese BS. So I thought, Oh God, the most terrible talking points.

Reagan got in the room with Gorbachev and said, “Mike, you got 120,000 troops in
Afghanistan? It’s just genocide. They don’t want you there. You’re killing kids. You’re
butchering the country. It’s just genocide, Mike.” Here’s Gorbachev in his earphones, cannot
imagine what he’s hearing. I’ve often said that the only person there who was more shocked in
the room was the State Department note taker; his pants were never dry. But the fact is that
Reagan would tell it directly because that was his way. He didn’t care that much about the
briefing book. He wanted to have these views and he was very frank about that.

He was very convinced on SDI, which was the subject at Geneva, Reykjavik, and the
Washington summit. At Geneva one time Reagan popped out with this, “We’ll share SDI with
you.” We had no idea where this had come from, none of us, who thought it was whacko.
Gorbachev immediately thought it was whacko. At one point he says, “Mr. President, the United
States doesn’t even share cow-milking equipment with us.” Reagan said, “Well that’s pretty
technical and difficult to share.” Reagan said afterward, “How come we don’t share cow-
milking machines?” Gorbachev got that somehow, but it must have been export controls because
of computer chips or some damn thing. But, you know, here we are going to share SDI with
them. But Reagan was very convincing.

Reykjavik was, I think, Reagan’s finest moment. When we were upstairs, we negotiated from 8
 o’clock at night to 6:20 the next morning, and I remember being in the little bubble at Reykjavik,
briefing Reagan and saying, “Mr. President, there has been more progress in the last night, in one
night, than we had in seven years since Geneva.” Then we went into overtime and that afternoon.
We were on the second floor of Reykjavik and Reagan and Gorbachev were on the first floor.
Then he kept going up a few times and we revised our position one time. Then Reagan was
getting tired of it all because we were supposed to stop at noon. He comes up the last time and
says, “This is going to be it, try one more time, but we’re not going to do any more. Nancy really
is expecting me home for dinner.” You look on the front lawn at the Hofti House, there’s about
2,500 journalists from around the world. There’s no other story going on in the world except the Reykjavik summit. It’s not like he stopped at a bar for a drink on the way home and Nancy had no idea where he was, but he said, “Nancy expects me home for dinner and what am I going to tell her?”

I said, “Mr. President, I’m sure she’ll understand.” Then he took our final position, walked over to the room, and kind of laughed and all of us said, “Good luck.” We knew it was a very big moment for the summit. Then he all of a sudden shut the door and came back—the door opened and he came back, and for ten years I wondered what made him come back.

Then when I went back to Reykjavik and retraced the steps, as you’re going down the steps at Reykjavik at Hofdi House there’s a big picture window next to the steps and you can see the front lawn of the Hofti House and therefore you could see the 2,500 journalists on the lawn. So he must have seen that and thought, *Oh my God, this is a gigantic moment,* because he came back and said, “Let me ask all of you guys something. Are all of you secure that what we’re doing is right for America? Are we getting rushed in because of the tension of the moment, to offer something that wouldn’t be smart?” I thought to myself, *God, if you had one question to ask at a moment like that’s about the best that you could ask.*

He went around, kind of one-on-one, George, Don Regan, John Poindexter, Ken, Richard Perle. Within ten minutes the Secret Service came in and said, “It’s over.” And we went right down the stairs. He went out and Gorbachev was really pissed off at him and he was really pissed off at Gorbachev. Gorbachev walked to the car, which I thought was the wrong way to go. Gorbachev turned to him and said, “Well Ron, I don’t know what else we could have done.” Reagan looked at him and says, “You could have said yes.” You know, kind of John Wayne-like. We were actually with Reagan back in the Ambassador’s house after that. Reagan couldn’t sit still. He was just hopping around, mad as could be.

**Strong:** Mad was unusual for him.

**Adelman:** Oh yes, he was very rarely mad. He got mad at Trudeau, at a few other people, but you know, it was hard to get him mad. But he was mad.

**Chidester:** You talked about how Reagan talked of genocide in Afghanistan. That kind of highlights the point that with the Soviet Union, arms control wasn’t everything for Reagan. It was human rights, other issues.

**Adelman:** That’s right. He was always very big on getting the Pentecostals out of the Embassy there, and he cared about human rights.

**Chidester:** Did that affect the negotiations you had, or did you focus strictly on arms control?

**Adelman:** We knew there was a bigger agenda there. In fact, I proposed at Reykjavik that we make sure that it doesn’t turn into an arms control agenda, and we had formal working groups right there. I suggested that the first day in the bubble. But Reagan was very good on human rights and all that kind of stuff. The big publicity was not on human rights or the regional issues.
It was always mainly on arms control issues; so that’s where the big focus was. But Reagan was always good at human rights issues.

**Chidester:** Did he ever try to link the two?

**Adelman:** Not policy-wise. In fact, he did the opposite. After 007 was shot down he came back from California and said those horrendous things about the Soviet Union. The next day we had a meeting on whether we should continue with the arms control talks and Reagan wouldn’t even consider it. Some people said, “We can’t do this.” Cap Weinberger and everyone like that. Reagan, that was a clear NSC problem. I mean it wasn’t an issue for him, even though we had set a time to talk about that. It was a horrendous act.

**Knott:** You told us a story this morning I think when we had the tape recorder off, about Geneva and something that occurred, a sort of light moment—

**Adelman:** Well, what we had feared about Geneva was that here was the man who was 75 years old and Gorbachev I think was still in his 50s—you can check that—but certainly was a generation younger, far more vigorous and far more knowledgeable about the issues. While I had been with Reagan two years at the UN and two years by then at the Arms Control Agency, it’s one thing dealing with Thatcher, and Kohl and [François] Mitterrand; it’s a different thing being at a super-power summit. There hadn’t been a summit for seven years. There is now going to be a summit with Gorbachev, with Reagan, and it was an order of magnitude difference. We were very afraid that Reagan wouldn’t pull it off. The day before, we all flew to Geneva and we briefed Reagan the day before the summit. Reagan was tired, cranky, and uncharacteristically out of it. So I thought, Oh God, this is going to be pretty bad. He’s an old man. When all was said and done he’d been through amazing stuff, but boy, he’s out of his league here.

The next day we got there to the chateau in Geneva. We’d spent a long time setting up the meeting. It was in a neutral place in a neutral city and a neutral country. This chateau was owned by the Aga Khan, and Reagan was told he could take it if he fed the goldfish; he was very attentive about feeding the goldfish. So we got there before he was going to meet Gorbachev, and we’re talking to Reagan in the hall. The Secret Service came up and said, “Gorbachev’s Zil limo is coming around the corner,” and Reagan—this is November of ’85—didn’t have a jacket on, was thinking about getting a jacket on but then decided he’d just walk downstairs. He comes down the stairs of the chateau and Gorbachev gets out of the car. Gorbachev has a hat on, Gorbachev has a gigantic scarf on, Gorbachev has a Soviet-like, Russian-like big coat on. He looks like an absolute old man huddled up to keep warm and just seems decrepit and old. He gets out of the car, comes and takes off his hat, and reaches for Reagan.

Reagan comes down the stairs like he’s a Labrador retriever. They talk for a minute; Gorbachev makes a very unfortunate time. Obviously they don’t speak each other’s language but kind of like, “You have no coat on, I have a coat on,” which absolutely emphasized, as everybody could physically see, “You’re chicken shit.”
Reagan’s out there feeling great and looking great. Gorbachev does that for a minute and then Reagan kind of points to the house like, “I just came out of the house, come on in and see me. I’m so glad you’re here.” Like he owns the house now, even though this is a neutral place, because he had gone out to greet Gorbachev. Then he shows Gorbachev the way, “Here’s the front door.” As Gorbachev is going up the stairs, Reagan slides his hand under Gorbachev’s arm in a gesture of kindness, but it came across as We hope you make it up these stairs, and if you can’t I’m here to help you.

The visual of it was this young, frisky, growing leader who had all of tomorrow ahead of him in Ronald Reagan, who is helping this decrepit man from the fallen empire get up the stairs. It was just an amazing sight. We all stood there looking at it and I go, “Oh my God, this is phenomenal.”

**Strong:** Now, about the Reagan Presidency and Reagan campaigns, there are a lot of those crucial performance moments.

**Adelman:** Yes.

**Strong:** And among the people who write about them, there seem to be some differences as to how contrived or planned they are, or how natural. What you’ve just told us is that on that occasion it looked to you like it wasn’t planned.

**Adelman:** I don’t think it was.

**Strong:** It was Reagan being Reagan.

**Adelman:** He was talking stories about Hollywood while we were standing in the hall and I think that he thought for the moment, Maybe I should get my jacket on, but then he kind of thought, There’s no time to do it. Or something like that. And the gesture of kindness that emphasized the point so much was I think just being a nice guy. It wasn’t that Gorbachev needed help getting up the stairs. Some of those—I think that “there you go again” was kind of planned. Certainly with Bush and—

**Strong:** The microphone—

**Adelman:** The microphone, “I paid for this, Mr. Green,” he called him—that was not planned, that was straight Reagan. I think the way I’ve been asked about that and the way I think about it is that Lou Cannon came up with the best explanation. Cannon had a football player in his high school who was a very mediocre player until he got somebody going after him hard. Then he turned sensational. He said in the league everybody knew if you left Charlie alone, he’d be mediocre. Once you mess with Charlie, you’ll turn him into an all-star. I think Reagan was like that. Reagan was fine, mediocre in all kinds of performances until he was really challenged in a big moment. He was a big moment player. Then he turned spectacular. Every summit I saw that. The last summit in Washington he made too many jokes and drove Gorbachev crazy, but the other times he was really good. His arguments were good. He was a big-game player in a big game.
**Knott:** You told us another story—I think it was at Geneva, about the joke with the arm—

**Adelman:** That’s right. He came back a little late from the first time he met Gorbachev. Ronnie [Reagan] was there. I don’t know how Ronnie got in—

**Knott:** He was there as a reporter for *Playboy*, I believe.

**Adelman:** There you go, good for you. He was standing around talking to us; I’d never met Ronnie before—I don’t think I ever met him afterwards, but anyway he was there. Reagan came in about 12:20. I think they were supposed to break at 12 or 12:30, or something like that. The first words I heard were Ronnie’s saying, “Dad, you know you’re late, we’ve been waiting for you to have lunch.” Reagan says, “Well, you know, when you do these simultaneous translations it takes a long time, especially when the translator is being told about Hollywood and the subtitles. Somebody will say something in Italian for three minutes the subtitle says “that’s fine.”

Reagan says, “Excuse me,” and headed for the men’s room. Then we were told to go around the table in Geneva, and so we all stood at the table waiting for Reagan and the White House chef, who I know very well was very proud that they had gotten fresh fish.

When he came out, Reagan stood at his place and had a grin like a cat who had just swallowed a canary. He was just so beaming. Then one by one all of us realized that one of his arms was in his suit coat, the other arm was just hanging down right there and Reagan was holding the arm in back of it so it would be clear. It was hanging down. Then the whole room started laughing, I was one of the last to catch on. Finally someone next to me says, “Where’s your arm?” And Reagan burst out and said, “Well, it was here before I met Gorbachev. I don’t where it is now.” He just got the biggest kick out of it, all of us laughed. It was just a great tension lowerer at the time because it really put all of us at ease.

Then when he sat down he started talking for some reason I never understood about the Queen, and when they went horseback riding she was more inclined toward Grenada and liberating Grenada than he was, and the Queen can’t take a position on it. He started trotting down the road with the Queen. Finally, I think it was me who said, “Mr. President, that’s great, but how was Gorbachev? Let’s go back to this, where we are, what we have to do this afternoon, hello?” Reagan said, “Well, he’s a new kind of Soviet leader.” I thought it was quite a remarkable insight, historically remarkable. Of course, Reagan had never met any of the Soviet leaders, so I don’t know how he knew it was a new kind of Soviet leader, I had no idea.

**Chidester:** You said that you felt that he had great negotiating skills, command of the issues, and everything. How did the people you were negotiating with see Reagan’s ability to negotiate?

**Adelman:** All of us knew that he didn’t want to get into technical details and the number of SS-20s; all that became kind of clear because that wasn’t Reagan’s strength. I guess the clearest moment of this was when we were in the bubble, which is a secured room in Reykjavik, and the bubble was the smallest bubble ever made. Because nothing secure ever happened in Reykjavik. We had a hurry-up summit there.
In Geneva where we had a bubble, you could get 32 people in. We had eight chairs in the bubble and we were sitting there on the morning at Reykjavik, the first morning, and Shultz was with us. We opened up the summit and I don’t know what happened, because I was told to go and the film would be there together, and so we were kind of bullshitting in the bubble and all of a sudden a gigantic door opens and this 7’ 4” Secret Service guy around Reagan said, “Now the President of the United States.”

Reagan came in the bubble. Now there are eight chairs for nine of us. So I was very gracious and gave the President my chair, but I wasn’t gracious enough to leave the bubble. So I sat down kind of against the Presidential knee and Reagan said something like, “Boy, this place would look great if it was filled up with goldfish.”

Then Reagan started talking about Gorbachev saying the number of missiles, the number of warheads, he wanted to do this and that and he started giving some numbers and someone said, “Are you talking about warheads, Mr. President?” “Yes, I’m talking about warheads, missiles.” It was quite clear that Reagan did not know whether it was missiles, warheads, it was 3,000, 30,000, or 300, something like that that Gorbachev wanted.

So we all were trying to—How do we unwind this? How can we decipher what the hell we’re supposed to do, ask him what Gorbachev has? After about five minutes of this, “Mr. President, did he say this or that?” Reagan didn’t know. Reagan says, “Well, he had a piece of paper he handed me.” So all of us dove for the piece of paper. He says, “You know, that was going to be where it was at, and not what Ronald Reagan said.”

He had no knowledge, no feel, and no interest in whether it was missiles, warheads, SEPs, throw-weights, none of that.

**Chidester:** But I mean, did your Soviet counterparts see him as dumb, smart, stubborn?

**Adelman:** Very stubborn. I think that the idea was he was stubborn, kind of out of it with his ideas on SDI, and that he had little support in the West because of all these protests they saw all the time, and basically that the peace wing was going to win on something like this so there was a temporary problem getting over Reagan. I think this was truer in ’82, in ’83. By the second term, they said, “Holy cow, this is a more formidable force than I thought.” So it was kind of like, “Maybe we have to get over it rather than somebody we have to really deal with.”

Then on SDI he really got them. On the Evil Empire he really got them. On the whole idea that it was an illegitimate regime—I think that sent them off the wall. The whole idea that it was a totally different paradigm from either Nixon or Carter before him. He said there were big issues, the two of us have to settle it in the world, and therefore we have to deal with detente anyway because that’s what responsible adults do. Reagan’s view was, “We’re legitimate, they’re illegitimate. We have to deal with them on issues because they’re here, but that doesn’t mean that they’re legitimate to deal with.” That attitude really came through and that was a gigantic change. That somehow you’re on the ass-end of history, you’re curtains, and boy, that got them.
Knott: Your own assessment of Gorbachev, what you saw.

Adelman: I was very skeptical at first obviously, and I thought Gorbachev was wrong about his future and, you know, that communism would last and had to be reformed. I thought a reformed communism was like fried snowballs. It just was not going to happen. But when all was said and done, I was too harsh on Gorbachev. Gorbachev at the end of the day was a humanist. At the end of the day he would not spend and tax forever. At the end of the day he would not have the jackboots, down the hall and bang on the door—he just didn’t want to do that. He just didn’t want to have a vision like that. So I think Gorbachev, in terms of humanist, was really very good.

Strong: Could he have afforded—what happens as he does that?

Adelman: Well, yes, there was—we had so many moving parts there that Reagan and Gorbachev were talking “away with nuclear weapons.” None of us were talking about doing away with nuclear weapons. They were in fairyland.

We suggested radical steps and I think that it would have been very good for both sides to do that, certainly on ballistic missiles. I didn’t see the Soviets ever doing that because our advantage was in cruise missiles and airplanes and anyway, there could have been 50 percent cuts and START levels. They didn’t go through with that. And it blew my mind that the next morning after the all-night negotiating session, this is Saturday morning, I think the 12th of October in ’86, they agreed to the zero option in Europe. They still wanted some in Asia but they agreed to the zero option.

After Reykjavik I gave a review with Peter Jennings and ABC news. I said I thought Reykjavik was a terrific success even though the summit broke up and they said, “Why? The summit broke down.” I said, “I know, but we got more concessions here”—here’s the same line I used with Reagan—“than we had in seven years of constant negotiation in Geneva.” The counter argument was, “Yes, but all those concessions were tied to giving up SDI.” My counter, counter to that was, “They were made by the Secretary General of the Soviet Union, agreed to. I cannot see going back in Geneva. I can see the first few rounds, but no one cares about that.”

After a while it’s unsustainable saying we need all this nuclear arms, SS-18s, and throw-weights and stuff we really cared about, when the head of the communist Soviet Union said in Reykjavik, “We agree we don’t need it.” Now really, what we could do is pocket that and eventually they’ll come around—and cut it off from SDI restrictions. And that’s what happened. So I thought Reykjavik was a big success. A lot of big people in the nuclear business, including some on foreign affairs—Dick Cheney called me up, “What the hell have you guys done?” Sam Nunn couldn’t stand it. Nixon said it was the worst summit in world history, and all that. But I thought it was an enormous success. I still think that.

Knott: Why did you decide to leave your position before the end of the administration?

Adelman: I left the day after Gorbachev left the Washington summit because I decided to leave on a high note and the eighth year of the Presidency was going nowhere. START was not going to be finished. I could see how much we worked on INF—five years—especially that last year
was a major sprint, getting all the nits and nats of writing a treaty and doing a treaty, a year when both sides had, in October of ’86, agreed on zero option in Europe. I don’t know what it was, but it wasn’t long after that that Gorbachev rolled in and said, “Okay, we’ll zero-out Asia.”

It took us all of ’87 just to work on an arms control treaty. So you had agreement on what the terms are. You had perimeters, monitoring, about the verification, on-site inspection, look at our on-site, there were gobs of stories on that. What we do with definitions, how you know about the technology. There are just a million things that you need for a treaty, and that took enormous work.

They thought they were going to do that in START the last year. I thought was ridiculous. I always liked to go on success.

[BREAK]

**Knott:** Just some general questions about Ronald Reagan. You touched on some of Reagan’s weaknesses; you’ve also obviously praised him a lot today. Were there other weaknesses or things about him that you wished were different?

**Adelman:** I wish he’d had some discipline in his staff, which he never really wanted to do. I wish that he was more curious. People have asked me over the years—Was Reagan smart? He wouldn’t have gotten good SAT scores, but he was right on the big issues and he was righter than the experts. Getting back to this phrase, he apprehended more than we comprehended. I argued with Ronald Reagan on whether communist countries would ever go non-communist. And I have a hundred times the knowledge that he did and certainly equal certainty. Reagan was absolutely right. And whether SDI would revolutionize the whole arms control talks—I thought it was a big step, but I didn’t think it was revolutionary. He said it was revolutionary. He was right; we were wrong.

On whether we would end up ever sharing SDI with the Russians, I thought it was crazy. It ends up that it’s the smart thing to do now and Bush is talking about that and [Vladimir] Putin is talking about that, and there are cooperative efforts on SDI on that. All these things that were gigantic decisions and somehow Reagan proved right. So, I think one part of being smart is you get right on maybe five issues of your times and that’s being smart. How he got those opinions I’ll never know. You know, you could make explanations, but it’s a mystery. It’s really mysterious. It comes up in time in history.

Look at [Abraham] Lincoln. Lincoln’s tenacity in keeping the union together was beyond rational belief. His thing for this guy who was born in a log cabin in Kentucky. I mean why should he have this mystical hold? No matter how many lives you’re going to save, can’t you work out a compromise? There’s something about, “No, we’re not going to spread slavery anywhere and we’re not going to give up any of the union.” It was just a force that everybody had to contend with. It was unstoppable for Lincoln. The more you read about it, the more you
decide it’s kind of mystical. There should have been a reason for it. I mean, yes, it’s a preference, but you have to be in the real world.

With Reagan, with Lincoln, and people like that, you don’t deal in the real world. They dealt in this world but, “We’re not giving in on this, we’re not giving in.” So that was pretty spooky to me.

**Strong:** Did you have any idea about how the Cold War might come to an end or did you—?

**Adelman:** Yes, I did, I had definite ideas that it would never end, and that the same thing I’d done in the ’70s with Rumsfeld I’d do in the ’80s and someone else would do in the ’90s and in the 2000s. How could it end? I mean the Soviet Union was not going to give up power, not going to give up domination over half the world. It wasn’t good, it wasn’t the nature of communism, it wasn’t in the nature of Marxism before communism, it wasn’t in the nature of the Soviet leaders. It wasn’t going to happen.

**Strong:** Do you think when Reagan proposed SDI, besides his motive for genuinely wanting to have a defense against nuclear weapons, that he had any advanced inkling of how this would change strategic calculations between the U.S. and the USSR?

**Adelman:** No, I don’t think he knew enough about strategic calculations ahead of time to know how it would change.

**Strong:** He never addressed the balance then by trying to——

**Adelman:** He was intent on that. He was intent that if we build up, they’re not going to be able to afford to keep up with us. A lot of people think that’s what won the Cold War. I don’t. Because when you look at Soviet defense spending, it increased about four to five percent every year through the ’70s and pretty much continued steadily until Gorbachev started all his economic reforms that crashed the whole place. It was not the case that the Kremlin was pretty steady and then when the Reagan build-up happened in ’81 on, then the Kremlin went to match it. They didn’t match it very much; they didn’t do much different in Reagan’s time than they had done, as far as we knew, on defense spending.

So his idea of bankrupting them because they couldn’t do it, I thought that was a bad theory. People still say it all the time; I still think it’s wrong. What got them was SDI. What was it about SDI? Several things. Number one: he was running around the whole strategic doctrine that they had accepted. Our idea before SDI was: They build an SS-18, we build an MX. They build a Mobile 25, we build a Mobile missile. You go back and forth and then you negotiate. This was running around the whole thing. This was saying, “Your ballistic missiles will become less and less important over time. We’re changing all the rules of the game. What your strength has been is not going to be a strength for long. We’re going to defeat it by ourselves.”

Point number two is the obvious point: technology they could not keep up with.
Chidester: Was he cognizant of that? We like to read our Monday-morning quarterbacking into this. Now it seems obvious that our strengths, computer revolution, things like this, that were just on the horizon—

Adelman: I think he was told that by the Joint Chiefs and others that we were so much better and I think he probably believed that—

Chidester: So that would be a qualitative edge for the U.S.

Adelman: Yes, a qualitative—and not compare the strength and they’re comparatively weaker in both, in all senses, not only in ballistic missiles and land-based missiles in particular but also in high technology. Plus it emphasized that their allies were impoverished and technologically backward, we could be in cahoots with Western Europe and Japan, and that would be a force multiplier as well. So it was all these things. I think they came out more than was known right at the beginning, and what really propelled SDI was not just Reagan’s determination, but it was the unbelievable way that the Soviets played the whole issue. Unbelievable.

In 1984, I did a study in the Arms Control Agency where we calculated Soviet paid-for propaganda; 80 percent of it was about SDI. It wasn’t even a program; it was a speech. I mean the Pentagon takes three years to gin up a program. They had been doing some ballistic missile defense and there was nothing; it was cotton candy. The whole first summit, the whole second summit, the whole third summit was dominated by SDI. If the Kremlin had any sense they would have said, “It’s a stupid idea, you want to waste your money, waste your money. Let’s get back to the game.” But they went ape-shit. Once they went ape-shit it was just heavenly because it really did affect their thinking; it affected their planning.

I testified a hundred times about it. “SDI won’t work,” I said. That’s certainly not what we heard from the Russians. They wouldn’t be going crazy if it didn’t work. And again, what was the ultimate defense against the Democrats in the Senate and the House? You don’t think it works, but guess who does think it works? It was phenomenal, better than we ever expected. And [Alexander] Bessmertenykh, who was Foreign Minister under Gorbachev after Shevardnadze at Princeton a few years ago said that SDI was really what ended the Cold War and ended the Soviet Union. It wasn’t obviously singular, but it was the last straw.

Strong: Can you talk about Reagan and his—

[ Interruption ]

Strong: You made the comment that he had the ability to apprehend things. The other thing that’s said about him is that he is a great communicator. We’re now seeing more and more of his editing of his early speeches and columns. I think we’ll see more of that as things open up in the library. Did you encounter that? Did you see packages that were given to him and came back with his changes that were better communications?

Adelman: I became friendly with the speechwriters at Geneva. Peggy Noonan was there and Pat Buchanan was there, and others. You know, when I was talking to them, it was clear to them that
for the first time in their lives, they had a guy who took their speeches and made them better. Certainly Nixon never did that, or anyone else before that. Reagan would just come up with these phrases and improve their speeches and they were just awestruck that the speeches would be better coming out than they were going in, and that was rare. Reagan cared about communication, he cared about words, and he thought about it a lot.

**Knott:** Ever see evidence of this yourself?

**Adelman:** No, but I knew that when we had NSC meetings and someone would come up with a phrase, it would register with Reagan and he’d throw it out afterwards. He cared about that.

**Chidester:** So he had a good ear for that too.

**Adelman:** He had a really good ear. He read *Reader’s Digest* and he read all these places where he’d pick up phrases. His whole life, as we know now, was writing letters, columns. And he really cared about ideas.

Mike Deaver tells the story that he was going around with Reagan these 20 years and he’d be reading mystery novels and all and Reagan would be there reading policy books and things. Mike would be reading this great Agatha Christie and Reagan says, “I wish I had time to read that.” It’s funny, you don’t think of him as a policy guy, but he cared about policy. Then you look at the book of all those columns and you realize it’s really strange.

What are the right wing conservative issues? There’s abortion, gun control, prayer in the school. Almost none of his radio columns or anything were anything about those. Every year you know there’s going to be an abortion speech with Reagan, to say how terrible it was. Then people would say, “Well, are you going to introduce legislation?” “Well, not exactly.” We did that, we did the abortion thing. We did the prayer in the school thing, the gun control thing, that’s it. Now let’s get back to work. He just cared about certain issues and I was so, so very lucky to be helping on one of the issues he really cared deeply about.

**Chidester:** I wanted to know what Shakespeare characters Reagan resembled?

**Adelman:** I was asked that at a Renaissance weekend with Bill Clinton in the audience and I said that Clinton was more like Bolingbrook, who spent his life attempting to be like and take over the throne from the duly elected king, who was then Richard II and George Herbert Walker Bush. I always thought of Reagan more like Claudius from Hamlet. Not that Reagan murdered his brother and married his brother’s wife—although Reagan was accused of everything but that during his time. But Claudius had a wonderful way of making momentous decisions in a very easy manner, seemingly effortless.

**Chidester:** And he spoke clichés—

**Adelman:** Everybody in *Hamlet* speaks clichés. But Reagan seemed effortless in what he did. He changed so much. A lot of leaders are grunting and groaning and talking about the demands
on the office, Carter was like that. Reagan kind of went through always happy and everything and made momentous changes.

**Knott:** Reagan had an official biographer, Edmund Morris, who wrote a book called *Dutch.* When we had the tape off earlier this morning you had some things to say about Morris and *Dutch*—

**Adelman:** He was a very good friend of ours; we used to see him all the time. I helped him on some of the stuff. He showed me some chapters on Geneva and Reykjavik before the book appeared and we were with him for dinner a week before the book appeared and we were terribly excited about it. It had been 14 years in the offing. We knew him through Nancy Reynolds for the last ten years and we were good friends. He was over Thanksgiving.

When the book came out I was sorely disappointed. Read it all. The writing was wonderful, but his technique of putting himself in the book and having fictional characters and fictional footnotes and not paying attention to what Reagan did I thought was a travesty, especially with the access he had, the time.

It’s sad to say because I’m not in the business of losing friends. I’ve never talked to him since then. I think it was just a terrible, terrible travesty. Plus he didn’t ask the right questions. He really got it wrong. He wanted to know what the inner, inner, inner Reagan was really like, and if you learn anything from Shakespeare, you learn that everybody is surprised by everybody else, including those you know very well. And what you learn by the greatest of Shakespeare, I’m talking about *Hamlet, Othello, Lear,* is that everybody is surprised by their own action.

It comes out clearest in *Hamlet.* Everybody in that play and all of us are wondering, *What makes Hamlet tick?* What makes Hamlet so gripping is that throughout that whole play, Hamlet is wondering, *What makes me tick? What kind of person am I?* His examination is absolutely spooky it’s so deep. There’s an ultimate mystery in all of us. There’s more of a mystery in somebody like Ronald Reagan, for all kinds of reasons, but ultimately you say, “Okay, we’re not going to get the core of what he’s really, really, really like. That’s okay, what I can do is show what he really, really, really did, and that we know pretty well.

That takes work, that takes diving into what he did at each summit, and that takes insight, and Morris was more intent on what he really was like rather than what he really did. I thought that when all was said and done, what bothered me about *Dutch* more than anything was not just the egotism of putting himself in the book and the phoniness of novel characters in the middle of a serious biography, but the lack of close attention to the policies and the ramifications of the Reagan Presidency. I thought that was terrible.

**Knott:** So the book on Reagan hasn’t been written?

**Adelman:** There are a lot of good ones, Peter Wallison wrote a good one. I think Lou Cannon, although he’s now on his fifth book on Reagan, which he’ll get right some time, after his fifteenth book on Reagan. Every one gets more impressive on Reagan. The fact is, *Role of a*
Lifetime, which I think is a very good book, the second edition was even more praiseworthy of Reagan. I’ll tell you, it’s a good place to kind of sum up.

When I left Reagan 15 years ago—I was in the Arms Control Agency 21 years ago—I loved Reagan when I left. I thought really enormously about him. In those 15 years, my estimation has grown and grown. It’s grown because I’m so startled at the changes he made, and how that changed our world. I’m startled at his personal characteristics, being so nice and not mean to anybody or vicious to anybody in politics; that’s pretty rare.

I’m startled by the lack of intellectual background he had and how much he really is an intellectual, how much he really did when he had freedom to do anything, just write a column, write a radio broadcast, write a letter. He just wanted to sit there and write. When you write, as all of you know, it demands intellectual rigor and exercise in precision. Now we have the 5,000 letters that Reagan wrote on all kinds of subjects. On the cover of Time magazine this very week, and those radio broadcasts, there are about 800 of them. Every one he went over and cared about what he said and how he said it. He cared about his attitude.

Somebody of his standing would have taken Deaver and Hannaford’s transcript and walked into the studio and read it, standard conservative commentary for a week. It doesn’t matter that much, as long as you get your voice and name on the air it’ll be okay. But he cared enormously. He realized this and he realized that. In terms of dealing with ideas, Reagan was an intellectual and that impresses me enormously because he didn’t act that way.

Knott: I want to thank you very much. It was very enlightening.

Adelman: I loved doing it, as you can tell. It’s fun talking about Reagan, I could talk about him all week. I was so lucky to be with him.