



GEORGE H.W. BUSH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW WITH JAMES A. BAKER III

March 17, 2011
Houston, Texas

Interviewers

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Riley: All right, we're a go.

Baker: 10:00 on the button.

Riley: All right. I had hoped that when Jim agreed to come with me that I could just turn the recorder on and let the two of you discuss this.

Young: No, he replaced me.

Riley: He told me last night he's not going to allow me to get away with that, so I get the privilege of asking the first question. We have all read the book, which is a fabulous book, very rich detail, and I know we can't reproduce everything here, don't want to reproduce everything here. We'd like to be able to move beyond that.

Baker: And also read *Work Hard, Study...and Keep Out of Politics!*

Riley: Yes. I've read bits of it. I have not read the whole thing.

Young: It was published in 2006.

Riley: Right, but the piece of it related to this I have looked at. I want to go back and ask you a question about the transition from [Ronald] Reagan to [George H.W.] Bush, which is notable, I think, on three dimensions. Let me throw this out there and get you to respond if you would.

Baker: Right.

Riley: The first is that historically, it's a very unusual situation, with a two-term President, followed by a President of the same party, Vice President.

Baker: Not since 1836 or something. When was Martin Van Buren?

Riley: Eighteen thirty-six, that's exactly right, so almost historically unprecedented.

Baker: Yes.

Riley: I don't know whether you would agree or not, but Reagan left some big shoes to be filled, and I wonder if that creates a problem for a new administration coming in. The second dimension of the question is we've heard from people that we've talked with from the Bush project that in some ways friendly transitions are more difficult.

Baker: They're not easy.

Riley: And then the third thing is that when you come in, you've got a huge array of issues to deal with, particularly in the foreign policy community, with a lot of things going on, and there's just a question in transitioning, how you manage to figure out what your priorities are in that environment. So let me start and throw that out for you and see if any of it—

Baker: Well, first of all, I think it's clearly different. I've been through transitions both ways. I do think a friendly transition can sometimes be more difficult, at least very difficult. Why? Because the new President has got to be seen to be the new leader, and in running for office he—and particularly one who has been an incumbent Vice President for two terms to a successful President, like Bush was to Reagan—has got to continue to support the policies of his predecessor, but also has to carve out a niche for himself and carve out an identity for himself and a persona for himself. So in those respects, it's somewhat more difficult.

If you read my book, you read about the debate in the yellow room of the White House on the [Manuel] Noriega issue, where for the first time, Vice President Bush really disagreed with the administration's position. I was a member of the NSC [National Security Council] at that time, but I knew where I was going to end up, and I was Treasury Secretary, and we had a spirited discussion about what we were going to do on Noriega. We carved out a little bit of a separate agenda and identity.

Also, you have to be seen to be proceeding—George Bush would say, “With all due prudence.” Prudence was a word he really liked. We got some flak at the beginning about the pause in the U.S./Soviet relationship, but that was very intentional. That was intentional not just for a foreign policy purpose, but it was intentional for a political purpose as well, because we didn't want to be subject to a charge that we were doing nothing but copycatting and following along. We wanted to have our own prism on it, our own imprimatur on that relationship—at that time, at the height of the Cold War, probably the most important foreign policy relationship. So we consciously did that.

Now, people have written—I think President Bush and Brent [Scowcroft] in their joint book even acknowledged that we didn't do the review as well as we probably should have. I don't know whether I opined on that or not at the time. I would agree with that assessment, that we probably didn't. I think it was the right thing to do, I think it was a very worthwhile thing to do, and whatever little flak we caught didn't cost us anything when you look at the concrete accomplishments that followed in terms of the U.S./Soviet relationship, the fact that we brought the Cold War to a peaceful conclusion. The Cold War didn't have to end peacefully. It could have ended very violently.

Young: Why was the report not useful to you, the review, if it's just mush or something?

Baker: Well, number one, it didn't discover any flaws in the prior approach, so it didn't mean we're going to change the approach, and so we had the review. I think someone wrote, I can't remember who, and said it was pabulum.

Young: "Mush," I think was the word used.

Baker: Mush. Thank you. Who wrote that?

Strong: You're quoted with that word, but whether it was at the time or later, I don't recall.

Baker: It's my word. Okay. But should we have gone? Look, I'm sitting there now as Secretary of State. I came up through the political channel. I was the President's political advisor and there was never any question in my mind that we should do that. It was the right thing to do politically, and if we discovered something, that would have been great, but we didn't.

Riley: Did you have the right people working on it?

Baker: I don't remember who we had working on it. We had the bureaucracy working on it, so maybe we didn't have the right people.

Strong: Everybody was working on it, you're right. I think that's part of the problem.

Young: So it bought you some time, in a way, to get your own principles.

Baker: It showed that we were deliberate, that we were thoughtful, that we were not just going to jump in here and say everything is going to go exactly the way—a new President has to carve out his own identity. We saw the same thing happening in terms of his leadership with the alliance, and we had the initial tensions, if you remember, with Margaret Thatcher, who was a wonderful friend and a terrific Prime Minister of the UK [United Kingdom]. But Reagan was so strong, so powerful, and so secure in his own skin he'd let her speak for the United States. Well, we couldn't do that. The United States has to be the leader of the alliance.

If you read my book, you read about the debate on short-range nuclear forces and the differences between the Germans and the Brits on all of that. That was a similar kind of thing, and from a political standpoint we needed to do that.

It turned out we didn't need to do it substantively, but what did it cost us? Nothing. It gave some heartburn to some people who were way overthinking, and maybe thinking we should go even faster. We gave [Mikhail] Gorbachev a little bit of grief because he couldn't figure out exactly what we were doing, but by May it was over. After my meeting with [Eduard] Shevardnadze, at the Conventional Forces, CFE [Conventional Forces in Europe] talks in Vienna, and that may have been in March, maybe it was a little later than that, but from about that time on. Then by July the President had told us, "I want you to arrange a summit." He told me and Brent on the porch of the U.S. Ambassador's residence in Paris. So do I think it cost the country anything? Absolutely not. Do I think it was the right thing to do? I absolutely do think it was the right thing to do.

Strong: But let me ask you a question about that, because when it's going on, the pause, there's criticism in the press, there's criticism among the elite opinion makers. Did that bother the President at all?

Baker: I call them the "thumb-suckers."

Strong: The "thumb-suckers," okay. Did that bother the President at all?

Baker: You'd obviously rather not be criticized, but George Bush knows that that comes with the territory. You're going to get that. You show me a President who can't take the criticism and I'll show you an unsuccessful President. No, I don't think a lot. When he decided by May—it was in July that he actually said, "I want you to do this."

Strong: But May is the series of public speeches he gives in Detroit and College Station, and then at the Coast Guard Academy, and then the trip to Europe, where the culmination of reporting on where we're headed comes out.

Baker: That's correct. Now, when was the NATO summit?

Strong: It's in June, I think.

Baker: In June, just before he told us.

Strong: Yes.

Baker: Where I knew that we were really getting ready to engage full time, seriously, and in a rapid way with the Soviets is when he agreed with me that we needed to do something dramatic, to overshadow the SNF [strategic nuclear forces] debate, and we did the great big CFE reduction. He had to call the Secretary of Defense and Bill Crowe particularly, who was Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, and say, "I want this done. Don't come back and tell me why this can't be done, I want it done." That was a big move. That was the move he had to make to be seen to be leader of the alliance, and it did it. When he did that I think it became apparent to those of us inside that we were going to move on the U.S./Soviet relationship.

I can't think of any other examples of—well, there are other examples of how tough it is to transition. I'm quite confident that as close as I am to the Reagan administration, having been his Chief of Staff for four years and the Treasury Secretary, I'm sure that there were people with him, around him, who probably had a little bit of difficulty with a kinder, gentler nation, but that's something you had to do. As I point out in *Work Hard, Study...and Keep Out of Politics!* maybe it was politics, diplomacy. At the beginning of the Bush administration there were only two people left from the Reagan team of any rank, the Vice President and me. The rest of them were all—they didn't go on into the next administration. Some of his staff did, but nobody in a position of substantial responsibility.

Strong: Let me come back to one of your earlier observations. Does being a good Vice President, and George Bush gets credit for being a good Vice President—

Baker: Does he ever, boy, I'm telling you.

Strong: Does it do you harm when you then run on your own or take office as a successor?

Baker: It doesn't do you harm if you can find a way to convince the people that you're your own person, that you've got your own ideas, that it's not just a cookie-cutter, repeat type thing, just the same thing all over again. And I think Bush was—but it just makes the job tougher, because there was no way that he could have or would have separated himself from Reagan until the time came at the very end when he was going to go out and run himself. He was a terrific Vice President. You never caught him quoted. He didn't say in the private meetings what his views were. He saved all that for the lunches with Reagan, because he knew there were no secrets in Washington and people loved to juxtapose the Vice President against the President. Harder to do for a guy who has been an incumbent Vice President.

Strong: And you said at the end there were only two senior people who had been there through the Reagan years.

Baker: That's right.

Strong: What about at the second or third tier of appointments across the departments?

Baker: Well, do you remember? We asked everybody to step down, if I'm not mistaken. Again, the idea is you've got to show that the guy's his own person; it's a new day. That doesn't mean you don't ask some of them to stay. I'm sure a lot of them were asked to stay. Certainly you didn't have any—the careers all stayed, but I think maybe some of the political—I mean, about Ambassadors now, but then you had that throughout the government.

Strong: Right.

Baker: So everybody was asked, if I'm not mistaken, to give the President their resignation. That's the way it should work.

Young: In your book *The Politics of Diplomacy* you start off with Nicaragua and Central America, and that struck me. Here's the Secretary of State, and you're going to Congress. You point that out in the book.

Baker: I tell people my first major negotiation was not with a foreign power, it was with the Congress of the United States. It was. And boy, was that a departure from the Reagan years. I think I wrote in the book that the wars in Central America were the Holy Grail for the left in this country and the right in this country.

Young: And the right.

Baker: Early on I went to the President and said, "If we can take this out of the domestic political debate, we can solve the foreign policy problem." I give Jimmy Carter a lot of credit for working with us to get that done. I don't think [Daniel] Ortega would have stepped down if Carter hadn't been there to coax him to agree to live with the results of the election. But there was no way you were going to solve that problem until you solved the problem in the United States between the left and the right on Capitol Hill.

Young: You remarked in the book about the importance of trying to establish a foundation of some bipartisan consensus for the work you were going to be doing in foreign affairs. And this was a thorn, that bitter partisanship and dispute.

Baker: It was bitter.

Young: It was very bitter and there was a lot of resentment, and you had to negotiate it out of the way.

Baker: We had to get it out of the way, and remember this, that the Iran-Contras thing revolved around those wars. I would argue that that was the only real blot on the Reagan Presidency. But there were some partisans up on Capitol Hill who were ready to see it resolved too, and I give [Christopher] Dodd and some people like that who were really hard over—but they were willing to negotiate and agreed to live with the results of an election, if we could get an election. We finally got both sides to say they would live with the results, and then we had to make sure that Ortega stepped down. But that was really a signal accomplishment, and it happened early on.

If you read *The Politics of Diplomacy*, you saw where Boyden Gray, the White House Counsel, went out the day after we announced the agreement and said it was unconstitutional. Damn, did that piss me off. It was a hell of an accomplishment, but the President called him in and read him the riot act. [laughter] It was the last—what were they calling it—a one House veto or some kind of thing. I can't remember all the stuff.

Strong: He is right, it is unconstitutional. It was still the right thing to do.

Baker: Absolutely right thing to do. He may have been right but he wasn't right going out and saying that, I'll tell you that, and the President didn't think he was right doing that either. He jumped all over him.

Strong: Can I ask you about another issue early on? The John Tower nomination. The President sticks with him to the bitter end and sticks with him even after Tower is willing to step aside and end this whole business.

Baker: Does he? I didn't remember that. Did Tower come to tell the—

Strong: Tower had two conversations where he said, "If you want me to, I can step out of this." One was with [C.] Boyden Gray; one was with the President. Both times he gets a response; once directly from the President, once indirectly from the President. "No, you will not step down; we are going to stick with you." I'm just curious, is sticking with your friend who's in the midst of that controversy the best political decision?

Baker: Yes, it was, at least to stick with him that long, because the way the opposition wounds a new President is to deny him confirmation of his Cabinet.

Strong: This is the first time a new President is denied a Cabinet nomination on the floor. They're denied Cabinet nominations when withdrawals take place. That's pretty common.

Baker: But the denial—so you're saying, why did you force it to a vote.

Strong: Right.

Baker: Let me say that I was probably involved in those discussions, and I'm sure I was, but I think it shows that the President was going to stick with his people. There was a feeling that this was sour grapes on the part of a lot of people. A very fine public servant and an extraordinarily good friend of mine in effect led the charge, and that was Sam Nunn. Sam of course had been on Armed Services with John, and I think there were some problems there. That's not to say that John was a paragon of virtue, because he sure as hell wasn't. But I think the political calculus was that we should not be seen to be throwing—Ronald Reagan used to always say, "I'm never going to throw anybody off the sleigh to try and appease the wolves, because that won't appease them, it will just whet their appetite for more." He used to say, and I think this is George Bush's philosophy, "Loyalty up, loyalty down."

Strong: You actually say that's really at the core of George Bush's character.

Baker: It is.

Strong: Is he unusual among the constellation of Presidents and politicians in how loyal he is?

Baker: He's really loyal and he's not going to throw somebody over the side just to appease the crowd. But one thing I won't do for you and I never have done it, and I've worked for four Presidents. I never compare. I tell people, "I don't do windows, I don't do floors, and I don't do comparisons." I get the question all the time, because I worked for [Gerald] Ford and Reagan and Bush I and [George W.] Bush II.

Strong: Bob Gates, in his memoir, says the same thing you do. This is a President, George Herbert Walker, who is unusually loyal to the people who work for him. He says that mattered a great deal; it was part of why we had such a successful team. But then he goes on to say there were also occasions when he was loyal to a fault and did things for foreign leaders, did things for members of his administration that didn't always get reciprocated.

Baker: I think that's probably true. In the lead-up to the second term, he could have and should have made some changes. It's not his nature to do that, and yet there were times when I know he would have liked to have had some changes. I know that. I'm not going to talk about personalities, but I know that.

Riley: Sure.

Baker: Tell me what else Bob said. You said in terms of foreign leaders—

Strong: He says he was sometimes loyal to a fault, and sometimes was loyal to foreign leaders and members of his own team when they did not fully reciprocate his loyalty.

Baker: Oh, I now remember what I was trying to recall. In one of my books, maybe *Work Hard, Study...and Keep Out of Politics!*, I talk about the time that I screwed up the State of the Union. I had a meeting with [Alexander] Bessmertnykh and he went out and he announced something that really hadn't happened in the meeting, and it got in the way. And instead of coming down on me with hobnail boots, the President said, "Oh, I understand, don't worry about it." But I was really

chagrined about it. That's the way he was. You know, in our administration—I want to repeat what I said in my book; I'm sure Bob said this too—we made the national security apparatus work the way it was supposed to work. It was the exception to the rule and it was because of George Bush, because he knew how it was supposed to operate.

There was one news story in the initial year or something about how the NSC [National Security Council] was taking over foreign policy and the State Department was being left behind, one of these thumb-sucking stories that you get all the time. He picked up the phone and called me and said, "I want you and Susan [Garrett Baker] to come up to Camp David this weekend." That was the end of it. We never had another story like that, never another story.

Dick Cheney went out and said, "Gorbachev's going to fail." I picked up the phone, I called the President, and said, "You can't have this." Well, Bob Gates was going to give a speech that ran counter. I said, "You can't do this. We've got to speak with one voice." He said, "You're right." He didn't like that he had to cancel the Gates speech. He didn't like to do that, because that created a problem within his inner family there, particularly with Brent. But with the Cheney thing, it was quick, and they went out there and they cut the ground out from under Dick quicker than you could imagine, because you can't have disparate public positions—this is one of the problems that's happening today. Everybody feels like they've got to go out and say something in response to the latest news story, and so the message is all diffused and diverse. You've got to have one message, and that's the way President Bush was. He knew how the national security apparatus ought to work and he made it work that way.

Young: So the foreign policy of the national security team, there were probably some deep differences among you, within.

Baker: Not too much.

Young: Or some disagreements.

Baker: Well, let me tell you what I think.

Young: But it rarely got out.

Baker: We didn't have the backbiting and backstabbing and leaking on each other. We didn't have that. We worked as a team. And I wrote that the main thing was the leadership of our President, because he knew how it ought to work. The second thing was we had all been friends in other iterations. Now, in terms of substantive differences, Dick was a little different. He had a more hard-line view, which emerged later in the 43 administration, I think, than some of the rest of us. But in terms of our approach and how do you walk the line between idealism, our principles and values on the one hand and our national interests on the other—Scowcroft, Baker, Bush, [Colin] Powell, we were all on the same wavelength, and Dick was a little bit different. But Dick was the kind of guy when he knew where the President was, that's where he would be. He was that way with Ford, who was a very moderate President.

Young: With respect to the general, what the United States does, as the news keeps coming out of the Soviet Union—you referred to it as the recognition of the decline of an empire. There were

two schools of thought about this. One is the weaker they get, the more they tend to break up, the better it is for the United States. Don't help them out of their dilemma or whatever it amounts to.

Baker: Right, right.

Young: That was your view and I imagine President Bush's also.

Baker: And Brent's and Colin's.

Young: There were people who were saying, "Gorbachev, he's just playing, he's tricking you." This goes way back, even to the Reagan administration.

Baker: "He's tricking you?" There were a lot of people who said that?

Young: Where was that view located in your time in the executive branch? Was it in the building anywhere?

Baker: That he was tricking us?

Young: No, no, this is in Reagan's time.

Baker: Reagan was leaning way forward at the end of his—

Young: Right, but there was a hard-line point of view, some kind of point of view, a very conservative point of view, "Don't deal with Gorbachev. Gorbachev is just another one of those—"

Baker: Well, I can't answer where it was. I will say this, that initially, I think Bob Gates, I think Brent, were more Cold-Warrior types. Bob wanted to give that speech. I read that speech and said, "We can't do that." And that speech basically said, "We've got to be careful." But the President and I and Brent fairly quickly came to the conclusion that these guys were genuine reformers, that we should work with them, that we could work with them, and that we ought to hope that they would succeed in their perestroika and glasnost.

Now, when did that happen? Certainly by the time of Malta. Malta was the first year, December. I concluded that—what I wrote in my book—with Shevardnadze before that. All he did was regale me with tales about how bad things were in the Soviet Union when we would meet. I never had an instance where he told me something and didn't live up to it. He used to have to act sometimes, in the arms control meetings we would have, to satisfy his generals, and you could tell when it was happening. In German unification, he had to attack.

Young: So most of you were onboard with the general approach, with your principles.

Baker: Yes.

Young: For dealing with the changing world.

Baker: I think so. We were onboard to the extent of feeling that there's evidence that these guys are genuine reformers and we ought to see if we can help them reform the system over there, and

that we don't lose anything by doing that, and that we're better off doing that, than if we take this hard-line approach.

Young: To the U.S. national interest to do that.

Baker: We thought it was in our national interests. And hey, by the way, it turned out to be in our national interest.

Riley: I want to come back and ask a question. You said that the national security apparatus worked the way that it was supposed to in this administration. Is it replicable?

Baker: Only if you get people—personnel is policy. First, you've got to have a strong President who understands how it's supposed to work and makes it work that way. Secondly, you've got to have people in the principal positions who respect each other, who are collegial in their approach, who have been friends in prior iterations maybe. I keep saying we were and are the exception to the rule. You look back; I defy you to find another administration where the national security apparatus worked as seamlessly as it did in ours. In every one of them you will find fighting and backbiting and bitching and leaking and all that stuff.

Young: That was in the Reagan years.

Baker: He had eight National Security Advisers, eight. He was a very successful President and is now voted the most successful we've had, even in front of Abraham Lincoln in a recent poll, but eight, *eight*. I've also arrogantly written—and he wrote this in his book by the way—that if he'd approved the job swap that Mike Deaver and I had worked out, where he would have become Chief of Staff and I would have been National Security Adviser, we wouldn't have had Iran-Contra. And we wouldn't have, we wouldn't have. Again, that's a very self-serving thing for me to say, but it's what I believe.

Riley: If Tower had survived, would the chemistry have been any different?

Baker: Yes, it would have been different. It's probably a really good thing for me that we ended up with Dick.

Riley: Why is that?

Baker: A lot of people were responsible for my political career and my public service career, but no one was any more responsible than Dick Cheney. George Bush obviously was right up there at the top, but Dick is the guy that pulled me out of obscurity. He was a 32-year-old White House Chief of Staff, and he went into the bowels of the Commerce Department and pulled the Deputy Secretary over.

Rog [Rogers] Morton had a lot to do with that. I'd worked for him as Commerce Secretary; he wanted me over at the campaign. When Ford's delegate hunter against Reagan was killed in an automobile accident, they came to me. That wouldn't have happened without Cheney. And then after the primary, after we won the fight with Reagan for the nomination, barely, they asked me to be Chair of the President Ford Committee in 1976, because Rog by that time had prostate

cancer. They needed to make a change, and that was as much Dick Cheney—it was Dick Cheney and Stu [Stuart] Spencer, Bob Teeter, people like that.

There were a lot of people. You know if you look back and you say but for this or that, it's true, but that's one thing. I was probably better off with Dick Cheney. We were buddies, we were close, we'd go on pack trips into the mountains in Wyoming.

Young: It might have been a different story, are you saying?

Baker: If Tower. The question was would it have been. Yes, it would have been. It might not have been quite as collegial. Tower had been Chairman of the Armed Services Committee. He might have seen himself as senior to a young upstart, former Democrat and Secretary of State. I don't know, John was a good friend, I got along well with John, but he was a man of strong views, and I think he would have been out there. Well, he was a Senator too. He'd been a Senator and as Chairman of Armed Services. He's used to articulating his own view of foreign policy.

Well, the Secretary of State is supposed to be the President's spokesman on foreign policy, and in President Bush's administration he made sure that was the case. Of course I had been his political person too, so nobody could ever challenge my bona fides politically, and foreigners knew when I spoke I was speaking for him, because we had been in a 40-year friendship. And I also wrote that if you want to be a successful Secretary of State, the most important ingredient is to have a good relationship with your President.

I'm not going to mention names, but you look back and see where the Secretary of State and the President are not really close, it doesn't work for the Secretary of State, because everybody wants a piece of that foreign policy turf, everybody, and you need a President who is going to protect you and support you and defend you even when you're wrong, which is what Bush did for me.

Riley: Let me ask you a question about that. In your book you indicate that you were doubles partners in tennis earlier.

Baker: Yes, we were.

Riley: And that you complemented one another. His game was different than yours, but you put the two of them together.

Baker: He was great at the net and I was great on ground strokes. We were both weak as servers. *[laughter]*

Riley: Were there any parallels in your foreign policy?

Baker: No, I don't think so, in foreign policy because there was no daylight between us. We really saw everything pretty much the same way.

Riley: Your strengths were the same strengths.

Baker: I think so.

Riley: And your weaknesses were the same weaknesses.

Baker: I believe so. Look at all the times where he followed—when I was a voice in the wilderness and he lined up with me. Going to the UN [United Nations] to get a resolution, Defense didn't want to do that, Margaret Thatcher didn't want to, a lot of people didn't want to do that. Hard-liners said, "Are you kidding? You're going to get all wrapped around the axle." I said, "Hell, we won't even bring it up if we don't know we have the votes," and he went with me.

We put a naval embargo on Iraq and they had a ship sailing for Yemen. I was at my ranch; it was summertime. I was at my ranch in Wyoming with nothing but a TacSat. I didn't have a phone out there in those days. I have a cabin way up in the wilderness. So I was talking to Shevardnadze with a military TacSat. I had to hit the satellite over the Indian Ocean to talk to him, and he was saying, "Give me two and a half to three days, and we're going to talk to Saddam [Hussein], to see if we get something done." Well, if we had taken that ship out, we'd have lost the Soviets. There wouldn't have been a coalition. They would have vetoed the use of force.

Young: Right.

Baker: I was a real voice in the wilderness and I said, "Please, I really think this is important." And he did. He overruled Brent, he overruled Margaret, he overruled Defense. Everybody was saying, "You can't have a naval embargo and then let one ship get through." And he said, "Well, I think this other is maybe more important."

The Two Plus Four. When there were internal people raising questions about whether we should use the Two Plus Four deal for German unification I was up at the Open Skies Conference in Canada and I had sold the damn thing to the British, who were against unification, and to the French and the Soviet Union who were against unification. And then I called up and I told him, "I got the Two Plus Four." And they said, "Well, I'm not sure the Chancellor is on board with this, are you sure about it?" I said, "I worked hard to get this done up here. My understanding when I left was this is what we wanted to do, and I've gotten it done; you can't see the limb off behind me." And he said, "Well—" I picked up the phone and called [Hans-Dietrich] Genscher and said, "You'd better get hold of the Chancellor and tell him that somebody in Washington is saying you're moving too fast here." That's what it was.

Young: Yes.

Baker: But I know what happened. It was some of the gnomes in the NSC who got Brent all stirred up, and it was also Horst Teltschik, frankly, who worked for Chancellor Helmut Kohl. But there I am, and it wasn't three hours before he called me back and said, "We're going to go with you. You're right. I've talked to the Chancellor; we're going to do it." I had said, "You'd better call the Chancellor now." I got Genscher to call the Chancellor too. But Bush was there with me. That's what I mean by having a relationship with your President. Like when I screwed up on the State of the Union stuff—and there were other instances.

I remember when the well was being poisoned for my Assistant Secretary for Inter-American Affairs, Latin America, Bernie Aronson. He was a Democrat. But he was strong on the Contra issue, he was on our side. I recruited him and he was one of a couple of Democrats that I put—you see, I had free license to staff the State Department. I didn't have to go to the White House Personnel Office. So I put him in there and it wasn't long before some of the hard-right guys in the Vice President's office, [J. Danforth] Quayle's office, were trashing him and feeding the President bad stuff about him. And one day I told the President, "I want to tell you something. Boy, this guy is really doing a great job, he's loyal to you." Without Bernie Aronson, we wouldn't have gotten a Central America thing, in my view. The President said okay and he supported me thereafter on Aronson. Having that support is really, really critical.

Young: Well, his support, his trust, his implicit trust in your judgment, not playing games.

Baker: To be willing to support you alone against—I've given you three or four examples. There were plenty of others, I guess, but those are the three or four that I can remember off the top of my head. That friendship was so important. He was there for me, even when I screwed up, and of course I tried to be there as well for him. But we had a good team, we had a really good national security team, and again, we'd all been together in prior iterations.

Strong: Can I follow up on one thing you mentioned?

Baker: Sure.

Strong: Is President Bush on the phone with foreign leaders a lot?

Baker: Yes.

Strong: And is he doing that always to clarify some issue like Two Plus Four, or is he just keeping in touch and maintaining?

Baker: He's doing the latter.

Strong: He's doing the latter.

Baker: Yes. Well, if you know this guy and you know how he operates politically, he pens these little personal notes. The secret of his success is that he'll pen a little personal note to everybody for everything. He's a communicator, he's always in touch.

Strong: And as Secretary of State is he filling you in on those conversations? Are you reading the notes that are—?

Baker: Nothing ever happened that I wasn't privy to. There was never a time when anybody from the NSC was sent to see a foreign leader or met with a foreign leader that I didn't know about. There was a rule that the White House Chief of Staff would never meet with Ambassadors, for instance. One time it happened with [John] Sununu and I just blew up in front of the President. He was embarrassed I got so mad, but what did he do? He came down and he said, "You're not supposed to do that, John." So he was protective of his Secretary of State.

People used to write occasionally that he would have been better as Secretary of State than President. Well, that's bullshit. He was a terrific President, but he would have been an extraordinary Secretary of State. There wasn't anything that ever happened that I didn't know about, and there was never any mission that I wasn't talked to first, or that there wasn't a State Department person along. You look at Scowcroft's mission to China and the aftermath of Tiananmen when he was caught toasting the Chinese and everything. Larry Eagleburger was on that trip, right? That's the way Bush operated, and that was his initiative as much as it was mine—I'm glad it worked that way and I probably would have complained if it hadn't, but I didn't have to.

Let me say something about Brent Scowcroft. When the President talked to me about who he was going to pick as his National Security Adviser, he said, "What do you think?" I said, "I think that's terrific, he's done it for Ford." And he said, "Well, I'm going to approach him." This was before he approached him, and he did, and Brent called me and he said, "I want to tell you something. I'm going to take this job, but I want you to know, as Secretary of State, that I am never going to go on television unless you tell me it's OK." I wrote this. "Unless you say it's okay." Well, having done that, it was fine with me. He could go on anytime he wanted to.

He was the perfect National Security Adviser—low key, low profile, and we never had—except maybe that time when I got in the way of the State of the Union, and that was my fault. He was a terrific NSC Adviser, and he, too, knew how it should work. I also wrote that Cheney and I, while we had differences, a lot of them, I bet we didn't take four or five issues to the President. We'd work them out in Brent's office.

Now this is a terrible—you're giving me a chance to say it, so I'm going to say it. You look at the foreign policy record of this administration and some of the things that happened. You look at the Central America Accord, you look at the unification of Germany, as a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the diplomacy. Substantial diplomatic accomplishment. You look at the Madrid Peace Conference, the first time Israel and all of our Arab neighbors ever got together face-to-face to talk peace. You look at the collapse of the Soviet Union in a peaceful way, the Cold War ending peacefully. You look at a textbook case of the way to fight a war—politically, diplomatically, militarily, and economically—get everybody else to pay for it. That was a textbook case of the way to eject Iraq from Kuwait. It's the only time in history that the UN Security Council has operated the way the founders intended, in terms of using force against a member state. The only time, except in the Korean War, when the Soviets walked out. All of that wouldn't have happened without his leadership.

Young: And his team, I think. It was this very unusual time in history and an unusual collection of people, unique maybe.

Baker: Yes, well, I said we're the exception to the rule in my view. I think history is going to treat him very well. I'm sure it will in terms of the foreign policy aspects of his Presidency. He unfortunately was not able to achieve reelection, thanks to Ross Perot.

Young: Could you talk a little bit as Secretary of State about the politics of dealing with Congress on some of these big ticket—of course there's the loan guarantee.

Baker: We had the loan guarantee. Well, yes, the only time AIPAC [America Israel Public Affairs Committee] has ever been beaten was in 1981, on AWACS [Airborne Early Warning and Control Systems], and in 1991 on the loan guarantee.

Young: Could you talk a little bit about how—

Baker: And that's tough stuff.

Young: The behind the scenes story on that, how that happened.

Baker: How loan guarantees happened?

Young: No, the story on the loan guarantees.

Baker: Yes, we can get into that in some detail if you want, but generally, let me say—

Young: Generally, the politics of it. How did you happen to get that done?

Baker: Generally, let me say this. I had a great team at the State Department too. I had some really experienced professional politicians in Margaret Tutwiler and in Bob Zoellick and Janet Mullins, who was our Congressional liaison. We judge our Presidents on the basis of what they can do with the Congress oftentimes, that's really how we make some judgment. Not necessarily in the foreign policy area, but in the domestic policy area certainly. I spent four years at the right hand of an extraordinarily wonderful President in Ronald Reagan, and I ran his Congressional operation.

Anybody who goes to Washington who doesn't understand that you've got three major power centers that you've got to deal with, they're not going to succeed. One is the Congress, one is the press, and the other is the bureaucracy, and you have to deal with them politically and adroitly, and we did that with Reagan. So we had some experience in doing it when it came time to try and do it for Bush's foreign policy. I wrote in *The Politics of Diplomacy* that my political experience was invaluable to me as Secretary of State. So was my legal experience, because being Secretary of State is very much a political job, but it's also a negotiating job. Political experience really strengthens you in both of those. Loan guarantees I think I've written about pretty extensively in *The Politics of Diplomacy*.

Young: Yes, you have.

Baker: President Bush got off to an unfortunate start with Yitzhak Shamir, the Prime Minister of Israel. Yitzhak Shamir, in one of his first meetings with President Bush said, "Don't worry about the settlements. We're going to take care of that; we'll deal with that." President Bush interpreted that to mean, "We're going to slow it down, we're going to stop it, we're going to deal with your problems." Every administration, Democrat or Republican, had been opposed to settlements. And then when that didn't happen, there was sort of a sense of betrayal I think on President Bush's part.

Did we have the loan guarantee fight before or after we ejected Iraq from Kuwait?

Young: It came up, as I recall—am I right about this, Bob? It came up at a very crucial moment, before the—

Baker: Before we went in?

Young: Before you went in, and it was like a fire bell.

Baker: We already had commitments from Egypt and Syria to send forces to the Gulf when this happened.

Young: I think so, but I'm not sure about that.

Baker: Well, I'll tell you a couple of things.

Young: But the question was, Israel will break away.

Baker: One of the major things we did was to keep Israel from being involved in that war, but I give credit to Yitzhak Shamir. He was really hard-line. Did you know that after [Benjamin] Netanyahu became Prime Minister the first time Shamir called him squishy, too soft, he'd given away too much? So that's how hard-line he was. But I'll tell you, when the war broke out and Israel was hit by the Scuds, they wanted to intervene, particularly Moshe Arens, the Defense Minister, and others. We got on the horn to them and at that time the President's relationship with Shamir was quite strained. He asked me to call him and I called the Prime Minister. I said, "We sure hope you're not going to—this would really turn this from an international community against Saddam Hussein to an Arab-Israeli dispute, and it really would be counterproductive." To his everlasting credit, Shamir overruled his Minister and said, "We're going to let the Americans take care of this." And we agreed to do some more sorties on the Scud sites in Western Iraq and so forth.

I can't remember when loan guarantees first came up, but I do remember the Prime Minister asking me for \$10 million, and I said that I would take that back to Washington, but that at the very least we'd want some assurance that it wouldn't be used to settle Diaspora Jews in the occupied territory. If you look in *The Politics of Diplomacy*, the tick-tock ought to be there, but at some point Shamir said, "My people tell me we can get it from the Congress."

Young: That's right, that's what I was going to say.

Baker: And I said, "Okay, then I suppose maybe we'll see you on Capitol Hill." I can't remember exactly when that was. I had been talking to Washington, because I wouldn't have said that on my own. But we'd taken the position. I think the President had already taken the position that he wasn't going to give the loan guarantees unless there was a commitment not to use them for settlement in the territories. And Shamir said, "Well, we can get it from the—"

Young: We can go around you and get it from the Congress.

Baker: The question then, I think, in my mind, was could they override a veto, and I don't think they could have done that. But anyway, we ended up beating them straight up on it.

Young: That must have been a pretty difficult task.

Baker: We beat him in the House and then we beat him barely in the Senate, I think. No, maybe it was okay in the Senate. What we won in the Senate was the vote in the Senate to go to war, to kick Iraq out of Kuwait; it was 52-47. That was a tough fight there. And then the AWACS vote was really tough, way back in '81, that was the Reagan administration, because when we decided we were going to—the one thing Jimmy Carter said to Ronald Reagan, in a meeting in the Oval right after the election, when the new President comes in—I was there as his Chief of Staff. He said, “I hope you’ll support me on AWACS to Saudi Arabia. We’re worried about Iran.” And President Reagan said, “I will.”

The first week we took office, we’re greeted with a letter from 75 Senators saying “Don’t sell AWACS to—” and at that time the fight was being led over at the State Department. Al [Alexander, Jr.] Haig was doing it over there, but it wasn’t going very well. He and Dick Allen were doing it and the President said, “Let’s bring it in here to the White House.” We brought it in and formed a war room in my office, the Chief of Staff’s office, and we finally won that, but very narrowly. We probably gave away the store to do it. I don’t remember all that.

So yes, that was tough, the loan guarantee. But I’ll tell you one thing the loan guarantee fight did. In my view it probably made Madrid possible. Madrid was important, not just because it broke a taboo. If you remember back in those days, the Arabs wouldn’t talk to Israel, they wouldn’t even sit down with them, and that was 25 years or so of policy. The loan guarantee fight was really a fight about settlements.

Young: Yes.

Baker: This didn’t impact in one way all of the stuff that we were going to continue to give Israel, and did continue, and in fact we even increased it. It was just that one issue, and that is one of things that I think—I don’t know this for sure—caused Syria to change 25 years of policy and say that she would come to Madrid. And when Syria said it would come to Madrid, it was pretty hard then for Shamir. The Israeli position for 25 years had been, “All we want to do is have a chance to talk face-to-face with our neighbors.” So at that point he was not able to say, “We’re not going to come to Madrid,” although he didn’t like it, didn’t want to do it.

Young: Generally, about how much time did you have to spend, or your staff, Janet Mullins and others, minding, working.

Baker: Quite a lot. All of these big Congressional fights, you spend a lot—calling Senators or Congressmen on the phone, trying to get their vote, having the President call them, bringing them down to the White House. You know the drill. We did it all the time on the big fights.

Young: You had to carry the water for your own issues on that. The White House didn’t, on Congressional relations.

Baker: Oh, no. On loan guarantees the White House was very much involved. No, no. But the Cabinet department that has jurisdiction over the issue is the one that’s in the lead, generally. If it’s tax reform, it’s the Treasury Secretary, if it’s loan guarantees, it’s the Secretary of State. If it’s—whatever it might be.

Riley: You write in *The Politics of Diplomacy* about your aversion to getting engaged.

Baker: Involved in that. I was taking the advice of people whose judgment I respected, a lot of people. I wrote about having gone to see every former Secretary of State, and I think I wrote about the advice they gave me. By the way, there's a lot of good stuff on that in my papers, which are up at the Seeley Mudd Library in Princeton. I think there will be copies down here at Rice University at some point. But the notes I took from all those meetings are up there. I think I met with almost every former Secretary of State, as I did when I became Chief of Staff, I met with all the former Chiefs of Staff. A number of people said to be careful of the Arab-Israeli dispute; it's sort of a graveyard for Secretaries of State. So I started carefully, but we made a lot of progress to get them talking to each other after 25 years. I'm going to claim—I hope this is correct, I believe it is—that it led to the Israel-Jordan peace agreement. You see, it led directly to Oslo. The United States wasn't involved in Oslo. The parties did that off to the side and it was dramatic. But had you not had Madrid, you wouldn't have had Oslo. You wouldn't have had Oslo in '93. Madrid was in '91, '92 maybe. I can't remember.

Riley: You occasionally mention in the book that the President was getting letters from Richard Nixon.

Baker: Yes, he got letters from him. I would occasionally get letters from him. Nixon stayed involved. I've got a letter posted out here on the wall. You may not have seen it.

Riley: No, I did not.

Baker: I was Treasury Secretary. It says, "Jim, I'm writing to let you know I'm going to start paying for my own security. The American taxpayers shouldn't have to pay for this. And don't try to talk me out of it. Nixon." And he did. He picked up his own security and dismissed his Secret Service for life.

Riley: Did President Bush have conversations with Nixon?

Baker: I don't know that he had conversations, but I think occasionally Nixon might come in. I can't remember. I think Reagan had more direct contact with Nixon.

Young: Getting back to the Congressional front again.

Baker: Excuse me, but let me say on that issue—I think I wrote in *Work Hard, Study* that Nixon advised Bush not to ask me to resign as Treasury Secretary. Didn't I, John?

Williams: Yes.

Baker: Nixon said, "Don't do that. It makes you look weak." But at that point we were 18 points behind. He was 18 points behind [Michael] Dukakis. Reagan didn't want me to go over either; I wrote that in the book. He thought I could be more beneficial at the Treasury, but that wasn't 41's view, and I think 41 was probably right. He had a dysfunctional campaign organization at that time because they had six people, the gang of six, and that wasn't working real well. We talked about that probably, on the prior oral history interview.

Strong: There's a Nixon quote about George Bush. I can't quote it literally, but it goes more or less like this: "He's one of those politicians that everybody underestimates. Don't underestimate him. When the big play has to be made, he will be there."

Baker: That's probably true. He made a lot of big plays in his political career. Here's a guy who was an asterisk in the polls when we started his Presidential campaign in 1979, and he was the only one standing against a heads-on favorite in Reagan. He's the only other one who had delegates at the convention. If he hadn't had those delegates, Reagan wouldn't have picked him. He didn't want to pick him. At that time it was anybody but Bush. But boy, Reagan knew that he had a jewel in his Vice President, and they became really close friends, not just partners but friends. And as we said earlier in the interview, Bush sure knew how to do the job of Vice President. I'll tell you who was also underestimated: Reagan. The chattering class all thought he was just a shoot-from-the-hip cowboy and they found out differently. Why don't we take a five-minute break.

Young: Okay.

[BREAK]

Baker: They're doing an oral history on me up there at the Seeley Mudd Library. All of that, together with a complete copy of my political and public service papers, will also be down here, but the original papers themselves are up there. They're right on the same shelf with John Foster Dulles's papers. *[laughs]*

Strong: A big shelf.

Baker: If you look at that second book I wrote, the first picture in the book is a picture of Ike [Dwight D. Eisenhower]. When I attended the inaugural in 1952, I was a Marine in the Korean War at Quantico. I came up with my girlfriend; somebody gave us tickets to the parade and we were right across the street from the reviewing stands. And there in the car with Ike, the new President, is his new Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles. Our papers are right next to each other's.

Riley: All right, Jim, you had another question about Congress.

Young: Well, this is not the most important thing about it, but you stressed at the beginning of the book the importance of having some consensus in Congress. You faced an opposition party Congress throughout your years, a large Democratic Party majority in the Bush administration, and you come to the Gulf War and they're not with you on this at the beginning.

Baker: That's correct.

Young: How should people in history read this? Because you were very good in dealing with Congress. The President was good, you were good. You probably had personal friends there from old times as well.

Baker: Yes.

Young: So how should people understand how that problem arose of having a problem with Congress and the country?

Baker: The problem exists—it didn't arise—when you have a Congress of the other party and you have to work with them. That's why sometimes a President will be more consensus oriented when they have a Congress of the other party. Ronald Reagan had a Democratic House. He had to deal with [Thomas P.] Tip O'Neill and did. Everybody thought he was such an ideologue and hard-line conservative. He was at heart a pretty damn good pragmatist. I've written so many times that he'd say to me, "Jim, I'd rather get 80 percent of what I want than go over the cliff with my flag flying." So you had to work the Congress. You weren't in a position where you could say to yourself, *We're just going to ram this through.*

Generally speaking, it's hard. Look at the problems [Barack] Obama had, trying to get health care through a solid Democratic Congress, some of the problems '43 had with a complete Republican Congress, his Social Security stuff and things like that.

When the time came to take the nation to war—and again, the Vietnam syndrome was not dead. The only time we'd ever had any conflict was Grenada, which some people refer to as a police action, and it really was not that major an expedition. And here we were sending 500,000 Americans to the Gulf to eject the fourth largest army in the world from Kuwait, a long way around the world. It was not a popular thing, and the Democratic opposition in the Congress was fanning the flames of unpopularity.

I write about how I'd go up there to have to testify and I'd be met with these cries of, "How many dead Americans is it worth, Mr. Secretary, to do what you're talking about doing? And how can we do this, with the cost of this, given all the social requirements we have in this country?" And it was that, in the final analysis, I came back to the President. I said, "We're going to have to figure out a way to get some help paying for this war or we're not going to get the approval that you want from the Congress."

I think the President would have gone ahead anyway, even if he hadn't gotten Congress's approval. In fact I know he would have, under the view that he had that authority under the Constitution to conduct the nation's foreign policy.

Young: But he—

Baker: But he wanted to get the support of Congress so he could say that the American people were behind the effort, get the people's representatives. Now where we really had trouble was in the Senate. So that triggered a couple of things. Number one, it gave more viability to my argument that we should go, if we could, to the UN to get our resolution authorizing the use of force. The voices that were opposed to that, they had to acknowledge or recognize that if we were able to do it, it would go a long way toward getting the approval of the American people.

Once we got the use of force resolution, I was able to go up to the Senate, let's say the Senate and the House or the Senate, and say to either Senator or Congressman, "You mean you're not going to support the President in this action that he's taking for the national interest of the country? The President of Ethiopia is going to support him, but you're not?" It was a very powerful argument.

The other thing was on the economic side; we got this war paid for. We paid \$10 million, which is a lot of money, but nothing in the big picture. The war cost \$70 or \$75 billion, and we got all but \$10 million paid for. Why did we do that? Because we kept getting met with arguments. Particularly, I remember Senator Robert Byrd saying, "How can you do this in the face of all the needs we have here?" I came back to the President and said, "Guess what? We ought to be thinking about trying to go to the people whose interests we are going to protect by this action we're going to take and have them contribute." After all, they're these oil-producing countries; they've got a lot of it.

So we started the Tin Cup mission, and I went first to the Saudis and I said, "I want \$15 billion." And they said, "What have you got from the Kuwaitis?" I said, "Well, nothing yet," and they said, "When you get \$15 billion from the Kuwaitis, then we'll talk about \$15 billion." I went to the Kuwaitis and they said money was no object. Then I went back to King [Bin Abdul Aziz al Saud] Fahd, and King Fahd said, "I don't want to talk to you about the amount. It doesn't matter what the amount is. Just go in there and talk to your former friend, the Saudi Finance Minister." When I was Treasury Secretary, I knew this guy. I went in there and he was as white as a sheet. He heard the King say, "Just talk to the Finance Minister." *[laughter]*

The Saudis came up with \$15 billion and the Kuwaitis came up with \$15 billion, and even the Germans, who couldn't do anything militarily, came up with \$6 billion. I think the Japanese—we got it from everybody, and that's why I say it was a textbook case of the way to go to war politically, diplomatically, militarily, and economically.

Young: How did you get them to give all this money?

Baker: They had a lot at risk. They couldn't kick Iraq out of Kuwait; Iraq was a serious threat to the Saudis, and they were brutalizing Kuwait. So they weren't going to argue over dollars. Fifteen billion is a lot of money, but to them?

Young: But also, Japan and others contributed.

Baker: Well, when we went to the UN, the international—that made this. This was an egregious act of aggression, and there wasn't any argument, except—the only countries we didn't have were North Korea, Libya, Cuba, and one or two others. Once you got to that point, people would—and look, it was right in the aftermath of the end of the Cold War, or the Cold War was ending. It wasn't quite over, but it was quite clear that the United States was going to be the sole remaining—well, maybe not sole remaining superpower, because we didn't know the Soviet Union would implode, but it was quite clear that the United States was the preeminent country in the world. People wanted to stay close to us, and Germany and Japan had been longtime allies, and we just unified Germany. So they had a good reason to help.

Riley: Was Panama an important predicate for all of this?

Baker: Panama simply showed that the United States was going to use all of the arrows in its quiver. It wasn't going to be tied down to having to go multilaterally, having just to go in unilaterally. We were going to use informal coalitions; we were going to use the existing bodies of NATO, the UN, the IMF [International Monetary Fund], the World Bank. We're going to use all of the tools at our disposal, and the surest and best test of a great power is if your national interest requires it, you just go do it. Like Margaret Thatcher said to President Bush when we were debating whether we would go to the UN to get a resolution. She was sitting there in the Oval Office and she says, "Oh, George, let's just go do it." Her argument was legally correct and logical, that we could do it under Article 51 of the UN charter. But if we'd done that, we wouldn't have had the support. We wouldn't have had the rest of the world, we wouldn't have had a use of force resolution, and we wouldn't have had the Congress of the United States.

Riley: Was there much internal dissent within the administration? Were there some hard-line voices?

Baker: No. Defense said we're going to get all wrapped around the axle. But we talked and I said, "Let me tell you something, Dick, we're not even going to call a vote. If we don't have the votes, don't worry, we aren't going to call a vote." That's frankly the mistake that was made in the second Gulf War, going for that second resolution, asking for it to be brought up before they knew they had the votes to pass it. Then it looks like well, if you've gone for it and you don't get it, you shouldn't go. That's what her fear was, and it was a legitimate fear. France, Britain, and the Soviets were really worried that history would repeat itself, and they were—to say "lukewarm" is an understatement. They were not in favor of German unification. They came along when America and Germany showed a real desire to get it done, commitment to getting it done.

Strong: Did Senators understand that if they hadn't voted to approve the Gulf War, the administration was going to go ahead anyway?

Baker: I don't think they did. No, I don't believe so, but we would have. You got a little bit of the same problem once you bring it up, but I think he would have gone ahead. But we didn't have to call for the vote until the vote count showed that we were pretty close.

Riley: Any specific hard cases of members you had to deal with?

Baker: Oh yes, but I'd have to go back to *The Politics of Diplomacy* for that, or even the second book might add some in that. Yes, there were hard cases. One of the guys who voted for it was Al [Albert, Jr.] Gore, if you remember correctly, when we agreed to give him more time to speak on C-SPAN [Cable-Satellite Public Affairs Network]. He said, "I'll vote for it if you give me 15 minutes." That's when our Senate leadership agreed with that. He was going to run for President. It's true.

Young: So had you anticipated the difficulties with Congress that arose over the Gulf War?

Baker: I'm not sure I anticipated the depth of the opposition on the economic front.

Young: There were some who were saying you hadn't given sanctions.

Baker: That's correct, a lot of them.

Young: So there were various arguments.

Baker: That's correct. There were people who didn't want us to do it who would use that argument.

Young: And there were people saying it's not clear what we're going there for, is it for oil or is it for this? The message wasn't terribly clear.

Baker: We used all of the arguments. We should have used them all, I think. I used one and I got criticized for it, when I said it's jobs. Well it *was* jobs. Look, I'd been in three administrations and in every one of them we've had a game plan that we would fight to preserve secure access to the energy supplies of the Persian Gulf. So I said, "Why the hell don't we call a spade a spade?" Everybody said, "Oh, tsk, tsk, tsk. You have to have a higher moralistic purpose than that in mind."

Young: Well, you did, actually.

Baker: We did. We also said it was to reverse unprovoked aggression and to get rid of a [Adolph] Hitler. Were we not supposed to use all of the arguments? Why were we restricted to one? That's what I never understand. All the people who criticized us. Why do you have to be restricted to one? If there are a lot of good arguments for doing it, use them all.

Young: You had the argument, of course, it was an invasion of another country.

Baker: Absolutely, unprovoked aggression against a small neighbor.

Young: Yes, sure.

Baker: That's not the way the world ought to operate. And they were brutalizing the Kuwaitis, see, we had that too. President Bush and I are Episcopalians, and the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, Edmond Browning, called and said he wanted to come see us. He said war is wrong, it's immoral, there's no sense saying it was a just war. So he came in and we met with him in the Oval, just the three of us: Bishop Browning, President Bush, and me. He said, "You shouldn't be doing this war, it's just wrong." So we pulled out the Amnesty International report that had all the pictures of the atrocities. They were cutting people's tongues out and they were raping the women. It was just an awful, brutal occupation. We didn't win him over, but I think we made him think.

Strong: Did those reports matter a great deal to George Bush?

Baker: Yes, they sure did.

Strong: Coming back to Panama, and this is again, something Gates says or hints at. He thought what really made a difference was the sexual abuse to the Navy lieutenant's wife.

Baker: Right.

Strong: Everyone knew that when Noriega oversteps the bounds, there will be a response. That was known. But he says it was that report that may well have turned the President to *Okay, this is it, he has overstepped the bounds.*

Baker: I think that's true.

Strong: And he attributes that to a kind of almost old-fashioned gentleman.

Baker: Noblesse oblige.

Strong: Well, not that, but that George Bush would have been offended by that story to a degree that maybe some other—

Baker: I don't know whether you can say that or not. I don't do comparisons.

Strong: I know you don't. So those human rights stories mattered to him also.

Baker: They did. They did and they do, you bet. You will not find a kinder, gentler, more compassionate person than George Bush. That's the way he is, thoughtful. If he were here, he'd be getting up and getting your coffee refilled and doing all that. Any time you're sitting having a drink with him, he's passing the hors d'oeuvres around. But he's thoughtful in other ways too. I don't mean just good manners. But that's the way he is, and I agree with Bob if that's what Bob wrote. That's what just triggered a visceral reaction. *Wait a minute. Why would we put up with this?*

Riley: You also report on occasions that he's very competitive?

Baker: Very.

Riley: You indicate that there were occasions you were able to turn that to your advantage. You'd find a way to present something to him.

Baker: I can't remember any good example. I think that's probably true. Did I give you some examples? I don't remember. We'd get out there on that tennis court and I do write about this. The tennis pro at the Houston Country Club was a guy named Hector Salazar from Central America. Hector was terrific, and he would play customer tennis with us. I knew he was playing customer tennis and I could never convince George Bush of that. He thought that by golly, this—he would carry the match to a 7-5 in the third set. He would dump easy shots into the net or something and George would say, "Come on now, Baker, we're moving up on him, we're going to win this thing." He was playing customer tennis with us. It's true. He might even acknowledge that today, maybe not.

We had some wonderful times together; it was right at the time he was getting into politics the first time. No, that's not correct. When did he run for—it was when he ran for the Congress and got elected, in the '60s. We won the Houston Country Club tennis doubles title in 1966 and '67. I was out at the club eating supper with my wife the other night and George and Barbara [Bush] were in a separate room. I heard that they were there, so I went in to see them. They were sitting

in the men's grill, right under the big plaque that says in 1966 and 1967, George H.W. Bush and James A. Baker—we were reminiscing about that. He's having trouble getting around now.

Riley: Yes?

Baker: I mean walking.

Riley: Exactly.

Baker: But there's a big deal coming up this Monday in Washington. We've got the Points of Light. All of the former Presidents are going to be there. It's going to be a big deal.

Riley: I was supposed to see Jean Becker tomorrow to interview her.

Baker: You can't. It's overwhelming.

Riley: It is. So I said let's hold off and we agreed we'll do it in May at some point.

Baker: She's been good for him.

Riley: You indicate you had biweekly meetings with the President during the administration.

Baker: Twice a week.

Riley: Twice a week.

Baker: But that's a formality. I met with the President anytime I wanted to. I of course had walk-in rights and all the rest, and I would call him on the phone a lot. But the biweekly thing came with a continuation, I think, of the Reagan practice, where we made sure that President Reagan had the opportunity to meet with his Secretary of State twice a week, alone, if the Secretary wanted it.

Riley: Were these frequent enough so that there was a pattern of how the meetings went?

Baker: No. I wouldn't focus too much on those, because I didn't need those meetings, but we just continued them from the Reagan administration. My relationship with the President was closer than that, I mean I didn't need to—but I usually used the time to talk to him about things that I might want to talk to him about.

Strong: You were more likely to set the agenda: "These are the things that we should talk about."

Baker: Yes, I would set the agenda.

Riley: And that would include foreign and domestic things?

Baker: No. You know, being Secretary of State is a humongous job. It's a big job, a difficult job, you're gone a lot. And I really didn't do much politics. For instance, I wasn't in on the decisions about the library and where he was going to put it and things like that that normally I

would have been in on with him. I wasn't in on a lot of the political decisions. I used to get calls from people saying we need to get going, he's not going. I said, "Look, I've got all I could say grace over here. I can't." I do remember, and I write about this in one of the books, flying home from a foreign trip on the evening of the New Hampshire primary, when Pat Buchanan got a lot of votes up here. And I'm thinking to myself, *Hmmmmmm, I may be looking at going back to the campaign.* And sure enough that's what happened.

Riley: When you're traveling, you're in touch. A great deal of *The Politics of Diplomacy* is text of the messages that you're writing to the President.

Baker: Yes, and secure phone calls.

Riley: The text that's in *The Politics of Diplomacy* is directly from messages that you—

Baker: Absolutely. Warren Christopher was very good to me. He gave me an office at the State Department, and any time you read something in *The Politics of Diplomacy* that's in quotes, it's exactly what was said, because it comes out of the memcons [memorandums of conversation]. Some of those are still classified; most of them are not. But if it's in quotes in that book, it was out of the memcon of conversation I had with a foreign leader.

You know what I think would be interesting to you guys maybe? We'll get it for you. We've declassified the text of the meeting with Tariq Aziz in Geneva. It's a fascinating meeting because it will show you this guy was really adroit at handling a terrible brief in a reasonably efficient way. It's interesting, if you're interested in the Gulf War.

Riley: Absolutely.

Baker: Everybody thought we were going to go there and negotiate. That was never the purpose. The purpose was to make sure historians were not able to say, "You went to war. You just jumped the gun here. You didn't exhaust every possible opportunity to resolve it diplomatically." John, see if we can get a copy of that.

Strong: Did the President do his important work in phone conversations or in face-to-face conversations rather than on paper?

Baker: I don't know the answer to that. He wrote notes all the time. You're talking now about the four years that I was Secretary of State.

Strong: Right.

Baker: I don't know how much of that was—but I'd say probably so. He did a lot of it in phone conversation.

Strong: Again, we don't want to make comparisons, but in general, Carter, Nixon, they did a lot of work on paper. And if you have access to the documents they received and the notes they wrote in the margin, you learn a lot. For other Presidents, those documents are less important, because Lyndon Johnson was doing a lot of his work in phone conversations and not writing down.

Baker: But there are transcripts of every conversation a President has with a foreign leader.

Strong: There are, and again, many of them have been released. The Kohl transcripts are released.

Baker: Yes, most of them, after 20 years, are usually released. I used to keep some fairly significant notes. I never kept a diary, but I kept notes, until about the 15th time I was called to testify before the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] about some investigation or something. It's too bad, it's too bad for history, but that damn independent counsel law was a terrible thing. I don't know whether you guys remember this, but Ford's Attorney General initiated an independent counsel investigation of him within four or five weeks of the election. What a perversion of the political process, but he was compelled to do it by the independent counsel law that says if you get one allegation from a credible source, you can—it would be the greatest thing in the world to get rid of that damn thing. I'll tell you who will tell you that too, is Bill Clinton. [laughter] But he signed a renewal of it.

Strong: He signed it. [laughter]

Baker: I mean come *on*.

Riley: And I think over his wife's objections, if I remember correctly.

Baker: Really?

Riley: Yes.

Baker: Maybe so. But boy, I tell you, I know where he would be on that now.

Riley: You went to Malta?

Baker: Yes, you bet.

Riley: Unless my memory fails me, I don't think there was much said about that event in *The Politics of Diplomacy*.

Baker: Oh, yes, there was.

Riley: Yes?

Baker: Oh, yes. I remember there's a picture of it and a summary.

Williams: A five-page summary.

Baker: No, there was a lot said about it, a really important meeting. President Bush got that idea from [Franklin D.] Roosevelt's meeting, I think, with Ibn Saud or something. So here we are on a cruiser and the damn thing is going like this, and I've got a Scopolamine patch on the back of my ear because I get seasick very easily. And then we get word that Gorbachev isn't going to come to our cruiser the way he was supposed to, because he can't swim. [laughter] He got scared, and so we had our meeting on the *Maxim Gorky*. But that was an important meeting, if

for no other reason than to begin to establish a relationship between the two of them, a relationship that Shevardnadze and I had already begun to establish, and a relationship of cooperation and trust.

Strobe Talbott and Michael Beschloss have written a book called *At the Highest Levels* that's really interesting about the U.S./Soviet relationship with the Bush administration and the Reagan administration. If you haven't seen it, you might take a look at it.

Riley: And it resonates as being true to you?

Baker: I think what's in it is true, yes. The one point it makes, which I think is true, is Shevardnadze was leaning more forward than his boss, because he maybe didn't have the political constraints. And then of course he didn't think his boss was successfully defending him, and that's when he quit. That was a dark day for us, because it looked like the Soviet Union might go back to the hard-line repression period. That was the time with Lithuania and stuff like that. But that book, I would call that to you if you're interested in supplementing this period. If this is just an oral history that's just another oral history, you're not looking at the Bush administration's foreign policy, except by way of oral history.

Riley: No, no, exactly.

Strong: That's correct.

Riley: That's correct. This is to be used as a resource document on its own, but it's important.

Baker: Well, you might have that in the bibliography. You can take a look at that book. You might want to put it in the bibliography.

Strong: Can I ask you about Shevardnadze? You described your relationship as a friendship.

Baker: Yes.

Strong: Would that also be appropriate to describe the relationship between Gorbachev and President Bush?

Baker: Yes, I think so.

Strong: There are real advantages to having those kinds of relationships.

Baker: You bet.

Strong: Are there also disadvantages?

Baker: Yes, because some people said, "We'll accuse you of sacrificing the interests of your country for the friendship." Well, you don't do that, but if you have the friendship—I call it a relationship of trust. If you have the trust, you can get a hell of a lot more done than if you don't. If you and I are trying to negotiate something and I know I can trust your word, we've got a

better chance of getting there than we do if—and if you think the same about me. So it's not so much friendship as it is a relationship, knowing that you can trust your interlocutor.

Strong: And how does one acquire that?

Baker: You test it.

Strong: You test it. What tests did Shevardnadze pass?

Baker: I think I said this early on in our discussion this morning. I never can remember an instance where he would tell me something and do something else, unless he was just acting for his generals, and I would know that.

Riley: He would not signal to you.

Baker: No, he wouldn't signal.

Riley: You had a sixth sense for it.

Baker: Well, you could tell. If he tells you something and then—you can just tell he wouldn't say that. But he never betrayed my confidence; neither did Yitzhak Shamir, by the way. I write in my book that I never met with him except one-on-one. I wouldn't have any note takers; I didn't want any, he didn't want any. He never once told me anything that he didn't follow through on, even though we disagreed fundamentally, particularly so with policy. Shevardnadze is not really too well now. He never told me anything that didn't turn out to be true.

Riley: But the question that is fascinating, that scholars are always asking: What's the role of the individual in historical events?

Baker: I've just tried to explain it the best I can, that you're always better off if you can trust the guy across the table, but you'll never know that until you test him. If he agrees to some things, if he ever welshes on you or if he ever lies to you, then you've got a problem.

Young: You've dealt with a lot of different personalities in foreign leaders. What happens when you have to negotiate with somebody where there isn't much trust, like [Hafez al-] Assad? How do you build a relationship that you can get anything out of with somebody like that? Your accounts of these hours and hours of sitting—

Baker: I spent a long time with Assad, but he welshed on me once. I can remember it like it was yesterday. And so I said, "Okay, that's it." I closed my folder. They were talking in Arabic and my Assistant Secretary at the time was Ed Djerejian, who's the director here of the institute, and he heard him say the Vice President of Syria, [Abdul Halim] Khaddam, who was a hard-line guy, he said he's getting upset, he may leave. Ed told me later that's what they said in Arabic. At that, Assad backed off of what he had—it's all detailed in *The Politics of Diplomacy*. He had told me something and then in the meeting a day later or two days later, he said, "That's not what I said." Well, it was. But when you do that, you'd better be prepared to walk away. In other words, don't ever try to bluff that. I was ready to walk away if what he told me the day before or two days before was going to change.

Riley: It was the land issue, the question of U.S. security force on the borders.

Baker: On the Golan—

Riley: Yes.

Baker: Really?

Riley: As opposed to giving it. I'm pretty sure.

Baker: I can't remember. It's in there.

Riley: Yes.

Strong: That famous conversation that takes place in the Washington summit with Gorbachev where he says he can accept a united Germany that chooses its own path, and the people behind him are all surprised at what he said.

Baker: Any country can choose the alliance in which it wants to join.

Strong: Was Shevardnadze surprised by that statement or caught off guard?

Baker: I can't remember. Was Shevardnadze still onboard then?

Strong: He was.

Baker: Are you sure it wasn't Bessmertnykh?

Strong: I'm not sure.

Baker: I'm not either, because I think maybe by that time it might have been Bessmertnykh.

Strong: Those are unusual occasions when a leader says something that all the people sitting behind him are shocked to hear.

Baker: That's right, yes. They are quite unusual. I'm not sure that Gorbachev understood the significance of what that meant, what he was saying. I don't know that. He's a smart guy; I assume he did. If you follow through on all of that, you'll find that it was only subsequently that he specifically agreed to the unified Germany being in NATO, with some restrictions on the use of NATO forces on the territory of the former GDR, but he got 22 billion Deutsch marks for it. So to what extent was that a deal—at the time he said that at the Washington summit he'd been talking extensively with Kohl. They got a lot of money, which they needed badly. I got them money, remember? I went to the Saudis at some point. They were having a lot of trouble and I specifically remember talking to Prince Saud and we got them a lot of money. I can't remember how much. They were in tough shape.

Young: Were you pretty free to make these tentative commitments that would involve money and support?

Baker: No, I couldn't make a commitment.

Young: You couldn't make the commitment, but it would be tentative.

Baker: But I could say, "I'll see what I can do with the Saudis." I couldn't spend money that hadn't been appropriated.

Young: That's right, but did you have major problems? Can you cite an example of getting an appropriation for something you thought was a good idea? How much time did it take you?

Baker: Working with the Congress?

Young: Yes.

Baker: A lot of time, because we had a Democratic Congress.

Young: I'm trying to figure out how much slack you were cut on these things.

Baker: With who? By who?

Young: With the Senate and with the House, on appropriations that you needed, for example.

Baker: Well, the Congress won't cut you any—you're not free to just go out and spend money unless it's been appropriated.

Young: I understand that.

Baker: At Treasury you are, because you've got a Treasury special fund. They call it—there's a several billion-dollar fund we used to—I can't remember the name of it.

Young: Well, maybe I should be asking this question about the Secretary of the Treasury.

Baker: I used that. That was a slush fund, the Secretary of the Treasury rainy day fund. I'm trying to remember what it's called. It was the secretary-something fund. But you don't have that at State. And also you want to make sure that what you're asking for is administration policy.

Young: Oh, sure.

Baker: You go through the whole OMB [Office of Management and Budget] process and all that.

Riley: The team that you've discussed, did that extend to the core of Ambassadors in these key areas that you were working on? Did you find generally that they were helpful, or not?

Baker: Well, Ambassadors are helpful, you bet, to a Secretary of State, tremendously helpful. We had a rule of thumb. I think it was about one-third political, two-thirds career that we would like to rotate everybody after three years. We kept to that for the four years that I was there.

Some Ambassadors are better than others, particularly political Ambassadors. Every administration has their contributors who get political Ambassadorships. Some places you pretty much have to stick with career people. But we were coming to the point where to get the attention of another country we could trot the President out in the Rose Garden. For instance, Saddam Hussein. We weren't worried about the absence of an Ambassador in Baghdad after they were all sent home. Even some time before, we'd just trot the President out in the Rose Garden. We knew Saddam was sitting there looking at CNN [Cable News Network]. We'd say whatever message we wanted to get to him. So as technology has improved, the role of Ambassadors has to some extent been mitigated, declined.

Riley: Even as a source of information about the country?

Baker: No, no. It's still very important, the reporting aspect is very important.

Young: I was interested about the intelligence side of your preparation, knowledge of what was going on and how to assess the situations you were dealing with.

Baker: Very important, but we have too much. We spend too much and we have too many disparate agencies in our intelligence community.

Young: Was that true at your time?

Baker: It was true then and it's even more true now. And so you're just flooded, the policymaker is flooded with intelligence reports. You don't have time to read them all, you can't read them all, and yet you're sort of held to a standard.

I remember in the BCCI, Bank of Credit and Commerce International. John Kerry, when he was a very young Senator, initiated an investigation. He thought maybe the Secretary of the Treasury had done something, because there was an intelligence report saying that the BCCI was violating Federal Reserve requirements or something, some obscure intelligence report that they could trace to having come into the Treasury Department. Well, I never saw it and it didn't matter whether I had or not. You get too much, too much, and overlapping and competitive. Everybody has their own intelligence bureau. The State has the Bureau of INR [Bureau of Intelligence and Research], the Defense has Defense Intelligence, and then each of the services have their own intelligence. And then you've got the NSA [National Security Agency] and you've got the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency], and now you've got a National Intelligence Chief, and it's all baloney, too much.

When I was there we were spending \$29 billion a year on intelligence. Now there's no telling what we spend on it. Sometimes it's good and sometimes it isn't, but is it important for the policymaker to have some way to go find out, if he can, what his to be interlocutors are thinking? You bet. Very important.

Young: But you couldn't trust necessarily what you got.

Baker: Some of it. Some of it was right, but some of it was wrong. But if you could consolidate all this in one agency, where you didn't have, as President Reagan used to say, "Fellas, bring me a one-armed economist so he can't say 'Mr. President, on the one hand, I think this, and on the

other hand, I think that.” Consolidate it all and have it all boil up to one source and then go to the policymakers. It would be a lot better, in my view. You wouldn’t have conflicting and competing claims and you wouldn’t be spending as much money on it. Now you might say, “Well, then, you wouldn’t get all the views.” I’d say get all the views but have it come up to one source. Don’t have State’s intelligence agency saying X and DoD [Department of Defense] saying Y. Then what do the policymakers do, what does the President do?

Young: You found this a problem, actually.

Baker: Yes, but what I’m really saying is it’s an overlapping of functions. It’s a part of the problem of our government being too big and having too many people up there trying to do the same job. It’s not just in intelligence. It’s true in other areas as well.

Young: Are there any examples you can think of in your own experience as Secretary of State where this was a problem?

Baker: I can’t come up with a discrete example for you. I really can’t.

Young: Where for example, something was going on that you didn’t even know about.

Baker: I’m sure there were some of those, but I can’t think back 20 years.

Young: It wasn’t a fatal problem.

Baker: I can’t pull one up from 20 years ago.

Strong: What about before Saddam Hussein invades Kuwait? There’s lots of intelligence reports that he’s concentrating troops on the border.

Baker: There you go, there’s a good example.

Strong: And then there was a debate. Does he mean it, or is he just bluffing and putting pressure?

Baker: That’s a very good example. All of our Arab allies were telling us, “Oh, he’s not going to do that.” By the way, I should tell you that in my view that was the genesis of the coalition to kick Iraq out of Kuwait. What do I mean by that? I was meeting with Shevardnadze in Irkutsk, Siberia, doing arms control. I get a call from the State Department saying, “We’re worried about the amassing of Iraqi troops on the border of Kuwait. You might want to see what your interlocutor thinks about that.”

I said, “Eduard, we’re worried that the Iraqis are amassing troops on the border of Kuwait and we’re worried about Saddam’s intentions.” He said, “He wouldn’t be so foolish. Don’t worry, he wouldn’t be that foolish.” I said, “Our guys are really worried about it. You might want to—” we were about to break for lunch. “You might want to check with the KGB [Komitet Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti] and see what you can learn.” He said, “I will.” He came back after lunch and said, “He would never be so foolish as to do that. Our people say that’s

absolutely not going to happen. He may be looking at one oil well that's right there, or a little area, a northern oilfield or something, but don't worry about it, it's not going to happen."

Within 12 hours he was in Kuwait, and Shevardnadze was so embarrassed by that experience. In my view that's one of the reasons he agreed with me immediately that I would fly from Mongolia where I had gone from Siberia to Moscow, and he would stand shoulder-to-shoulder with me in an airport in Moscow and condemn the actions of that Soviet client state. I write in my book that's the day for me the Cold War ended, when the American Secretary of State and the Soviet Foreign Minister were condemning Iraq and calling for an arms embargo. He did both of those without Gorbachev's approval and without the approval of the Arabists in the Foreign Ministry. The intelligence, our intelligence, was not necessarily wrong. Our intelligence was that he's amassing, but a lot of people tell us he would never go in.

Riley: You had that example in the Middle East, and then all of these epic developments in Europe and in the former Soviet Union. The natural question is whether there was, within the administration, concern about the fact that there had not been sound intelligence that would have prepared us to expect these things.

Baker: No. The simple answer to that, no. Could you think of a better result than we were able to achieve? No.

Riley: If it's a favorable result, then we're not concerned about whether the intelligence got—

Baker: I've already said you should be concerned about erroneous intelligence or deficient intelligence. That's a given. That's a no brainer. But in retrospect, are we concerned that our intelligence—the answer is no, because everything turned out the way we would have hoped it would turn out, really, when you think about it. Now, were we just lucky? Maybe so.

I'll tell you one thing that we haven't talked about here, and that is George Bush's prudence and perspicacity in knowing that he was going to have to deal with Gorbachev and Shevardnadze after the wall came down and not dancing on the wall. He got unshirted hell from the media. The same kind of thing, by the way, the drumbeat that's going on now with a lot of this stuff that we don't know where it's going to end up. But he got a lot of grief from the media for not being more emotionally exuberant about the fact that the wall had come down. And he said, "Wait a minute. We're going to have to continue to deal with these people, and I'm not going to stick it in their eye." He was so wise on that, really. Everybody thought he was wrong, but he was right.

Riley: Even some people in the administration, on evidence of other conversations we've had.

Baker: Really? There you go.

Riley: At least one speech had been drafted to sort of declare victory. Were you—

Baker: I don't remember that, no. His instincts on that stuff were really good. I was in that Oval Office interview when he was accused of not being willing to acknowledge a 40-year victory or something. I remember it like it was yesterday. He was sitting at the Oval Office desk and I was right there with him. I remember Lesley Stahl and others saying, "Why are you so dispassionate?" He said, "I'm not a passionate kind of guy."

Young: There was also some criticism or some observations, some of it critical, some of it not, that when his reelection was coming up there was remarkably little said about his successes in foreign policy, in foreign affairs.

Baker: Let me tell you, the criticism that I recall that I think was justified was he waited too long to get geared up and get going.

Young: Yes.

Baker: But even President Bush would acknowledge to you that he tended to compartmentalize. There was governing on the one hand and there was politics and electoral electioneering on the other. Somehow Labor Day was the day you converted from governance to—well, that's not true anymore. As I said, when I was over there at State, a lot of people would call me and say, "You've got to get him to get going early." I said, "Hey, I'm overwhelmed over here, the world is changing. I'm doing all this stuff. Other people are in charge of the politics right now." With respect to the second point you make, and that is that we didn't concentrate enough on our foreign policy victories, that's not where it's at in politics. Let me put on my political hat and take off my Secretary of State hat. Unless it's war and peace, unless the country is about to go to war or suffered casualties or something like that, the foreign issues don't cut it in our domestic politics. People vote their pocketbooks.

Young: So the noise level about it may be great, but it actually doesn't—

Baker: That's not where it's at politically. I used to have a saying—I was privileged to be in a leadership role in five Presidential campaigns, and I said this at the first one, the Ford one, where we came from 25 points behind and almost won, to the last one. There are three issues in any campaign for President—the economy, the economy, and the economy, in that order, that's it. Unless war and peace intrude, there aren't any other issues. People vote their pocketbooks.

Strong: Did President Bush like the governance side more than he liked the politics side?

Baker: Yes. I'm sure most people would. I think most everybody would.

Young: Like the what side?

Baker: Governance.

Strong: The governance side, if he's dividing those activities.

Baker: Probably.

Young: But you don't divide them, do you, yourself, in your own practice?

Baker: I'm saying that nowadays you don't—I'm saying you can't divide. Running the White House is like one big campaign. When you look at what's happening now with the technological revolution, the fact that you've got to respond now in minutes and hours rather than days and weeks, the fact that we've got the Internet, you've got bloggers out there, you've got all these media outlets that overwhelm the system.

The 24-hour news cycle is no longer a 24-hour news cycle, it's a 5-hour or 10-hour news cycle. So you pretty much have to run an administration like you're running a campaign. We had pretty much gotten there in the Reagan years where we had a theme of the day and we tried to put everything around it. They did the same thing in Bush one, but I don't think that President Bush himself personally geared up, didn't get the organizational aspects of things going as quickly as he should have for his reelection. I think he would probably even acknowledge that.

Riley: But even before then, this was a President that from the outside, the messaging apparatus didn't seem to be as finely tuned as the one in the predecessor operation.

Baker: I'm not sure I would agree with that, because it was patterned after it.

Riley: Within the State Department, you personally as well as the people around you, are all very accomplished at message, but that didn't seem to—

Baker: Well, that's 50 percent of an administration; that's the foreign half. That's a judgment you have to make. I didn't see a lot of difference, frankly. I think they tried to pattern it in the same way. But I want to say one other thing about the politics. I'm not at all sure that any prior preparation on the political side, organizationally or anything, would have done the job, given the circumstances that President Bush had to run for reelection. He unfortunately had an economy that was coming back, came back just in time for Bill Clinton. It came back in October, just before the election.

I've said the economy is the issue, and he had to fight that, but in addition to that, he had to fight maybe three other things. One, a third party candidate who took 19 percent of the vote, and two-thirds of every vote he took, he took from us; we know that from the polling. And then the fact that we'd been there twelve years. It's hard for one party to maintain the White House after eight years, much less twelve years.

And then lastly, we didn't do enough to create—at the State of the Union in January of '92 we should have gone up with something called Domestic Storm after Desert Storm. He was so popular and everything, and this suggestion was kicked around by the political guys. Again, I wasn't party to it because I was off flying all around the world, but it would have been a good thing to do. He could have gone up and said, "I've dealt with Desert Storm, and the problems of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. Now I'm going to concentrate on Domestic Storm." Have something around which we could build his campaign. We didn't do that. That was our fault, but Perot was not our fault, the fact that we'd been there twelve years was not our fault, and the economy was not our fault.

Young: On the last point you mentioned, which is actually your first point, there's a fair amount of people saying, in the oral history, from the Congressional side, that the Bush White House finished doing its domestic policy in the first two years, and there were substantial legislative accomplishments then.

Baker: What were they? Americans for Disabilities.

Riley: Clean Air.

Baker: Clean Air was a big one.

Young: Those are really important.

Strong: And he doesn't get credit for it, but the budget deal with Congress. There are two steps to bring down the deficit, the negotiations with Congress in his administration and then the Clinton tax increases. Those two things matter a great deal, and hardly any credit is given for the first.

Baker: That's right. He's not only not given credit for that, he's castigated for breaking his word. No, that's true, that's absolutely right.

Riley: Did you have a reaction to that event when it happened?

Baker: I wrote about it in *Work Hard, Study...and Stay Out of Politics!* I saw Dick Darman in the car reading the *Washington Post* headline on one of my Wednesday morning meetings with Scowcroft and Cheney. I'm walking into the West Wing entrance and it says, "Bush Breaks Pledge." And Dick Darman's my guy now, that's why he's there, and he's a smart guy. I leaned in the window and I said, "Too cute by half, Dick." Because they had said we will agree to tax revenue increases, that's not increased taxes. Tax revenue increase, you get there by additional growth. And I said, "Dick"—that was Dick and Sununu—"that's too cute by half." That was my reaction to Dick at the time. Do I think substantively it was probably the right thing to do? Yes. Politically, it was very damaging, but substantively you're quite right.

Strong: Because the internal Congressional—

Baker: No, because the tax increase was not accompanied by a spending restraint. Anytime you give Congress a tax increase, they're going to spend that and more if you don't have spending restraint.

Young: But as I said, there was a widespread perception that the White House was not going to do anything further on domestic affairs.

Baker: Well, I've just said that I think we should have—

Young: While the economy—there were all kinds of complaints coming from Republicans, donors, everything.

Baker: That's right, that's right.

Young: We're talking [Robert] Mosbacher and others, they said it was this. And you're saying that—

Baker: You heard me say we should have gone up with something on the domestic issue or the economy around which to coalesce a campaign. I really believe that.

Young: And you had a lot to build on for that, too, that you could have capitalized on.

Baker: What could we have done besides a Domestic Storm kind of thing? You know what we went up with? Some crime initiative. That wasn't right. Now, do I fault the President's advisors for telling him the economy is coming back? No. It was coming back. The technical people were right, but there was no political patina on it. There was no effort to come up with something around which we could run for reelection. That's true. That's what you just heard me say. But I think there are four reasons we lost. That's one of them, but the other three are overwhelming. The economy, in the state it was in? Now, doing what we just talked about would have helped on that issue, but nothing would have helped on the Perot question and nothing could have been done much about the fact that we'd been there twelve years. And people were tired of us, particularly the press were tired of us.

Riley: Is Perot somebody you'd known in Texas?

Baker: Not me, but 41 had known him. I write about that too, about how he shot the messenger. I write about the meeting in the Oval Office between President Reagan, Vice President Bush, and me, when President Reagan said, "We've investigated this top, side and bottom, and there are no Americans alive in Vietnam. You guys are from Texas. Do you want to tell Ross?" The Vice President said, "He supported me in my—I'll be happy to tell him." He told him.

Young: And paid a big price.

Baker: I think so.

Riley: I want to ask a question about how you keep yourself going. During these mass travels and all of the variety of high-pressure things that you're dealing with as Secretary of State, physically, how do you manage?

Baker: I got very tired on a lot of those trips and sometimes even a little disoriented. One trip, I think it was 38 hours long. I came from the Middle East, to South America and somewhere else? I can't remember what the statistics are. But I would get out of the limo sometimes and be dizzy. But I had a nice airplane with a stateroom, a bed. My poor staff didn't have the opportunity to stretch out, but I did, and I used Halcion at the time. At the time, Halcion was okay. It was only later they said it's really bad for your health. I found it really worked for me. I could get six hours.

Riley: That's for sleep?

Baker: It's a sleeping pill. I could get six hours of solid sleep, and I did, but it's debilitating. You ask Hillary [Rodham Clinton]. She's talking about it now. She's saying how tiring it is, and I was older, I think, than she is. How old is she? The women don't tell.

Riley: She must be right at 60.

Strong: She's a little older.

Baker: Yes, see I was 60. I was 58 to 62 when I was Secretary of State.

Riley: And eating habits? You had somebody on there? I'm just curious.

Young: Russell has been doing a lot of traveling recently.

Riley: I'm thinking yesterday—yes, when I'm in Charlotte, trying to get on this crowded airplane and I can barely breathe. How in the world does somebody live?

Baker: Well, the Secretary of State's airplane is a little bit nicer.

Riley: That's true, but I'm not living on it for—

Baker: You have the Air Force to feed you and all that.

Riley: Right.

Baker: But I didn't even go on the wagon. I would have a drink. I've just come back from the Middle East, I was there for ten days, and on this last trip I didn't drink much on the way over or the way back, and that helps a lot. I've been blessed with good health.

Riley: Did you ever find yourself stumbling because you were—

Baker: No, but as I say, you could sometimes be a little disoriented. I was going to so many countries in such a short period of time, sometimes you'd think, *Now, where am I today?*

Riley: I'm sure.

Baker: But I managed it.

Strong: Did the President's health issues matter in '92?

Baker: I think there's a lot that's been written on that. You can talk to Burt [Burton] Lee, the President's doctor. You should do that. He had Graves' disease. People said he didn't really want it; he didn't seem to be out there fighting for it. That is total baloney. I told you how competitive he is. He worked his tail off in the '92 campaign, and he very much wanted it. I don't know the extent to which the Graves' disease was debilitating. I really can't tell you that, but it was certainly not a lack of desire or effort or competition. That wasn't it. I know that because we worked him really hard.

Riley: Did you find any surprises when you came back to the White House? Was it working the way you thought it would?

Baker: I brought my own people in, because in something like that, you've got to have your own people. Of course it would have been better not to have to go back to the White House. It would be better to go to the campaign, like I did from Treasury in '88, but the law had been changed, so I had to go to the White House. The law had been changed, so that having been Secretary of State I would not have been able to have conversations with the people I worked with in government for a year at the Cabinet level, if I had gone out into the private sector for his campaign.

Riley: Of course. I see now.

Baker: So I came back as Chief of Staff. When you have an incumbent President, you run the campaign anyway from the Chief of Staff's office. It's where the body is, it's where the message is, and the '84 campaign was run right out of my office in the White House. That was the biggest victory any President has ever gotten. We got 49 states, damn near got Minnesota, against [Walter] Mondale. We had the arrogance and temerity to go into Minnesota on the last day. We lost the District of Columbia and Minnesota.

Young: I wonder if you'd like to have some thoughts to help historians, or those who are going to be revising history or looking at history, about the importance of the personalities. You dealt with this tremendous range of personalities from different countries with different interests. You were spending a great deal of time in that.

Baker: I've said personnel is policy. I've said that if you can develop a relationship of trust when you're negotiating with somebody, whether it's in a law firm or in business or as Secretary of State or whatever it is, it will help you get good things accomplished. Human nature, being what it is, you're going to be confronted with a lot of different people, a lot of different personalities. The foreign policymaker in our government is always going to have to find the right mix between our principles and values, which are a foundation of our foreign policy, support for democracy and human rights, and our national interest.

You see that today in spades in what's happening in the Middle East, but it's there in almost every foreign policy relationship. It doesn't crop up with our relationship with the UK, for instance, because they've got the same paradigm, the same philosophy, but it crops up in— a good example is what we're facing today. How do we handle this with Saudi Arabia? They don't subscribe to our principles and values. That doesn't mean we don't try to promote our principles and values, but it also means we'd better do it with full recognition of the geopolitical consequences involved in, let's say, a revolution in Saudi Arabia or a protest that results in a collapse of the government. Who's to say what's going to come next in Egypt?

We confronted all of that. We confronted it in China, we handled it—again, this is an arrogant thing to say, but we handled Tiananmen Square just right. We sanctioned China; we said, "This is not the way you treat your people," but we kept the relationship going, an extraordinarily important relationship. We don't need to be an enemy of China and they don't need to be our enemy, and George Bush was able to thread that needle and walk that line. We didn't give up on our principles and values, but we didn't go to war against the Chinese government because they didn't share those principles and values. We handled it just right in much of the Cold War, particularly toward the end, where we were able to get Soviet Jews to emigrate from the Soviet Union because of our commitment to human rights and still keep a geopolitical relationship with our number one opponent out there. It didn't devolve into something really bad.

Young: In an earlier time, the word "linkage" was used. You know you can't link our foreign policy to our human rights issues and others. You don't link these two.

Baker: Linkage was an overused term in my view. I understand what you're saying.

Young: It was way back—

Baker: I gave a speech at the Library of Congress, the [Henry] Kissinger annual lecture at the Library of Congress, about three or four years ago.

Williams: Three years ago.

Baker: —three years ago, that I called “the case for pragmatic idealism.” I’ve said it’s too bad that we cannot practice foreign policy according to the principles of Mother Teresa, because we believe in those, but we can’t. Why can’t we? We can’t because if we were to do that we would be intervening in every protest all over the world, whether it’s Rwanda or the Congo or—

Young: Tahrir Square.

Baker: Tahrir Square or Libya or anywhere else. We’d be in there militarily. You can only sustain a foreign policy for this country for as long as the American people support it. The American people in our democracy are the final arbiters of our foreign policy, and when you cross the line where there’s no longer a national interest involved and you’re just doing it all on idealism and the body bags start coming home, you lose the American people. And when you lose the American people, you lose the policy. That’s why it was so important for us to try to get the Congress in the First Gulf War. You lose the policy.

Young: But it may not win you the next election.

Baker: Well, that didn’t cost us the election.

Young: No, but I mean the foreign policy successes didn’t, as you said earlier—

Baker: That doesn’t guarantee you an election, no, no, but it guarantees you—

Young: It didn’t give you much credit to deal with.

Baker: Presidents seek credit and need credit on two issues: prosperity, the economy. I told you that in my view it’s 99 percent of it, and peace. I also said it’s the economy unless it’s war and peace. You have to have the peace too. Now if we’re so idealistic that we’re going to intervene militarily in every conflict, every dispute around the world, we’re not going to have peace. Stability is still important in foreign policy, but that doesn’t mean you sacrifice your principles and values. You continue to support them, but it doesn’t necessarily mean that you send your young men and women to fight and die in every corner of the globe, either, and that’s the line you have to walk. I’ll tell you who was very good at walking that line—George Bush. Really good. When faced with an egregious violation, as in the case of Iraq’s aggression against Kuwait, he said immediately, “This isn’t going to stand,” and he went to war to reverse it.

Young: Now you have stateless terrorism.

Baker: Now you have stateless terrorism.

Young: Doing just as bad things.

Baker: Yes, and that’s a threat to the homeland.

Young: Right. And how do you—?

Baker: You have to confront that from time to time.

Young: It's going on everywhere. What can you do and where do you do it?

Baker: You do what we're doing, and that is, you focus on your counterterrorism efforts. You're supervigilant. You roll up these efforts to attack the homeland and you try to prevent breeding grounds. You try to resolve the Arab-Israeli dispute, for instance, in the Middle East, which serves as such a breeding ground for some of this. You try to prevent Afghanistan from becoming a failed state once again, where this stuff can breed.

We've got this problem now in spades. You've got it in Yemen, the possibility of a failed state; you've got it in who knows, Egypt. Who knows who's going to take power? Fortunately we have the Army in Egypt and they're close to the United States. We give them their supplies and they're a force for stability, but you don't have that in some of these other countries. And what should we be doing in Bahrain, where the Saudis are afraid that Iran is going to—would we rather have Iran on the Arabian Peninsula? You've got all these—Bush was a wonderful leader on all that stuff, because he knew it can't just be all one or the other. You can't just be always realism and no idealism, or you can't just be always idealism and never realism. You've got to look at each country and the fact situation in each.

Strong: Isn't there an irony, if the Cold War is over, if the Middle East is going in the right direction, if our alliances are healthy, then you can elect an Arkansas Governor? Peace actually, in some ways, makes the talents and successes of the administration less compelling.

Baker: I'm not sure I agree with that. I think any time we elect a President, more often than not we're electing somebody with no foreign policy experience. Any time. Jimmy Carter was elected during the very height of the Cold War, turned out to have been surprised by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. I don't know that I buy that.

Riley: What would a second Bush '41 term have looked like?

Baker: We would have had a shot with Yitzhak Rabin. We would have really had a shot at an Arab-Israeli peace deal. We were making a lot of progress. Bill Clinton, for all the work he did, and he did a lot of good work trying to get one in his second term, he postponed dealing with it to his second term for political reasons. And that's been the problem with most of our Presidents. George Bush had the guts to try and deal with it in his first term, Obama's had the guts to try and deal with it in his first term, but he hasn't succeeded. It's too easy to postpone that one. I think we would have had a great shot. As you've indicated in your question, we had the world going in the right direction, and another term would have given us the opportunity to cement some of that. Now you don't know what would have happened. Who can tell?

Riley: Would you have gone back?

Baker: I would have gone back to State, notwithstanding some of the things he said in the campaign. You remember at one point he said, "I'm going to ask Jim Baker to do for the economy what he did for the foreign policy of the United States." Do you remember that? In an

exchange with—I didn't think that was something he should have said. He didn't talk to me about saying that or anything. But all I'm saying is I would not have gone somewhere else. I would have gone back to State.

Riley: Do you think the rest of the team probably would have stayed intact, or have you got burnout?

Baker: I think there would have been a lot of it that would have stayed, particularly the foreign policy team. I don't know where he would have gone for a Chief of Staff. He would have had to get a new Chief of Staff. He tried Sununu, he tried [Samuel K.] Skinner, he tried—I guess it's just those two.

Riley: Did he talk to you before he designated Skinner?

Baker: I'm not sure he did. He didn't ask me to be the executioner on Sununu. I think he asked George W.

Riley: That's what we've heard.

Baker: Is that right? I don't know that he talked to me. I can't remember. I was really out of politics when I was Secretary of State. What about some lunch?

Strong: That's a good idea.

Riley: Thank you.

[BREAK]

Riley: Hang on just a second. Okay, we're back on, go ahead.

Baker: I wanted to call your attention to a passage in the transcript of the conversation between me and Tariq Aziz just before the ejection of Iraq from Kuwait. I think it was January 9th or something like that. I had been asked before I went to that meeting, by the Defense Department, to tell the Iraqi Foreign Minister that if they use weapons of mass destruction on our troops, we would respond. And so what I said to the Minister was, "Minister, if you use weapons of mass destruction on our forces, the American people will demand revenge, and we have the means to exact it." Then I said, "That is not a threat, it is a promise." So after they captured Saddam and debriefed him, they said, "Why didn't you use your chemical weapons when the Americans were coming?" And he implied—maybe he didn't say this in so many words, but implied—it was because of what Baker told Aziz at Geneva. So it was effective.

The Obama administration has changed the nuclear posture review of the United States to now provide that we will never threaten the use of our nuclear deterrent for diplomatic or political purposes, never threaten another country that is in compliance with its Non-Proliferation Treaty

obligations. We will not threaten. I think that's a terrible mistake, based on this real-time example of how such a threat really worked to protect our troops, because Iraq was not in violation of its NPT [Non-Proliferation Treaty] obligation.

Strong: They were, but we didn't know it. They were in violation of them with the activities they had ongoing.

Baker: Do we know that they had enough activities ongoing to be in violation?

Strong: Yes.

Baker: I didn't know that.

Strong: They had clandestine nuclear development activities that they had not reported.

Baker: I see. Okay.

Strong: So technically they were not there.

Baker: We know they were.

Speaker: Lunch is ready whenever you are ready.

Baker: We were just about to wrap up.

Riley: We're headed that way, thank you. Great.