



GEORGE H. W. BUSH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW WITH RICHARD HAASS

May 27, 2004
New York, N.Y.

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Knott: Thank you, Richard Haass, for participating in the George H. W. Bush oral history project. Just to help the transcriptionist, if we could just go around and briefly identify ourselves so she can associate a voice with a name. I'm Stephen Knott.

Haass: This is Richard Haass.

Strong: And Bob Strong.

Knott: What we like to do usually is just ask you to tell us a little bit about yourself, how you first got involved in government service. We notice that you served back in the 1970s as a legislative assistant to Claiborne Pell.

Haass: [*chuckling*] I need to say, the first year of my first job was in the early '70s, first as an intern, then as a legislative assistant to Senator Pell. It was in the midst of my graduate work at Oxford. I told some people that I was interested in working on the Hill and that was the one job offer I got. So that was my introduction.

My first summer was the summer of '74, which was, among other things, the summer of Mr. Nixon's resignation. That was my introduction to Washington. It was the final stages of Vietnam and it was really the rise of the post-Vietnam foreign policy debate. I got my doctoral thesis out of it. One of the hot issues that summer and the next year when I came back was the rise of potential naval competition between the United States and the Soviet Union in the Indian Ocean. That emerged as a test case of where we were going to go after Vietnam.

I spent about a year working for Pell. I went back to Oxford, finished up my graduate work, and went to the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London. While there, one of the first conferences I attended was to give a paper on the changing role of Congress in American foreign policy. Several people from the Pentagon—this is now the [Jimmy] Carter administration—were there, heard it, and invited me to come back to work in the Pentagon. About a year or year-and-a-half later, this is now mid-to-late '79, I returned to the United States and spent the last year or year-and-a-half of Carter working in the Pentagon on the Persian Gulf along with such people as Paul Wolfowitz, Dennis Ross, and others, planning the rapid deployment force, which became the Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force, which ultimately became CENTCOM [Central Command] years later.

I went to the State Department for the first four-and-a-half years of the [Ronald] Reagan administration, first in the Bureau of Politico-Military Affairs, then in the Bureau of European Affairs. I spent three-and-a-half years teaching at the Kennedy School of Government, and then I got involved in the campaign of Bob Dole. I was one of Dole's principal foreign policy advisors in the primaries. If you recall, Dole won Iowa in late 1987. I had been working with him for some time, brought in by Bob Ellsworth, and then I actually went on Dole's staff. I was with Dole then in New Hampshire. If you recall, that's when the bottom fell out and Bush 41 ended up beating Mr. Dole in New Hampshire. Soon after that, the Dole campaign truly unraveled and came to an end.

Then I got asked by Mr. [James Addison III] Baker and company to join them—he was working with then-Vice President Bush I guess, if I have the time right—and I did. So all of that is a very long lead-up to my ultimately getting asked to do the job I did by Brent Scowcroft.

Knott: Take you back again, when you first went to work for Senator Pell, did you consider yourself a Democrat at that time, or did that position happen to be available?

Haass: No, at that time I was a Democrat. I had been quite critical of the war in Vietnam. I would say I was a Democrat on the way to becoming an Independent. I was reinforced over those years by, oddly enough, two things; one was the writings of [Aleksandr] Solzhenitsyn, when I was a graduate student at Oxford. I went through all of his writings and that had a big impact on me. Also in the early and mid-'70s in England, the Labour Party was really going off the rails. It had really become a labor union party and had become very far left. You had the rise of a whole new bunch of conservatives including, ultimately, Mrs. [Margaret] Thatcher, whose thinking I found rather attractive.

So most of the reason I went to work for Senator Pell was simply a chance to work in Washington. By then I would say I was probably already in the land of independents, and it was only time before I moved into the land of moderate Republicans, though I think there's a lot of overlap.

Knott: Do you consider yourself a neoconservative?

Haass: No, and I don't think they consider me one either. [*laughter*] If anything, I'm probably closer to a paleoconservative.

Knott: Oh really? Interesting.

Strong: Can I ask you something about the years in the State Department? In that period, would you have had any contact with the Vice President, Vice President Bush, people working with him? Are there issues in the steps he took?

Haass: Very little. It's hard to imagine now, given the prominence not simply of Vice President [Richard] Cheney, but of his staff. The Vice President's office has almost become the equivalent of another bureaucracy; it's almost as if there is now something called the Department of the Vice President, where you have all this staff and at every meeting you attend in the interagency

process you have Vice Presidential staffers sitting at the table in the same way you have people from the NSC [National Security Council], Defense, State, what have you. Well, in those days it just wasn't there. The Vice President was pretty much the Vice President, and his role was pretty much whatever it was personally with the President.

Vice President Bush had maybe one staffer; it was Don Gregg, if I remember correctly. Maybe Don had an assistant, but there was no interagency presence. They weren't at the table, so I had almost no relationship at that point with the Vice President. He wasn't, if you will, a day-to-day visible factor, particularly at my level, which was sort of the office director or deputy assistant secretary level; there just wasn't a staff. So there was not this sense of OVP [Office of the Vice President]. One talked about the VP maybe, the VEEP, but the concept of OVP did not exist then.

Strong: And during the Iran-Contra explosion and then various investigations, you were at the Kennedy School then?

Haass: Right. I was basically teaching at the Kennedy School. My only connection with all that was as a sometimes-pundit on television.

Knott: We are also doing a Reagan oral history project. Any recollections or any outstanding observations on either Alexander Haig or George Shultz?

Haass: Sure, we can talk about both.

Knott: Please.

Haass: When Haig—this is chronologically—was Secretary, which was for the first year-and-a-half, this exactly tracked for me the year-and-a-half I was in the Politico-Military Affairs Bureau with people like Rick Burt, Bob Blackwill, Jim Dobbins, and others. Sure, I could also reflect on Arnie Kanter, Dick Clarke, Randy Beers; it was an interesting group of people who had assembled—quite a talented group.

The public perception of Haig obviously is the “I’m in charge here” type. It is not terribly flattering. I think Haig deserves more credit than that. It’s not simply for what he did, but also for what he prevented. Haig was, by far, in the first year-and-a-half of the Reagan administration, the person with the most experience. He had the most, you might say, developed or formed geopolitical perspective. Just to give you some examples, the first Cabinet meeting—my memory could be wrong here, but I think we’re talking about January ’81—was over how the Reagan administration would react to the Iran hostage deal that had been negotiated by the Carter administration in its waning hours.

For some reason, I can’t even remember why, I was assigned the task of writing most of the papers. I think it was largely because the two bureaus in State that were pretty much staffed up at the beginning of the administration were the Policy Planning Staff and the Politico-Military Affairs Bureau because the heads of those bureaus did not have to get confirmed. You had

Wolfowitz in one and Burt in the other. I was there with Burt and knew something about Iran. My doctoral thesis had been about Iran and the Persian Gulf.

I think Haig also trusted these two staffs. These were people who were coming from the outside; they weren't Foreign Service officers. He knew these guys personally. Anyhow, I got the assignment so I wrote all the papers. I'm pretty sure I'm right about this. What was so interesting about the early meetings was how many people were open to the idea of rejecting the agreement that the Carter administration had designed, the exchanges with the Iranians. I was stunned. I believed that the administration would or at least should want to begin by putting the hostage issue front and center, which had obviously bedeviled the Carter administration tremendously. Haig got it completely; he understood 100% why rejecting what had been negotiated would have been an unbelievably dumb, self-inflicted wound. The most important thing was to get the hostage issue behind us so you could face everything else on your agenda.

If he hadn't argued that at that meeting, I can't tell you for sure that the Reagan administration would not have repudiated, at least in part, the deal that had been struck with the Iranians, and who knows what would have been the consequences of that. On other issues, like China and Taiwan, Haig by far had the most authority, the most strategic authority. Again, it was important to develop a strategic relationship with China; his view was let's not allow this campaign rhetoric about Taiwan to become policy. He was representing what you might call the Nixon-[Henry] Kissinger traditional, strategic wing of Republicanism. There were a lot of other people around the table, Bill Clark and others, who were coming at it very differently.

So I would say on lots of issues, on various arms control issues, Haig was in some ways representing what you might call the mainstream foreign policy center. The Reagan administration, particularly in its first term, had some fairly radical voices and tendencies. I just think Haig deserves credit for having blocked some questionable ideas from potentially becoming problems. He had his own bug-a-boos about going to the source, and he was at times overly obsessed about Cuba, Libya, what have you. But my own sense is that he deserves more credit than a lot of people give him.

In terms of Shultz, he became Secretary roughly in the middle of '82, if my memory serves me right, which is right around the time Burt, Bob Blackwill, Jim Dobbins, Mark Palmer, and I all moved to the European Bureau, basically moved from PM to EUR.

Strong: By the way, was that kind of group movement commonplace?

Haass: I doubt it. I don't think it was particularly welcome at the time. I think most of the FSOs [Foreign Service officers] in the European bureau felt probably as the Romans did when the Visigoths were coming in; they were about to get sacked, pillaged, and whatever.

Strong: Was that Burt wanting his team to come with him?

Haass: Yes, and I think it was very much him wanting the team he had had in PM to come with him. And I think it probably represented a bit of distrust toward the Foreign Service, a little bit of a we-they kind of mentality. I think both Dobbins and Palmer were Foreign Service officers at

the time. So was Blackwill. Actually, the PM network was mostly Foreign Service, but it wasn't representative. If it were a business I'm not sure it would have been a friendly takeover; it was probably something a little more muscular. Again, I didn't have daily interaction with Shultz, just periodic interaction. I'm not sure, but to me the dominant issues were Iran, the Middle East, and Lebanon.

My strongest recollection was not one with Shultz but with [Lawrence] Eagleburger. I think Eagleburger at that time had become the Under Secretary for Political Affairs, and after the Beirut bombing there were lots of questions about what we were going to do, rumors we were going to get out. Part of my responsibilities at EUR was dealing with the allies on all the non-European issues like the Middle East. That was one of the things that came under my portfolio. So Eagleburger called me up and said, "Are you going to do this with me?" He was instructed by the White House to call in the British, French, and Italian Ambassadors, the other three countries that were troop contributors to Lebanon, to call them in to reassure them that despite what they were reading in the *New York Times*, we were staying, we weren't going to leave them in the lurch, no surprises.

So Larry and I dutifully did that. And that morning, literally, we finished the meeting, and an hour later the call came from the White House telling us the policy had been reversed. We had to call them back in that afternoon and essentially said, "Never mind," which I think was probably the low point of his and my government service up to that point.

Knott: I have a couple of specific questions. Again, I may be way off the mark here, but the Miller Center has a kind of joint collaborative effort with a group in London that is very interested in the Falklands crisis. Do you have any recollections on that?

Haass: Oh yes. Again, give me the dates.

Knott: The dates were spring '82: April, May, and June.

Haass: The spring, yes. I remember we were in PM and I ran the office of what we called at that time regional security affairs, so this was essentially on my plate. You've also got to remember that all of this was being done against the backdrop of what was perhaps the principal strategic challenge of the day, which was getting a response in Europe to the SS-20 deployments, and the whole goal was obviously to get the Western response to the Soviet-Euro missile challenge.

What was interesting about the governmental response to the Falklands was how divided it was. You almost had three camps in the administration at the time. You also had some interesting cross-bureaucratic lines. This wasn't neat; it wasn't like State thought this, and Defense thought this, and the White House thought that. It was nothing nearly so simple. Instead, you had coalitions between and among the various bureaucracies, so you had people from the White House, State, and Defense in one camp, and in another camp, and in another camp. But essentially you had a pro-British camp, which said we're going to do whatever it takes, because once Mrs. Thatcher rolls the dice on this we—I say "we" because I was a member of that camp, which had decided that if the British lost in the Falklands, the Thatcher government would fall—we would never get the Brits to commit to deploying missiles. If you recall, our policy at the

time was that we needed the British and a continental country, i.e. two countries, one of which had to be Britain, to agree to the missiles. We knew if we couldn't get the missiles deployed, it would be cosmic defeat for NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization], and dealing with the consequences of that would be difficult. So we saw the Falklands very much through the prism—

Knott: Who else was in your camp, the British camp?

Haass: It was people such as Rick Burt, Bob Blackwill, myself, and Cap Weinberger, who was probably the unofficial leader of the camp. So I would say it was Weinberger and ourselves. After the whole war ended, the British had a thank you lunch at the embassy in Washington, and basically, all the top EUR team was invited.

The second camp was the pro-Argentina camp, which was essentially the ARA Bureau [Bureau of Inter-American Affairs], at that point the Latin American bureau, at the State Department, and Jeane Kirkpatrick. They saw the war through the prism of the ARA Bureau, a little bit of “clientitis,” but mainly through the struggles in Central America. If you recall, Argentina was being extremely helpful in what we were doing in Central America. Suffice it to say, for us, because of what was going on in Europe, we needed to help the Brits. For them, it was because of what was going on in Central America; they needed to show some loyalty for the Argentines. Tom Enders, if I remember correctly, in the Latin bureau and Jeane Kirkpatrick, two people who didn't normally necessarily agree, and yet they were basically together.

Then thirdly, you had the Al Haig dimension of this. If you remember, this was toward the latter end of his tenure; Haig was on the way out. The banana peel was there, or whatever image you want to use; the ice was getting thin. I think Haig, and I don't mean to do an injustice here, probably saw this as the one way to save his job. If he could pull off a settlement in the Falklands, it would be very hard to dismiss this very embattled, controversial Secretary of State. So he basically became a third camp, literally airborne; for weeks he was airborne. His goal, or his purpose, was to mediate a deal and to end the war. So you had these three camps that were basically British prevail, Argentines prevail, and mediation and diplomacy prevail.

In the end the British camp did prevail. I remember late-night phone calls from [Sir] Robin Renwick, who at that point was the counselor at the British embassy or something; years later he came back as Ambassador. But I remember getting a call at 3 o'clock in the morning, asking did I know where they could get some runway matting equipment. What the British needed to do was build temporary, artificial runways on some island down there. I can't remember which island it was, Ascension or one of those islands. I said, “It's 3:30 in the morning in Washington on a Sunday, where the hell am I going to get runway matting?” Where do you go, Home Depot? Where do you find runway matting? So of course I called over to the Pentagon and yes, they had it.

And you have these bizarre things. Well, Weinberger then would order whatever it was people like me would call over for. Weinberger said, “Get it to him, get it to him. Double what they want and get it to them yesterday.” Then the JCS [Joint Chiefs of Staff] would do everything they could to prevent any of that stuff leaving because they wanted to keep it all for their own stock. They didn't want to draw down their stuff and give it—again, it was as classic a Kennedy

School case as I've ever been involved with; everything from institutional biases to differences in the bureaucracy. But because the NSC system was so weak under Reagan, you had no serious effort to come to a policy or to meld it. What you had was these competing camps and they coexisted for the duration of the crisis.

Knott: Another big issue at the time, and I'm wondering if you were involved in it, was this natural gas pipeline?

Haass: A bit.

Knott: It became a kind of an ideological litmus test in the early part of the Reagan administration.

Haass: Sure, I was just writing about it yesterday. I have to give a speech next week in London at Chatham House. It's an annual speech on U.S.-European relations. I was going back to some of the previous episodes of friction in the alliance and I was citing that. I didn't have direct responsibility for it. I think this was in '83.

Knott: I think it was '81 or '82.

Haass: You think it was that early? I remember we had the Lebanon war at the time, but the pipeline issue didn't come under me, though we were working on it. But you're right. Essentially, you had people like Richard Perle, Steve Bryant, and others at the Pentagon who were, shall we say, zealous about this. They saw this as potentially a source of unlimited Soviet leverage—"Finlandization" in its effect for Western Europe. And there were others who basically felt that such concerns were awfully exaggerated. But in any case, if the U.S. went in in a very heavy-handed way and tried to stop it, we would do even more damage to the alliance than the Soviets ever could if the project went ahead. This was just one of numerous examples of disagreements over how best to deal with the Soviet Union, how to manage the Cold War, how much leeway to give the allies in Europe as opposed to demanding that they toe the line. This was emblematic of that. That was one of many such differences.

Knott: Could you talk a little bit about—you mentioned the SS-20s and the installation of the Euro missiles in response. It sounds like you were somewhat in the thick of that, if I understood you correctly.

Haass: You have to be a little more specific, although I'm not sure what I remember. This is getting back to my youth. I remember it was in the late '70s when [Helmut] Schmidt—I can't remember if he was chancellor at the time or not—came to London, actually to the Institute for Strategic Studies. I think it was around '77; it might even have been earlier. He gave this speech, it might have been the first Alastair Buchan lecture. I remember because Alastair had been my supervisor at Oxford before he died. Schmidt was the first one who drew public attention, in a very dramatic way, to these deployments of SS-20s and—

Strong: And criticized the SALT [Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty] negotiations but dismissed—two super powers were ignoring the—

Haass: That's right, because intermediate range missiles were not covered, and basically said, "You created this giant loophole. It may not matter that much to you Americans, but let me tell you it matters a lot to us Europeans." He put the issue on the strategic agenda, front and center, and that was the lighting of the fuse.

Knott: You had a massive freeze movement, antinuclear movement.

Haass: Oh, sure. There was both an elite debate and a popular debate. You're right: the popular debate was the nuclear freeze movement. There were the housewives, or women of Greenham Common. I remember my own personal story about it all. I was in London for a lot of that. I was in London from '77 to '79 at the Institute [for Strategic Studies] and I must have been on TV a thousand times during that period. I remember one day going to the dentist. Going to a dentist in England was always a slightly frightening proposition because their dentists looked at least one or two decades behind us in technology. He was using some kind of drill, and it was grinding so slowly you could hear it. It was not a confidence builder.

I remember the dentist looking at me while putting on the drill bit, "You're Richard Haass, aren't you?" I said, "Yes." "I've been seeing you on TV a lot." I said, "Yes." And he said, "I see you're in favor of the deployment of the Pershing missiles." I said, "Yes." And he said, "You might want to know that I'm the head of the local chapter of CND." [laughter] There's a moment when your life passes before you.

Strong: CND being the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.

Knott: Felt like Dustin Hoffman in *Marathon Man*.

Haass: That's right. [laughing] So it was really impossible to get away from it. There were elite debates about what was necessary in terms of countering SS-20 deployment and so forth. There were debates about how much you then needed an arms control track in order to lubricate the deployment track, and what would constitute a credible arms control track.

In the late '70s, before we got into government, I think a lot of the debate was really over whether and how to respond. I think the debates were, in part, driven by the Europeans, which is ironic because later on, when the Americans finally bought into deployments, you had the Europeans, to use a Mrs. Thatcher phrase, "going wobbly." So it was kind of bizarre. There was a certain irony or whatever word you might want to call it. All the same, once we were committed to it, a tremendous amount was at stake.

If I remember correctly, there were lots of elite debates about how many systems were needed. Then we ended up with the Pershings used in combination with cruise missiles. Cruise missiles alone wouldn't be enough; you needed something that was fast-time to target. You needed ballistic missiles, you needed missiles in more than one country. If you just had them in Britain, that wouldn't be credible; you had to have missiles on the continent as well. When we got into government, and I might be blurring my pre-government and government time here and I apologize if I am, it was front and center. But the question was, two things: how do you use the

arms control track as lubricant for the anti-deployment track? Second, there was a tremendous battle over public diplomacy.

Government decisions, like in the Netherlands and other places, were clearly going to be—and Jerry Bremer, by the way, was ambassador—influenced by their own policies. So you were very conscious that everything we did in Washington was important because it would influence public opinion in European countries, which in turn would create a context that was more or less supportive of deployments. It was one of those times you were playing both an outside game and an inside game. It was very complex and you had tremendous battles across the river in Washington.

You mentioned a minute ago the battle over the pipeline. One of the things, again, people such as ourselves were saying was, you don't want to have a knock-down, drag-out with the allies over the pipeline at the time you're trying to make it easier for them to go ahead and build support for deployment. What's your priority then? For an academic, it was one of the richer kinds of struggles because you had internal U.S. government struggles, you had public struggles, you had elite questions, questions with the Hill. Again, it's a perfect Kennedy School sort of thing.

Knott: You gave us an assessment earlier of Al Haig. I was wondering if you might do the same for George Shultz?

Haass: Shultz was interesting to all of us because he was new to a lot of us. Let me contrast him with Haig. Haig was somebody who had been, because of his military career and then his White House phase, either a direct or indirect participant in what we might call foreign policy debates for decades. So Haig knew about this issue; for example, he was totally supportive of going ahead with the deployment of the Pershings and SS-20 weapons. Early on in the Reagan administration, there were people asking, why the hell did we bother with the deployments? Haig said you can't pull the rug out and change the terms of this now, it's too far down the track. But there were people asking why are we bothering? It's not worth it. Haig was kind of a traditionalist. Haig was very much the foreign policy traditionalist in the year-and-a-half in the Reagan administration.

Shultz was different because he did not come in with great experience in foreign policy. He had had the Treasury job, the Labor job, he had the experience at Bechtel, what have you, but he had not been a participant in the foreign policy debate. He was not the sort of guy who could tell you the difference between MXes and Pershings when he began, which meant that he was much more open to propositions and arguments that were less conventional. There was also the fact that his relationship with Weinberger was a non-relationship. One of the consequences of all that, the lack of a relationship and his own familiarity with some of the issues, meant that more of this was handled at lower levels, at the Assistant Secretary level, at the Burt-Perle level. It was more important in this administration than in any other administration I can remember. More of the work actually got done, or didn't get done, if you will, at that level.

For example, Shultz was much more willing to go along with some radical ideas, say, with nuclear disarmament, than I think Haig ever would have done. Shultz didn't buy into what we might call traditional, strategic thinking. Whether it was positive or negative, he was much more

the outsider, if you will, in the whole strategic debate. The issue that in some ways he seems to me most associated with was the Middle East. Not so much Iran-Contra, which you all know the story of that, but rather his attempts at negotiations, the frustrations in Lebanon, with Syria, and all that. That was the one issue he got, in some ways, passionately involved, and, clearly, he came away from extremely frustrated with Syria. I think it was ironic because people, when he began, thought he was going to tilt toward the Arabs because of his Bechtel background.

I don't think it is unfair to say that by the end of it he was, shall we say, disillusioned with the Syrians and others and had moved a lot closer to the Israelis. I think we, meaning the United States, made a mistake in thinking that we could ever sustain a separate Lebanese-Israeli peace agreement. That was an unrealistic strategy. That was asking too much and this was never going to be sustainable. So I think Shultz's efforts, at the end of the day, were doomed to fail. It was inevitable we were going to end up at loggerheads with the Syrians over that.

Strong: Later, when you're talking about the Bush administration, I suspect that you're talking about a different kind of National Security Council system.

Haass: Yes.

Strong: I'd like to ask a little bit about these Reagan years. What's the consequence of having a weak center and, again, is that weakness a function of the turnover in National Security Adviser, or the people who held that post, or President Reagan's own disposition or preference?

Haass: I can only really speak about the years I was there, essentially the first term and the first Security Adviser of the second term. I think that—remind me, you had what, three or four people in those years? William Clark—

Strong: You had [Richard] Allen.

Haass: Allen, who initially got into trouble, then was it Clark?

Knott: Clark, then [Robert] McFarlane.

Strong: [John] Poindexter.

Haass: Then you've got [Frank] Carlucci and [Colin] Powell, who essentially, how to put it, hit their stride. You were pretty close to four false starts. It's a pretty good example of the bagel or doughnut approach, for you had an interagency system where the center was missing, it was weak. It's a combination of lots of things. One was the strength of some people on the periphery, the Shultzes, the Haigs, the Weinbergers; these were fairly tall trees in the forest. All this contrasted with the relative weakness of people at the center who weren't of the same stature or knowledge. It's always a mistake to have a major imbalance between the center and the periphery. If the center is that much stronger, e.g., the Kissinger-[William] Rogers approach, that has its own problems. And if the inequality is in the other direction—which is closer to the Reagan model, as Shultz, whatever his famous quote was: things never get decided in this town, things never end in this town—well, you're setting yourself up for that.

So, if the center can't perform the necessary function, several things flow from it. One is that debates tend not to end. When decisions are made, people act as if they weren't made and there tends not to be good follow-up with discipline. The actual decisions often don't get the kind of rigorous, disciplined scrutiny they ought to get. It seems to me it was a combination of strong people at the periphery, weak people at the center, a President who wasn't terribly involved, and you end up, again, with the doughnut approach to national security policy-making, and it's not helpful.

Knott: Let me ask you about your stint as special Cyprus coordinator. Any memorable—

Haass: Why I didn't get the Nobel Peace Prize?

Knott: How did that job, that task, come about, and anything that stands out from your time?

Haass: This is the early '80s. I moved to the European bureau in the summer of '82 and I had this funny set of issues. I was in charge of relations with Europeans outside Europe, like the Middle East and Central America, policy-planning issues for Europe, Cyprus came under me. There was a special Cyprus coordinator, but after about a year he stepped down and since I was already overseeing Greece, Turkey, and Cyprus, it made sense just to give it to me, so I ended up doing it for the next two years. I think I did it from—

Knott: We've got you down from '83 to '85.

Haass: Eighty-three to '85, that's exactly right. Cyprus was great training—I don't mean it to sound disrespectful, but what it did, at least for me, it had a big impact on my own thinking about other disputes. I've obviously since then gone on to spend a lot of time in the Middle East, with Kashmir, Afghanistan, and most recently I was the envoy for Northern Ireland. So Cyprus had a lot of impact on my own thinking and also had a lot to do with the book I wrote about negotiation, *Conflicts Unending*. What you quickly realize, or I quickly realized, was that there was an obvious package. There was an obvious, to use the Middle East terminology, final status outcome, which involved compromises by both Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots. But everyone who had worked on the problem for an hour had come around pretty much to the same sort of issues about a weak central government, large degrees of autonomy, certain types of compensation, and what have you. Everyone also came around to saying we need to try to solve the whole thing or you could have lesser agreements. Basically, find a solution or mini packages. And it's very analogous to the Middle East where sometimes people say let's go to Camp David, or other times they'll say let's go step-by-step with a roadmap, and what have you.

Very quickly I realized that the key thing that explains why agreements don't happen, why peace doesn't break out, is not the absence of a potential agreement. The outlines of the potential agreement are usually known to everybody. Instead, what's interesting with Cyprus is why you still couldn't get an agreement when in principle it looked to be in the interest of both sides. That, to me, was what was fascinating about it, that you had to get into the politics and psychology and pathology of the situation.

With the Turkish Cypriots, often it was better to be a big fish in a little pond than to go back to a united country where they'd be overwhelmed. Or the Greek Cypriots, even though they would get some of what they wanted back under any agreement, they still couldn't quite bring themselves to do it because they wouldn't get everything back. It was one of those visceral rejections of a compromise because it wasn't there, it wasn't right, it wasn't just. You had a strong personality [Rauf] Denktash in the north and various people such as [Spyros] Kypriano in the south. When I first went to school, if you will, on the real problems of negotiating these quasi-tribal conflicts, I must have made a dozen trips over there in two years, and what I'd do every trip is see the Turkish Cypriots, the Greek Cypriots, then I'd go to the two mainlands, two motherlands. I'd go to Ankara, I'd go to Athens, and try to get the motherlands to play a helpful role, sort of "hang in there," to their colleagues on the island. You have to play the public game, you have to play the private game.

A lot of what I learned, things on negotiation, came from them. Again, the reason it led to my book on ripeness is that you very quickly learn that what's standing in the way of conflicts being resolved is almost never an idea. It's not as though, gee, if I could only think of a more clever final status arrangement, that would do it. That's never it. It's never figuring out where you want to get. It's almost always thinking about how you get from here to there and how to build a political context in which people either feel confident they can make compromises, or feel they have no choice but to make compromises. As I began, I remember my first trip to Cyprus, writing a cable saying, "This is not going to be that hard." [laughing] "It's obvious what has to happen: boom, boom, boom." [laughing]

Clearly, people thought I was having too many martinis by the pool. After one or two trips, the reality sets in and you realize that it's not the absence of a pretty developed sense of the only conceivable compromise that would have any chance of being simple. It's just you can't get from here to there.

Strong: Is ripeness observable or manageable?

Haass: Certainly, it's observable when it's there. The lesson I drew is that ripeness, more than anything else, is about the willingness and ability of political leaders to get from here to there. They have to also agree on broad outlines of what "there" is and on a process for getting there. But the key is the willingness and ability of the respective political leadership to be prepared and able to lead. You can observe it when it's there. The problem is, it's almost never there.

To me, what I took away from Cyprus is that when ripeness is not there, it doesn't make a lot of sense to focus on final status. Instead, what you ought to focus on is how you create a context that empowers these people to make the compromises and the decisions you want them to make. You want to transform the environment. Just jump ahead many years later. If you look at the [William] Clinton administration at Camp David in the last year of that administration, they came very far on defining the details of the package. The problem was they hadn't built the context for it and that's why ripeness, to me, is important. It's a good discipline for a negotiator because it makes you think constantly about what do I need to do publicly and privately to maneuver everybody, empower them, pressure them, all of the above, persuade them, to make the sorts of decisions you want them to make.

So if the situation isn't ripe, that doesn't mean you give up; it means you need to target often more-modest dimensions of the situation in order to, one by one, remove the barriers to people going down the path you want them to go down. That's what I took away from the Cyprus thing: spend less time on the details of the negotiation and more on the context and the politics of it.

Strong: Again, I may be getting a little ahead, but does this kind of thinking put a premium on personal relationships at the highest level, say Carter-[Anwar] Sadat, make some progress at Camp David, or later in the one you're more familiar with, Bush's personal relationships with [Mikhail] Gorbachev and others?

Haass: I think that's exaggerated. The personal relationships can be useful at the margins, but at the end of the day people are not going to make difficult decisions because they like you or they feel comfortable with you. They're going to make the decisions because, on fairly cold calculations, they are either better off if they do it or worse off if they don't do it. The personal thing is often exaggerated. I think it's useful; but I think it's usually not as important as the fundamentals.

Take Northern Ireland, which I worked on the last few years. I made more than a dozen trips. So, yes, it's useful that I had a working relationship with Gerry Adams and other people. But I still couldn't get Gerry to do some of the things I wanted; it didn't matter that we have a good working relationship. I still couldn't get him to say and write certain things. I couldn't get the provisional IRA [Irish Republican Army] to say and write certain things. I think the personal relationships tend to be exaggerated.

This is an aside: most Presidents, from FDR [Franklin Delano Roosevelt] on, tend to fall into that trap, into the personal diplomacy trap. Virtually every President succumbs to that, at one point or another.

Knott: So you leave the State Department in 1985 to go to the Kennedy School. Do I have the chronology correct?

Haass: Yes.

Knott: Then in 1988 you have this affiliation, position with the Dole campaign. Tell us, perhaps you already touched on this, how you make the transition from Bob Dole to the Bush circle.

Haass: I'm not quite sure I can actually do the archeology on it myself, but the Dole thing basically came to an end, it must have been around February or March. It essentially died in New Hampshire and then—

Strong: Do you know how you came to Dole's attention, could you explain that?

Haass: Yes, I came to Dole's attention through one of Dole's best friends, a guy named Bob Ellsworth, who a few years before had been Ambassador to NATO. He was a former Congressman. He was best man at one of Dole's weddings, at his first wedding. I think he was

Deputy Secretary of Defense at one point. Anyhow, Bob and I had become friends, if my memory serves me right, through the IISS [International Institute for Strategic Studies] years before, in the late '70s. He was a part-time member of the foreign policy-defense policy establishment, and I was a junior member, and we had become friends.

It must have been sometime in the mid-to-late '80s that he said, "My friend Bob Dole is going to run for President, would you help?" I liked Dole, I found him attractive, thought he had a decent shot, and said sure. This is when I was up at Harvard. That's essentially what brought me in. Dole had a guy on his staff who was his day-to-day foreign policy guy and who I did not think the world of, so I started doing more and more for Dole and he seemed pretty comfortable with it. It was almost that simple. Campaigns are funny things. Campaigns tend to be pretty rag-tag affairs. They're not usually organized; they're not for the insecure; they're not for the anal-compulsive. Those who like line diagrams are going to get very frustrated by political campaigns, particularly Dole's. There were informal lines of authority and so forth. But anyhow, I spent a lot of time with Ellsworth writing stuff, speeches for the candidates, not particularly succeeding. If you remember, you had about a half-dozen Republican candidates, including Haig, if I remember correctly.

Knott: That's right.

Haass: You had [Donald] Rumsfeld for a while, Dole, [Jack] Kemp, and Bush, obviously. One of the big foreign policy questions was regarding the arms control side of the zero-option and all that, arms control in Europe. Bush was the only one who was supporting Reagan's policy at that time. He was Vice President, but everybody else was to Bush's right. Interesting. And to Reagan's right, which I felt was nuts. But I couldn't persuade Dole, so I said, this is crazy; you're going to end up diluting your position, because there's you and four or five of these other characters, all to the right of Ronald Reagan? And, you're going to allow Vice President Bush, who is going to be the only one, first of all, in this position? So it's going to be one against five? Plus, he's going to be the only one supporting Ronald Reagan and the only one supporting arms control? What am I missing here? This is nuts. But anyhow, I couldn't persuade him.

I think it was one of the issues that clearly helped Vice President Bush get the nomination. Anyway, I think it was originally Dennis Ross, who was an old friend of mine, who asked me to join the Bush campaign. Dennis was playing the role for Bush that I had played for Dole, essentially his foreign policy coordinator.

Strong: In a campaign like this, how many people are giving foreign policy advice to a candidate? A small number?

Haass: Giving advice to the candidate, a small number; involvement in the campaign, often dozens. What you do is you have all these people who want to help, in part because they want to help and in part because, obviously, they're hoping that if the guy wins it leads to a nice job in the Old Executive Office Building. So you have dozens and dozens of people. What you end up doing is creating working groups and committees and task forces. Everybody wants to help and you need to channel them in certain directions. But the number of people actually meeting with the candidates is usually just a handful. If you're smart, it's only a handful. I mean, for example,

look at [John] Kerry now. You've got Randy Beers playing that role for Kerry, and then you have almost circles. You've probably got an inner circle now, Richard Holbrooke and Sandy Berger and Joe Biden and a few others. Then you've got concentric circles and you may have task forces and all these people at the Brookings Institution and Carnegie who want jobs in a Kerry administration who are doing what they're doing. That's pretty much the way this spins.

I think it was Dennis who originally approached me and spoke to Baker, and Baker and I spoke, if I remember correctly. It was small; it was just Dennis and one or two others and me in the spring of '88. So it wasn't a lot of people but Dennis was clearly *primus inter pares*. You also had [Brent] Scowcroft playing kind of a different role. Dennis was doing the day-to-day writing of the papers, traveling. Baker had a special position as the campaign chair, but he wasn't really a big-name foreign policy expert yet. Scowcroft played a role of sorts. Dennis was kind of the day-to-day guy and then you'd have the bigger guys like Baker and Scowcroft, and I just got brought in.

But I didn't have a large role; to say the least, it was modest. Then after Bush won, so now we're at the fall of '88, it was kind of weird in the sense that the "great mentioner" mentioned me for any number of things but nothing ever happened. So I'd be on this list for that, this list for that, this list for that, but the phone never rang. I was running out of time because I'd promised Al Carnesale, who was the Dean at the Kennedy School, that—I can't remember when it was, it was some date we'd agreed on; I can't remember if it was in December, or January 1—I had to give him a go/no-go about whether I was going to be back to teach. I'd have to plan the courses and all that. It wasn't until about a day before my go/no-go decision that it finally got resolved. It was one of those—

Knott: Who did you hear from? Do you recall who called?

Haass: It was Brent. Brent called and said, "Would you be interested in the Middle East job on the NSC?" I said, "I don't know, let me think about it." It wasn't what I'd thought I was going to get offered. So I thought about it for a day and said yes, and even he said afterwards, "Your name was on several of my lists. You were the number-one guy on the Middle East job, but you were the number-two guy I was thinking of for the European job." I'm kind of a generalist. Baker later said, "We were thinking of you for either the Middle East job or the European job at State." For a while I was thought of for the Latin American job until some academic paper I'd written got published in the *Miami Herald*, which blew me out of the water on the Latin America job.

Knott: Why did that blow you out of the water?

Haass: I had written a paper at one point about the struggle going on in Nicaragua and, among other things, had said that the Contras could not win a military victory. The paper argued that giving the Contras military support would set the stage for an acceptable diplomatic negotiation, would help make it ripe. But I said you could not arm them to an extent that we could ever hope for a military victory. Somehow that got translated into a piece in the *Miami Herald*, a front-page story about how a principal foreign policy advisor to Vice President Bush did not believe in the Contras, or something. Needless to say, it was not a helpful story at a time that winning Florida

was—as Baker informed me, my prospects for becoming the Assistant Secretary for Latin American Affairs suffered a setback that day. Of such things careers are made and lost.

Knott: Right. You said that when you received this offer you were surprised because you had had something else in mind. Would you share with us what you—?

Haass: I was thinking of being at State. I'd worked probably recently more on Europe so I thought maybe the Assistant Secretary for Europe, possibly the policy-planning job. I don't know. The idea of being the Middle East guy on the NSC was not something I'd expected. I'd done some writing on the Middle East, but it was not something I'd expected. I'd had a relationship with Brent but it wasn't that close a relationship. We didn't know each other that well. So it came as something of a surprise.

Knott: What kind of discussions did you have with Brent, understandings that you had with him going in?

Haass: Almost none. *[laughter]* Later on he told me that the reason he offered me the job was because he basically thought well of me, but also he wanted someone to work on the Middle East who he didn't think was so, what's the word, defined. He was thinking more of the Arab-Israeli side because, although the job included work on the Middle East peace process but also the Gulf and also South Asia. He wanted to avoid somebody who he thought was so committed or so defined on it that he couldn't get any new thinking out of him. But no, we never really even talked. He just said, "I'd like you to do it." I said I'd think about it and called him back a day later and said, "Okay, let's do it."

Strong: Now were there additional professionals working on the Middle East that you subsequently recruited, and how large was that?

Haass: It's interesting in retrospect because when I got there, the previous crowd had pretty much cleared out. [Robert] Oakley had already cleared out; Bill Burns was there, I think on his last day. Also, at the administration's end at the White House, the safes are emptied, so everything goes to the Presidential Library. So, literally, I show up and it's now January 20-something, a couple of days after the administration began, by the time the clearance things come through. There's nothing in the safes and there's virtually no staff there. It was a very bizarre moment. There's no manual; here's how you do the job. So it's really odd.

Traditionally, it's a very small staff, usually just the senior director and two or so assistants. So what I did was, I kept one person, it was Sandy Charles, who was there working on the Persian Gulf and all that, and had been at the Pentagon. I hired David Welch, a Foreign Service officer, to work with me on the peace process, and that was it. That was the staff. I think now you would have more than a dozen people covering what the three of us covered. It was just a different period and a different sense, maybe, of what the NSC should be. It was very small. People are recruited from the inside who could be detailed over, so we didn't have to pay for them or find slots for them. Very small, a modest operation.

Knott: Did you meet with President Bush right off the bat or at any point during the transition?

Haass: I don't think so. I'd have to go back—I don't think so.

Knott: When was your first meeting with him? This is a question we always ask.

Haass: I don't remember. [*laughter*]

Knott: You don't recall.

Haass: You're the first person who's ever asked me that.

Knott: Not during your State Department years, that you recall?

Haass: Oh yes, I met him a few times when he was Vice President, but I couldn't tell you to this day when we first met.

Strong: Did Scowcroft make a habit of bringing people from the past into—

Haass: Not early on. You've got to remember, when we took over in '89 it was January 20-something, the most pressing issue in my account, which again was the Middle East, the Persian Gulf, and South Asia, was Afghanistan because February 15, '89 was the date set—I'm pretty sure I've got this right—

Knott: You've got that right.

Haass: —for the military withdrawal, the completion of the Soviet military, the Red Army military, withdrawal from Afghanistan, and the whole question was, we had to put together a post-Soviet Afghan policy, so it came to me. The first substantive national security decision document of the Bush administration was on Afghanistan, and I had to write it. So I wrote it. I had to write the background for the briefing. I think it was the first time I'd been involved with the President in this administration. The whole question was about how were we going to respond, what was going to guide our policy, and to give you a very precise question that has all sorts of interesting overtones, given the last decade or so of history, what was going to be our relationship with the various Mujaheddin whom we'd been arming up the kazoo against the Soviets. What was going to be our relationship with them? How much were we going to arm them? Who was going to get it? What was going to be the criterion, because in the past, the criterion was that we'd give arms to the guys who were best fighting the Soviets. We didn't care what their ideologies were; we didn't have that luxury.

Now it was very different and we had to think about how much to give and what should be the criterion. We were thinking about post-Soviet Afghanistan. We knew that the government was probably not going to survive; how was it going to evolve? What was going to be, whether it was Najibullah or his successor, how were we going to use our relationship to steer Afghanistan? It was one of the most frustrating experiences I had in government, which is because I found myself—here I was, a young guy just starting at the NSC. I'd been to Afghanistan, I knew something about it but was not an expert, suddenly put in the middle of this—we didn't have

much time. Indeed, at one point I remember getting frustrated at a meeting and saying, “If we don’t get our act together, I’m going to have to go to the President and ask the Soviets to delay leaving because we’re not going to have our post-Soviet policy in place yet.” I found it very frustrating because the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] was so tied to various characters, and I thought they were extremely slow to transition from the anti-Soviet basis for policy to a post-Soviet basis. I remember going out there and getting briefed and having arguments—

Knott: Langley?

Haass: Langley. And coming back and talking to Bob Gates, whose whole career had been out there, and now Brent’s deputy, and saying this is Jell-O, I can’t grab it, I know I’m getting the runaround. It was just very unsatisfying. At the end of the day, the policy we ended up with, I’m not sure—I don’t think it was the best—was essentially one that said we will not try to get ambitious in Afghanistan. We will not try to use our various instruments, arms aid, financial aid, what have you, to try to manipulate the politics of Afghanistan to favor this or that Mujaheddin over another. I was very uneasy about it then. I remember Larry Eagleburger and others also being uneasy about it, saying why are we being so passive here, why don’t we try to do it? The feeling was, well, we’ll get drawn into all their internecine squabbles, it will be too hard, we don’t have enough people involved. We were giving support to the Pakistanis, if you remember. But I remember feeling uneasy about it.

Again, I felt very frustrated because the CIA still had the upper hand because they were the guys on the ground who were dealing with the Afghans through the Pakistanis. It was one of those things where I just felt, it was actually instinct, that we were wrong. But I had just gone to work at the White House; here you are at the NSC, and there’s a tremendous feeling of frustration and almost powerlessness. I felt I couldn’t quite change the policy. Every couple of months I’d go out to Langley and I’d have the same unsatisfying conversation with all the guys who were saying, “Well, yes, I know what we really want to do but we can’t quite do that.” I felt the United States was slow to change its policy, basically put more pressure on the Pakistanis not to help certain groups. I believe we should have tried more to have steered post-Soviet Afghan policy. That said, I have no idea whether we could have succeeded, because again, we didn’t have a direct path, we had to do it through the Pakistanis, through the ISI [Pakistani intelligence service]. But it was not one of the more successful or satisfying government experiences I’d had.

Strong: Let me ask a question about that. Was there anyone at the time thinking about any spillover that was going to occur?

Haass: A little bit. We talked about it. You’ve got to remember it was early on in the administration. Early on, the first few months of any administration are rough because there are not too many people who know each other; people aren’t in place, particularly those who have to go through confirmation. One of the advantages of being at the NSC is that you don’t have to go through that. People don’t know the issues. So the Afghan issue was coming up by February 15th; it was way too soon for it. Yes, there were—I was startled over the amount of equipment out there that we had just pushed in an inordinate amount of ordnance, including the Stingers.

Strong: Was anyone talking about cutting that off or getting those back?

Haass: The feeling was that people were apprehensive about doing so because you didn't want to alienate the locals. So it looked like we developed a habit. We were supplying people, and that was the way we thought we could keep influence. It wasn't quite clear what the options were. It was hard to get people's attention. Again, so much of it was contracted out to the Pakistanis.

Strong: When did you first encounter the name [Osama] bin Laden?

Haass: Not then. I don't remember, but it certainly wasn't then. The person I remember then who was the big warlord was Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, and he, to me, was the symbol of what was wrong with the policy. Here was this guy who may have been a good anti-Soviet but was clearly violently anti-American; he was this nut, basically. So I mentioned the idea that we were—the CIA, the DoD—still involved with people like him, I felt we were way too slow to jettison him and others like him.

I understand that we had to get into bed with some unsavory characters because the priority was to defeat the Soviets, but I think we were slow to make the transition. I never heard bin Laden's name. I mean there was [Ahmed Shah] Masud obviously, one of the better guys, and we could go down the list. But the bottom line of the Agency was, don't try to micromanage this to where we say so many arms and so many dollars to X as opposed to Y. Don't play favorites in Afghanistan.

Strong: Were they making those calls or were they letting—

Haass: I think the general feeling was, let's not get ambitious in Afghanistan. Again, it did lead, over the next couple of years, if you remember; ultimately, the Taliban came in. I guess that was during the early Clinton administration. But I think for the Bush administration and the Clinton administration, there was a kind of passivity, a lack of ambition about Afghanistan, not so much because we thought it would sort itself out well, but there's a sense of, it's Afghanistan, it will be messy, but it will be an Afghan sort of solution. We could try, but we probably won't make much difference. It won't be great, it won't be awful, it will just be. So there was a kind of fatalistic approach to Afghanistan. It wasn't a priority, people didn't get ambitious, and they allowed it to drift, subcontracting it out in large part to the Pakistanis. And that's kind of where the policy was, I think, for essentially the four years of the Bush administration and most of the years in the Clinton administration.

Knott: So it wasn't on your radar screen for the entire four years you were there?

Haass: It was low priority.

Knott: Other than that initial burst.

Haass: The initial burst, and then periodically a little, but when I think of how I spent my time, and I don't have my schedules any more, I would rattle off ten other issues before Afghanistan. Obviously, the Middle East peace process, Libya, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, nuclear certification, India. I could go through the list. Afghanistan was not high. There was a sense of allowing

Afghanistan to be Afghanistan. It was one of those places that people thought almost no matter how much effort you put in or how much you tried, your ability to really shape events was going to be modest. The feeling was that we had just helped them accomplish this great thing in defeating the Soviets; that was the main event, not a lot of follow-up. I think that was true for the next 12 or 13 years, essentially until 9/11.

Knott: I'm going to mandate that we take a break, exercise my prerogative as chair.

[BREAK]

Knott: Why don't you start things off.

Strong: I'd like to hear a bit more about this getting-started period on the NSC staff and I have a couple of questions related to that. Did you talk to some of the holders of the position you had? Was there a stack of papers from the transition or the campaign that meant anything or got things started? Then maybe give more discussion of that first group on the National Security Council and how they began to work together.

Haass: As I said, when you come into these jobs at the beginning of an administration, the files are empty, which is bizarre. That's the way it is at the White House. I talked to Bill Burns, who had been the number-two or number-three guy there, and I spoke to Dennis Ross, who recently had done it. I think I may have spoken to Bob Oakley or Bill Clark. I didn't read any campaign-type things but I was pretty familiar with what the Reagan administration had done. I had worked on these issues, some of these issues at least, and Dennis and I and others had talked about them. But people always find it out; it's not as though you show up, and there's not a big briefing book that gives you a lot of guidance, there's not a manual on how to get it done, you make it up as you go along. *[laughter]*

Knott: Could you talk a little bit about the organization of the Scowcroft NSC?

Haass: The Scowcroft NSC, at least at the beginning, was pretty small. You had Brent, you had Bob Gates as his deputy, and then you had directorates. You must have had a dozen or 15 directorates, either geographic, like mine—one for Latin America, one for Europe/Russia, one for Asia, whatever—or functional, arms control, intelligence or congressional affairs, what have you. They were all pretty small. Mine was me plus David and Sandy. The Europe one was Bob Blackwill, Adrian Basora, Bob Hutchings, *[Condoleezza]* Condi Rice, at some point Philip Zelikow, but he had himself plus three. Compared to the current NSC staff, I must point out, it was much, much, much smaller.

There were staff meetings maybe once or twice a week collectively but, with all due respect to Brent, I found them not useful. The NSC staff doesn't do a lot collectively. It was pretty much each directorate works on its own domain, and you don't necessarily ask or care much what the Latin America guy thinks about China. That's not the way it works. So it tends to be fairly compartmentalized.

Strong: Now when you work on an issue like Afghanistan, you were talking to whoever had the Soviet Union?

Haass: Sure, although actually not that much, because it was already post-Soviet policy. If it had been the previous year, sure. But when it did come to something like going to Helsinki or some summit with the Soviets, obviously Condi and I would coordinate because she had that experience. Or when it came to the Iraq war, we'll talk about that later, to the extent others were involved, we obviously coordinated across the directorates. But for the most part, there wasn't a whole lot that was the NSC staff as a kind of corpus, as a collective. It tended to be more individual.

I looked around, thought hard about who I would hire, spent a lot of time talking to David Welch about his group of issues, Sandy Charles about hers, and brought in—obviously spent a lot of time talking to people around the government. I made it a point to meet regularly with outsiders. I used to hold regular Middle East sessions, for example, to talk about those issues; I didn't isolate myself.

Knott: You would bring them in?

Haass: Bring them into our offices; we'd have lunch and dinner together. We get a heavy flow of visitors; you don't lack for contacts and information, a lot of people want to see you. I spent a lot of time every day with Gates and Scowcroft, either individually or collectively. I think my time with the President was sporadic for the first year-and-a-half; it would happen every so often. Thereafter it became intense. I think within the staff, also, there's sorting out. Brent got more comfortable with certain people than with others, so certain people started to take on different roles outside their own parish.

I think one of the things that happened as he got more comfortable with certain people, there was clearly trust; I was writing the President's speeches on Russia by the end of the four years. When he gave the response to Nixon, I wrote that. So you end up taking on some different roles. Anytime you're a boss—I've been a boss now several times—you learn people's strengths, you learn their range, and all that. You learn what you can put on their backs. I think it was the same thing for Brent. It took time to realize exactly what he had. So different people took on different roles.

Strong: Would you have had regular contact with congressional staffers or members?

Haass: No—

Strong: Was that for the other—

Haass: I think the first year-and-a-half with members it would just be incidental. I knew some pretty well, people like Les Aspin or certain Senators, like Dick Lugar. Yes, there was some contact. It became more systematic with the Gulf War, with the Iraq War. With staffers, not a lot; a little bit but not a lot.

Strong: For the Middle East portfolio, were there meetings that amounted to lobbyists coming in?

Haass: Oh yes, it was the Middle East. I would spend a lot of time with representatives of the Jewish community, and AIPAC [American-Israel Public Affairs Committee], the Conference of Presidents, various organizations. Remember, I had just come to this job from the Kennedy School and I had taught a lot of management courses. I ultimately wrote a book on management—it was originally called *The Power to Persuade*, then it was called *The Bureaucratic Entrepreneur*. But I'd already developed the whole idea of a compass and the idea that you have to pay attention to each of your directions, your bosses, your staff, your colleagues on the inside, the people who matter on the outside. I was pretty conscious of not getting isolated in this job, particularly on an issue like the Arab-Israeli question, you got isolated at your peril. It was so political that you had to spend a lot of time meeting with prominent members of the Jewish community; you'd have to meet with the community leaders.

Strong: I want to ask some broad questions about flow of paper and the staff. Did you do a lot of writing that went to the President's desk? Did you get notations coming back or were you getting feedback from Gates and Scowcroft much more than you would from the President?

Haass: I ended up doing pretty much two kinds of writing. One part of writing is what you have to do, which is briefing papers for meetings. You've got to answer the mail, which to me was the least interesting, but you've got to do that. Just because it's probably my temperament, my background, I probably did more writing of the planning sort, the next steps to the Middle East, the next steps for this, where do we go next with Iraq, or where do we go with Iran, or what have you.

Strong: And those would have been memos addressed to whom?

Haass: The President. There would have been cover notes from me to Brent and it would be a memo from Brent to the President. I did quite a bit of that. I didn't get a lot of feedback; I did sometimes. The key thing is that they went forward, and I knew they'd be read. Sometimes we'd have meetings about it. The President was not the kind of guy who wrote detailed marginalia. That wasn't his style. I've worked for bosses who do that. Once in a while there'd be a meeting on the Middle East; at one point early on there was a meeting of Brent, Jim Baker, Dennis Ross, and myself with the President. I had written him stuff about where do we go with the Middle East and I got all the feedback I wanted and then some.

Strong: And it was clear he'd read what—

Haass: Oh, yes.

Strong: And if he got one of the big presidential notebooks with an executive summary and lots of appendices, did he dig deep in those kinds of documents?

Haass: I doubt it. My God, I never took them seriously. I mean those trip books are a colossal waste of time. You'd get all these papers from the State Department. The President would be going to Oshkosh and he'd have 50 papers on this or that. I thought that was a colossal waste of time; nobody reads it.

Strong: But the things you were writing were short.

Haass: Yes, I'm a big believer in think pieces that run a few pages, two to three pages, single-spaced, maybe four, but not a lot longer. Briefings for meetings should be kept short. I think you can usually say what you've got to say and keep it fairly short. It's rare that I would go longer than that. Time is such a precious commodity. One, to write it takes a lot, but more important, for the guys you're writing for. In my experience, to compete for the President's time and attention is tough.

Strong: When the President was speaking to an Israeli leader or someone in your region, did he use a note taker?

Haass: Yes, the way that would work was fine. Anytime the President has a meeting, you'd do a formal briefing paper. It would have background sheets in it and you'd say, here's your purposes in meeting, here's what [Yitzhak] Shamir is bringing to the meeting, here's what your goals should be for the meeting, here's some talking points. So we'd review those. I'd obviously take this seriously. The first draft would usually be done by someone on my staff after we talked about it. Usually what also mattered more was the pre-brief, and sometimes it might be that Brent and I would walk into the Oval Office and take two minutes with the President before so-and-so was ushered in. The President had or had not read the briefing paper, depending. He'd say, "What's he got on his mind?" And I would basically give him a quick squirt, and he'd say, "Okay" or "What is it we want to do here?" I'd say, "The two things we really want out of the meeting are X and Y." He'd say, "Okay, got it."

You've got to remember, this is a guy who had been Vice President for eight years. For every day into the Presidency, by definition, he'd been President for one more day; he was the former head of the CIA. He was a foreign policy junky. You weren't dealing with somebody, I thought, who needed tons of briefing. He knew a lot of these people; he spent a lot of time working the telephones. He had a pretty good background and knowledge bank inside of him. To me, the most important things were maybe to offer some specifics, to write the think pieces, to get him to think about stuff that he hadn't thought about, or to get him to think about stuff differently. But for the most part, this was different from working for Ronald Reagan, who I remember. I was maybe in ten meetings with Reagan, not a lot in my years there, very rarely, but you sensed that he was looking at the—following the cards a lot more. With Bush, you sensed it was more internalized. That's because he was more comfortable and familiar with the material.

Strong: When he was having conversations with various leaders, was there information coming down about pieces of information he was picking up or things he wanted?

Haass: Yes. It's always hard in a bureaucracy to get debriefed. I'd often get what I needed from Brent. Again, in my case, you've got to divide it almost into phases. The first year-and-a-half of

the administration was qualitatively different from the next two-and-a-half years, for three reasons. One is the first year-and-a-half, besides being new and all that, the focus of the administration was very much on the handling of the end of the Cold War. That, for the most part, was not inside my area of responsibility. So for the first year-and-a-half the NSC staffers who were most involved were my friend Bob Gates, probably Bob Blackwill, and Condi Rice, who was very much in that area. My involvement with the President was relatively episodic because we had at best a halting and unsuccessful attempt to get something going between Israelis and Palestinians.

The Gulf was talked about intermittently, not more. Afghanistan was talked about a little bit in the beginning, then not a lot. Pakistan was discussed largely around that one issue of nuclear certification. But basically, with the exception of the Arab-Israeli question, the issues in my parish were not coming up regularly. And even those were not the principal issues on the President's foreign policy plate, which again, had much more to do with the end of the Cold War, dealing with Gorbachev, and so forth. So for the first year-and-a-half, I would say, to use the vernacular, the amount of face time I had was quite modest. The Middle East was a frustrating area because we couldn't quite get it going; we must have sliced and diced the approach a dozen times. There were the ten points, the five points. A lot of negotiation also was handled at the State Department because it was operationally diplomatic. Baker was doing a lot of it. Our role was more secondary or supporter.

It became key, for example to entertain visitors. In the spring of '89, I can't remember the order but you had [Hosni] Mubarak, Shamir, and King Hussein all to the White House. That was a lot of intense time with the President, getting him ready for those three meetings, going to the three meetings, and all that. And then it would fall off and there'd be another visitor. For the first year-and-a-half, most of his involvement was surrounding visits because there was no real sustained diplomatic enterprise in the area. Otherwise, obviously, in-house meetings, what do we do about this or that, the Gulf question, an Afghan question, or a Pakistani question. There is a divide between the first 18 months and everything afterwards.

Strong: When all the files are opened at the Bush library, that's decades and decades away, where would you recommend people start digging? What would be— [Haass laughs]

Knott: Give us a shortcut.

Strong: Where would you find the best paper story of what took place, or is it impossible?

Haass: I have no idea. Paper story of what first of all?

Strong: The foreign policy work of the National Security Council, the work you know about.

Haass: The answer is—

Strong: I think the answer to the Reagan White House would be look at the speechwriting files. He paid attention to that.

Haass: I think I did as much foreign policy speechwriting for Bush 41 in the end as anybody. I don't think that would be it, though the speeches were representative of whatever it was he developed. I think you'll have your basic material, your NSC memos. You're not going to find a lot of presidential feedback. You'll have all your formal national security documents, which will tell you something. I think his memoir with Scowcroft, in part because it draws on his diary, would give you quite a lot of useful stuff. You've got Baker's book, which doesn't tell you a whole lot. The other principals haven't done books, unless I've forgotten it.

Strong: [unclear; two people talking at once].

Haass: Yes, faithful summary. I will ultimately do mine. That will be my next book, not the book I'm doing that I start in January, which will cover the Bush administration. Dennis Ross' book is coming out this summer, and will capture some of that. I don't know where you're going to find the mother lode. I think it's the historian's dilemma more generally in this age of email and conversation. I think the written record, not that it's ever inaccurate, you just never know what percentage of the story you're getting. You don't know if you're getting 40% or 80%, so it may not necessarily be representative.

When I think of the Persian Gulf crisis—there were all the meetings I was in of the Deputies Committee, the small group we had; all the meetings of the aides, some of which I was in, some of which I wasn't—I don't know what kind of records you're going to get of it. There wasn't someone sitting down playing [James] Boswell in those meetings. Often, I had written the papers for the meeting and I would write things; I didn't sit down and write the summary of the meetings. There may be some summaries somewhere at the NSC. There are summaries of the formal NSC meetings, but not of the dozens and dozens of just meetings about stuff, so I don't think you're going to have any luck.

Strong: Memoirs may be important, and oral history.

Haass: You're not going to get the full formal record of all the conversations; it's just not going to be there. You'll be able to piece it together but there are going to be holes and that's unavoidable.

Knott: You did mention during your first year-and-a-half at the NSC that there were these halting and unsuccessful attempts at Arab-Israeli dialogue. Could you recount some of those halting—?

Haass: Again, my memory is not great here so maybe you can jog it, but let's take a step back to what we inherited in '89. As I recall, I wouldn't swear by this, but you had a situation where you had one new development, which was in the interregnum between the election and the administration, where you had the United States open up a dialogue with the PLO [Palestine Liberation Organization]. Shultz did that, which gave this administration—I think it was through Tunis, our embassy there—a dialogue with the PLO. But the question was, how do we advance the peace process?

If you recall, the U.S. position was opposition to a Palestinian state; there was no interest in that. The idea was to talk with non-PLO Palestinians about how we could move something forward. The idea was not final, status, but something more modest, some version of autonomy. You had at various times Egyptian plans, American plans, five-point plans, Mubarak ten-point plans. I can't remember for the life of me the details. You had Israeli plans. What most of these, if my recollection serves me right, had in common was some way of finding a Palestinian interlocutor who was not PLO and whom the Israelis would deal with. They had to go through a great charade because to get a Palestinian interlocutor that wasn't PLO still required the PLO to allow it.

We went through endless, endless meetings with Israelis and with Palestinians about this, trying to come up with some formula for elections that would produce a Palestinian interlocutor that was acceptable to the Israelis and also acceptable, to put it bluntly, to [Yasser] Arafat and to the PLO. Now remember, these people had to be non-PLO. We spent the best part of 15 or so months trying to do that. I can't remember all the details. All I remember is that it took place over a year from roughly the spring of '89 to the spring of '90, the entire effort had about run out of gas by the late spring of '90.

In a funny sort of way, had the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait not happened then, I think the administration would have had to do a rethink, where do we go next with the Middle East, because the attempts with the Shamir government and the rest were just getting nowhere. But because the Iraq war came up then, it allowed us to say we're not going to deal with the Middle East until after the war and then we can talk about it; you had a hold on until Madrid, for the Iraq war, the Gulf War changed the dynamics. What else can I say?

I remember it was all uneasy in the sense that the administration never established a comfortable relationship with the Israeli leadership, there was a lot of mutual suspicion, to put it bluntly.

Knott: Why was that?

Haass: I don't know. I was thinking about it because I knew you were going to ask me that. On one level, objectively, the Bush administration, the one we're talking about, had a very good record of performance on things that mattered to Israel. I can't remember everything, but when you think about it, you had an administration that helped get the Ethiopian Jews out, got the Russian Jews out, got Zionism as racism repealed by the UN [United Nations] General Assembly, successfully fought a war against Saddam Hussein, ultimately did Madrid. It got the first face-to-face talks ever between Israelis and Arabs. One could go down this pretty impressive list. Yet there was never a comfort level.

You asked me before, do personal things matter? Well, maybe this is one of the areas where personal things mattered. Apart from the chemistry, I don't think the Israelis ever—particularly the Likud, Shamir and his people—ever particularly trusted either President Bush or Secretary Baker. I can't explain whether it was chemical. I don't know; there just wasn't a comfort level there. I think Bush and Shamir in particular had trouble, in part because they got off to a terrible start; it was an ironic diplomatic moment.

There was a meeting—again, I hope I’ve got my sequence right; you might want to check this out but I’m pretty sure it was the first meeting between Shamir and Bush in the spring of ’89. It was just the four of us in the sense it was Bush, Shamir, Moshe Arad, the Israeli Ambassador, and myself in the room. Often you had one-on-one meetings before a larger meeting of the two delegations can sit together. I don’t know how the ritual started, but I think often it was a way to make foreign visitors feel good. We’re going to have this real intimate tête-à-tête before we bring in everybody else. Kind of silly, for the most part, but that’s the way it’s sometimes done. There’s nothing it’s going to add, and the people supposedly with you, these are obviously people you trust. Anyhow, you go through this ritual.

The President, as you know, had a concern about settlements and the issue came up, the President raised it, he said, “Look, you know, Prime Minister, the question of settlements really is important to me, it matters....” And Shamir, literally, waved it off with the back of his hand, and he said, “Not a problem, no problem, don’t worry about it.” It took me about six months and numerous conversations with Moshe Arad to realize that when Shamir said that, he and Bush understood diametrically different things from it. What Shamir was saying was it *shouldn’t* be a problem; you Americans are exaggerating the significance. Bush took it to mean, oh, I’ve got his pledge that he’s not going to do anything to cause me a problem.

So when Shamir then, after the meeting, continued to do things with settlements, and start new settlements—literally every time Jim Baker would show up there he’d be greeted by a new wave of settlements—Bush took it as an act of bad faith; this guy has lied to me, this guy has crossed me. It wasn’t until six to nine months later that Arad and I, almost kind of doing archeology on it, figured out that must have been the moment. I then went into see the President and told him that. I said, “I think I now understand the problem between you and Shamir.” [*laughing*] I told him what I just told you and he looked at me like I was truly naïve. It seems I didn’t make a big dent; it wasn’t one of my more successful interactions with the Commander-in-Chief of the Western world. But I do think that that had a lot to do with it, in addition to the lack of comfort.

There were lots of other things. I remember during the Iraq war, once these things get on the wrong track it’s hard to get them on the right track. There were some of the Scud attacks in Tel Aviv and there was a meeting, and Moshe Arens, the Israeli defense minister, was visiting. I gather he had been on the phone with his wife and Arens came away extremely upset because when he came into the meeting with the President or Baker, no one asked him how his family was. They hadn’t realized he’d been on the phone with his wife. It was one of those kinds of things. It was one of those relationships that could never quite get on track.

I remember the spring of ’89. Mubarak must have come to Washington before Shamir. So Mubarak comes and the President takes him to a baseball game, the Orioles, which in itself is one of those bizarre moments. Walking through the crowd, the only 25 people in the stadium wearing suits, looking like complete jerks. A week later Shamir comes. I remember two funny things. One is, because we had done this with Mubarak, the idea was that we had to do something personal for Shamir. I had a call from Scowcroft saying, “Find out what Shamir likes to do.” We took Mubarak to a ball game, we can’t take him to a ball game, we have to come up with something different. I called up Moshe Arad, the Israeli ambassador, and said, “I know this

is going to sound like one of the stranger calls you've gotten, but what is your Prime Minister's hobby? What would he like to do with the President?"

"I don't think he has any hobbies." Go find a hobby I told him. Moshe keeps saying that he doesn't have a hobby. We end up with a walk around the Rose Garden or something, that's the most we could think of. It was clearly straight from the bottom of the barrel. I remember one of Shamir's closest aides [Eli Rubenstein] was very upset. He said, "I don't understand it. Mubarak comes and you take him to the baseball game, you treat him like your bubbala," which is Yiddish for grandmother. "You treat him like your bubbala and now when Shamir comes, you don't treat him like anything special." It was interesting. From the beginning, the Israelis—Shamir and the people around him—and this administration just never clicked.

They had some good moments. I think a very interesting moment was when the Israelis were attacked by Scuds by Iraq, and Bush prevailed upon Shamir not to retaliate. That was one of the most fascinating moments between these two men who did not particularly like or trust one another but were still able to work together in an extraordinarily difficult moment. But that was the exception. There was just never chemistry. It was obviously a lot better when [Yitzhak] Rabin became Prime Minister. For a lot of Americans, where Rabin was coming from, that kind of more traditional, Labor Party position, embracing territorial compromise, was just more practical. There was more of a like-mindedness there.

Knott: You mentioned President Mubarak, one future historian 50 or 100 years from now might be interested in your own assessment of Mubarak.

Haass: Mubarak never lacks for confidence. By the time Bush had become President, which was '89, Mubarak had been in power for over a decade and was very confident, very comfortable in establishing these personal relationships with American Presidents. "George, let me tell you, I know these Arabs, trust me, George." He was constantly speaking on behalf of the Arab world, quite confident in his predictions not to worry about Saddam, things like that. I found him increasingly confident, often not accurate in his predictions or analyses; he clearly had a blind spot about his own country.

Knott: The blind spot being the fundamentalist movement within his—

Haass: And it wasn't an issue on the agenda. We can talk about that later, if you want. I found his aides, people like Osama el-Baz and others would be helpful talking to Palestinians and help us with the peace process. The Egyptians were moderately helpful but couldn't be counted on to do all that much heavy lifting.

Knott: President Bush had a good relationship with him?

Haass: Yes, President Bush had a good relationship with Mubarak and his wife, a good relationship with King Hussein. It survived all the difficulties during the Gulf War. The President was very generous toward King Hussein. By and large, Bush had good relations with most people. He was able to talk to lots of people. Bush was incredibly respectful. He was good with the personal thing, the manners, he was very good with that and in the Arab world that matters a

lot, the formality of it. Bush was extremely good. He knew these guys for a long time. They trusted him. This might have also contributed to some of the unease in the relationship with the Israelis, but we were trying to line up Madrid.

As you recall, we got the Syrians on board before we got the Israelis on board. Bush invested in these relationships. The fact that Syria and Egypt joined the coalition against Sudan was not, shall we say, an accident. He had banked quite a lot in the Arab world. Yes, I think he talked to Mubarak, and probably Mubarak and King Hussein were the two Arab leaders with whom he had the most comfortable long-term relationship. He also had a relationship with somebody like [Prince] Bandar in Washington, which was different. I think those were the two, Mubarak and Hussein, that he had the longest relationships with. They probably went back 15 or more years, maybe 20 years.

Strong: There's some disadvantage to those long relationships because for eight years he would have been carrying Reagan policy wherever he went and—

Haass: Didn't hurt him.

Strong: It didn't hurt him?

Haass: He was very well liked. I don't know why, whether it was a personal thing or he was sensitive and understood, was somewhat sympathetic to some of their positions, or the fact he was from Texas and had an oil background. I have no idea. They knew each other over the years in his various incarnations, but for whatever reason or reasons—I never sensed that he paid a price for the Reagan years in the Arab world, I never picked up on anything.

Knott: You mentioned the good relationship he had with King Hussein. Could you give us your own assessment of King Hussein?

Haass: It's not that generous, to be honest. I think personally he was a gentleman and all that, but I guess I'd say two things. I thought King Hussein was slow to make peace with the Israelis and I think he only did it after the Palestinians, rather than before. It was only after Oslo and all that that King Hussein would finally do things. I can explain it in terms of his own domestic vulnerability, but he would never lead in the way I thought was desirable; he was not a Sadat.

Then secondly, I was very disappointed over his behavior during the Gulf War where Jordan clearly tilted toward, or sided with, Saddam. Again, he may have done it out of necessity because he was weak and worried about Saddam or because he was worried about the reaction of the Palestinian population. Or he simply may have done it more cynically because he sided with Saddam who he thought was going to get away with it. I don't know the answer to that. In any case, his position was not appreciated. The President was far more understanding of it than anybody. The President cut him a tremendous amount of slack and preserved the relationship doing that. I came away thinking he was a decent, honorable man, but he was wrong and disappointing on the big issues. I found that we couldn't count on him.

Knott: Did you agree with President Bush?

Haass: I thought he was understanding. He wanted to preserve the relationship and he was understanding of his position. Obviously, nobody wanted to bring King Hussein down. I wasn't thinking about sanctions or anything like that, but I tended to be disappointed by just how much help we were going to get. I thought he also did go farther than he needed to in terms of tilting toward Saddam if it was only because of his own interest for self-preservation. My own hunch is that he thought early on that Saddam would get away with it. That's my reading on it.

Knott: Would you give us your assessment of President [Hafiz al-] Assad of Syria?

Haass: I only met with him a couple of times. I think he made his strategic assessment that he could work with President Bush. I think he made the strategic assessment that the Americans were serious about standing up to Saddam, and that Assad understood after the Cold War that obviously he had lost his super power patron and the Americans were the only game in town. I think he took a calculated risk, from his point of view, to throw in his lot with the United States. You saw two manifestations of it. One was his willingness to join the coalition, in however a limited way militarily, it still mattered a lot politically. Syria and Arab had credentials that Egypt didn't have after Sadat.

And secondly, his willingness to sign on to go to Madrid, to send his foreign minister there, and again before Shamir did. The fact that the Syrians were going gave us some leverage to persuade Shamir to come, who was reluctant to sign on. So I think Assad, in that sense, was a pretty clear calculator and I felt he was, as a result, someone one could work with, with limited risk. I had no illusions about him in terms of what he was doing at home, which was anything but reformist. I had no illusions about Lebanon. I had no illusions about his priority, which was, one, stay in power, and two, to get back the Golan. I think he simply decided that by hitching his wagon to some extent to the U.S., that increased the odds that he could get the Golan.

Years later, when it all came to a head, obviously it didn't work. He and Israel came close but never quite got there. I think he did not play his hand the way he could and should have. I think he overplayed it; I think he made a mistake. So be it. But I thought he was quite calculating and, if you will, strategic. It was a pretty sophisticated relationship where we were able to do business in some areas while at the same time we clearly were fundamentally different forces in other ways.

Knott: Yasser Arafat, I don't know how much contact you had with him.

Haass: You have to remember in the Bush years, though, there was none because the whole idea was to intentionally work on diminishing Arafat. That accounts for all that rigmarole then about coming up with alternatives to speaking to the PLO for the first 18 months, and then coming up with a Palestinian delegation that was nominally not PLO. So the PLO-Arafat days of Middle East diplomacy really began in earnest right after the Bush administration. It was much more of a Clinton phenomenon.

I met Arafat, I don't know how many times since, during the Clinton years, when I was an outsider. My own hunch is that history will judge him quite harshly. He is somebody who never

made the transition from a kind of nationalist guerilla resistance leader, I guess I'd call it, who was in opposition, comfortable with symbols, comfortable with what he was against. He never made the transition to someone who would have to govern.

If you govern you have to choose, you have to make compromises, you have to be more pragmatic. He never made that transition. I do think he missed an historic opportunity at Camp David. I do think he's tried to have it both ways. He's still, in some ways, the guy who showed up in New York with the olive branch and the gun and he never quite made a strategic choice. He's more tactical than strategic as a person, and he's paid a price. At some point tactics piled upon tactics piled upon tactics do not translate into strategy; it's simply a big pile of tactics. That's why history will judge Arafat harshly, because he's never transcended tactics and symbols. As a result he doesn't have much to show for the wanderings and for his nonleadership. I believe the Palestinians in many ways lost out as a result.

But it has put us and the world in a difficult position. The epitaph may be, Yasser Arafat: you couldn't make peace with him, but we couldn't make peace without him. So we're now trying to make peace without him and I'm not sure that's working because he's clearly undermining it at various stages. All those years of trying to make peace with him didn't work either. So my hunch is that history will be very harsh.

Knott: We'll stick with the Arab-Israeli conflict for a while. Could you discuss your role with the Madrid conference?

Haass: Sure. Let's put it in phases. In the run-up to the conference—again, let's take a step back. As I said before, the peace process had essentially run out of gas in the late spring of '90. All these attempts had come up with some scheme to get Palestinian representation. You then have the war. The administration, the President, has actually said we're not going to introduce these questions onto the table because we don't want to look like we're going to reward Saddam. He wanted a neat break for the Gulf War, then we could revisit it. So now we're looking at the spring of '91.

From the spring of '91 to Madrid, which was in October, you had the efforts to resurrect a peace process. The idea was to take advantage of the momentum of the war. I thought—Brent and Dennis and Baker, we all thought—the war gave us a lot to work with, that politically and psychologically we banked a lot of credibility to do something with. The Arabs trusted us a lot, particularly the Syrians and the Egyptians. Arafat and the PLO had been dramatically weakened by their pro-Saddam/anti-Israeli stance and we'd gotten through the war on pretty good terms with the Shamir government, so we thought a lot of things were lining up. The idea was to take a run at it.

The President had always wanted a conference. I should have mentioned this before. Even when he came into office, there had been a whole debate for years in the Middle East about an international conference. People such as myself had written against it, always thinking that an ill-prepared conference, a conference held before the situation was ripe, would be a mistake. The President always liked it. I had plenty of conversations with him where I'd write memos about

next steps in the Middle East. I would get a marginal note, “What about a conference?” He’d never let go of it; that was always something he wanted.

Strong: Was that his belief, that at such an event he could really make some progress?

Haass: The President thought the mere fact that you could have it would be an accomplishment that would impart momentum. He never had the mistrust of it that I did, that a conference could backfire on him, it could blow up, gang up on Israel. He didn’t have those deterrents that I had. But what the Gulf War had done was transform the context. Suddenly we thought we could get a context that could work for us. Again, that the Palestinians were so much weakened, U.S. credibility was so high, Israelis had more trust in us, for all those reasons. So the President was very pleased because he wanted to have a conference.

The war ended in February. We had quite a few Deputies Committee meetings about where we would go afterwards, in February and March. I had written a lot of stuff, memos, to the deputies, to the principals, to the President, about a Middle East peace process after the war, essentially saying, put everybody off, we promised it; essentially arguing what I just told you here, that I thought a lot of the pieces would give us an opportunity that hadn’t heretofore existed. I thought we also needed to take a run at it because we promised people we would.

So then we spent several months going back and forth. We needed to write letters of assurance for the various people who needed terms of reference under which they would attend the conference. We would draft them in my office, we’d then clear them with State, go back and forth. Then you had these back and forths with the Syrians, the Israelis. The problem was really just with those two. I don’t think we ended up sending the Palestinians a letter, I think the assurances to the Palestinians were in the letters to the Egyptians and Jordanians, to the best of my recollection. But essentially it was coming up with terms of reference, assurances about what we had, not so much how the conference would be conducted in a tactical way, but more what our policies were about, different issues and so forth.

I left out one thing—all of this was done against the backdrop of the March 6th, if my dates are right, speech that the President gave after the Gulf War, the speech to Congress, which I had written. The idea there was to lay out some building blocks, some principles. I get my speeches mixed up between that and the Madrid speech, but it laid out some principles that would guide our approach. We said certain things to various sides, some that they wanted to hear, some that they didn’t want to hear. But we could get away with it then. It was the right thing to do.

So it went back and forth, and finally got the Syrians on board. As I said, I thought that helped us with the Israelis. The Israelis didn’t want to be the odd man out. There were a half-dozen, or eight or nine, trips by Jim Baker. What Baker’s trips were doing, in many ways, were serving as the backdrop for the letters of assurance. His conversations were fleshing them out so people felt comfortable with a U.S.-convened and U.S.-led conference. That’s how we spent the time, for months. I thought it was a very effective piece of White House-State Department cooperation. The President gave a speech in March; Baker was doing exactly what a Secretary of State ought to do. He involved my deputy David Welch on all these trips and there was fairly close coordination. I thought the system worked extremely well then and we sewed it up.

We brought the Russians on board more for window dressing. We used it to launch, if you remember, all the bilaterals as well as the multilaterals. That was part of it, what people wanted. So I felt we had together a good rapport. Before, when you asked me why Israeli-U.S. relations weren't good, clearly, one of the ways we got off on the wrong foot was the AIPAC speech of Baker's. Baker went to AIPAC in the spring of '89 and gave a fairly honest speech. But it was too soon for that, and it was a tactical mistake. There's a time to deliver public messages, but it was premature. I think he was badly advised and I'm one of the people involved in it and I should have caught it. Dennis and [Daniel] Kurtzer and [Aaron] Miller—I think we'd all been working on these issues for so long, in a way it desensitized us to the fact that a new administration shouldn't be saying some of these things and we hadn't built up the account yet with the Israelis. I think that just got things off on the wrong foot and put the Jewish community on edge. I should have mentioned it before; I mention it now.

Strong: So you ended up in Madrid?

Haass: The period from the spring of '91 through the Madrid meeting was a very good example of State-White House cooperation. The process for doing this was—quite honestly, often the meetings were just me, Brent, Jim Baker, and Dennis. There wasn't a formal interagency process for handling the Middle East. One of the reasons I mention that is because in this administration, the current [George W.] Bush administration, there is, and the Middle East is handled like any other issue. The Pentagon and the Vice President's office, all these other people sitting at the table want to discuss the Middle East. In our case, the meetings often happened when Jim Baker would come over to the White House and stop in Brent's office and he'd have Dennis in tow and I joined them, and the four of us would talk about it. Or Dennis and I would talk about it at lunch together. So the process worked in some ways because it was extremely streamlined and you had four people involved who were pretty like-minded. Then we could take the united position to the President, supported by his two closest aides, who were Baker and Scowcroft. It was a very tight-functioning sort of thing.

My role in Madrid was twofold. One was writing the speech for Bush. I drafted the speech and the only thing I really remember was having a colossal fight with the White House speechwriters about it. I had painstakingly drafted the speech and it was one of those labors of love for me. I had been working on this issue off and on for almost 20 years, cared about it passionately. You work on the Middle East and you get to know all the code words and subtleties. So I had all the formulations and had worked it and then gotten Scowcroft to sign off, got Dennis Ross and Jim Baker to sign up. Everybody was happy. Then I gave it to the speechwriters, I thought, for simply putting it on the cards. Instead, it comes back to me redone and changed fundamentally. I had certain formulations in it that had been carefully drawn, certain language is sacred because of Camp David and other stuff, quoting, and they changed the words.

By then I hadn't had any sleep in I don't know how long. It was the one time I think in the four years that I completely lost it. I just completely blew a gasket and acted, shall we say, unprofessionally.

Knott: With the speechwriters?

Haass: Yes, just lost it.

Knott: Who resolved that?

Haass: It was a combination of Scowcroft and the others, and obviously pretty much I calmed down. This was not just pride of authorship. I wasn't just being a jerk, although I was acting like a jerk, but it actually mattered, here's why, boom, boom, boom; I pointed it out; they said okay. They said, if you can, don't change everything back more than you have to. Basically, be a grownup about it. I said great, I hear you, and it turned out fine.

Strong: The President would have understood most of those code words, too, wouldn't he?

Haass: Yes. This is just a fight before you get the speech to the President. But he was comfortable with it in the end and I felt really good about it. Once the conference actually started in Madrid, the only goal was to survive it. I don't know if you remember, but it lasted for a day-and-a-half or two days. It was a little bit like one of those TV shows where you're strapped on the bomb and you pray it doesn't go off. The only goal we had was to survive the Goddamn conference so we could get into the bilaterals and then the regionals. It was a close call. The body language wasn't warm. Shamir came, even though we advised him not to come because we wanted to keep it ministerial, we wanted to avoid a situation. Also we were worried that if Shamir came, some of the bad blood between Shamir and some of the Arabs would surface, which, of course, it did. He then gave a fairly tough speech because he's preaching, like any politician, for the galleries back home.

[Farouk Al-] Shara, the Syrian foreign minister, gave an extremely tough speech, if you remember, holding up a picture of Shamir from the '30s when Shamir had been in one of the militant groups, calling the Prime Minister of Israel a terrorist. One of the Palestinians, Saeb Erakat, was wearing a checkered headscarf as a symbol of his association with the PLO. The entire thing was a sort of, please God, get us through this. That was our only concern. We were worried about the little things at the time. We were worried that if somebody spoke too long, somebody else would then demand equal time. The entire thing was just to survive it.

The only funny thing, I think, was when the Lebanese minister or somebody spoke too long and Baker was getting fidgety. I was worried that everybody else was going to ask to speak as long, and the longer anybody spoke, the more dangerous it would get. One of the guys in our delegation—we were sitting in rows behind the President and Jim Baker and whoever it was from the State Department side—was supposed to be the timekeeper and Baker or someone turned back to look at him to ask him how long this guy was going on and he'd fallen asleep. [laughter]

Anyhow, we did survive it, just barely. Then we went into the bilaterals and the multilaterals. I chaired the group on regional arms control. That was the beginning of the peace process grinding down because we were never quite able to translate Madrid into anything that led to a lot. So the Israeli-Syrian group didn't go anywhere, the Lebanon group couldn't go anywhere because it was totally dependent on the Syrian group. The key thing was the Palestinian issues, which

obviously ground down. So Madrid ended roughly at the end of October, if I have my dates right, of '91.

You then had just over a year left in the administration. Over that year virtually nothing went forward. The biggest issue in the peace process at that time was loan guarantees. When we take a step back and look at the Bush administration's Mideast policy, you end up with four distinct phases. The first 18 months were unsuccessful in trying to come up with a Palestinian alternative to the PLO that could participate in meetings. Then you had a hiatus because of the Gulf War. Then you had the most successful phase of the run-up including Madrid. And then you had the post-Madrid grinding-down phase, which essentially couldn't build on the momentum of Madrid. So there you have it.

Strong: Was there thinking about what you would do in a second term on those questions?

Haass: No, but people were feeling optimistic because you had Rabin get elected. Let me see if I got my dates right. Rabin became Prime Minister in Spring '92, was it? You had the successful resolution of the loan guarantee issue. I went up to Kennebunkport, Rabin came to Kennebunkport in June I think, in '92—

Knott: Sounds right.

Haass: After all the months of to-ing and fro-ing you had him and Bush put to bed the loan guarantee issue. Bush went out on the lawn in Kennebunkport, I remember that nice day, and did that, so you had the repairing of the U.S.-Israeli relationship. Plus, you had a Prime Minister who the President felt, one, he could really like and two, he felt he could really work with. So what you might have had was another serious run at things. It still may have ended up in Oslo because what happened, if you recall, was the Israelis got frustrated between the end of Bush and the beginning of Clinton and openly decided to take matters into their own hands at Oslo, and do direct talks rather than U.S.-brokered talks. Now, had Bush gotten reelected, maybe there would have been less of a loss of momentum, maybe a U.S.-brokered effort would have been better and then Oslo wouldn't have been necessary, I don't know. But in any case, there wasn't a lot of thinking other than in a general sense that we finally had in place in Rabin someone whom we could work with.

Knott: Just to shift gears here a bit, you mentioned a couple of times writing speeches for the President. How did that come about? You certainly did not start off that way.

Haass: I don't know how that turned out. I realize that's a truly useless answer for you, but it wasn't planned. Most things in life don't happen by design or by edict. I wasn't writing speeches for Bush the first 18 months.

Strong: Who was writing foreign policy speeches then?

Haass: I don't think he was giving a lot.

Strong: What about the period of speeches before the trip to Europe and—

Haass: Things like that would come out usually through the NSC staff, the drafts, and then they'd work them with the speechwriters. I might have been involved. But it wasn't a lot. What happened was, after Iraq invaded, this became front and center. I ended up spending more time with the President that first week than I had spent with him the preceding year and a half, and I ended up spending more time with Scowcroft. Instead of spending maybe a couple of hours a week with Brent, I ended up spending five hours a day with Brent. It's hard to say, it's hard to exaggerate how my working life changed after that. I ended up building a relationship with the President, and also I was the only one at all the meetings. It just worked out that way, not because of anything special about me. Someone had to be the person in the Deputies Committee, then take care of the work. I ended up being the writer for the Deputies Committee when we created the so-called small group. A lot of it was sensitive, so it was six of us. I was the person who ended up doing all the writing going into the meeting and then coming out of the meeting.

So if the President needed a speech or public statement, there'd be no one else who knew the stuff, there'd be no one else who was intimately involved with that. I'm not a great speechwriter. I'm not Peggy Noonan, I don't write poetry, but I think I can write decent enough prose and I knew the issues because I was in the meetings, so it just fell to me. It would be like this, the President wants to go out; you've got to prepare his remarks. Literally, Brent would say, "Richard, the President wants to go out in two hours. You've got to prepare his opening statement for the press," or, "The President wants to go speak to the Congress. You've got to do it, because there's nobody else to do it."

It wasn't like a normal State of the Union address so you could spend three months going back and forth. Things were so compressed, there wasn't any time to get anybody else up to speed. The President cared about it passionately. It just worked out. If it turned out I was totally incompetent, I expect they would have found some other way to handle it, but it just worked and the President felt comfortable enough. It was important to me, what you were going to say publicly, there was virtually nothing that was more important. So when I had the opportunity—I won't be shy about it; it was obviously something that I didn't run away from.

Strong: Was he making changes to the language you were preparing for him at that point?

Haass: Brent and I were spending time every day just talking things over. In his office every Saturday morning, Brent and I had a chance to spend at least an hour together. We would have a "we're in this mess, how are you going to get us out of it?" kind of conversation. Or he, Bob Gates, and I, the three of us, would do it. It was usually the three of us. But every day we would talk about it. We were so on the same page, I can't exaggerate that. We could almost reach the point where we could talk in shorthand. I'd say, "Okay, what I think we need to do with this speech is X, Y, and Z." Brent would say, "Fine." I'd do it, he'd look at it, and he'd either okay it the way it was or say it needs this or that. I'd do it, he'd show it to the President, he'd read it, and he'd either like it or he wouldn't, or he'd change it. But by and large, I don't think he'd say anything. Most of the things pretty much went through the way they were or with only modest changes. He'd say, "What about this sentence, what about that?"

But I got comfortable writing for him. You learn what somebody likes. You listen to somebody—for example, Bush does not like Reagan-like rhetorical flourishes. The first thing I wrote for him, he told me that. He said, “I’m not comfortable saying that.” So what I wrote for him then were very little speeches, they weren’t fancy speeches, but they were—I’m not sure if they were plain, I always felt I was trying to write clean, literal prose. They wouldn’t be soaring images. They were not going to be Reagan-like, touching-the-cheek-of-God type, the shuttle Challenger speeches. That’s not who I am, that’s not who George Bush is. They were very direct, straightforward, explain-the-situation kind of speeches and that’s what he liked. So it wasn’t hard. I didn’t find it hard to write for him. Keep it straight, not fancy, sentences short, very direct kind of speeches.

Strong: The principal audience you’re talking about when you’re writing these speeches, is it policy community, is it the public—?

Haass: It was all of it. What was so odd about writing, it was really interesting to me, was when you write a speech for a technical context like the Middle East or Iraq, you can’t “narrowcast” your audience. You can’t write just for the foreign policy elite, or just for Congress, if you’re giving a State of the Union speech. Every time you’d have to write for main-street America, Congress, foreign policy elites, also allies around the world, you have to write for the Iraqi public, maybe the Israeli public. So what became so interesting is I’d write it and I would then stop and ask myself, how would it play in these different environments?

Literally, for several of the key Iraq speeches, I would bring in interpreters and say, “How will this word be interpreted and what connotation does it have?” just to be sure that we had it right.

Knott: You’d bring in State Department interpreters?

Haass: Or White House. Like David Welch; do we have it right? We’d often think, how is it you reassure one audience in the one message today? You can’t say this paragraph’s for you and this other paragraph is for you. We didn’t have that luxury. In the old days, politicians could speak in some smoke-filled room and tell each individual audience sequentially what they wanted to hear, but those days are over. Every speech is global, particularly in a crisis time. CNN [Cable News Network] picks it up live. So there was very much a sense of multiple audiences and you just had to be aware of it, and be very careful with the language and think very hard about the messages. So I’d write it; after I write speeches, I always say them because when you say a speech you get a sense of the rhythm. It’s very different from reading: whether it works, whether your sentences are too long, because people can’t take in that length of thought. I always say my speeches when I’m writing for the President or writing for myself.

Then I would often, in this case for example, I’d ask people, do you think we’ve got the tone right? We want to reassure the Arab world, we don’t want to alienate the Iraqi people, we want to send a tough message to the Iraqi government, or we want to send this to the Israeli public if it’s about the Middle East, this to the Palestinians, how do you write it? And how would this work, say, with the domestic audience, the American-Jewish community? The main thing you’ve got to do when you’re a speechwriter is ask those questions and be aware, because the one thing you never, ever, ever want to be is surprised by a reaction to a speech. You almost want to be

able to predict. I think the worst thing I could do for a President is have him go out to do something, and have a reaction that he or I did not anticipate. That seems to me bad staff work. That's the sort of thing you guard against.

Knott: And you had his voice, his cadence in mind as you wrote. Did you get better at that over time?

Haass: I think so. Short, and again nothing fancy.

Knott: I've heard it said he had this aversion to the lofty, Reagan rhetoric.

Haass: It's a little bit of that George Bush don't boast, don't be fancy. He'd say, don't put me on the couch, but if I were going to put him on the couch, it's the guy who comes out of a comfortable life and it's a sense of nothing fancy. It's don't overdo it. It's the understatement, it's the plainness. Here's a guy who—there's a modesty about him. There's a modesty about the man.

Stone: That's an unusual trait for a politician.

Haass: It's an extraordinarily unusual trait for a politician. There's a real modesty, so the speeches needed to be modest and you didn't have—what's the thought I'm trying to get here?—he felt passionate about some of this stuff, a real sense of right and wrong. But it was just that he was saying was what he felt comfortable with. There wasn't any sense—I don't mean this as a criticism of Reagan—I never sensed with him a calculation like some politicians who are able to be actor-like and say this is what will work in that circumstance. It was much more that he'd say what he felt comfortable with and I think that worked for him as a politician.

And indeed lots of times he got frustrated. Remember, people forget, but in the fall of '90, after the Iraq invasion, when support for what the administration was trying to do often flagged, Bush found it very hard, very frustrating, because he was so persuaded that what we were doing was morally right and politically and strategically necessary. The fact that the opinion polls often showed support flagging was very tough. He would go out and you'd sense his frustration sometimes. It was while he would push the arguments—I got uncomfortable sometimes with some of the [Adolph] Hitler stuff. He just rode it out.

Knott: Did he miss—I'm taking you far afield here but you know when the [Berlin] Wall fell and there was criticism from the right that there was never a defining moment when the President—[voice fades away]

Haass: I don't know, I could argue that one both ways, and it's true that he didn't say things in a way that made people appreciate the moment. On the other hand, for Bush, the priority was maintaining his relationship with Gorbachev and not doing anything that would complicate Gorbachev's life. So you could argue that Bush gave up an easy politician's moment in exchange for the long-term ability to work with this guy.

Strong: He consciously gave that up. He was fully aware that—

Haass: Oh yes. I think it was just his instinct, don't do certain things. I once read in the *Washington Post* that there was a coach who told his players, after you score a touchdown, act like you've been there before, don't do your touchdown jig sort of thing, your funny little dance. I think Bush had a very similar approach, that after you score, you've historically scored, so he's not going to trivialize it. He'd done this at the end of the Cold War. Don't do anything that complicates this other guy's life because you're still going to need him, you're still going to need to work with him. So resist the temptation to gloat, which is all in keeping with his personality. Suffice it to say, there was a coming together of the strategic argument and the man's personality, both of which leaned toward underplaying things and being sensitive as to how it would work for the other guy. That's who he is.

Strong: Very unlike a politician.

Haass: It's very similar to negotiations. Every once in a while you'll come in contact with somebody who understands that in a negotiation you don't want to win everything, you've got to allow the other guy to walk away from the table and feel some sense of victory so he can go and boast and sell it to his constituency. Bush, as a politician, instinctively knew that it was wise to handle this in a way that didn't create problems for Gorbachev.

Strong: We're almost at a break but I want to come back and ask some more about this sense of right and wrong and where it came from, how it plays out.

Haass: I don't know. I don't know enough about Bush's youth and his family life, other than to say he seemed to have been brought up with a pretty strong sense of right and wrong. Although he had a comfortable childhood, he was not spoiled in any way. It's less a religious sense of right and wrong, and more a sense of personal decency, manners, and how human beings treat each other, and what he's comfortable with, given the political process. I think he was genuinely offended by the brutality of the Iraqi occupation in Kuwait. The idea that this sort of stuff could go on was just offensive.

I remember when the Emir of Kuwait came and visited for that lunch at the White House, this must have been August of 1990, it was very real. Bush was affected by the stories of what these people had been reduced to. All human beings have codes of their own: sort of moral, whatever word you want to use today, values. Bush clearly did.

Strong: Did the same thing happen about Somalia at the end? Is it again—?

Haass: I don't know; I wasn't heavily involved in that. I couldn't tell how much of that was Somalia, how much of that was also reaction to not getting more involved in Bosnia. Maybe there was some compensation there, some manifestation of the frustration, and I don't know the answer to that. To me it's an open question. But clearly, the President was genuinely affected. He was comfortable saying that we were doing what we were doing in Somalia for humanitarian reasons. Lots of people who were kind of strategic-realist sorts are almost uncomfortable with that kind of an argument, and his feeling was, it's the right thing to do so let's do it. Not for

strategic reasons, it wasn't because failed states become potential breeding grounds for terror. He didn't dress it up with a strategic rationale, it was just humanitarian.

I think the administration erred in its approach to Bosnia. The administration could and should have been more forceful. I know the reasons why they weren't, why they chose to do or not do what they did. What I don't know is what, if any, connection there was between the Bosnian policy and the Somalian policy. If there was a connection, I don't know whether it was conscious or unconscious.

Knott: Let's break for lunch. Thank you.

[BREAK]

Knott: Let's begin the afternoon session. We thought maybe a good place to start would be to ask you to give us your assessment of some of the major foreign policy players in the Bush administration. Let's start with Secretary of State Jim Baker.

Haass: Be a little more specific than saying, "give my assessment." Give me a little help here.

Knott: Strengths, weaknesses, you'd said earlier something to the effect that perhaps there was a bit of a learning curve for him.

Haass: With Jim Baker—in those movies in the old days when they used to give you a dime and say you could call a lawyer, only one phone call, Jim Baker is probably going to be at the top of your list. He's better at mastering a brief and then working with it than almost anyone I've ever seen. He's also as good or better than anyone I've ever seen at using staff. Let me explain, what I mean by that is in terms of figuring out who around him has talent and then really taking advantage of it, in the best sense of the word. He did it with Dennis Ross, with Bob Zoellick, with Margaret Tutwiler, and others. He really got a lot out of people and was comfortable. Once he trusted them, he was clearly comfortable deferring to them. He had also something that I think is critical for a Secretary of State, which is a close personal relationship with the President.

That period I mentioned before, in the build-up to Madrid, that was Jim Baker at his best. He was also very good in that long series of talks with [Eduard] Shevardnadze on various issues in the winding down of the Cold War. In the Gulf context, probably his key contributions were two things. One was the resolution, Resolution 678, in the run-up to the war, that was very important, as was the so-called Tin Cup mission, raising money for the war. That was not so elegant but that's what we called it. What these things have in common is, when it's clear what the President, what the administration wants, I can't think of anyone better to go out and get it than Jim Baker, in terms of focus, drive, stamina, diplomatic skills, and negotiating skills. Those are his strengths.

Knott: I understand there was a last-minute mission to Baghdad you were not particularly supportive of.

Haass: My enthusiasm was finite, that's true. It wasn't to Baghdad, it was to Geneva.

Knott: Excuse me, Geneva, of course.

Haass: So we're talking January of '91. I didn't trust what the Iraqis were going to do. I thought only mischief could come of it. In a funny sort of way, Jim Baker's talents were not an asset here. He's a guy who is so good at negotiating and getting a deal, part of me was nervous he would get one that might not leave us better off. See, to me—it probably sounds awful to say so, but I'm saying it—as terrible as war can be, as uncertain as war could be, I thought there were potentially worse outcomes at that point. I didn't want the world to think that we were simply bluffing and hollering vis-à-vis Iraq and Saddam. In order for us to avoid a war at that point, I thought Saddam surely had to agree, and then implement the letter of Resolution 660 and subsequent resolutions. I was nervous about a diplomatic process at this last minute that could be perceived by some that we had blinked rather than he had blinked. It worked out just fine because, quite honestly, literally and figuratively, Jim Baker went the extra mile. Saddam still wasn't willing to meet us, I won't say halfway, any part of the way. It further reinforced the administration's message that this was a war that Saddam brought upon himself. So my concerns turned out to be unnecessary.

Knott: Saddam could have really put you in a fix if he had—

Haass: I had worried all along, not just then, but any time up to the war and even during the war, during those six weeks of bombing, that Saddam would throw out half a loaf or a couple of slices of a loaf and he would pull back from part of Kuwait, or agree to pull back if certain conditions were met. I was worried that he would do things that could excite or attract the antiwar elements around the world that could make it difficult or impossible for Arab governments to cooperate with us and that could potentially influence our own domestic politics. So sure, in Geneva, in a small group, one of the things I did—I had prepared with everyone else an address, what we would say if Saddam came out with a quarter of a loaf or half a loaf. Basically, it was a series of tests to say, “We will only stop what we're doing if you meet the following tests,” and they were extremely demanding tests, militarily and diplomatically. The idea was to make sure that he was not pulling our chain, that he couldn't get us into stops and starts.

What was surprising to me is we never had to use it; it stayed in our drawer. Even in retrospect, I'm surprised that Saddam was not more tactically adroit, either in the run-up to war or anytime between the beginning of the war and the end of the war.

Knott: How about Secretary of Defense Cheney?

Strong: Again, our agenda here is that historians are going to look at these things later on and—

Haass: Yes, but still, I hear what you're saying. One of the very few principles I have in life is not doing things *ad hominem*, if you will. In terms of Secretary Cheney, he and I didn't always see eye to eye. One example of this was the night that the Scuds landed in Israel. Cheney, at that point, was essentially willing to give a green light to Moshe Arens, who was his Israeli

counterpart, and said if Israel wants to retaliate, so be it. I remember this because it was right after the Scuds came down and several of us, Scowcroft, Eagleburger, Baker, myself, Gates, I think it was, all gathered in Scowcroft's office around 7 or 7:30 that night, the night the Scuds first landed in Israel. The President was in the residence, Cheney was at the Pentagon I believe. And Dick Cheney is on the phone to Scowcroft or somebody and says, "Moshe Arens just called me basically for a green light, with the codes and all that, so Israeli forces could fly, planes could fly and there wouldn't be any accidents between American and Israeli planes, so we wouldn't shoot them down as hostiles and so forth by accident. Does anyone object?"

Even though I was by far the most junior person in the room I said, "I do." I said, "I don't think at this point it's necessary militarily or a good idea diplomatically for Israel to get involved in the war. I understand why any country being attacked would want to retaliate, but I think you have to ask the question whether on balance this was either necessary or desirable if the larger goal is to keep the coalition intact and to defeat Saddam." In the end, the rest of the group came around to my position, as did the President. It wasn't a question of whether one was right or wrong, we just didn't see things necessarily eye to eye.

There were some other occasions where he and I didn't see eye to eye, but so be it. Let me put it this way. In the current context when one reads about him being the most powerful Vice President in history, extremely forceful, I don't doubt any of that. He didn't have anything comparable to that role in the first Bush administration. Firstly, he wasn't Vice President, he was Secretary of Defense. Secondly, whereas in the current Bush administration he's much more what you might call at the political and geopolitical center of the administration, I think in the first Bush administration, that was less the case. Scowcroft, Baker, and President Bush were all in one place and to some extent—it might be too strong to call Dick Cheney the odd man out, but he clearly was not at the center of the first Bush administration in any way like he's at the center of the second Bush administration.

Strong: What makes it possible for a person at your level of the National Security Council to challenge the judgment of a Cabinet Secretary in that kind of setting? Was that commonplace? Is that—

Haass: [*Laughs*] That explains why I'm sitting here.

Strong: No, is that evidence that this was a good group?

Haass: There are probably several answers. One is that this was a very collegial administration and also, by this point, people knew each other pretty well. Maybe I'm naïve but my feeling is that if you do things respectfully and depending on the style you make your arguments, people will address them on the merits. I never said, "You're wrong." I'd simply say, "I disagree and here's why." It seems to me part of my job on the NSC, as an NSC staffer, is that you essentially have two jobs. One is the coordinator job—call it an honest broker, call it what you will—to essentially ensure due process.

The other, though, is you have a separate job as counselor. You are there to make sure that the President or the National Security Adviser get all the input. You don't simply broker between

them if you don't think all the necessary inputs are there. I felt it was my responsibility to say and write things, even if no one else did, if I thought they were an important part of the mix. Now, at the end of the day, you had to be careful when you did it. You couldn't allow your advocacy or your counselor role to get in the way of your brokering role. If you did, you would lose your bona fides as a broker, so I was careful. But in a situation like this it was simply a situation where I felt it was an important position that needed to be put on the table. No one said, "You're out of line." People talked about it. In this case it happened to carry the day.

Strong: Why is Scowcroft better at balancing those two roles than some of the other people in that office have been?

Haass: Without getting into detail, most of my regrets in government are acts of omission, not commission. I have very few regrets about things I said or wrote, even the ones that are wrong. Nobody bats 1,000. But my regrets are more the times when I didn't speak up or I didn't make an argument. This was one of those moments when I just decided to speak up because I thought the stakes were enormous and I happened to think I was right. You win some, you lose some. But what's the worst that can happen? People disagree with you? Okay, I can live with that. Nobody bats 1,000, but I thought it was important enough. Again, just about all my regrets are the things I didn't mention.

You asked about Scowcroft. I really think he's been the best at this job than anyone who has come before or since, and I don't mean that as any criticism of anyone who came before, it's just a compliment to Brent. Why? If you were to try to bottle it and have his successor drink it, I don't know. So much of it has to do with, in part, his temperament. He's an interesting combination of someone who could be quite intellectually forceful but is quite modest, a very interesting combination. He had a close relationship with the President yet he still very much knew who was President. He also understood that one of the ways he best served the President was by giving him his honest advice.

Scowcroft was more intellectual and conceptual than people realized. I'm not suggesting Brent was at the level of Kissinger—nobody is—but Brent was and is much more of an independent thinker, much more of an ideas person, than a lot of people notice or give him credit for. This is probably because he wasn't an academic in the sense of writing tons of books or dozens of articles for *Foreign Affairs*. But Brent brought up many original ideas, I thought, to the debate within the administration, probably more than anybody. He's just a more original, conceptual, foreign policy thinker, a more independent thinker. He's not scared to go against the flow. He and I had some strong disagreements at times, and he was comfortable with that.

He was willing to listen. If you had an argument that persuaded him, he'd be willing to take it on board. Not having a big ego is a tremendous asset in this job, probably in any job. But for the NSC job, it's good; it also means other people trust you. So people didn't feel they had to do end runs around Brent because they trusted him to play it straight. He wasn't seen as so committed to his own position that he couldn't represent theirs. So he ended up having the trust of his colleagues and the trust of the President.

Strong: What would be an example of him effectively representing a position that he didn't really hold?

Haass: Any time. I was often with him when he did it. He'd say, "Mr. President, here's the situation. You should know that Jim Baker thinks X, Dick Cheney, based on my conversation with Dick, thinks Y, I think Z, but I wanted you to know that and we'll do whatever you want, obviously. You were elected by the American people, we weren't, but you should know we're divided on this one." Just very matter of fact.

Strong: And that was commonplace?

Haass: It didn't happen that often because this was a pretty like-minded administration, more than most. I've worked for four Presidents and I would say, by order of magnitude, this was the least-divided administration of the four. Compared to Carter, Reagan, and Bush, the current President Bush. This was by far the most, what's the word, the principal players, including the President, were on the same page, to use a trite expression, more than any other administration. There weren't either structural problems or personality problems that I've seen plague other administrations. You didn't have the equivalent of, for instance, NSC versus another agency, or the Weinberger-Shultz kind of thing, or the [Zbigniew] Brzezinski-[Cyrus] Vance thing, or Kissinger-Rogers. You didn't have anything remotely like that in this administration. To the extent you had differences, they tended to be collected at the Pentagon because of Dick Cheney and Paul Wolfowitz, but they were in the minority.

In a funny sort of way, they were as much in the minority in Bush '41 as the State Department was in Bush '43. I think a lot of it has to do with Scowcroft's personality. It matters, the personality of the National Security Adviser matters a great deal.

Strong: Did the President, now this is something maybe you can't answer, but did he know he was putting together that kind of team?

Haass: He mentions that a little bit in the book, in his memoir. Yes, I think he wanted people he felt got along. Again, I don't think you would have lasted long in this administration if you had been a recurring problem, it just wasn't done. I can't quite articulate it, but it just wasn't the culture of the administration. So disagreements were quiet, there wasn't a lot of leaking, it was quite personable. It was actually fun. It sounds bizarre, but it was by far the most enjoyable experience a lot of us had had before or since in government. There was a lot of camaraderie and kidding around, and even between people who disagreed, like Scowcroft and Cheney, it was very relaxed. There was a lot of camaraderie, it was fun.

And when it came down to the small groups, the six of us, we got along fine. We may have disagreed on some issues, but we largely agreed. I often describe interagency politics as a kind of surcharge or tax, and in every administration you get some surcharge and it just adds to the difficulty of doing business. There was less of it in this administration by far than I've ever seen. It might have had something to do with who was appointed, something to do also with the fact that we'd all worked together, we all knew each other. People felt pretty comfortable. It came off pretty well.

Knott: One name that has not come up yet, I know you're not comfortable talking about names, but I'm going to try anyway, Vice President [J. Danforth] Quayle. Did you have a lot of interaction with him?

Haass: Sure.

Knott: And what was your impression of the Vice President?

Haass: I had quite a lot of interaction, although not one on one. He and I only did a few of those before he did meetings, and those were fine. Sometimes he was in his office, once or twice he was at the Vice President's residence on Massachusetts Avenue, when he was going on a foreign trip or he was going to meet with a leader. He was fine. He was always open, he actually did give and take; he always treated me well. My own thought was he tended to be underestimated a little bit. One thing, he was the butt of all those jokes, which seemed unfair to me. That said, he participated in the principals' meetings. He didn't have the authority, as you might expect, of a Baker or Scowcroft or Cheney. He didn't have the same kind of stature or relationship with the President. He didn't have the staff. Even though he had [William] Kristol, he didn't have the same kind of foreign policy staff; he had one or two people. It wasn't an interagency role. It was much more the role of the Vice President as a kind of counselor to the President. I wasn't privy to that.

Some of the best stuff he did was some of his speeches. Some of Quayle's public stuff was excellent. The "Just War" speech he gave was, I thought, very thoughtful. Kristol really put together a good staff. He wasn't a major player. Every now and then, on the Middle East he clearly came out of the White House with a more sympathetic line toward Israel's Likud government. Clearly, he didn't have much impact on where the President and Baker and Scowcroft were coming from.

Knott: I'm going to throw another name at you.

Haass: I'm really enjoying this part. [*laughter*]

Knott: We got you right after lunch; we figured you'd be in a good mood after eating. What about Chief of Staff John Sununu? Were you pretty much sheltered from him?

Haass: He and I always got on. We had the New York Giants football team in common. He was very funny. He was very respectful and deferential on foreign policy matters. He gave tremendous latitude to Scowcroft. John knew not to intrude on that. He knew he wasn't an expert. He also knew not to get in the way of Scowcroft's relationship with the President. So he was not a problem at all for the NSC. He cared most about the Middle East. I used to talk to him about the Middle East.

Andy Card, as his deputy, used to come to a lot of our deputies' meetings, which I thought was a useful innovation. Andy is a sensible guy but also it was a way to link up that side of the White House to the national security side. I don't know if that had happened before. John did not, for

the most part, intrude. He sat in on some stuff, not on others. We had a lot to do with each other when it came to speeches. On several of the big speeches, I would write the foreign policy half and we would come together and with the speechwriter, whoever, from the domestic side. So we'd sit in John's office. It would be me, whoever was doing the domestic part, and John, and we talked about it.

The only time he told me to mind my own business was when I tried to get him to introduce a gasoline tax. The idea was that when the price of gas came down, for every two cents it came down, I said, why don't we introduce a penny tax? That way, the price of gas would still come down, but we would discourage the use of gasoline. I made all the arguments, the energy arguments, environmental arguments, it would be good for the Treasury, reduce our dependence on oil imports. He basically told me [laughing] you may know something about foreign policy but stay the hell away from this. That's the cleaned-up version of what he told me.

Then once after the war, I tiptoed on the political side. It was when we were doing the March 6th speech and I had written most of it, and again, part of it was domestic. I said, "John, what you need to do in this speech now is operation domestic storm." Again, he told me what he thought of my political insight. So now I was 0 for 2.

Strong: Was there comfortable collegiality on the domestic side of the White House staff, or would you not have even seen enough of that—

Haass: The answer is there wasn't, but I only know it by gossip and distant observation. It did not work as well. There are lots of reasons, the personalities didn't get along as well; there were differences. You didn't have on the domestic side an equivalent to the NSC system and you didn't have the equivalent of a Scowcroft. The President wasn't as interested, as engaged. So for a whole host of reasons it didn't work as well. In the end, it was the reason he was a one-term President.

Knott: Did you know Richard Darman well?

Haass: I know him.

Knott: No formal interaction really?

Haass: No, only in the sense that he would come when we had Cabinet meetings about foreign policy, either about the Gulf thing or other stuff, he and I would go. So I saw him in those days. And when money issues came up, say in the context of the Gulf, we had to raise the money, he was there. But most of the time, very little. We had a lot of personal interaction over the years but not a lot in that job.

Knott: You mentioned earlier, and again, you may not want to go here, but you said that the biggest regrets you had were those of omission, where you didn't speak up where you should have. Would you be willing to give us—?

Haass: I'll save that for my memoirs.

Knott: A few quick questions about the Deputies Committee that you mentioned, which seems to have been a very important institution in the Bush administration. Could you talk about your work, your role in that?

Haass: Sure. There was a formal Deputies Committee, which was chaired by Gates for most of the time. That was literally the number twos or number threes, depending upon the other departments, and depending upon the issues. So the core was basically Wolfowitz for Defense, the number three, Dick Kerr, the number two guy at the Agency, [David] Jeremiah from the Joint Chiefs, [Robert] Kimmitt, the number three guy at State. Did I forget anybody?

Knott: I think you've got them all.

Haass: Then, depending upon issues, you might have someone from Commerce, you might have somebody from Treasury, what have you. So that was the Deputies Committee. That worked well, I think, because everybody was a grownup. Also, Gates had one of the rarest and most valuable skills in government, which is the ability to run a meeting.

Strong: What is that skill?

Knott: What does that mean?

Haass: It has a lot to do with figuring out what the agenda is in advance, not letting people run away too much with talking or the time, making clear at the end of the meeting what was exactly discussed and decided, what was the expected for follow-up. It's a bit of crispness and a bit of clarity. All I can say is, it's rare. It also helped when people knew that Gates had a good relationship with both Scowcroft and the President, and there was every incentive to work within the system. Then again, it may be because in lots of cases there were not tremendous ideological battles; there were differences, but not ideological battles.

Strong: How did it change when Gates was no longer there?

Haass: It did not work nearly as well. It's a little bit hard for me to talk about because it gets into personalities, but basically when Gates left to go over to the agency and Jonathan Howe took over, a lot of the air went out of the balloon; it just didn't work. Jon did not have the same sort of ability to cut to the quick, it often just bogged down in details, very long meetings, and unclear outcomes.

Strong: When that forum is not working as well—

Haass: What happens is one of three things. Either the system breaks down completely, or people tend to work around it, or it still goes on, or all three. For example, after Gates left, very quickly I said this is no longer a useful channel for me. What I did was I started working around it and I just did stuff at my level and talked to Scowcroft about it. By then I had such a good relationship with Brent it was easy to do. Basically you work around it; I know it sounds harsh, you work around it. It's like water, you find a level. You do bureaucratic workarounds and you

find a vehicle or the channel where you can get things done. It's not efficient, it's not good, but that's the way you do it.

What we did, during the Gulf crisis, is we formed a kind of subset of the deputies, the so-called small group, which included me and the five gentlemen I mentioned. We must have met every day, sometimes several times a day; sometimes in person, sometimes over the secure video system. Sometimes it was just the six of us in the room, nobody else; sometimes it was plus one, or plus some others, it just depended on how sensitive it was. But it worked as well as any other group I had ever been associated with in terms of just day-to-day management.

What also helped was that people were smart, that was a tremendous help. They got along well for the most part. They also had good enough relations with their bosses that they could come to a meeting with a pretty good sense of where their boss was at, and you knew that at any of the meetings. Or they could get to their boss and if there was work to be done they could get his okay or they could get the boss to sign on. So it was very plugged in. There is nothing worse than having these meetings and you don't know where they lead. So it worked extremely well, I thought. It turned out to be really quite efficient.

Strong: Is the story about policy making in connection with the Gulf crisis that is available now on the public record in the memoirs and the various accounts and interviews we've already done, is it largely well known? Are there significant gaps?

Haass: That's hard to answer. I think some of it's controversial, I think it's largely well known. I'd say there are four phases, for what it's worth, or five phases. You have all the stuff that happened before the Iraqi invasion and that's controversial. You've got stuff with two layers of controversy. One is over the long-term U.S.-Iraqi relationship there, whether the U.S. was slow to see Iraq as a threat and all that, and whether the policy of so-called conditional engagement went on too long, whether it was managed well, so there's that. You might call that the strategic period of the prewar situation. Then you have the tactical, the couple of days before, the warnings that went back and forth, the statements. You've got that story.

It's known, but not well known. There are lots of misunderstandings about the strategic as well as the tactical prewar situation. The story from the beginning of August 1990 through mid-January, 1991, essentially Resolution 678 and sanctions, I think the basics are known. That is phase three. The war itself is a fourth phase and is pretty well known and, in some ways, the least interesting to me, if I can say that. Then you have the fifth phase, the aftermath, the messiness of the aftermath. That's the other controversial bookend, if you will. I think it's pretty known, it's just people disagree on it. Sometimes, just because people know what goes on doesn't mean they all come to the same understanding.

The pre- and postwar phases are clearly the most debated. I'd say that's where the controversy remains. The war itself is pretty straightforward. The diplomatic prelude, six months—the basic story is known. It's a pretty successful story, actually.

Strong: Was there a point at which you believed military force was going to be necessary to bring it to resolution, and did that come early, did that come later?

Haass: It came very early, very early on. I remember saying to Brent, to the President, that this was unacceptable. When you use the word “unacceptable,” it had to mean something. You could try sanctions, but I had very little confidence sanctions would succeed, certainly not soon enough that there would be a Kuwait left to save. Almost from the beginning I thought there was a decent chance that we might have to use force. Historians will find talk about that in my early memos.

Strong: Was Scowcroft in agreement with that judgment?

Haass: Yes, as was the President, as was Gates, as was Eagleburger. They were the ones who were the strongest in agreement that this Iraqi aggression had to be reversed. There were two good reasons to try sanctions, but sanctions would likely fail and we would therefore likely have to use military force. The two good reasons to try sanctions were, one, we didn’t have a military option for several months so we might as well do something, and secondly, it is an important box to check, to use that unfortunate phrase, in terms of the management of the process. The only chance you had to drum up significant support for using military force is that you showed that you explored the alternatives, that diplomacy couldn’t work, sanctions couldn’t work, that you were not rushing to go to war. It is important to show that you’re reluctant to go to war when you go to war.

You had the domestic and international reasons to explore sanctions. I thought they had very little chance of working, based upon the history I knew about. Also, my own reading of Saddam. Again, I thought we had nothing to lose. We needed months to do the military preparations. What I underestimated, to some extent, was that some people were going to fall in love with sanctions. A lot of people in Congress and elsewhere wanted to give sanctions more time. I felt a little bit surprised by that, that people actually thought they would work, including people I had a lot of respect for, thought they actually might work. I was surprised at that.

Strong: In that build-up period, there are a couple of controversial questions that people are still interested in, one the seeking to double the troop size—

Haass: Yes, that was late October, early November.

Strong: And more broadly, the war powers’ decision citing to the Congress to get a resolution and then succeeding at that.

Haass: Well, the doubling of the troops—I don’t remember a lot of details. I was on the plane with Baker at the time; we were running around doing what became Resolution 678. But the Pentagon had been talking for a while about the need to increase the forces, larger than we originally had been led to believe. It wasn’t handled in a terribly smooth way. I don’t remember the details but it was kind of messy politically in terms of congressional notifications and the rest, and it left people with the feeling that it wasn’t a technical decision, even though we were technically just doubling the size of the forces. A lot of people read it to mean that we were lighting the fuse to go to war. As it turned out, that was about half-right in the sense that you couldn’t leave that many troops parked out there forever; there was no reason to let the situation

linger anyhow. Again, Kuwait was getting “eaten,” if you will, every day. People were paying for it with their lives and Saddam had an ample chance to turn around, if he had any intention of turning around.

So the idea that we were essentially saying there’s not an unlimited amount of time was, to me, totally consistent with where we were going diplomatically, which was to give him an ultimatum anyhow. Look at it this way. On January 14th, if Saddam had said, “Uncle. You get everything you want,” then we wouldn’t have gone to war; we would have had to have taken yes for an answer. We had done a lot of thinking about what that would entail because I had done memos for the President and for others about what do we do if Saddam says yes, and what would a containment strategy then look like. How would we protect our interests in the Gulf, absent the war against an Iraq that then would still have all of its toys? So it was something we were prepared for. It was another way of saying the doubling of the forces, while it certainly made the possibility of war more likely, in no way did it make it inevitable. It was still Saddam’s war to avoid. That was simply the military analog to our diplomatic strategy that said you don’t have forever to make up your mind.

There was a debate about whether you needed to go to Congress. Most people felt, reluctantly felt, it was desirable. Cheney was the one person who largely argued not. He had real contempt for his former colleagues, let me put it that way. Baker and the President, though, felt it was essential politically. The sequence, if you recall, was the opposite of the current administration. It was a U.N. first, Congress second, sequence because the feeling was we could lock in the international community and that would make it less difficult to deal with Congress, which was the way it worked. It was not the most deftly handled domestic head-counting lobbying effort. Anyhow, we squeaked through, particularly in the Senate. If you remember, there was a difference in what the Congress saw it was doing and what the administration saw it was doing. By that I mean, Congress said, quote, “We are authorizing the war.” The administration said, “Thank you very much for your support for our policy,” i.e., we don’t need your authority to do this, we’d love to have your support. Which is another way of saying, if we don’t get your vote it does not mean we lack the authority to go to war.

I had lots of conversations with Boyden Gray and others about that. It’s one of those great historical “what ifs.” What if, say, in the Senate, the votes had gone the other way, which they very well could have done. I still think we would have gone to war. I can’t prove it, but in my heart of hearts and based upon conversations and what the President and others were saying in the context of those weeks, I believe we would have gone to war. To use the street expression, it would have been “guts ball.” If the President had gone to war after a congressional vote which basically didn’t express support, that didn’t give him authority, it would have been a major roll of the dice. You would have had dozens of impeachment resolutions. My hunch is the courts would have avoided it like the plague because the courts always hate to get in the middle of foreign policy, and I think it would have turned out all right for the President because the war turned out all right. But it really would have been going on the high wire without a net. I can’t prove it, but I think he would have done it, given how strongly he felt that it was the right thing to do. He would have said, “Politics, well, so be it.”

Knott: Just to take you out of sequence a bit here. You traveled to Baghdad in May of 1990, correct, with John Kelly?

Haass: No, incorrect.

Knott: Incorrect, okay.

Haass: Separate trip.

Knott: Could you tell us about that trip to Baghdad and your meeting with Saddam?

Haass: I never met with Saddam.

Knott: Thanks for correcting the record.

Haass: I traveled to Baghdad in May 1990, that part was right. I told Scowcroft I thought I needed to get there. Let's paint the context. This was now 16 or some months into the administration, and the attempts at conditional engagement, which were coming to an end, were failing. They hadn't quite ended, they were coming to an end.

You have to remember, we came into office roughly six months after the end of the Iran-Iraq war, and during the war there had been some limited U.S. engagement with Iraq. The feeling when we came in was, okay, we had helped Iraq a bit, not militarily by the way, but the United States had helped Iraq a bit during the war because Iran was seen as the larger threat. So the question was, now that the war is over, can we then build a relationship with Iraq that's based upon more than simply opposition to Iran? There were various things that went on, different credits such as CCC [Commodity Credit Corporation], a little bit of diplomacy.

It was increasingly becoming clear that it wasn't working. There had been a series of statements and actions by Saddam that were highly offensive, plus there were certain questions about what was happening with the administration of the CCC program. There was an extremely modest relationship that had survived with Iraq, and Congress wanted to shut down that modest relationship. The question I had was, should we do it? I wasn't sure. I wanted to go out there and just get a better feel. I thought I'd tour around the Gulf; it had been a while since I'd been there.

So I went to Iraq. It was right around the time of the Arab summit there, which is why I didn't see Saddam, who was busy getting ready for it or something. My host was Tariq Aziz's deputy at the time, who used to be the Iraqi Ambassador to the United States, Nizar Hamdoon, who just died here in New York a couple of months ago of cancer. Hamdoon was in some ways the leading proponent of Iraqi engagement with the United States. He was sort of a hand reaching out. So anyhow, they had invited me, and I finally took them up on it. I met with Tariq Aziz, then the Foreign Minister and I believe Saddam's deputy, for several hours. And my message to Tariq Aziz was, we tried with you guys, you're making it impossible, and unless you stop X, Y, and Z and start improving your behavior, what little there is of this relationship is going to end.

His reaction for the most part was, you all have decided that we're the next enemy. I said, "Where do you get that idea? We're taking heat for even trying constructive engagement." And he said, "For example, you have all these forces in the Gulf. They're clearly aimed at Iraq." I said, "That's ridiculous, we've had forces in the Gulf for decades. I know something about this, and second of all, we still have forces in Europe even when the Cold War ended because we keep forces in parts of the world we have interest in as a way of expressing our interest. If Iraq intends nothing bad, you shouldn't worry about our forces. If, however, you intend something bad, then yes, we do have forces in the area. It's a physical expression that we have vital interest in this part of the world."

So we went around the mulberry bush on that. It was an inconclusive meeting. My message was, unless you change your behavior, what little there is of this relationship will not survive. Their position was that somehow they were misunderstood and we had already closed our minds to them and decided they were an enemy, which I simply said wasn't true. It could become true, depending upon how they acted.

I had meetings with other Iraqis and came away in some ways impressed with what was going on, with the building going on now that the Iran war was over, with the talented population. Baghdad was booming at the moment. But not optimistic, given the conversations. My own feeling about our conditional engagement was that if it didn't work, it should be because the Iraqis killed it. I thought they were slightly paranoid and my feeling was, don't play into it, but make them be the ones who constantly made it impossible to have a relationship, rather than us. But then when the irregularities surfaced in the CCC program, we had to put it on ice anyway.

I spent time in Kuwait and other countries on that trip and I didn't come back with any sense that a crisis was imminent. There was nothing in the air, there was nothing in the water, suggesting that things were on a precipice. That just wasn't the case.

Knott: How good, in your view, was the intelligence that you were getting from the CIA on Iraq?

Haass: I'm trying to remember. At this point?

Knott: Yes, summer of '90.

Haass: Again, you have to put it into two phases. I think if you do it up to July, there's nothing special. Iraq was not a particularly high-level target. We were watching what they were doing, but nothing special. What changed was roughly from mid-July on, and Charlie Allen and company started getting indications that Iraq was clearly building up against Kuwait. That wasn't in dispute. What was in dispute as of mid-to-late July was how to interpret it. What were their intentions? I take the word of people who read photographs; they tell me how many tanks and how many soldiers are there and I say, OK. Clearly, the Iraqis were on a build-up. But that didn't tell us what their goal was, what their intentions were.

The prevailing assumption, one that I shared, was that the purpose was, one, to lend some muscle, almost a form of gunboat diplomacy, to put pressure on Kuwaitis in the context of OPEC

[Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries], where essentially the Iraqis were pissed off over Kuwait exceeding its quota, which the Iraqis saw as one factor keeping the price of oil down. This hurt the Iraqis, given Saddam's ambitious goals. They had all this debt left over from the war. They had all the resentment of Iraqis and most Arabs for Kuwaitis. Most of us put two and two together, and we thought it was that the Iraqis were trying to muscle the Kuwaitis into curtailing their higher production and give Iraq what it wants in OPEC.

That was essentially our reading—and that was reinforced by April's [Glaspie] July 25 meeting with Saddam, where he had given her a message. The message she had from Saddam was, "Oh yeah, don't worry, I'm going to meet with all these envoys, the whole situation is fine now, the Kuwaitis have the message," and all that. That message, reported by her, after her July 25 meeting, plus what we were hearing from Arab leaders reinforced the sense that this was kind of an elaborate Arab diplomatic choreography. Indeed, the message from the Saudis and others, if I recall at the time, when the UAE [United Arab Emirates] asked us to an in-flight refueling exercise with the tankers, the Saudis, [Prince] Bandar, and others, yelled at me, saying, "You Americans are going to screw up the diplomacy. We've got things under control now. Don't you go heavy-handed mucking it up." Which is ironic, shall we say, in retrospect, but there you have it.

The sense was, in any case, by July 25 or 26, the situation was calmer. What didn't happen, though, was the military levels didn't come down. That was an anomaly. Why is it all the diplomatic signals are better and the situation on the ground is not getting better? For a couple of days you had that inconsistency, and then around 24 to 36 hours before the invasion, the nature of the Iraqi buildup was changing in all the ways the CIA measures' warning. Somebody was seeing all the patterns of an imminent attack. Different types of readiness measures were suddenly going from yellow to green, so clearly the Iraqis were taking steps that went beyond a bluff. Around then Charlie Allen came to see me. Then it was qualitatively different. Then we were in that drill, if you will, that last day, trying to make sense of what was going on and thinking about what, if any, options we had to avert it. Well, it was clearly a different situation than we had thought up to that point.

Strong: The other intelligence question often asked about this period, we find out after the war they're farther along with weapons of mass destruction. Was that a subject we were interested in before the Gulf War? You had mentioned that you paid a lot of attention to what was going on in Pakistan.

Haass: We did pay a lot of attention to what was going on in Pakistan, on the nuclear side. Our assessment was Pakistan was farther along. In the case of Iraq, we didn't know how far they were along. It turns out we underestimated it badly. The feeling was, we knew about the chemical. I can't remember what our intelligence was saying about biological, but I think it was quite suggestive. We knew they had the "Big Bertha" gun. We knew they had done some work on the nuclear, but my hunch is we thought they were at least five to ten years away from it. They had more ambitions than they had capabilities, that's my recollection of what we were saying at the time. Indeed, it wasn't until after the war when people got in there that we discovered their multiple programs, that they were considerably farther down the road than anybody had thought they were.

Knott: You talked probably more than enough about the August 1st meeting with President Reagan, I believe, excuse me, with President Bush, where you're with Brent Scowcroft and the word comes in about the—is there anything you can tell us about that that hasn't already been said a thousand times?

Haass: To make a long story short, Gates was away, so instead of having the Deputies Committee at the NSC, we went over and had it at State. Kimmitt was chairing it. I went over. Kerr was there, and Wolfowitz. It was not a terribly satisfying meeting but we agreed to try to piece together the intel. But by late in the afternoon everybody concluded that this was not simply gunboat diplomacy, they were going to attack. We didn't know the extent of any attack. We didn't know if it was an oil well grab, a country grab, or something in between; we had no idea. Whatever it was, we didn't much like it. The feeling was, the only chance we had at this point to get the Iraqis to back off was a direct communication from the President to Saddam, so I was given the task of going back and persuading the President to do that. I went back, met with Brent, explained what had happened at the meeting. When people came out, he said it made sense to him. So he called over to the President's secretary; the President was in the residence, we went to see him there.

Again, we summarized the situation and we talked about the logistical problems of how you get to Saddam, it wasn't as if we had the phone number. I said the easiest way to do it was through our embassy, we had a chargé there at the time, Joe Wilson. We said you could get Joe to set up the talk. The President said okay and literally, as we were agreeing to do this, even though I said I think it's a long shot. By then, it was about 7 o'clock our time, plus or minus an hour. I said it's seven or eight hours difference so it must be 2 or 3 in the morning in Baghdad; it might be hard to get through to Saddam. I said it might be physically impossible; I doubt a lot of people are going to wake him up. I wouldn't want to be the guy in Iraq who wakes up Saddam. The expression “shoot the messenger” there is not just an expression.

But literally, while we were talking about the logistics and feasibility of it, the phone rang and it was Kimmitt as Acting Secretary. Baker was hunting or something with Shevardnadze, and I don't know where Eagleburger was. Kimmitt called over saying he had just heard from Nat Howell, our man in Kuwait, saying that Iraqi forces were shooting up the place. That was that.

Knott: Do you recall the President's reaction?

Haass: It was more like, I guess we are going to have a war. I don't remember his precise words, but we still didn't know the extent of it. It was just these first reports. We had no idea whether to trust the reports, how extensive it was. In any case, the feeling was that whatever moment there had been for a potential call, that moment had passed. We didn't know the full extent of what was going to happen, so it was more a mixture of questioning and concern. We knew we had something of a crisis on but we didn't know the full extent of it. It was more a kind of charge to Brent and to me to figure out what's going on and get back to him as soon as we had a clear picture of events. Then we could talk about what the hell to do.

Knott: There were reports at the time, fairly quickly after the attack, the invasion of Kuwait, that Saudi Arabia might be next.

Haass: That was a genuine feeling. I thought there was a good chance the Iraqis would go on, that if they had Kuwait there was certainly nothing standing between them and Saudi Arabia. If they really controlled Kuwait, they don't have to. Part of what I was worried about was that the Iraqis would have a hold over Saudi Arabia. If you had an Iraq that had conquered Kuwait, if the world basically stood by, you would have an Iraq, therefore, in control of 20-odd percent of the world's oil resources. Against that demonstration effect, I didn't think the Saudis would be a terribly independent player any more.

I couldn't rule out that they would also go on to physically occupy, invade Saudi Arabia. They hadn't stopped beefing up their forces in the south of Iraq. There's no reason his forces couldn't turn. We didn't have intel that I remember saying they were going on to Saudi Arabia, it just seemed to me that you couldn't rule it out. But again, I argued, they don't actually have to do it to get many of the benefits of it. I thought, either way, it was unacceptable. So did Brent and the President. Very quickly, we all came out on the same page.

Knott: Were you hearing from Prince Bandar at this time, do you recall? Did you have a relationship with Prince Bandar?

Haass: I had a relationship with Bandar. I can't remember the first time I heard from him. I met with him a lot in those couple of days. I'm sorry; I can't remember that first day or two exactly. What I remember about spending the most time with Bandar was—I've got my days mixed up, I apologize, it might have been Friday or Saturday. I'm trying to think. Help me with the chronology. The first meeting was Thursday, if I remember correctly. Yes, the first NSC meeting was Thursday; the thing happened Wednesday night. So Thursday was the first NSC meeting.

Yes, I think I met with Bandar Friday, after the second NSC, certainly met with him Saturday. I know it was Saturday, I think it was Friday. Because by then the whole question was the Cheney mission. What was interesting about that is once Scowcroft and Sununu and I had the meetings with Bandar, we said, "The President decided that he's prepared to send the Secretary of Defense out to discuss with you the defense of Saudi Arabia," and Bandar said, "Well, I shall speak to the King about that. I'm sure he'd welcome a visit and a discussion." We said, "No, you don't understand. We're not interested in having the Secretary of Defense come out there for a discussion about whether to do it, but rather how to do it, i.e., we want the decision to accept American forces taken before he goes out."

Bandar gulped at that point because then he had to get on the phone and say, "You've got to make a decision now." We all thought it was a nightmare if we went out and we had this conversation and then we couldn't agree to do anything. We thought that would really make everybody look feckless. So if the Secretary of Defense were to go out, and also Gates was traveling with him, you couldn't have this senior team rebuffed. So the pressure was on Bandar to make that case. Clearly, the Saudis were uncomfortable being forced to make such a big decision so quickly. To their credit, they did. Bandar earned his keep right then.

Knott: There was another event that you were sort on public display and that's when President Bush returned from Camp David.

Haass: My Andy Warhol 15 minutes.

Knott: Your famous moment.

Haass: Yes, it's all true in the sense that, that was Sunday. We had the first NSC meeting Thursday, which was a fairly unfocused meeting. The Friday meeting was much better, where the President was careful about not speaking, but Scowcroft, Eagleburger, and Cheney all powerfully articulated about the need not to allow this to stand. Saturday morning was the meeting up at Camp David and then we came back Saturday and worked all day. I'd stopped working in my office by this point and moved over to the "sit" room. I just couldn't keep going back and forth, even the 50 yards were taking too long, and I needed all the information support I could get in the "sit" room, so I'd set up shop there.

Scowcroft called around early afternoon Sunday and said the President is coming back from Camp David and I can't be there. When he gets back he needs a briefing on what's going on as well as some suggestions of what he should say. So I said, "When's he coming?" Brent said, "About half an hour." I said, "Oh great." My first reaction, "Oh shit, I'm not dressed for this." I've got shorts on, a T-shirt, I was a mess; it just wouldn't look right. I had to borrow clothes from people at the NSC. I borrowed a jacket, borrowed a shirt, I still kind of looked like a mess. I had to figure out what I wanted Bush to say, some talking points. I knew what I wanted to get him to do, but I was so tired, I couldn't physically do it very fast. Condi was with me and she got frustrated watching me. She said, "This is pathetic; I can't stand it." So she yanked me out of my chair and said, "Just dictate." It was very high-priced help, Condi Rice typing out as I dictated what the President needed to say when he landed.

I was so tired I couldn't get my bearings and I literally had to be pointed, like, there's the South Lawn. That is what sleep deprivation will do to you. So anyhow we got it done. Condi ripped it, literally, out of the typewriter—this is in the age of typewriters—gave it to me, walked out, and just waited there. When the President landed he gestured for me to come meet him. He asked me what was going on. The Arab governments like Jordan and Egypt, whom the President had been on the horn with over the weekend, kept saying not to overreact. Saddam has done a bad thing, but don't overreact. The President was skeptical. He wanted to know if there was any information in from anywhere that they were going to get Saddam to reverse this, and the bottom line was uh-uh. We were coming up empty-handed.

I gave him the piece of paper, gave him the summary of what we'd heard, and then some themes, essentially this was a terrible thing, unacceptable, etc. Basically made the arguments and that's when he gave the "this will not stand" statement. I was criticized by a certain chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff for all this. I didn't know that at the time, but for a while I was in his doghouse because he felt I had made policy on the fly and had gotten the President to stake out a pretty tough position on all this without having run this through anything like a process. As I told him later, that's where the meeting came out Friday and that's where the President is. So what can I tell you?

Knott: I can imagine how tired you were that day. Did you put in those kinds of days for the duration of this? I mean, by February, were you pretty well exhausted?

Haass: It's one of the ironies of government, and anyone who has worked in government would say this, that arguably some of your most important decisions are made during crises, and crises are when you're operating on the least amount of sleep. If you look at August, September, October, November, December, January, February, those seven months through the end of the war, I would think, in that time, and I don't think I was different in this, I worked seven days a week, probably averaged 16 hours a day for that time. I remember having, I think, three days off in those seven months. One was the day I got married, one was Yom Kippur, and one was Christmas. Just to show I'm ecumenical. Those are the only three days I remember having off in seven months.

Knott: You got married in the midst of this?

Haass: The good news and bad news is I went to Paris on my honeymoon. The bad news is I went with the President and Scowcroft. I'm still paying for it. [*laughter*] There was one nice thing; one of the things we have on the wall of our house is a note from the President. I don't know if he knew I got married, he had some vague idea. Someone said, "This is Haass' honeymoon." The word started to go around on Air Force One, going over. "This is your honeymoon?" He said, "Give me a piece of paper." So he took one of the pads that say "Air Force One" and wrote, "Dear Susan, Richard was with me today in the desert. Please forgive us, honest," which was nice. We have it framed now. That was her wedding present.

Knott: That's great. You also traveled with the President to a one-day summit with Soviet President Gorbachev in—

Haass: Helsinki.

Knott: In Helsinki. Anything in your recollections from that meeting stand out?

Haass: Two things. One, we had done a lot of preparations earlier, before the summit. Dennis Ross and I had met with various Soviets, and Baker met with Shevardnadze. I think I have the sequence. It was the gap between Shevardnadze and Gorbachev that was surprising. I think it was, if I have it right—check this with others—that Shevardnadze had led us to believe the Soviets, at this point Soviets, Russia, Russians I guess, were here, and it turned out that Gorbachev was in a different place, and could not be nearly as forthcoming, clearly reflecting the domestic politics there. You just sensed that this was a guy caught up in something large, and he was just overwhelmed and couldn't quite deliver.

Knott: Distracted, is that—

Haass: Totally. Not particularly focused, I thought. The other thing I remember was the long debates with the Russians, what's the date on this?

Knott: I've got September 5th or 6th.

Haass: Yes, we were working on some of this stuff, some of the resolutions about sanctions. I remember, in order to get their support, working out wording with them about the exception in the sanctions to allow food and medicine to get in, which was a good thing on humanitarian grounds, but also became quite useful diplomatically. I can't remember the name of Shevardnadze's principal Middle East—[Sergei] Tarasenko or something—but working out the wording on that. I'd had no idea at the time that that would become such a big issue; it was good we inserted it just because it ultimately became one of the biggest issues with sanctions. At the time, I had no idea it was going to be so central.

The whole thing, though, was slightly odd, and Madrid in a different context reinforced it in two ways. One is how different all of this would have been if you had still the Soviet Union and the Cold War. The United States had the luxury of doing all this because we didn't have a rival superpower that was almost in a knee-jerk way going to back the country we were opposing. It created so much space for the United States in a way that you never would have had during the Cold War.

Secondly, it was how diminished Gorbachev was, almost literally like a shadow. So a lot of it was yes, they're on the Security Council, but in a funny sort of way there's an element of doing this because it would help Gorbachev politically. We almost went out of our way to help him manage this situation, rather than because of an objective reflection of Russian power.

Knott: Then in November you traveled with Secretary Baker. You've already touched on this, perhaps we've exhausted it.

Haass: That's the 678—

Knott: Right.

Haass: That whole strategy came out of an earlier meeting Bob Kimmitt and I had, which I think was in early October. Bob and I said, "Let's just talk about where we go from here." I went over to his office and we sat down for about two hours, just the two of us, and we mapped out a strategy. We basically said, "How do we bring this to a head?" We talked about it and then I wrote the memo after he and I came to agreement on the agenda. I wrote the memo for the deputies and the President and the principals, which was essentially what became Resolution 678, which was the idea that we need to bring this to an end. We need to give an ultimatum to the U.N. On the other hand, we don't want to go for a resolution and fail to get it. So the whole idea was for Baker to shop it around, to see if we could get a resolution. If he could, great; if he couldn't, we didn't want it to be a failure. So we didn't want to try to and fail, we just wanted to kind of smoke it out. That was the strategy. We went with that and it worked, we basically sold it. He traveled all over and he got people to buy into the ultimatum approach on January 15th. The trip with Baker was his thing. My role in that trip was essentially sitting on my butt. He did all the work. I was just there.

I remember getting yelled at by Baker over the troop-doubling thing and all that. He was so pissed that this was going on while he was out there. He got me; he said, "Will you get on the Goddamn phone and speak to Brent and tell him that you guys can't do this while I'm out here because how can I be out trying to look like we're making a good-faith diplomatic effort? Can't you control the White House?" I sort of said, "Sure, I'll get on the phone." I called Brent and said I was getting carved a new asshole by Baker. But there was nothing I could do; we'd already gone forward. I think I got a delay of a day or something, but that was about as good as I could do. Baker was not mollified. "Why did I bother to have you here on the plane if you can't stop these guys from doing this?" *[laughter]* One of those wonderful moments of being in government. Anyhow, such is life.

Knott: Do you recall a January 1991 briefing where you brought in some, it was reported that you brought in some Middle Eastern experts including April Glaspie and others to talk, perhaps in military terms, how the war would go, casualties and so forth?

Haass: It wasn't so much on the war, it was more whether the Arabs, how the Arab people would respond. They weren't military types, these were more Arabists. I did it several times, people like Fouad Ajami, Bill Rugh, Bernard Lewis on one occasion, I believe. Yes, the idea was to bring in respected former diplomats or Arabists to give the President a sense of how different U.S. policies were being pursued and might be pursued.

Strong: In those sessions, is he mostly listening, is he asking questions?

Haass: Yes, he would ask questions. Just to get a better feel for how what we were doing was playing in the Arab world, which I thought was a smart idea. You never know what you learn. These were important people in terms of debate so I thought it was a good investment in time. He got a lot out of it.

Knott: You're not a military person, but on the eve of war, what was your thinking as to how it would go? Any expectation that it would go as easy in a way as it did?

Haass: Yes, because of what Powell and some others told me. One night Colin said, "These guys don't know what's going to hit them." I mean, he had better than most an appreciation for how good we'd become militarily. He had, I won't say contempt, but his view was, don't inflate what these guys are. So Powell's view was that it was going to be one-sided. He and others felt good and I picked up on that. But it still went better than anybody thought. It was more impressive.

Knott: Could you recall for us your own mood on the eve of war? Obviously, this is one of the biggest events in your life and the administration's life.

Haass: It was. I thought, and maybe this sounds off-key, but I felt good about what we'd done. When I looked at the previous five or six months, I thought we had helped steer things pretty well. I felt that we'd served the President well. Based upon everything I'd heard, I knew he felt pretty confident about how things would unfold. I don't know if the word is "pride" or "satisfaction," but it just felt pretty comfortable. He seemed comfortable; Scowcroft was very

pleased, very comfortable, was very gracious and generous at the time. He and I had a nice moment.

Also, the other thing you feel is slightly out of it. By that I mean, up to that point it had all been diplomacy and you suddenly realize not only is it real, but suddenly it passes to the other building, so there's a funny moment of having nurtured this thing and suddenly you let go of it. Indeed, within a day or two of the war starting, I didn't have nearly as much to do.

Knott: Interesting.

Haass: I was still working long days, but the run-up to the war was actually a busier moment than the war for someone in my job. The whole theme was that we weren't going to micromanage the Pentagon. So we were not going to sit and pore over bombing targets; it was a very conscious decision. And there was other stuff to do.

Knott: I think this is a good point to take a break.

[BREAK]

Strong: We don't have a lot of time left. Can I change direction maybe a little bit and ask this question? Clearly, the most important things you would have worked on were the Gulf War and Madrid and the Middle East and the opportunities that came after. Those are topics that have been quite well covered in various memoirs and various accounts. Are there things you worked on that scholars, commentators, observers of the Bush administration haven't given enough attention to that would be hidden successes or important issues that you don't get asked about?

Haass: Regards to the hidden part?

Strong: Yes.

Haass: I'm sure there are [*laughter*]. You probably should have asked this in the morning. Let me answer the question this way. One is, I think there were three major foreign policy accomplishments of the administration, and two of them are the Gulf War and Madrid. I think the third is the handling of the end of the Cold War. I was lucky enough to be a central part of two of the three. There obviously were a lot of other things where I think the administration deserves some credit for, but lots I didn't work on intimately. For example, trade. I think he deserves a lot of credit for essentially leading to the NAFTA [North American Free Trade Agreement].

One thing I did work on—I think it was the spring of 1990—were efforts to diffuse the Indo-Pakistani tension that had developed. It's just been written about a little bit in the literature by South Asian experts, and there is a whole group of those, but that seemed to me one of those discreet diplomatic undertakings where in a way its very success buried it. If we failed, trust me, you would have heard about it and we would have spent most of today talking about the

consequences of our failure, if indeed they had gone to war, and who knows what that would have led to. But I think that was a pretty good example where we got concerned that events were beginning to spin out of control and basically said, let's go there and do what we can and try to slow things down and make them aware of what they're doing, and particularly what the states might do. I had gotten the agency to run certain simulations about how things would likely unfold and what we did was share that with them and said, "What you're doing is extremely dangerous, and by the way, you won't benefit from it." So I feel good about that. I actually think you never know what would have happened had you not done something.

Strong: Was that sharing of information the principal American leverage in those negotiations or discussions?

Haass: I think so. You let people know that you're watching also. You're not just uninterested or allowing things to spin out of control. I think that's one thing.

The Middle East, we talked about. I can't think of any brilliant successes that were not talked about. I don't mean that in a critical way. Is there something that you're thinking of? Help me a little bit.

Strong: No, I want to give an opportunity for you to put things in this record that we may have not been clever enough to ask you about.

Haass: I think we've covered it.

Strong: May we move on then to ask you about those three big successes and to ask you about the one you *didn't* work on because we haven't talked much about that. In that you may be more of an observer than a participant, how do you rate the performance of the President and the other senior team in the management of those complexities? You certainly understood the European side—

Haass: I give them pretty high marks, but again, there are those who say it was all going to work itself out anyhow, it was inevitable. I don't buy it. I think the investment in Gorbachev and Shevardnadze was a good investment. The talks with Germany, the two plus four, I thought was a good piece of diplomacy; Bob Zoellick did a good job. Clearly, that's the way history was moving, but the fact that it moved as quickly as it did and as relatively neatly as it did, I don't think was preordained. People did some good work there. People at the senior level, Baker in particular, deserve a lot of credit. I think Bob Blackwill at the NSC and Bob Zoellick at State deserve a lot of credit for that.

On Iraq and the Gulf War—let me put it this way, it's not clear to me that what we did was axiomatic. By that I mean, I could very well imagine how a President may have reacted differently. It could very well be that other administrations after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait would have learned to live with it, might have stuck with sanctions, might have just said it was a bridge too far, it's not worth it, we'll contain it, what have you. So, for example, I don't know what would have happened had Ronald Reagan been President then or Bill Clinton, speaking of the Presidents before and after.

What reinforces my saying that is that I remember the first NSC meeting, that Thursday; it was all over the place. We were talking about cutting off Iraqi oil shipments and someone from the economic side of the House was saying embargos never work. Oil is fungible, you always get around it, until I pointed out yes, but it's different if we're blowing their tankers out of the water, and he stopped. It was as if it hadn't occurred to him that we were actually going to take that step. I just use that as an example. It was not preordained, inevitable, that the United States would have responded the way it did to Iraq, all of which reinforces my own sort of great man view of history. I think people do matter, particularly the top people in an administration.

So in a way the decision to go to war, whether to go to war, how it was handled, was deft and there I give Scowcroft tremendous credit. I think Baker was very good on the negotiating of 678, but strategically, the arc of the policy, I would give Scowcroft as much credit, or more credit, than anybody. He clearly reinforced the President's sense that this couldn't be allowed to stand, to borrow from his language, and how we went about it. I'm not sure there was consensus on that. Some certainly felt more strongly about it than others.

We haven't talked about the aftermath of the Gulf War and if you want to that's all right—I don't want to come off as a Pollyanna. There are things that the administration didn't get quite right and that's one of them. I'm happy to talk about it; the Balkans, there are other things I don't think we got quite right. Clearly, some of Panama.

We haven't talked about the loan guarantee matter either. Baker and Scowcroft deserve a lot of credit for how they managed the run-up to Madrid afterwards. I think it also revealed some of the limits to what we can do. You want to be helpful, you've got good people in place, just sometimes you feel that you can't do better than the cards you're dealt and you have to deal with certain realities. There were just limits.

Overall, as you sense, I'm a pretty big fan of the administration's foreign policy.

Strong: Let me ask another, a broad question. Sununu wasn't interested in your political advice, but I am a little bit. Why is it that those significant accomplishments, and they were significant at the time, don't translate into electoral clout when you come up for reelection?

Haass: History suggests that foreign policy accomplishments, almost like trade agreements, the benefits of them are so diffuse that people don't react to them that strongly in a positive way. They react more to those parts of foreign policy they don't like because they feel it more acutely. Obviously, the end of the Cold War, the success in the Gulf, what it did was it actually made the world seem more benign, it reduced the salience of foreign policy. In that sense, the administration was a victim of its own success, you might say. It gave us the luxury as a society of focusing almost entirely on things domestic.

It is almost a parallel with post-World War II Britain, that after you go through, in that case World War II, in this case the Cold War and the Gulf War—the idea that you turn away from people who are associated with national security and foreign policy is not, shall we say,

unprecedented. Then, on the economic side, it seemed to me Bush had partially bad luck and partially didn't do something right.

The bad luck was they came out of the recession too close to the election for the perception to kick in, and secondly, I don't think the Bush administration, on the economic side, did a good enough job explaining his policy. For example, when you had the Andrews Air Force Base agreement, he changed the pledge on taxes. The idea of simply releasing a several-paragraph statement was absurd. If it had been up to me, the President would have done a major address from his desk at the Oval Office and he would have said, "I know when I ran I pledged no new taxes. I'm about to break this; this is the most difficult thing I've ever done in public life, but here's why. I know I'm going to be criticized for this and some will say I haven't kept my word, here's why."

I would have totally anticipated the criticisms and explained what he was doing, and I think a lot of reaction would have been that was quite courageous, the right thing to do. So my hunch is that he had a bit of bad luck with the timing of the recovery, but I also think Bush suffered a little bit from what we said before, from the plainness of his Presidency. I think at times he almost felt that if he simply did the right thing for the right motives it would be rewarded, and that's not the case in life. Sometimes you have to explain things and package them so people get it right. I think Bush did not do it nearly enough to explain his decisions economically.

I can't prove it, but my own hunch is he would have been reelected had he done this, because the reality was pretty good. The last, the third-quarter economic results were not bad. We were clearly moving out of recession, but the perception hadn't caught up with the reality, and he didn't do enough to close the gap, if you will, between reality and perception. To me, the key moments were two: one was the Andrews Air Force Base agreement, not going out there and essentially making lemonade out of lemons, and secondly, after the success in the Gulf War, not going out and almost saying, "We've won this tremendous victory and I want you to know, though, that I'm going to work just as hard at making things right domestically," because then we were in a recession. So much of it was presentation; it's very frustrating.

Strong: Less in the vision, more to do with presentation?

Haass: Usually, but I think there was a problem sometimes in vision on the foreign policy side. This was an area of frustration, one I lost. After Brent and the President came out with the New World Order statement, I basically said that's fine, but you've got to articulate it and you've got to flesh it out. I wrote a memo fleshing it out. I wrote a speech and couldn't sell it. In the last year in particular of the administration there was a certain flight from foreign policy. People read the polls in the wrong way. There was too much a sense that we've got to deemphasize foreign policy, and I would have argued no, emphasize more domestic policy. Again, I'm way out of my lane here, I'm no expert on politics, but my hunch is that more could have been done on the vision side, in particular, on explaining thinking about the post-Cold War world, the post-Gulf world. I think that hurt the President a little bit. The phrase "New World Order" became a little bit hollow.

They were hurt a little bit also by the Bosnia reaction. The administration didn't do as much as it could and should have done and almost came at it, how do I put it, as overly narrow realists. There was a case for doing more and I think people dropped the ball on that.

Strong: That was a part of the world that Scowcroft knew so well.

Haass: They knew it too well. Brent and Larry knew it too well, and there was a sense of let's not get too drawn into the complexities, it's terribly complicated. I've seen it in several things. I've seen it in Afghanistan, I've seen it in Bosnia. Too much expertise can immobilize people. You see in the complexity all snares. Oh my God, if we get involved there it's too complicated. We can never succeed. All these hatreds, all these complications, that can immobilize you. In Afghanistan and the Balkans, Bosnia, the administration did too little, it could have accomplished more. I would have been more interventionist.

Knott: There were reports in '92 that the President's heart wasn't in the campaign and some of it was being attributed, in press speculation, to his health. Did you ever see any signs of the President flagging at all in his last year in office?

Haass: I heard all that and read all of it, all the speculation. No, I didn't. As I constantly tell people, I'm not a real doctor, but I heard it all, the gossip was making the rounds.

Knott: You didn't see it.

Haass: No, but it's hard also to tell. There's so much stress and fatigue that comes with those jobs. How old was he then, 70-ish? Who am I to say what's normal? But I didn't notice a big dropping off, if that's what you mean.

Knott: Taking it away from sort of the broad theme, which I'm reluctant to do, but to ask you about a specific issue. It was reported in '92 that you had flirted with the idea of a possible warming of relations with Iran, constructive engagement I believe was the term that was at least used in the *New York Times*. Could you tell us a little bit about that?

Haass: I can't remember the timing of that, sorry.

Knott: The *Times* reported in June of '92 that earlier that year you had launched the formal review of U.S.-Iranian relations and floated the idea of a new policy of constructive engagement consisting of lifting of some sanctions.

Haass: Sounds right, I just can't remember what I did. I got so involved in Iran policy in the current administration, I get it mixed up. I'm sorry, I don't remember; I apologize. I know we did a review. I just can't answer that. I'm sure it's all true, though; if it's in the *New York Times*, it must be.

Strong: Some percentage of it must be.

Haass: After yesterday, I have to be careful saying that.

Knott: This morning you referred to Libya in passing. I was wondering if that was one issue area that you were involved in.

Haass: It came up more in the Reagan administration, for obvious reasons. In the Bush administration—and again, I get mixed up between administrations, about what they were doing in the WMD [weapons of mass destruction] area—it was more of a preoccupation, in a funny sort of way, with the Reagan administration because of the no-fly zones, the Gulf of Sidra, Pan Am 103. Then it became of interest in this administration (Bush 43) because of the secret three-way talks with the British that ultimately brought things pretty much to a successful conclusion. But I don't remember a lot in the Bush (41) administration. I could be missing it, but I don't remember a lot. I don't trust my memory a lot on this, though.

Strong: If you had gone back to the Kennedy School after serving in the Bush administration—

Haass: The one we're talking about, Bush 41?

Strong: Yes, and they had asked you to teach a course on foreign policy in that administration, what would you have had people read, what would you have wanted them to get?

Haass: I did teach a course on foreign policy afterwards, not at the Kennedy School. Several years after I left the administration, so it was somewhere in the mid-'90s, I don't know the exact year, but I spent a semester teaching foreign policy at Hamilton College. I was the Sol Linowitz Distinguished Visiting Professor. I did that one day a week; I flew up from Washington, I was at Carnegie in Washington. I taught the course based upon the NSC. What I did, each week I said, "Here's the scenario: you've just gotten intelligence that this is happening in Burundi, there's about to be a massacre or a massacre may have just started. What should we do about it?" Or, "The President wants to give a speech fleshing out a New World Order, what should he say?" Or, "Israelis have just built ten more settlements after they told us they wouldn't, what should we do about it?"

So what I did each week was build a course based upon what I thought were realistic, NSC-like scenarios, and gave them some readings, recommended where they go off and get some more readings, if they had the time and the appetite, and focused a lot upon how they would write short memos. I wanted to teach them not just about foreign policy but about the kind of writing that was required in government if you were going to be effective. So the lesson I gave them was, you can write a memo of whatever length you want, but I'm not reading it after the third page. It's your choice: if you want to write a 30-page memo, fine, but the last 27 pages are for your memoirs, not mine.

I ended the course with the speech, a short presidential address. I wanted to make it as real as possible. I wanted to make the teaching, in a sense, capture what it was like. I'm actually bringing it here now to the Council on Foreign Relations. Once a year we have a national conference where we bring together people, members who are from neither greater Washington nor greater New York. A third of our members are national. We're going to have a mock NSC. I'm going to have people who work in the government go through the drill, and the drill I'm

giving this year is a [Pervez] Musharraf assassination and how would we react to it, and then we have intelligence that Pakistan and India are mobilizing forces. How do we diffuse it? It's that kind of thing. Taiwan declares independence, what do we do about it? You can imagine it.

In terms of the books I wrote after I left the Bush administration, I was really interested in a few things. One was just how to think about the foreign policy challenges. Since I couldn't get the President to give a speech on the New World Order, I wrote *The Reluctant Sheriff*. That was an attempt for me to work out my sense of how the U.S. should deal with challenges. The Gulf coalition, in some ways, was the model because there was no Persian Gulf-equivalent of NATO, so there was no regional security organization to deal with the threat. Well, how did we do it? We basically cobbled it together. As we dealt with the Gulf crisis, that, to me, was emblematic of how you deal with post-Cold War crises. You never would have had an Iraqi invasion of Kuwait during the Cold War; the Soviets never would have allowed it. And putting together the kind of response we had to put together was a very post-Cold War thing. To me, that was interesting.

I wrote books about tools—a book about military force, a book about sanctions, and so forth. When you're in government you've got a limited number of tools and I was very interested in writing very practical stuff, and teaching about tools. How is it you use military force? What are the lessons of sanctions versus military force? That to me is pretty practical. I got very interested in how you would write and teach in ways that would prepare people for the sort of thing I did because I didn't think, by and large, schools were doing that.

Strong: They're still not.

Haass: They're still not. But again, when you go on the NSC staff, there's no manual. How is someone supposed to know what is it you do? That's why I wrote that book on management. There's no place people go for thinking about these things and for preparing for those kinds of jobs.

Strong: Does that institution need reform?

Haass: The NSC?

Strong: Yes.

Haass: I would say some, in the sense that I think it is way too big. I get nervous when NSCs get too big. They get inherently too operational, and part of the advantage is you want a limited number of people. You have certain types of integrative positions, overviews. You have too many people, everyone gets stove-piped. So I'm nervous about an NSC that gets too big and too operational. It seems to me that we're probably in some danger of that now. I think the principal innovation that was useful was the NEC to better integrate economics and non-economics.

You've got an equivalent sort of thing now—I don't know how well it's working on Homeland Security—to better integrate what's domestic and what's international. In general, I don't think there are institutional answers. At the end of the day it's much more what the President wants, it's the qualities of the person who is the National Security Adviser, it's the quality of the people

who run the other bureaucracies, it's the relationships between them. I don't think there are institutional fixes. The problem of the current Bush administration is not a problem to which there's an institutional fix, I would suggest. It goes beyond that.

Strong: You've already said some things about how you think historians later on are going to look back at this period. Is there more to be said about that subject, kind of frame it into a—?

Haass: I think George H. W. Bush will be seen as an important transitional President because he's the last President of the Cold War and the first President of the post-Cold War era. I think he will get very high marks. I think he'll get extremely high marks for his ending of the Cold War and I think he'll get very high marks from historians for his handling of the Gulf crisis, for the most part.

Where I predict the marks won't be as high is, he did not do enough to articulate a post-Cold War foreign policy strategy. What the United States didn't do in Bosnia, what it did do in Somalia, and so forth. There wasn't an attempt to develop and articulate a strategy for the new era. That was a missed opportunity. He could have done more because I think by '92—'91 even—some of the features of the post-Cold War world were emerging, in the sense it was a world in which more things could happen, whether it was Iraqi invasions or failed states and so forth. The discipline and restraint of a bipolar world had gone and it was a mixed blessing. He could have done more to have said just that, to help the Americans understand this world, what kind of things would likely follow from it in terms of what we might be asked to do, what we should be prepared to do. It's hard to do that on the spot. That is, to some extent, the advantage that academics have.

The Clinton administration could and should have done better with that also, because they had the advantage of being on the outside when it all happened. They came in and went through eight years without doing a good job on it; they did not come forward with anything particularly thoughtful. Oddly enough, the first truly thoughtful attempt to make sense of it all was the current administration's national security strategy, which I would say is strong in some parts and, quite honestly, I would suggest, flawed in others. But that, to me, at least gains respect as the first serious effort, intellectually, to come to grips with a post-Cold War, in this case, post 9/11, world.

Strong: I'm skeptical of scholars with hyphenated "posts." I'd rather see them with other names, like periods of time. When would you have a name for the period after '89 or '91?

Haass: When the character of the age reveals itself. You're right; you use the prefix "post" because you know where you've come from, you don't know where you are or where you're going. Until the personality or character of this era is clearer, we'll keep using post.

Strong: Do you think New World Order might have been a label—

Haass: I didn't much like it. It wasn't simply because of some of its historic overtones. Again, it didn't tell me anything. It didn't provide much content and guidance to me. I read it as saying, okay, we knew we'd come out, the Cold War world didn't apply, but to call for a New World

Order, to say there is one, isn't to say what it is. Define it either as a reality or as a goal. If it is set as a goal, then lay out a path for getting there. I wasn't wild about it. I would tease Brent about it and give him a hard time. I wasn't real pleased about it, and it hasn't stuck.

Strong: Marxism didn't stick either.

Haass: No. I remember Reagan used to talk a lot about "beyond containment," which told you nothing about the policy. It was still a Cold War view, it was just more detente. He couldn't use that word, but essentially it was a more relaxed East-West competition.

Strong: Will 9/11 be more a defining event than the Gulf War?

Haass: That's a great question. Quite probably. It seems to me the Gulf War wasn't so much defining as it was emblematic of one kind of security problem that was likely to emerge in a post-Cold War world. It was pretty classic in the sense of trans-border aggression. It would be the equivalent, I suppose, if North Korea did something in South Korea. But it turns out that the Gulf War in some ways hasn't been that characteristic. Much more characteristic, it seems to me, has either been state collapse of one form or another—a lot of things the Clinton administration dealt with, what the Bush administration dealt with in Somalia. Or now substate actors, terrorism.

My hunch is that this is more likely to persist and it seems to be having a much greater impact on America's collective psyche. It's much more likely to be persistent. The Gulf War had a beginning, a middle, and an end. The war on terrorism doesn't have an end, so it's much more likely to be part of the fabric or structure going forward, than the Gulf War ever would.

Strong: If al-Qaeda declared war now.

Haass: It now, to me, is part of the architecture. You live with it. The Gulf War was a classic war and may end up being one of the last classic wars. It just seems, in some ways, very old-fashioned as a war. That said, I still think what we did was incredibly right. In no way did we want people to get the message that this was somehow now acceptable behavior in this new era. That, to me, as much or even more than oil, was the reason for doing what we did. I really thought we were sending a powerful message about what it was could and could not be done.

I feel totally comfortable in that respect, felt totally comfortable at the time, in the basic thrust of our policy, which was to reverse what the Iraqis did. Had we not done that, it could have become much more characteristic of the post-Cold War world. If people had gotten the message, hey, we can get away with a lot, then I guess they would have tried to get away with a lot. History suggests that.

Strong: Did you see evidence that that message was heard around the world, besides the opportunities that opened up for Middle East peace?

Haass: No, I'm not sure about all the messages heard around the world. One of the ironic ones was, "Don't fight the United States in a war like Iraq just did." If you've got to get involved,

either use weapons of mass destruction or use terrorism. The Gulf War reinforced things that would hasten the emergence of either weapons of mass destruction or terrorism. I doubt it, but it certainly reinforced the sense, in people's minds, that the last thing you wanted to do was fight the United States in a classic war on a classic battlefield. That was something that was to our comparative advantage. I think it had that impact on people's thinking; that was not the area we were vulnerable at, there would be other ways.

Strong: If you were part of a team like this one, doing an oral history interview of President Bush, what questions would you ask?

Haass: You're going to have trouble because he's not reflective, and he fights being reflective. I'm not sure he's *not* reflective, but he resists being reflective, is a better way of putting it. I wish you well. I went through some agony working with him and Brent on their book, so my heart goes out to you both if you're going to interview him. It's going to be tough.

Strong: Why the resistance at being reflective?

Haass: It's just who he is. I don't know; it's hard-wired into his personality. But I would go through each of the principal things, whether it's the things we've talked about, the principal decisions, things he did, things he didn't do. I think it would be interesting to get his views of other people. I'd love to get his views on foreign leaders, people in the government at the time. Why did he feel so strongly, let's say, about reversing Iraqi aggression, why didn't he feel more strongly about doing something in Bosnia? Get him to talk about what his regrets were in the aftermath of Iraq. Does he now wish it had been different, or is it what I say, he's more confident than ever he made the right decision not to go to Baghdad, and that kind of thing. It would be interesting to get him to reflect upon the major decisions, the major people. All this stuff I'm sure you've thought of 150 times. But it would be interesting to get him to talk about which Presidents he's admired most and why.

Strong: Is the answer [Dwight] Eisenhower?

Haass: I don't know. Actually, I think there are some similarities there. I think that, like Eisenhower, his reputation will go up with time, like [Gerald] Ford. Moderate Republicans all share a certain problem, which is, in some ways, the reasonableness of it. Centrism tends not to excite people. What happens over time, though, is the basic competence of moderate Republican administrations tends to get admired, and a lot of what they did looks pretty good. All three of them—Eisenhower, Ford, Bush—were not great salesmen, all weathered recessions, all did some pretty practical foreign policy. It's not the kind of stuff that gets your blood going. Your base does not get energized by it, but it tends to look pretty good. That's my hunch; he's not going to be ranked in the top tier of Presidents if, by that, you mean [George] Washington, FDR, [Thomas] Jefferson, those on your top five or ten list. But I think he'll probably be like Eisenhower. I think his ranking will tend to go up over time for the reasons we discussed, where it turns out he looks pretty good in foreign policy.

On the domestic, on the economic side, it actually looks better in retrospect than it did at the time. The performance—again, almost like Ford in that sense, never politically rewarded for it

but historians will probably be fairly positive, fairly generous in their predictions. I think it will look better in time; that would be my guess.

Knott: Well, Richard Haass, we want to thank you very much. You've made an invaluable contribution to the Bush Oral History project.

Haass: I doubt it, but I'm glad to do it.

Knott: You have; thank you very much.