WILLIAM J. CLINTON PRESIDENTIAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW 1 WITH ANTHONY LAKE

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WILLIAM JEFFERSON CLINTON HISTORY PROJECT

TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW 1 WITH ANTHONY LAKE

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Riley: This is the Anthony Lake interview for the William J. Clinton Presidential History Project. First we want to go around the table to get a voice ID so that the transcriber knows who is talking at a given point in time. I will begin and we can go in this direction. I'm Russell Riley, Assistant Professor and Research Fellow at the Miller Center at Virginia.

Coughlin: I'm Kelli Coughlin, note taker.

Destler: I'm Mac Destler. I'm a Professor at the University of Maryland and have done a few other things in the past.

Knott: I'm Steve Knott. I'm an Assistant Professor and Research Fellow at the Miller Center.

Lake: I'm Tony Lake, a former bureaucrat.

Owen: I'm John Owen, an Associate Professor at the University of Virginia.

Riley: Okay, great. Shall we begin at the beginning?

Lake: And go to the end and then stop? As in Alice in Wonderland?

Riley: That sounds good. Your first association with Bill Clinton comes—

Lake: Actually, could I begin as we were discussing downstairs?

Riley: Please do, by all means.

Lake: One ground rule is that I have a terrible memory, so when anything I say disagrees with the memories of anybody else, you should go with their version unless it's literally an indictable offense on my part, in which case I'd like an opportunity to refresh my memory.

Secondly, we're going do this chronologically, but one's memory tends to be a jumble and is not chronological. Another caveat is, as we were discussing downstairs, the thing we always miss in tracing through any issue is the pressures of time and the number of issues that are coming up every day, with never enough time to deal with any of them in the way you would like to. As I was saying, I would bet almost anything that during the Cuban missile crisis, [John F.] Kennedy spent no more than 20 percent of his time on the future of humanity and 80 percent was on the

daily crush of work.

Therefore it is going to be hard for me to remember things because while the things we discuss may have been the most important thing that day, there were a lot of other things going on that make it hard to remember. This is all my lame excuse for maybe not being very helpful on these things, but I'll try.

Destler: We teach our students—or try to—that lots of things are going on.

Lake: But I probably talk to five graduate students a week, literally, who are doing theses on these things, and each of them is tracing one red thread through things at the exclusion of everything else, which kind of misses it. Finally, I noticed in the chronology, which is quite good, that it was based on newspaper reports, which are often not quite good.

Destler: Yes.

Lake: So there's one point in here, and if I forget it, on Bosnia, which suggests, I believe, that I presented to President Clinton a plan for allowing the Iranians to send weapons into Bosnia, which I think came in the *Los Angeles Times* years later or something. You suggested I use the word, that is utter bullshit. My memory is good enough to be sure that I didn't do that. I think I'd remember it if I encouraged the Iranians to send arms anywhere.

I would suggest that on Bosnia, for example, much the best book on it, in fact the only accurate book I've seen, is Ivo Daalder's *Getting to Dayton.* On NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] enlargement, the [James] Goldgeier account is I think much the best, at least it fits best with my memory. And you might want to look at the beginning of one of the chapters of *Six Nightmares*, a book that I did that talks about Haiti, Bosnia and Northern Ireland, and is based on the documents I got in the White House and went over, my own documents, which are sketchy but as far as I know accurate.

Riley: We're in that gray area in the development of history where the documents aren't available. One of the things that is very valuable about conducting these interviews is it gives the respondents an opportunity to correct the kinds of press accounts that students across the country would probably be relying on in the development of such things.

Lake: Yes. Even documents, as the Pentagon Papers show, miss the oral stuff. And I think this is an important point for historians. More and more, sadly, the opposing party in the Congress uses—I once said everything short of subpoenas, but including subpoenas—to get documents on everything in an effort to make a case against a President of a different party. More and more officials are loathe to put anything in writing in order to evade that, which is one of the sad costs for historians.

Destler: One other problem with documents I'm sure we'll compensate for in this is that there is not much from the President in documents, typically.

Lake: Yes.

Destler: You find lots of documents to the President, but very few from. Any handwritten—

Lake: In this case we have left-handed backwards checkmarks. Although this President wrote a lot of comments which I couldn't read, literally. I would have to take them to Nancy Hernreich or somebody who could read his handwriting, to figure out what it was that he was asking about.

Riley: Any crucial misinterpretations you recall of those?

Lake: "*Don't* bomb," he said, "*don't* bomb." [*laughter*]

Riley: When we speak of chronology, I'm merely suggesting that what we want to do is start with your earliest recollections. Once we get into your position within the administration, I think we would be much more comfortable talking more thematically about the issue areas. We don't intend to march you through from week to week or month to month through the presidency. So with that sort of preface, could you then take us back to your earliest recollections of meeting Bill Clinton?

Lake: The pause is not—

Riley: It was a thoughtful pause.

Lake: It was a croissant choking pause. I was thinking about what book to write next, I guess it was early 1991, and thought that rather than doing a book which looked back, using newspapers, whatever, to write a history of something, that I would try covering an event and then writing about it. So I thought I would write a book on the Democrats and foreign policy and a presidential campaign and why we once again screwed up.

So I started covering the '92 campaign, interviewing various candidates or more often their staffs. I discovered to my frustration and dismay that because [George H. W.] Bush was already under attack for being the "foreign policy President," most of the candidates had reached the conclusion that they simply wouldn't talk about foreign policy. To show that they were more pure than the President and cared more about real Americans. I thought it was really stupid to evade foreign policy issues. But since I was interviewing them, I had to bite my tongue raw and not say anything. Most of them seemed about 12 years old, which is what I suppose I was when I went to work for [Edmund] Muskie back in his campaign in 1971.

By the fall of '91, I hadn't interviewed Clinton yet. I went to my friend Sandy Berger, who had been one of my deputies on the policy planning staff back in the [Jimmy] Carter administration and was an old friend of Clinton's, going back to the [George] McGovern campaign, when they had worked together. So Sandy set up an interview outside Boston somewhere, I can't remember, in some town, after a fund raiser that Clinton was to be at. Sandy also knew that I was getting frustrated with the book and he suspected that if I smelled cordite in the air, maybe I would get interested in being involved somehow in the campaign.

I had done a number of campaigns back in the '70s and had sort of lost my taste for it all in the

’80s and had become increasingly dismayed by the partisanship in Washington, which I’ve written about. And still am, which has gotten worse and worse, instructed by a book that Mac Destler wrote and that I signed.

Destler: Yeah, right.

Lake: In 19—when was it, ’84?

Destler: Eighty-four, yes.

Lake: It’s called *Our Own Worst Enemy* by Mac Destler and two friends.

Destler: I don’t think you can get away with that. We know the title was yours, but there’s evidence that some of the content was yours, too.

Lake: Well, I scribbled in it but the thoughts were yours. So before meeting Clinton himself, I met with Hillary Clinton and George Stephanopoulos. We talked for an hour or so about the campaign, sort of feeling each other out. Then I drove with Clinton to his next event. We spoke for maybe ten or fifteen minutes.

Riley: This would be late ’91?

Lake: This would have been early fall ’91, early autumn. We spoke for about three minutes on arms control. Then when he was asking me where I was from, I started talking about my neighbors in western Massachusetts who were having a hard time of it economically and he got very passionate about their plight; I was passionate about their plight. Completely without apology I will say that I decided I would forget the book and work for Governor Clinton’s election for a while because of his position on domestic issues. That is primarily why Presidents get elected and should get elected.

Many people ask me if it is true that he cared more about domestic policy than foreign policy, and my answer is of course. He spent a lot of time on foreign policy, and we’ll discuss his record, but it does matter more to me as a citizen what their position is on the issues that most directly affect me. Take that, Council on Foreign Relations.

Destler: Oh my God.

Lake: Yes.

Destler: I can’t stay. [*laughter*]

Lake: So anyway, then they called me—I think it was Hillary Clinton, actually, who called me—and asked if I would help out on a speech that he had decided to give at Georgetown University. One of three speeches—

Destler: I went to that speech.

Lake: —laying out his views.

Destler: It was a good speech.

Lake: Thank you, if I do say so.

Destler: His "ad hoc-ery" was even better than his speech.

Lake: His "ad hoc-ery" was always better than his speeches. We can discuss that if you want. He was the only candidate or senior official I ever did speeches for who didn't make my palms sweat when they started going off on their own, because he was better than any of us. We'll come back to him.

So, without signing up for the duration, I said, "Okay, I'll work on the speech," and went down to Washington then and worked with Sandy and Bruce Reed and I think Strobe [Talbott] was somewhat involved, Michael Mandelbaum, a couple of others.

Riley: Those were the people who were advising him before your arrival?

Lake: I guess so, yes. Worked out of the DLC's [Democratic Leadership Council] Progressive Policy Institute offices, mostly with Bruce Reed and Will Marshall. Outlined a speech, started writing it, mostly with Will and Bruce. Got a call then from—after we'd sent a couple of drafts down to Little Rock—got a call asking me to go alone down to Little Rock to meet with the Governor to go over the speech, which I did. Should I just free form?

Riley: Please, this is very instructive.

Lake: It was very interesting to me because basically you can't get from here to there and you have to go through, I think I went through Memphis, and got another flight down to Little Rock. I was sitting next to a woman who was not a fan of the Governor. She saw this speech draft that I was going over one more time on my lap and said, "Oh, are you going to see the Governor?" I said, "Yes," and *kaboom*. She went on and on with her negative bill of particulars.

At the end of the day then with the Governor, which I'll come back to, I said to him, in a relaxed moment, "You know, coming down, I sat next to a woman who is not a fan of yours." And it was very interesting, he said, "Did you get her name?" I thought to myself, *Wow, this guy has a chance if he is doing retail politics, person by person*—but it was true. He had a phenomenal memory for people and names and I saw this over and over again. I think because he was genuinely interested in people, especially in people—

Riley: It wasn't Paula Corbin Jones, was it?

Lake: No. Actually I don't know, come to think of it. Anyway, when I got down there, I spent I'd say six hours with him going over the speech, paragraph by paragraph. His wife came in and out from time to time. I was extremely impressed. Impressed in fact by how much he knew,

because he would use each paragraph as a way then of discussing that issue; impressed by not only how well he knew what he didn't know, but finally, and most important, how prepared he was to say when he didn't know things, which is a sign of confidence. Most senior officials will never admit they don't know something because it makes them look weaker.

The other things that impressed me very much is that after we would go over a paragraph and put it into the shape that he wanted, and talked through the substance, he would almost always say, "Okay yes, I believe that." I've worked with a number of candidates whose object was to figure out whether the *listeners* would believe it, not whether they themselves believed it. It has since struck me that, as I've written, his problem was not that he believed too little—which I think was the problem of George Bush, who I admire in many ways, but who was not passionate about issues, generally.

Destler: The father?

Lake: The father.

Riley: Forty-one.

Lake: Right. But that Clinton believed too much and too passionately about too many things, and therefore was unwilling to make tradeoffs. Because to get *this* and spend political capital on *this*, he would have to give up *that*, and he hated the thought of not getting that.

Destler: And he hated to talk to people about making it, too.

Lake: Right, yes. And it was in a way related, I think, to his personal life, where he was always so successful and easily the most talented person I've ever worked with. And the smartest, and I've worked with some very, very smart people. He never had to make these choices and to discipline himself in almost any aspect of his life, but it was true of the substance.

So anyway, we agreed on the speech. Right now I can't remember how, but they asked me to then stay on into the spring. This sounds frivolous now, but my thought was, *Okay, I'll go on doing this until the beginning of baseball season*, because I figured he'd probably be out of the campaign by then. And it would interest me to do it and I liked him and believed in him, so I signed on for that long.

The Georgetown speech, then. We had a meeting back here on it with some of the usual foreign policy suspects, and we were going through the speech in some of the usual nerdy foreign policy ways. Suddenly behind me at this table—there were probably eight of us in the room, I can't remember who was there—there was this natural eruption, with this voice booming out, "This is all garbage. The American people won't understand this, this is too blah, blah, blah, blah," and it was my introduction to James Carville.

Destler: Ah, okay.

Lake: Who I got to like a good bit, though he certainly epitomizes the partisanship that is like a

fingernail on a blackboard. We had a very interesting argument then about some of the offending passages. The point of it all, and I was trying to make the point throughout the campaign, and I think we did it pretty well in fact, that you weren't going to be able to politically deal with Bush on foreign policy issues if you didn't lay out your own views and in a way take it to him, get a jab in his face. Because otherwise, Clinton, like any candidate, would not pass what is, I think, the central test on foreign policy issues, and that is simply to demonstrate some level of competence.

I don't think that Americans, except for interest groups—Mac, you're the expert obviously—but I don't think they are that concerned about the details of foreign policy issues. I think they are much more concerned with whether this person is going to be able to take care of business abroad so that they can go on with their daily lives and worry about the economy, et cetera, et cetera. And you can't do that unless you talk about it with confidence in some detail, even if some of the details are boring. But anyway, it was an interesting argument with Carville.

Owen: Can I ask you to clarify? What did Carville want, rather than what you wrote? Just critique?

Lake: I can't remember.

Owen: Just criticism of Bush, but nothing positive put forward?

Lake: Much more negative about Bush, much less of what Clinton believed. But mostly much less in the way of what I considered convincing details about the points he was making, and make the rhetoric much more red-blooded and all of that.

Owen: Right.

Lake: I think my other argument, I don't remember it clearly, was that in fact probably very few Americans were going to read word-for-word his Georgetown speech, so that you have to approach it through the filter of the foreign policy establishment here. And if you don't convince them that it is a serious speech, then you won't get what you do want in the articles, which is, "This was a thoughtful speech in which this Governor from Arkansas seems actually to have some ideas."

Riley: Did it strike you as odd that Carville was weighing in on this subject?

Lake: No, I've worked in other presidential campaigns where the political operatives were more and more predominant. What was interesting was there were no pollsters there, as I recall. Oh there were, yes, [Stanley] Greenberg was there.

Destler: Greenberg was there. He's an intelligent guy.

Lake: He's an intelligent guy. So anyway, then to my shock, and possibly to everybody's except for his, he won primaries, did better and better. So I kept staying on, but never agreeing—I don't believe, until the very end—to sort of sign up for the duration. Which is not that I didn't believe

in him, but I didn't want to leave my farm and I didn't want to go back in government. I genuinely didn't.

I remember, and I never should have admitted this to David Halberstam—whose book I haven't read but what little I read I didn't recognize myself in—but at the convention, when it was clear not only that he had won the Democratic nomination but probably was going to win the general election, I was, everybody was euphoric. It was a great convention and great speeches and all of that. I was in Sandy Berger's room—I'm sort of violating here, talking about myself and the point is to talk about Clinton, but anyway—

Riley: No, no, it is equally important.

Lake: No, it is not equally important. I was in Sandy's hotel room before he went over to some "hoo-rah" and Sandy, Susan—his wife—and I were in our tuxedos, as I recall. And as they were leaving the room, I was still sitting there before I went off, and Sandy looked back and said to me, "Why do you look so sad?" I wouldn't remember this if he hadn't said that to me, but it was because I knew, at that moment, in a moment of clarity, a) that he would win the nomination, and b) that he would likely ask me to be his National Security Adviser. And I knew that this was going to come at a personal cost, and it did.

So the campaign then, Sandy from Washington, me from my farm, and then we heard about through—I can't remember who now—a former Kennedy staffer, Nancy Soderberg, who Sandy and I interviewed, and liked, and sent off to Little Rock to be our presence in Little Rock. That sort of triumvirate ran the campaign on foreign policy. George Stephanopoulos used to refer to us as a "wholly-owned subsidiary of the campaign," because they gave us a lot of freedom to put out statements or whatever. George was an extraordinary impresario of all the substance. We always cleared them and the Governor always looked at them, but it wasn't the center of the campaign. But we put out a lot. I suspect that Clinton said more than Bush did on foreign policy.

Destler: Bush was trying not to talk.

Lake: Yes, he made a terrible mistake, I think, in refusing to talk more about foreign policy. Whereas if he had been all over us, he could have killed us. There was one, when we gave a speech on Russia, that Strobe and Mandelbaum worked on. I'm pretty sure Strobe did, yes, he must have, of course he did. Clinton was giving the speech in New York and we'd scheduled it some weeks in advance. The Bush folks then suddenly decided that he had to give a speech on Russia and they scheduled it for the same day, which was a tactical mistake, because it simply lifted ours.

Destler: In May.

Lake: In fact, quite a respected reporter was tipping us off—to my surprise, but we welcomed it—as to what he was hearing from them about what Bush would say. Which is a no-no but what the hell. We weren't asking, he was just—

Destler: Right.

Lake: Then, since they were putting the speech on at the last minute—I think he spoke in Philadelphia—technically it was terrible. The cameras weren't working very well, it was a bad microphone, it was a small audience, et cetera. Clinton looked like a President because we'd had a long time to prepare, and Bush didn't. It was great. We were of course able to promise more than they were because they didn't have time to clear their speech adequately through the whole government.

Destler: Did you do briefing on debates?

Lake: Yes, oh yes. So on a series of issues, Bosnia, where first Senator [Albert] Gore and Leon Feurth were very much pushing taking a very, very strong stand on Bosnia. I remember at one point, based probably on what I'd learned from working on our book, Mac, about not over-promising too much—we did over-promise, of course. We always do.

Destler: That was your chapter, actually.

Lake: Was it? I guess that's right. [*laughter*] Why are you disassociating yourself from this book so quickly? I remember one line, because everybody was laughing about it afterwards—I did keep pointing to it in the first couple of years when we were in office—the line that I guess Leon had written was, "We must do everything we can to put a stop to dah-dah, dah-dah, dah," which to my literal mind includes nuclear weapons.

Destler: Yes, everything you can. At least 50,000 troops.

Lake: Right, exactly. So I added in "reasonably," which you'll see in the speech still. Of course you can always argue about what's reasonable. This is not a sign of my "lack of passion" about Bosnia, because in fact, it was topic A throughout. I did care passionately about it. But you want to be a little careful. Similarly on Ireland, the Governor made a statement that he hadn't cleared with any of us, including Soderberg, who was the—what was the Spanish civil war, "apasionata"? What was her name?

Destler: I don't remember.

Lake: Anyway, on Northern Ireland. Even she was opposed to this when she heard about it. He promised that we would name a special envoy in Ireland, that we would do all kinds of things on Northern Ireland which absolutely drove London up a wall, which we had to walk back for the first nine months or so. In general, I think we did a pretty good job taking the issues to Bush but in ways that were reasonably responsible. Stephanopoulos was great to work with because he was very smart, but gave us a lot of running room.

Then, let's see, anything else on the campaign?

Riley: Were there certain areas when you were first getting to know Clinton that he really seemed more passionately interested in?

Lake: Yes, right from the start, in fact, he understood something that none of us foreign policy nerds did, and that was what later became called globalization. We just didn't fully understand it since I'd been trained in and always worked on—you've got national security on the one hand, you have domestic security on the other—and I was not alone, this was true of all of us. Because he had been a Governor, and because he had brought a lot of trade into Arkansas, it's often said that he cared more about economic issues, that our policies were driven by economic concerns, which simply isn't true. It was more that he was seeing the connections between the economics and the politics, and between the domestic and the foreign, and was less limited to the boxes that we were all living in.

Riley: So you think this came from his experience as Governor, then? That he had lived—

Lake: I do. Yes. And he's a pretty smart guy.

Owen: He gave a lot of signals during and after the campaign of the priority of economic issues. Naming the economic advisors first, before the national security advisors.

Lake: Absolutely, and having the big "hoo-rah" on economic issues, which he never did in foreign policy,

Destler: And in letting it out that he wasn't calling every foreign leader the first couple of days after he was elected.

Lake: I don't think he let that out.

Destler: Well, somebody did anyway.

Lake: I'd say that the three most difficult individuals and groups that I had to deal with were Saddam Hussein, Slobodan Milosevic and the President's political advisors and schedulers. [*laughter*] I won't put them in any particular order. And I couldn't use the Pentagon against the third, which is very frustrating.

Destler: How about assassination, was that ever—?

Lake: I checked. It turns out the executive order covered domestic as well as foreign. [*laughter*] The advisers were constantly putting out this stuff, were constantly doing everything they could to make it hard to schedule these meetings with foreign leaders. The saving grace was that he would overrule them, which nobody outside ever understood. I cultivated, which is too calculating a word, because they became real friends of mine, Betty Currie and Nancy Hernreich. The keepers of the gate.

Destler: Right.

Lake: I knew, perhaps because I'd worked before in the government compared to some of the others, that presidential time is the most important thing. So I never took more time with him than I needed. I would actively discourage him from telling jokes, stories. I resisted putting our

feet up and—I mean, I'm a New Englander anyway, but it was out of calculation to save the time. Because he lacks the time chromosome that allowed him to know when time was going by. Also, and it's a different issue, but he is an incredibly gregarious, engaging man who values friendships. I mean, he's tough and not prepared to go every mile for friends who worked with him if he thinks it's not in his interest, but still is a very warm, gregarious person, and most of the people around him were his friends.

I believed for various reasons that I could not do my job as well if I succumbed to being his friend. Also it was hard to draw the line between being a friend and being a courtier and I detest courtiers. We got along very well, and he was always very nice and would send me things—and remind me to come back to the story of O. J. Simpson and Korea. Whenever there was an athlete around, because I love sports, he would send them down to meet with me. He'd send me neckties. And since I left, we became sort of friends. But I didn't want it at the time.

In any case, Betty and Nancy knew I wasn't going to waste his time and I would almost avoid face time, as they call it. So when I said I needed to see him, I don't think there was a single time that they objected or that he objected, ever. And there was never a time—well, there was one time when I got cut off when I was briefing him for a press conference, and remind me to come back to that. The "fight" with my friend John Podesta. I don't mean bureaucratic fight, I mean "fight."

Riley: Oh yes, we'll want to get back to that.

Lake: You will want to get back. Podesta's been going around telling my students about this, which means they actually listen to me perhaps after he tells them. And we became good friends afterwards, but, we joked about getting the World Wrestling Federation, whatever, the Celebrity Boxing or something, to put us on the circuit. But anyway, I'll come back to that.

Riley: Did you have trouble in any instances, were there—?

Lake: Yes, not only was I not told to make it shorter, but in the early days, when meetings would turn into sort of gab fests, *I* would try to end them. I remember once just standing up, which I suppose is rather rude, and saying "thank you," encouraging everybody else to stand up so we could leave him and so he could get on to his next meeting. But as I said, it helped me never to have a problem of access, ever.

Riley: Were there others that the President considered friends from whom he was getting foreign policy advice, that might have created problems for you in terms of competition for his ear?

Lake: Yes, he had a lot of friends who he heard from all the time, who would write him letters on their plan for the Middle East or whatever. He would read them, and he would then send them to me with hieroglyphics, his hand writing, asking us to send him a memo or something. I was always glad that he was reading alternative things, in principle. In practice I didn't like it sometimes. Not because it meant that people were competing with me, because if I couldn't deal with half-assed ideas from the outside, then I was losing in the marketplace of ideas. I had the NSC [National Security Council] and all of this, so that never bothered me at all. I think that was

good. And I grew up bureaucratically in the ’60s, when the mind guards were keeping Lyndon Johnson from hearing from folks like me and my younger colleagues who thought we were on the wrong track in Vietnam.

So no, that didn’t bother me. What bothered me was that we were tying up the NSC staff in writing one-page memos on why this was a bad idea or even good idea on a minor issue when time was of the essence and I needed them to be working on other stuff.

Knott: Could I ask a question about the ’92 campaign? Did you by any chance play any role when that draft story broke? Did they ask you to—

Lake: Which draft stories?

Destler: The letters, his letters to the ROTC [Reserve Officer Training Corps], the—

Knott: I think it was just prior to the new—

Lake: No, I don’t think so. I can tell you a story about me and the draft. We don’t have time?

Riley: By all means.

Lake: Actually, Richard Shelby was so desperate—or his staff was—to get me, that they actually tried to, I was told by a reporter, run down my local draft board to make the case that I was a draft dodger. The story is the following. This may be stupid to spend the time.

Riley: No, it’s not stupid at all. Don’t worry about it.

Lake: Because this is my one claim to singularity in American history, probably. After college, I wrangled a scholarship to Cambridge. I’d wanted to be an American historian, but I got very excited by Kennedy and by some Southeast Asian friends and I had passed the foreign service exams, mostly to appease my parents, and hadn’t told the foreign service “no” yet. Suddenly I got excited about foreign policy things, which I hadn’t studied in the past, and got particularly interested in Asia. So I tried to teach myself Chinese from records that I ordered from Yale University and used the Mandarin Primer. And of course failed miserably, but did learn a little Chinese. I decided I wanted to go someplace interesting in Southeast Asia if I joined the foreign service, and Vietnam sounded like an interesting place.

So I joined the foreign service and volunteered to go to Vietnam. Without administering a sanity test, they accepted my application. So I was assigned to Vietnamese language training, to then go off and be a provincial reporter in the countryside. During that period, Local Board 20 in Torrington, Connecticut—you never forget the number of your draft board—sent me a draft notice. So I went to the State Department and said, “They’re going to draft me and I wanted this assignment.” So the State Department wrote the draft board, supporting my occupational deferment. But instead of writing, “Mr. Lake is now assigned to Vietnamese language training,” —this is a long time ago, as best I can remember it—they wrote, “Mr. Lake is NOT assigned to Vietnamese language training.”

So I got a phone call, I guess, or letter, saying "You lying weasel, off you go into the Army." So I got the State Department to fix that and we went back and forth. I flunked my physical because my Volkswagen got hit by a Mack truck on the way to the physical, and when I took the physical my blood pressure was up, and so they wanted me to retake the physical.

Finally they said, "Come up to Torrington and meet with us and we'll decide this. It's the only way to sort it out." So I went up to Torrington, Connecticut, met with the draft board. Their approach is really interesting historically. This was in 1962. Their first question was, "What's the State Department?" So I tried to explain it to them. I said it was kind of like the Peace Corps, which they'd heard of. So that was okay.

Destler: Some of us got deferred from being in the Peace Corps.

Lake: Their second question, I swear to God, was, "Where is Vietnam?" I said, "It's near Laos," which was the hot issue.

Destler: How old was—?

Lake: Remember Kennedy at a press conference pointing at Laos.

Destler: Yes, yes.

Lake: So he said, "Okay, okay." Then the third question was, and here I didn't—yes, I did sort of lie. I certainly misled them. They said, "Okay, you say that you are studying Vietnamese." Now, I hadn't said that. I said I was assigned to study Vietnamese, in fact I was just a couple of weeks away. They said, "Speak Vietnamese." And I thought to myself, *Not too many Asian language speakers here on this draft board, given their questions,* so I counted to ten in Chinese, all the Chinese I remembered, and they deferred me. I may well be the only American who beat the draft in order to go *to* Vietnam, since they weren't sending draftees there then.

Anyway, this is not a story I told often when I was still serving the President.

Riley: A great story for the record, though.

Knott: Shelby's people later tried to go after this?

Lake: They wanted to go and interview the draft board to show that I was a draft dodger.

Destler: Were they alive?

Lake: What?

Destler: Was the draft board alive?

Lake: I have no idea whether—oh no, they called a reporter.

Destler: I remember how old mine was.

Riley: You spoke of your impressions of Clinton's general intelligence when you first met him. Can you speak a little bit about his familiarity with foreign policy issues, more generally?

Lake: Let me talk about both. Well first of all, he's the quickest study I've ever seen, more than Henry Kissinger, more than anybody I've ever worked with. So it's hard to judge in retrospect how much he knew going into it because he would just suck up the information. But I'd say he had a very good generalist's knowledge of foreign policy when we began. Better certainly than most Governors. Not as good as a foreign policy expert, but right up there.

Riley: But enough to surprise you.

Lake: Well, on some issues that he'd been involved in, of course, he would know a huge amount. On other issues he would know nothing. So in the first year, during his press conferences I remember, sometimes, there was one on—I remember we were abroad somewhere and he was discussing Lebanon and was getting into the intricacies of our position on Lebanon. Which was not only ambiguous but extremely precise in its ambiguity, because you could offend somebody if you got it slightly wrong. He would keep looking down at me during the press conference and I'd nod or shake my head very, very discretely or whatever, and this impressed me, to come back to the point I made earlier about his being willing to admit when he didn't know something.

In one of his early press conferences, he got something wrong. It was in the OEOB [Old Executive Office Building], and as we were leaving the conference room and walking down the corridor he put his arm around me and said, "I really screwed that one up, didn't I?" Which is amazing, because he knew how smart he was and he wasn't going to screw up very often.

And after that, I can't remember his either making a major blunder in a press conference or his following the talking points exactly, the way some Presidents, including some contemporaneous—I will reveal no names—who are obviously very slowly making their points. Or when I worked for Kissinger, I would help put together the briefing books for President [Richard] Nixon in his press conferences. I don't mean write them, I mean put them together from many sources. Kissinger would go over them and then we'd send them out and we'd get them back and in the margins would be the one, two, three, four circled and the underlinings as Nixon really studied them so he would have the exact points to make.

Clinton would take them, do little riffs and they were always right on. And on speeches he would always take off for probably a quarter of the speech, including the State of the Union addresses, and always make them better. And I am not a flatterer. I mean, this really was true. He had his warts, but this he was great at. We would prepare him by doing the usual briefing books, which he would whip through, not underlining them or anything. Then I would get my staff folks on those issues, Sandy and I, and then I would say, "Here are the questions," and then just talk him through what I thought the main points were—blip, blip, blip—that he ought to cover, and he would take them in—and then make them better.

I should mention the Podesta thing here because this was about a briefing. This was in Jakarta, I can't remember what year even, and we were getting ready for his press conference after his meetings. It was for an APEC [Asian Pacific Economic Cooperation] meeting, I think.

Destler: Podesta was not yet Chief of Staff.

Lake: Podesta was the Deputy Chief of Staff and a new Deputy Chief of Staff, and trying to make sure that the trains ran absolutely on time. (No train in the Clinton administration ever ran anywhere close to on time, which used to drive me crazy.) There were things going on back home with political content, so we had to cover those things, and Podesta wanted to get to those in the briefing. But this was foreign press, a foreign occasion, there were a lot of tricky issues that we had to go over and I just knew the questions were going to come up. And they did, in fact. Take that, John. You're not in doing oral history with him, are you? Podesta?

Riley: Eventually.

Lake: You probably should.

Destler: You should.

Owen: Oh, absolutely.

Riley: But I don't know—

Lake: Well, when you ask him, say that I said he was wrong, wrong, wrong on the substance of our argument. But anyway. He may well have been right, I don't know. So it was going on a bit and Podesta started getting more and more antsy and finally he just broke in saying, "We don't have any more time for this foreign policy stuff," and cut me off in a rather dismissive way. There was jet lag, we were all exhausted. He was more dismissive than he should have been. He "dissed" me.

We got outside into a corridor afterwards. I think [Warren] Christopher was standing there, or people told me he was, looking semi-shocked, because I was angry, which I don't often get. But when I am, I am. I said to John, "Don't you ever, ever do that again. The President needed to know those things. You don't talk to me ..." blah, blah, blah. He said something or other and I don't know whether he actually touched me or not, but I did grab him and whap him against the wall, kind of.

Riley: [*Laughing*]

Lake: This got people's attention. So then I had to buy him lunch, and we became very good friends. There is no better way to bond with somebody, I suppose, then literally—

Destler: Smack them against a wall.

Lake: Put your hands on their lapels.

This was the process we would generally follow: I tried, as much as possible, in briefings of the President to—especially before he saw foreign leaders, not so much before press conferences—to have my staff person do it. I think maybe the ones that you talk to will confirm that. In part because I recalled how Kissinger would never have the staff folks even in the room with Nixon. I thought it was a) better for morale to have them there and do it, and b) more importantly, they knew more than I did and it was better for them to do it. Sometimes they weren't very good at it and then I would—

Destler: But you'd be there, too.

Lake: Oh I would be there too.

Destler: I don't know whether this is the time, but I wonder if you could talk to us a little bit about the transition and beginnings of the administration in a couple of respects. One is, you came with experience in prior administrations. What were your thoughts? What were your thoughts about how the policy process should operate, things to do, things not to do?

And as a second question at some point, you mentioned particular issues that you briefed Clinton and Clinton had things to say and different from the Bush administration. When you came in, was there any more general policy theme or policy orientation that you thought was shared by Clinton and his people that differentiated himself from George H. W. Bush? I mean, when I think of 1977, for example, my sense is almost all the Carter people who came in had a very clear point, a sort of theme of difference with Kissinger. I don't know whether the same was true with George Bush the first.

Lake: Less so than in '77, but those were extraordinary times. And as you wrote in our book, when you come in, you always think that you're going to be able to reinvent every wheel. Then you discover that there were some reasons, the main one being American interests, why, in fact, the wheels are going to pretty much be in the same tracks. It is surprising to me, parenthetically—this doesn't have to be in the transcript—that this administration has persisted as long as it has in allowing an ideological difference to triumph over realities.

Destler: I've been surprised too, actually.

Lake: So, first on the ideological point. I later pushed, in late 1993, as best I could in a speech, which was denounced as the bumper sticker effort, for the promotion of democracy and free markets, but focused on democracy. That had its roots both in my own beliefs, because I've always been passionate about that, but also then politically during the campaign. Especially when I thought we were going to lose, I thought one thing the campaign could contribute was to try to heal the breach in the foreign policy community between the [Ronald] Reagan Democrats and the Carter Democrats.

Because what made us similar, even if we had very strong disagreements (and sometimes on their part mostly ad hominem disagreements,) over how to carry out a policy of containment and

how to conduct the Cold War, et cetera, the one thing that made us similar was that we believed in the power of ideas and ideals. I had been a vice chair with Ben Wattenberg of the committee that established the National Endowment for Democracy, which was largely inspired by Reagan's speech at Westminster on democracy. So, in meetings with people like Ben Wattenberg and Adrian Karatnycky, who was close to [Joseph] Lane Kirkland, Josh Muravchik, et cetera, that we could, in making the argument the Cold War was now over, make the argument that we all believe in democracy. They were skeptical that I actually believed that stuff, but I did. It certainly set us off from Bush, who was, unlike Reagan, much more of a—

Owen: Realpolitik.

Lake: Realpolitik person. So Clinton spoke about democracy a number of times during the campaign, especially with Eastern Europe—American audiences. Clinton as a New Democrat believed in it. I mean, there's no question he believed in it, he just wasn't, I don't think, as passionate about it. And it was very important on our policies on NATO enlargement. So that would be the theme.

On the transition—first, before I get there, anything else about the campaign?

Owen: Can I just stick in one question. What do you think drew Clinton to you? You've talked about what drew you—

Lake: God only knows.

Owen: You said he wasn't passionate about what became known as enlargement, but did he have some instinct in that direction?

Lake: He believed in it. Definitely.

Owen: Do you think you shared a kind of deep philosophical approach to foreign policy that, say, others don't?

Lake: Yes. And an instinctive—and here I'll get a little personal, which I hate doing—but the people I admire, the way Abraham Lincoln is my hero and Winston Churchill is not, are those who bring a heartfelt passion to the issues but then an essential skepticism and moderation as they apply their minds to the issues. Because I think when you move from ideals to ideology you get in trouble. That was certainly the great lesson of Vietnam. If you don't have the ideals and the passion, then you're simply a technician. But if you have only the ideals and the passion, you're a danger to humanity because you go off on ideological crusades.

Clinton had struck me as very much balanced like that. Again, to a fault. In believing so many things and with some passion, but then I think refusing ever to nail his flag to the mast of one issue. I think that appealed to me in how he approached things and maybe that—

Owen: And maybe that appealed to him.

Lake: He said once when I was leaving—we had a wonderful event that my staff organized over at Blair House. They gave me a bunch of wonderful mementos that still mean a great deal to me and it was all filled with—at least for me anyway, and I think for most of them because they were all there, or for some of them anyway—with sentimentality and what a good time we had and all. I was giving a little talk about public service and I noticed them looking away from me over towards the door. So I looked around and there I could see a head looking around the door and it was the President, who had walked over to Blair House to say something. I don't know how that got organized. So after I was done, which was very quickly as soon as I saw his face, he said some things.

One thing that struck me, and I'm still not sure what he meant, was he said that he had appreciated my sense of timing, of knowing when you could get something done and when you probably couldn't. It bothered me slightly because I was generally, as I hope we'll discuss on Haiti and Bosnia and other issues, pushing, but never pushing to the degree to which he lost confidence in me, if you see what I mean. And it's a neat judgment often. And I didn't like it because I didn't want to feel that I'd been too good at the timing and hadn't pushed as hard as I could have done.

Riley: And that's also a hard thing to make a judgment about prospectively, right?

Lake: It's the only time you make the judgment, absolutely, that is the key question.

Owen: If you try not to push too hard, you never know that you pushed as hard as you could have.

Lake: Well, we'll come to that because in the first year I didn't push hard enough because of the way I saw my job, and I changed.

Destler: Okay, why don't you talk about how you saw your job and how it changed?

Lake: But we were on the transition.

Riley: Transition.

Destler: Okay.

Lake: You keep letting me drift off. Anything else on the campaign?

Riley: I can't think of anything, but if it occurs we'll feel free to come back.

Lake: Okay. Now, the transition—

Riley: Where were you election day?

Lake: Election day—I'm going to sound like such a tight ass—but anyway, I stayed on my farm. You have to understand, I did not want this to lead where it did. I'm glad it did in retrospect,

despite the costs, because it's what you do.

Owen: You sound like John Adams.

Lake: Give me a break.

Riley: We're trying to encourage him here.

Lake: I stayed on the farm and watched on television all my friends down in Little Rock. I never went to any of these celebrations. I did go to the convention, the only one. I didn't go to the next convention.

Riley: You were not working in Little Rock, you were working in Washington or in New York?

Destler: On my farm, he said.

Riley: The whole time you worked on your farm?

Lake: By fax and telephone. And then I would travel to meetings in New Haven or debate preps in Wisconsin.

Owen: Were you teaching?

Lake: Yes.

Owen: Five colleges, okay.

Lake: On a farm, you've got to feed your cattle every day, seriously.

Riley: So you were actually a farmer?

Lake: I was a real farmer. Yes, seven, eight thousand bales of hay a year.

Riley: Oh my God.

Lake: Two to three hundred gallons of maple syrup, a herd of 30 cattle, wife raising horses and dogs, children.

Riley: So Mac knows this, but the rest of us don't.

Lake: Norman Rockwell painting off in the corner, this 1790 farmhouse. You can't make a living farming, so I was "working out," like all the other farmers and I was teaching down in the valley, but I was mostly a farmer. And it was hard to get away.

Riley: So election day you were there—

Lake: Yes, and later, at the press conference, I sort of established a bit of a goofy image with reporters. When Clinton presented us all—

Destler: This was the appointments for foreign policy.

Lake: Yes. We each said something and then Clinton, I remember, joking about not believing I was a real farmer. So I showed him my hands and the calluses at the press conference and then somebody asked, "So why did you take this job?" I said I was doing it for the money, because I was actually going to get paid more than being a professor, or God knows, a farmer.

Owen: We understand.

Riley: Commodity prices were so poor at the time.

Lake: So when it got to me, after everybody talked about public service, dah-dah, dah-dah, dah, I said simply, "The price of beef is down. So I took the job here."

Riley: When did you get the call?

Lake: So I didn't go down to the election, which again, doesn't mean I wasn't for him, because I was passionately. Then I told Sandy I didn't want to do the transition. I'd done the transition for Carter, from the [Gerald] Ford to the Carter administration. Told Sandy I wanted him to do the transition, please, so Sandy did it. He would call me from time to time for advice and I was out on the farm. Warren Christopher was in charge of—

Destler: Right.

Lake: I was down in Washington actually for the bar mitzvah of Sandy's son when I got a call and went to a pay phone to phone his hotel, and it was Chris from Little Rock saying the Governor wants you to be National Security Advisor. And I knew it might happen, obviously. Again, didn't make any calls, talk to anybody, ask friends to call, anything, because I was profoundly ambivalent about it. And immediately said yes, because you don't say no. And I think my thought was, *I'll do this for a year simply because I'm more experienced than anybody else.*

Destler: Did you subsequent to that have any conversations prior to the 20th of January with the President about what the job was, what your mandate was?

Lake: Oh, yes. I can't remember, there were two or one, or maybe I went down to interview for the job but I don't think so. But we did talk. I did talk to him about the job and gave him my views on how the job should be done, a view which as I said lasted about ten months. But it seemed sort of pro forma. He was really interviewing some others. There was one guy who should have gotten one job and didn't because of the interview and we paid a price, because the guy that was named instead of him, who was named at the last second, primarily for political grounds—I'm not talking about Les Aspin—didn't work out.

Then before the announcement we went around the room and the President would ask each of us—I'm still sort of offended—the hard questions that might come up about their personal lives.

Owen: Oh, yes.

Lake: And got to me and said, "There's nothing there, basically. You're so boring," and went on to the next.

Destler: Went on to Christopher.

Lake: So what else? The mistake we made in the Carter transition, I remember, was spending too much time on issues and not enough time on personnel. I remember pushing Sandy on that.

Destler: Right.

Lake: Then after I was named, during the transition, I'm starting to meet with people, deal with, in a series of meetings with the Governor on Haiti, where what we said during the campaign we simply couldn't sustain as the refugee flows increased. Bosnia, and what to say about that. I remember one wonderful moment with Leon Feurth who I love—not like, love.

He is so passionate and so quirky, and it was a meeting on Bosnia. I had told him before the meeting—because we had the usual—some experts in to talk to the Governor about it—and I'd said to Leon, "You know, this is the chance for the experts. We'll all get our shot." And something set him off and Leon went off on a five minute rant. Probably two minutes, but it seemed like an hour. And Leon's future wasn't entirely clear at the time. Then Sandy and Nancy and I had gone downstairs and we were in the lobby of the hotel waiting to leave and Leon came down looking like a dog coming in out of the rain, just drooping all over. He said, "I really screwed up, didn't I, Tony?" And we all just went and hugged him and tried to—because it was great, he had been wonderful in the meeting and always was. Because you could always count on him at principals meetings to let it out, ask questions other people weren't asking. On Haiti, on Bosnia, on gays in the military, on maybe other issues.

We then did have a series of meetings with the Governor on how to approach them. Obviously Sandy and I met with Brent Scowcroft and Jon Howe, whose life I ruined a month or two later, not seriously, but in calling him and getting him to go off and be the UN [United Nations] Representative in Somalia, and who I saw a few weeks ago and we're still friends. He easily forgives, I guess. Then meeting with Chris, to get to your question, Chris and Les and others about how to organize the government, or organize our part of it. And then present to the President our drafts of the—

Destler: Initial orders.

Lake: —how the system would work.

Destler: That was not a conflictual process in this administration.

Lake: Not at all. Well it wasn't enough of a conflictual process in 1977, which I remembered.

Destler: Okay.

Lake: (Whereas Cy Vance got rolled and wouldn't admit it when Phil Habib and I went to him and said, "This is a recipe for tsuris.") Let's see if I can remember early 1993. Oh yes, and during that period then meeting people on the NSC staff at the time, because I wanted to keep as many as I could, to be as nonpartisan as possible, and discovering to my shock that all the documents were gone and all the safes and everything, which is a really stupid system. Absolutely outrageous. Then meeting with Bob Rubin, who I'd met a couple of times in New York at dinners. And our designing—and I can't remember whose—it was my idea, but it was based on something the Bush people were already doing in another area.

Destler: The joint staff?

Lake: The joint staff notion, which works, actually. I remember saying to Bob that we've never gotten this right, that it's impossible to organize a White House properly on international economic issues. Should I go on on this a bit?

Riley: Please do.

Lake: The problem being—this is obviously more and more important in an era of globalization—that if you put international economic issues on the NSC staff, which has been done from time to time, then you do a pretty good job of integrating the political issues abroad and the economic issues abroad, but you do a lousy job of integrating foreign economic policy and domestic economic policy, which is also increasingly a false distinction. If you put it on the economic side of the house, the opposite happens. You sever foreign economic and foreign political, which in an era of globalization is also increasingly a false distinction.

So we tried to resolve it by sharing the same staff on international economic issues, which meant that on major international economic issues, which was a lot of issues, more and more issues, the memos had to go to both Bob and me. Which forced, if there was disagreement, Bob and me to agree. And it forced the staff folks to make sure that each side of the house was involved. This was when he was the head of the National Economic Council. Unless, of course, you hire Russell Crowe and what was his name, in the movie, *A Beautiful Mind*?

Knott: John Nash.

Lake: If you have a schizophrenic, then I suppose they wouldn't feel that they had to talk to both of us at the same time, maybe if one of us was imaginary. It worked actually pretty well.

Destler: One question about staffing. The economic thing seems to have been really focused on and this solution seems to have been quite sensible. It was clear at that point with the gays in the military thing bursting out and everything, and his background and so forth, that the military issues were—How much did you try to deal with that in terms of getting senior military either on to the White House staff proper or on the NSC staff, as they had been in most, but not all

administrations?

Lake: Very much so, on the NSC staff. I wasn't so involved in the military office.

Destler: Talk a little bit about that.

Lake: I had three or four candidates to be the senior director on the military side. I had one director doing both arms control and the Defense Department, so I wanted to make sure they were integrated, although we had a separate nonproliferation office, which I can come back to. And so I interviewed three or four people, all but one of whom had worked in the Pentagon and two of them were former military, because I wanted to get former military.

My first special assistant was a military guy, an active colonel. Because I definitely wanted to—not just for political reasons, but also because they knew stuff, and I wanted that perspective. But the most impressive of them all was a guy that I originally interviewed, as I recall, to be, not the senior director, but one of the directors, Bob Bell, who had been working with Sam Nunn. He so impressed me that on the theory that I always tried to follow—sort of like drafting in the NFL [National Football League]: I'd rather get the best athlete, even if he is a little younger—

Destler: Even if you don't know what position they're going to play—

Lake: —then figure out the positions and play to their strengths, rather than find more senior people. So people like Bob Bell and a whole series of them, who tend to be a little younger. They did a great job.

Riley: Of course the problem is that you may end up with nothing but wide receivers and quarterbacks. Did you have that problem?

Lake: Oh we did the run and gun, absolutely. It was always go deep and it was the Steve Spurrier—no, no, obviously you get expertise and people who are interested in those issues. But what I mean is I'd rather have talent than experience. So I got Bob Bell and he brought—I can't remember who he had, but he had a number of military folks there. And then Dick Clarke and his director had a number of military people, too.

Destler: But you didn't have a deputy who was military or a second deputy or something like that, which a lot of past—

Lake: No, because it was clear Sandy—

Destler: Because Sandy was going to be the Deputy.

Lake: Chris asked Sandy to be his Deputy at State and Sandy thought about it for a few days and then came with me, for which I am extremely grateful.

Destler: That's interesting, yes,

Lake: And that was the only deputy, until Nancy later became a deputy. She later became a deputy because she was in effect doing a deputy's work. I wanted to split off from Sandy some of the issues that he was dealing with because I was always worried—and this is a big issue on the NSC staff, and especially with deputies. Sandy and I had a slight disagreement about this. I should talk about my relationship with Sandy. That was difficult to—

Destler: Yes, that would be good.

Lake: I used to call it 11-year-old soccer, in which everybody wants to follow the ball and nobody plays their position.

Destler: Seven-year-old soccer.

Lake: Okay, seven-year-old soccer, I stand corrected. And so, I made Nancy a deputy in part so that it was clear that she was in charge of African issues, a few other issues, so Sandy could spend more time on other stuff rather than having to deal with everything. And also because frankly the political people wanted more women in senior positions, but the main reason was the substantive one, because she was doing the job already, in effect, as staff director. But there were not a lot of deputy positions, as you recall.

There was a lot of blood shed in the Nixon administration over whether Kissinger would have a deputy and if so, who it would be. Which made the scene look like the final scene of *Hamlet* with dead bodies all over it.

Destler: Did you start out with Sandy with a division of labor on issues or roles, or how did that evolve?

Lake: Not so much, and this was hard. Sandy and I were and are very, very close friends. I have huge respect for him, though we're quite different in how we approach issues and our interests and our political antenna and all those things, which was good. Initially we were each doing everything, but as he was running the Deputies Committee, we were splitting it more. The Deputies Committee looks over implementation, and sort of tees issues up then for the Principals Committee. Sandy would get frustrated because, as he put it, he would get to dribble the ball up, and then I got to put it in the basket.

Riley: And his relationship with the President actually preceded yours, predated yours.

Lake: By about, chronologically, two decades, and in personal terms, infinitely. Again, because in part, as I was saying, I didn't want to get too close to him and Sandy was one of his closest friends. This, I think, in retrospect, was one reason why I didn't handle our relationship well for the first, say, two years. Because I was so sensitive to the fact that Sandy in my own office, and Strobe Talbott over in State on Russia issues, were extremely close "friends of Bill." I wasn't and didn't want to be. I think I felt threatened by it.

So I think I went too far in the first two years in making sure that I was the one who was always putting the ball in the basket, especially in meetings with the President. While I never didn't let

Sandy speak, but he also—he didn't have a lot of experience and he didn't know the issues the way I did and so sometimes he wouldn't know stuff. So I would do the briefings to a fault and this frustrated Sandy more and more.

That frustration was starting to become apparent to people in New York, who live for Washington gossip and who would start playing back to me that there was a problem between me and Sandy, which would upset Sandy, upset me. Anyway, so much for New York. We were close friends, so we would talk about it. And I learned, and it was much better in the next two years. I started giving him issues to put the ball in the basket and became much more relaxed about his taking care of things with the President while I was doing something else, and we got better. At first I thought it was his fault for wanting to be involved in everything. Then I realized it was also my fault and so we started to trade off issues more.

Owen: When you did trade them off, was there any particular pattern?

Lake: He would do more economic stuff than I would. Otherwise, I put the ball in the basket! [*laughter*] I can't remember now, but there would be a series of issues, or an issue when I didn't have time to deal with it, or as I was more and more getting involved in negotiations, and people would fling your book back at me wherever we said, "The National Security Advisor should not do these things." I can't tell you how often that was quoted back to me.

Destler: That was more my chapter.

Lake: And I would say, "That was true in the early '80s, it doesn't work in the '90s." We were right each time.

Riley: That kind of tension between the two of you was not something that could have been resolved structurally, of course.

Lake: Not at all. Most issues are personal rather than structural, I think. And if we hadn't been friends, it would have ended badly. But we were friends and we worked it out and I think it went well in the final two years, to the dismay of our mutual friends in New York who had less to gossip about. Then he became a terrific National Security Advisor.

Riley: Back to John, did you have a follow up to that?

Lake: Oh, you wanted to talk about my conception of the job.

Owen: Yes, I guess conception of the job.

Lake: Here we're going to get into tricky territory, of the kind we talked about downstairs a little bit. I alluded to this in my book but I skewed it slightly. My view of the job was colored very much by my admiration for Andy Goodpaster, actually.

Destler: You thought if you were getting something else out of it, it couldn't be public service.

Lake: Right, exactly, which is a bit quirky. My father was English and had served in the U.S. Navy during WWII, which he loved more than anything else he'd ever done, and had sort of brought me up admiring the nameless British civil servant who has dedicated his life to getting things done. There's a hubris about it, also. I really did, dammit, together with the Algerians, negotiate the peace agreement between Ethiopia and Eritrea in 2000. There was a ceremony then in Algiers with the UN Secretary General and the OEU [European Union] Secretary General, and all this grand hoo-haw and all these Presidents and everybody.

Destler: This was when you were a private citizen.

Lake: I was acting for the State Department and the White House, but as a private citizen, a volunteer. So I sat there and watched this whole hoo-haw—and they actually mentioned my having done it a couple of times, but still—the ceremony went on without my being a part of it. I took a tremendous arrogant pleasure, and I think in retrospect it was arrogance, at doing it without getting the recognition. Do you see what I mean?

Destler: Yes, okay.

Riley: Sure. A passion for anonymity.

Lake: A passion for anonymity, which I found admirable. Nowadays it turns out it is psychologically unhinged somehow. I saw Andy Goodpaster a couple of weeks ago and he went on and on about this is the way he thought you should do things. I mean, talk about a voice from the past, and my heart just leapt when I heard him talk about this.

Destler: Was Brent a more recent model to some degree? He wasn't as anonymous—

Lake: Yes, less so, but Brent was my model also. That was to the outside. And I paid a real price for it, I think. And on the inside, my model was very much that—let me back up a minute. Mac, you've written about this, so I refer your 30-year-from-now graduate student to Mac's writings on this issue. That's I. M. Destler, and if you, his web site—

Destler: Be sure you get that spelled right.

Lake: D-E-S-T-L-E-R.

Destler: She [Kelli Coughlin] knows the spelling because she's a friend of my daughter, it turns out. Everything is a conspiracy.

Riley: Your daughter saved her in the mountains this weekend.

Lake: Or as he will often say, "I. M. Destler, and you're not."

Destler: That's a quote I should have made.

Lake: I give it to you.

Destler: A Chevy Chase line.

Lake: Old Chevy Chase line. Anyway, the essential tension in the job of the National Security Advisor is, on the one hand, you are in charge of making sure that the President hears all views, in an efficient fashion, making sure that everybody has access, et cetera. At the same time, you are the National Security Advisor. If you have the job, you ought to care about issues and you ought to be offering the President advice. If you are a Type A competitive type like me, you want to win.

Destler: Yes. And you want the system to move in the direction that's—

Lake: I want the right policy outcome because that's why I'm there, to affect policy, but I want to make sure that the Secretary of State is heard, at the same time, and those two things can be in tension. That was always a wrestle. There was only one time that I'm aware of where Christopher got angry because he wasn't in a meeting that he thought he should have been. In fact, he was on a trip and there was a screw up, but it was a screw up and he was right. But otherwise, I think, except for [R. James] Woolsey, and that's a different issue, nobody could ever say that they didn't have full access.

We designed the system then in a much less complicated way than we had done in 1977. I won't go through that history, but it was not a good system. It was just a recipe for four years of bloodshed, because it had floating chairs of the committees depending on the issue and therefore you always had a fight about who would chair and therefore set the agenda. You would have a fight about is this a crisis or isn't it, and what is policy. I don't mean, "What is THE policy," I mean, "Is this a policy issue or isn't it."

Owen: Policy was in the name of one of the committees.

Lake: Right, the other was the crisis coordinating. So if you could claim it was a crisis, Zbig [Zbigniew Brzezinski] chaired it; if you could claim it was policy, then Vance chaired. It was a disaster. So the deal was, I would always chair the Principals Committee and my deputy would always chair the Deputies Committee, which had been pretty much the system under Bush. We didn't change the system a whole lot.

I think one reason why Chris and Les and everybody wanted to do this was, I was junior to them. Chris had been the Deputy Secretary of State, I had been the head of policy planning and had worked for Chris in a way, although I reported to Vance. They were quite confident that in the two aspects of my job, I would be more the coordinator than the advocate, which is what I believed.

Destler: Right.

Lake: And they knew I had a passion for anonymity and therefore was not going to step on their toes publicly. So that's the way I started out doing the job. And maintained that until October.

Owen: Somalia.

Lake: Black October. Not just Somalia. Haiti, Russia, the whole series of things.

Riley: Ninety-three.

Lake: Ninety-three. The passion for anonymity worked pretty well because I noticed in your chronology here, based on newspaper reports, you left out my having gone to Europe in August of 1993 on Bosnia. To push them just as hard as we could on what led to then the Sarajevo ultimatum later and the NATO summit and all. I got away with it, nobody in the press knew that I had done it.

Anyway, by October, we weren't doing well. This is true for every administration, I think. We learned some things from it, the President learned to be a little more aggressive himself, but I remember—here I'm just going to have to look at it when you put it in the transcript— Colin Powell left when?

Destler: It would have been September, October.

Lake: Yes, September, October. And Colin had been one of the first people I'd talked to when I came to Washington to take on the job. I remember his confirming my view of how to deal with the press. I mean, this is Colin Powell, hero of Desert Storm, even though he kind of opposed it—

Destler: And who had the additional advantage of having been National Security Advisor.

Lake: And he'd been National Security Advisor and all that. I said to him, after we'd chatted about this and the other thing in his office in the Pentagon—this would have been in early January—"So just tell me about what a day is like in your life as the Chair of the Joint Chiefs, so I can understand it." He said, "Well, it begins every morning with my going out on the porch of my house and looking around for the newspaper and discovering, excuse me, that the *Washington Post* has been jammed up my ass." I thought to myself, *Whoa, this is going to be tough. If this is happening to Colin Powell, what's going to happen to mere mortals?*

The way I refer to this is, "I look around and discover that an anatomical impossibility has been performed on my person by the *Washington Post*." Anyway, and Colin, I found at Principals Meeting, was the guy that I most liked talking to, even when we disagreed somewhat. In the famous exchange between him and Madeleine [Albright], I came down on his side.

Destler: Oh yes, the "What do have an Army for—"

Lake: "—if we're not going to use it." And my saying that he's asking the questions that we should have asked in Vietnam, which is true. Not necessarily, I wouldn't agree with his answers always, but I did agree with the questions. We weren't close, and he was critical in his book of some of the early views on Bosnia.

Destler: Did he push you to be more active?

Lake: That's what I'm coming to. So when he was leaving, I had a semi-emotional meeting with him and telling him that I thought he'd served his President well, which I think he did. Because God knows he disagreed on a number of things, but as far as I could tell he was reasonably straight on gays in the military, et cetera. He offered the President good advice, and to my knowledge he was always very straight with me, even when we disagreed.

So anyway, I thanked him and talked about this, that, and the other thing and then he said—I don't remember the exact quote—but, "You have to change the way you're doing your job and become more aggressive and more assertive."

Destler: Okay.

Lake: Which is very tough. So, and in any case I was humiliated by what happened in Haiti with the Harlan County, and determined that we would do something different about that. Somalia had blown up—and we should come back to that because the clichés are wrong about what happened in fact—that we were under assault by the Congress over that. We were getting killed on the Hill for almost everything, and we were getting it on Bosnia and I decided I just had to push more and that I couldn't leave, because I had assumed that I would, that I would stay for about one year.

But I did offer my resignation to the President after Somalia. It was kind of pro forma. One does. Frankly, if I thought he was going to accept it I would have thought about it. It was a part, though, as it turned out of his—I can go into this, and this is really sad, because I love Les Aspin—but the President decided that he did have to make a change in Defense. I wasn't much involved in those discussions. Strobe actually was much more involved. I remember going to one of the last meetings on the subject, then stupidly saying that I would tell Les because I was a friend and I thought that was the right thing to do.

I keep saying, "This is the right thing to do," or "What one does." I've done a lot of things that aren't the right thing to do, but I'm not going to talk to you about that. I don't want to sound like too much of a prig in all this, but anyway, I thought that was the right thing. The President should have said, "No, I'll do it," but—

Riley: Presidents seldom do.

Lake: They seldom do. I always did. I fired a bunch of folks and I'm afraid I got rather good at it.

Destler: It really is better to do it.

Lake: It is much better when you do it yourself.

Destler: You're right, it really it is. I've only done it twice in my life.

Lake: They don't piss on you as much later if you do it yourself, among other things. Anyway, so I met with Les in my office and I said, "Les, I have very bad news." And he immediately looked upset and said, "Tony, you're not leaving, are you?" And I felt like throwing up. Then I told him.

Destler: He didn't know.

Riley: There's a lot of things on the table to delve into and I'm trying to figure out what's the best approach, which of these to pick on.

Lake: So I became more aggressive and you'll see in some of the books how I pushed then much harder on intervening in Haiti, on getting it done in Bosnia, et cetera.

Owen: It seems like, let me just clarify one thing. It looks like the first ten months of the job, it seems like there are two qualities, both of which maybe changed. One is the honest broker role, rather than pushing your views.

Lake: I would give my views but I wouldn't fight.

Owen: You began to fight harder after—

Destler: You wouldn't fight and scheme to move the President in your direction.

Lake: Scheme? *Scheme?*

Owen: In a word. But the other is the anonymity so—

Lake: I held on to the anonymity pretty well. I did start doing more. But there was a trade off—let me stay on the anonymity piece just for a minute. There was a trade off. This is one of the problems now with modern Washington and how things are done. Because there is so much more press attention, and I don't think we have the time here, there's been much written about why there is so much more press attention, all of the outlets. Almost every cabinet officer now has a personal spinner in ways that were unimaginable 20-30 years ago, whose purpose is not so much to spin policy, as to spin the boss.

The result is that what used to be the internal elbows become the public battles and the press is looking for it. So there were constant stories about personal battles between me and Chris that were wrong. And they were missing what were in fact—

Destler: Policy battles.

Lake: —substantive battles that were constant. But the trade off was, I knew. This is part of my excuse for not doing these public things with my own staff, who were always pushing me to do more, but there was kind of—it wasn't even implicit, it was almost explicit—agreement with State that if I didn't do too much public talking, then I could do more private diplomacy and stuff, if I didn't get a lot of publicity for it. Because otherwise I would have been dissing the

Secretary of State and taking away things from him.

Destler: That makes sense. I don't know whether you want to talk about this or not, but Powell's comment is obviously a comment—

Lake: I've never said that to anybody since that conversation. I put it in more general terms.

Destler: It's not about you, it's about—everybody goes in, your job, you go into a particular situation. Both Christopher and Aspin are enormously talented people in certain ways, but neither one of them was driving policy in a major sort of way. So the question for the President is not—

Lake: And the way I was doing my job in the first nine months was more the way the President wanted me to do my job. And this was—

Destler: Because he wanted to fend things off more than he wanted—

Lake: He hated people being unhappy.

Destler: Oh, I see, okay.

Lake: And the only times he would ever criticize me were—Once he really got angry at me when he felt I had dissed Strobe—and I didn't mean to—in a discussion on Russia policy, when we disagreed rather strongly. And he got angry at me because Strobe was his friend and he felt I was being too aggressive. He would occasionally, in the last two years, say that maybe I was pushing my colleagues too hard, or "elbows are a little sharp," or something. But on the other hand, he wanted the policies to move in the directions that I thought he wanted to move in. So I started saying in the last two years, in a way that would have been unimaginable for me just personally and psychologically in the first year, to say, "Screw it, the issue is more important than the relationship."

The fact that Chris and I were able to keep any of this out of the press, or very much out of the press, is both because he's a genuinely good guy and because we both had such vivid memories of the Carter administration. That we were damned if were going to repeat it. I reached the "Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo" with Tom Donilon and Mike McCurry, I think it was, while he was at State, when there were starting to be stories of the State Department sniping at me over Bosnia, or over the Air Force Academy speech, et cetera. It was getting out of hand. So in some hotel room on the road somewhere, I said to them rather firmly that we could either not snipe at each other or I was going to unleash the dogs of war from my side on Chris. We didn't need this and the President didn't need it.

We reached what I referred to as the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, because it is my favorite name for a treaty, even though I have no idea what it was about. So all I had to do was say "Guadalupe-Hidalgo" and they would knock it off, or my people would knock it off.

Destler: This was the third year basically?

Lake: Probably into the second year sometime.

Destler: Just one other thing about this first year period. I mean, the conventional story was that you and Chris were hired to keep foreign policy issues away from the President so he could focus on the economy. Could you talk about that?

Lake: [*chuckling*]

Riley: You want to keep moving or you want to think about this?

Destler: You want to take a break?

Lake: Let's do this and then we'll— [*pause*] Well, I've never said this to anybody and it sounds self-serving and I don't mean it to be, but Sandy once, as we came out of a meeting in the Oval Office, referred to me as the "President for foreign policy." This would have been in the first or second year. Which is a wild over-statement, but I think he was saying it in frustration because—well, let me back up for a minute. That's on the one hand.

On the other hand the cliché that the President wasn't interested in foreign policy or spending time on it is simply flat-out wrong. There was a constant battle with the schedulers and political folks, who believed that foreign policy was a threat to the President's future, political future. In fact, I was told later—and I'll come back to Dick Morris and polls, make sure I do—the egregious Dick Morris.

Destler: Put it on the list.

Riley: I've got it on the list now.

Lake: That in both, you can look it up, in both '94 and in '96, the President's highest public marks were for foreign policy, in fact. That wasn't because he didn't do anything. But they were always fighting to not let foreign policy intrude in his "real" work. I think it was probably towards the beginning of '94, the scheduling people, in order to make their point, did a computer run on how much time the President had spent on meetings with foreign leaders, phone calls with foreign leaders. Then they compared it with the first year, year and a half or whatever it was, of the foreign policy Presidents—Bush 41's first year, year and a half in office—and damned if it wasn't—

Destler: Very similar.

Lake: —identical. It was eerie. It was damned near identical. So he was certainly spending the time.

He would certainly, whenever we needed a Principals Meeting, would do it. On the other hand, it is true that he spent, unlike his predecessor—I mean Bush liked to sit around and talk about foreign policy. Clinton would talk about it when you got him into the meeting because he loved

talking about whatever was before him, but he did not want, instinctively, to spend more time than he had to on it. He certainly gave me a lot of running room. I mean, I met with him or talked to him every day, and I would have little 3x5 cards with the five or six things that I wanted to talk about that I was going to be doing that day.

Destler: But if you had asked him for an honest answer, and he could give you an honest answer, "What are the five things I want to move on most in my first year," foreign policy wouldn't have been one of them.

Lake: No.

Destler: It would have been the economy.

Lake: No, no, it would have been, "I want to get rid of Bosnia and all these damn problems."

Riley: Get rid of the issue.

Lake: Yes, which was my most devout desire also.

Destler: Everybody wanted to, sure.

Lake: The following is propaganda: There are two kinds of issues here. You've got the urgent issues, the immediate issues, which are the crises that have to be resolved, and they're at the top of the inbox. When we came in they were Bosnia, Somalia, Haiti, issues like that. Crises that we goddamn inherited. And we inherited a situation in which there were troops in Somalia and no mission and no time table, whatever people have said. In Bosnia, where there was a war going on, people were dying and there was no policy except, "This isn't our problem." Haiti, where there were increasing flows of refugees and no solution to the problem, and all with a lot of publicity.

When we left, and we may have done them wrong, but they were not crises anymore. And there weren't any new crises, after the first four years, that I'm aware of, that the second Clinton administration was dealing with. And by God, I'm certainly proud of that. More important, while those are the immediate issues that go to the top and they were the ones the President simply wanted to get rid of, there are also the important issues, which are the structural changes, like NATO enlargement or like free trade agreements, arms control issues or whatever. And we made a pretty good start on a lot of those as well. Those are what I'm actually proud of, that we did some of.

I'd say he was very interested in the latter, the important issues, especially again the economic issues, which he had a particular experience with as Governor and which he knew touched the lives of American citizens in ways more important probably than NATO enlargement. But he also cared about NATO enlargement. I knew where he was on these issues, which is why I was able to keep pushing the way I did within the bureaucracy and with my colleagues. The others, he just wanted to get rid of.

This made it difficult for me on a daily basis because after the announcement in Little Rock of all of this, Chris and I were sitting at a table down in the basement of this motel or whatever it was with a couple of others, and I said, "Okay, we have to start talking about the daily routine and the morning brief, because I need to be in there first thing in the morning to ..." and Chris started laughing even before I'd gone on. I said, "Why are you laughing?" And he said, "I've been down here, I've been working with him. This is not a morning person. Good luck being the first person he sees each morning."

So, there was that. In addition, every time I walked in for the morning brief, I had the big B for Bosnia written on my forehead and he was going to have to go to the dentist, like all of us, and deal with this damn issue, which was a nightmare. And it was a nightmare because we cared about it. Or most of us did, and he did, and Gore did. But at the morning brief, I would run through then what I wanted to do on the day's business and he would basically say, "Fine, go take care of it." Then if I had a problem I would always be able to see him during the day but it was very much, "Okay, take care of it." He was delegating. That's why Sandy said what he did. There was never a policy decision that he wasn't involved in and there was never a time when he wasn't making those decisions.

He got better and better then at appearing presidential. In the early days, before big meetings, I had to tell him once or twice before meetings, especially with the military, that he couldn't go in there—this was in the first year—and simply ask for opinions, especially with the congressional leadership. His first meeting on Somalia was a disaster because he went in there saying, "What do you think?" You've got to go in there, listen to them and then tell—

Destler: Tell where you're going.

Lake: Then lay it down. And in fact, again, as your book pointed out, the Congress is never going to take the responsibility for a difficult decision, so you can roll them, almost always in the end. They'll criticize you, they'll scapegoat you, but they'll let you do it. And that tended to be the pattern. So he was not a "Jimmy Carter, I want to get involved in the details" President ever.

Destler: Not interested in it.

Lake: But he certainly was in charge, and more and more obviously in charge in the way he conducted himself after say, the first year.

Riley: Let's break five minutes and come back.

[BREAK]

Destler: We thought maybe we'd go ahead and start talking a little bit more about specific issues at this point, which we've talked about. Bosnia, just first question—

Lake: [*chuckling*]

Riley: You have a B on your forehead.

Destler: I take it, it wouldn't be unfair to say that was the issue that preoccupied you more than anything else in the first year?

Lake: That would be fair to say. The first three years.

Destler: First three years. In terms of just time spent agonizing over it, time trying to figure it out.

Lake: Um-hum.

Owen: I'm glad you brought up your trip to Europe. Was it August '93? This escaped the notice of the press. I want you to talk about whether "lift and strike," the Europeans could conceivably have gone for it in '93 when you guys were—

Lake: Why not?

Destler: I'm sure you wonder.

Lake: Why not?

Owen: Well, they didn't.

Lake: I know they didn't.

Owen: They didn't go for it—

Destler: Because it put their people at risk, I suppose.

Owen: In other words, could the administration have done something? Could you have been more persuasive? Could Chris have been more persuasive? What—?

Lake: I'm buying time until I finish sucking this cough drop here. Okay, here's the dilemma. Remember the rhetoric of the time, on all sides. These are real dilemmas for everybody. Dilemma for the Europeans was that, on the one hand, I think that many of them, just about all of them, did want to resolve this problem. It was not that they were callous, indifferent, old world wimps. But they did have troops on the ground, in UNPROFOR [United Nations Protection Force], which was doing good humanitarian work and who were taking risks and should be honored for it, to get supplies to people in villages, et cetera. But they were acting under rules of engagement that were insane and that in effect made them hostages—in fact, later literally hostages from time to time—to the Serbs and the Bosnian Serbs.

So when we would say to them, "Let's do X, Y or Z, lift and strike" or whatever, they would say to themselves, "We can't do this because if our soldiers get killed as a result of that, we are in big

trouble domestically, at home. And in any case, we don't want to put our soldiers at that risk." So they would come back to us with the debating point, and it was a debating point of "Okay, put your troops on the ground," because they knew damn well that the hawkest of the hawks, Robert Dole, any of them, never were saying put one American boot on the ground in Bosnia absent an agreement, right?

Owen: Right.

Lake: Right. Especially because the only terms of reference we could do it under, the rules of engagement we could do it under, would be these loony rules. Why should we want to put our own hostages on the ground? So that was a debate to the death on each side. And what we could not get people here to understand was that the Europeans had a real dilemma here.

Owen: Sure.

Lake: Imagine for a moment that we were in the European position, that *we* had screwed up and gotten our troops in that kind of a position on the ground and couldn't change it at the UN now, and couldn't withdraw because of the humanitarian consequences of it. It would be admitting a mistake, which governments don't do easily anyway, and then what if the *French* or the *Brits* were to take a unilateral action that got *our* troops killed. What's going to happen to NATO? What would be the reaction in Washington? It would be huge. And in fact, in retrospect, the Europeans were probably less vehement about our policy proposals than we would have been if the shoes had been on the other foot. You see what I mean? So that was a real dilemma in approaching the Europeans.

On the other hand, we couldn't simply say, "Okay, let's go on as we are," because it was obvious to us that what they were trying to do was going nowhere, including the Vance-[Lord David] Owen plan, and the only way to move Milosevic was to be tougher with him, at least to some of us anyway in the government. And in the end, the only way to bring the Europeans along and to resolve the problem, was to collapse UNPROFOR. But you don't lightly do that, again, when UNPROFOR was keeping all those people alive, because then you're really rolling the dice and assuming that you could resolve the problem if you did collapse UNPROFOR.

So I think the short history of Bosnia is, "Sure, we got Dayton because of our brilliance and because we are the greatest diplomats in the history of mankind and got our act together" blah, blah blah. That's all in quotes, if you read some of the memoirs. But the real reason is, I think, that yes, we did push, and I'm proud of it and by 1995 got Dayton, but that without Srebrenica, and without [Jacques] Chirac, who did play a role in changing European opinion, and without the coming of winter that they could see looming before them—

Destler: What about the Croatian offensive?

Lake: Certainly without the Federation and the Croatian offensive, which changed things on the ground, but there I'm not talking—no, let me back up.

Destler: Okay.

Lake: Because I'm talking about changing the European view.

Destler: Right, okay, got you.

Owen: So Srebrenica just showed that UNPROFOR was a failure.

Destler: Yes.

Lake: That finally—first of all, European public opinion started to change into saying, "Yes, we can't go on like this." It showed the Europeans that UNPROFOR was what we'd been saying it was, and they wanted out. So when I went, in August '95, to sell the "end game strategy"—and I'm sure we'll come back to this—Sandy Vershbow, who as I wrote is an unsung hero of this and should have gotten much more credit for all of this than he's ever gotten, my senior director for European affairs—as the Europeans started to agree with what I was proposing, Sandy kept saying, "Yes, well that was pretty good, but I knew they were going to agree all along." And in fact, I was going through an open door. We just didn't know how open it was, and I think it was because of those events.

Anyway, to back up then, to '93.

Destler: Could lift and strike have worked?

Lake: Could lift and strike have worked? In substance it should have because it would have allowed the Europeans a way out. We could have found, I am convinced, a way to protect UNPROFOR and it might well have moved the Serbs. But it might not have, because what moved the Serbs, to come back to your point, Mac, was also the Federation between Croatia and the Bosnian government and the Croatian offensive and the fact that things were changing on the ground.

Owen: But you couldn't get the Europeans—

Lake: But we do get some credit for having helped put the Federation together and holding to it and for giving the Croats the famous yellow light, which I'm proud of, because that was not a universal view in our government. Which does not mean that we unleashed them. We just didn't leash them. We never *explicitly agreed* to the Croatians sending arms in to the Bosnians. And I'm sure we'll come back to that since that was a central point of controversy with the Senate Intelligence Committee.

Owen: So the last question on the lift and strike. You said a moment ago you remained convinced that had NATO done air strikes, the European troops on the ground could have been protected.

Lake: I couldn't—

Owen: You couldn't get the Europeans to see that.

Lake: I think we could have protected them. There might have been some losses. But Jesus, compared to the losses of life in general in Bosnia, that would have been a small price to pay. Now that's easy for an American to say, because they weren't our people.

Owen: Was European resistance at this point, did it have something to do with the desire for Europe to solve its own problems? Or was that over by '93?

Lake: No. The what?

Owen: The desire for Europeans to solve—

Destler: To show Europe's ability to do things without the United States.

Lake: I like hearing the phrase. Let's try it again, "The ability of the Europeans to solve their own problems." Good. That would be nice. Even the desire. I do not recall a single meeting in which any European representative was saying, "We're going to take care of this."

Destler: Said, "Stay out of this, it's our. . . ."

Owen: The public rhetoric early on in the civil war was—

Lake: Well, Vance and Owen, and that was a very, very painful moment. Because I was very close to Cy Vance; Warren Christopher had been very close to Cy Vance. I'd worked with Owen when I was violating the rule on how you should behave as a policy planning director. I got involved in the negotiations on Rhodesia becoming Zimbabwe, when I was [inaudible] and Vance and Owen worked closely on that. So I liked them both, admired them both actually, and when we disagreed with their plan it was very painful. They were genuinely both hurt and angry with Chris and me.

Destler: Was Chris's job on that trip in the Spring of '93 to sell lift and strike?

Lake: Yes. Chris has gotten a bit of a bum rap.

Destler: I was wondering about that.

Lake: And this is partly my fault for being too cautious early on, but it was tricky for all the reasons I've just described. So we thought rather than lay it out there absolutely and say, "We're the new boys on the block. There's been a change in American policy. We are engaged. Here's what you're going to do: shut up, salute and don't worry too much if some of your guys get killed on the ground because we know better." We sent Chris off explicitly, we sent him off to *consult* rather than to *sell*.

That was, I thought, a nice way of selling. I wasn't there. I think he saw it as a way of consulting, and consulted. Then the stories were, "We failed to make the sale," because it was a new approach and we should have seen that, we should have been more aggressive from the start.

And then in August I did go over to try to push harder and didn't make the sale. But I did say, rather than, "We're here to consult," I was saying, "Okay, here's our policy, it's approved by the President."

When I was flying over with Reg Bartholomew on the plane, I remember calling George Stephanopoulos back in the White House, saying on the plane phone, "When I say the President has made a decision and this is our policy, go and just confirm that he has made a decision and this is our policy so I don't get cut off at the knees here." George called back and said, "Yes," so I could be a little more aggressive. While we didn't get lift and strike, it did lead—begin to lead, I'm not saying I did it—to the changes at the NATO summit and beyond that led to the Sarajevo ultimatum and our actually whacking some people over Sarajevo.

Riley: How did that trip come about?

Lake: I can't remember. I know I wanted to be asked.

Riley: So, "circumstances arose," to use a passive—

Lake: I'm sure at that meeting somebody asked if I'd go.

Riley: Can you tell us a bit about the trip itself, what you saw as your principal mission? You just addressed that a little bit.

Lake: Was to start selling our policy.

Riley: Where did you go?

Lake: I went to London. I can't remember where else I went. I can't remember now, actually, because I confuse it with my later trip, which I remember vividly.

Destler: You must have gone to Paris?

Lake: I think so, but I just don't remember.

Riley: Is there much that you do remember about the trip that you could report?

Lake: I remember secretly flying into a military base in London after dark and meeting in a hotel room with the British officials.

Destler: Do you feel a certain irony?

Lake: Going back to my Vietnam—

Destler: Kissinger.

Lake: The secret trips to Paris? Absolutely. And maybe that was on my mind on the way, return

to the romance of my youth.

Owen: You all did seriously consider Vance-Owen in the first months of the administration, right? But you ultimately—

Lake: Yes, I met with Vance a couple of times during the transition period.

Owen: What was wrong with Vance-Owen, or what was it lacking?

Lake: One, I don't think it was negotiable. And two, if it had been negotiable it was a terrible plan because it would have had all these tiny little spots all over the place, which is just a recipe for more fighting—and ungovernable, and no Bosnian state to build on. But otherwise we thought it was a very good plan.

Riley: The President's engagement on this issue ebbed and flowed according to what else was on his agenda, or—?

Lake: Well, he would always, always discuss it. It was always item number one. I would bet 90 percent of my morning meetings with him began with Bosnia.

Owen: There is quoted in Liz Drew's book on Aspin, "The President is going south on lift and strike," it was apparently during the Christopher trip.

Lake: He'd read *Balkan Ghosts* apparently. I don't remember that, actually. It probably happened. No, no, he would get frustrated and he would say, "We need to do something," but he never pulled the plug on anything.

Knott: Do we want to stay in Bosnia or can we take a crack at Somalia?

Lake: The first issue, in '93, another big issue on Bosnia was the air drops, supplies, which struck me as something we could do. Colin said, "No, we can't do it," went away. Came back a few weeks later, which is when I started liking him more and more, and he said, "Yes, we figured out how we can do it."

Destler: Without further prodding?

Lake: Yes.

Destler: He just goes away and figures it out?

Lake: Well, I may have prodded him a little, I can't remember. I'm sure I raised it a few times. And they figured out a way to do it. Which shows, when people say he was always playing a game and always saying, "Yeah, we can do it, but it is going to take three thermonuclear devices and 500,000 guys," is a caricature because he did figure out how to do this and we did do it.

I remember then briefing reporters in the Roosevelt Room about it—on background of course—

and they were all saying, "This is crazy." You know, the same reporters who were saying, "Why can't you do anything," were saying—it's their job I guess—that you're going to kill people because they're going to be looking for the packages outside their perimeters, or blah, blah, blah, but it did save some lives.

Owen: The question is, do we just want to carry Bosnia through?

Lake: This is your deal.

Riley: I'm happy to follow your lead, Mac, go ahead.

Destler: Maybe it would be sensible to carry Bosnia through. Basically, the US gets more assertive in articulating its policy.

Lake: And the President really pushes it, together with beginnings of NATO enlargement, at the NATO summit—

Destler: Is that January now?

Lake: End of December.

Destler: End of December '93.

Lake: And gives his speech in Brussels. His mother had—I'm just free-forming, never mind. I will tell you one little story just to break in for a moment if you like, about my military assistant, Jim Reed.

Destler: Can we say no?

Lake: Before the President's speech in the square in Brussels, got there about an hour early with some of my other staff folks. Jim had his briefcase with him. He wanted to go and see some site around the corner. He told somebody, one of the other guys there, that he was leaving his briefcase while he walked around. I guess they didn't hear him because he leaves and then the security folks turn up to do the site inspection and everything, including Belgian police, and they see this briefcase there. Whose is this? Nobody knows. All kinds of alarms go off. The police are getting exercised, Secret Service is getting exercised, et cetera. Then somebody says, "Where's Jim?" They don't see him. Maybe it's his.

So somebody else says, I swear to God, somebody else says, "Well, let's beep him so we can find out." So they page him. Jim had put his pager on buzz and left his pager in the briefcase. So suddenly the briefcase starts going, "Bzzzzzzz." [*laughter*]. Luckily, Jim about that time appears and reclaims his briefcase.

Lake: Shows that we were on the alert for terrorism right from the start. Anyway, sorry. So at the summit meeting, NATO Secretary General [Manfred] Werner and Joseph Luns, the Dutch Prime Minister, kind of take Clinton under their wings on how you get it done at NATO.

Riley: And this is, forgive me, this is ’94?

Lake: End of ’93, beginning of ’94.

Riley: Thank you.

Lake: And help him sell a more aggressive policy on Bosnia and the beginnings of NATO enlargement at that meeting. They should get real credit for help with the rest of NATO.

Owen: Can I ask at this point, it appears from some recollections you have somewhere in this briefing book, that one kind of underlying motivation for you in acting on Bosnia, in the particular way, was to preserve and bolster NATO. Because you saw NATO as part of the general strategy of promoting democracy.

Lake: Yes.

Owen: So can you talk a little bit about that? To what extent were you passionate about what was happening in Bosnia because you saw it as part of this larger thing?

Lake: In truth, yes, that was a part of the policy view of it all, but this was mostly visceral, because people were dying. I don’t like to admit this, but on Haiti and Bosnia especially, I was mostly pushed by reactions to the people dying and sort of squishy soft, liberal, Wilsonian emotion, and then finding policy, clear-headed Kissingerian strato-policy reasons for why we had to do this.

Riley: Interesting.

Lake: And you know, most officials are human beings so it is always a mix of the two. If you try to sell humanitarian interventions or involvement on strictly emotional appeals and humanitarian appeals, you’re going to lose, while there are lives at stake. Now, I would sometimes take it to an extent that Clinton would disagree. When we were writing speeches on Haiti, for example, explaining the intervention, I would keep making the strategic argument for the speech and Clinton would say, “No, they’re cutting people’s faces. We can make an emotional appeal here,” and he was right, it did work. You’re the expert on public opinion, but it is two different audiences.

Destler: I don’t know how much we want to talk about ’94.

Riley: Let me ask one follow-up question about the meeting. Were you in on the meeting with the President and these NATO figures when they were trying to sort of coach him about how to proceed?

Lake: Yes. Yes.

Riley: Do you have recollections about how they proceeded in this? I mean, it’s got to—as an

outsider—

Lake: NATO acts by consensus. This was a summit and all the representatives are sitting around a big table. "Coaching" is sort of a condescending word, I'm not sure I would say coaching, but guiding. I did say "taking under their wing," which is true. So in the private meetings they were both helping him work through the arguments—although we had done a lot of preparation also for it—that would best appeal to them, and giving him the lay of the land: "This guy thinks this; she will react this way; he will react that way," et cetera. But then at the meeting, during the discussion, then coming in in a supportive way also.

Riley: I guess there's a parenthetical question here about Clinton's relations—

Lake: They didn't convince him to take those positions, but they were very helpful.

Riley: It was an educational process.

Lake: Well, tactical and helpful, yes.

Riley: The parenthetical question is about his interaction with these foreign leaders. I don't know whether you want to comment on that now or keep this in mind as we go from one issue to the next.

Lake: Might as well.

Destler: Why not.

Lake: He was great at it. And in ways that I found initially frustrating, in fact, as did Chris and the Vice President, Gore. First of all, one thing that struck me constantly, especially with democratically-elected leaders, is that they share, the leaders, an experience that nobody else in the room has had.

And there is not only, as I have said in flights of rhetorical fancy, a "language of democracy," which there is, but there is a language of leaders who are facing, even in dictatorships, the problems of public opinion. The two things leaders could always agree on, in every meeting I've sat in, are that the world would be a better place without the press. In a practical sense. In principle, they're all for it. And, secondly, the currency traders should be shot, but maybe a little torture beforehand would be useful. Those are the two things I always hear leaders absolutely agree on and bond about. But anyway.

Clinton was extraordinarily successful in establishing personal relationships with foreign leaders, just as he is and was with just about anybody. I mean it is phenomenal. He would do it sometimes at the expense of raising the tough issues with them. So repeatedly in meetings, there would be schmooze, schmooze, kiss, kiss, common language of democracy, common language of democracy, isn't being a leader difficult, isn't being a leader difficult, et cetera, when we had just briefed him on, "You've got to raise this tariff issue, or this human rights issue."

Destler: And you would be sitting there?

Lake: And it would be the Vice President next to him and then Chris and then me, and then others. Then quite often, the Vice President and the Secretary of State and I would start looking at each other, even passing notes, about, "Okay, who is going to do it," and then one of us, usually Chris, sometimes the Vice President, occasionally me, would raise the dreaded issue after the President had gotten through. Sort of good cop, bad cop.

But it was useful because he could then use those personal relationships to get things done, and especially the relationship with [Boris] Yeltsin was extremely important. Because there was a constant pattern of, he meets with Yeltsin, Yeltsin agrees to—maybe sometimes in a compromise form, but generally not even—what we were promoting on an arms control issue often, or something. He was *usually* sober when he agreed to it. I'm not joking. Then we would meet with the Russian officials two days later to follow up and they would be back to their initial position. Then the President would have to call Yeltsin and say, "Wait a minute," and then Yeltsin would usually enforce the discipline and we'd get it done.

If the President and Yeltsin hadn't gotten along so well—I didn't like Yeltsin in fact—we couldn't have done that. And it was true with [Helmut] Kohl; it was true with even [John] Major. They got along very well, they had a good time together. I say "*even* Major" because of all the erroneous stories about him and Major not getting along. Not because Major was a difficult person, I like him very much and thought he did, personally, a great job on Northern Ireland, given his political realities.

Destler: Was Gore important in the Russian relationship?

Lake: Yes. In a very different way. I mean, not in changing policies particularly, but in the Gore-[Viktor] Chernomyrdin, he got a lot of stuff done on a lot of specific issues.

Knott: Is there a foreign leader that he didn't quite click with? You said his charm was very—

Lake: That's interesting, I'm pausing.

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

Riley: But there wasn't anybody, then—?

Lake: I'm trying to think of anybody he disliked.

Riley: Or someone he found particularly opaque. Maybe not that he disliked, but somebody whose calculus he couldn't quite decipher.

Lake: Isn't it interesting that I can't think of any.

Owen: Chirac?

Lake: Because I could give you a long list with Nixon. I could give you a long list with Jimmy Carter. I can't give you the Clinton list.

Owen: Kohl?

Lake: Kohl and he were huge pals. Sitting at two restaurant meals watching them in their pig-out contests was one of the revolting experiences of my life. Chirac, he got along fine with. I liked Chirac a lot.

Destler: How about Asia, China or Japan? Japan was changing leaders a fair amount.

Lake: With Jiang Zemin it wasn't an issue because early on the meetings were so stiff with Jiang reading his points, looking over at his advisors when he was sort of new, to make sure that he was getting it right. It was interesting to see how Jiang over time stopped looking over at his advisors, and he just started speaking more extemporaneously as he got more and more firmly in control.

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

Lake: [redacted] So I can't think of any foreign leader that he didn't like. I mean, this is Will Rogers in the Oval Office. He never met a leader he didn't like. He would get a little testy when we would say, "This guy murdered four people this morning because they believed in human rights. He's going to go back and probably murder a whole bunch more and he's a bad guy and everything." It is not that he ever gave away the store, I can't think of a concession he ever made, sort of like Roosevelt, for the sake of a personal relationship with his enemy. He just liked them and got along with them and it was useful.

Riley: You said you didn't care much for Yeltsin.

Lake: I did not care much for Yeltsin. One low point, I thought, with the President, with Clinton, was at Hyde Park. Well, let me back up. I didn't like Yeltsin because he abused his underlings. I didn't like Yeltsin because he drank. I have a number of alcoholics in my family and I react badly to people who are slurring.

I liked Yeltsin, on the other hand, because he had done some heroic things earlier and because in '92, when Clinton had met with him, he had been great, literally, at the meeting in Blair House. Because Clinton was quite uptight. This was one of his first meetings with a foreign leader, the press was watching. I'd flown out to Las Vegas to meet Clinton, at a speech, to help brief him on the plane coming into Washington. The Bush administration was jerking Yeltsin's schedule around to try to not give him much time with Clinton. Yeltsin had left a meeting early at the White House in order to come over and meet with him. Then the White House wouldn't let us meet with the press anywhere around Blair House, so we had to walk a block or two to meet with the press afterwards, outside. It was not very good.

Yeltsin had been a stand-up guy about the arrangements. And in the meeting he hit it off with Clinton right away, in talking about politics. He didn't have to be that good to Clinton in '92. I liked that. But I particularly didn't like, from Clinton's point of view then, at Hyde Park when they met, Yeltsin really drank a lot of wine at the lunch, and was clearly reeling around. At the meeting afterwards he did make some useful policy concessions, which we dutifully recorded while his officials looked rather glum. But then they went out to meet with the press. I can't remember what exactly he was saying, but Yeltsin went on and on, in a rather funny way, abusing the reporters. Clinton started laughing, cackling as he could when something amused him, and I thought—I'm sounding very stiff here—but it was very unpresidential and not good.

But he did get along well with him.

Riley: You were at the meeting with the NATO figures, early '93.

Lake: And that set up then the agreement I guess in February or so, after the mortaring of the marketplace in Sarajevo. I can't remember whether that was before the summit or after it. The Sarajevo ultimatum, which took a lot of work here in Washington with the Joint Chiefs, to get agreement that we could actually try to do this. The Joint Chiefs arguing two things—and here I'm going back to earlier arguments during the previous summer also—that one, a lot of the mortars were sort of mom and pop mortars. Like mom and pop stores, where they would just have a mortar that they could put into their garage and then come out and flip a few more rounds into Sarajevo and then put it back in the garage. It was very hard to get them.

And secondly, I remember Colin saying something that was I think quite interesting, which is that you can't just use air power to take out artillery. It's why we use cluster bomb units, which are quite horrible, to go after the personnel, because an artillery piece by definition is built to withstand explosions on the inside. Therefore you can hit them almost directly and they're still going to be there.

We got our own military's agreement on how to do it, then briefed the President who wanted to do it, and we implemented the ultimatum. The Serbs did pull back outside the zone and that led to the notion of protected areas, which gave us a handle then on beginning to put more pressure on the Serbs under the guise of doing something the UN would agree with. Although, because of the dual key system, the UN was always diminishing what we could do, even in late '94 over the Bihac, which was the low point and I'll come back to that in a second.

We got the UN's agreement to an air strike on the airfield in that area on the border between Bosnia and Croatia that the Serbs were using to bomb the airfield. And I came in the next morning to discover that they had delayed until the Serbs could remove their aircraft. And then dropped a few, cratered the runway a little, because the UN had objected to our actually being more serious about it. It was very frustrating.

In any case, because they were moving back—and this may be propaganda, it is how I honestly remember it, but you always remember things somewhat the way you want to remember them—'94, I think if you look at it statistically, was therefore a better year. Which is to say there were less incidents, less casualties, UNPROFOR was working better. I think in part because of what we had done around Sarajevo, and therefore it simply became harder to convince the Europeans to do anything.

Destler: Because it now seemed stable.

Lake: Right. Our failure in '94 then was, we spent a little less time working on Bosnia and more on Haiti, especially, and other issues. Because things were better. Our failure probably was not to use that good period to really push harder on trying to get, in '94, a negotiated settlement. On the other hand, the only way to get a negotiated settlement was to put pressure on the Serbs and there was less basis for doing that. We did, during that period, get the Federation, which was immensely important, I think. And I think—when was the Nixon funeral? The spring of '94, wasn't it?

Owen: Right. April or May '94.

Lake: And we did get what later became the infamous, "uninstructed" cable to our ambassador in Croatia with regard to the Croatians allowing arms to go into Bosnia. We can discuss that now if you want or come back to it.

Riley: We'll discuss it now.

Lake: Because this was later. I probably spent more time on this in my hearings for the DCI [Director of Central Intelligence], because, especially Arlen Specter believed that we were violating the congressional constitutional role or something, and hell doth have no fury like a congressman whose prerogatives have been scorned.

What happened was, as I recall it, we were on the plane coming back. Strobe was on the plane. Our ambassador [Peter] Galbraith who was, to put it mildly, aggressive in his views, and on the right side of the issue, but really pushed at least to the edge on these things. [Franjo] Tudjman had asked him if we objected to their allowing arms to go through. If we were to say, "Yes, we objected," then we were denying arms to the Bosnians who needed them, but more importantly then we were going to screw up the Federation, because the Bosnians would naturally object to the Croatians not allowing the arms to go through. These were not Iranian arms as far as I know. That was later, but who knows, maybe somewhere, I don't know, but I don't think so.

In any case, if we said, "Yes," then we were violating the arms embargo. Now we actually, under the UN resolution, were not committed to enforcing an arms embargo, we were simply committed to not doing arms ourselves. Even the yellow light was not, in technical terms, a violation of it. Later our compromise with the Congress, who wanted to lift the arms embargo altogether, in which we said, "Okay, we won't enforce it anymore, but we're not going to violate it ourselves," was consistent with international law, as lifting the arms embargo would not have been.

In any case, so Strobe and I—I'm quite sure I remembered Lord [Horatio] Nelson's clapping the telescope to his blind eye before the battle of the Nile when he was ordered not to engage, and somehow didn't see the signal and simply didn't take a position—we went back to the ambassador saying, "You're not instructed." It was later, I remember a meeting then with Jenonne Walker, my staff person at the time, when she said at the meeting in my office a day or two later when Galbraith came back again, "Does 'uninstructed' mean that we're for it?" And I said "No, uninstructed means uninstructed, period." Anyway, on the plane we went to the President and said, "Here's the way out of the dilemma, we'll just say he's uninstructed," Strobe and I did. The President said, "Fine, makes sense to me." So he's uninstructed.

Now our mistake was, as I said later, we then didn't tell the Senate that we had done this. And we should have. It just didn't occur—I mean I just didn't think of it. It wasn't that we were trying to hide it from them, we just didn't think of it. In fact, I thought it was rather clever, or at least the right thing. So Specter was to argue and then of course Shelby and the others, who simply were trying to screw me, picked up on it, that we were avoiding the Senate Intelligence Committee. In fact, in my view it was the Foreign Relations Committee that we should have

briefed, because this was not an intelligence matter, because we weren't doing anything. Their argument was that this was a covert operation and that in fact out there we were—

Destler: You were facilitating in some fashion.

Lake: —helping. There were then later stories that our ambassador had been involved somehow in various things, which I think were false. I don't think we ever went over that line, but it certainly wasn't a covert action and it wasn't an intelligence matter.

Owen: So the whole idea of these being Iranian arms didn't come up at this point?

Lake: No, no, not that I—no. And I don't think that I've seen evidence ever since that it was, but certainly the *Washington Times* or somebody were trying to inflame it by saying we were bringing Iranian arms into Bosnia, when in fact we were working to try to get the Iranians out of Bosnia.

So that's '94. We're doing those things, but we're not really [inaudible], and then it all starts to collapse in late '94 around the Bihac.

Riley: Can I ask one question, going back. We may, depending on how you feel, want to go ahead and break here in just a second. But this relates to the—

Lake: What, and give up a talk about Bosnia?

Owen: Oh, we'll come back to it.

Destler: Good old days, eh?

Riley: Exactly. Give you a chance to catch your breath. This relates to the shelling of the markets in Sarajevo. That becomes a kind of a turning point because of the perceptions of what's going on, right? Can you comment about that as a—?

Lake: Well it was horrible, seeing the pictures of it and all, and it certainly reinforced within the government, those of us who had strong feelings about this, and it helped—I mean, something that horrible, like Srebrenica later, you shouldn't say helped, but it did help with public opinion and with other NATO members.

Riley: But there were other horrible things that went on that you didn't have pictures of.

Lake: CNN [Cable News Network] effect.

Riley: I guess that's what I'm asking you to comment on.

Lake: That reminds me again, I'm sorry for going off on these little things.

Riley: No, this is very instructive.

Lake: I was accused sometimes of being too close to CNN. I remember two or three articles about this, being too close to Wolf Blitzer and the other CNN people and using them. In fact, in my view, governments very seldom use reporters, or vice versa. The relationship is too edgy. But I do remember once using them which was—and I can't remember when it was or what the issue was exactly—but we needed to get some position to the Serbs in Pale, and we had no way of communicating with him.

I remember calling in the CNN reporter, it wasn't Wolf, and saying, "Here's a scoop. Here's our view on something or other." Because I knew it would go right on, "The White House said such and such," and it would get to Pale and it was the only way to. . . . Then I've got in my book, I won't repeat it here, when we hit Baghdad, we had no way of knowing because it was nighttime, what the effects of the Tomahawk raids would be. We assumed CNN would be there and then discovered to our horror that the CNN correspondent was not in Baghdad but was in Jordan. So we weren't going to be able to see exactly what had happened right away.

Knott: This was the attack in retaliation for the plot to assassinate President Bush?

Lake: Yes, I remember I was talking to CNN about it, Tom Johnson I guess—and he said their correspondent had a relative who lived in Baghdad. The correspondent called the relative, cousin or something, and the relative who lived near the ministry reported on what the relative had seen in a phone call to Amman. Then the CNN correspondent told Johnson who told me and it was that we had hit the ministry.

So there was a meeting. Everybody is sitting around in the President's little dining room off the Oval Office, waiting for word of some sort. Meanwhile, of course, all the talking heads are out there pontificating when they had no clue what had happened, even less than we did, but were speaking with great authority about what had happened.

The President said, because he had to address the nation now, "Are we certain about this report? Do we have certainty?" And I said, "Well, we have *relative* certainty." A day or two later that line appeared in the press as Vice President Gore having said, "We have relatives.…" I didn't mind not getting credit for the policy stuff, but to have a pun taken away from me really irritated me.

Riley: The record is now straight.

Destler: Maybe helped Gore's image.

Riley: All right, so let's mark where we are.

Lake: Yes, we're up to Bihac.

[BREAK]

Riley: ... I think you were going to pick up on Kissinger and the wire tapping before we got back to Bosnia.

Lake: So I've got a letter on my wall, near some very modest athletic trophies, in my sort of trophy section, a letter from Kissinger which we negotiated when I dropped the suit then, with another letter from [Alexander] Haig saying he agrees with Kissinger.

Riley: This is the wire tapping, just for the record.

Lake: Saying that I'm a great American and that the taps hadn't turned up anything derogatory, et cetera, and the taps were illegal, I believe. There were some fudge words in there.

Anyway, then flash forward to '94 I guess it was, when the intelligence community got reports that a Middle Eastern terrorist organization was surveilling me. (A later threat became something that got into the press. The organization was said to be Sudanese, and I never commented on it, but in fact it was the same organization and from a different source.)

[redacted]

When the FBI first got word I was being surveilled, the idea was to put a counter-surveillance on me so that they could see who was following me. That involved then putting a tap on my telephone, so if the bad guys were calling to figure out where I was, the FBI could get a lead on them. Who knows, this was probably all absolute nonsense, and I tried not to pay too much attention. So they needed to put a wire tap on the home telephone of Anthony Lake. This time they needed my permission.

So I'm sitting at my desk in the White House, the same desk that Henry Kissinger had sat at, and the FBI guys turn up with the order saying, "You will place a wire tap on the home telephone of Anthony Lake." So I signed the "Anthony" and then it occurred to me there was a parallel here, so I looked up and said to these guys who were standing there, "You know, there's a certain irony in this." Without smiling one of them said, "We know, sir." Then I signed the "Lake," and that's the second time my home phone was tapped on orders of the White House.

Owen: We left off at Bihac, I believe.

Lake: Yes. November '94. All hell was breaking loose. Bihac was under siege, we had Bangladeshi soldiers without winter clothing and ammunition and they're about to be overrun, and the issue is what do we do about it. The Europeans were blocking action, blaming the Croats for all of this. Clearly, if we had acted unilaterally, we were going to blow NATO apart. I don't think there was any question about it. And so, to my regret, I agreed with the position taken by the State Department and supported by the Defense Department, which was that we would change our policy on Bosnia from engagement to containment, i.e., "Okay, there's not much we can do about Bosnia, let's keep it from flipping over, washing over into the rest of the Balkans,

et cetera," and backed off. I also recommended it to the President, and he accepted it.

I think knowing what I knew then, I would do the same thing again. If you see what I mean, even if it was the wrong thing, because it was the necessary thing. In my memory it was a couple of months—Sandy Vershbow told me it was only a few weeks—before we started pushing again. There was a period where we just, I just didn't work very hard on it. And then couldn't stand it any more and then got Sandy Vershbow in and we started working on what became known as the "end game strategy." And it's covered very well in the Daalder book, *Getting to Dayton*. But it was absolutely the low point because for a while there I threw up my hands.

Destler: And when you did get re-engaged basically, at what point does the President feel that part of it is that the current situation isn't viable any more? That's Srebrenica?

Lake: Here, actually, there's a few things. One, '94 had been better, which is to say still awful, but better. After the Bihac then, it starts getting "worser and worser." I can't remember when Goradze was, but it is getting worser and worser and there are more and more meetings about using air power to defend the safe areas. So in substance he is getting more engaged.

Also, I regret to say, Dick Morris is right, that Morris was showing the President on the political side—not in my presence ever, because I refused to talk to Morris, see anything that he was doing. I went to the President and he agreed that I shouldn't. We can come back to that if you want. But clearly the President was more and more concerned with what this was doing to the administration's political image on foreign policy issues. And I was saying to him this is a cancer on foreign policy. So he was very open to efforts to resolve it. While I think I started pushing it before he became so fervent about it, soon he was pushing me hard to come up with this right away, but it took a while to get others on board and to frame the issues and come up with a plan that made sense. And then either sell it to my colleagues or bring the differences to the President. But I was pretty sure that the President was going to come out the right way on this.

So that's what we did. I guess we don't have to go through it all, but we did work through the so-called "end game strategy." Madeleine Albright then became a supporter of it, then we got some people in the State Department to be supporters of it, but I was having a very hard time, frankly, getting some of my colleagues to even talk about a change in the strategy. I remember some explicit arguments about it in which they were saying, "No, we don't have time to do this, we have to keep dealing with the everyday issues on Bosnia." And towards the end then I remember saying, "Okay, we're not going to come up with an agreed paper here. Within one week, let's each of us come up with our own version of what we should do. We simply have to do this."

Implicitly, I was saying that if you don't have a paper, then you won't have a position. Then we put the papers all together in a couple of memos to the President, there were some meetings, the President approved the NSC strategy, and at the end, I guess it was [William] Perry who suggested that I go off to Europe and sell the new approach, which I did. There was an argument at the very end at which the State Department—Chris wasn't at the meeting—but the State Department argued that I should go off to talk to the Europeans about the *process* of how we proceed, but I shouldn't get into the substance of the new approach.

Destler: Because you shouldn't do substance?

Lake: No, because—I don't know. Anyway. Yeah, maybe. But again, I was avoiding the press as much as I could. But the President said, "No, we're going to do it." I made sure that again I could say to the Europeans, "The President has decided, and in this case we're going to act unilaterally if you don't agree to come along," which is crucial.

Then I traveled around, and as I said, I thought I was going to have to try to beat down doors. I would prefer to believe in retrospect that I did beat the doors down, but the fact is, the doors were much more open than I had realized because the Europeans had had it. Once I got the Brits to agree, who had probably been the most difficult of them all, I then asked them to brief their press on what we'd agreed and went over with them exactly what they would say to the press. By the time I got to Bonn, there were stories that this had gone well, even though I wasn't briefing the press in London, so at each stop I could then build on the last and convey a kind of consensus, which worked everywhere except the press in Paris.

And then we traveled to Madrid and Rome and Turkey and met with the Russian foreign minister at a resort on the Black Sea. Came together, and then when it was obvious we had something to work with, meanwhile, they'd been figuring out in Washington who would do the negotiating. It has been written that I wanted to go on then and do the negotiation itself. The fact is I did want to, because I was involved in it, but never really seriously proposed it or contemplated it because I had other stuff to do. They convinced Dick Holbrooke to do it, who oddly enough was resistant at first, and so when he arrived in London then for a hand-off, I had a meeting to sort of push him along that he has written about accurately. I can't remember actually what he wrote in his book but I said, "If this doesn't work we will take the hit. I promise you, you won't." And secondly, "This is what we've been dreaming about all our lives, that we could try to end a war." And he did a brilliant job.

Destler: That really was a hand-off in the sense that before that time—

Lake: He was not involved.

Destler: —you had been the driver and he wasn't involved. Then when you handed it off, you were obviously still involved but he was now—

Lake: He would report in and I would try to be supportive, but—

Destler: In both senses it's a hand-off.

Lake: Absolutely.

Owen: What was the thinking about Milosevic at this point, as someone to do business with?

Lake: I didn't know him.

Destler: You didn't visit him on your trip.

Lake: A bully. And you weren't going to move him unless you could bring pressure to bear, which was to me very clear. A key change that the President made in my talking points, because Sandy Vershbow and I had drafted a long version, I think it was seven pages, of the talking points I would use in the presentation to the Europeans, so that my colleagues would know exactly what I was going to say. There would be no surprises, that's the way you do it. The first half of my talking points were about how we were going to bomb the hell out of them and collapse UNPROFOR, et cetera, and the second half was, "And here is the negotiating position we should take."

So the power first and the diplomacy second. The President suggested that I flip them, so I could begin with the diplomacy part and then talk about the power part, since it was the power part that concerned the Europeans mostly. As I was flying over I contemplated his suggestion. He did say, "I would suggest," and I thought (a) there was something to what he was saying and (b) he is the President and I'm not. It was one hell of a suggestion, I thought. So I did flip them around and it was better. If I could emphasize with the Europeans that the point of this is to bring power to diplomacy—the two are, in fact, inseparable—and that the point was to resolve this diplomatically, then it made it much easier for them to go on than if I was just coming in like the American cowboy saying, "You've just got to bomb these people because they're bad folks." And that was a part of a recognition I think that most of us had had for a long time, that you weren't going to convince Milosevic through appeals to our common humanity.

I met with him in Dayton. The only time I met him, briefly, was when I went out to Dayton and met with him in his little room at the Air Force base. And he actually used a trick that [Henry Cabot, Jr.] Lodge used to use when I worked for him in Saigon. He moved the furniture around, or had somebody move it, so that he was sitting in a straight chair and was higher, and he had me sit on a sofa which I sank down into so I had to be looking up on him like some adoring sycophant. Lodge used to do that and Lodge was very tall, he didn't have to.

Destler: And with the Vietnamese. [*laughter*]

Lake: I remember this simply because I thought I won the argument. I have of course forgotten all the many arguments that I've lost. But Milosevic began by saying, "Mr. Lake, I understand that you are more anti-Serb than anybody else in Washington." And I thought for a moment and said, "No, but I hope I am more anti-aggression." There was this pause and then he smiled, which was instructive. Because, okay, this is his kind of language. We're going to yell at each other a little bit and then we'll see if we can do business. Which is why I think Dick was so effective with him.

Destler: Dick was one—I don't know if this is a good time to bring this up, it was a sui generis negotiation—but the first Clinton administration was characterized by several instances where you had particular special envoys or special people. You had [Robert] Gallucci doing North Korea, obviously Strobe, and that's a little different, but doing Russia. You had [Dennis] Ross in the Middle East.

Lake: The difference was Strobe helped make the policy also.

Destler: Yes.

Lake: Whereas on Korea, Bob was acting as a diplomat who made policy recommendations but didn't decide the policy as much as Strobe did.

Destler: Was there a pattern, though?

Lake: I was later a special envoy on both Haiti and Ethiopia-Eritrea.

Destler: Was there a reason why this? I mean there seemed to be a particular tendency for this administration to use special envoys and there may be something about the way, maybe they were more effective—?

Lake: I think they are. I think special envoys are a good idea.

Destler: You think it's just because—?

Lake: As long as they are disciplined and check in occasionally.

Destler: Is it because they just would work in any instance and you would figure it out, or is it because of the particular—?

Lake: I think, first of all you can often find people that have personal relationships with the foreign leaders, who can be effective in that way. Secondly, it simply is more time consuming than it used to be, being an Assistant Secretary of State or whatever, because every issue is connected to every other. The State Department has to be involved in many more issues than it used to be, trade issues, et cetera, because all the dots are connected in one way or another.

Therefore, coming back to the question of time, it is very hard to get an official who should be doing other stuff, to just work on that one issue. Look at the Middle East today. I mean, if we are really going to get involved in it, I think we're going to have to not have our Assistant Secretary, who is doing just it all the time. I will take it as the sign of a real commitment to it if we name a special envoy. . . . Well, we did, [Anthony] Zinni, there you go. I'm sorry, I should have thought of that right away. He's a good guy, worked with me on Ethiopia-Eritrea.

That is a sign—that even an administration that is doctrinally opposed to special envoys and denounced us for using them, is using one. And I hope as they get more engaged in other diplomatic endeavors they'll have others to do it. It's just a practical matter.

Destler: It doesn't go around the system, though?

Lake: No, it shouldn't. And if you hire professional envoys who know how the system works, they shouldn't be going around the system, although they should be trying to manipulate it.

Riley: Other issue areas. Haiti, want to talk a little bit about that?

Lake: Well, I wrote about it a little bit in *Six Nightmares*. Basically, after the humiliation of Harlan County, which was misinterpreted, because this was not a military action. There were mostly Canadians on board. This was pursuant to what we thought was an agreement with [Raoul] Cedras.

Destler: Right.

Lake: And then they reneged. Our mistake was in not having a few destroyers right there to help [inaudible] but even then, I don't know if we were going to attack Haiti with a couple of destroyers.

We then went on trying to negotiate an internal settlement. [Jean-Bertrand] Aristide was getting more and more upset about this because he thought that we would sell him out. I didn't completely understand how strong his view was that we might sell him out, because after all, we were trustworthy, in my view. Bill Gray, who was our special envoy for a while on Haiti, asked me at one point to look at—which I've done subsequently—to look at the Episcopalian cathedral in Port-au-Prince. One of the wonderful Haitian murals over on the left as you're facing the altar is a mural of the Last Supper and there are Jesus and all the disciples and they're all black, except for one.

Owen: Judas?

Lake: Yes, Judas is white. And we had sold them out often enough in the past century that Aristide was not easily going to be convinced by all this. So it was becoming clear by the beginning of '94, to me anyway, that we weren't going to negotiate successfully with Cedras. Larry Rossin was a foreign service officer on my staff and a terrific, courageous guy, like Vershbow, willing to take on the State Department even though he's an FSO. I say that as an aside, but it ain't easy for an FSO to do that. I remember when I was working for Kissinger, getting called by the Secretary of State and being screamed at for following Kissinger's orders on something. My whole career, which turned out to be short-lived anyway, was passing before my eyes as he spoke. But Larry was fervent about Haiti.

And so by the spring, I remember on opening day, flying back from Cleveland, talking to George Stephanopoulos about it and then the President. I had become convinced that we were going to have to intervene militarily. There was then quite an argument with just about everybody. Certainly the Pentagon and especially the State Department were opposed to this. I didn't enjoy losing policy arguments, but this one I did, at a meeting in the cabinet room in which the President agreed with the State Department position that we should simply implement more sanctions.

Larry had convinced me, and I think it turns out to have been right, and I then argued—that the sanctions were simply going to create more refugees and make the problem worse, but it wasn't going to move Cedras because he was eating just fine. And I remember saying at the meeting, I was really angry, "Okay, if we're going to go down this road then we need from the State Department their vision of what a strategy is." They didn't have one. And then I just started

lobbying for the intervention.

Strobe became an ally. Sandy Berger was a good ally. By August and September, as the thugs kept cutting more and more people, and as it got worse and worse in Haiti, it became more and more evident that we would have to. As I recall, the political people were opposed. The Vice President would go back and forth a little on it. But by the end of the summer, the President decided, "We've got to do it." This was just months before the election and I think it was the turning point for him. In retrospect it seems laughable that we would be concerned about a military operation against Haiti. And you could well say, "If you can't whomp Haiti, who the hell in the world can you whomp?" But I remember going over aerial photography of what looked like a serious camp with heavy armaments, which when I visited Haiti later were all rusted. But you couldn't tell that and it looked as if we were going to have to really take them down.

The President said, "Yes, we're going to do it." He worked with the commanders who were going over the plans for the operation, looking more and more presidential, and when it then worked, because of the diplomacy and it was not a hostile intervention, in my view, it was kind of a turning point in his—

Destler: Learning experience.

Lake: —learning how to be commander in charge, take control, take charge, bite the bullet. Understand that what matters politically is not the initial reaction to something but whether it works or not down the road. And I think it made a difference then in his approach in '95 on Bosnia.

Knott: President Carter was involved in that.

Lake: Yes. He was also involved in Korea.

Destler: Right, right.

Lake: Let me say quickly, I thought his recent trip to Cuba was on a scale of 10, a 10. That is not what I am about to say about his trips to Haiti and Korea, which are quite controversial and were at the time.

It was very complicated at the end. Carter—and the book *Six Nightmares* has something about this—Carter knew Cedras. Had been down before. We needed to try at the last minute to get some sort of negotiated solution, which to us meant Cedras leaving, Aristide coming in.

Destler: Right.

Lake: He was the elected leader. Even Bush had recognized him as that. But not an uncontroversial person, however, on the Hill.

Anyway, so we wanted to do it peacefully. The initial idea that Bill Perry and Shali [John

Shalikashvili] had suggested was that [interrupted by phone ringing]. The initial notion had been that Shali and I go down to have a word with Cedras, which I really wanted to do. Again, I didn't propose it, I think Perry proposed it. Then we decided that the best would be—Nunn I guess, I can't remember exactly how this came up, but I think we went up to Sam Nunn, who said, "How about getting Carter and Powell also." Or maybe it was—I can't remember exactly. In any case we decided that all three would be good. They were volunteering. I was for it, Gore was for it. I think Chris was against it initially.

Destler: Was Carter proposing to go on his own then?

Lake: Maybe. He'd been down there. It's clear in the book. I've got the chronology right there. But anyway, so they're down there and it was quite a dramatic period then because they're negotiating with Cedras. The key was Powell, who described in vivid detail just what our troops could do to Haiti if they didn't agree. Carter was appealing to them, including on religious grounds, on how it had to be settled, et cetera. We had not shared with them exactly what the military plans were to go in, but we did tell them that the time was exceedingly short and we weren't going to change those plans and that Cedras had to leave.

They were negotiating a deal in which Cedras could stay for a while. The problem with that was that Aristide believed that once again the United States was going to screw him. And if he sent word to his people in Haiti that the Americans coming in were there not to liberate but to dominate, then all hell was going to break loose with the people. So the final day, and I think it was a Sunday, I'd also broken a tooth, probably grinding my teeth over either Bosnia or Haiti, I shuttled between the dentist chair, the Oval Office, and Aristide's hotel room trying to convince him that even if there was a delay, we still would bring him back to power.

Now I had spent, sometimes with Strobe Talbott, maybe every few weeks going over just keeping Aristide calm while we worked this through. He is one of the most fascinating characters I've ever known, very complicated. Much more complicated than either the people who think he's the devil or those who think he's God understand. I don't understand him well, but he is really complicated, and really interesting and really smart. We used to—I still don't know whether you want anecdotes or—

Riley: Absolutely, it helps enrich the record.

Lake: Before we went over to meet with him the first time. Strobe had said, "You know, we've been lecturing the Haitians all this time on what to do." And in fact, my first conversation with Aristide had been when I'd woken him up at 2 in the morning over the Governor's Island negotiations in the previous fall, to try to bulldoze him into agreeing. So it started off on that foot. Anyway, Strobe said, "We always tell them what to do, we never ask them what's going on. Why don't you start with some questions?" And I thought, *Hey, not a bad idea. Learn something*. And so I began by saying, "It is entirely conceivable to me that you know more about Haiti than I do. What's your view?" And just listening to him for quite a while.

Then we used to take turns serving coffee to our respective delegations as a sort of competition for who could be more self-effacing. Pure bullshit but good theater. So anyway—

Riley: No foot washing.

Lake: No foot washing. Draw the line. So at this meeting Bill Gray and I were meeting with him on the Sunday, trying to convince him that while it looked like there would be a delay, he would return. Carter wanted much more of a delay and I think he—I can't remember exactly—I think he even wanted it that Cedras wouldn't necessarily leave. I can't remember. The terms were much softer. So we're arguing with Carter about the terms. So I needed to convince Aristide to trust us.

I said something his then-secretary, now wife, reminded me of a year or two ago. I first said that if we didn't get him back by let's say, it was September 15th, I think it was October 15th, a month later, that I would resign. And she could write it down, because she used to take notes on these things. And I said secondly, "I'll make the following bet. If you don't go back by October 15th, I will come here every morning, in your hotel room, for the remainder of our term in office and serve you coffee. And if you do go back, I expect a cup, not just of coffee, but—" I've forgotten what the term is, but of Haitian coffee with rum in it—"that you will serve to me at the palace."

He started to smile a little and finally Bill Gray's eloquence about all this in vouching for us, he agreed to let it happen. I did, parenthetically, go back later and he had just gotten back to his residence and he had a dinner for me. It was fascinating, the visit. Because it was after—I didn't go down to the grand hoo-haw on television, that went down a few weeks later. At the dinner, nice dinner with some of his friends and a few of the Americans, after the dinner suddenly the waiter appears and there's a cup of coffee and there's a thing of rum. So he serves me this and he explains to the guests what this was about.

I thought it might happen, so I pretended to be making it up, but in fact, I thought about it on the plane going down and I did an Aristide impersonation of using the coffee as a metaphor. Sort of talking like Aristide, watching to see if he was going to smile or not, and he did. I wouldn't have gone on otherwise. "Oh, look at the coffee, look at the rich black trustworthy, rich Haitian coffee. See how the good rum is coming in and see how well they mix together in the spirit of reconciliation—"

Owen: This is in English?

Lake: Yes. "In the spirit of reconciliation in the cup here, just as Haiti is reconciling," blah, blah, blah, and he started laughing. Then he said that he wanted to go the next day to Cité Soleil, which is the slum in Port-au-Prince, to see his people again and he wanted me to come. Our general who was there said, "No, can't do that, security, et cetera," and then he said, "Well, I'll look into it," and the next morning they called and said, "Okay, we'll set it up." So I went with Aristide and there were probably, oh, there were hundreds of thousands of people there. I'd never seen such adulation in my life. He asked me to speak, which I thought I should do because he was thanking Clinton for having restored democracy to Haiti. I just said, "Bon Jouh," which is Creole for hello, and the crowd went crazy. For a brief moment in my uncharismatic life I knew what it must be like to be a demagogue, and it ain't bad. It can be heady stuff.

Anyway, so on that Sunday we have the 82nd, I think it was—it may have been the 101st —the 82nd loaded on the planes and actually flying towards Haiti.

Destler: I remember that, yes.

Lake: And then we're calling the Carter party and I guess it was Larry Rossin who was with them—who behaved wonderfully through all this and was torn, because they kept pushing him out of the room and he kept pushing his way back in again so he could maintain some influence with our envoys—and saying, "You've got three hours and then you've got to get out of there," because otherwise they were going to be in the middle of a war. They barely got an agreement that was, it turned out, a little softer than we had thought it would be. So then we had to pick up the pieces afterwards. There's still anti-Carter graffiti around Haiti for this.

But let me say the theme here is, it was very useful to have him there because he gave Cedras a face-saving way out. Many of the Clinton people, especially our political people, hated it, because Carter was getting credit for what Clinton should have gotten. Their view was that Clinton did it and Carter got in the way. Carter's view, as he and his people were saying to the press right away, was that we damned near screwed it up by having the 82nd on the way and it was all his own doing. The truth is, it was both power and diplomacy. Without the 82nd Cedras never would have left; without Carter it would have been a fight. Similarly on North Korea, which was *the* most dangerous thing that happened in the four years.

In brief, as you know, the North Koreans were using the deterioration of the fuel rods as a way of pressuring us to make quick concessions. Some folks, normally sensible folks here in Washington, were saying that we should bomb the facility, which was an excellent idea except for the fallout, which probably would have been real, and the rockets above the DMZ [Demilitarized Zone], which could kill a large number of South Koreans and not an insignificant number of Americans. If we had bombed the nuclear facility, I'm convinced they would have responded. So we had been working at the Security Council to get in place sanctions, as a means to pressure them.

We did a lot of planning, both on what the sanctions would look like, integrated planning, and on necessary military operations if the North Koreans did what they said they would do if there were sanctions, which was to invade South Korea or turn Seoul into a sea of fire. Serious, serious stuff. I'm about to get to O.J. Simpson.

So, Gallucci brilliantly was negotiating what became the framework agreement. Carter announced—in Haiti we wanted him to go, in this case he was going—and we later discovered that he was going to Pyongyang with a CNN person. When he got there, he established a good rapport with Kim Il Sung and started trying to negotiate a deal. And was meanwhile trashing the sanctions, which in our view was the leverage that was getting the North Koreans to think seriously about this. We meanwhile had been quietly, but I'm sure the North Koreans knew about it, bringing in more military forces, stationing our ships off shore, getting ready for a war if it came, very carefully. So he was trashing the sanctions. And negotiating a deal that fell short of what we needed to (a) deal with the nuclear issue in substance, and (b) sell it on the Hill.

So there was a meeting in the Cabinet Room of all of us working on it, including my staff folks, Dan Poneman and others, and word came in that Carter was taking this position. It was clear that we had to try and pull him back and the way to pull him back, the only way to communicate with him because he was in Pyongyang, was over the telephone, which meant of course that we were talking not only to Carter but to the North Koreans. Which was good, because this was a way to get the message directly to them.

So somebody is going to have to call Carter and people looked around the room and everybody is scrunching down in their chair and I got chosen. So I called him and we had a rather direct conversation about what we were prepared to see in an agreement and what we weren't, and sanctions were definitely on the table, et cetera.

I'm told that after he hung up, because I had run the transition for him and had worked on various things in his administration, that after he hung up in his hotel room he turned to our DCM in Seoul who was acting as interpreter and shook his head in sorrow with some anger and said, "You know, that young man once worked for me." I liked the young man part. The suggestion that somehow you go on working for the former President rather than. . . .

Got the agreement. He then held press conference after press conference. Again the Clinton political people were furious. I guess this came before Haiti.

Destler: Yes, right.

Lake: So they start spinning. "This was all Clinton, Carter got in the way." Carter is announcing triumphantly his agreements and driving the Clinton people crazy. He got back over a weekend. Clinton was up in Camp David and so Carter wasn't going to get a chance to see him. Carter is furious at Christopher, with whom he'd been very close, because he knew that Chris hadn't been enthusiastic about his going at all. So I got the black spot again. I got to meet with Carter in my office and it was frosty. He was really angry at all of us. Maybe not quite so much at me, but at all of us, and especially that he felt Clinton was dissing him by not seeing him directly when he got back.

Then the leak-counter leak agony of recriminations started between the Carter people and the Clinton people again. And it was unfortunate because once again, there is no doubt in my mind that the North Koreans wouldn't have agreed if we weren't getting right to the brink of sanctions. I think we had the Chinese probably at least abstaining from the sanctions at the Security Council.

Destler: Would they have agreed if Carter hadn't come?

Lake: If Carter hadn't gone, I don't think they'd have agreed because he gave them a way out. So it was an unpleasant but extremely useful collaboration.

Knott: It's like good cop, bad cop.

Lake: Yes. And if you get your choice, try to be the good cop. It's a lot more fun.

Destler: Yes, you managed to be the bad cop twice.

Riley: Speaking of cops, you keep raising O.J.'s name.

Lake: During the crisis, this is a footnote to history, but one I kind of enjoy. This would have been in '94. When he did get into the white Bronco?

Riley: June.

Lake: This would have been about May, right there in '94. As I said, the President could be, was, still is, very generous. He knew that I loved sports. And so when Nolan Ryan or Cecil Fielder, whoever, was visiting the White House, he'd send him down to my office.

[redacted]

In May, I think, the President was on a "working vacation" in San Diego. To show that he was fully alert and working all the time, instead of briefing him on the phone about North Korea which I was doing constantly, the public affairs people thought it would be better if I was out there so the reporters could see that he was engaged. So I flew out to San Diego to talk to the President about Korea. The only way he could do it with his schedule was to have me drive in his limo with him out to a golf course where he was going to play golf that afternoon. Then I would get another car and drive back myself.

So we had about half an hour for a full discussion on Korea and where things stood and various other issues. Get out to the golf club and he goes into the club house, I get into my other car. I'm just getting into it when the Secret Service guy comes out and says, "The President wants to see you down in the pro shop." So I'm thinking to myself, *I've forgotten something,* or *We're about to have a new Korean policy*, or something, what's all this about. I run down to the pro shop and there is the President with his golfing partner and the President says, "I just thought you would want to meet O.J. Simpson."

So I thought, *Fine*. Simpson and I look at each other, and we'd done the obligatory sentences on the weather. He's trying to think of something to say and he says, "Why are you here?" And I said, "North Korea." I swear to God, Simpson then says, "This is a really dangerous crisis. They have a million men under arms just north of the 38th parallel. They have threatened Seoul. This is

too dangerous to contemplate military action, you need to negotiate this out. Be very careful." He was sort of Mother Theresa doing her impersonation of a former Buffalo Bills running back.

So while everybody else was watching the white Bronco thinking, *O.J. Simpson, axe murderer*, I'm thinking, *O.J. Simpson, peacemaker on North Korea who has somehow gotten himself in trouble*.

Riley: In a couple of instances, you've mentioned Dick Morris.

Lake: You want to get back to more mature reflections.

Riley: I don't know, I'm about to talk about Dick Morris. You tell me if that's more or less mature.

Lake: I'm about to get monosyllabic and Anglo-Saxon.

Riley: You've mentioned Morris's name on a couple of occasions and you've made a couple of references to the President's political people. Tell us a little bit about your sense about Morris's place in the White House, the President's political people, the role that they played in the foreign policy-making apparatus, if any, how they got the President's mind. Whether you feel like this was idiosyncratic to this President or is it something that's typical.

Lake: Oh no, not at all, not at all. Every President has them. The problem is, e.g. Carl Rove, that they are becoming more and more important as the nature—and don't start me on my rant here—but as Washington has shifted from being about—

Destler: Governance.

Lake: —government, to being about politics. Obviously, I sound naïve sometimes about all this. I, on the other hand have worked on various political campaigns, but there was a time, or maybe there wasn't. There was a cartoon once of somebody saying to another person, "Ah, Punch, it isn't what it used to be, but then it never was." Similarly, maybe I'm making up a halcyon past, but there was a time when the point of politics in a democracy, you have to have politics, was to debate policy and to be the fuel of democracy and government. Now I think more and more, I think it is almost indisputable, politics has become an end in itself. Substance is simply a device in the political wars. Even as the two parties, at least until very recently, disagree less and less. It is sad, it is just sad, as Ross Perot would say.

In any case, certainly, in truth, the Clinton White House was very political. Clinton is the greatest politician of our time. This is a partisan note, but I think one reason the Republicans were after him so much, like [Franklin] Roosevelt, was that he was one hell of a politician. And you have to be one hell of a politician if you're going to be a Democrat and get elected in this country. So they were very influential and a lot of their habits that they developed in the campaign about war room, strike back fast, were certainly carried over into the White House.

If it weren't for the fact that George Stephanopoulos and I were very close, I would have been in

serious conflict with them all the time. Because I do believe, first, that while politics does not now and never has stopped at the water's edge, nonetheless you ought to make some distinctions. And secondly, that in fact, the best politics on foreign policy is to have good policies, because no matter what you say for tomorrow's headline, if you fail you're going to be in deep trouble a month from now or two months from now.

They could never understand this. They would never agree to it. I think it was always, "What is today's story and what is tomorrow's story going to look like," and they were very, very good at that, but a total absence of strategic political thought, I think. And, as I learned more and more later, too much reliance on polls, et cetera.

Destler: But Morris thought of himself as thinking strategically.

Lake: But in political terms.

Destler: But thinking strategically.

Lake: No, he did. Especially in his early days, especially in the early days. Morris is a very smart guy, and he did think strategically. And he did, I still don't know exactly what it means, figure out triangulation, et cetera.

Destler: I don't either.

Lake: I first met him, and I was jarred by this. I think I wrote about it, actually.

Destler: I think it's in your book.

Lake: The night that the military got [Scott] O'Grady, Lt. O'Grady had been shot down over Bosnia.

Destler: Right.

Lake: It was a very late night and I was alone in the West Wing. A parenthesis here which is sort of interesting, tracking and calling the President and telling him how we were doing. Our military was loathe to give me real-time information about it because they knew and they're right, you don't want to tell the White House things that might turn out not to be true. And things generally aren't true the first report you get.

Destler: Make sure he's really out, too. You want to make sure he's really out.

Lake: Or they really have picked him up rather than it being rumored, et cetera. But NSA [National Security Agency] was tracking all the communications and reporting to the situation room. So I was actually getting from our intelligence services word on how the operation was going before Bill Owens, the deputy chair of the JCS, was even getting it.

So I was informing the military briefers and all this and then telling the President. And about one

in the morning or so, we'd gotten that he was out over the Adriatic, good news, called the President and said, "I'm going to smoke a cigar here in my office even though I'm not allowed to," because there is nobody else by then, anywhere. He said, "Come on up and smoke one out on the Truman balcony," which I did. I came up to the residence.

So I went up with my cigar. As I'm walking into the residence, this guy is leaving and as he leaves, the President introduces me very briefly, I barely caught his name. As he leaves, it was the only time I ever heard it, he says, "Good night, Bill." I heard the First Lady call him Bill. Nobody else, ever. Not because of him, but because of the office. And I thought to myself, *Who is this? What is this?* So it began on a hostile note. Then I heard he was coming on board.

I did go to the President and say, "I mustn't talk to him. I mustn't read his stuff," and what Morris could never—Morris took umbrage at all of this and denounced me in his memoirs for being naïve because I thought you could keep politics out of it. I don't think he understood just how bad it would have been, politically, for word to get out that I was talking to him.

But he was there and he was clearly spinning the President up, usefully so, I think on Bosnia, for example. I gather he claims credit now for solving the Bosnian problem, which is not quite true. But this was useful, and I think in the meeting when the President was out on the putting green, practicing, and Sandy Berger and Nancy Soderberg went out and were talking to him about something or other, I've forgotten where I was, and he just blew up about, "We have to do something more about Bosnia, fix it today," it was because Morris had spun him up, I'm sure, about the polls. Which is not to say that's why the President was doing it, because, as I said, I think Haiti had an impact, the pictures of Goradze, all those things.

Owen: How did the '94 elections play into this? For example, did you as National Security Advisor feel that this was a judgment on the job you were doing, on foreign policy as a whole?

Lake: No, not at all. Because the polls showed that he was doing very well in foreign policy compared to even the economy, everything else. It was horrible afterwards because the President went through an extended period of a very bad mood because of the outcome. It did lead to a shift in the Congress and made our lives much, much harder. But no, I didn't ever see it as a referendum on what we were doing.

On the subject of politics, there were people on my staff who got much closer to the political people than I would and I think they lived to regret it. I should have been even stronger in just telling them not to do it, rather than suggesting they not do it.

Destler: Sandy was closer later, anyway.

Lake: Yes.

Riley: You had mentioned that on Bosnia, his influence—

Lake: Although actually it was useful. Sandy did sit in on the meetings with the poll people and the political meetings with the President, at the President's request. I said, as I recall, that I

wished he wouldn't but I wasn't going to say no he couldn't. The President is the President. And it was useful to have Sandy there to inject some sense of reality with them. But I think it was still a mistake, because later it did make him vulnerable to charges, all of us vulnerable to charges, that we were too involved in all the nasty stuff going on politically.

Destler: The person who came in earlier to rescue the administration was David Gergen.

Lake: David is—I have great respect for him. David is no—I know Dick Morris, Dick Morris is not a friend of mine. And David Gergen is no Dick Morris. [*laughter*]

Yes, David appeared after the debacle. I think it was written about, he did in fact make a run at my job in suggesting that he kind of take over some of these issues. And I pushed back a little.

Destler: Yes.

Lake: He didn't take over those issues. And he did go to the State Department, not of my doing, and I think he's a good man. He had good advice. Once I'd pushed back a little and we'd established the nature of our relationship, we got along very well. Nice to meet with him from time to time. That didn't bother me because he was more on public presentation and he wasn't a political operative.

Destler: He was an interesting presentation guy who wasn't a highly partisan person, and Dick had some—

Lake: Yes, I had no idea whether he was Republican or Democrat. I always enjoyed, when I was up on the farm, watching [Mark] Shields and Gergen.

Destler: Right.

Lake: I think he's a sensible guy and was useful over at the State Department and we included him in Principals Meetings. I don't think he was a member of the Principals Committee so much as a participant, but that was useful.

Knott: Did you feel that you had the President's backing or that you were constantly fighting to keep the political operatives at bay?

Lake: No, I always felt the President was there. And as I said, more of the problem was with the schedulers, who were politically-oriented and who felt that foreign policy was a snare and a diversion. That was endless, endless argument. Because it would be first, that I couldn't go to every scheduling meeting. So Nancy or somebody would go and then there'd be long arguments about whether he had to see the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom while he was here or do something domestic. Then there would be the scheduling meeting with the President and when there was a real difference I'd have to go and make the case. As I said, in the end, we almost always won, not because of our advocacy, but because that's the way the world is. But it was a constant battle.

Riley: I want to get back in before we lead this too far and ask, you had suggested that on Bosnia, Morris's influence with the President had been favorable.

Lake: I think probably.

Riley: Are there any instances that you can recall in which you felt like Morris's influence was not so favorable in a foreign policy area?

Lake: I can't think of one. Because I never knew what he was doing. So I don't know what he was advising the President. I didn't want to know. I still don't know. I do know that he left rather dramatically.

Riley: Sort of.

Lake: His was probably an even more ungraceful dismount from public service than mine was.

Destler: I would say so.

Riley: Well-turned phrase.

Lake: We'll probably come to that. Anyway, after he left, he certainly expanded his role beyond any limits the facts can support, I think. I'm thinking particularly of a *Wall Street Journal* piece he wrote. I don't know if you saw it, on terrorism—about how the President had consistently and at the urging of Sandy Berger—I don't know why he is angrier at Berger than me about all this, but he seems to be still—had consistently, at the advice of Sandy Berger, turned down opportunity after opportunity to destroy all the terrorists or arrest [Osama] bin Laden. And that he, Dick Morris, was always arguing for being tougher on terrorism.

Destler: And he had a way to do it, huh?

Lake: He appeared on, what's her name, Greta?

Knott: Greta Van Susteren.

Lake: Yes, show. Actually, behind the scenes, she had called a friend of mine to say, "I've got this guy coming on. He's going to talk about terrorism, what should I ask him?" So got a few questions, or a little background talk. You don't pull her strings but just—

Riley: Sure.

Destler: Right.

Lake: So this was not one of the questions, but he then says, as he had in the article, Clinton at these meetings was saying, "No, I don't want to do this," when we could have snatched so-and-so or gotten so-and-so. Most of it is just—all of it is nonsense. Nobody in the Clinton administration or the Bush administration is sitting around saying, "I just can't be bothered to get

bin Laden today." It's nonsense. People are doing their best generally, which is sometimes not good enough, but still their best.

So she says to him, "So, you say you were in all these meetings?" And he says "Yes." And she says, "Did you have a security clearance?" He starts yelling at her, "No, I didn't have a security clearance." She says, "Then how were you at all these meetings that you've written about?" And he blows up. I think he practically walked off the set.

But the fact is, we had a lot of meetings on terrorism, he was at none of them. But now, in retrospect, *he* was the one who damned near saved us from 9/11. Do you get the sense I'm not fond of him? He said in his book—

Riley: You need to be a little more—

Lake: I should be more diplomatic. I'll try to recall my foreign service training. He said in his book something like, that when I walked by him in the corridor once, I did not look at him as if he was an evil rodent, or something. So I guess I wasn't disguising—he did come to symbolize for me the things that worry me about politics now. And partisanship.

Destler: When I was talking to people, not about foreign policy-making, but some economic policy-making people, there was a certain pattern you heard about Clinton. That was that he would be, I guess fairly notorious about speeches in the sense of rewriting things, cutting and pasting up until the end.

Lake: More than that.

Destler: But the other was on substance. That staff people would think they had structured the issue, but then the President would be schmoozing with another group, which was sort of his—it may have been more domestic policy.

Lake: I think it was more domestic policy.

Destler: Because there was a sense that it was very hard for them to get an anchor, because the issues would go into the—

Lake: Well, not just that he'd talk to somebody else. Because in general he would stick with it pretty much, because they were his decisions and the stakes were so high and this wasn't a seminar. But in the first year, year and a half or so, I kind of struggled because he is absolutely brilliant, but wasn't expressly linear in his logic. I can't describe it quite, it wasn't that he would suddenly have an insight from nowhere, and it wasn't that he was simply leaping ahead of us, it was that he would—maybe it's a lawyerly thing—he would come up with his view, almost as a hypothesis that you would then test.

In the first year or so, when we were still filling in the background on a lot of these issues as they were coming up—for me too, because I'd been out of the government—I'd be working it through and then would feel almost pedantic as he would leap out into something, sometimes the

same place but sometimes a little over.

I remember going out to the Vice President's residence over a weekend because he had worked with him going back farther, and saying basically, "Help. It's working out fine, but I will say at the end of one of our conversations, in a very literal way, 'Okay, here's what I'm going to do and here is what we need to do.' And I'll go off and work on the details, but I don't understand what's going on here. We're not communicating." And the Vice President actually said that I wasn't being linear enough. That rather than trying to do it his way, I needed to, in effect, lecture him more and fill in my own blanks, which I didn't want to do a lot because I don't think you lecture Presidents.

Destler: Does that mean that Gore did it himself?

Lake: Oh yes, sometimes, certainly on the environment. I walked in on a lunch once, they had their weekly lunch, I think on Thursdays. I had to go in and talk about something. I find this charming actually: the two of them were there at the table. Because as I said, Clinton said, "Come on in if you have something important," so I went in. And there they were, the two of them at the table, and there was a flip chart on global warming. The Vice President during lunch was using a flip chart to tell the President about global warming.

Destler: Wow.

Lake: Isn't that cool?

Destler: That is wonderful, yes. [laughing]

Owen: The soul of an academic there.

Lake: But anyway, after a year, year and a half, as he was on top of all the issues—and there is no way to learn about the issues better than working on them—then we used kind of a shorthand and I would get it. But it was a struggle for a year and a half, just because of my way—

Destler: He basically was applying his imagination to them.

Lake: His imagination or just his way of—it's not intuition, it's something else. It is brilliant but it's hard to track sometimes. So that could be a problem. But otherwise, he would stay, as far as I know, stay pretty much with his decisions.

Riley: Interesting.

Knott: I have some questions about Somalia. I realize we're jumping ahead.

Destler: Go ahead.

Lake: I want to talk about Bosnia. [*laughter*]

Riley: One or two other questions about relationships in the White House. Am I correct in remembering that you reported directly to the President and didn't have to go through the Chief of Staff?

Lake: Absolutely. However, I tried to make sure that the Chief of Staff was on every memo, that I would wander in and tell him what I was doing, et cetera, without ever giving up the principle that I could go directly to the President. So I never had to send things through the Chief of Staff. I never had to ask the Chief of Staff to get a meeting or something. But I did try always to work with the Chief of Staff in every possible way.

Destler: Did the Chiefs of Staff sit in on many of your meetings?

Lake: Yes. And I welcomed their presence at the morning brief. I would always invite him to Principals Meetings. I would ask them to talk about the domestic implications of things, without discussing the partisan politics.

Leon [Panetta] was a brilliant Chief of Staff. Best I've ever seen in any administration.

Riley: I want you to talk about that. But there was a change-over, [Thomas "Mack"] McLarty began in that position, and you were there to watch the transition from one to the next.

Lake: And Mack remains a good friend of mine.

Riley: But he took some hits for, I suppose, his inability to impose a sense of external discipline on a White House operation that wasn't noted for that trait. Can you talk a little bit about that, and then what Panetta was able to do that McLarty was not?

Lake: I think—and I hope you're going to be talking to Mack.

Riley: Yes. In fact, we've got him in about a month's time.

Lake: He's a wonderful person. Look, I had been in the foreign service, I had worked on the NSC staff, I'd run a transition, I'd worked in presidential campaigns, and I was struggling. You cannot, unless you have done it for a while certainly, be a President in a sure-footed way. And it's damn hard to be a National Security Advisor, even if you've seen it a lot, until you do it. I got better at it and I wasn't real good at it in the first year, I think in a number of respects, as I've been suggesting.

Mack had never worked in the government, one. Two, he is very smart but a genuinely nice guy. I mean, you can be a nice guy and be tough, but was a nice guy and had always made it by being a nice guy and being liked and assuming that therefore things would fall into place. And third, he was a friend of the President's, and therefore I think he had a hard time telling the President bad news or enforcing a discipline, which in a funny way has to include a President as well as the others. Because if the President is going to allow the younger folks running room to go around—and this sounds like a very small thing, but wearing blue jeans and conveying an aura of arrogant indiscipline—then how was Mack ever going to enforce it? So it didn't work out.

I'm sure Mack will be very honest on how it didn't work out. He didn't do a bad job, he just didn't get on top of the discipline question the way he might have and it cost him. Then he—almost unparalleled in my experience—when he was moved, rather than sucking his thumb or making it worse or whatever, found a new niche which he did wonderfully and it didn't seem to worry him too much. Whereas, many in Washington who live by their titles rather than by their jobs would have been crushed and made fools of themselves. He did it all with great dignity and remains very successful and dignified good guy, and good for him.

Owen: Why was Panetta so good?

Lake: He had a great political sense about how to deal with the Hill, et cetera, so he could carry water up there. He is just himself, a charming, tough, nice guy who was always a delight to work with. He knew how to stay close so that he would know what was going on and offered suggestions without ever making it an issue between him and me. Mack and I once did get into it, now that I think of it. Never did with Leon. He was extremely supportive. I tried to work on it by giving him a chance to see what his views were so that I could try to incorporate them in some ways. It was just great.

Riley: Did you notice much difference in the way the White House operated when Panetta came on?

Lake: Yes, Leon was prepared to crack whips. I think he was prepared to tell the President that he had to be more disciplined about this, that or the other thing, because he wasn't a friend. He'd earned his stripes at OMB [Office of Management and Budget] so the President respected him. In a way, Leon's relationship with the President was what I was hoping mine would be and was to some extent, I think, which was professional more than personal.

Riley: And his term outlasted your own? I'm trying to remember if there was another transition.

Lake: I think a little bit.

Destler: Close to, similar.

Lake: We went through some difficult tricky things together.

Riley: Steve, did you want to go back to Somalia?

Knott: Somalia.

Lake: No, actually it didn't. I think he left just before I ended up leaving. Because at the very end, when I pulled my nomination, I was talking to Erskine Bowles—maybe as his deputy and Leon was away, I can't remember—but it was pretty close. And Leon is one of those folks, even though we hardly have seen each other now for quite a while and we're not close personal friends—and this is my test for friendship—if Leon were to call me tonight, at midnight, and say, "At 1 a.m. I need you at the Greyhound bus station wearing just your underpants and I can't tell

you why, and you'll find out," I would do it.

Riley: You would tip us off if that were—

Lake: I chose the dark because it's an ugly sight. But what I'm saying is, this is not because he could order me to do it, but I trust him, completely.

Riley: Sure.

Lake: Though there is that property in Florida he sold me. [*laughter*]

Knott: The conventional wisdom back in '93 was that the Bush administration had begun this program to feed starving people in Somalia and that under the Clinton administration it changed into a kind of nation-building, to hunt down the war lords and so forth.

Lake: It did.

Knott: Could you just comment on that whole situation and the criticism that you expanded the scope of the mission without providing the necessary military backbone to succeed?

Lake: As I recall, when they decided to go into Somalia—and I would love to find out exactly why they did. I believe they checked with us. I can't remember now exactly, but I believe they did and we said fine, because people were starving and it was their watch and they knew what they were doing and all that.

One reason why I kept Dick Clarke on in charge of multilateral affairs on NSC staff was—who has since become the anti-terrorism czar and is now the cyber warfare czar, and I've said and written wonderful things about him and believe in him—was the brilliance of his briefings on what they were doing in Somalia. Those briefings did not include either what the specific mission was, or more importantly, what the exit strategy was. How long is this going to go on or how we get out or whatever.

But that was not my question anyway then. It should have been, but my question was, and Sandy Berger's question was—because the deputies mostly ran this, which does not mean it was their fault. It was a series of tactical decisions that had to be made, all of which we approved. My question was, "Okay, what do we do with them that can actually resolve the problem?" Because, and I would argue this again, it is not enough to go in, see that one harvest is collected and then get them out again and leave chaos and anarchy behind.

So, absolutely. You're goddamn right. It wasn't mission creep, it was mission creation. To try to figure out with the UN what to do with these soldiers so that we could try to leave behind us a sustainable position. I'd do it again. Not to say we didn't make any mistakes. There was then, as I recall it, the ambush of the Pakistani peacekeepers by [Mohammed Farah] Aidid's forces. The issue then became, if you do nothing and simply swallow this, then what happens to peacekeepers around the world?

Destler: Right.

Lake: And this is a larger argument, but you could argue, well, we shouldn't have peacekeepers around the world, in which case we'd better schedule three days of argument because I'm going to argue for a long, long time that we do. As we have now in Afghanistan. So we then went after Aidid. And Jon Howe, who I'd actually helped hire when he, as a young lieutenant, went to work for Henry Kissinger, and had known forever, really liked and admired, and who was then the deputy for Brent Scowcroft and who knew more about the Somalia mission than anyone. After we thought about who could run this from the UN side, I called, and he was happy living down in Florida, but I convinced him to go off to Somalia. I have no idea why he agreed. Maybe it has something to do with public service, which does him credit.

So off he went and he became the hawk of hawks. We've got to go and get Aidid. You could argue that that should have given us some Republican cover but of course it didn't. And we didn't try to have it do that. Then we went through a series of efforts to get Aidid. It clearly after a while was not going terribly well. I don't remember who initiated the idea of sending in the Delta Forces. I do remember the conversation with Colin Powell in which Colin said, "This is not great but we really have no choice. We've got to do this," and my agreeing and checking with the President and the President said, "Yes, we'll send them in," somewhat reluctantly, but still doing it.

We were never involved—I'm skipping ahead a little bit—in the decisions on whether to send tanks or whatever it was, and as a principle, the White House should not be deciding whether you do or you don't send tanks. That's a professional military deal. I remembered so vividly on this and some other issues, Lyndon Johnson choosing the targets in North Vietnam, that I would always argue you need to know what's going on, you need to make the big decisions, but do not fool around with the professional military's doing their job. Clinton certainly above all was in no position to do that.

Destler: Was there a proposal to have a British force do something?

Lake: I don't remember. But I can remember the military folks coming in to the Oval Office more than once, and once on the phone with the President, saying, "Okay, we're going to go after the spaghetti factory" or "here's what we're going to do," just so the President would know. I don't remember whether the October operation was briefed to him. He was in California. But in any case—again, no apologies. I think that we had to do something in response to the attack on the Pakistanis, and if we could have gotten Aidid, that would have been great.

The two mistakes were in personalizing it so much with Aidid. I had written a book which was partly about a mistake we'd made in personalizing it with [Augusto Cesar] Sandino. We probably should not now be personalizing it quite so much with Osama bin Laden, although *we* also did that with Osama bin Laden. He was, let me note, the only terrorist that we gave an acronym to. He was UBL, which is a sign that we were taking him very seriously, because in Washington the greatest sign of seriousness is to provide an acronym.

That was one mistake. But the more fundamental mistake was in not listening to the Bob

Oakleys, who were saying you need to see this more in a Somali political context, try to work this out through political dialogues, just get smarter rather than doing this strictly on—and damn it, this was the same mistake we used to make in Vietnam, and I should have known better, quicker—doing it through programs and doing it through military action, rather than doing it in a local political context that made sense.

We started to get that message by late August, I guess. I remember a meeting with Boutros Boutros-Ghali when the President was up there, must have been in September for the General Assembly speech, in which he was pressing Boutros-Ghali to look at this in a political way. I can't remember what the initiatives were, but they were things we had to do politically. Boutros-Ghali is sitting there, with his arms crossed, hunched down on the sofa and he was not liking it at all, but we should have damn well insisted with the UN that it not take quite the military approach that it was in Somalia. We raised it and you could argue therefore this is exculpatory, but it's not, because we could have raised it a lot harder and a lot earlier and I should have known better from experiences in Vietnam and other places. And we should know better now in Afghanistan. But there it is.

The clichés about what happened here in Washington are wrong. The cliché is that we thought, *Oh, my God, Americans have died, we've got to get the hell out of here*, and turned tail and ran. In fact, there was a firestorm on the Hill about this. I can remember a vehement argument in the Oval Office with the political people, who were saying, "Get out, get out, get out, this is a loser." I remember arguing, "Big mistake if we do because you're going to put a bulls-eye on every American around the world if you simply get out."

The President meeting with the congressional leadership the first time, as I said, just walking in and saying, "What do you think," which was a disaster. So they were all over him. But then the President decided yes, we're going to have to get out. Because especially Bobby Byrd and everybody, they were going to get us out if we didn't do so. But let's do it properly. So there were very intensive negotiations with the congressional leadership, bargaining back and forth, and primarily Bobby Byrd—I can't remember why he was—and then worked out a schedule, which was longer than they wanted and not quite as long as we wanted.

Then we built up our forces and then gradually drew them down while getting the Pakistanis out. Zinni did a great job of managing it. Dick Clarke once told me that that was about when we were scheduled to get out anyway. I have no memory of that and I'm not sure whether that's right or not, that was his memory. Then the—and now we're going to get into really painful subjects—then the cliché is that because of Somalia we did PDD 25 [Presidential Decision Directive], establishing the rules about peacekeeping, and then decided not to intervene militarily in Rwanda, even though there was a genocide, because we were so scared by Somalia.

There's *some*, but only some truth to that, at least for me. It was clear we needed a PDD 25. We needed PDD 25 not so we could circumscribe peacekeeping operations and not do them anymore, which is what some of my fellow peacekeepers now believe, but because if we were to do a peacekeeping mission, (a) it had to make sense on the merits, and (b) politically it was going to be necessary to be able to show that this was serious and that we'd asked the right questions, the kinds of questions Colin Powell had been asking about Bosnia.

Destler: And you didn't do it just anywhere.

Lake: You can't do it everywhere. I've been half-quoted at some press briefing in the White House. I began by saying, maybe this is a stupid sentence, that, "When I wake up in the morning, I want to save every child and solve every conflict, but you can't do that. Therefore you have to make choices." I've seen that sentence quoted sometimes saying, "I wake up in the morning, I want to save every child." There's this loony Wilsonian crazy, wants to intervene everywhere. And then "but you can't do everything" only quoted as, "You can't do everything" as proof we didn't want to do anything. Anyway, the point is, unless you ask the questions and work through the answers, then you're not going to be professional about it and you won't have a political basis for doing peacekeeping in the future.

So we did do PDD 25 and the impetus was Somalia because we hadn't asked the questions properly. When those questions were asked about Rwanda a lot of them came up zeros when our military was saying—and I've tried to go back, because this is truly painful, and I haven't found all the documents still, nobody has. This is real Rashomon.

I'm sure that our military was saying that if you do the 5,000 troops that I guess General [Romeo] Dallaire was asking for, you can probably secure Kigali, but you can't do the whole country. And we're not even sure you could do Kigali because it would have been a hostile insertion. So there was no easy answer.

The problem I think was not just that we, but everybody—in part because of Somalia, and in part because Rwanda is a long, long way away and logistics are difficult—the sad fact is the possibility of an American intervention never came up. It was so far beyond anybody's imagining. We were, I know from a memo, trying to figure out how we could get sufficient resources, just money from the Congress to do anything, much less send in American troops. I met constantly with NGOs [Non-Governmental Organizations] during this period, they never suggested it. As they agree, I've talked to them since.

Now, we, on Rwanda, did a number of things wrong. Should have raised it, should have looked at it, should have gone back to our intelligence people, saying, "Tell me more." There was a meeting in the early stages of it, when I went over to the Pentagon to the tank, to talk about what we would do about the Americans who were caught in Rwanda.

Destler: Right.

Lake: Which was our first responsibility. Not our last, but our first. And I've always been interested in Africa and I knew that Rwanda and Burundi were the places that the OAU [Organization of African Unity] maybe could do something for the first time seriously. And I remember at this meeting, towards the end of it, as we were thinking, *do we listen to the ambassador and let him lead a convoy out*, which he did and was right, or *do we send troops into Bujumbura, Burundi, and if we have to, do a NEO* [Noncombatant Evacuation Operation], *and get them out.*

Knott: Do a "NEO"?

Lake: A NEO, which is a—here we go again—it's a hostile insertion to go in and get Americans out of a hostage situation. If you're ever in trouble abroad, yell, "NEO!" and see what happens. The 101st will arrive and save you.

So towards the end of this meeting I said, "What is this about? Who is fighting whom over what? What's going on?" The DIA [Defense Intelligence Agency] folks there couldn't tell me. That's how well we were on top of what was going on in Rwanda. I should have said, "Wait a minute, people are dying, tell me more," and didn't. I should have said, "We need to think about an American intervention here," and I didn't. But there was no meeting at which we thought, *Should we go in or not?* and decided not to. Because again, it just never—and it's interesting in retrospect that after the war was over—and I do remember at some point saying to, I think it was Susan Rice, who was working in multilateral affairs at the time—"I think the best solution is for the patriotic front—" the RPA [Rwandese Patriotic Army]—

Destler: To win.

Lake: —"just to win." Because the UN is never going to be, based on Bosnia, assertive enough to get it done, which turned out to be true. But anyway, when it was over, then I personally ran the Goma operations, getting water in, et cetera. I'm very good at guilt, but I wasn't doing it out of guilt. It was just because there was a need there and I was interested. It wasn't until later, especially after I'd visited a churchyard there that fall and saw a couple of hundred bodies including pregnant women who had been raped and killed and everything, that I began to say to myself, *There should have been more things that we could do somehow*.

It just didn't seem possible. So it is not a case of Somalia so scarring us that we couldn't do what evidently was the right thing. It was worse in a way. It helped establish a context in which the questions didn't even arise. But again, I would assert, it included the Congress, the executive branch, the NGOs, the press, everybody. Go look and see.

Destler: Isn't this also pretty much just about the low point of the administration, as far as reputation—?

Lake: Late '93, early '94. You're right, but that never even occurred to us. I wish we'd at least thought about it. But had we gone up to the Hill and said, "Here are the folks who brought you Somalia," and gone to the Secretary of Defense and said, "Hey, you want a nice new one? Call Les Aspin and see how this goes."

Destler: And this UN guy in Rwanda says if you take 5,000 troops and spread them all around all the Rwanda, the Hutus will back up and you'll be fine.

Lake: Yeah, right. When the Belgians actually were saying to us, I learned later, according to Chris, were saying to us, "We want to get the hell out of there, give us some cover." The other point of this was that there *weren't* 5,000 UN troops to be found.

Riley: But it's striking in contrast on the domestic side with Haiti, because the civil rights community had sort of taken that as a cause for concern. I don't recall, my recollection is exactly as yours on this—

Lake: Absolutely.

Riley: There was nothing.

Lake: Great illustration.

Destler: They were doing Haiti—

Lake: Randall Robinson was in a hunger fast, not about Rwanda, but about Haiti. This was off-camera. And very painful, because it *was* a genocide. And another mistake, the State Department concluded that it would not use the "G" word, because if you say it's a genocide then you are legally obligated to do something about it. At some point I heard that that was what was going on. I didn't leap on it. I did then give a speech in which I used the "G" word without authorization and said "genocide," just because that's what it was. But that was much too late.

Knott: It is your retrospective judgment that the United States could have done something significant that would significantly inhibit genocide?

Lake: Yes. Sure, absolutely. We do have the 101st Airborne. It was within our capacity to do Rwanda. It would have been a lot harder than Haiti. There probably would have been a mess.

Knott: I guess I should say, given domestic politics as well—

Lake: I still have trouble—No, but it was inconceivable to me.

Destler: That we would have done it.

Lake: Technically we could have done something.

Knott: Right, okay. But politically it hadn't even come up.

Lake: Politically, metaphysically. I can't even say that it was a political no-go and that we concluded that we can't get this done politically. It was just inconceivable to anybody, including the NGOs, anybody, that we would do what subsequently now, I wish I at least had raised in a quixotic way, maybe just for the sake of my own conscience, and which the NGOs certainly should have been arguing for.

Owen: Isn't there just a larger thing? We don't as a normal thing go looking around the world and seeing where are the most people being killed so we can intervene.

Lake: There is an answer, actually.

Owen: Which is?

Lake: I will now rant for a moment. This is part of my peacekeeping speech, which I haven't done for six months or so. It's terrorism 24/7 now.

Destler: We'll get to terrorism later.

Lake: Let me give you the notes from my speech. There is no such thing as an humanitarian intervention. It's always a mix. And there is no such thing as a strictly realpolitik intervention. Unless either Attila the Hun or Mother Theresa is making policy, it is always going to be a mix of it. The mixes will differ among individuals and administrations. Kosovo was certainly a mix, and I suspect some of the folks pushing for an intervention in Kosovo were moved by the plight of the Kosovars, others because this is in the Balkans and a dagger at the heart of NATO, etc., etc., etc.

But let's suppose it's 50/50. Okay? Let me ask you, how many people died in Kosovo?

Knott: Not just Americans you're talking about.

Destler: Total people.

Knott: Does anybody really know?

Destler: Less than 10,000.

Lake: It ended up about 15,000. It looked on television like it was hundreds of thousands, but it was about 15,000 people died. Southern Sudan, 2 million people have died over the last decade. Now, give me the 50/50 humanitarian vs. interests ratio on Kosovo. Let's call it now, 90/10 on the Southern Sudan. Even with a 9:1 ratio, the people who died in the Sudan are 100 to 1 more than in Kosovo and yet we're not doing much more than send [John] Danforth there.

And there are a lot of reasons why, we don't need to go into them, but one of them is they look different. Another is we're not used to thinking about dealing with Africa in the same way that we deal with Europe, not just on racial grounds but in general. But there are 2 million people who died and there is slavery and they are going on dying and I'm not saying that we should invade, but we should do more.

Actually, another anecdote. I was concerned about this, one of the things we needed to do was get more attention to the Sudan problem so that we could begin to build some sort of base for being a little more aggressive about it. Not invade, but just get a little bit more aggressive. So Don Steinberg, who was at the time my press guy and then was the African guy, and then went off to be our very effective ambassador in Angola, came to me one day and said, "There's going to be a demonstration out in Lafayette Park about southern Sudan. It would be unusual, but you want to get attention for Sudan, so why don't you go out and meet with the demonstrators? We'll have some cameras there. They're okay, they're good folks. You're not going to be in bed with loonies," et cetera.

So I said fine. So, busy morning, barely read my briefing paper before I went out. I get there and it turns out that the demonstration is being led by a rather tall gentleman named Manute Bol, who was I think at the time or just had been the center for the Charlotte Hornets. Seven feet eight, I believe.

Destler: He played for the Bullets for a while.

Lake: He played for the Bullets before then; he played for Southern Connecticut in college. So it was great television of my animated conversation with Manute Bol's belt buckle. He's looking down to see who is this aging gentleman—it didn't work out terribly well.

Riley: I suppose I have a naïve question, and that is—

Lake: Why do I have my hand in my wallet now?

Riley: No, no, this is about whether the inattention to Africa was accentuated by the end of the cold war. During the cold war there was a kind of—

Lake: Absolutely.

Riley: So in effect you were confronting a different dynamic that wouldn't have been at issue before.

Lake: If I could have argued that Rwanda was about to go communist, we've got an interest. Africa is, in fact, more important now than it ever was during the cold war if you look at oil, exports, the potential for its support for terrorism which is very serious, extreme Islamic influences just south of the Sahara, in northern Nigeria. Very serious problems. But no cold war, less attention.

Riley: But that's the kind of thing that people in the future probably will pay a great deal of attention to. You're confronting a dynamic in which you're having to be a little bit improvisational. The kinds of signals that generations of policy makers have gotten accustomed to, to prompt them about reactions, or towards reaction, have changed.

Lake: Yes.

Riley: Is that something that you gave much attention to while you were in office?

Lake: Sure. Yes, yes. And, in my speech on democratic enlargement—

Destler: Talk about that a little bit.

Lake: The only article I've seen about it, that Douglas Brinkley did, was totally wrong as far as I can tell. I mean, it just doesn't click with my memory at all. Because he was emphasizing my saying, "We need a bumper sticker phrase," which I'm sure I said at some meeting, though I

never thought it was going to be "Democracy Now" on bumper stickers all over America. But I did think we needed to say what we thought and have a theme and a guiding principle and all that. I believe that still.

But Brinkley has written it was because of free enterprise, or free markets, and that this was all driven by economic considerations, which isn't true at all. We put in the free markets because they're linked and because it would help gain support for the idea, but it really was democracy. By which I don't mean just elections, but I mean civil society and rule of law, and all those things. Where was I?

Destler: Where it came from.

Knott: We had just asked about the end of the cold war and Africa and so forth.

Lake: And a lot of our discussions that went into that speech, and just constantly on how we could bring order. In the sense of if you said "Clinton foreign policy," what comes into your mind, out of this mess of Bosnias, and Somalias, and Haitis and NATO enlargements and all that.

We certainly were always looking for an organizing principle. It was explicitly because you didn't have one anymore, since all of the foreign policy debates from [Harry] Truman and [George] Kennan were about how do you pursue the policy of containment? Actually I got in the middle of it more, in trying to resolve the difference between, let's say, the Vances who were arguing what was called the regionalist perspective, which is to say you take the Africans seriously on their own merits and deal with regional issues in terms of regional realities, and the so-called globalists or the Brzezinskis, who were saying, "This is all about us and the Soviets," and "The SALT II [Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty] is buried in the sands of the Ogaden," et cetera.

I remember trying to argue, while I was certainly a regionalist, that a *regionalist* perspective was the best *globalist* policy. Because if you're competing for influence with the Africans, if they think you're treating them as pawns in the cold war, you're going to lose. Whereas if you can convince them that you're serious about their own problems, then you can do better against the Commies.

I remember arguing this with Vance on the plane once. In front of a group of reporters he yelled at me, "You sound just like Henry Kissinger," which is something I've not often been accused of. But those were the arguments. It's not just that there was an organizing principle for American policy, there was an organizing principle for our arguments.

Destler: Right.

Lake: So it's worse than you're saying. It's not just that we didn't have the answers in the early '90s, there wasn't even a coherent set of questions.

Riley: Can we hold on to that? Do you want to take a five minute break? John, you've got the

first question coming out of the break.

[BREAK]

Riley: John, you had a follow up.

Lake: We haven't talked about China or Ireland or—

Owen: I think this will be quick and you already know what it is. Because you mentioned things that don't come up, let me bring up another item that may well not have come up. That is, any consideration of democratic enlargement might be perceived, say in China or the Muslim/Islamist quarters, as Western imperialism or American imperialism and thereby disguised as something good, that sort of thing.

Lake: Actually, the sad thing is that it didn't get that much attention. I mean, I wish they had. I think the reason why I was being surveilled by some bad guys in the Middle East was the piece I wrote in Foreign Affairs about backlash states and dual containment, which is somewhat part of the same principle and I repeated it in the speech. But in terms of our promoting democracy, I think in their view, it was just one more bit of nattering America and they moved on. So I'm afraid there wasn't a backlash. I wish there had been. Then there would have been a dialogue. There wasn't that much backlash here. There was a lot of backlash here about NATO enlargement, democratic enlargement.

I was going to say, it's not really off-color. I'll pretend I just don't understand what it was about, but there was some considerable discussion about what do we call this thing. One view was "democratic expansion," but it struck me that that was—these are all "E" words—that expansion was almost too military.

Destler: More imperialistic, too.

Lake: I went over the speech with Newt Gingrich beforehand, who I enjoyed. Didn't completely agree with everything in the "Contract for America," but he is an interesting guy. We talked about ideas and I liked him. He suggested a way to talk about this was the "blue blob" and the "red blob," because he remembered when he was in school, you had the blue on the map and the red on the map, the bad guys, and that I ought to evoke the same thing. I can't remember, I tried to put it the speech. I can't remember whether I kept it in or not. I don't think so. I think it came out, because blue blob is not Churchillian.

Knott: Gingrichian.

Lake: But to talk about how "we in the democracies of the blue blob," "the blue blob this," see, it doesn't work.

Riley: Maybe with a British accent.

Lake: Anyway, so "expansion" was a little bit too much of the troops of the blue blob going over the border and fighting back the red blob. And the State Department phrase, "democratic engagement," is simply "engagement." Too passive. So Jeremy Rosner, who worked on the speech, and I decided on "democratic enlargement."

So the speech is done, ready to go. I had breakfast once a week with the other principals. No substitutes, just us. No agenda, we'll talk things through. The theory being that we wouldn't actually make decisions there if we didn't have an agenda. In fact, it became sort of a decision-making body, which was cheating, but. At one of these breakfasts I said, "Okay, I'm giving a speech on this NATO enlargement," and Madeleine actually blushed. I said, "Why are you reacting this way?" She said, "Well enlargement is, you know. . . ."

But it was too late to change it, and I decided the hell with it anyway. But I enjoyed, when I gave the speech, looking out in the audience to see if anybody—and just a few. And it wasn't specific to any particular gender. When I told the President this, he was sort of amused, I guess. He didn't change it. The President approved the speech. He never actually got into it very much, which disappointed me also.

Riley: He didn't get into the issue?

Lake: The speech or the theme. And I would occasionally have to remind him or his speech writers that we needed to include "democracy" as a strategic goal—for example, when he talked about the future of Europe, which was very much his concept, because *he* put this into his '94 speech that this is the first time in the history of Europe that we have a real opportunity to create an undivided Europe.

Owen: Whole and free.

Lake: No, that was the Bush phrase.

Owen: Oh, sorry.

Lake: Ours was a "peaceful, undivided and democratic Europe." You see, I kept putting in the "D" and sometimes they would forget it. Because whole and free is different from democratic.

Destler: Free means non-Communist?

Lake: Yes, I suppose.

Riley: Why do you think that didn't—

Lake: Catch on?

Riley: Or didn't engage. I'm curious about it not engaging the President. What does that tell us about his—

Lake: Couldn't tell you.

Riley: —thought process, about his personal interest in various parts of the globe?

Lake: He believed in it, I know. Okay, let me ask you another quiz. I'm really interested in your reaction. If I say to you, and give me quick reactions, if I say to you, "Clinton," what issue comes to mind? [pause] You see, there you are. And I think the problem is, I had the temerity to talk to him about this once or twice. I wish he had taken some issue and, to use the same image I used earlier, and nailed it to his mast and said, "Win or lose I'm going down with this," so it would have defined him later.

Riley: Health care actually came to my mind.

Lake: Walked away after one year. Still believed in it, strongly; believed in democracy strongly. But he couldn't hammer one thing.

Riley: While we're on this subject—

Lake: For reasons I described earlier and I wish today that he could become as great as ex-President as Carter by picking a couple of things and hammering them. But the world is too rich with opportunities and things to do and issues to seize on and everything.

Destler: He wants all the desserts.

Lake: He wants all the desserts, and those aren't the same as just desserts.

Riley: There were some references in some accounts late in his presidency and in the post-presidential period, that he occasionally, sort of jokingly made an aside to some aides at one point, saying, "Gosh, I miss the cold war." There is in another account that I've read—and I can't remember where, it may have been a Bob Woodward account—where he said that he felt like a President that was out of his time. Since that period, especially since 9/11, there's been these occasional references to Clinton feeling like he had never had a full opportunity as President to be as expansive in office as he wanted to be. Is that consistent with your understanding of Clinton?

Lake: Oh, absolutely. Not just of Bill Clinton but of the accidents of history. Without [Adolph] Hitler, tell me about Winston Churchill. He was the loony who brought us Gallipoli and who was nattering away. If [Neville] Chamberlain had been right and Churchill wrong, which was possible, I suppose, and Hitler had said, "Okay, the Sudetenland will do me, thank you very much," and gone back to being a minor German despot, who is Churchill? Who is Lincoln without [Robert E.] Lee? Who is George Bush without Osama bin Laden? Clinton never had that canvas to paint on.

Destler: Right.

Lake: That's how it works.

Riley: Did you have conversations with him about this? Casually?

Lake: No, not really, no. Because I find it distasteful to say, "Gee, wasn't it great when we were on the brink of annihilation with the Soviets? Cool." I think, in retrospect—and again, this didn't occur to me at the time and in the next four years, I don't know if they were worrying about it as much as we did at least in the first two years—that the theme wasn't democracy, it was globalization. Because that's where Clinton would keep talking about it. But he didn't take the time to think it through in clear enough terms to get a "shtick" on it. But he certainly, when you could see him waving his arms and just hear Clinton the professor, because he loves teaching. I mean, he just loves being a healer and a teacher, those are the two things you could see him really—he loved talking about the connection of economics and politics—

Destler: He had a beautiful understanding.

Lake: —and the lessening importance of borders. He understood this in a way that none of us did.

Destler: But he never put together a program. A whole bunch of things you could connect.

Lake: And it wasn't—I've got a cartoon in the attic somewhere I think, that Vance sent me, in which Lucy is staring off into space, or Charlie Brown is, and the other says after a few panels, "What are you doing?" The last panel is, "Just conceptualizing." I used to, when I was doing policy planning, go to Vance over and over again and say, "Carter doesn't do it, you don't do it, we've got to be out there saying, 'Here are the concepts behind our policy.'" And Carter and Vance just couldn't do it.

It's not that Clinton couldn't do it, because he certainly had the mind to and even the instinct to, but it just didn't happen. And I would wish in retrospect—I hadn't thought of this before—that rather than saying, "Democracy, that's nice, give the speech," and then occasionally mentioning it, he'd said, "Wait a minute. That's not here, let's talk about it." It would have been great. And work it through for half a day. I should have been pressing him then, saying, "So what do you mean by—" because there was no such word as "globalization" as I can recall then. "What is it, what's this idea here that I can see lighting up when you're talking freedom, democracy whatever, what the world is?" And maybe he'll someday give that speech.

He started to sometimes. Sandy did some good speeches for him on that, I think, towards the end. But that was eight years. You're contemplating, does that make sense to you?

Destler: That makes sense, yes. I think it does make sense and it's sad.

Lake: It is hardly a clarion call. GLOBALIZATION. You know, "To the barricades my friends, follow me into the era of globalization."

Owen: Helping those who were hurt, helping those who were left behind. There are a lot of

things that Clinton was very good at, in potential very good at.

Lake: "And the digital divide" and all that.

Owen: All that stuff, his education theme, but somehow it never happened, he never got it together.

Lake: And he could have related it to being the education President domestically, which is what I think he should have been.

Destler: I want to raise a process question that is also a hook for talking about a few issues we haven't talked about much. That was your role as a diplomat or a message carrier in various issues, which, as you pointed out earlier, grew. It was not what you came in with as your job. You thought that that was not the thing to do.

Lake: And it was the most fun I had.

Destler: I guess it started fairly early with Northern Ireland.

Lake: Actually it started with Bosnia.

Destler: It started with Bosnia?

Lake: And the trip in August.

Destler: You had Northern Ireland. In the end you went to China.

Lake: Went to China, did Northern Ireland, Haiti—

Destler: So use this as a platform and talk a little bit about Northern Ireland and China but also about the role and why you end up doing it. Does it compete with others? Does it compete and conflict with your role as the policy manager or does it basically work in?

Lake: Sure.

Destler: How does it work?

Lake: Sure. And I probably did it more than others have. I don't think Condi [Condoleezza Rice] is doing it. She may end up doing more.

Destler: She went to Moscow once, I guess, to negotiate.

Lake: She did. But not in the midst of a dispute. I would bet you anything she does more. I think this is in part because—well, in part because I wanted to. And frankly, would sometimes try to organize it so that my colleagues would ask me to do it so that the other colleagues wouldn't think that I was pushing it, which is how China happened, for example. It was in part because I

thought we should be more engaged on an issue than some of my colleagues did. The only way to stay engaged was to do it. Certainly, nobody else in the government, except people in the White House, thought we should be pursuing the policies we were on Northern Ireland.

Destler: Right. Some thought definitely we shouldn't.

Lake: Indeed. Yes. And part of it was just frankly because I enjoyed it. We get impatient and wanted to do it, which is the wrong reason, it was undisciplined. But the main reason is a structural one, which is the following.

The illusion, and I think it is an illusion, that you can do the sort of lead agency model of organizing government, in which State is going to take the lead on this, Treasury will take the lead on this, Defense will take the lead on this, doesn't work very well even in good times. Now I think it is impossible because with globalization and with the interconnection of issues, more and more agencies have more and more real equities involved in just about any policy.

I mean, take China. It's everything. Military, economic, human rights, diplomacy, proliferation, all of those things are huge pieces and have different agencies that want to play. Commerce, Treasury, all of them want to be involved. And they are simply not going to let any other agency play the lead role. We had to take China out of the State Department and put it into the Deputies.

Destler: China was a fair example where you initially gave it to the State Department.

Lake: Yes, and took it back and put in the White House, perfect illustration. There is one place that can make policy now, and that is the White House. I hope they allow [Thomas] Ridge to have soon the power that is equal to his responsibilities. And this is not peculiar to the United States.

So what this means is that the National Security Advisor, or the head of the economic council, whatever, simply has more influence—and has to recognize it, and should recognize it more quickly than I did in the first year—for structural reasons, as the adjudicators for the President in policy disputes and as the drivers of all the agencies, than they ever had before. That is simply a part of the reality of the modern world. One consequence of that is that the presidencies around the world are now increasingly more important than the foreign ministers. And the consequence of that is that if you want to move another government, you need to be going after the presidencies, or their equivalent.

Therefore, I inherited from Brent, a bank of telephones so I could pick up the phone and there is the Brit, or the French or the German counterpart—or we had the numbers of others at hand. I would talk to my Korean counterpart when we would have an economic dispute that had become political. Spent a lot of time with him doing stuff on Korea. Or my Japanese counterpart, though they came and went so quickly it was sometimes hard to keep track.

If you want to move them diplomatically, you have to be on the phone. I bet Condi is on the phone all the time, on Iraq or whatever. So I was constantly talking to them, even when I wasn't negotiating on things. Finally, other governments increasingly know that it is the White House

that can get things done or not get things done. So with Northern Ireland parties or whatever, or with the Chinese after a while, if it's the White House calling or talking, they're going to pay more attention.

Which is, as a former foreign service officer, something I bemoan, seriously, because the Secretary of State ought to be in charge of all this. As I have been saying, I am a Colin Powell fan, both personally and in terms of his policy views right now, and he has uphill slogging as we can see. Not because he is losing the arguments, but for structural reasons, I think. And because he is burdened by a State Department which for cultural reasons is averse to taking hard positions on things. So that's my answer.

Knott: Can I follow up specifically on Northern Ireland or—?

Lake: Whichever one.

Knott: The opening, or the communications that you had with Gerry Adams. There was, I'm sure, a considerable amount of dispute over whether you should even have any contact with him. Could you just sort of walk us through that?

Lake: Well, as I mentioned, during the campaign the President had taken a number of positions on Ireland that were not just beyond our current policy but inflammatory and in my view ill-advised. Not the first time a candidate has done that. I'm sure we should have—I don't even recall now what happened before he said these things in New York and whether he'd been briefed or not, I don't know. And Nancy Soderberg, who had worked for Kennedy and had great knowledge about Northern Ireland and all, I'm sure if she had known he was going to be meeting with this Irish-American group, she would have briefed him. And because she did care about this issue, she would have told him with great credibility, "Please don't say this." But he said it. So that helped get the British on full alert about what the crazies were going to do when they came in. So we had to walk the dog back in the first months, and we did, including saying no visa for Gerry Adams. There won't be a special envoy, et cetera.

At some point there was then a letter from some member of Congress, I can't remember who it was now. Actually I don't blame myself here, I blame Nancy (who rarely made mistakes) because I didn't know all the subtleties of the issue at the beginning. I knew almost nothing about it. The way letters are written is, the President gets a letter, it goes to the NSC staff. It is sent over to the State Department for a first draft. It comes back. The NSC staff turns the passive voice into the active voice, re-writes it a little, the President signs it, it goes back. On this one, some formulation that was absolutely the British, traditional State Department formulation on this issue slipped through. The President didn't know anything about it, he signed it, and all hell broke loose here, on the Hill, because we were clearly taking the British side in this. I can't even remember what the specific issue was.

So we're suddenly coming under pressure politically to do more on this. Meanwhile, I had gone up on the Hill to a meeting with a Congressional Irish lobby. There are two of them up there, one of the moderates including [Edward] Kennedy and others, who thought we should be more involved, but were moderate. Then the more hard-edged folks, including Richard Neal and Peter

King, who were great, and Joe Kennedy and others. I was feeling ill. I didn't know much about any of this stuff and they're all over me, "Live up to Clinton's pledges, we need to do the envoy," et cetera.

I remember that I said to them that I will look into it and that I think we should get more engaged; I don't know the issues well enough to be sure, but I pledge to you that I will seriously look at this. I remember Joe Kennedy, this was quite early, treated me the way members of Congress are used to treating administration people. Rather than talking to me, talking to the others, he'd come in late, talking to the others saying, "Oh, we've heard this before from administrations. He doesn't mean it, he's not going to do this."

I didn't feel well and I was naïve and didn't know how you are supposed to kowtow to members of Congress and I sort of made him look at me. He was sitting next to me, and I said, "I think you just called me a liar, and I'm not." And I can remember he looked at me as actually a human being and not an administration official. He called me to apologize, wrote me a letter. It was very interesting and as part of what I was saying earlier, if you do talk to them directly sometimes you can make progress. Anyway, our position was, don't give Adams a visa. Then he was invited over to give an address to a very conservative group in New York, I've forgotten their name now.

Destler: It's in your book I think.

Lake: Yes, with Kissinger on the Board of Directors, et cetera, which gave us some considerable cover. Nancy convinced me that we had, as I write in the book, a win-win situation here. Which is that if we brought him over, yes, all hell will break loose with the British and, as it turned out, with the State Department and the Justice Department. But if he then doesn't moderate, then we know. Then we can say, "Okay, we're not doing an envoy or any of these things because he's hopeless." Or, if he starts to moderate then we win because we can actually make some progress on Northern Ireland.

So we issued the visa and I won't go through all the details, but then there was a series of further visas for others who had had some involvement in terrorism. After all, Yasser Arafat had had involvement in terrorism and he'd been on the South Lawn. You're not going to get a settlement in Northern Ireland unless you can break Sinn Fein off from the hard liners in the IRA [Irish Republican Army], which we were arguing. And as the President used to say in another context, even the blind pig finds the acorn.

As it happens, we turned out to be right on this issue. Progress was made. So we'd gotten drawn into it. I talked to most of the leaders in the Northern Ireland parties once every week or two. I was very careful not just to talk to Gerry Adams, who is an engaging fellow, but to David Trimbull, even Ian Paisley, all of them, so that there was equal time. And the British and the Irish. We sometimes got, especially with the British—with my friends, and they were friends, who were my opposite numbers—into very difficult conversations, because it was a very emotional issue for them.

It amused me because one thing we would do is before they would meet, the Brits and Sinn Fein,

which they would do occasionally, we would talk to each of them. Making no promises, but knowing what each of them was going to say, saying, "Well I'll bet this might work if you said this," and "I'll bet that might work if you said that." So we'd have a pretty good fix on what the meeting would be like and we'd think that this is going to lead to a real breakthrough on issues like decommissioning. Then they'd get into the room and take one look at each other, and the talking points would go out the window, and fur would be flying, and they couldn't get past hundreds of years of history and the "curse of [Oliver] Cromwell."

I remember one conversation with one or the other, I can't remember if it was on the Irish side or the English side, when we were then talking about Bosnia. This guy, who had just had another blow up, said, "Why can't they (the Bosnians) get along? What's the matter with these people?" And then I'd think about my own feelings about Dallas Cowboy fans. You know, we're all prisoners of history. So we kept working it.

Then we used the President's trip to Northern Ireland, and first to London, as a way almost of blackmailing the Brits into—I've forgotten what the specific issue was—agreeing on something or other. And joking with my counterpart who knew damn well that we were blackmailing them and I'd say, "Yes, we are." I got a breakthrough on Air Force One on the way over there, got one of my cherished possessions—it was Bruce Lindsey's idea, it was very nice of him—they suddenly produced a bottle of champagne and the President gave me this bottle of champagne. There is a photograph of his handing it to me as we celebrated this breakthrough.

His trip was, I think, the high point of the first term. I've just never seen anything like it. There were these huge crowds who so wanted peace, and were so enjoying the cease fire and this taste of peace. They helped convince me, I still am optimistic, because the people are so far ahead of the parties that I don't think they can turn it back now. And George Mitchell, who did the real hard negotiating, should have had a Nobel Peace Prize.

Riley: How did his appointment come about?

Lake: We still couldn't name a special envoy, because the Brits would go up in smoke. For them it is like if they announced a special envoy to deal with a dispute between New Jersey and New York. Where should Yankee Stadium be? Well, here's Her Majesty's Representative to tell you it should be in New Jersey.

Owen: Or help us solve our civil rights problem.

Lake: Exactly. But clearly we needed somebody who could be working on this and I had known George back in the Muskie campaign, and just have inordinate admiration for him. In fact, supported him to be Secretary of State in the second term. Nothing about Madeline, but I just thought he would have been great.

So we named him the representative on *economic* issues in Northern Ireland, which is a pretty lame cover to get him involved, but what could they say, because we were doing economic development work there. Then it evolved in the second term and he was doing the job and more and more. The British, to their credit, after their initial heartburn over the visa and our getting so

involved, soon came to work with us very well. With occasional real disputes, but would always talk, and came to see that we could be useful in moving this along. And after all, they had a huge stake in seeing this resolved. This is their Bosnia, they don't enjoy this. So by the time George came in, I think they were more open to it than they would have been initially.

Knott: Was the Labour government more receptive than—?

Lake: Oh yes.

Knott: When did that change?

Lake: Very much so. And [Marjorie] Mo Mowlam, who was the First Secretary for Northern Ireland was great. But the one I admire most is John Major. Major was on a razor thin majority, in the end of one vote, and if the Unionists walked, his government fell. I can recall his, in effect, National Security Advisor telling me when I wanted him to do something or other that it was a bridge too far because, he said, "This is the kind of issue that governments fall over, so back off," and I did. I don't mean I was always pushing the Brits, because we were pushing Sinn Fein, God knows, very hard on a lot of stuff. Despite that, Major, again once we got over the original problems, always took it as far as he could within the realm of political possibility. I really admire him greatly.

He wrote me a letter when I left, the NSC got letters from various foreign leaders I worked with. Major wrote me a letter, obviously not written by him, but saying something like he'd always enjoyed working with me, even on those issues on which I had failed to overcome my natural reluctance to intervene in the internal affairs of other nations. [*laughter*] Which is classic, just classic.

Riley: Who did Mitchell report back to?

Lake: It was after I left. I'd say the White House. The State Department, especially the Justice Department, especially the FBI, fought this tooth and nail, all the way through. One reason is that British intelligence, who had been fighting the fight against the IRA—to their credit, because these are damned terrorists—believed that this talking to them and trying to apply diplomacy here was a snare and a delusion and some form of endorsing terrorism.

Since we don't spy on NATO allies, or at least shouldn't, we don't have any independent intelligence sources on Northern Ireland, which is frustrating. And therefore we're dependent on British intelligence, who were hyperbolic in their views of things. And therefore the FBI was hyperbolic in their views of things, and therefore were completely of the belief that we were selling out to terrorism in talking to these people.

Destler: For vast political gains, they would say.

Lake: You know, most decisions are 51-49 and I'm still not sure whether right or wrong. This, we were right, dammit. I mean, just look at the results. They were wrong. But they probably still don't believe it, and British intelligence certainly doesn't believe that and went after me

personally a few times in ways that I didn't particularly appreciate when I would catch them at it.

One of their leaders came over to meet with me and I think she wanted simply to see this devil first hand or something. And it's so funny because I really was fairly balanced, my father was English, I'm an Anglophile. So I pressed her very gently: "Can I see the evidence that Gerry Adams is still involved in terrorism or whatever it was?" And it was pathetic. I mean, either she didn't have it or wouldn't show it. The British ambassador, who was a friend, I looked over at one point and when she wasn't looking he rolled his eyes in embarrassment. But they were just very locked in on it and that became a reality for Major because if he went too far, then they would get him and then he was in trouble politically.

Riley: There were stories about Clinton working the crowds over there in Ireland. I didn't know whether you had any anecdotal information you wanted to add to the record about that, about his reception.

Lake: He was often moved, he was overwhelmed. He didn't have to work the crowds, it was overwhelming. The only thing I've ever seen, anything like it, was in Cité Soleil when Aristide went, got permission to go and shake hands with the crowd and he asked me to come with him. Usually when you're with a President in a situation like that, you can tell that two-thirds of it is, "This is a rock star," "I'm seeing a celebrity," "I'm in the presence of the God-head that comes with this title," whatever, and a third of it is personal affection, depending on the President and all. In Cité Soleil it was just adulation, period. And in Ireland it was as close as I've ever seen it with any President, ever. And he bathed in it and we were all very moved by it.

I've said this to Americans, and I don't use this because it sounds like a slur against my Irish ancestors on my mother's side, but I remember talking to a constable—and there's more than one—who was very excited because for the first time, because of the cease fire, he could go into the local pub and have a pint now without fear of being killed by the Catholics, on the other side.

And just story after story when you would talk to people in the crowds. I remember sitting on the stand, there was a big Christmas tree and the tree was green and the ornaments were orange and just thinking about my parents who, when they would argue, it always came back to Cromwell.

Destler: Probably didn't enjoy China that much.

Lake: We miscalculated.

Destler: You mean on the visa? On what?

Lake: No, on China policy. An important part of the '92 campaign, in showing that we were for democracy and against dictatorships, was going after China. This was in the wake of Tiananmen Square. The Bush administration was completely isolated, at least initially, on its policy with overwhelming majorities in the Congress opposing their policy. And we believed what we were saying. We did get a little over-the-top sometimes in talking about "the butchers of Beijing," a phrase that I didn't write but certainly approved, and we did think that we could apply pressure on the Chinese in a way that would force them, in their own calculations of their own interest, to

make some concessions on human rights issues, and we were wrong.

We were wrong because we didn't understand Chinese history. And I'm leaping forward here, but it is almost palpable when you talk to Chinese officials, or just Chinese generally. It's as if they were alive during the unequal treaties and they are not going to let foreigners tell them what to do on their domestic problems. It has nothing to do with Communism, freedom, any of these issues. We don't understand since we're an ahistorical people, which is our greatest strength but also our weakness, that history is just alive for them. So we weren't going to succeed in this and I didn't understand that at the time.

So we linked MFN [Most Favored Nation status], as we had called it, to human rights performance. This was without the enthusiastic support of the National Economic Council or the Commerce Department, because it was costing us. It became clear after a year that it wasn't working. We weren't getting anywhere in particular. So then we tried something different, which was that Bob Rubin and I, and I guess Win [Winston] Lord was there—and by the way, Win was great on this throughout. You can remind me to come back to that.

Destler: Okay, good.

Lake: Met with a Chinese representative at the Nixon funeral very secretly to suggest to him that we needed to, in our mutual interest, work out some kind of deal and that we should send our representative over. We did send Mike Armacost over then quietly to talk to them and to try to work something out so that we could—

Destler: This is before June '94 or afterward?

Owen: Before we backed off—?

Knott: The Nixon funeral was before.

Lake: Before. And try to work out a deal. And the bottom line was that the Chinese weren't dealing, for reasons I've just described. It's not because they were in a stronger bargaining position, because the President used to say, at that time we were running about a $40 billion dollar a year trade deficit, which meant they had a bigger stake in our economic relationship than we did. Since they were taking advantage of us, in effect. But they weren't dealing.

So we thought of a new approach, which was then in June. The statute had to be—you had to renew this thing once a year, in June. We tried a new approach and it was a—I almost said "pathetic," but it wasn't, because we sold it actually. An approach which we portrayed as being a more effective way of promoting human rights, which was to say that we will support MFN again, but we're going to do other practical things such as getting American businesses to push harder on promoting human rights through their activities, and we're going to go after military industries, we're going to use rifles, not shotguns, et cetera.

I remember, to my regret, a meeting with some of the Chinese human rights activists here in the United States. And actually convincing them, because I believed it at the time, that this was a

better policy than what we were trying before. I'm not saying that the other policy worked, because it wasn't. So they applauded it and that helped with the reporters. I do remember afterwards thinking, *My God I hope this works*, because I agree with these people and their approach.

And that didn't work. Then we let it sort of slide through a good chunk of '95 with State Department making démarches, and I guess there was a bad Christopher visit.

Destler: That was in '94 I think, actually.

Lake: Was that in '94?

Destler: Yes, that was—

Lake: And then Commerce and Treasury smelled blood in the water.

Destler: Right.

Lake: And so we had to have a meeting in the Roosevelt Room at which I wholeheartedly endorsed Christopher's stewardship of this policy and his efforts, "And yes, the President—" of course checked with the President first— "does think human rights has got to be on the agenda." It got pretty nasty. I mean, in general**,** not just on this issue but on arms export issues also—they at Treasury used to refer to Lynn Davis, who was in charge of sanctions, as the "Under Secretary for the Destruction of the American Economy." [*laughter*] Since State didn't have enough clout to manage it, we took it from Lynn and gave it to Sandy Berger and put in the Deputies, so that we could try to organize it all.

But then through the remainder of '94 and '95 not much happened. Things were getting worse with Taiwan and the mainland. By the fall of '95, intelligence reports that they were getting ready to lob, maybe test missiles, build-up, were starting to get worse, and I got more involved. It came in part because I used to have Thursday morning breakfasts maybe once a month with outside experts, on terrorism, on China, on Africa, or whatever. We had a meeting on China, that would have been maybe in the summer of '95 or something.

Riley: Non-governmental experts?

Lake: Yes, non-governmental experts. On Saturday mornings, especially when Joe Nye was at the NIC [National Intelligence Council], I used to have Blue Sky sessions in which we would just get people who were interested, Policy Planning at State, the NIC, and we'd just sit around and talk about things. Somebody from the NIC would present something.

Owen: National Intelligence Council—

Lake: Yes, at the CIA. We would just talk about things and that began to frighten people because again these were supposed to be informal, non-policy meetings but obviously they were leading in one or another policy direction.

Mike Oxenberg after one of the meetings with *outside* experts, as we were walking up out of the situation room, said he wanted to talk to me. He took me into Nancy Soderberg's office down in the basement and reamed me. Said our policy is drifting and the Chinese don't take it seriously unless it's the White House involved and I had personally to get more involved and there was precedent for this going back to Brzezinski when Mike had done it, and Kissinger before that, and that I had to overcome my natural reluctance to do diplomacy and get more involved. So I said, "Oh," and started talking to others.

There was then a period of probably a month or two in which I didn't get more involved because this one would have seemed to be getting onto Chris's turf. I remember Strobe then—Strobe Talbott, who was by then Chris's deputy—would talk to Chris about it and was encouraging me to get more involved, but to be careful, let him work it through with Chris. It's not that Chris was opposing it, he is a gentleman and we always got along, but he knew this was going to be difficult for him.

Then I can't remember exactly how we came up with the notion of, "Okay, we need to have a different kind of conversation with the Chinese."

Owen: Does this follow the furor over the visa? The Taiwanese visa?

Lake: Oh probably, yes, it does. I've gone to Taiwan a number of times and I'm a Taiwan-simp, but they really did snooker us on that visit. But we needed a different kind of dialogue with Beijing and so we thought, *We need a strategic dialogue*, and we need to find a way to get them somehow to go beyond reading their talking points at these sterile meetings and really engage them on how we each look at the world.

Liu Huaqiu, who wasn't the national security advisor but was as close to one as they have and liked to portray himself that way, and a very hard liner, seemed to be the right person to do it with. So we invited him to come over. He came over first for a meeting with Chris and Bill Perry and me, to make it clear that this was a team effort—and then a dinner in Chris's dining room. Then the next day, or maybe more than a day, he and I went out to the [Averell and Pamela] Harriman estate and we just sat down and talked about things with our teams.

The great thing about Liu Huaqiu was that he memorized his talking points rather than read them, which was a step forward. We had very good discussions about where we stood, our reasoning behind this issue, that issue. I began and just made it up on impulse—and the State Department note taker obviously almost broke his pencil—by saying to him, "Look, I know that you are close to Li Peng and you have a reputation for being a hard liner. I know that you think I'm a human rights, democracy fanatic. So if *we* can talk things through, there's hope. And let me say at the beginning, we're going to talk about human rights at some point here, but I'm under no illusion that I'm going to convince you. You're a Marxist, but as a Marxist," these are not the exact words, "you also know about the forces of history. And the fact is, I don't have to convince you because you're on the wrong side of history and China is going to become a democracy." And he loved it. He said, "Fine. I'm not going to convince you to Marxism, you're wrong," blah, blah, blah, we got that out of the way. The day he arrived was the first day that

they shot, actually shot missiles at Taiwan.

Destler: Yes.

Lake: When the news came in, he looked shocked. I think he knew they were going to do it at some point, but they forgot to tell him that they were going to do it while he was meeting with us. We had had some meetings beforehand and I remember going to the staff and asking whether we had ever said to the Chinese that if they were to attack Taiwan, it would have "grave consequences," which in diplo-speak means things go bang. And we never had. We agreed that we would say that and the President agreed, so we made that point with them. We had a very clear and stiff dinner about the crisis and laid down these markers and then went down to Virginia and had very good meetings.

I then went to China, got the traditional talking points beforehand. Neither I nor Bob Suettinger on my staff liked them particularly. They came up from the bureaucracy. So I held a series of meetings with our analysts from the CIA about how the Chinese look at the world. Then on the plane wrote what I referred to earlier as the "strat-rap," of, "Okay, here's how it looks to you," so at least they could either nod or not nod. "Here's how it looks to us. Here's why you have to, why the world—" I didn't put it this way, but what we were trying to get across to them is that in effect there are two boards now. There is the globalization board, although I don't think we called it that, even by '96. And there is the realpolitik board and we've got to play on both at the same time. It is not one or the other.

They were then and still are playing on a 19th century realpolitik board, against "the hegemon," and so the object was to try to, if not convince them, at least to help lead them through what are some of the real issues out there and why we have a symmetry of interests in dealing with economic issues. Then do some business on the terms for accession to the WTO [World Trade Organization], but mostly it was 30,000-foot high altitude discussions of strategy. Their game was to keep coming back to, as I said, to balances of power, realpolitik, which we had to talk about, and to drive wedges between us and the Europeans. "Well, you're saying this but the Europeans are saying that," which got tiresome.

Anyway, I spent two or three days there I guess, meeting with Liu, as I said; the foreign minister; with the prime minister, Li Peng, very unpleasant; with the PLA, the army, which is very important, because they are so insular, they need to be broken out of it. We established the strategic dialogue which then went on with Sandy and others. And I think it helped, because speaking to them very firmly about Taiwan was important. I think in a way they welcomed the two aircraft carriers we sent in the sense that we were talking their language, if you see what I mean. This is something they understood. This is the board they play on.

We still needed ambiguity, in the sense that we needed to make it *clear* that if they attacked Taiwan something very, very bad was going to happen, but we shouldn't tell them exactly *what*. Because that (a) locks us in, reduces our flexibility, practically; (b) allows them to plan for the "what"; and (c) then misses the other part of the ambiguity, which is we have to convince the folks on Taiwan not to do something crazy—i.e. declare independence—that could precipitate the crisis. Which, parenthetically, I don't believe—and I argue this with my friends on Taiwan—

they need to do, because in effect they are independent and time is on their side. I think China will become a democracy before Taiwan is so weak that it can be overrun or we lose our commitment to them.

Riley: Was China an issue that it was easy to get the President engaged in?

Lake: It was easy to get him engaged. He was very good at adding subtleties and massaging things, again because this is the third and fourth year, I mean, by then he knew the issue very well. He's formidably intelligent and he was really very good at it.

Owen: Let me ask you about the two boards. You triggered my thinking on Clinton who—

Lake: The two bores?

Owen: The two boards.

Lake: Who was the other one?

Owen: Oh no, no. The realpolitik and the globalization. Sounds like the President took more naturally to and in fact was an early kind of innovative thinker on the globalization board. The Chinese were—

Lake: And didn't care so much for the realpolitik.

Owen: Well, that's what I was going to ask you. Talk about that a little bit if you would. Did that affect his thinking on China, on Russia? I don't know. Is there anything to the conceptual framework that I'm hearing you describe, that he operated under?

Lake: Well, I think he changed over time on this. It's not that he shied away from the use of force, but, and I agreed with him, he was very much a last-resort sort of person. And as I said, he changed my talking points around on Bosnia, et cetera. He never was going to posture as a hawk. And I honored him for that, because I can't stand the people in Washington who—I don't want to be too personal about this—but I've noticed are often, in personal terms, unlikely ever to have played football. If you see what I mean. Who relish appearing tougher than anybody else on sending Americans off to risk their own lives and to slaughter others.

Riley: Chicken hawks.

Lake: Exactly. And Clinton never postured that way. Let me back up for a moment, and I won't wave my arms around about this, but one of the first articles I wrote after leaving the White House in '70 was something that I wrote with Roger Morris called, "The Human Reality of Realpolitik." Essentially arguing that for psychological reasons, when you're in this racket and are making decisions in which somebody is going to get killed, and the real question is who, and how many and for what—unless you are a homicidal maniac, you're not going to want to feel bad about killing somebody, right? And therefore you take refuge in abstractions, in anodyne language, and in finding ways to blind yourself from the reality of what you're actually doing.

And I'd grown up, my first ten years of my career were mostly on Vietnam, watching people do this and never explicitly saying, "Okay, so many Americans are going to die, so many Indochinese are going to die, or whatever." It's bad form. If you raise that at a meeting, you're being wimpy because you're worrying too much about whether somebody is going to die or not.

My argument was then, and I believe it now, that it's not wimpy, it's actually tougher to take a clear look at the human consequences of your decisions, and important (a) because that's what's at stake and (b) if you don't, then you're out of touch with reality, right? And, okay, I will wave my arms just a little bit. The obscenity was that in Vietnam, we were asking 22-year-old second lieutenants to decide who would walk point, and look that guy in the face and say, in effect, "Your chances of dying tomorrow for the sake of the platoon, or the squad, are better than anybody else," while in Washington senior officials were talking about "Rolling Thunders," and arguing for more B-52s and less F-104/5 strikes, saying, "We need more tympani and less brass in the bombing strike." Or "terminate with extreme prejudice," all a way of shielding decent men and women, whom I knew well, from the consequences of their own decisions. Right? If you're going to ask a second lieutenant to be clear about what you're doing, then you can ask the President to be clear about it, or the Secretary of Defense. End of arm-waving lecture.

But in the discussions of the strike against Baghdad, after we were able to convince a doubting Justice Department that there was something worth acting over here, we had to choose the targets. Clinton said, "Okay, I want to know who is going to die. What's the collateral damage going to be, how many will be killed?" Then had, I think not the wimpiness but the guts, to say, "Okay, let's do it after midnight because we're going to kill some cleaning crews but at least we won't kill innocents as much as we would have otherwise. And we can still make the point." I remember afterwards saying to him, "That was gutsy, I think. I admire the way you approach that," because it would have—especially given his position, as you recall, with the draft and everything—it would have been easier for him to posture and say, "Kill them all, let God sort them out," and do his famous George Patton impersonation.

What interests me is that years later he still remembered the name of the woman who was killed across the street from the ministry. Which impresses me. And again, it didn't mean he wouldn't pull the trigger, because he did on Haiti, and he would on Somalia, whether it was ill-advised or not, but he was hesitant about it. I don't think he liked the power deal. But he would do it and, as I said, you've got to do it if you're going to get diplomatic solutions. Sometimes you've got to bomb them, or threaten to.

The one sin—it's now late and I'm verging into lectures—but I think they did violate it once or twice later on, in Kosovo. In fact Sandy once told me that this is what he remembered, and this is what I learned—never bluff. The way you think about these things is decide first how far you're prepared to go, and on Kosovo it should have been, "Yes, I am prepared to use ground troops," and then use that to get your diplomatic settlement. Rather than be sort of playing around and signaling the way we did when we flew planes up and down along the Kosovo border without having decided whether we were actually going to bomb them or not. You see what I'm saying?

Destler: Yes.

Lake: And the result is your diplomatic position is weaker and therefore you don't save the lives in the end. But if you, the future graduate student, want to get into the racket, be prepared to think explicitly about who you're going to kill for the sake of saving other lives.

There was an incident, right at the end before we hit Baghdad, where I walked out onto the Chief of Staff's little garden outside his office. This was early in '93, obviously. A number of the political folks were sitting there and they were worried that if we did this, that there would be civilian casualties, that they would be on CNN and that we were going to be hit from the left for having done this.

I remember arguing that I agreed with them that you shouldn't kill innocent civilians, but that—I remember this vividly—that the problem was that there was no doubt in my mind that if we hit the ministry, we would deter future terrorist actions by the Iraqis. The problem was, we would see on television the bodies of those we kill now and we would never see the faces or know those whose lives we saved later. But suck it up and you've got to do it. You can't go back now. This is literally hours before we launched the Tomahawks.

Destler: That's true of any use of force in a preventive sense.

Owen: Deterrence can't be proved.

Lake: Yes. And the President said, "Absolutely," and overruled them and we went for them.

Destler: You want to take up another subject—?

Lake: And the rest is history. We so pound Saddam's intelligence services that they rose in rebellion against him, overthrew Saddam in 1995 and—

Multiple: And we all lived happily ever after.

Riley: How's your voice holding out, okay?

Lake: Okay.

Destler: One subject we said we were going to raise is terrorism. Want to talk about that?

Knott: There is also the normalization of relations with Vietnam, want to hold that?

Riley: Hold that for the follow-up?

Lake: Well, if we get it all done, the next time we get together we could simply drink and have a good time and go to a baseball game.

Knott: That sounds good.

Riley: Unfortunately, there's not even single-A ball in Charlottesville.

Lake: There's not even single-A ball in Baltimore. [*laughter*] He said bitterly—although I'm a Red Sox fan.

Knott: These are good times. All right, terrorism. Mac?

Destler: We think of the terrorism thing as arising recently, but it was certainly a present issue in the first Clinton term. Obviously the Trade Center bombing took place early then. By 1996, if I remember correctly, Dick Clarke was coordinating, or helping coordinate security at the Atlanta Olympics. Would you talk just a little bit about that issue, how it came—?

Lake: And a whole lot happened in between.

Destler: Yes, okay.

Lake: Maybe find an anecdote about Ramsi Yousef. The plot to blow up all the American carriers flying over the Pacific, which I remember Dick Clarke reporting to me, going to the President, saying we have to ground all the flights. It sounds like not a big deal, but in fact it's a pretty big deal.

Riley: Sure.

Lake: So we needed to ground flights and we called the FAA [Federal Aviation Administration]. It was a Saturday morning and said, "Ground them," and they said okay. Then it occurred to us that they worked for the Department of Transportation and we really ought to involve the Secretary of Transportation. We were trying to act very quickly. So I told Wilma [Hall], my wonderful assistant, to get the Secretary of Transportation. Called, no answer. Didn't have a home number. So I said, "Okay, well call the operations center there." There isn't one. "Well, call anybody."

So finally, she came into my office, with Dick Clarke who was there, and we got Washington telephone books. We started trying to call the guards, any office at random in the phone book. Nobody, just zero, zippo. So we went ahead without the Department of Transportation. What amused me is seeing the movie *The Rock*—isn't it called *The Rock*, about the terrorist incident on Alcatraz? When our frogmen are swimming underneath the water to get on to the Rock and they have instant communications and everybody, probably the President is listening to this, and everybody is wired to everybody. This ain't the American government. We were unable, ever, to put in place a system in which the members of the Principals Committee could instantly communicate with each other.

My first phone call to the Secretary of Defense, I called the White House operator and said, "Get me Les Aspin," and the operator said, "Who?" I said, "The Secretary of Defense." And I swear to God, the White House operator, this vaunted system, said, "Which Secretary of Defense?" I said, "For God's sake, we only have one Secretary of Defense."

Owen: Who is now in office.

Lake: And we could never get wired in this life—so it is not like the movies. Anyway, so there were a series of these things.

Riley: The World Trade Center bombing being the first.

Lake: Being the first. But there was the assassination of the CIA people on 1/23, there were various plots, some were virtually rolled up, in fact. We were certainly aware of all this, as I said, since I spent time in a safe house and was being surveilled and all that, which I took a little personally but not too much.

Again, I remember holding meetings with Brian Jenkins and others at Thursday morning breakfasts about the nature of terrorism. I'm still using the things that he said then in my speeches, and wrote in my book about what I call "existential terrorists." It is a real shift from terrorism with a clear political purpose to terrorism simply for the sake of lashing out and killing, which is much more difficult to deal with because they're anonymous, they're not as well-organized, they can work in smaller cells or individually, like [Ted] Kaczynski.

Let me quickly say, did we do everything we could? No. Are there other things I wish we had done at the time? Absolutely. It is one of the reasons I wrote my book, calling for our doing more on these issues. At the same time, we did start to engage on this in a way that I think no administration had before. Of course the threat was greater, and I became, thanks to Dick Clarke, largely, very concerned about what I kept calling the nexus, i.e., the ways in which terrorism and weapons of mass destruction can come together. And we still haven't seen it. The World Trade Center was not that. And the anthrax was not that. It was some pathetic twit more likely than a real terrorist attack, and it is going to happen.

Riley: Yes.

Lake: And good luck to all of us. I used to say at Principals Meetings, "We can't prevent this." I remember saying this more than once, "We can't prevent it, but when it happens in the future, we ought to look back on this period and say we did all we could." Because that's all we can do. I remember at a meeting saying on this specific issue to the FBI and CIA people, "Do you have all the money you need?" And I remember this vividly because it was the only time I can recall I ever heard bureaucrats say, "Yes, we don't need any more money." But we should have spent more capital on reorganizing the government in ways to deal with this that we need to be doing now, and should have spent even more time on trying to organize something.

Osama bin Laden. As I said, he was the only one that had an acronym. It was at one of our Principals Committee meetings that we established a special cell to start tracking him. At the time, up through when I was there, through '96 and in early '97, which is before we knew of the formation of al Qaida, and before the attacks on the embassies, which were in '98 I believe, we knew him as a financier of terrorism more than as a leader of terrorism, if you see what I mean. But it was serious enough so that we were trying to get on his case.

Not to be defensive about it at all, but let me be defensive here for a minute. There are two

allegations from that period about this. One is—no, one is a later period. Is it? Yes, one is later. Let me deal with the later one that wasn't on my watch and that is the allegation that the Sudanese kept trying to turn over documents to us that we refused because we didn't like the Sudanese. Let me use the word "bullshit" twice in one day. There is no evidence for this.

I think this is Sudanese intelligence putting this out, post-9/11, as a way of showing that they're anti-terrorist. And it just doesn't make sense. We had repeated visitors to Khartoum. They could have turned them over. Our ambassador there, Tim Carney, who is making these allegations, and who they knew was sympathetic, was our ambassador to the Sudan, they could have given them to Tim Carney and they never did. And there is no evidence that they approached the FBI and the FBI was told by the State Department don't talk to these lowlifes. So, that's crazy.

The other one, and it occurred the day, I'm told, that I was down in Virginia talking to Liu Huaqiu, so I don't have a clear memory of it myself, but I have talked to people who were working on it. Was that when the Sudanese came to us and said, "Okay, we'll get rid of Osama Bin Laden, expel him," which we had been pushing them to do, to disrupt him, that they asked us to take him in. Now again, I don't have a clear memory of this. The argument now is that if that had happened, he never would have gone to Afghanistan and no 9/11. Here I'm being defensive, but that's what you do when there's an offensive charge.

In retrospect the problem was this. First of all, we did try to get the Saudis to take him. We didn't press it real hard because they were never going to take him, as was clear. We had other things we were trying to get them to do in the wake of Khobar. But they would be in an impossible position, I assume this was their reason. If they killed him all hell breaks loose and if they don't kill him all hell breaks loose. And I don't remember what our reasoning was about his coming to the United States, but I'm quite sure that it would be the following.

If you bring him here and don't tell anybody, then we've got a constitutional problem, if we just hold him in the slammer and nobody ever knows. You can't do that, really. Or you could bring him here and put him on trial and since we didn't have the goods on him, we lose. That's unattractive. Or we could bring him here, as I say in response to this question, give him a tourist visa and have him visit Disneyland, which is unattractive also. So what do you do? This is before the Taliban took over in Afghanistan, so not being prescient, we didn't know what was going to happen if he went to Afghanistan and we were delighted. We did say don't send him to Somalia because we were worried about his links to Aidid and Somalia. We had no idea that Afghanistan would be such a bad place to send him and, of course, had we known, we would have resisted that but we didn't.(Later note: there was no evidence that the Sudanese actually offered him to us.)

Otherwise on terrorism we did begin the programs of training first responders in various cities. I can't remember whether it was while I was there or just after, but in retrospect I wish I had spent more political capital. But it was a priority.

In PDD 35 I think it was, I can't remember, which George Tenet put together, we, for the first time ever, I believe—at least I was told it was the first time ever—put together a priorities list for the intelligence community on targets. It was not every issue ranked in order, but it was, "Here

are your priorities." And this cuts both ways, because some would argue that we weren't serious about terrorism since it wasn't the first priority. I would argue that it shows we were serious about terrorism since we made it a priority target, but it was in the third tier of three tiers. But I think it was still right. The first tier was supporting our military forces when they're in combat. I still wouldn't argue with that. The second tier was so-called hard targets, North Korea, China, Cuba, which were then lousy at getting into and I suspect still are. The third tier was functional issues, notably terrorism and Osama Bin Laden.

Riley: Was there a greater effort to try to coordinate the domestic and the foreign component of the—I'm thinking in particular of, and this may not be relevant—but of Oklahoma City, which occurred.

Lake: Yes, we were trying to do that even earlier than that, after the World Trade Center. It did become clear, very quickly, very clear, that the FBI and the CIA simply couldn't work together on these things. Louis Freeh remembered this when I saw him afterwards, Freeh and Woolsey were in such a fight over whether the FBI could increase its presence abroad that they couldn't speak to each other. I had to have a lunch in my office with the two of them just to get them to talk about this. I thought it was crazy. It's very hard to figure out what's intelligence and what's case-building, criminal activity, but it was a stupid bureaucratic fight. But we did get a counter-terrorism center.

[two pages have been redacted]

Destler: I remember worrying that he would go to Baghdad.

Lake: We still don't have evidence that Saddam is behind all this terrorist stuff that has happened since. So I simply don't understand the argument that we weren't tough enough on him in '93. The point is, if you really want to go after terrorism now, it's not a Q, it's an N at the end of the I-R-A, if you see what I mean. And nobody is saying, "Let's bomb Iran for all of this." But it is Iran, not Iraq, that is supporting Hezbollah, et cetera. And Iraq may be involved somewhere, but nobody still has been able to make that case and believe me, there is a huge cottage industry in Washington now desperately looking for the smoking pistol on Iraq. None of which is to defend Saddam who is a truly—and I don't use the word often and I wished the President used it even less—evil person.

On the reaction to the embassies, let's just roll the tape back to the reaction right afterwards. I don't remember anybody saying you didn't do enough. The attacks were having done too much, as you recall.

Knott: Particularly in Sudan.

Lake: Particularly in Sudan. And let's look at that for a moment, because again, I wasn't there, but I have talked to friends, Tenet and Berger, since. As I understand it—and you'll have to go into this more when you do your oral history, I'm sure George Tenet is going to be happy to sit

down with you and discuss all of this [*smiling*]—the evidence wasn't conclusive about the factory, but there was evidence. As I tell my students when we look at this, if you're Sandy Berger, or if you're the President, and the embassies have just been blown up and there is evidence—again not conclusive, but evidence—that they maybe developing chemical weapons at this factory, you always have to think about this decision, not simply in terms of what happens if I act, but in terms of what happens if I don't act.

Destler: Right.

Lake: If I act, then I have whacked a factory and look silly. If I don't act, this is a possibly impeachable offense. And I think that's almost a no-brainer. But in any case, the main point is sure, there probably should have been more done at the time and I suspect most people would agree with that. But I don't remember anybody saying at the time—

Owen: Given the information at the time.

Lake: I mean, I think that George Bush, on September 10th, should have personally gone out and grounded all of the airplanes. But give me a break, how would he know? You get intelligence reports at least once a week of some plot or other and if you go into hyper drive every time you get one of those reports, it's going to be Chicken Little after a while.

Owen: Absolutely.

Lake: So why don't we give President Bush a break, and why don't we knock off all this oral history stuff and give former bureaucrats like me a break. Thank you very much.

Riley: It's been a very long day, you've been very generous with your time. You've been very generous to offer to pick up some loose ends at some point, if we can make arrangements. Let me talk with my colleagues here and see what we haven't covered and maybe a nice summer or fall afternoon in Charlottesville would be—

Lake: Fall would be better. Summer, I'm not very well acquainted with my sailboat any more.

Riley: Fall would be perfect for us, maybe there's a football weekend at some point that we could have you down for.

Lake: And we could go to a game, then do more.

Riley: Wonderful. We'd be happy to do that of course. Well, it has been very illuminating.