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**Alexander M. Haig, Jr. Interview Transcription**  
30 November 2007

**Timothy Naftali**

General Haig, welcome to the Richard Nixon Presidential Library. This is our first oral history, and we will introduce ourselves and then we'll proceed in this order asking questions. And we look forward to your participation. Thank you, we appreciate it.

**Alexander Haig**

I'm delighted to be here, especially for an inaugural like this. I like that term.

**Timothy Naftali**

You like that term? John?

**John Powers**

I'm John Powers. I'm the supervisory archivist at the Nixon project, and I welcome you.

**Alexander Haig**

Good, thank you.

**Douglas Brinkley**

I'm Douglas Brinkley, director of the Theodore Roosevelt Center and professor of history at Tulane University in New Orleans.

**Alexander Haig**

I know the institution well.

**Timothy Naftali**

I'm Tim Naftali, the incoming director of the Richard Nixon Presidential Library.

**Paul Musgrave**

And I'm Paul Musgrave. I'm Tim's assistant here at the Nixon materials project.

**Alexander Haig**

Very good.

**Douglas Brinkley**

Happy birthday, you're getting close.

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**Alexander Haig**

How did you know?

**Douglas Brinkley**

I've got your bio. December 2nd coming up.

**Alexander Haig**

It's very close.

**Douglas Brinkley**

Do you do anything --

**Alexander Haig**

I never thought I'd reach 39.

**Douglas Brinkley**

Do you do anything to mark your birthday? Are you going to do anything this year to celebrate?

**Alexander Haig**

Yes, I'm going to go from Florida to Washington for Christmas and see my grandchildren, so it's a happy time for me.

**Douglas Brinkley**

How many grandchildren do you have?

**Alexander Haig**

I have eight, seven of which are boys and one girl, and she's my favorite.

**Douglas Brinkley**

You were mentioning -- how many of your -- are any of your grandchildren in the military?

**Alexander Haig**

Yes, I have one that just finished Georgetown Law, had been recruited to be a lawyer for the Army and decided at the last minute he'd prefer to be a Ranger, Airborne Ranger Special Forces type, and that's what he's doing at Fort Benning, and I'll see him at Christmas.

**Douglas Brinkley**

Can I ask him --

**Timothy Naftali**

You want to go ahead?

**Douglas Brinkley**

When you -- tell me just a little bit about growing up and what made you want to go into the U.S. military. What were your influences as a young boy, and did you have any heroes? Were those heroes in the military?

**Alexander Haig**

Yeah, I think from the very beginning of a state of being serious, and that's long about seven years old, I guess, I felt that the military was going to be an extremely important part of the American society and appeared ahead because the clouds of the Cold War were just beginning to form up. And not only Nazi Germany, but I had a fixation at the time that Marxism was an evil ideology and that sooner or later that was going to be our real enemy. Little did I know it would reappear again in the waning years of my active life. So I always had that interest and I felt that -- my father died when I was quite young. I was nine. I felt I was going to have to do it on my own whatever it was going to be and that probably meant even an education. As it turned out, I did get a scholarship, partial scholarship to Notre Dame, because my representative who had given me an appointment to West Point was suddenly killed in an airplane crash and there I was without. And so I started at Notre Dame, and two years later I got an appointment to West Point.

**Douglas Brinkley**

Did you have a political upbringing in your household? Were people pro-Franklin Roosevelt, for example? Or what was the attitude towards --

**Alexander Haig**

Well, my father was a very successful Philadelphia lawyer who lived like most Philadelphia lawyers at that time. He spent the money before he got it. And when he died at the age of 38, 39 -- actually at death, he left my mother with three children, no insurance and a pretty sizable debt. And that was a rather stark thing. We were all in private schools. We lived in a beautiful home with servants, and suddenly the world got very stark and grim. And so I spent the rest of my life always scrambling for money so I could live up to the style to which I wanted to become accustomed. And that was really the beginning of my thoughts about West Point. Maybe it was economic determinism or it was my really strong feeling that the military was going to play an increasing role in our nation's affairs. As it turned out, they did, of course.

**Douglas Brinkley**

Did you have memories of Franklin Roosevelt at growing up? You would have been, what --

**Alexander Haig**

Well, my father was a staunch Philadelphia Republican, had been in World War I as a JAG, but was serving in the infantry but the war was over before he got deployed. But Franklin Roosevelt's name was a dirty word in our house. I can remember my father telling me two things. He said, "One, son, don't go into the military." And I said, "Why," because he had some Quaker teachings as a young man, although he wasn't a Quaker and went to the University of Pennsylvania and had a lot of concerns about the military. So he would have died twice if he had seen me go into West Point. And second, he said, "Don't be a politician." And I said, "Why?" And he said, "Because it's filled with people that can't do anything else." And I'm not so sure that's not true.

**Douglas Brinkley**

You wouldn't have been 20 years old in 1944, right, with World War II going on. Were you following the war in the Pacific and following what was going in Europe, and did you have an inclination to look up to people like Nimitz or MacArthur or Eisenhower? Do you have any memories of thinking about those leaders?

**Alexander Haig**

Yeah, I had, I had my heroes, of course, and I did follow World War II in both theaters. And later, as a young officer, I got to work for Douglas MacArthur right in his office, and I talked to him every day. And so I had a chance to assess him very carefully, and with a young eye and untutored eye, he was the greatest military man I had ever met, and still remains that way. And a lot of my political upbringing came from his demise, which was totally untrue. I can remember telling Truman's daughter and her husband who came to me when they were writing his memoir that it was Douglas MacArthur who insisted that Truman land on Wake Island first so he could greet him as the pro counsel in Asia when he arrived. Well, that's nonsense. I packed MacArthur's bags. He was there the night before, before Truman ever came, because he wouldn't know what the word insubordination was. And you'll know in this recent diary just released, Truman asked Ike to come see him after he came back from Europe, and he said, "I want you to be president of the United States, and I'm going to not run in order to make room for you." And Ike was a little taken aback because he was probably a Republican by heritage and upbringing in that part of Kansas. And he said, "Well, what are you going to do about MacArthur?" And Truman's response was "I'm going to take care of MacArthur. You'll see what happens to MacArthur." And I happened to think that whole thing was political, like most things in Washington. And I've learned to only reinforce those sentiments as a result of my limited experience in Washington.

**Douglas Brinkley**

How did this, this young kid struggling in Philadelphia and then going to West Point get to suddenly be spending time with Douglas MacArthur and being that close? How did you get selected to work for MacArthur?

**Alexander Haig**

Well, I was a platoon leader in the First Calvary Division, and I also played football for the division football team. Now, I don't know whether it was true or not, but MacArthur was a great fan of football. And next thing I know, I was asked to go up by a fellow I knew to serve as an aide and administrative assistant working between the chief of staff, Ned Almond, who I worked for every day and General MacArthur, and their offices were interconnected. And when the war started and I was the first one to receive that call from Ambassador Musheo [phonetic sp] in Seoul, and I was very skeptical because we had had a number of false alarms. And I say, "Are you sure?" And he said, "Yes, I'm sure," he said. And he was very descriptive about it, and so I called the chief of staff who called MacArthur. And in those days they used to be able to make cool decisions. And his answer was, this was about 11:00 in the morning, and he said, "Very well, assemble my staff. I will be in at 6:00 tonight and we'll make a decision." And I was there at 6:00 and straight through and went to the first telecom between President Truman and MacArthur at the outbreak of the Korean War. And I learned some lessons by listening to that which have historic connotation.

**Timothy Naftali**

What were the lessons?

**Alexander Haig**

Huh?

**Timothy Naftali**

What were the lessons?

**Alexander Haig**

Well, the lessons were that it was Truman, I think, as I recall, who said, "What are we going to do about Taiwan?" And MacArthur's sentiments were very pro-Taiwan, and he said, "Well, we'll have to do something to be sure that they're not engulfed in this conflict." I found that rather unusual because it was not China, the People's Republic of China, a brand new revolutionary government that was involved in the invasion but rather Moscow. They were the tutors, the logisticians, and they had advisors at every company level unit in the North Korean forces, and I know, I saw them firsthand, saw the pictures and photographs and the evidence later. But be that as it may, I thought, this is a mistake. And what the Chinese interpreted was that we were, when we crossed the 38th parallel a month later, that what we were really going to do was reinstall Chiang Kai-shek on the mainland and overthrow, and there was no contact whatsoever with it. So that lesson to me was always talk to friend and foe, but know who is friend and who is foe. We didn't do that, and I think it was a serious mistake by both leaders.

**Douglas Brinkley**

Were you ever intimidated by MacArthur?

**Alexander Haig**

I was always intimidated. I was in awe of him. I thought he was an unusually talented man. When he, when he spoke in normal conversation you could have printed it right then in any textbook, and it would not require a single re-draft. I know his speech at West Point was given extemporaneously, and it's one of the most magnificent speeches ever given. Luckily a cadet taped it; that's why we have a record of it. And he spoke totally extemporaneously. That was the man. He was a very impressive man. He had certain pride. Some people might even think bordered on the arrogant, but never would it be to defy an order from the president. Never would it be to be disloyal to a president. He was in uniform, and he knew our Constitution better than most.

**Douglas Brinkley**

Did you stay in touch with him? Did you have a relation with him after the Korean War or did you -- how long did you stay in touch with him for?

**Alexander Haig**

Well, I didn't stay particularly close to him because I went to Europe after that and after a brief tour at the service academies, both Naval Academy and West Point. And I did keep in touch with Mrs. MacArthur because he died shortly thereafter, as you know, and to her dying day we stayed in touch with her. She was another marvelous woman. She lived up in the, the hotel in New York City, Waldorf Towers, and I think a lot of that was supported by the family that owned the hotel, another fine family. They did that.

**Douglas Brinkley**

There was John F. Kennedy, I believe it was, got advice from MacArthur about --

**Timothy Naftali**

One question about MacArthur though, Dwight Eisenhower was no fan of MacArthur's.

**Alexander Haig**

And vice versa.

**Timothy Naftali**

What did MacArthur tell you about Dwight Eisenhower?

**Alexander Haig**

Well, I know Ike was quoted to have said he studied theatrics under MacArthur, and I think MacArthur said something along the lines that he was the finest clerk I ever had. That didn't, didn't sour the well on either of them as far as I was concerned. I think they were both magnificent men. I think MacArthur was a strategic thinker of -- at the level of George Patton, who was a tactical genius. Ike was a catalyst for what was just right for shape headquarters in World War II and that is, he could bring diversion, attitude and interest together and kneel them into a functioning unit. And I think he turned out to be one of the great presidents. And the more the scholars are researching him, and I

know the center of that has been up at Princeton University, they are concluding that he was probably among the very best of the American presidents, and that's because he ran an organized, policy-making apparatus.

**Timothy Naftali**

Well, to what extent when, when you were working with Henry Kissinger as his number two in the National Security Council, to what extent was the Nixon administration modeling itself on the decision making pattern of the Eisenhower administration?

**Alexander Haig**

Well, obviously Nixon had been two-term vice president so he knew the Eisenhower system well, and he believed it was a sound system. The National Security Council, which was formal, which had decision memos published after a decision was made so there would be no question about what was said and to avoid some of the pitfalls of the Johnson administration and the Kennedy administration, which were so informal that what would happen is they would have the meeting, the decision would be made and each Cabinet officer would go back to his department to try to prove how much influence he had with the president, so they put a little twist on it that coincided with their departmental view. And when you got out in the field, you were getting a cacophony of policy decisions. And that's when they created the so-called country team concept to try to straighten that out, if you recall, in the history book. And that included giving the ambassador authority to knock everybody's head together and take whatever was passed down by Dean Rusk or whoever the secretary of state was at the time as the gospel rather than the CIA view or the defense view or the USIA view. And that's one of the things that Nixon wanted to avoid like the plague. On the other hand, he was fearful of one of the pitfalls of that system. And that was the Army way of expecting your staff to come in and tell you, here's the solution, boss, and this is the way you better do it. In order to do that in a bureaucracy like the U.S. federal government, everybody scratches everybody's back so instead of getting a clear-cut philosophic decision you got a mishmash of compromise, a watered down philosophically vapid course of action. Now, I wouldn't say that I suffered from that too much, but that was the tendency that Nixon was trying to avoid, and Kissinger and he colluded to prevent that so we asked for options rather than a single recommendation so it would have some philosophic content and integrity. And frankly, it would have worked 100 percent of the time if we didn't have a Cabinet that was running its own little fiefdoms and frequently doing what they wanted rather than what the president ordered.

**John Powers**

General Haig, I was interested in talking, you worked as the military officer for Cy Vance and for Joe Califano.

**Alexander Haig**

That's right.

**John Powers?**

How did you come to work in the Nixon White House?

**Alexander Haig**

Well, Joe had some role in that and so did Bob McNamara because I worked for Bob McNamara as well. When Cy was deputy secretary of defense I was deputy special assistant to both.

And both of them spoke to Henry Kissinger about me. I was on an Army list that was submitted by the United States Army, but I don't think I was anywhere near the top of that list. I wasn't a Washington guy at that time, and I wasn't a European graduate. I was in the Far East. So I didn't have a lot of what I call political clout, which usually goes along with that kind of a recommendation. But there was a professor, an advisor at that time of the secretary of the Army and a chief of staff of the Army, a man named Fritz Kramer who was an expert on Europe, he was German born, and we became fast intellectual friends. When I worked on the Army staff and handled NATO and Europe and so we would meet regularly and I didn't know it but he was the guy that sort of brought Henry Kissinger into the world of America and helped to get him educated and into Harvard and from that point forward, so he also went to Kissinger and said, "This is the man you want to get." And when I was called down to the Pierre Hotel from -- I was acting -- I was dean of men at West Point at that time, a colonel, and back from Vietnam, getting my wounds nursed, and it was a great surprise to me that I was asked for. And the day I met with Henry was in the Pierre Hotel. He talked about Vietnam; he talked about the world at large. He was most interested in that I wasn't a military intellectual. That means to have all string of degrees. I did have a master's degree in foreign relations, but he wanted to know whether I was a combat officer and I said, "Just look at my record; make your own decision." And I think he concluded that I was because I had everything from purple hearts to distinguished service cross and many silver stars and air medals and distinguished fine clauses, so he was happy. And he hired me that day.

**John Powers**

Did you meet Nixon at that time?

**Alexander Haig**

No, I didn't meet Nixon because our conversation ran so long that Nixon went home that afternoon. I didn't get to see him. I did see him shortly thereafter. But he hired me that day and I left West Point, I think, within two or three days and went down to the Executive Office Building and started writing a paper on how we would keep the president informed. That meant all of the security apparatus of the government laced together to give him a daily report. And it exists to this day.

**John Powers**

You served as a battalion commander for the 26th infantry?

**Alexander Haig**

That's right.

**John Powers**

How did you -- did your view of the Vietnam War change before you went and while you were there?



**Alexander Haig**

No, as a matter of fact, before I went, I went from McNamara and Vance in the Pentagon where I was deputy special assistant, as you pointed out, to the Army War College, and there my paper was picked as the paper to be presented to the class in the graduation week. And in that I attacked what I call the strategy of incrementalism and it had to do with a devised Harvard import which said that when you get into a crisis with an adversary, never go in with preponderate force; always go in with a minimum force necessary to be just a little bit better than they were. It came from the Thomas Schelling school. And I assaulted that as the, the culprit in both the Korean War, which was a matter of force strategy because we had dismantled our World War II resources almost completely. You recall that, Louis Johnson [phonetic sp]. I write about that in one of my books and those experiences. I knew him working for MacArthur. But what it has is the exact opposite consequence. It guarantees escalation. If you go in with a, a minutia response, the other side is tempted to say, well, I could match that easily, and I'll do it. And they do it more dramatically. And that starts a chain reaction, which leads you into greater conflict rather than less.

**John Powers**

This is a great transition to talk about incrementalism on Nixon's 1969 Vietnam policy and the difference between Johnson and Nixon's first year strategy. And I'm interested in learning your opinions about Operation Duck Hook or "Pruning Knife" as the military called it for the dramatic escalation to try and bring about peace. Do you recall anything about those Vietnam contingency plans in July and September of 1969?

**Alexander Haig**

Yeah, I recall them very well, and I had nothing to do with them incidentally because at that juncture I was involved in intelligence and keeping the president informed every day of the world. But the other side of the NSC was, was working those papers and Mort Halperin and others were involved in that process. Mort Halperin was described by many as a left-wing liberal. I didn't find him that way at all. He was fairly tough-minded, and I know I worked after the EC-121 aircraft was shot down over international waters off the coast of North Korea, something we had been doing incidentally for 20 years, so it wasn't an accidental thing; it was a very calculated thing. And I had to then start shifting into the other fields of NSC. And as a matter of fact, by then Henry had pretty well made me his deputy, so I helped to reorganize the whole NSC after his first European trip and all the procedures that were followed henceforth.

**Timothy Naftali**

Can we ask -- can we probe a little more on the EC-121 story?

**Alexander Haig**

Right.

**Timothy Naftali**

In your memoirs, you tell a remarkable story about how the president made a decision and Secretary of Defense Mel Laird didn't follow through with it. Could you tell us a little bit about what you recall of the EC-121?

**Alexander Haig**

Well, sure, that is the most memorable side of -- most memorable side of it had to do with missing an opportunity to send a message to both Moscow and to the stooges of Moscow and Pyongyang was one of those at the time, that this was a serious administration that was not going to be taken for granted or a pursuer of incrementalism. And so I was put on the -- they had a hawk team and a dove team, and Halperin and I were put on the hawk team. I don't know why they picked what they thought were exact opposites to do that, but Henry did it in his genius. And another group, I think it was probably Winston Lord handled what I called the soft-line response, after shoot down. Now, we recommended immediate military action against the North by taking out one of their airfields, and at the same time, to tell Moscow that our toleration days were over. This included the determination to settle Vietnam immediately, with or without the Soviet Union and if the Soviet Union were to join the other side, we were prepared for that contingency as well. And that was what I thought was going to happen. But at the last minute the president decided to go the soft line, which was to do really nothing but conduct some bombings in Cambodia.

**Timothy Naftali**

When you said you thought it was going to happen, did the president actually say this was what he was going to do?

**Alexander Haig**

Pardon?

**Timothy Naftali**

When you say you thought it was going to happen, that the hard-line approach was winning the day.

**Alexander Haig**

Yes.

**Timothy Naftali**

Did you actually hear the president endorse it?

**Alexander Haig**

I thought he would. I thought he would endorse it, but he didn't. And I don't know where Henry stood on it. But I suspect he was on the soft line, that's my suspicion. You would have to ask him. But be that as it may, it was a lost opportunity, and in the later years when I was White House chief of staff, Nixon told me it was the worst mistake of his presidency not to respond then early on in a

decisive way to convince both Moscow and whoever else, Hanoi, Pyongyang or any one of the camp that this was a different America.

**Timothy Naftali**

What role did Secretary of Defense Laird play?

**Alexander Haig**

Well, now, as part of reacting to the initial attack, Nixon ordered, President Nixon ordered the movement of the Pacific fleet, the 7th fleet to the waters off of North Korea. Well, two days went past, three days went past and we got no signs of the movement of the fleet. So I called the assistant to Mel Laird and said, "What's happened to the fleet? The president wants to know where they are." He said, "Oh, I don't know about that, but you'll have to ask somebody else, don't ask me." Well, I knew I was getting a fancy-dancy answer. And the fleet actually never did go. Now, we suggested to the president that he shouldn't tolerate that, and the president did not like personal confrontation, and he was very fond of Mel Laird, and rightfully so. Mel Laird was a very competent, political individual. He came from the Hill. He was respected there. And I think Nixon knew he couldn't fire him and Bill Rogers, too, because they were both against doing anything aggressive, both of them. So nothing ever happened. And following that we were plagued with a number of crises, one in the Middle East, Yom Kippur War; one with the missiles implanted in Cienfuegos and a big step up in action in Vietnam.

**Paul Musgrave**

Were there other examples of times where the president's reluctance to force any personal confrontation led his subordinates to take advantage of him?

**Alexander Haig**

Well, yeah.

**Paul Musgrave**

Or to not carry out his orders?

**Alexander Haig**

And Henry was of the same ilk. He didn't like confrontation either. I guess big men don't, but a lot of big men have to. So I had -- if you say anything, I was a policeman between Bill Rogers, secretary of state, and Mel Laird in the White House. And believe it or not, that's how you remember the yeoman. That's why the yeoman was in the White House, because the president said, "I want to be sure that the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff hears every decision I make. I can't count on the third floor of the Pentagon to pass it on." So we had a liaison officer sent over from Admiral Moorer, God bless his soul, who came over and became the yeoman's boss and the yeoman came to do his typing. And his mission was to tell the chairman every decision that was made at the time it was made and not to rely on a mixed signal from the third floor.

**Douglas Brinkley**

You called Henry Kissinger a genius, and you get a kind of twinkle whenever you mention Kissinger. What is it about Henry Kissinger that you found so --

**Alexander Haig**

You don't think there was something between us, I hope.

**Douglas Brinkley**

I don't know. What is, what is your -- what was the relationship with Kissinger? If you're the middleman in between Laird and Rogers, what is your relationship with Kissinger like at this time?

**Alexander Haig**

My relationship was very good with Kissinger. We seldom differed on a foreign policy issue. I think we came to our solutions through different routes, but we generally felt that we needed far more starch in our foreign affairs, the conduct of our foreign affairs in a war that was already beginning in a shooting phase, and it was a decision by Moscow not to get bogged down. They were failing economically and demographically at home. And I think they had decided that the best way to deal with the United States was through proxies and to back those proxies and if it became a matter of conflict between the two super powers, to back off. And he did it repeatedly during the Cold War, if you analyze all these crises that took place, whether it was the Middle East or Asia or wherever. And we could have won Vietnam. I have said that; I believe it. If we could have kept the bombing up, the Christmas bombing for as much as three or four more weeks I think we would have gotten an agreement from Hanoi to move back north of the 38th parallel -- the 17th parallel.

**John Powers**

I was interested in talking a bit about the Christmas bombing, that you took a very hard line on that that differed from both the president and Kissinger's. With a few different --

**Alexander Haig**

Oh, not the president's. The president was very much for it.

**John Powers**

Why don't you think he continued the bombing later?

**Alexander Haig**

Because he was threatened with impeachment. We had a couple of tough guys that were far senior to me. One was John Connally, who was constantly urging him to, to stand tall on these things and to take the kind of action that would get attention. And Henry, who was anything but a, but a liberal peacenik, he was anything but that. He was always at least speaking the tough law. And I think the president's own instincts were very much in sync with that. But when that bombing started, that was

very late in the game, you recall, very late. And there had been earlier bombing which -- the previous spring which were also quite effective. That's what brought the North back to the table.

**John Powers**

The May 8th bombing.

**Alexander Haig**

And then when we got there, something had happened. And it would be hard to say what, whether it was an upcoming election or a perception of Moscow, and of course it was all run out of Moscow. I have no doubt about that. Doesn't mean the others were stooges, they had their own interest also. But their logistician and their strategist was Moscow. And, you know, something happened and we got stonewalled in Paris when we thought we had every reason to expect some flexibility.

**John Powers**

And along those kind of lines, Henry comes back from the peace talks in mid-October of '72 --

**Alexander Haig**

Yeah.

**John Powers**

-- and says that peace is at hand. It's very close. What happened then between October of '72 and ultimately finally in January of '73 when they do sign?

**Alexander Haig**

Well, I think what happened was the bombing.

**John Powers**

But what was the --

**Alexander Haig**

That's why they signed it.

**John Powers**

What was the sticking point in October of '72 as to why they didn't sign?

**Alexander Haig**

A reassessment in Moscow that, that Vietnam was a quagmire for Nixon and that we were probably prepared to take something far less than what Henry was discussing at the table, and that was rather flexible, right at the edge of being acceptable or unacceptable. And very difficult to ever sell to President Ho Chi Minh and never was really. He never really did accept it. And he was right.

**John Powers**

General Haig, that's a great transition into talking about all of your trips to Saigon during this time frame to talk to General Xu. Could you care to tell us about those discussions?

**Alexander Haig**

Yes, as you know, there was a glitch out of Hanoi announcing Henry's visit, which he was allegedly bringing the outlines of this agreement arrived at in Paris. And it, it caused a real problem with Xu and so it was obvious that there was going to be no constructive dialogue between Kissinger and Xu ever again. And I had since indicated that I wanted to leave and I was scheduled to go back to the Army. It had something to do -- Vietnam had something to do with that decision on my part. I was, I was afraid that we were putting too much faith in what the American people and the American Congress and the American press would support if Hanoi violated the accord, and I told that to President Nixon. And he wrote a letter for me to take to Xu. And in that letter it assured him that if these provisions of the accords were violated, that we would resume the bombing of Hanoi. And it was made public. A lot of people have written who opposed the war and claimed that that was a secret codicil. It wasn't a secret codicil at all. The president announced it, that we would take action. And it also assumed that the Congress was going to continue to support Xu at the level we were supporting him in Vietnamization program. That's arms, equipment, training, money, all the things that were necessary. Well, no sooner did the ink dry on Xu's reluctant signature and the Paris Peace Accords get signed than we had a resolution come out of the Congress forbidding any bombing in Asia. So that's telling the enemy that you had no sanction. And I knew at the time Vietnam was lost. I knew it. And I told it to Henry, and he knew it. And it was done by one of the president's own people, whose name will remain unnamed but should be a lesson to all of us, right inside the administration that bombing halt was negotiated without my knowledge and I was --

**John Powers**

Why should it remain unnamed at this late juncture?

**Alexander Haig**

Just because and stuff, I mean, [unintelligible]. So be that as it may, then the immediate strangulation of all the aid started and by the time of the North Vietnamese attack, which was a year or two later, you recall, two years later, they had -- you didn't have grenades to throw or bullets to fire. That was the tragic end of Vietnam. Now, the real tragedy of it was, you remember we talked and I spoke today about the so-called domino theory. There was a domino theory, and it began to happen when Hanoi started to overrun Cambodia and was knocking at the door of the borders of Thailand. It was then that the Chinese told me as commander in NATO that they were going to have to punish Hanoi and to prevent the domino theory from becoming a reality. And they did, they attacked. That was in 1979. They lost 50,000 men in that attack because they were unprepared to conduct it. And the North was well-armed with Soviet weapons, advisors and a lot of other help. And they prevailed, the Chinese, out

of courage and what I call sacrifice. And what did our president do, who was then Jimmy Carter? Condemned them for aggression, holy mackerel. Can you believe it? That's what we did.

**Douglas Brinkley**

What part of the anti-war movement most -- bothered you the most that you felt was undermining Nixon's Vietnam policy? Were you watching all that domestic unrest? Was there an aspect of the anti-war movement that really got under your skin?

**Alexander Haig**

No, no, kids are kids. Most of it was done by kids and, you know, the government has a responsibility to, to support its policies but with the bully pulpit and somehow if you got the right course of action, it should be presentable. Unless you surpass what I call the threshold of Democratic society, that is that they run out of breath pretty soon in conflict. And in that process, you have to take some lessons about entering into conflict in the first place. One is, you must be sure that you prepare the grounds with the American people who are, after all, paying the price. Number two is that you go in with enough force that you make your case and do it quickly and get out. And that takes overwhelming strength, which we have been until very recently able to muster. I think it was Friedman who said recently, the trouble with this administration is that it likes to get into wars, but it doesn't like to provide the means with which to conduct them. And we went in there with two and a third divisions when George Bush, Sr., went into Iraq, for example, with the equivalent of 26 divisions. Now, how could you have such a discrepancy and be on sound ground.

**Timothy Naftali**

General Haig, part of President Nixon's approach to ending the Vietnam War and reducing international tension was to open the door to China. And in this morning's conversation you alluded to the fact that Henry Kissinger and you had your doubts about the opening to China strategy. Could you tell us something about that?

**Alexander Haig**

Well, we were both the product of our experiences.

**Timothy Naftali**

But do you remember --

**Alexander Haig**

Taiwan.

**Timothy Naftali**

When did you first hear -- when did you first hear that there was going to be an opening to China?

**Alexander Haig**

Well, this is very early, probably the second week of the administration. Henry came back from the Oval Office and said to me, "Al, this madman wants to normalize our relations with China." And he laughed. And I said, "Oh, my God." And I remember in my own case going home that night and thinking, hell, I was on the first American advisory group to go to Taiwan after the war broke out in Korea with my father-in-law who ran the Fox Commission and started the aid program for Taiwan. But I also was very skeptical that early about the need to talk to the Chinese who were already having their doubts about the Soviet Union, and were seeing increases in Soviet forces along their borders. And so even that early, that communication could have borne great fruit, but most of all, they had to know that we were fighting North Korea and the Soviet Union, not China.

**Timothy Naftali**

From you way you described this, though --

**Alexander Haig**

Huh?

**Timothy Naftali**

From the way you have described this anecdote it sounds as if Henry Kissinger was surprised. But hadn't Nixon -- hadn't Nixon already telegraphed his interest in a new policy in Asia even before he became president?

**Alexander Haig**

Well, he wrote an article some years before, I think.

**Timothy Naftali**

"Foreign Affairs."

**Alexander Haig**

Two years before, wasn't it, about the need to do it. But no, never -- all their discussions never touched on the China thing in the early day. It was everything was Vietnam and the Soviet Union. Always [unintelligible] sort of in the subject, if I may add. Now, in fairness to Henry and to myself, naturally, the more we thought about it, the more enthusiastic we became about the initiative. And today I remain enthusiastic about it if we don't let the neocons get us into a war with China, which they would like to do, as though they don't have their hands full already.

**Douglas Brinkley**

Where does this, this -- today you had -- I'd actually use the word anger towards the neocons. What's the origins of --

**Alexander Haig**



Not anger, frustration.

**Douglas Brinkley**

Well, frustration.

**Alexander Haig**

Frustration.

**Douglas Brinkley**

What's the beginning of your frustration with the neocon movement.

**Alexander Haig**

Wrong-headedness.

**Douglas Brinkley**

Where did it -- when did it start with Al Haig versus the neocons? When did that tension begin?

**Alexander Haig**

I was aware of this, this group -- first place, I knew the editor of the "Wall Street Journal," Bartlett, who was a neocon. I knew Albert Wohlstetter, who was the big bomb guy in the early days of the nuclear writings and was a neocon. I knew Richard Perle from his days with Scoop Jackson. He was a raging neocon and probably the intellectual giant of the group, not the educationally leader. They had a Yale professor who probably holds that role today and did then. They saw that the Democratic Party was going sharp left, and they didn't agree with that. So they during the Reagan administration joined the Republican Party.

**John Powers**

But weren't the neocons, the genesis of them, the '70s, weren't they also against the Nixon administration's SALT policies, vis-à-vis the Soviet Union in arms limitation treaty.

**Alexander Haig**

Well, I don't know about that because Richard Perle has had the most ambiguous recollections on that subject of anybody I know. You know, when I was, I was in NATO Europe when we were trying to modernize our theater nuclear forces and if anybody fought for modernized NATO nuclear forces, it was Al Haig. As a matter of fact, I did the same with Richard Nixon -- I mean, with Ronald Reagan when I was his secretary of state. Yet he's passing around that I was against the modernization of the theater nuclear forces. That's absolute insanity. It's totally untrue. Talk to Helmut Schmidt, talk to Helmut Kohl, they'll tell you where I stood on those things, including the neutron bomb, which cost Helmut Schmidt his job because President Carter undercut him. He got him to support it, then

withdrew it on the advice of his U.N. Ambassador. That's what happened. I know because I was right in the middle of it, and I finally got him to go on with the production of the bomb although he wouldn't deploy, and that's as far as he would go. So no, Henry Kissinger was not naive about the China thing. He just came as a bolt out of the blue that didn't sound Nixonian to him, I guess.

**Paul Musgrave**

You were one of the first people in the Nixon administration to visit China.

**Alexander Haig**

Please speak louder.

**Paul Musgrave**

You were one of the first people in the Nixon administration to visit China in advance of the president's trip. What was that like, especially for you as a Korea War veteran?

**Alexander Haig**

It was a very memorable experience. What I did was head up the advance party for the president's first trip there. Henry had already been there secretly, and I did the backroom work on that one, that trip to -- so-called trip to India and the real trip to Pakistan and Delhi belly and getting into Beijing. But Henry was sort of the substantive guy and I was the logistician, if you will. But I found out when I went that they decided in Chinese way that they were going to treat me just like they would treat the president, hold all the same banquets, all the same meetings, except with Mao. I did have the meetings with Zhou Enlai the first night I was there from almost 3:00 in the morning, from midnight until 3:00, after 13 mai tais [alcoholic beverage] imposed on me. So it was a very memorable experience and when I first went there he had the entire diplomatic corps assembled and all of the press in Beijing assembled. And he started out on a diatribe about the United States and Vietnam. And I said, "I didn't come here to be insulted. I'm taking my party back to the airport." And we started to leave. He emptied the room, and we sat down for three hours of very intense discussion.

**Timothy Naftali**

Did you talk about Korea with him?

**Alexander Haig**

Yes, I did, because I fought the Chinese in Korea, and I saw them stacked up like cordwood in front of our positions, and I knew what they suffered, and it was because they thought they were defending their homeland. And that was a diplomatic error of profound magnitude.

**Timothy Naftali**

But didn't, didn't some of MacArthur's -- didn't MacArthur unfortunately help create that impression that we were going to go into China?

**Alexander Haig**

Well, I don't think MacArthur would have had that impression. I mean, wouldn't have pursued that policy if Nixon -- or Truman had said no. Truman was in favor of that. You remember, that was a political issue, especially here on the West Coast where we had Senator Knowland who used to spend half his time pressuring the president on Taiwan and the other half consorting with the Taiwanese government. And he was a very powerful Senator, and there were a lot of others like him, as you know, and this was a, this was a Communist, anti-Communist dimension of American thought that persists till this day, sometimes rightly, sometimes wrongly. I happen to think it's an evil system, but that doesn't mean the people are all evil.

**Timothy Naftali**

Do you remember what Zhou Enlai said to you about Korea?

**Alexander Haig**

Huh?

**Timothy Naftali**

What did Zhou Enlai say to you about Korea? What did this discussion produce?

**Alexander Haig**

Well, you know, I don't think any Chinamen would agree with what I interpreted. But what I interpreted in a very convoluted and very subtly presented advice to me was, you Americans better not lose in Vietnam and you shouldn't withdraw from Southeast Asia. That's the simplification of a very complex, rather lengthy discussion. But I don't think I was wrong in interpreting that. And I would say again today that there's a growing nervousness beginning to reappear in Beijing about the current Russian policies. Certainly I had no doubt about them, and I hope no American official has any doubt about this government in Moscow. It is our enemy. It is acting as our enemy in every venue in which we are interfacing today unless it's something in their long sought interest.

**Douglas Brinkley**

Has Putin been a disappointment to you? Has Putin been a disappointment to you? Did you have high hopes for --

**Alexander Haig**

No, I thought he was a KGB goon when he came in, and I think he's a bigger one now that I have had a chance to witness him.

**John Powers**

I was interested in going back and talking about Nixon and the military. And there certainly appeared to be between the Pentagon and the White House a distrust or the Radford affair or this -- why, why do you think that Nixon distrusted the military or the military distrusted Nixon?

**Alexander Haig**

Oh, oh, oh, the president didn't mistrust the military. He mistrusted the civilian management structure that he had put in place above them. He was very, very pro-military. I mean, he was a Boy Scout, Richard Nixon, in every way, and he thought the military was the cream of the crop. I never had any doubt about that and never heard him say anything that would suggest otherwise. He also believed, however, in the tradition of Abraham Lincoln, that when the military makes mistakes, and they do, just like anybody else, you have got to move quickly and remove them. That he believed. In fact, he ordered me to take over Vietnam, and I said, "You're going to have to sleep on this because you have got the wrong guy. It's not our commander; it's his boss." And that was the secretary of defense that was causing the problem.

**John Powers**

Along those lines then, General Abrams in Vietnam, that there were -- and also General Ryan at the Air Force Chief of Staff, too, on the relationship at times certainly from listening to the tapes appeared to be sometimes tense and Nixon really trying to urge them to be bold and to be dynamic and to be decisive in Vietnam. Do you feel with what you have just said that it really it wasn't so much the military, it was, it was the civilian leaders that were watering down the orders?

**Alexander Haig**

Absolutely, you know, I made 14 trips during the Vietnam War to Southeast Asia and on every one of those trips, I think without exception, I sat down for hours with General Abrams, a man I loved and respected. He was one of our greatest soldiers. I watched him be diminished with each trip. And I was really fearful for him because I knew he was doing things he hated doing and had to do. A great example of that was the Laos incursion. I mean, Abrams didn't even leave his headquarters in Saigon. Fred Wyant [phonetic sp] who went up as his deputy was miles from the battlefield, no American forces supported that thing in the kind of way that the president thought they were going to support it. And they got chewed up and mauled and that set back Vietnamization years. No, General Abrams was a splendid commander. I never knew him to do anything wrong that he ever would on his on do and he was a brilliant, brilliant tactician. He was a brilliant commander in the second war, in the second war. He was George Patton's leading battalion. God, everybody worshipped Abe, myself included. So no, there was no tension. The president knew; he just hated confrontation. And I can understand that because every president that I have worked for, and I have worked for seven, four of them called me by my first name. They all hated to fire people. And I guess they thought it was either friendship, party obligations or whatever it may be. I know that Ronald Reagan used his attorney general to fire his household help because he couldn't do it himself. He hated it. And they're privileged to do what they want. They're, they're the boss, if it works. If it doesn't work then they have got to move.

**Douglas Brinkley**

How do you respond when you hear inter-popular culture people say the United States lost the Vietnam War?

**Alexander Haig**

I think we did. And we didn't have to.

**Douglas Brinkley**

Where were the -- why did we lose?

**Alexander Haig**

That doesn't mean I would have gone in it the way we did. I was there. I'm the only American that was there at the takeoff, participated in the combat and was there at the end. The only one, and it was through two parties. Believe me, the mistakes were political. And it had nothing to do with our ability to prevail. All we had to do at the beginning of that war before we got into it, when we were being challenged, was to start mobilizing, to start moving forces and I guarantee you the Soviet Union would not have permitted Hanoi to go on.

**Douglas Brinkley**

Which of the architects of our war policy, was it McNamara who you hold fundamentally responsible?

**Alexander Haig**

I worked for Bob McNamara. He was a very bright guy. I consider him a friend. I think he was caught up in incrementalism and the whiz kid that he brought in that took over the third floor with revolutionary ideas how they were going to be better than these dumb military professionals. Well, those dumb military professionals spend a lifetime studying war and history, and especially the mistakes of their predecessors over the years. And I'd be hard pressed to, to just knee-jerk a contempt for them, which I have seen in intellectual circles. I went up to this Harvard thing which described how -- they had President Jimmy Carter who wasn't even in the Vietnam conflict, didn't see it, didn't know it, the guest of honor to criticize the Republicans, and I can tell you, they said that Kennedy was going to get out of Vietnam. I sat there watching Kennedy build up, build up, build up till over 15,000 people who were flying all their air, close air support with sandbags in the back seats of the airplanes. That meant a non-pilot pilot from the South so they could claim that they were flying their own planes, and they weren't. So he wasn't going to get out. He was a fighter. He wasn't a quitter unless he could find a way around it cheap. Then he'd do it. Smart man would.

**Douglas Brinkley**

How do you explain to a parent who loses their son in Vietnam, one of the names on the wall, you know, well, we made political mistakes? Is that hard for a general like yourself to recognize the loss of life of those soldiers that maybe it was the political bungling cost soldiers' lives? Is that the hardest part of the Vietnam lesson to absorb?

**Alexander Haig**

No, I think the military had their share of misjudgments in Vietnam. But I think incrementalism and the failure to bring -- I used to say take it to the source. We never went to the source of the problem. The source of the problem was the Soviet Union. And that had to be a part of everything we did. Well, we did try to work with the Soviet Union but mostly by loving kisses and Détente, rather than the kind of cold turkey talk that they understand. And you delude yourself, what I call schmoozing, the then Soviet Union and I'd say you dilute yourself if you try it with Mr. Putin.

**John Powers**

I'm interested in exploring the discussion -- the comments you just made on Détente. Because what the Soviet Union's -- certainly the belief that Nixon was very successful in dealing with the Soviet Union.

**Alexander Haig**

Yes, he was.

**John Powers**

His assault on resolving the Berlin and coming to an agreement on Berlin, were we not successful with the Soviets in bringing about an end to the Vietnam War? Is that really -- was that an area that we --

**Alexander Haig**

Oh, they weren't helpful at all. They weren't helpful at all until we sunk a few of their ships and told them send some more if you'd like. They understood that.

**John Powers**

The first time that we began to mine the harbors was in May of '72.

**Alexander Haig**

That's right.

**John Powers**

And that was --

**Alexander Haig**

That was a one arm tied behind your back operation.

**John Powers**

Could you talk about that a little bit?

**Alexander Haig**

Well, that happened in the first real stalemate that Henry ran into in Paris. And he came back and he said, "We're going to have to do something." And there wasn't any question about it. They stuck their finger in our eye and they said, "There's not going to be any peace, we're going to win." Now, what happened was we started bombing the North, but it was very restrained. It was not the kind of bombing we did at Christmas. All military targets, incidentally, but we never went into the heart and soul of the heavy stuff.

**John Powers**

The dikes.

**Alexander Haig**

Huh?

**John Powers**

Or the dikes.

**Alexander Haig**

Oh, we never did the dikes really. They didn't make that much difference but could have if they had gone on a while. But we did sink some ships in the harbor in the second go around. And among them were Soviet ships.

**Timothy Naftali**

Intentionally or by accident?

**Alexander Haig**

Huh?

**Timothy Naftali**

Did we sink them intentionally or by accident?

**Alexander Haig**

No, they were in there. They were delivering goods. Nobody cared who they were. They were legitimate targets.

**Timothy Naftali**

But that's still, you know, the United States government was always very wary of sinking Soviet ships.

**Alexander Haig**

They shouldn't have been there. They knew we were going to -- we weren't going to tolerate what we -

**Timothy Naftali**

Had we signaled this --

**Alexander Haig**

You know, Henry shared everything with Bill Greenan [phonetic sp], even maybe more than I would have. I can remember Cienfuegos. You didn't ask about that.

**Timothy Naftali**

We're going to, yes, talk about that. That's a fantastic story.

**Alexander Haig**

Cienfuegos happened after this failure to respond to the EC shoot down and the weakness we showed, and next thing we know, we get the photographs of submarine pens and submarines in those pens being developed in Cienfuegos Harbor and these were nuclear capable subs. I mean, nuclear, not only nuclear propelled subs but nuclear delivered subs. And at that time Henry and the president were on their way to meet with de Gaulle, as I recall, and they called me on the phone when we had confirmation of this. I passed that on first and then I got the response. The president, Al, the president wants you to go to Dobrynin and give him a stark message that this is unacceptable. I went over to see Mr. Dobrynin in a darkened office and always the most cordial, brilliant fellow you ever laid your eyes on. He was a raconteur; he was everything. Had many years, 20 something years as ambassador to the United States. He knew all of us. Played us like a piano. You know, and I went in and I said, "We have proof that you are building submarine pens, and I have been instructed by the president to pass on a message to you that this is unacceptable." He said, "Are you threatening me?" I said, "No, I'm telling you that if you don't remove them we're going to remove them for you." He hit the table and said, "This is an insult." I said, "Thank you. I delivered my message; you better pass it on." And I left and I reported it to Henry. I thought he was going to fire me. "How dare you speak that way to the Soviets!" I said, "Henry, that's all they understand." You know, an old German Soviet marshal told me once, he said, "We don't care what you [unintelligible] capitalists say. We don't believe you till you spend your money, then we know you're serious." And that's something we ought to think about when we deal with Russia. They watch us. I think they thought I was serious because in 24 hours they started dismantling every one of those things and Henry didn't say another word.

**John Powers**

At the same time that Cienfuegos is going on, too, there are two other crises that Nixon talks about in his book, "The October Crisis." One was the election in Chile of Salvador Allende and the other, though, was in the Middle East and had to do with Jordan. And I was wondering if you had any knowledge of the Nixon's efforts to come to the aid of King Hussein and all of that.

**Alexander Haig**



I had a great deal to do with it. As you recall, Henry was out of the country most of that time so I was the interface with Rabin, who was the ambassador in Washington at the time, and I lived through every hour of that, every hour of it. I was, I was the point of contact. I was the Henry Kissinger in that crisis. I was a part of it.

**John Powers**

And how did you -- how did that operate? How did you work through this crisis?

**Alexander Haig**

Well, I got the call from our ambassador in a bunker in Amman Jordan when the uprising occurred. And then we had reports of the Syrian tanks on the border, manned by Syrians, driven by Syrians with a Soviet officer on the top of each tank until it got to the border, then they jumped off and the tanks went across. And at that point, Jordan's forces were very courageous and very professional. They are British tradition forces. And they're brave and they were disciplined, and they did very well in the initial stages of battle with the PLO and the insurgents that had been in place and ready to start this thing. But they were no match for the tank columns that came across the border. And I had just gotten home, midnight, when this news came in that they were beginning to buckle, Jordanian forces. Rabin and I were on the phone together that whole night. And I had to call the president and tell him that we have got to let the Israelis move here. And they did, by air. And destroyed most of those Syrian tanks, and that's what saved Jordan.

**Douglas Brinkley**

Do you ever worry that U.S. foreign policy is too closely tied to Israel?

**Alexander Haig**

Of course, always I worry about it. But I also worry about what is our real problem around the world today. It's a squandering of American credibility worldwide, and it's a product of 30 years of misjudgment, especially in the Middle East by presidents of both Republican and Democratic alike, both parties. I could go right down the list of 30 years.

**John Powers**

But Nixon was such a successful diplomat in the Middle East.

**Alexander Haig**

Oh, he was successful.

**John Powers**

In Egypt.

**Alexander Haig**

No, that's why I think he was one of our greatest foreign policy presidents. I think the history books are going to judge him far more favorably than contemporary news media driven histories. And also, remember, he who has the power writes the history. Well, he lost the power so he didn't write any history.

**Timothy Naftali**

Could we get back to the September crisis because when you were acting as Kissinger, it's very interesting in your book but reading your account of it, there are a few questions. Did, did you have authorization to order the COB aircraft to fly its command mission?

**Alexander Haig**

To do --

**Timothy Naftali**

The COB, the command mission.

**Alexander Haig**

The COBs?

**Timothy Naftali**

Yeah.

**Alexander Haig**

Did I have --

**Timothy Naftali**

How was -- was that a decision you made?

**Alexander Haig**

Yeah, I made that decision.

**Timothy Naftali**

I thought --

**Alexander Haig**

But I had talked to the president about the need to do it. And I don't know whether Henry was in Moscow or on his way back but, you know, the buck stopped with me.

**Timothy Naftali**

Well, I was going to say --

**Alexander Haig**

And I thought it sent a signal that was very important and it wasn't belligerent. We had every right to send a COB aircraft to Tel-Aviv any time we wanted, and did.

**Timothy Naftali**

Absolutely, but did you also order the stepping up of the alert status of U.S. ground forces and the placement of the 82nd Airborne Division on a six-hour alert?

**Alexander Haig**

In Europe.

**Timothy Naftali**

Yeah. To say that --

**Alexander Haig**

I conveyed it but never without the president's okay.

**Timothy Naftali**

No, I understand, but it was an interesting way of sending a signal to the Soviets.

**Alexander Haig**

Important way. As I say, if you don't spend the money, they don't believe you. And do you blame them with the way we promise and threaten and do nothing? We have had 30 years of that, American presidents.

**Timothy Naftali**

What was Kissinger's reaction to those signals?

**Alexander Haig**

I never asked him. He was happy because it came out very well.

**Timothy Naftali**

But because it's in the history of that crisis, Henry -- I mean, as you describe it, Kissinger doesn't play much of a role in that crisis. Big decisions are being made by the president through you.

**Alexander Haig**

Oh, no, no, no, no, Henry wasn't there. When he wasn't there, that's the way it had to be. I don't know whether Henry liked it or disliked it, but he sure knew it was happening. I don't think he would have spent 30 days at the Yom Kippur War if it hadn't been for the president. He wanted to go home every day. Brent Scowcroft was in my office pounding the desk, "We got to get Henry home." And I'd send the message back after talking to the president. "Stay there till hell freezes over."

**Timothy Naftali**

This is when he is negotiating. This is during the October [unintelligible]

**Alexander Haig**

That's what led to Camp David. Sure.

**Douglas Brinkley**

Do you think Jimmy Carter did a good job at Camp David? You're critical on Carter a lot. How was he --

**Alexander Haig**

I don't think Jimmy Carter did many good jobs at anything, to this very day. I mean, here's a fellow that overthrew the Shah of Iran. Now, he may not have known that he was doing it but everything he did had the practical consequences of doing that. He ordered me to order my deputy to go down to keep the troops in the barracks when law and order was breaking down and the moolas [phonetic sp] were taking over the capitol, and I refused to do it, and I said, "And I know what that means." So he then called my deputy, or had his secretary of defense call him and order him to go. Well, his career meant more to him than mine did to me because I quit and left NATO. That's -- you'll find within a week of that happening I went to Washington to be sure I knew what had really happened. Brzezinski was doing something to help the Shah. He won't admit it today probably, but he was, and thank God he was. Vance was on the other side of that issue and the president sided with Vance.

**Timothy Naftali**

Was that the origins of the Heiser mission?

**Alexander Haig**

Huh?

**Timothy Naftali**

The Heiser mission.

**Alexander Haig**

Heiser mission, sure. And Dutch Heiser was my deputy that ran UCOM [phonetic sp] day-to-day basis. I called him, I said, "Dutch, you're going to be confronted with a decision that you get probably once in a lifetime; that is whether you want to keep your career and do what's wrong or stand on principle. I've done the latter."

**Douglas Brinkley**

Were there any private moments with Nixon that you reflect back on where for -- obviously you are working together, did a friendship develop? Is there any stories of private Nixon, the real man behind the president that you can think of that you remember once in a while?

**Alexander Haig**

You know, all I can say about him, I've served seven presidents, four intimately close range. He was the most thoughtful, considerate and I think intelligent president of them all. He was the most serious about being president. He never stopped work. He never made a decision off the cuff or short -- took anguishing time to do it. He plumbed every source he could get for advice. And as a result he didn't make a lot of mistakes in foreign affairs. Domestic side he felt was better laissez-faire. The less the government tinkers, the better it will be. And there's a lot of truth in that but not always so he probably -- if he could be remade he would probably never have put price and wage controls in, which was the idea of John Connally.

**John Powers**

You left the White House in January of '73 to become vice chief of staff of the Army. Before returning to the White House in May what were your initial thoughts about the Watergate break-in?

**Alexander Haig**

Well, I didn't think it was anything but the kind of political mischief that went on regularly. And I mean, my God, I, I had seen enough in Washington to know that nobody was going to get the sainthood award for being president of the United States. Lyndon Johnson wouldn't have. I know the Kennedys wouldn't have because they lied to the American people about the Cuban Missile Crisis for years, even under sworn testimony, some of them. And no, you know, I expect politics to be politics. It's a dirty game but it doesn't mean that everybody has to be of that mold.

**John Powers**

So how did it come about that you became the chief of staff on May the 1st of '73?

**Alexander Haig**

Chief of Staff of the White House?

**John Powers**

Yes, sir.

**Alexander Haig**

It's a great mystery to me. I thought I died and went to heaven because I was back in the army and I loved the army. I still do. And I enjoyed it because not only was I vice chief of staff but Abrams was not confirmed because of the Cambodian hearings so I was boss. I never did anything without talking to Abe about it beforehand if it was of his, you know, authority level. But no, I was happy as a pig and I got a call -- well, I got a call a couple of times from Ron Ziegler. He said, "The president wants to know what you would do about this." I said, "God, I don't know, Ron, I'm not there and I'm not going to give off-the-cuff advice on something that I don't have a full sensitive grip on." But I went back to my wife and I said, "Now, why would he be asking me?" The next thing I know I was down at Fort Benning at a meeting. We were having a banquet after the meeting, and I got a tap on the shoulder that said, "The president would like to talk to you." So I went back into the back room and it wasn't the president, it was Bob Haldeman. He said, "Al, the president wants you to come over and replace Haldeman -- replace me and Ehrlichman." I said, "What?" He said he wants me to replace -- you to replace me and Ehrlichman. And I said, "That wouldn't be good for the president. It wouldn't be good for me." And he said, "No, I'm serious." He said he wanted -- he's standing right here. And I said, "Well, please ask him to think about this a little longer. I think it would be a mistake." And I went back and I was at dessert and I went back again. Then I could hear the president telling Haldeman, "You tell him that he'll have nothing to do with Watergate, this is temporary until we get somebody, but we have to keep things functioning, and we have to abide by your decision to resign." It wasn't his decision to resign. I thought a lot more of Haldeman, incidentally, than the American press did. He was, he was a man of some character. And he was not what he was portrayed to be, some kind of a fascist, not at all, not at all. He was selfless. I never saw him sit at a Cabinet table. I never saw him take a favorite seat in the helicopter like the Reagan gang. They had all the [unintelligible] being president of the United States, most of them. They sat at the Cabinet table. They -- out came their opinion. Nobody wanted to hear their opinions. They wanted to hear the president's opinion. That's what you want in a Cabinet meeting, not a staffer who is neither confirmed nor elected. So there's a legal violation there in my view when you pass total authority to someone who is not confirmed or elected.

**Douglas Brinkley**

How well did you know Gerald Ford? Now you're back in the White House. Had you known Ford through Washington circles, through Capitol Hill much?

**Alexander Haig**

I did know him, sure. I knew him because I had been in the Kennedy administration, the Johnson administration. I knew him and I respected him greatly and I still do. And people will never know what a courageous man he was. And he really was.

**Douglas Brinkley**

You mentioned a little bit ago about the body language that Zhou Enlai showed you kind of signaling without saying, and there's that famous meeting dealing with the pardoning of Nixon when you're

meeting Gerald Ford. Did you ever, ever signal to President Ford that look, you better -- you know, I have already talked to Nixon and I think some kind of pardon is going to be necessary?

**Alexander Haig**

No.

**Douglas Brinkley**

You know that big controversy over that moment.

**Alexander Haig**

Only, only from certain members of Ford's staff. You know, remember, anybody that worked -- you know, government is a power seeker's paradise and the higher you go the more ruthless the power seekers become, the higher you go. You don't get more purity and more selflessness; you get more cut-throatness. And it's insatiable. It's part of the Washington scene. And whoever is chief of staff is free game. I had it in the Nixon White House. I had it in spades in the Ford White House. Ford didn't know it. He begged me to stay on, and I didn't want to stay on but he made it possible for me to say no because I said, "If you stay on you have to give me hiring and firing privileges." And I was going to fire two of his favorite guys because they were inadequate to be in the White House of the United States of America, and they proved to be. Years later he put his arm around me and he said, "You know, Al, if I had listened to you I would still be president." So I tell you, you just have to know what a White House is. It's a den of friction and competition and ambition and when you get a good guy, oh, you're blessed, you really are.

**Douglas Brinkley**

That moment when you go in to see -- did Nixon ever pull -- I mean, the pardon's in the air. Did Nixon ever mention to you, look, geez, what's going to happen to me here? You're going to be left in the White House; I may have to leave. You're going to have to really help Gerald Ford?

**Alexander Haig**

No.

**Douglas Brinkley**

Have you been public about everything that occurred or is there some story you want to tell now?

**Alexander Haig**

Sure, everything, everything I ever did in those last hours I have written about in my book.

**Douglas Brinkley**

Right.

**Alexander Haig**

I didn't leave them with a hatred or a disappointment in Richard Nixon, precisely the opposite. You know, I lived through every agony he went through and his family went through. And it was a terrible drain on my own family. I wasn't used to losing. I hadn't lost too much up until then, but I lost him and the country lost him, and I think it was a result of domestic political excesses. Let me give you an example. Friday night I get a call from "Time" magazine. "General Haig, we have a story that President Nixon and Bebe Rebozo own the bridge from Nassau to Paradise Island and have been taking \$2 a car ever since." I said, "What? Where did you get that crazy story?" "We have it on absolutely unshakable ground." I said, "Well, you let me talk to the president and I'll give you an answer." Well, the president was on his way to Florida, and it took me two hours to get him. And when I got him, he said, "Where's Paradise Island?" I said, "In Nassau." He said, "Oh, I know that place where Huntington Hartford built something." I said, "That's the place." I said, "They say you own the bridge, you and Bebe, and you have been taking fares." "Dear God, Al, nothing could be farther from the truth. I never heard of such a thing." So I called them up right away. Oops, too late, we have gone to press. And they printed it. And they've never retracted it. Now, this is the kind of thing that went on every day of the week in that White House. And when I went over it was under the condition I wouldn't have to touch Watergate. I couldn't have walked in the door without being up to here in Watergate.

**Timothy Naftali**

Wait. There was -- who gave you this offer? Who promised you you wouldn't have to touch Watergate?

**Alexander Haig**

The president.

**Timothy Naftali**

He said you won't have to deal with Watergate again?

**Alexander Haig**

He said, "You will not deal with Watergate."

**John Powers**

Was that primarily --

**Alexander Haig**

And I got over there and he didn't even have a lawyer. He had Len Garment, who wasn't too well at the time and I don't think the president trusted him to be his lawyer and I don't think Len wanted to be his lawyer. But be that as it may, I said, "You got to get a lawyer." He said, "Who do you recommend?" I said, "Bennett Williams." He said, "He's a Democrat." I said, "Of course, he's a Democrat, that's why you ought to hire him. He's a lawyer first and a Democrat second because he's a



good lawyer, probably the best in the country." John Connally had enough sense to hire him. John Connally got off scot-free, and Richard Nixon would have had he listened to --

**Timothy Naftali**

When did you find out about the tapes?

**Alexander Haig**

When did I find out?

**Timothy Naftali**

Yeah, when did you learn that the conversations you were having with the president [N1] in the White House were being taped?

**Alexander Haig**

Oh, well, I learned that the night Butterfield gave it in testimony. I knew there was a taping system because there had been a taping system since the days of Franklin Roosevelt. And as a special assistant to McNamara, I was liaison to the White House from the Pentagon so that meant all of the support that the Pentagon gives to the White House, and believe me, it is considerable, including personnel, all of the communication and the White House communications agency walk -- I used to deal with and they told me about the taping system. But it was voice-activated. And that meant -- and Lyndon Johnson had it most places. He'd just push a flip -- a switch if he wanted it. The president -- and I talked to the president later about this. I said, "How did you ever put in a voice-activated system?" He said, "Haldeman said it was the latest technology." If you slam the door the thing started. So everything was mindlessly being taped. And I couldn't believe it. So I ordered -- the president was out in the hospital with double pneumonia, spitting up blood with a temperature of 104. I didn't even know if he was going to live the night. And I said, "Dear God, tear that system out right now." So I had it torn out without even talking to the president. Then I got in the car and I drove, drove out to the hospital and took the two lawyers, Fred Buzhardt, who we had by that time, came from Defense, great patriot who gave his life for his country. I can tell you he did. And Len, and we got out there and I said, "This is the case, boys, what does he do with the tapes?" And Buzhardt said, "Have a bonfire." And Len said just the opposite. And the president got so mad when he heard that answer he said, "Get out of here. Haig, you stay." And I stayed. He said, "Al, what's your recommendation?" I said, "Get rid of the tapes. They're your property and the minute they're subpoenaed, they become the people's property." And he said, "I have to sleep on it." The next morning I went in and his temperature had broken because they had given him a lot of drugs and he said, "Al, those tapes are going to defend me. They're going to protect me from what I'm being charged with." Every day the charges were escalating. Some of them was wild, crazy, nothing. You know, like using taxes device at San Clemente, and I mean, I knew where he borrowed the money. I knew his -- the poor guy left office owing half a million dollars and never took another nickel from the government after that. You know that. I mean, he took his retirement. He didn't want a Secret Service. He was a misread, misunderstood president, which he probably contributed to and he'd be the first to admit it, but it didn't make him any less capable and it didn't make him wrong in the things that were policy-related to the governance of this country.

**Timothy Naftali**

But he was convinced the tapes would, would defend him?

**Alexander Haig**

He was. I think he was. I didn't think -- you know, somebody said, "Oh, he wanted to write a diary or he wanted to write books and this would tell him how." A lazy man, he wasn't. He sat down and wrote how many books after he retired? He wrote them all by hand on a yellow tablet like that, and I used to come see him and feet would be up just like they were in the White House, writing every line that was printed. And brilliantly written, and of all the presidents since Truman, he was rated the best writer of them all.

**Timothy Naftali**

Did he tell you why he had put this taping system in in the first place?

**Alexander Haig**

Why he what?

**Timothy Naftali**

Why did he have the taping system?

**Alexander Haig**

He -- because he always had one. There was always one there. And he said -- he told me -- he told Haldeman to get rid of it, tear it out long before that happened. And he was surprised that it was still in. Now, that could have happened but God knows where Haldeman's mind was. He had enough problems. I know because I shared them afterwards. So I don't know. But I think not burning the tapes was the biggest mistake he ever made.

**John Powers**

You had recommended that he burn the tapes, but in inner circles you also say that had he made that decision and actually burned the tapes then you would have resigned.

**Alexander Haig**

No, I didn't say that. What I said was that he asked me to burn the tapes. He said, "Would you be willing to do it?" And I said, "No." I said, "Get someone who is not going to be held accountable substantively for what he did." Get Manolo, get somebody who has no reputation for responsibility of authority.

**Timothy Naftali**

So he asked you hypothetically at some point?

**Alexander Haig**

Huh?

**Timothy Naftali**

So the president asked you hypothetically at some point whether you would be willing to destroy the tapes?

**Alexander Haig**

Yeah.

**Timothy Naftali**

Was this when he was in the hospital?

**Alexander Haig**

Yeah. I said, "I can't do that." I said, "I can't put my family in that position. I won't do it."

**Timothy Naftali**

This was when he was in the hospital?

**Alexander Haig**

Yeah. And then I, I made no headway. He said, "Al, I think I'm going to take my chances with the tapes." So I then went to Agnew who was under indictment for 40 felonies, 40. Now, there was a man that should have been impeached. And I went to him and I said, "What do you think about the tapes?" He said, "Oh, get a bonfire, now." I said, "Would you tell that to the president?" He said, "Yes." So I brought him all the way out to Bethesda, sat him down. I said, "This is what the vice president has to say, Mr. President." He said, "Mr. President, get rid of those tapes while they're yours. Get rid of them."

**Paul Musgrave**

Who said that?

**Timothy Naftali**

Spiro Agnew.

**John Powers**

You mentioned Vice President Agnew. Could you talk a little bit about your role in Agnew and the resignation that led to Ford's nomination as vice president? How did Nixon diplomatically tell Spiro Agnew that he needed to resign in October of 1973?

**Alexander Haig**

Well, it didn't exactly work that way. You know, we had an attorney general with Elliott Richardson, and Elliott Richardson is the one that came to me in June. I had just come there on May 8th and the first week of June he came in and he said, "You think you got problems now," he said, "Wait until you hear this one." And he said, "We have got 40 felonies with the vice president, and I have been a prosecutor in the state of Massachusetts. It's an open and shut, cut and dried case. This man is guilty as sin. He took money in envelopes in the White House in the vice president's office." And I said, "My God, Elliott, what are we going to do?" And Elliott said, "Well, you know, Al, this is a real crisis." He said, "Here you got a president and the impeachment machinery is already beginning to form, and you got a vice president who is impeachable immediately." And I said, "Yes, and that means a double converging impeachment with the speaker of the house next in line." See, I knew that all along. It didn't take Ronald Reagan's staff to decide I didn't know what the pecking order was for the presidency. Dear God, I'm the only man in the history of this country that presided over the removal of a president and a vice president. I knew the pecking order. That was never the question the day Ronald Reagan was shot. It was never the pecking order. It was who is going to keep this Cabinet together? Who is the senior Cabinet officer, and the secretary of state is. That's all that argument was about but it got totally distorted by Jim Baker and his minions.

**Douglas Brinkley**

Why did Baker -- you have a conflict with Baker? What did Baker have against you?

**Alexander Haig**

Nothing except he wanted my job because he wanted to be president, and he had to be a Cabinet officer. And he didn't get mine. He then got Don Regan's the same way except Don knew who it was and he went over and he said, "All right, you want my job you can have it, but I have to have yours." Okay, let's go in and tell the president. That's what happened.

**Douglas Brinkley**

And you were often pitted against Baker and Bush and they were such close allies. Was that the --

**Alexander Haig**

Pitted against Baker? No.

**Douglas Brinkley**

You don't think so?

**Alexander Haig**

Bush worked for me twice. I had known Bush for years. I respect George Bush, you know. He wouldn't have been my president. He knows that.

**Douglas Brinkley**

Who would have been your president if you had a choice?

**Alexander Haig**

Besides myself?

**Douglas Brinkley**

Yes.

**Alexander Haig**

No, no.

**Douglas Brinkley**

Was Reagan -- would Reagan have been?

**Alexander Haig**

Oh, yeah, oh, yeah. I supported Ronald Reagan, campaigned for him and we decided what was going to happen in the Cold War before I accepted the job. You know what it was? To continue with containment because the Soviet Union was already in an advanced state of decay and all we had to do was stay together and stay strong, and when I meant stay together I mean with our European allies and those in Asia who are our traditional allies, and I include China in there as a growing ingredient. And sooner or later we were going to prevail without bloodshed, without a shot being fired. That was his real strategy. And the minute he got out of the scene, his underlings started claiming he won the Cold War because he built Star Wars or because he beat up on Grenada or because he hit Panama. Come on, that's some serious business. It was a 50-year struggle, and it involved both parties and both presidents from both parties, and our allies in Western Europe are very important. And when you ignore all those realities you get in trouble, and that's what we have done this past eight years, seven years, six years.

**John Powers**

You knew Fred Buzhardt from your days together at West Point.

**Alexander Haig**

No, I didn't know him at West Point.

**John Powers**

How did he become the counsel to the president and what was your relationship as chief of staff to Fred Buzhardt?

**Alexander Haig**

Well, I told the president he had to get a counsel. My God, there wasn't a day that wasn't six tons of subpoenas and he had no idea of how the White House was being bombarded when they're all organized by "The Washington Post" and the DNC right in town. And that's what was going on, and it was a full-blown campaign of the most professional proportion. It involved press charges. It involved legal actions. It involved everything you can dream of. He needed probably 50 or 100 lawyers. And I said, "Take Bennett Williams." And he didn't. And I said, "Well, take Joe Califano." I said, "I know Joe, he's an honest man. He won't do anything but what's right according to the law." "Oh, he's a Democrat." The president didn't trust Democrats, and he had good reason to. But, you know, they are people are people and professionals are professionals. But anyhow, the only thing I had left -- everybody I ran by, we asked a couple of other people. One was a Cabinet officer who had defended him in the past and refused to do it. And we -- the only guy available was Fred Buzhardt. And I talked to Fred. I liked the cut of his jib. I knew he was a West Pointer so I knew he was probably an honest man because you don't survive that place in those days if you weren't. And he literally killed himself to defend the president. And I know it. And you wonder where Woodward and Bernstein's "Final Days" came from? Those parts of it that are accurate, and they are not all accurate but there are parts that are: Fred Buzhardt. I was in NATO and Fred called me. He said, "Al," he said, "I'm going to talk to Woodward and Bernstein." I said, "What in the hell are you doing?" He said, "No," he said, "If I don't, they'll print nothing but lies from people that don't know what's going on." And that's the game in Washington. You try to prove to a journalist how important you are because you make every decision even though you may have just heard about it.

**John Powers**

How much of your time was spent as Chief of Staff of trying to manage the media and to try and --

**Alexander Haig**

Manage the media?

**John Powers**

Well, not so much manage the media but to respond to the media?

**Alexander Haig**

I didn't spend a lot of time doing it. Ron Ziegler, God bless his soul, who is also dead prematurely, gave his life to serve and he helped it a little, unfortunately, by abusing himself, which he shouldn't have, but a wonderful, loyal, wonderful American, a patriot that we owe a debt to.

**Douglas Brinkley**

What do you -- what's your opinion of Bob Woodward as a reporter?

**Alexander Haig**

Well, he's a reporter.

**Douglas Brinkley**

I mean, have you --

**Alexander Haig**

Damn clever one, not always truthful. I don't believe the Casey story for 30 seconds and neither does anybody that I know knows. So he's not incapable of a little fabrication now and then, gilding of the lily.

**Douglas Brinkley**

How did you -- now that we know who Deep Throat was, for a while your name was speculated as that. Did that bother you that you were constantly being considered Deep Throat?

**Alexander Haig**

Well, you know, at first I was just completely outraged, but I knew exactly where it came from.

**John Powers**

You were the first one to suggest that Mark Felt was Deep Throat.

**Alexander Haig**

That what?

**John Powers**

You were the first person to suggest that Mark Felt was Deep Throat.

**Alexander Haig**

That's right. How did you know that?

**John Powers**

It's on the White House tapes. You -- right during the first leaks investigation you suggested to the president that Mark Felt was responsible.

**Alexander Haig**

Yeah, you know why?

**John Powers**

No, sir, I'm interested in learning.

**Alexander Haig**

You remember in that first book that they wrote, what was it, the president's boy -- men --

**Timothy Naftali**

"All the President's Men."

**Alexander Haig**

"All the President's Men," follow the money. Now, what does follow the money mean? It meant that that was the real gem they got from Deep Throat. And as I did my book and analyzed it years later I confirmed that in my own mind, because the only thing in that first book that was really honest and true was following the money. And it is what got Nixon in trouble, that money. And the only people in the U.S. government, the executive branch of the U.S. government responsible for following foreign currency, is the FBI. So I knew it was the FBI. Then I said, "Well, now, let's research it. What happened?" Mark Felt, I believe, thought he was going to be the next director. And when Nixon went and put Gray in, that's when Deep Throat started. And I think he had enough evidence to really hang up in the court of law. It doesn't mean anything from the standpoint of what were the motivations. Well, obviously the motivations were the cover-up for his friend, Mitchell, above all. And he didn't get any money out of it. I can name several presidents who left the White House very rich. And we never even questioned that. Both of them happen to be Democrats. Now our Republicans are in trouble for the same thing, kind of thing. I, I just don't think that what he did -- he left owing a half a million dollars or 400 something thousand dollars. I know that. He didn't -- he never took any money afterwards. He didn't take money for speeches. He wrote all his own books and that's what sustained him, plus his retirement, which was handsome, handsome enough. But he never took anything for being president.

**Douglas Brinkley**

Were you ever worried that Nixon, after he left the White House thought that you were Deep Throat?

**Alexander Haig**

No, no.

**Douglas Brinkley**

He knew better.

**Alexander Haig**

He knew better. Of course he knew better. I stayed in touch with Nixon until the day he died.

**Timothy Naftali**



When, when do you think he figured out that the June 23rd, 1972 tape, the so-called "smoking gun" tape --

**Alexander Haig**

Yeah, the "smoking gun," yeah.

**Timothy Naftali**

When do you think he figured out that it existed? Wasn't it a -- he listened to it and then told you that there was a problem.

**Alexander Haig**

Listen, I had two lawyers listen to it, including St. Clair and Buzhardt. And they said this is very damaging but it's not definitive. Because he -- Nixon had a strange way of doing things. He always would take the devil's advocate position. I have never known him not to. You know, and then he would say, "Or don't you agree?" And if you agreed he knew you were a phony. If you didn't agree he said, "This fellow is worth listening to," and then he would ask some serious questions. And that's the way these tapes read if you read them all the time. "Don't you agree?" Oh, of course we wouldn't do that. That was his style. He never really displayed his own personality in any tape I have ever read, and I haven't read many of them incidentally. But it was never his personality. It was the role he was playing at the moment and the fellow who was crossing him. If it was Dean, huh, and incidentally, Dean is the source of my being Deep Throat. He wrote his book and he went to the publisher. The guy said, "This book is awful." He said, "I'm not going to give you your advance. We can't afford it." And he said, "Well, what do I have to do?" And he had a ghostwriter who was a "Time" magazine journalist who happened to be the best friend of my press secretary who was also a "Time" magazine journalist. And he said, "Hey, there's a book being written about you by John Dean." And I said, "What's he writing about me for?" He said, "He's going to name you Deep Throat," because my friend refused to write it. He said, "You know that's a lie, and I'm not going to write it." So he didn't. So Dean wrote it himself, the last chapter of his book. He created Deep Throat. Now, it was a real problem until I realized that Deep Throat was a hero on every campus in America. We made him a hero, huh? He's still a hero. He's not a hero to me, and I don't think he was the source of the recent revelations either.

**Timothy Naftali**

Wow, I mentioned the "smoking gun" tape because the president understood that it was a problem.

**Alexander Haig**

Oh, anybody understood it was a problem. But it was a defensible one if you had a good, straight, honest, objective hearing.

**Timothy Naftali**

You tell a story in your memoir about --

**Alexander Haig**

That doesn't mean he didn't do it. I think he did, and I think he admitted it several times. He couldn't admit it enough for some people.

**Timothy Naftali**

When you say that he did it, you mean that he participated in the cover-up?

**Alexander Haig**

Yeah.

**Timothy Naftali**

But you tell the story in your memoir which is quite dramatic of October -- in October 1973 when you discovered that at least part of the 18-and-a-half minute gap was an intentional erasure and what a problem that was going to be. And I mean, can you, can you tell us that story of how you found out that, that somebody --

**Alexander Haig**

Well, I didn't find out anything about those tapes. You know, the first thing I was told by counsel, Fred Buzhardt, was, "Al, don't ever touch a tape. Don't ever be alone in the same room with a tape and don't ever, ever listen to a tape." That's what he told me, and it was the best advice I ever got. So I got a general, John Bennett, God bless his soul, come down and handle the tapes. And I told him the risks involved, and he is a straight shooter and a wonderful man. So he handled all the tapes. I never did. And all I ever did was take advice from Fred Buzhardt, who I trusted implicitly and explicitly and in every way you can, and it was well placed.

**Timothy Naftali**

So he's the one who told you that there was this erased portion of the tapes?

**Alexander Haig**

Oh, yeah, I was here. We sent it out to Fred for he and St. Clair on the West Coast to look at, and they both said it's very damaging but it's not, it's not definitive. I mean, it's not inclusive. Or wait a minute.

**Timothy Naftali**

Conclusive, what was damaging?

**Alexander Haig**

It wasn't necessarily going to be interpreted the way people who assumed the president was always wrong came down on it. And he, you know, he had the choice. But that wasn't the reason he resigned, that tape. We had a government -- you know, I remember when we had that Yom Kippur War and

"The Washington Post" came out with a front page story claiming the president has just trumped up a crisis with the Soviet Union in order to deflect attention from Watergate. And we came as close to a nuclear war in that crisis of any crisis in our history because we actually went on alert, and the Soviets were tampering with doing the same when they, they caved. And let me tell you, there have been members of the Cabinet like Jim Schlesinger who put out a line of bologna that is so self-serving and dishonest he ought to be shot. And that is to the effect that Nixon was so drunk that he couldn't go to the meeting so he, Schlesinger and Henry Kissinger ran the meeting and handled the crisis. That is bologna. I chaired the meeting. [Unintelligible] meeting at all, it was a WSAG meeting. The president never went to a WSAG meeting, ever. And for him to put that out and give it to the British, BBC, which is what he did, I think is unforgivable.

**Timothy Naftali**

How important is it to keep in mind that you have a crisis going on in the Middle East when you're trying to understand the Saturday Night Massacre? The fact that these things are happening simultaneously, does that -- is that an important thing to keep in mind?

**John Powers**

And Agnew's resignation.

**Timothy Naftali**

And Agnew. All these things are happening at the same time.

**Alexander Haig**

Of course, you know, intimately in a [unintelligible] I told that to person after person, including the Attorney General of the United States who handled the whole Agnew thing, except I had to be the force criminal as far as the vice president was concerned because he quoted me all the time every time he said it. Haig said you get to do this. Haig said you got to do that, and I did say he had to resign. But the president did, too. I got him in for -- I wasn't a fool. I don't fire people. I was chief of staff, so I brought him in and the president fired him. Told him he had to resign. And you know what his interest was? I'll lose my retirement. Get me my retirement and I'll do it.

**Paul Musgrave**

Speaking about the Agnew resignation, at what point did the president seriously begin considering that he would have to find a replacement to vice president?

**Alexander Haig**

What do I think?

**Paul Musgrave**

When did President Nixon start seriously searching for a replacement vice president and why was he unable to go with John Connally who was probably his first choice?

**Alexander Haig**

Well, I don't have to tell you that the president was very fond of John Connally and John Connally was his choice to be on his ticket for the second term. He would have been. I was the go-between between John and the president. And when it looked like Agnew had to go he wanted Connally to replace Agnew. And I said, "Mr. President, this is a very difficult thing to do." Not because John Connally, there was anything wrong with him that anybody knew at the time but because he was formidable and the Democrats would not want John Connally in the White House. He was more popular with Democrats than he was with Republicans. And he was, he was a very charismatic guy. I don't know whether you knew him but he was. He was the old Murchison-type Texan. Boy, he laid it all on the line, put it right down, including wage and price control, and he damn near talked Nixon into doing it the second time when I was chief of staff, and I said, "If you do it, I'm out of here." That's why we stopped it. That's a fact. The president thought John Connally was absolutely, I guess, infallible. And he was a tremendous human being and a tremendous personality and you couldn't help but be influenced by him.

He was a very charismatic guy.

**John Powers**

Do you think he had the most influence on Nixon?

**Alexander Haig**

No, he had a lot but not the most. I think Nixon's mind had the most. He was a very cerebral guy and much more cerebral than any president that I worked for, most of whom were so busy they just jump from one thing to the next and can't waste the time to think back on it. Nixon thought very carefully of every decision he ever made, and he plumbed every bit of advice he could ever get. But once he made a decision he walked away from it, too. And that's a good trait to have. He didn't worry it through and then start changing and tinkering with it.

**Douglas Brinkley**

Did you ever worry if Gerald Ford was going to be up for the job as president?

**Alexander Haig**

If who? Gerald --

**Douglas Brinkley**

Gerald Ford was up for the job.

**Alexander Haig**

Did I worry about it?

**Douglas Brinkley**

Yes.

**Alexander Haig**

I never worried about it. I had great respect for Gerald Ford. And let me tell you, it's no mean job to be leader of the House of Representatives, and he was respected and loved by everybody. Some of them loved him too much because they started conniving to get him in that office before his time was.

**Timothy Naftali**

Where did the idea of -- for Gerald Ford?

**Alexander Haig**

Huh?

**Timothy Naftali**

Where did the idea of naming Gerald Ford come from?

**Alexander Haig**

Where did it come from? Good sense. I was a great Nelson Rockefeller supporter. I don't mean I was a New England liberal Republican, but I worked with him in foreign affairs and he was tough, believe me, very tough. He's the guy that talked me into running for president. And off the record, you got the record off?

**Male Speaker**

I don't know.

**Alexander Haig**

I didn't know he was going to die over-exercising. But I had a bankroll and everything so I wasn't, I wasn't a complete maniac but he up and left the world and, of course, he never -- in the Ford White House, the White House staff killed him. They humiliated him. They -- I watched him literally, physically just go down, down, down. And I'd come back every month and I'd go over to see him and I'd said say, "Mr. Vice President, you have to just shump this off from these midgets," and that's what they were, came over on the Hill -- from the Hill with Gerry Ford and that's why I didn't stay with Ford.

**Timothy Naftali**

Well, in his oral history, Nelson Rockefeller blames Donald Rumsfeld for the fact that he had --

**Alexander Haig**

I hated Rumsfeld because Rumsfeld, after all, was chief of staff. And Rumsfeld wanted to be president. I have no doubt about it. I know, he was running but he didn't have the guts to throw his hat in the ring because he didn't have enough support, so he declined at the last minute. We had a real gang my year. '88, my God, we had DuPont, we had Haig, had Rumsfeld, we had the Reverend. Who else did we -- oh, we had Jack Kemp, I think.

**Male Speaker**

Yeah.

**Alexander Haig**

I think. Who else did we have?

**Timothy Naftali**

Bush.

**Alexander Haig**

Bush, yeah. Oh, how did I forget that?

**John Powers**

How would you describe Nixon's relationship with Ronald Reagan while Nixon was President?

**Alexander Haig**

Very good, very good. And I was the go-between on much of it and it had to do with the Vietnam War first and foremost. And, you know, it was -- Ronald Reagan was always supportive and somebody said that he defected on Vietnam at the end. No, he didn't, he never did. His staff did, but he didn't. He stayed, he stayed strong.

**Timothy Naftali**

How about on China?

**Alexander Haig**

China, he never in my hearing ever said anything pro or con. But when he came into office it was clear that all the men around him had either been in the direct lobbying with Taiwan or had some connection. Deaver, several other guys and, you know, they started right out by violating the assurances we had given Beijing not to have two Chinas. They invite the whole Taiwan delegation for the inaugural. That was my first crisis, and then go in there and tell the president you couldn't do that unless you want to violate an agreement that you made with the Chinese, your predecessor did. It was Ford who made the agreement. You know, you can't -- people don't care whether this guy is president or that guy. He's the president of the United States. That one president always -- if a president gives his word you never violate that word unless it's in the most extreme circumstance. If you do, you lose your

credibility. What's our problem today as a nation? Zero credibility everywhere in the world, that's our problem and it's dangerous, dangerous for the world. You got to rebuild it.

**Douglas Brinkley**

Let me ask you about a few key players during the era we're talking about just to get your kind of thumbnail sketch on what their character is and what you think of them. Jack Kemp.

**Alexander Haig**

Oh, Jack's an old friend for many years. Jack is Jack. Everybody knows Jack knows Jack. In my case I love him dearly, and I love his wife and his family. He's a wonderful guy. I love him.

**Douglas Brinkley**

What about George Schultz?

**Alexander Haig**

George Schultz is a very close friend. I recited today we both had of one mind on this Iraq conflict. Don't go to the U.N.; go to NATO. God's name we did that for I'll never know.

**Douglas Brinkley**

What about Bill Clinton?

**Alexander Haig**

Well, I know Bill Clinton better than most, not intimately but I went to his White House more times than I did to George Bush's White House. Put it that way.

**Douglas Brinkley**

For advice -- what was he advice --

**Alexander Haig**

As a guest, and I don't think I was ever invited to George Bush's White House except for the president of Yemen, and I went through the line and a little fellow stepped out of line, put his arms around me and said, "This is the General Haig, the strongest American I know." I said, the fact, I won't be back. And we weren't.

**Douglas Brinkley**

Why weren't you invited a lot to the Bush White House? Was that the Baker factor at play that you weren't involved with the Bush Administration?

**Alexander Haig**

No, I campaigned against him. I'm the only one other than Pat Robertson and Pete DuPont who ever said anything truthful about him.

**Timothy Naftali**

I want to ask you a couple of points that come from your memoir. In your memoir you blame yourself for the Stennis Compromise.

**Alexander Haig**

How unusual for me to blame myself.

**Timothy Naftali**

No, but it's -- I'd like you to, for the record, to tell a little bit of the story of the Stennis Compromise and what you think Richard Nixon should have done.

**Alexander Haig**

You're not going to find I'm blaming myself. What I said in my book was that unnatural as it may sound, when we were facing the impasse and how to get out of this hemorrhaging of tapes and, you know, every time you give them ten they wanted 150 more and it was a matter of presidential prerogative as well, very debatable by any court. These rulings that it was public property suddenly, you know, merged right out of the emotion of Watergate and the hate involved. And we all sat down, Fred Buzhardt, myself, Len Garment and Elliott Richardson.

**Timothy Naftali**

Charlie Wright?

**Alexander Haig**

And this was after -- what was the event? Whatever it was, Nixon came and said no more. I am going to fire this fellow who was, believe me, he was fishing in any pond he could fish in. He had a staff that hated Nixon. They have quote after quote. You could go -- any objective analysis would tell you that was -- that was a headhunting group. Cox I'm talking about, and so the president decided to fire Cox. Oh, I know, it was after

Agnew resigned. He said, "I'm going to clear the decks." He said, "I'm going to get this snake who, Elliott Richardson put in here. I'm going to get him out." And I said, "Wait, Mr. President, be careful." You know, I don't think he could have gotten away with that. Maybe he could have but I cautioned against it. So we all sat down and I said, "Well, I'll tell you what the president is going to do if we don't come up with a solution. He's going to fire Cox." Elliott went, "Ah, you can't do that. Don't fire Cox." He said, "I'll tell you what. What you do is tell Cox no more tapes." Give them this batch that are under discussion, and incidentally, that did not include the "smoking gun" for reasons I don't know but it just -- they fired along around it but they never asked for that one. But anyhow he said, "We'll say, I will go to him and say, 'This is what the president is going to do but he wants your assurance you won't ask for any more tapes.'" He said, "This is the plan." And I said, "Are you sure?" And I said because



we'll have to put it in play. We'll have to go to Stennis for the Stennis Compromise, the guy that will listen to the tapes and make the judgment on the tapes then subpoenaed. And then having done that we would have to get Howard Baker. We would have to get the leaders to join us. That meant the Southern guy --

**Timothy Naftali**

Ervin.

**Alexander Haig**

And I said I'm willing to try it, and Fred is willing to try it, and Fred has got Stennis's agreement to do it. Stennis was a great patriot. You know, he was a Southern Democrat in the finest sense of the word. And it was Elliott's plan so we started it in motion. We had all the meetings in the White House and Howard Baker said, "Wonderful, geez, we got it." This is the solution, of course. They all agreed, Irwin, everybody agreed. And we put the thing in motion. This was a Friday night and Mel Laird came wandering into my office, and I'm thinking here, "Oh, my God, I can't believe this is finally off our back, off the country's back." And Elliott said -- I mean, Mel said, "Did Elliott Richardson agree with this?" And I said, I said, "He not only agrees with it, it's his plan." And he said, "Well, you better talk to him because I just did, and I got the feeling he was sitting with Cox when he called." So I immediately try to get him. I couldn't get him. I stayed in the White House until 10:30. I couldn't get him, called and called. So I went home and I got into my library at home, picked up the phone, called Elliott Richardson again. He finally picked up the phone. And he sounded to me like he had been drinking. And I said, "Elliott, are you still with us?" And he said, "No, Al, I'm sorry, I'm not. I have just spent an evening here with Cox and I can't do that." I said, "Well, you're not going to tell me that. You're going to tell the president that and I want you in his office tomorrow morning at 9:00." And I said, "You realize we're on the verge of a conflict in the Middle East that you're now going to pull this one on us?" And we were, as you know. So next morning, I drag him up to see the president. President said, "Elliott, Al told me you devised this plan." And Elliott said, "Well, that's true in a sense but my heart wasn't in it. Now my heart's in it." So he said, "Get out of here." So he left. Now, what happened was the guys around him thought he could ride this into the presidency and one of them ended up on Reagan's staff as number two for Jim Baker. He's the guy, Garment. I know it because -- and, of course, Elliott put a knife in the president's back, and he never pulled out of it. He started drinking, drinking, drinking, drinking. He drank himself to death. He should have. Watch how you handle that.

**Timothy Naftali**

Yeah.

**Alexander Haig**

That, that last part you ought to take out.

**Timothy Naftali**

I have one other question from your memoir and that's, you said that in the Yom Kippur War, U.S. Intelligence convinced the Israelis that the Arabs would not attack.

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**Alexander M. Haig, Jr. Interview Transcription**

30 November 2007

**Alexander Haig**

U.S. intelligence, that's correct.

**Timothy Naftali**

Is that the --

**Alexander Haig**

per sec. 1.4 (c)(d)

**SANITIZED**

Golda Meir came over here. Golda Meir came over here to talk about this subject and I sat there in the office, in Henry's office. And she said, [REDACTED] are telling us they're not going to attack. What should I think?" He said, "Absolutely right. They're not going to attack." She went up to New York, and they attacked while she was up in New York. And, of course, Henry was beside himself. He didn't want to be guilty of that one. But that was the advice he got and why he gave it to her, I don't know. I wouldn't have. You could never be sure what was going to happen with that crazy place.

**Timothy Naftali**

You also didn't have that much respect for the CIA, did you?

**Alexander Haig**

Huh?

**Timothy Naftali**

At that point, weren't you suspicious of the CIA? I mean, the CIA --

**Alexander Haig**

We were suspicious of them all from the beginning. They claimed there were no merveng and Soviet missile systems; they had been merveng for years before they ever admitted it. They claimed that there was the Port of Kompong Som and Cambodia was closed to the north. That's where 90 percent of the supplies came right up through Cambodia for the port, and that's why Ford was as aggressive as he was when he was about that -- remember that, that was his first crisis and he handled it well, I thought. But be that as it may, yeah, that's what she was told. And then they -- after that Henry's calling me saying that Schlesinger is not permitting the supplies to go to Israel. We owed them F-16s. We owed them TOW missiles, a lot of things. They weren't moving. He wouldn't let an El Al plane land here unless they painted over the El Al sign. Why people of Jewish extraction get into the U.S. government and become anti-Israel is beyond me, but Weinberger was the most anti- Israel man I've ever known. Did you see that NBC special about a month ago?

**Timothy Naftali**

No, no.

**SANITIZED COPY**

**Alexander Haig**

You know why? It was killed by the administration. You know why?

**Timothy Naftali**

No.

**Alexander Haig**

Because Ronald Reagan had approved a strike against the Bekaa Valley training camps of Hezbollah after our Marines were murdered.

**Timothy Naftali**

Yes.

**Alexander Haig**

And the night it was to happen, and this was Bud McFarland who was the National Security Advisor who was the main guest on this show. He said, "I went home to bed. They were to start the -- were to start at midnight. Of course, I stayed awake. I got a telephone call from the Pentagon saying the raid had been cancelled." He said, "I got up and ran down to see the president and I woke him up and I said, 'Mr. President, you know that raid you approved today on the Bekaa Valley? It's been cancelled.'" He said, "Well, now, Bud, that couldn't be so, I approved it." He said, "Mr. President, I just talked to the Pentagon." He said, "Well, Bud, call them again, get Cap, find out what happened." So they call. Bud is on the phone and the guy said -- I think it was the JCS watch officer said, "Mr. McFarland, the raid has been cancelled." And he said, "Well, who did it?" He said, "Cap Weinberger." He said, "What?" "Yeah, Cap Weinberger." So they hung up. He said to the president, "Mr. President, you have treason in your Cabinet." He said this -- "Cap Weinberger just canceled the raid." And the president said, "Well, Bud, he's a fellow Californian, and we have to take care of our own." Then they put the admiral on that was to conduct the raid, confirmed everything. They showed it once, and I never saw it again. Most incredible little vignette I have ever seen on TV.

**Timothy Naftali**

Doug has to go soon. Do you have some questions you would like to ask?

**Douglas Brinkley**

No, you have been just terrific. I thought you have -- it was just a great afternoon here. You have been very candid, and I appreciate it.

**Alexander Haig**

Yeah, I have been candid. I don't mind being candid for history, not for the press, for history.

**Timothy Naftali**

No, I just want to -- what we'll do, let's take a five-minute break. Doug's going to leave and then we'll do another 15 minutes where we can ask our last questions if it's okay with you.

**Alexander Haig**

Yeah, what time is it?

**Timothy Naftali**

It's five to 4:00. Is that okay? Thanks, thank you, Doug.

**Douglas Brinkley**

Thank you, guys.

**Timothy Naftali**

Let's just take a five-minute break and then we'll finish up with our last questions.

**Alexander Haig**

You guys all ask good questions, very good questions.

**John Powers**

Great stuff.

**Timothy Naftali**

That's great.

**Alexander Haig**

You got all the nerves.

**Douglas Brinkley**

Yeah, that was the idea.

**Alexander Haig**

Well, you did.

**John Powers**

No, you did well.

**Timothy Naftali**

Thanks.

**Douglas Brinkley**

Thanks, Tim, that was a really fun day. Thank you for making --

**Douglas Brinkley**

Thanks.

**John Powers**

Great meeting you.

**Douglas Brinkley**

I appreciate it.

**Timothy Naftali**

John, have you got some questions left that you want to ask?

**John Powers**

I was a little interested on the effect of the Cambodian invasion on the NSC staff.

**Alexander Haig**

Well, that's a good question. I'm glad you asked it.

**Timothy Naftali**

We're taping, right, fellows?

**Alexander Haig**

When you say the NSC staff --

**Timothy Naftali**

Wait, wait, wait, let's hold that again.

**Male Speaker**

Repeat that question one more time. Okay. And whenever you're ready.

**John Powers**

I was wondering if you could talk a little about the effect of the Cambodian invasion on the NSC staff.

**Alexander Haig**

Well, you know, they call things either facts or pretext. Cambodia was a pretext for some individuals who had lost favor because of lack of performance in the NSC staff and they were going to go one way or the other. Either because they were not performing well or because their philosophic bent was counterproductive to the president and his policy. That's, that's my own personal judgment. And in one case in particular I know it's true. A fellow was looking for an excuse; he was about to be fired. None of those fellows had any authority at that point. One was an administrator and handled the flow of papers. The other was a -- I call it de-frocked, fair-haired boy of Henry's. And the other was just a guy that was finished with Henry. He was finished. So they all three left on the pretext of Cambodia. Now, when in the history of our country has it been illegal, immoral or wrong to attack a country that is containing the enemy with the approval of the existing president and leader of that country who was being occupied against his will by Hanoi who asked us to do it and so we did it. We were losing 600 men a week, as I pointed out today, being killed in Vietnam. And most of those attacks were coming across the border from Cambodia and then going back in the sanctuary. I know because I fought a battle right on that border, the Battle of [unintelligible]. If you look at it it's the largest battalion operation of the war. And we were attacked by two regiments out of sanctuary, but I knew what they were going to do and we were ready for them, and we really banged them. But whoever would have thought that the American people would stand up against taking military action to protect your own forces when they are attacked from sanctuary of a government that wanted you to do the job. That was the truth. And we didn't do it without congressional authority. We briefed every key committee. I did the briefings so I know it. Defense Committee, Foreign Relations Committee of the House and Senate in both cases. And they said, boy, have at it as any good American would.

**John Powers**

Was the invasion successful?

**Alexander Haig**

Are you talking about the invasion or the bombing?

**John Powers**

The bombing.

**Alexander Haig**

Was it successful? It was at first. But they immediately adjusted their deployments to break up into smaller units and to disburse farther in so it sort of could say it was a mixed bag at best.

**John Powers**

As a military man, what is your view of My Lai and Lieutenant Calley?

**Alexander Haig**

Oh, I think absolute outrage. And it's an anathema and an aberration. It's just not -- it's not anything that is acceptable. But I would be far more scrupulous than that. When I was in Vietnam I had a commander that wanted to drop the dead bodies of VC on top of the enemy to break their morale. I said, "It's not going to happen on my watch. If you do a thing like that I'm out of here. I'm going to leave." And he was a fairly high ranking guy, let me tell you. More stars than I thought I would ever get. But he didn't do it. And if we don't stick by our principles and our values and what we stand for as a nation among our fighting men, heaven help us. That's why these things that happened in Iraq, to me, I know the reason for it, because all the supervision was stripped out of our force structure. Corps headquarters was taken out. They're the people that watch what I call the prisons, the POWs, all those ancillary logistics things, all stripped out. They had a core commander who is fighting the battles and had to worry about that damn prison. Rumsfeld, believe me. Perle, believe me. Wolfowitz, believe me. I know it, and that other guy from Philadelphia, where I come from. Disaster, really.

**Paul Musgrave**

General, I'd like to talk about 1974.

**Alexander Haig**

Are you glad you asked?

**Paul Musgrave**

By the summer of 1974 how in touch was President Nixon with the day-to-day working of the government? Was he still carrying on as he always had or was more of it being picked up by the staff and the Cabinet?

**Alexander Haig**

You mean after he --

**Paul Musgrave**

Before, before he was. June and July of 1974.

**Alexander Haig**

That last 18 months?

**Paul Musgrave**

Uh-huh.

**Alexander Haig**

I won't pretend that he wasn't preoccupied. He couldn't -- I mean, never a day went by there wasn't a brand new assault of some kind that had to be answered and addressed in timely fashion. In my own case, I never did anything that didn't have the approval of the president. I was raised in the old school. I wasn't elected to anything. You know, I detest White House staffers who assume authorities that they are not qualified to assume. And it's counterproductive to our system and to the Democratic process, which confirms or elects. And I never did it. You know, that night we gave the ultimatum to the Russians and the Yom Kippur War, which I think was the closest we have ever come to it. But I'll tell you what happened the day Reagan was shot. This has nothing to do with Richard Nixon. But the day he was shot, Cap Weinberger raised our alert level to a level without authority from anybody, without talking to anybody in the Cabinet. He did it on his own, and the Soviets immediately respond by raising their level to the highest level we had ever measured. And I learned that last spring, and it was covered up by Jim Baker. He was -- he told them, no, don't release that. Of course, they made me look like some kind of a raving maniac. You remember that day? The truth was I knew that they picked up our alert because I -- Cap didn't even know what DEFCON 2 was. I asked him. I said, "Do you know what DEFCON 2 is?" He said, "No." And he raised it to that. I said, "Well, you put your pilots in the cockpits and you have raised your lids on your missiles, and they're up and ready to fire." The Soviets picked it up because there are stringers at every one of those sack bases. That's what I -- why I went up to that press room and said, "I'm in charge of a group here pending return of the vice president," which Dan Rather cut out because he had advice from the hospital to do so by somebody on the White House staff.

**Timothy Naftali**

He cut out, what, pending return of the vice president, that portion of it?

**Alexander Haig**

It was cut out if you look at his -- and he brought in two professors from NYU to say that I didn't know the pecking order. Dear God, I just explained to you what it was to have a president and a vice president removed. I knew the pecking order. It was the Speaker of the House, Carl Albert, who was a drunk, under doctor's care, was going to be the next president. You wonder what Watergate was all about, a converging double impeachment and that's what the Democrats wanted and were working for, and they'd deny it to their deathbeds. But I know it.

**Timothy Naftali**

So on the day that President Reagan was, was shot, you heard that Weinberger had raised the alert level. Is that what drove you?

**Alexander Haig**

He said it. He came into the meeting late. He was 20 minutes late. He come in and he said, "I have just alerted our nuclear forces." I said, "What?" And we had just concluded in our discussion that this kid was a kook. And of course, that was the most important thing we could determine, that this have some external influence. And it didn't. It proved to be a complete nut case. And so this wasn't an East/West problem, but it quickly became one because Cap made it one.

**Timothy Naftali**



Now, what -- why do you -- to go back to '73 to the Yom Kippur War. Why do you feel that alert was the closest that we ever came to nuclear war as opposed to, for example, the Cuban Missile Crisis? What was it about the --

**Alexander Haig**

Cuban Missile Crisis was, you know, could have been.

**Timothy Naftali**

But what was it about --

**Alexander Haig**

But it never got to that heat level.

**Timothy Naftali**

What was it about the alert in '73? How did the Russians respond? Why do you know that we were so close? Why did you feel we were so close to a nuclear war?

**Alexander Haig**

per sec. 1.4 (c)(d)

**SANITIZED**

Oh, because first place, we watched our forces. The airborne units were moving down. Their fleet had already gone through the straits in the Mediterranean heading for Egypt. They were going to [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] And then we got an ultimatum message from them. And it said we are going to go with you or without you. So we had to answer it. The first thing we did was raise our nuclear alert.

**Timothy Naftali**

How high did we go?

**Alexander Haig**

We went fairly high but not as high as Cap did. But we knew they would pick it up. That's all we wanted to know.

**Timothy Naftali**

This decision to raise the DEFCON level, was it made at the WSAG? How was it -- how was the decision made?

**Alexander Haig**

The WSAG decided on what they thought we should do. I took it up to the president. I said, "Here's what they say." And he said, "Is that high enough?"  
And I said, "As long as they pick it up it's high enough." And they did pick it up. [Unintelligible] picked it up.

**John Powers**

In the aftermath of the '73 war, though, Nixon was a hero, both to Israel and to the Arabs in the Middle East.

**Alexander Haig**

In the '73 war.

**John Powers**

And the aftermath of the '73 war.

**Alexander Haig**

Well, I don't know about the Arabs.

**John Powers**

He went to Egypt and Saudi Arabia and Syria.

**Alexander Haig**

Oh, a case of -- no, wait a minute. No, Egypt was Sadat and if you were to ask me who I thought was the greatest statesman during my time in government, I'd probably put Anwar Sadat with Winston Churchill, in that stature. I mean, here's a guy that knew he was going to be killed and went to Israel knowing it was going to be his death. Now he told me he was. He said, "I won't live through this, but for peace I will do it." He was a remarkable man, and of course, they killed him. It didn't come as a surprise to me. He told me they were going to kill him.

**Timothy Naftali**

When did he tell you that?

**Alexander Haig**

He told me that when we went and visited them right after the war. Went to Egypt.

**Timothy Naftali**

In '74?

**Alexander Haig**

Because Nixon went and that's when he had phlebitis.

**Timothy Naftali**

Uh-huh, but because Sadat hadn't been to Israel yet in '74.

**Alexander Haig**

Wait a minute, maybe I have got the wrong day. This is hard; it's a long period.

**Timothy Naftali**

Sure.

**Alexander Haig**

But it did -- he told me this. Oh, I know when he told me this. He told me then this when he came to see Reagan. And I brought him in and I told President Reagan, I said, "Now, be prepared for this guy. He's a serious man." I said, "First place, he's very religious." I said, "In the second place he'll go down on his knees, he'll ask for a map and he'll show you the two crescents of Soviet planning to take Africa, one through South Africa and Angola and the other one on the upper tier." And sure enough he's sitting there and he said, "Have you got a map?" Map comes out on the floor. He's down on his hands and knees and he's talking about this, Soviets are going to do this and they're going to do that, very anti-Soviet. He learned from the war how bad they had been. And off the record, off the record, in the middle of this briefing one of the president's contacts fell on the map and I looked up and he was sound asleep. And I thought, Jesus Christ, so I hit the president's leg with my heel twice while he was so -- oh, yeah. He did that on the Pope. Did you know that?

**Timothy Naftali**

He fell asleep? No, I didn't.

**Alexander Haig**

The Pope, when he went to Rome. This is what kind of stuff that was happening.

**Timothy Naftali**

This is at the beginning of his administration.

**Alexander Haig**

Very early, after he was shot, though. And he was sitting there in a chair. He gave a beautiful speech, magnificent. Then the Pope retaliates. The Pope is about halfway through and I look over at the president and he's on real-time television all over Europe. I get Nancy's attention and she goes over

and she shakes him. And I said, "Cut the television." They cut all the television off. And I was so -- this was Deaver. He programmed that poor guy from the time he got up in the morning until midnight with camera opportunities. That's all he ever cared about was public relations. And I tell you, the Pope didn't know what to say. And, you know, he was a very nice man, the Pope. And I went out -- he grabbed my hand and he said, "You have let your boss get too tired." I said, "I know." So I went out with Deaver and I said, "Mike, you take him home and put him to bed right now and you get him some sleep, and if you ever do it again, so help me God, I'll kill you or you're going to have to kill me." So the next place we go is to the palace to see the president. And the foreign minister is there, and, and -- no, the prime minister is there. They have a president and a prime minister so my contact was the prime minister, Spadolini. I knew him very well; he was an old friend. So I'm going in and Mike Deaver taps me on the shoulder. He said, "The president doesn't want you at this meeting." And I said, "Well, he shouldn't be at this meeting, this is for the number two and protocol-wise, that's for me. I don't care, whatever the president wants we'll do." He said, "The president doesn't want you at this meeting." So I go back in and foreign minister comes in and, oh, I'm so embarrassed, this -- what happened? I said, "I don't know." I said, "I don't care." I said, "You know, sometimes these people when they travel they get tired." The next thing I know the president's aide comes in. He said, "The president needs you immediately." So I go in the room. There's Spadolini sitting and the president -- [snores] -- this is a true story. And I couldn't believe it. I said, "Mike, goddamnit, do you know what you're doing to this man?" This is the kind of crap that went on in that Reagan White House. It's a miracle we got -- except for the president whose instincts were incredible, really very good instincts. Thank God for them. They would have killed us. Deaver, I never dealt with people like that. You know, I had been around a long time. This is not the first government.

**Timothy Naftali**

Well, I have never heard anyone say Richard Nixon fell asleep in meetings.

**Alexander Haig**

Boy, if he did I'd like to know when. I don't think he ever slept, even at night.

**Timothy Naftali**

In your memoirs you tell a poignant story. You mentioned that you were so concerned for the president in the summer of --

**Alexander Haig**

Start that again. You didn't get that last thing. That's out. That's not in. I don't want to talk that way.

**Timothy Naftali**

What's that?

**Alexander Haig**

You know, if you guys put these things together and you have impressions and you have ideas and they influence how you treat everything. I don't like to talk this way but I tell you, you get one shot at

it, you're going to do a history and it's, it's important that these things get conveyed right and don't sound like a vendetta. I just think there's things that have to be put out.

**Timothy Naftali**

No, that's fair. Well, we're not interested in vendettas, we're actually interested in --

**Alexander Haig**

You know, don't, don't be the victim of one either.

**Timothy Naftali**

Well, what we're talking about will be most useful for people a long time from now. But there's a very poignant moment in your memoirs and you talk in the -- mention in the summer of 1974 you were very concerned for President Nixon's health.

**Alexander Haig**

Yeah, you bet I was.

**Timothy Naftali**

And if I -- for the record, you have written about it but for the record, if you would, you might tell the story of what you told the doctors.

**Alexander Haig**

What I told --

**Timothy Naftali**

Told his doctors, you were concerned about the prescription drugs that he had.

**Alexander Haig**

Oh, yeah, but in the first place, he had phlebitis and that trip to Egypt was really -- and of course, we went beyond there, too, but it was up like this and the doctors came in and said, "You have got to go home. You have got to get treatment for this thing because these things have a way of flaking off and going up through the system and you get a stroke and die." And I'm not so sure -- I didn't know whether he had a death wish or not. You know, he was not taking care of himself.

And he stood up in that damn train all the way across Cairo to Alexandria, and I just was very upset about it. He and Henry were having a row, Henry with the wiretaps or whatever the hell it was, which the president had nothing to do with other than take the advice of J. Edgar Hoover and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Earl Wheeler. But anyhow, that got me started worrying. And then one night I was sitting with the president, we were commiserating, going over the things and he didn't look well. And he got up and he said, "Al," he said, "you know," and he walked over to my desk. He was in my office is where he was. And he, he said, "In the Army, you open a drawer and you put a pistol in and you

close the drawer and you leave and the fellow takes care of himself." He said, "I'm beginning to think maybe you better put a pistol in my drawer." And I didn't know what to say. It was a serious time. We weren't joking or kidding or anything else. He hadn't had a scotch or anything. So I told the doctors be careful what they gave him. This was in the last week of his presidency. And I said, "You really have to be careful what you give him." You have no idea what kind of state of mind he would be in in his position. I mean, the only thing he ever wanted was to be president of the United States, and he knew he was a good one. He knew it. Of course he did. He knew more than any president I knew. He knew everybody he dealt with. They respected him. So -- but I did do that. Now, I'll add a little vignette to that because I found out that that last week Woodward and Bernstein were going through my garbage, personally. And my son said to me, he said, "You know, those guys, I caught them out there going through your garbage pail." I said, "Who were they?" He said, "Woodward and Bernstein." So two nights after Nixon had resigned and he was in California, I got home and there the two of them sitting on my doorstep and they said, "We're writing another book, we need some information." I said, "Oh, come on, I'll give you a cup of coffee but that's it. I'm going to bed. I'm not giving you anything." And so we sat down. My wife made them coffee; they each had a cup of coffee. And they said, "You told the doctors not to give the president pills." And I said, "That's not true. I told them to be careful what pills they gave him because he is in a state of trauma, whether to resign or not to resign, his family pushing him not to." And that's the way it was. Of course, they were a good family. I would have done the same. But the economy was in deep, deep trouble, beginning to get extra bad. We had oil problems, as you know. And I think he began to realize that he couldn't govern because whatever was coming out was being vetoed or, you know, they wouldn't get him passed or he was being blackmailed on it. So he decided on his own to do it, to resign. And he didn't want to put the country through what would have been a year-and-a-half to two-year horror with no governance, and the Soviets bleeding internally from what had just happened to them in the Yom Kippur War, Sadat defecting from their sphere of influence.

So I, I told them, I said, "You have it wrong." I said, "I just took a prudent step and told the doctors to be careful what medication they make available to the president until we got through this bad point." Then they went around and told everybody I gave them the whole book. Well, of course, I knew I didn't because I never talked to them. Off the record, this guy, you know, somebody asked me about today what do I think about Woodward? I'm in NATO three months later, and I get a call from Woodward. He said, "I bought my tickets; I'm coming over. I want to talk to you. We're finishing up our book called 'The Final Days.'" I said, "I told you I'm not going to talk to you." He said, "Oh, no, you have to." He said, "I've already bought the tickets and I've made the expense." I said, "Look, I'll tell you, Bob, if you come over I'll, I'll receive you and give you a cup of coffee but I'm not going to talk to you about anything that happened while I served the president." So in he comes. Well, in the meantime I got my executive who was a brigadier general, a guy named John Barter, just got murdered in Northern Virginia. His girlfriend's son stuck a knife in him, wonderful guy, Rhodes scholar, everything, first captain of the Corps cadets. But anyhow, he sat there with a yellow tablet and in came Woodward and he sat down and I gave him a cup of coffee. He said, "You know, we're writing this book, Al, and strangely enough we both decided you can come out of it a hero or a bum and the choice is up to you. If you give me some good juicy bits on Nixon, you're going to come out a hero." And I said, "You see that door, Bob?" I said, "You better get to that door before I get to you." And he got up and literally ran out of my office because I would have -- whatever it took. He was a lot younger than I am, but I tell you I would have knocked his block in, and he ran out of the office. Now, that's what I think about Woodward. And did I write it in my book? I didn't because my -- the fellow who helped me collaborate it, I wrote the book when you really got down to it. You don't ever get a collaborator because nobody says it the way you want to say it. And he's a wonderful guy. He said,

"Don't do this." He said, "He'll just be after you for the rest of your life." He said, "I know, he's a vindictive son of a bitch." And I didn't do it. But I feel like doing it every day of the week because I know what a liar he is. And I know how he told everybody I wrote "The Final Days." I didn't write "The Final Days" at all. I never gave him a thing except that confirmation that he had from one of the doctors in the White House.

**John Powers**

I have to ask you one question about the 18-and-a-half minute gap.

**Alexander Haig**

You won't believe this 18-and-a-half minute gap in the sinister forest.

**Male Speaker**

[Unintelligible]

**Alexander Haig**

Huh?

**Male Speaker**

You can tell us the truth right now before they change the --

**Alexander Haig**

No, this one you can put on the tape for all I care.

**Male Speaker**

Right, that's true.

**Alexander Haig**

It was a joke. You know, Ben-Veniste, you know, Ben-Veniste, you see him on the news all the time. He was the guy that was on the intelligence committee that --

**John Powers**

The 9/11 Commission.

**Alexander Haig**

The 9/11 Commission. He was part of Cox's staff during this period. I came over from Fort Benning -- remember that call I told you about that I -- first time in the office and they bring a special envelope in and it was a subpoena to go before a grand jury. I looked at it and I thought, well, the hell is this? You know, I wasn't even in the White House when Watergate -- when Deep Throat was operating, for example. I was vice chief in the Army. And when the key stuff was given, that's where I was. Hell, I could show you I was traveling. I knew because I checked all the dates against my calendar. And in any event, they said -- we're in the courtroom and this guy Ben-Veniste came in and I had this experience with him with the subpoena and I went over to the grand jury, and they were all asleep in the District of Columbia, true story. He said, "You see that grand jury?" He said, "They do what I tell them and if you put a finger on the president you're out of here in 15 minutes. If you don't, I'm going to keep you here until I get you on perjury like I did Dwight Chapin." In other words, they keep you there until you get tripped up on a technicality and then you went to jail. That's what happened to Dwight Chapin, fine young man that ever lived. So anyhow -- and another one, too, the one that handled drugs, equally fine guy.

**John Powers**

Krogh, Egil Krogh.

**Alexander Haig**

Absolute superb human being. Went to jail, God almighty, defrocked, debarred. Anyhow, these are what I call the crimes of Watergate. So I get in there and the -- they're all black, and I looked at them and so I thought, "What am I going to do?" So he came over, and he said, "What are you going to do?" And I said, "Have at it, you son of a bitch." That's what I said. So he started. And I started answering in Dap [phonetic sp]. I said, "Speak in crime. It ain't no" -- no -- "Speak in rhyme, it ain't no crime." And these guys, "Hey, that's cool." And they were listening and I started bouncing, talking Dap talk, which I had learned in the Army. Half my units were dapping all the time. And next thing I know they're listening to me, and they're not listening to Ben-Veniste, and he's getting madder and madder and he starts to lose his cool. And I say, "Don't lose your cool or the next is your stool." And he said, "Get your ass out of here," and I left. And that was the end of Ben-Veniste. But only by the luck of God did I get out of that place. He didn't charge me with perjury for something I didn't know anything about in the first place.

**John Powers**

So who do you believe -- or what do you believe happened with the 18-and-a-half minute gap?

**Alexander Haig**

Now, in the 18-and-a-half minute I think was erased and I think it was erased by Rose as a loyal -- God, she loved Nixon. And she'd do anything for him. And I think Bebe came in and told her, hey, this is something you got to -- because I think he and Bebe had listened to some tapes. And they didn't start until then and that was very early in maybe June or July. And we had the word on the vice president, and things were looking very grim. And I think -- I don't have any way to know but somebody did it. I don't have any doubt about that. But in the courtroom, Sirica was a friend of mine. He lived right down the street from me on Dexter Street. And Ben-Veniste started this, you know, prosecutorial stuff with me and he had no reason to talk that way



to me. And so I sort of looked down and he said, "Who did it? Who did it?" And I said, "Well," I said, "Some friends of mine think it was a sinister force." And I winked at Sirica. He said

[unintelligible]

. You know, he's this bad guy. That's what he was telling me. So then he got on to something else. You remember we had that guy said the devil made me do it, the comedian who ended up being a very good friend of mine. I made him -- I helped him so he gave me --

**Timothy Naftali**

Flip Wilson?

**Alexander Haig**

Huh?

**Timothy Naftali**

Flip Wilson?

**Alexander Haig**

Flip Wilson, one super guy. Motorcyclist, Harveyite. Harvey motorcycles. Harvey, Hartley, what are they called?

**John Powers**

Harleys, Harley-Davidson.

**Alexander Haig**

Harley, Harley. He went to the big conference in Washington of the Harleys. But anyhow, he looked me up and said, "You helped me. You helped me on my show when you did that." And again, I winked at Sirica and afterwards as we were walking out, Sirica said, geez, and he said, "You're the first guy that brought any levity to this thing since I have been with it." And the next thing I know, I got 10,000 letters from demonologists all over the country. You, you were right for the first time. We have a public official that knows what's really going on. Then I got 10,000 equally outraged letters from women because I, I said at the same hearing, I said, "Well, you know, Judge, I have known my wife to get on the phone and say she was on for five minutes and it was an hour-and-a-half by the clock." So all the women started on me. I thought, Jesus, God, if I ever get in front of a court I'll go for life. I'll be up for life. But that's the truth of the 18-and-a-half minutes. It was a joke.

**Timothy Naftali**

Okay, do you have a question?

**Paul Musgrave**

One last one. What would be your impressions of Leon Jaworski?

**Alexander Haig**

Patriot, very true American, and tough, unyielding but a straight shooting honest professional. And I had great admiration for him because he could have made life a lot more difficult for President Nixon than he did. And he told me in our last meeting that he would never follow up with criminal charges against Richard Nixon. He said, "The man has suffered too much already." He was a Lyndon Johnson guy who I also knew very well.

**Timothy Naftali**

I'm sure -- my last question is: I'm sure you stayed in touch in President Nixon after he resigned.

**Alexander Haig**

Yeah.

**Timothy Naftali**

Did he ever say to you that he wished he had done something differently?

**Alexander Haig**

Yeah, yeah. First he told me the greatest mistake of his presidency was not reacting vigorously to that provocation at the very beginning of his -- that was in April of his presidency. First April of '69, he should have taken action; instead he showed weakness. And, you know, first crisis, how could you know. I think he made a big mistake, and I think Kissinger helped him make it. That's my judgment. Because I had him pretty well convinced that he had to do something, but I wasn't that close to him that early. I was against, as I told you today, against doing away with the draft. And I told him, "You're throwing the baby out with the bath water. Don't do this." It's not going to be as good an Army, but it's going to be all American and if you get all classes, as you must, you'll have a legislature that will understand something about the seriousness of going to war.

**Timothy Naftali**

Is there anything else that he mentioned that he wished he had done differently?

**Alexander Haig**

He never did on that; he did on the reacting strongly. He wished he had risked impeachment on the bombing in the North, Christmas bombing. He thinks he could have saved the South. And I think he could have, too. He might have been impeached but what the hell. He was largely finished anyway and to go out of that war being impeached for doing what's right -- and he would have won. I don't think they would have impeached him anyway. I never did. You know, these guys talk tough, but there are very few of them put their money where their mouth is. That's why Democrats today don't realize they

now have the monkey, and if they walk out of Iraq, they're going to be held accountable for it right at about the time their candidate is up for president. That's why they're all doing a shifty dance of the devil, seven veils.

**Timothy Naftali**

Did President Nixon give you any advice when you accepted the position of secretary of state for Ronald Reagan?

**Alexander Haig**

No, I know he weighed in on my behalf, that I know. But the guys that really got me in were the kitchen cabinet. Justin Dart, Salvatori --

**John Powers**

Henry Salvatori.

**Alexander Haig**

Yeah, and a couple of other guys. They didn't like Shultz, they thought he was candy-ass. That's what Nixon used to call him, candy-ass.

**John Powers**

By-the-book.

**Alexander Haig**

Huh?

**John Powers**

You said he was too by-the-book.

**Alexander Haig**

Well, no, he also, the war -- he left Nixon right at the -- right when the stuff hit the fan and I tried to talk him out of it and I didn't like it. I thought he owed Nixon more than that. But I like George Shultz, really. We are very good friends. I just -- that's an observation that's unwarranted but nevertheless is true.

**Timothy Naftali**

Well, thank you very much for your time, General Haig. We appreciate it. And future generations will appreciate it.

**Alexander Haig**

Well, you know, I have had a great, great deal of admiration and gratitude to Richard Nixon. You know, he didn't do me a lot of good, but it didn't hurt me either. I survived. I survived it all. And I never knew him to be anything but a friend and a very good president. He was a good president. In hindsight, he was probably the best I worked for. I know in foreign affairs he was head and shoulders above any, any of them.

**Timothy Naftali**

Well, I asked you if he had any regrets. Did he have any regrets about the way he handled the domestic side of the House? Because that's what got him into trouble.

**Alexander Haig**

Well, I tell you on equal rights he had no peer, maybe Lyndon Johnson. But he carried on a great deal of the --

**Timothy Naftali**

Well, I meant Watergate.

**Alexander Haig**

Oh, Watergate, Jesus. Don't ever be your own lawyer. You can't. And that's what he tried to do. You know, I come from a law family. My father, my sister, all my uncles were lawyers. I tell you, they always said that, don't ever be your own lawyer, and that's what he tried to do. He sat and worried every, every little thing. I mean, God almighty, I'd sit there for hours with him after a full day of trying to keep the government together. Try to -- do you know how many Cabinet officers we were missing when I came in? We were missing five. A total of 90 top executives in the executive branch were gone because Haldeman, and it was mostly Ehrlichman got the president to sign that thing demanding everybody's resignation. And, of course, Watergate burst at the same time. Most of them said, hey, woo, woo, thank God for that, and so they left. And you know who kept the government running? Public servants, professionals, civil servants and military, and I put military guys all over the government because I couldn't get anybody else to do things. They'd run it. We ultimately got them replaced but, boy, it was a horrible time. We could have had, we could have had a total collapse of the government. It was that bad because of these stupid things that Haldeman and Ehrlichman had the presence to do in the transition. Why would you tell everybody to resign? You know, they, they automatically, if you're a cannon officer you say, now, you know, I'm finished this term and you may want to appoint somebody else. If you want to do it, I'm ready. But Jesus, God, not to demand a resignation, terrible mistake. I said to the president, "Why did you do that?" He said, "Oh, they just shoved it in front of me, Al, you know that." And he wasn't too happy with Laird, as you know. And he certainly wasn't too happy with Bill Rogers who was a good friend of mine and a good friend of his.

**Timothy Naftali**

But you brought Laird back into the White House in May of '73.

**Alexander Haig**

Sure, I did.

**Timothy Naftali**

Why?

**Alexander Haig**

Because I had to. I had nothing but animosity on the Hill and I knew Laird would give us some credibility. And, you know, he was good at politics. Don't get him into national policy because he's a populist. Every day, what's, what's good for the president's popularity. That's what drove him. And when you put a guy like that in that job you got to expect that. But you also have to get rid of him when he let's you down. And he should have done that, didn't like to do it. Ronald Reagan couldn't do it. President Nixon couldn't do it. I think Jimmy Carter could do it. He was ruthless; he could do it to anybody, his mother.

**Timothy Naftali**

Well, thank you for your observations and your public service. Thank you very much for your time, General Haig.

**Alexander Haig**

Good luck with this.

**John Powers**

I hope you have enjoyed it as much as we have.

**Alexander Haig**

Well, I have enjoyed it but I probably said more things than I should have.

**John Powers**

That makes it all the more enjoyable.

**Alexander Haig**

Yeah, well, except for me because I'll get the aftermath of it.

**John Powers**

That was great.

**Alexander Haig**

But I want you guys to have a successful program.

[N1]