

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

**PARTICIPANTS:** Lt. General Brent Scowcroft, Deputy Assistant  
to the President for National Security Affairs  
Leslie A. Janka, NSC Staff  
Kathleen Troia, NSC Staff (Notetaker)

Twenty-five Georgetown University Undergraduate  
Students, School of Foreign Service  
Dean Peter Krogh, Georgetown School of Foreign  
Service  
Dean David Raymond, Georgetown School of Foreign  
Service

**TIME AND DATE:** Tuesday, October 29, 1974  
5:05 - 5:50 p.m.

**PLACE:** Room 305  
Executive Office Building

[Mr. Janka gave brief background information of General Scowcroft and his job as Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs. General Scowcroft entered the room at 5:10.]

Scowcroft: I think we can best use this time with a brief, general introduction of foreign policy and a question and answer period. Let me start with a general foreign policy orientation of the Administration, that is, American foreign policy since 1968.

What we were faced with at the beginning of this Administration was now to bring American foreign policy in tune with the objective realities of this day. Since World War II the United States had a continuous and, by and large successful, foreign policy. The premise on which our foreign policy and the world was based had changed greatly. Back after World War II the United States was self-confident. We were a leader in the world, we had just emerged from a great victory over our enemies, and the communist monolith opposition divided the world into a black and white problem. Our allies were devastated by war and looked to us for leadership and material help in rebuilding their economies. Our enemies of World War II were devastated economically, militarily and psychologically.



The Third World was beginning to emerge, looking to the United States and the ideals upon which it stands to help them emerge into a community of independent states.

Our foreign policy hadn't changed fundamentally since then but the world had changed dramatically. The Communist nations no longer were a monolithic opposition, in fact they were fractured dramatically into competing forces in some cases. The nuclear monolith which we had held during World War II and for a time after that, or at least our strategic superiority, had changed. There was now a functional parity in strategic forces. Our allies were no longer devastated, but now on their feet. If we were not partners with them, we were in many cases now competitors.

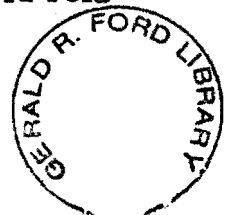
The colonial world emerged into the Third World. It was a different kind of world since 1949. We tried to change our fundamental foreign policy to match the world we now found ourselves in.

First, we had to disengage ourselves from a long and difficult war -- the Vietnam War. The Administration accomplished this by preserving the blood and money we had sacrificed previously, as well as managing to preserve what we had considered our national interests when we went into the Vietnam conflict originally. The war had brought fundamental attacks at home on American foreign policy, the Administration, and on the President himself.

With the Soviet Union we reopened a dialogue which had been tried before but had never been carried out. That is -- what we now call detente. There is still no fundamental change between the United States and Soviet Union but now we are trying to find areas in which we can talk, to define our mutual interests. We don't try to make every point of difference a major issue, or score debating points. Our contacts with them we do not look at in cold war terms, but build where we can and treat disputes through communications enhanced by the contact we've had. We are attempting to deal with each other in a manner and with a frankness never before possible.

With China a different dialogue was needed. We had been shut off from the Chinese for a generation. We set about to reopen contacts with them. There were no fundamental points of antagonism with the Chinese, with some exceptions around the periphery of Asia and in other places.

With our Allies we tried to put relations on a more positive than negative basis. With the fracturing of the old communist monolith, our old relationships with our Allies had to be redefined.



The Third World was trying to develop a relationship of independence as well as self-reliance. We wanted to show them they have the primary stake in their own survival. We determined to help when necessary and in areas where we could assist them, but the first efforts must be their efforts.

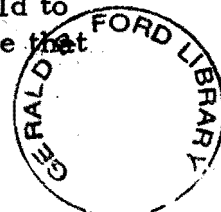
There are more specific and regional areas we could cover, but let's go to your questions and develop the specific regional issues as we go along.

Question: Israel has already said they will not deal with the PLO. Now, in light of the Arab Summit designating the PLO as the rightful leaders of the Palestinian state, and if the Israelis do not negotiate with them, what are the chances of war?

Scowcroft: That is a very, very difficult issue. It is not crystal clear at this point just what the decision in Rabat means in practical terms. Just whether Jordan will physically withdraw from the area, or whether Jordan and the PLO will develop a joint negotiating team in Geneva or what. The Israelis have made it clear that they are unwilling to negotiate with the PLO. The practical matter is if it comes to that they may have very little chance in the long run, certainly in the short term it is not helpful to the negotiation we had hoped to develop. Whether this would result in a stop or a delay in the next round of negotiations makes a renewal of the conflict more likely.

Question: I wondered about policy dialogue and decision making on smaller problems -- for example -- arms supply to Ethiopia. How does the NSC operate in formulating opinions, in drafting reports, and in presenting different points of view on issues. How many different options are presented to you?

Scowcroft: You're talking about NSC mechanics. Let me briefly describe the arms to Ethiopia as an example. When the crisis was first emerging we called a meeting of the Washington Special Actions Group (WSAG), one of the committees of the NSC mechanism composed of representatives of State, the Department of Defense, CIA, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and chaired by Secretary Kissinger in his NSC role, not as Secretary of State. They decided in that meeting that a study be done to identify what where the trends in Ethiopia and what US policy should be. It was an interagency study. Most of these [studies] are done by the same representatives as sit on these groups. It is chaired by State of Defense or wherever the principal interest is. This study suggested that we do what we could to demonstrate continuing interest in and support of Ethiopia and make that



manifested by whatever concessions we could within budgetary restrictions and specific resolutions on what we can do. Within that we gave them slightly increased aid as a demonstration of support while going through this situation.

The Senior Review Group is composed of people at the Deputy Secretary level of the Departments and chaired by Dr. Kissinger. The Senior Review Group, or SRG, reviews most general foreign policy issues. They could have handled the Ethiopia one, but didn't. The WSAG is more crisis oriented, dealing with specific crises as they develop.

Question: The Washington Special Actions Group would outline options and present them to the decision maker?

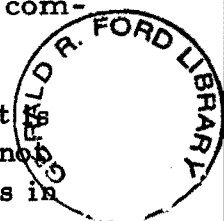
Scowcroft: Yes. WSAG is more of a crisis-management committee than a policy development group. For example the Middle East crisis. The bulk of policy development and general policy issues are handled by the SRG. The Verification Panel is basically the same people, including the Director of ACDA, and they deal with all arms issues. All these groups have the same people basically, and develop options and discuss how to achieve these options and prepare a realistic range of options for the President. They are not similar options, reconciled beforehand. They make as clear and logical as possible every option.

Question: According to Senate Foreign Relations Committee testimony by State and Defense officials after the October War, it was most evident that there was a total collapse of the intelligence community and of NATO policy, preventing a unified policy study of the October crisis. What was the NSC reaction to the October crisis -- do you see a recurrence of failure as indicative of NATO?

Scowcroft: The NATO reaction stems from their relative dependence on the Middle East for oil. The Europeans who had not to long before criticized the Year of Europe speech which said Europe had only European interests now said the Middle East war was not a European concern and NATO should not get involved. It was the manifest of short run economic concerns with oil. In our view it was short-sighted, but it showed the real concerns for them.

Question: Was there a failure of the US intelligence community in predicting the Middle East war? What are the functions of various NSC committees and how are these crises handled?

Scowcroft: They are handled in the initial effort by WSAG. Initially it is to find out what is going on. If there is an intelligence failure, it is not so much a total failure as a particular group which interpreted events in



a particular way. Nobody thought it made sense for Egypt and Syria to go to war. The events were rationalized by those of that set of mind. They were reinforced by the example among the allies. One reinforced the other. Egypt normally held maneuvers at this time and the movement of some forces up near the Suez at this time was very realistic this year. [Laughter] But no one was thinking of a logistical movement. In hindsight it perhaps was very logical.

Even that the Russians moved three to four days before to pull out their families and advisers quite hurriedly was interpreted as an anti-Soviet move resulting from deteriorating relations between Egypt and the Soviets.

Question: Is the breakdown of the intelligence community a perennial problem? What can we do to correct this?

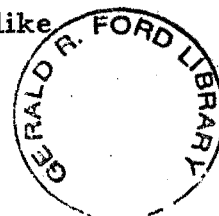
Scowcroft: Sometimes there is. It is a way of crying wolf. There were a number of events signaling a breakdown of hostilities. I was called in the middle of the night about a cable saying this was happening. For every one where something is happening there are fifteen where each event has a normal explanation. But it won't happen again. [Laughter]

Now, in fact, there is an overreaction of the intelligence community, they overplay each activity.

Question: With regard to the CIA in Chile and the President's rationalization that the Communists spend more money in Chile than the United States. Is the Chile situation indicative of what is happening in the United States with Watergate, the domestic situation, and the issue of freedom of speech?

Scowcroft: I don't think the President was justifying that since the Communists spend more we had the right, he was just pointing out that they spend a lot. There are certain activities that are in the interests of the United States but become self-defeating if they become publicized. One such incident was the famous secret bombing of Cambodia from 1969 to 1970. There was a practical reason for doing this, not to deceive the American people, and the key Congressional people were told. The fact is that Sihanouk had tacitly agreed to our bombing of North Vietnamese sanctuaries in Cambodia. It was a tacit agreement that if we would have had made this public he would have condemned it and we would have had to stop. As sovereign of his country he couldn't just allow bombing of his country.

Question: Wouldn't prior approval of Congress prevent actions like this and in Chile?



Scowcroft: There is a resolution which would prevent actions like this. We think it is very harmful. The events in Chile that were to support certain groups in Chile were not kept from the relevant committees in Congress which have oversight of CIA activities. If made public they would have defeated it--it would be politically unpopular. Allende and the forces who supported him were attempting to stifle the press, their opponents and the opposing parties. It would have been self-defeating if these activities were done overtly. No party wants it to be known they are receiving funds from a foreign government. Our interest in countries around the world is first based on their foreign policy behavior and only secondly on their domestic behavior. There was not a foreign policy threat [in Chile] such as a Communist government in Chile would be. Of course. Naturally we would like to see solid democratic regimes brought to the world. Our priority is their foreign policy behavior and whether they are a threat to the United States' self-interest and security. This can only be done in a way not to attract attention. If done in an overt way it would negate their purpose.

Question: The dicotomy of what you are saying is that we are defending the interests of a nation from the interests of its people. We were supporting a government that will overthrow a Communist government but in so doing not striking a note for a democratic free government in Chile but setting up a military dictatorship. Had this been known would there have been some opposition in the NSC? Would there be a counterbalancing force conscious of NSC consideration of the ideals of society trying to protect and preserve democracy?

Scowcroft: Of course. What we're doing in Chile is supporting democracy. Had what we done succeeded there would have been no coup. The coup happened because of the desperation of the army and because there was no democratic regime in sight. They thought things were so bad that a Communist regime was coming. If the democratic opposition had more of a chance there would have been no coup .

Question: What about US support for the totalitarian regime in Greece? While it is a stable, non-Communist government it is totalitarian just the same.

Scowcroft: That is a difficult issue. There is rarely unanimity within the government on issues of this kind. We must remember that our first concern has to be with the international behavior of the country we are looking at. The alternative is for us to meddle in internal policies.



of countries of the world. It is just because a country is non-communist; nobody argues that we should have covert activities in communist countries. When we put pressures or automatically cut off funds when they do bad things we tend to weaken them to their enemies working on them for quite other purposes.

The Greek regime was increasingly unpalatable to us. When the Cyprus dispute first broke out we were under heavy pressure to denounce the Greeks as being responsible for it. After the Greek coup we were under pressure to denounce the Turks. We tried to figure the fundamental US interest in the Eastern Mediterranean at this crisis. With this in mind we could help the regime become more democratic.

Question: The Senior Review Group, the Verification Panel and the others--all but one is headed by Dr. Kissinger. The National Security Council is headed by Dr. Kissinger. He is a Presidential Assistant, Secretary of State, affecting the entire foreign policy process. It seems that the President wouldn't be presented with all the issues if there is only one person controlling the information. Is there any validity to this or is it necessary?

Scowcroft: Of course there are various methods used. The National Security Council as it is organized now, develops proposals and background to get all the points of view and rational options and then presents these to the President. Secretary Kissinger, as chairman of these meetings and sub-groups and the NSC chief does not act in his capacity as Secretary of State. The Department positions are brought in by Mr. Ingersoll as deputy Secretary of State, not by Secretary Kissinger. As he is Secretary of State some views are inevitable, especially because of the situation and his personality. But everyone's views are represented.

Janka: [phone rings] The General has to get back to his office.

Scowcroft: Let me take a few more questions first.

For instance with the Bay of Pigs incident. People say that the President wasn't fully informed. Actually, the President had too much information--but it was not coordinated. The President tended to go with the views of the last person he listened to. They came into him, one by one, and presented their options.

The best way is to have all options presented simultaneously. This is the best way to avoid a Bay of Pigs-type situation.



Question: But is all this centralization good?

Scowcroft: It works well. The President and Secretary Kissinger's relationship goes back to Kissinger's days at Harvard. Ford used to lecture at Kissinger's classes. This system works well without stifling the legitimate views of other agencies and departments.

Question: After Dr. Kissinger's "peace is at hand" speech, when it was obvious that peace was not at hand the US resumed bombing. According to the Szulc article in Foreign Policy, Dr. Kissinger and the President planned that statement for political reasons to win the election. Is there any truth in that idea?

Scowcroft: It wasn't planned before hand, or said for political purposes. Szulc has some good data but the problem is he stands it on its head. Perhaps now it is clear that the "peace is at hand" speech was a bit premature.

Question: But did the President know where we stood when the speech was made?

Scowcroft: The President probably didn't know that Dr. Kissinger would use those exact terms.

Question: But what was the purpose of resumed bombing if we had been bombing so long and it was not effective?

Scowcroft: The North Vietnamese had backed off from the agreement and the understandings that Dr. Kissinger thought he had brought back with him. We wanted to give them the clear message that we were not to be toyed with. We had to insist on prosecution of the war--the bombing, the very heavy bombing showed that we were seriously interested in a reasonable negotiated settlement. We would not put up with what they had been after all along--achievement on the bargaining table of what they couldn't achieve on the battlefield--the destruction of the South Vietnamese Government.

Janka: General Scowcroft, I would like to thank you for giving us your time and your valuable insights into foreign policy from the Nixon Administration up to the present time.

Scowcroft: Thank you very much.

[General Scowcroft departed. Mr. Janka continued to talk to the students for five minutes.]

