Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

HELMUT SONNENFELDT

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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Q: Today is February 19, 2000. This is an interview with Helmut Sonnenfeldt. Let's start. When and where were you born and something about the background of your family?

SONNENFELDT: Well, I was born in Berlin, Germany, in 1926. My parents were both physicians, and they were practicing under the German state health insurance system in a small rural town 120 km. west of Berlin. My mother was interested in obstetrics and she'd been trained in it, in addition to other aspects of medicine. She very much wanted her children to be delivered by her professor of obstetrics, who worked in Berlin at a highly respected clinic. So my brother had been delivered there in 1923, and I was delivered there in 1926. So Berlin was my birthplace, but I grew up in this small town west of Berlin. It was a county seat, Gardelegen, in a not very prosperous agricultural region.

My parents, as physicians, were respected citizens (there were, I think, five or six other doctors in the town or in the area). They had started in their practice at the time of the great inflation in Germany. Everybody was struggling; but by the time I was born, I'm told (I obviously don't recall it), things were really looking up in terms of their life and their lifestyle. They weren't ever interested in great luxuries or extravagances. In any event, when I became aware of my surroundings, at age three or four, we lived in a nicely-furnished house. On the ground floor, my parents had their medical offices; and upstairs, we had quite a large apartment; and that's where I spent my childhood.

Q: What about the Sonnenfeldts? What are their German roots, and how long were they?

SONNENFELDT: On the Sonnenfeldt side, my father was born in Berlin. My grandfather on my father's side had been born in what was called West Prussia, which once had been, and later again became part of Poland (in 1919, when it was restored to Poland after the First World War). It's a little murky before that. It is said in the family that my grandfather's father was a foundling. I don't know anything about the circumstances, except that he was adopted by someone named Sonnenfeldt. So what the precursors were on that side, I don't know.

My grandmother's family came from Breslau, in Silesia (called Wroclaw after World War II), and went back several generations in that area.

My paternal grandfather had a small clothing-manufacturing place in Berlin. My father and his brother were sent to university, but their two sisters weren't; that wasn't done in those days.

Q: No.

SONNENFELDT: My father studied medicine, and just before he was completely finished, the First World War broke out. He was drafted into the Imperial Army as a physician and was shifted back and forth between the Western and Eastern Fronts, and won an Iron Cross [German military honor], which is something that figured later in his life. Then, after the war, which he was fortunate to survive, he completed his medical education and started this practice in Gardelegen, west of Berlin - halfway between Berlin and Hannover.

My mother was an only child. Her father's was the only Jewish family in a smallish town in Schleswig-Holstein in the north of Germany. Her father was very much personally committed to education, and had been well educated, I think partly by himself, in classical Greek and Latin. He insisted that my mother should go to university, which she did in Hamburg. She too studied medicine. Through some complicated connections, she happened to meet my father in Berlin. In Germany, you don't usually stay in one university; you go to several, which is how they met.

I don't know much about my maternal grandfather's ancestors. But there was in his family a very brilliant physicist, who, if he hadn't been Jewish (although he wasn't a believer), would have been nominated to the Kaiser Wilhelm Society, which was the German version of the Academy of Sciences. I didn't get any of his genes, but my one brother, Richard, did.

Q: What was his field?

SONNENFELDT: Well, he was a physicist, and he was, inter alia, involved in the invention of the Osram light bulb. I can't tell you precisely what his field was; but that was one of the things associated with his name. It earned him the approach to become a member of the German Kaiser Wilhelm Society, provided he converted to Christianity. But, even though he wasn't a believer, he decided he wasn't going to convert. So there was some special distinction on that side of the family. I'm not exactly sure what his antecedents were, but he was obviously a man of great gifts. My brother became quite interested in science and engineering. So I've always said that the genes from that branch of the family came to him rather than to me.

My grandfather on my mother's side (i.e., her father) headed the only Jewish family in this town of Brunsbï¿½ttelkoog, which is well known in Germany because it's at the place where what was called the Kaiser Wilhelm Canal (now called the Kiel Canal) joins the North Sea. So it was quite a well-known place. Parts of the German battle fleet were moored there in World War I. My mother kept telling us about these huge ships in her childhood. The canal was built so that ships could have a short and direct link between the Baltic Sea and the North Sea.

In any event, my grandmother on my mother's side came from Mecklenburg-Schwerin. I imagine all of them at one time or another, some generations back, had probably come from Poznan or from that part of Poland which had been part of Prussia since the late eighteenth century.

Q: When you grew up in your family, because it was certainly a major factor in those days, how sort of "Jewish" was your family? I mean-

SONNENFELDT: Well, they were Jewish. They knew it. My father had been Bar Mitzvah. My mother was an only child, and she did not have a similar ceremony. Coming from Berlin, my father's family knew many Jews, but they weren't particularly observant. I do think in our very small town of Gardelegen, there actually had been a somewhat larger Jewish community in the nineteenth century than when I was growing up. They did have religious services, especially on the high holy days. That continued, I know, into my childhood, because I remember going with my father into a hall that was rented for the purpose of holding services. But it's pretty clear that until Hitler came along in 1933, this was not a major part of their lives. In fact, my mother used to sing in the Christmas Eve choir of one of the Protestant churches in town. But they remembered their Jewish background, as did the few other local Jewish families. In addition to services, we did get some Jewish religious instruction from a rabbi who came by train from another town every week.

In the German schools, the Prussian schools where we lived, there was required religious instruction. There was, I guess, a class maybe once a week, maybe twice a week, for the children in the school to get instruction in religion. Jewish children, even before Hitler, were not expected to participate. But especially after Hitler came to power, we were not allowed to participate. So the rabbi came, I think every Tuesday afternoon, from a town nearer Berlin where there was a somewhat larger Jewish community. He came down on the train and spent an hour or two with the Jewish children; and that was accepted as meeting the requirement for instruction in religion. We learned prayer book Hebrew and the Old Testament, and so on. Then our family started lighting candles on Friday nights, said prayers, and so on. So some Jewish practices came back. My father remembered them from his father, who had been quite religious. My grandfather was still alive, and he came to see us periodically on weekends, taking the train from Berlin. He would do a much more elaborate Friday night Sabbath service. So we understood that we were Jewish; and if we hadn't done so, some local citizens would have reminded us as discrimination, at first rather mild, became more and more direct.

Q: Did you find also in the small town a split between the Protestants and the Catholics?

SONNENFELDT: There was a small Catholic community there. The region in which this town is located had been in the midst of the Thirty Years War. Armies fought back and forth, and there were all sorts of folkloric stories about it. There was a residue of a Catholic community; there was a Catholic church. It's still there, and now has about 50 members, the priest told me when I visited there recently. Churches aren't faring all that well, anyway, in Germany; but the major church there remains Lutheran. I guess the Catholics lived okay; but in this region, they were not a major religious group.

Q: What sort of home life, I mean, what sort of intellectual life, were you getting from your two parents, both of whom had medical degrees and all? And also, how many brothers, and sisters did you have?

SONNENFELDT: I have one brother who is three years older than I. We went to school in Gardelegen, first to primary school and then to a gymnasium (high school) that you went to after four years of primary school. My brother was of course three grades ahead of me, and while it was still possible, we had friends in our respective age groups. We both had French as our foreign language. We were taught history, mostly German history, and some literature, almost entirely German literature, and geography, mathematics, and so on. At home there was?well, there was not much dinner table discussion because my parents worked very hard. They frequently were out at night because of emergencies; in those days doctors made house calls. There was a hospital in town; but basically, you went there only if you were really deathly ill or you needed an operation. So they had quite busy lives.

But we had scores of volumes of Goethe and Schiller on the bookshelves. When these works came up in school, we read the plays and poetry, not in simplified fashion. Since we had them all at home, we could talk to our parents about them. They had been raised on German literature as children themselves, and retained a lot of what they learned.

There was still in those days - let's say the mid-1930s - a lot of reminiscing about the First World War, because my father had been through it. He had some pals in town who had been through the war as well. They would drink beer and play the German card game Skat; but most of that dried up as the Nazis came to dominate the town. But we heard a lot of war stories. It was sort of a general cultural environment. Medicine was medicine, and that wasn't so much for children. I mean, we were told about how babies came into the world pretty early in our lives, and so on; but there wasn't a whole lot of talk about that, even though on many a night, one or the other of our parents was out delivering babies. They usually managed to catch some sleep because there was always a midwife to take over.

I would say ours wasn't the most brilliant intellectual life, but we were educated people. We talked about whatever came along, and we had a good library, so I leafed through a lot of books. My inclination was toward history, and I started reading what history books there were in my parents' library. They dealt mostly with Germany, very little with anybody else, except for the war books from which I got heavy doses of the German version of events.

Q: What about the impact of the Nazis? I mean you were born in '26. Hitler came into power?well, around '33, didn't he? So you were just starting school about that time.

SONNENFELDT: Well, I started school in '32. I was quite aware of the election of 1932, which was the presidential election. My parents were sort of leaning toward the SPD (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschland or Social Democratic Party) direction; I don't know whether they ever were registered members of it or not. But that was a crucial election for President, because it was Hindenburg, thGerman military hero, against Hitler. A lot of people who ordinarily wouldn't have voted for Hindenburg did vote for him in order to block Hitler. Hitler, indeed, did lose that election, but he still was on a steady climb. There was quite a bit of political talk at home when people came by. I tried to listen to it as a five-year-old, six-year-old. Our family had in the meantime acquired a radio, so we were able to hear some political speeches. I remember waiting with my parents and brother for the election results on the German radio in this 1932 election. Hindenburg had won.

Then came several more elections in 1932, at lower levels, and then a series of government crises. These led to the designation of Hitler by Hindenburg, after a lot of bargaining which I didn't understand very well as a child. Not much of it was reported in the newspapers, but a lot of the secrets became known afterwards. Hitler was designated as Chancellor. The idea of conservative politicians was to surround him in his Cabinet with respected conservatives who would supposedly block Hitler when necessary. That was obviously a fantasy, and did not usher in a happy time. Indeed, very shortly after that took place, there was a demonstration in our town by brown-uniformed Nazis. There used to be a lot of demonstrations on the first of May, by Communists, Social Democrats, and other groups in observance of this national holiday.

But on the first of April, 1933, the Nazi demonstration included what was called a boycott. There were two or three Jewishowned stores, and the offices of physicians; and Nazi soldiers, really Nazi troopers, planted themselves in front of the Jewish businesses, and my parents' medical practice. So that was really the first major shock wave, especially in our small town, where everyone knew everyone else. People began to take their distance from us, although some were courageous and stayed in touch.

Then I remember in that period how the Nazi youth organizatioin uniform and with a fife-and-drum band - kept marching up and down the street, and also kept going out on sort of semi-military hikes, and so on. I didn't quite understand what was going on. I remember asking my mother, "Why can't we do this?" and she explained that we couldn't. There were about eight or ten Jewish children in this town, and she organized a little hiking and bicycling group that went out into the country, so that we would not feel we were totally isolated and out of it. But this group was only the Jewish kids, and there were no uniforms. As time went on, my parents made contact with some Jewish people in nearby Magdeburg, which was a much larger city. (It's now the state capital of that part of Germany.) They became acquainted with some Jewish physicians there, and there was a Jewish lodge that they joined. So we went fairly frequently to Magdeburg, where the Jewish community was much larger, maybe a hundred families with children, with whom we became acquainted.

In 1934, my parents' medical practice was still quite active. We could still attend the local schools, but not make friends. We could still go to a resort on the Baltic. But we heard of more and more Jewish people who had decided to leave Germany.

The next major event was in September, 1935, when the Nuremberg laws were proclaimed. These laws basically introduced an ever-growing regime of restrictions on the lives of Jews. One clause, for example, prohibited Jews from employing maids under age 35, on the presumption that the women weren't safe from sexual advances. My parents still managed to bring in an elderly family to help with the housework. The man was a World War I veteran and he refused to be intimidated.

My parents still saw patients. But after 1935, maybe '36, they were expelled from the German state medical insurance system, so they had to practice privately and charge fees, which was not yet prohibited. Of course, this shrank the size of their practice; but they still saw numerous people they had treated in the past, who stuck with them, even though they now had to pay for treatment. They still went out to the villages and helped people who had illnesses of one sort or another. But all that petered out by 1937, and there just weren't enough Jews in the area to maintain a medical practice. My parents did have some patients who came from other towns in the general region. For a brief period, they set up a kind of clinic for delivering babies of Jewish people, and I think in one or two cases, non-Jewish people who wanted their babies delivered by my parents. So we had some people come in as patients who lived in our house for the time it took to have their babies. Our family's life was steadily transformed and beginning to be uprooted.

By 1937 it became very difficult for my brother and me to be in school. There were constant anti-Semitic incidents. One teacher, in particular, was a very ambitious guy in the Nazi operations, seeking to promote himself. He was particularly vicious in his remarks in front of the class. So my parents took us out of the school in the town. There was a Jewish gymnasium (high school) in Berlin. We had relatives there on my father's side, and we were sent to live with aunts and uncles so that we could attend this high school in Berlin.

Q: During this time, as things kept getting more and more difficult, did you ever hear your parents or any others of the family discuss getting the hell out?

SONNENFELDT: There began to be talk about that quite early, actually, because they heard of other people, and even some distant relatives on my father's side (my mother's side was a very small family) who had decided to go off to the U.S. or some place in Europe or Palestine, as it was called then. So yes, it came to be very much a topic by, let's say, 1936-37. My parents got a lot of literature about different countries. The Jewish organizations, which still functioned in Berlin, sent out materials about Latin America or Australia or the United States, Canada, and some European countries. Well, my parents - my father was a German patriot; he'd served in World War I - they couldn't quite believe that this persecution was going to go on forever, but then it became obvious.

By late 1937, they decided that we had to get out; but it wasn't that easy. So my mother decided to take a trip to the United States. There was a family from our little town which had emigrated to the U.S. in the 1920s. My parents had had some occasional communication with them. My mother contacted them, and they invited her to come to stay with them in Baltimore. She went there in early 1938 to look and see what could be done to find work for her and my father. In those days, American immigration laws required that if you came to this country seeking permanent residence, you needed to have someone who would guarantee that you would not become a ward of the state. This involved a $10,000 affidavit that the sponsors committed themselves to. Through the people with whom she was staying, my mother found a Jewish family in Baltimore who had already given several of those affidavits. They were quite wealthy business people in Baltimore, and they did it for our family.

Q: Was this within the Jewish community in Baltimore?

SONNENFELDT: Yes. But the search for some employment was not confined to Jewish people. My parents would not be permitted to work as physicians until they passed thMaryland State Board medical exama difficult and long-drawn-out process. But they hoped to make use of their medical experience.

Q: I don't know how it is today, but there was a rather substantial Jewish community in Baltimore.

SONNENFELDT: There's a very substantial Jewish community today, as there was at that time. It was partly German Jewish and partly Polish-Russian Jewish, rather divided at the time. And yes, there were indeed some wealthy families. In fact, the man who gave my mother this affidavit was named Lansburgh, and was part of the family which owned Lansburgh's department store.

Q: Department store, yes; a major department store in Washington.

SONNENFELDT: Right. But there were branches of it in Baltimore. It was quite a substantial retailing community, but also light clothing manufacture; and there were quite prominent medical people at Johns Hopkins and the University of Maryland.

So my mother came home to Gardelegen (I can't remember exactly when) in the spring of 1938, after having spent several weeks in Baltimore. She had made job and other arrangements - all of them subject to getting an American visa and a quota number, because immigration to the U.S. was still governed by legislation that involved a quota system for Germans. My parents decided that this was going to take time. They filled out all the forms and got a quota number, which was - I can't remember what the number was, but it was quite a high number - and the visa wouldn't be issued until that quota number was available. I think they were accepted as candidates for a visa, subject to this quota business getting settled. They had all the documentation, which took a lot of comings and goings and correspondence with the States, and frequent contacts with the American consulate in Berlin.

So my parents decided to get my brother and me out of Germany. Through a cousin of my father's, they made connections with a boarding school in England. The school agreed to give Dick and me scholarships, and my mother accompanied the two of us to the school in September of 1938. Many people urged my mother to stay on in England, because it was clear that conditions for Jews in Germany were becoming even more difficult. But she insisted on returning to Gardelegen to wait with my father for the immigration matters to get settled. They sold their house at an extorted price (for which they later, after the war, got modest compensation) and stayed with another Jewish family in town. But there wasn't much progress in getting their visas for the States. My mother, it turned out, had a medical school classmate in Sweden; so they got in touch with that lady and asked whether they could come to Sweden as visitors, to wait there for their American visas.

Eventually that connection worked out, but in the meantime, on November 10, the day after the infamous "Kristallnacht," all adult Jewish males in Gardelegen were ordered to report to the Town Hall. All of them, including my father, were arrested and taken to the Buchenwald concentration camp. My father was held there for only a few weeks when he was suddenly sent home, on condition that he and my mother leave Germany within six months. (It was not until after the war was over, when my brother was the Chief Interpreter for the U.S. prosecution at the Nuremberg war crimes trials, that we found out why my father had been released. In his interrogation of Field Marshal Hermann Goering, the Number Two man in the Nazi, hierarchy, my brother learned that Goering, who had been in charge of the camps for a short period, had ordered that all Jewish prisoners who had served honorably in the German armed forces in World War I should be released and told to get out of Germany within six months. My father was among the lucky prisoners to be let go, since he had served as an Army doctor on both the eastern and western fronts, and had been awarded the Iron Cross.). So my father returned to our hometown. They were able to complete the arrangements to stay for a time in Sweden, and my parents left Gardelegen, I guess, just after the war started in 1939, and went to Sweden.

Meanwhile, my brother Dick and I were in England at a boarding school, the Bunce Court School. It was a very good school which had been started in the 1920s in Germany and in Italy. It was, for those days, a progressive school. It was coeducational (one of I think only two or three coed boarding schools in England at the time), and it combined a really very good academic curriculum with work. I can't remember who invented these kinds of schools, but somebody in the States did, I think. They had the pupils, the children there, do most of the housework. There were grownups to guide things along and in charge, whether it was the kitchen or the laundry or the vegetable gardens or chickens, or the carpentry shop. You were supposed to get a rounded education: we made our own beds and cleaned our own rooms, and so on; so it was the combination of all these things with a demanding academic program.

Q: Quick question - when you went there, at some point there were these, I'm not sure if I'm getting the name right, but they were called kindertrains?

SONNENFELDT: We went to England before the Kindertransports, which started some months later. And actually, the school got an influx of children from those transports.

Q: Now explain what these were.

SONNENFELDT: I'm not exactly sure who organized the trains, but somebody obviously had to. They brought Jewish children from Germany, and by that time, from German-occupied areas like Czechoslovakia and-

Q: Austria-

SONNENFELDT: And Austria. Also, I believe, some children who had been sent earlier to other parts of Western Europe, because most of the countries later might be attacked and occupied, but where the families were separated, and these transports came to England. I don't know who made the deal with the British government to accept that, because the British were not that open in their own immigration policies. But they did come in large numbers; I forget what the total number was, but it was-

Q: It was significant\!

SONNENFELDT: - a significant number! Our school had 60 students when we started there - which was small, and of course, the premises were not all that large - I think we must have gotten something like 40 or 50, or maybe more, additional children when the first of these transports arrived in 1938-39. I think the Kindertransports may have started in late '38 (I'm not exactly sure). Of course, through this undertaking, there were a large number of children who were saved. Unfortunately, in many instances, they never did see their parents again because the parents had difficulty getting out, although some did get out. But once the war started, in September 1939, it became extremely difficult. There were some people who somehow managed to get out through occupied Poland and, via the Soviet Union, all the way to Asia. Some ended up in Shanghai, and some did get to the U.S., but basically immigration had stopped. There were some that fled to Scandinavia. Before 1940 and the German invasion of Belgium, Luxemburg, Holland, and France, some had gotten to those countries. Many of them got caught up in the German invasion when it was launched in May of 1940. Some stayed in unoccupied France, which, however, wasn't that a safe place either, because Vichy-France collaborated with the Germans on Jewish matters. Some ended up in Spain, Portugal or Italy. The Italian government was Fascist, but was not, at that point, as systematically anti-Semitic, anti-Jewish, as the Germans were.

Q: Well, when you got to your school, that was ?'39 or '38?

SONNENFELDT: I got there in September of 1938. We got there during the week of the Munich crisis.

Q: Okay. So you'd have been 12 years old.

SONNENFELDT: I was just twelve, on September 13. We left home in Germany on the 17th because the school year in England started on September 20, 1938. What greeted us when we got to this school out in the farmlands of Kent (in the southeast of England) was children and others shoveling away at building air raid shelters, because of the Munich war scare, which subsided after the Munich agreement.

Q: Well, as a young boy interested in history, this is a great time to learn an awful lot about a lot of places, wasn't it?

SONNENFELDT: Yes. Well, by that time I was able to read academic history books. I wasn't able to read English too well, but I learned very quickly. The student body at the school was mixed, with Germans and others as well as English kids. We had very good English instruction. We were expected to speak English. After about six months, I was able to read the newspapers and listen to the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation), which became an important thing and even more so during the war.

They had a famous evening newscast on the BBC. Once you were 13, you were allowed to stay up till 9 o'clock, which was when it came on. Of course, there were no radios, except the headmistress had a "wireless" in her room. My brother was an amateur radio buff. He had managed to find a shop not too far from the school, where he went on his bicycle and got some vacuum tubes and a condenser, and earphones. So he built himself a radio. I guess he also must have found a loudspeaker. So the older boys (he's three years older than I) had this radio in my brother's cubicle where they stayed, and I occasionally sneaked in because I was interested and began to hear about it. But the war, once it started, really was an enormous geography lesson.

Q: Oh, yes!

SONNENFELDT: And lots of other things. In 1940, we were able to listen to Churchill's speeches on the radio. The newspaper the school got was the Manchester Guardian. The Guardian nowadays is not a paper I'm particularly happy with, but it was the great British liberal newspaper in those days. The school's headmistress was sort of Center Left, I guess we'd say now. They also got the New Statesman, which later became much more radical. So I started devouring those papers. I can't say that I understood every word, because they were intended for adult intellectuals, and so on. But I did very soon get keenly interested.

Then we instituted an overnight news bulletin, which we typed up (hunt and peck) based on the nine o'clock BBC news. Some of us were able to get German newscasts, in German, on the few medium-wave radios of those days, so we were able to throw in some things that the Germans said. We typed up this sheet and hung it on the school's bulletin board, so that anybody who wasn't able to listen to a radio could get some information about what was happening. At the beginning of the war, after Poland was occupied, things seemed to be kind of dull. It wasn't until the Germans went into Norway and Denmark in 1940, and then in May, into France, that the news became more dramatic and also closer to home.

Q: Yes, for a while it was called a "sitzkrieg" (warfare marked by a lack of aggression or progress).

SONNENFELDT: That's right. I personally became keenly interested in anything in the newspaper that showed the British navy, all the ships, different categories of ships, and the German navy, and the French navy, and the Italian navy, and so on. My naval interests never really have subsided. I'm on the CNO (Chief of Naval Operations) Executive Panel; I've been a member for 25 years. So navy interests go back some 60 years.

Q: I grew up in Annapolis, and I could tell you the tonnage of every ship you could think of.

SONNENFELDT: Yes, terrific! Well, anyway, I graduated from this high school in 1942.

Q: Oh! While you were there, within the neighborhood - here were a bunch of kids who were out of Europe, a lot of them out of Germany. Were the local people sort of looking at you sort of sideways or otherwise?

SONNENFELDT: I frankly never encountered it, even when there were fears o"fifth columns" - fears that the Germans had organized to confuse the local population and to block military movements on the roads. This school was located in a rural area and had good relations with its neighbors. It was eventually evacuated because it was too close to the south coast of England. After the fall of France and the general concern about when the German invasion would start, this school was evacuated to the northwest, to another large house in Shropshire, which was also in an agricultural area. We had our own vegetable gardens, both in Kent and in Shropshire. The farms around us had sizable orchards and potato and vegetable fields. In Kent, they also grew hops. Most British adult males had been conscripted; the government made some exceptions when there was only one man who could work the farm, but in many cases their young men were drafted and young women joined the British women's military units. Our neighbors needed hands to work in the fields or to pick the fruits or hops. The Kent hop neighborhood was like that around my hometown in Germany, where there had been breweries since the thirteenth century. In Kent, the breweries were further away from the fields. But anyway, we went out in the afternoons and on weekends to help the local farmers - we're talking about spring, summer, and fall of 1940 - to bring in their harvests. They liked that, and they gave us maybe? I don't recall, maybe a few shillings a day; a pound would have been too much. So we were able to earn some extra pocket money, which was great because the school gave us only one shilling and sixpence a week, so that we could buy some chocolate at the neighborhood store. We really didn't need money, but it was nice to earn a few shillings.

So, back to your question: I at least can't recall encountering suspicion of us as foreigners, even though the population was urged to be very alert to strangers and to Germans dropping down in parachutes. As I mentioned, talk about "fifth columns" had become widespread. So there was quite a bit of that, but it was not directed against us. However, by the time of Dunkirk - the British military evacuation from France, in June of 1940 - the British government introduced new regulations. There was widespread anxiety, almost a panic, about the risks and dangers from foreigners in Britain. One result was that all German males over 16 years of age were interned, irrespective of the circumstances under which they had come to Britain; and that included my brother. I wasn't 16 yet in 1940; he was. My brother and several other students in the school, children - they were adolescents - were picked up and interned. You know, we knew something about concentration camps in Germany, and so we weren't exactly sure, and they weren't exactly sure what internment meant. They thought maybe it was temporary. Many people thought it was temporary, but the result was that my brother and I were split up. (Incidentally, my father had been put into Buchenwald concentration camp during the Nazi pogrom in November, 1938. He was released after two weeks because of the Iron Cross he had been awarded in World War I.)

My brotheDick's life turned into a long, long odyssey. I don't mean to digress too much. He eventually got shipped to Australia, as did many of the internees, and others were sent to Canada. The government wanted to get them out of Britain, although some were kept on the Isle of Man. But he was on a ship to Australia which also carried some of the early German prisoners of war that the British navy had captured, or that had been captured from air battles. It was a rough trip for these Jewish refugees that were on the ship going to Australia; basically, the German prisoners controlled the ship below decks, and they harassed the Jews. Once this became known (after they got to Australia), it became a scandal in the British press; and the British changed their laws and distinguished between enemy and friendly aliens. By the time my brother got to the camp where they were all taken, in the outback in Australia, the commandant there got all these Jewish people assembled and said, "You are all going to be freed, and you are to go back to Sydney and get on a ship back to England so that you can resume your lives; or you can stay in Australia." A lot of them did. I occasionally hear from some of them who had been at the boarding school in England.

My brother decided to go back to England. The ship he was on was requisitioned by the British navy several weeks out of Sydney because of a crisis with Japan - this was late 1940, the so-called Burma Road crisis - and Dick and the other returning internees were all dumped ashore in Bombay, India, and told, "You're free now." My brother found some work there, and also happened to find some German Jews in Bombay who knew my family. He telegraphed my parents, who by then were in Baltimore. They got some money together and he earned some money as an electrician, and eventually he got enough to buy a ticket on a ship to go to the States. He got to the States sometime in late 1941; so he rejoined my parents and resumed his life here. I was still at school in England.

When I finished my English high school education, somebody found me a job in Manchester, as a laboratory assistant in the physics department at the university. I didn't know a whole lot about physics, but anyway it was an instructive kind of a job.

Q: Washing test tubes and this sort of thing?

SONNENFELDT: Yes, and they were actually doing some very high-class cosmic ray research, and it involved moving a lot of lead around from one cloud chamber to another cloud chamber. But I began to pick up some scientific knowledge, and I started building primitive radios in my spare time. Anyway, I was in Manchester in this job and I got a little money, and my parents sent a little. By that time, they were not making a huge amount, but they were making enough to help me out. I did take some science courses in the evenings and on weekends, but I wasn't headed toward my family's accomplishments.

Q: They'd gotten to Baltimore by this time?

SONNENFELDT: Yes. I should have said that they were in Sweden when their U.S. visa number came up; but by then, the war had started. They traveled to New York on a Swedish-American ship which was originally supposed to have stopped in Southampton, England, on the way to New York; but because of the war, the Swedes observed the war zone; and so they came directly to the States sometime in early 1941. And I stayed on in school in England.

My parents settled in Baltimore and had some jobs, which weren't the greatest. But anyway, they settled. At that time, they worried about what was happening to me. They knew my brother had been interned; but then, eventually, they got his telegram from Bombay. It didn't specify exactly why he was in Bombay, but at least they knew he was all right. They'd scraped together some money and sent him some to help him get passage to the U.S. So he rejoined them in late 1941.

I finished high school at the Bunce Court School in 1942 and, as I mentioned, I went to work in Manchester. I lived there in a hostel organized by the Jewish community in Manchester, which had quite a sizable Jewish community - a Sephardic community, partly Spanish-descended Jews, who also were quite wealthy, as well as other Jews. It was a good set-up. In those days, because of the British conscription, which was widespread, there were jobs to be filled. Some of the hostel members took part-time university courses, as I did, and began what later became their professional life in that way.

By 1944, travel by non-VIP (Very Important Person) civilians across the Atlantic was permitted; so I went to London to get a visa to enter the United States. Of course, my parents were residents; and this visa was to join them, and also to become a resident of the United States. Someone helped me to get passage to the U.S., which turned out to be on a 2,500-ton banana boat, very clean, which left from Bristol in early March, 1944. There were maybe 12 staterooms, so there weren't more than about 24, or at most possibly 30 passengers on this little ship. But we got out of Bristol and went through the Irish Sea to somewhere near Belfast. We joined a convoy of about a hundred ships with escorts, even though generally the Atlantic was then considered clear. But the convoy went quite far north and zigzagged; it was a three-week crossing. We were all rather young on this little ship, and so it was fun; it was pleasant. There were rough seas, but we mastered that gradually. One or two of my shipmates are still alive, and I'm still occasionally in touch with them.

So I got to the States on the first of April 1944, and rejoined my family for the first time since 1938. My parents, by that time, were physicians at a well-known mental hospital in Baltimore, Sheppard Pratt. It was one of the few psychoanalytically-oriented mental hospitals, which my parents were not - they had had quite good psychiatric training and had applied it to some extent in their rural practice in Germany.

So my initiation to American life was in a mental hospital. I lived with my father and mother in this mental hospital, and found a job in Baltimore with a photographer. In not quite six months I would be 18 years old, and subject to the draft. I also got admitted to a couple of evening school courses at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. The chief psychologist at the mental hospital was at Johns Hopkins as a full-time professor, but he did some consulting at Sheppard Pratt. So he helped me get into one course - I think it was sociology - and another which I think it was a philosophy course.

I got acquainted with people in town, younger people in Baltimore, through my parents or through some of the physicians who had younger siblings or cousins or friends. So I made friends in town and slowly began to change my English accent. I began to drink up American popular culture.

Actually, when I lived in Manchester, I went to the movies. There were lots of American troops that eventually were stationed there; so practically all the movies were American. (Most movies were American anyway, since the British movie industry pretty much shut down during the war.) They had some very good movies, and so I learned who Bing Crosby and Fred Astaire and other stars were, and I got a little more acquainted with who was what, and what was what in the States. My first job in the U.S., with a commercial photographer, was a very good experience because he had contracts with the Coast Guard in Baltimore; and we used to go out across the port of Baltimore to take progress pictures of the various Coast Guard cutters that were being built there in Baltimore. He had other contracts with the city; he took pictures at schools; he took pictures all around; and so I got around.

A little later in the year, I learned a bit about American politics during the 1944 presidential election campaign between Roosevelt and Dewey. Dewey came to Baltimore and rode down Howard Street in a white convertible to a rally in the Armory. I was out there taking pictures of Dewey as he passed by. My boss at the photography place was an ardent, ardent Republican! He couldn't stand Roosevelt! I just felt deeply offended when he mocked Roosevelt's language and made nasty remarks, because I'd never known of any American president except for Roosevelt. So for me, Roosevelt was the obvious choice. I had nothing in particular against Dewey. Anyway, I still have somewhere in a footlocker at home those pictures I took of Dewemy first experience with a presidential election.

Then on top of this bit of Americana, Baltimore had a Triple-A baseball team called the Orioles. On the night before the Fourth of July of 1944, their ballpark burnt down. I got a call early in the morning from my boss, who said, "Get down to 29th Street to Oriole Park. It's burning! I want you to go down there and take pictures. I want you to take pictures of the mayor or anybody else who you can find there, and I'll be down there with you." There was a camera called the Speed Graphic, which had recently been invented. It was relatively small, with a flash lamp. I had one of those on loan from my boss that I could use. I'd taken some pictures of my parents from time to time.

Anyway, by the time I got down to Oriole Park, I guess they had doused the flames, but it was a great event! The Mayor, Theodore McKeldin, was passing out matchboxes with his picture, and signing autographanother bit of Americanization for me. In addition, the Orioles were in last place at that time. They moved to Memorial Stadium, and I became an Oriole fan, and they won the International League pennant. They went all the way from last place, climbed over Rochester and Buffalo and Jersey City-

Q: Oh, great days!

SONNENFELDT: And then they were in the Little World Series-

Q: Triple-A.

SONNENFELDT: The Triple-A League World Series. I can't even remember who they playe(but my wife, who is from Baltimore and was a big Orioles fan at that time, says they beat Louisville to win the pennant). It was the same year that the St. Louis Cardinals and Browns were in the World Series. The Browns later became the Orioles. So anyway, I suddenly became a baseball fan.

A little later that year, when I was still waiting to get drafted into the army, the football season started; and Navy played most of its games in Baltimore at Memorial Stadium. So I got a rapid introduction into American football and went to many games, including NavyNotre Dame. I think they beat Notre Dame, 56 to 0. They had all different troops and the colleges too.

Q: It was great years for ArmyNavy.

SONNENFELDT: And then the ArmyNavy game was played there in Baltimore that year. That was the year of Blanchard and-

Q: And Davis.

SONNENFELDT: Doc Blanchard and Glen Davis were the big stars, playing for Army. I was 'way up above one of the end zones and took the pictures of both teams' lines - the Corps of Cadets and the Brigade of Midshipmen - and then took pictures closer to the field of various plays. I didn't know enough football to know exactly when to take the picture, but I have a whole batch of those. So anyway, I learned, and got acquainted a bit with what Americans talked about and did.

Q: Did you notice any difference on this thing? I mean, here you'd gotten a good dose, particularly when you were working in Manchester and all, of how the British were and then the Americans were. Did you see any differences?

SONNENFELDT: Well, the British were at war. Manchester had been pretty badly bombed during the blitz. Fortunately, while I was there it was no longer in the German crosshair, on the German target list. Most of the younger men were gone; some of the women were gone. The parts of the town that had been badly mauled by the German Luftwaffe bombing were slums. The people weren't really terribly well accommodated. But they were cheerful, and actually they were friendly, the ones that knew me. There wasn't any hostility toward us as Germans. While there was sort of an underlying cultural anti-Semitism in Britain, the people I worked with at the university in the lab (including the lab assistants and lab stewards, as they called them, who weren't professional) were very kind and helped me get going there. The public in general was polite and friendly; we queued up for the movies, we queued up at bus stops, we queued up for everything. The people weren't very demonstrative, and I didn't go to the few sports events in town. At the university there was a sort of a makeshift faculty because a lot of people were involved in war work, and so on. But they were friendly. Most of the people that we had more close contact with were Jewish, because it was the Jewish community that had set up the hostel where I lived, and then looked after our welfare. But all in all, I think the guy who sold me my fish-and-chips for lunch near the university where I worked was always very friendly and talked about the war and so on.

It's hard to make distinctions, because I can't say that I was that close to the population at large. But Manchester had a great public library and a first-class symphony orchestra, several "cinemas" and theaters. I made enough money to get cheap tickets for them. One other memorable thing about Manchester: it had horrendous fogs. All traffic stopped, even bike rides!

In the States?the war was going on, of course. D-Day, June 6, 1944, was just two months after I came to this country. So the Americans were as much focused on the war as the British were; both clung to the news. But this, I think, really began to boom with D-Day in this country - not that people had ignored the war, and of course, it was going on in Italy and the Pacific. I never encountered (except maybe once or twice when I later was in the U.S. Army) anything like, "Get out of the way, you damn Kraut!" or something like that. There was occasionally a bit of needling, but on the whole, no. You know, people here seemed to be more relaxed. I don't remember whether they had any soccer games in England during the war; they did have cricket, with players beyond draft age. But in this country, you know, football games were a big deal - and baseball games, especially when the Orioles were climbing up the ladder, were a big deal. So people seemed to live mostly normal lives. There was practically no rationing - there was no blackout. There weren't really any constraints. And in England, there was some, but not that I personally noticed. And in England, I didn't drive so I had no problems with "petrol." Wherever I went, I used a bicycle, even on 40-or-50-mile trips.

Q: Well, there was some rationing in Americ[sugar, gas and shoes]?

SONNENFELDT: Right, nothing of consequence. So the life here in America seemed much more normal and not subject to as many rules and regulations. People drove their cars at night. In Britain, they were allowed to do that, but all they had was a little slit in the headlights, and most didn't have any gas anyway; so very few people drove anymore, at least private people in England. In the States there just seemed to be more hustle and bustle, and people seemed to go about their business. Of course, they showed pictures of their kids who were in the service in their windows, and this sort of thing.

Q: And the stars and all that.

SONNENFELDT: A lot of flags, and there were lots more newspapers than I was used to in England, with banner headlines, and so on. So these are all very superficial observations-

Q: Yes, but I mean this is a young man's first impressions. Now, before we go to your time in the military, what about your family?

SONNENFELDT: A bit more background: my parents were both psychiatrists. My father has written up some of his experiences when he had been picked up by the Nazis and sent to Buchenwald. As I mentioned, he was released because he had served as a doctor in the German Army in World War I, and had been awarded an Iron Cross. His release was due to the intervention of Hermann Goering, who decided that all Jews who had been picked up in November of 1938 who had been in World War I and had won Iron Crosses, that they were to be released and told to get out of Germany within six months (that wasn't a hardship in the sense that they might not want to get out!)

But my parents had a rough start in the U.S. They couldn't practice medicine in Maryland because they had not passed their state boards [examinations to obtain licenses to practice]. There weren't any state board examinations during the war, and they didn't know that much English. My mother had pretty good English because she was instructed in it in her high school in northern Germany, where they spoke High German as well as Plattdeutsch, which is a German dialect with some similarities to English. My father had studied Greek, Latin and French. In addition to his medical work in the hospital in Baltimore, he took English lessons. Of course, he was totally surrounded by Americans. Unlike many German Jewish people who ended up in New York, where they basically lived among German Jewish refugees, my parents knew only a few German refugees in Baltimore. But they worked almost entirely with American people, so the language was something they just had to absorb. As psychiatrists they had to talk to patients. They used very elaborate family history accounts as a technique of trying to figure out patients' problems. The diagnostic work in those days was, by our current standards, relatively primitive, as were the treatments.

My parents gradually became quite fluent in English. Then, when the war ended, they did pass their state boards. It was a big struggle, especially for my father. You know, they had to go back to what they had learned in medical school, years earlier.

Q: Oh, yes.

SONNENFELDT: But they got their licenses. They had a private practice for a while, and then went back to serve on the staff of a large state mental hospital. Unfortunately, both died young, both of them of cancer when they were in their sixties, in 1958.

So they didn't really have a very pleasant life. But all in all, they had some years in the United States where they did well; and they had no desire to go back to Germany.

My brother did very well in his life, in his career.

Q: What did your brother do?

SONNENFELDT: Well, my brother ended up in the OSS (Office of Strategic Services) after he went in the Army in 1942 or '43. General "Wild Bill" Donovan picked him up, used him as an interpreter, and took him to Nuremberg when the war crimes tribunal was formed. Donovan was the first U.S. representative to get things started; then Supreme Court Justice Robert Jackson was appointed by President Roosevelt as the U.S. Prosecutor. My brother became the Chief Interpreter for the American prosecution. So he interrogated Gï¿½ering and many top Nazi leaders - really a fantastic experience, less than seven or eight years after he had left Germany as a refugee, to suddenly be thrown in with all these people that brought tragedies to so many people! When he came back from the Army, he went to Johns Hopkins, where he studied electrical engineering. He went to RCA (Radio Corporation of America) after that, and was involved in the invention of color television (for which he holds some 40 patents) and a lot of the computer development that RCA was working on in those days. He had a very successful engineering career. He was dean of Brooklyn Polytechnic for a while.

He's had really quite an extraordinary career, including the Nuremberg experience and his saga of being sent to Australia! His ship returning from Australia was actually torpedoed by a u-boat, but fortunately, it was only a glancing hit, and the ship went on its way. So he has a big story to tell. A German publisher has published his memoirs in German.

When I came back from the military, I went back to Johns Hopkins University and then to the State Department. So my parents witnessed most of that, until they both died in 1958. By that time, I had been in the State Department six or seven years.

Q: So at least they saw both of you well launched.

SONNENFELDT: Yes, they did. By the time they died, my brother had three children, and my wife and I had one daughter, who was a baby. But they did see the grandchildren. So they had at least something that was good in their lives after the trauma of being uprooted and going through all of that. So there we are!

Q: Well, we've come to - you joined the army or were drafted in?

SONNENFELDT: Both.

Q: Both? Okay. [Laughter] And when?

SONNENFELDT: I came to the U.S. in April of 1944 to join my family. So I came with, not a visitor's visa, but a?whatever it was called, a resident visa-

Q: Immigrant visa.

SONNENFELDT: Immigrant visa, and that made me subject to the draft. So when I reached my 18th birthday, in September of 1944, I registered. I got a draft notice and reported either in December or in early January of 1945, at the Armory in Baltimore. I was given my choice of service. I'd always been a Navy buff, and I really wanted to say Navy, but then I said Army. So anyway, that's how it started.

Q: [Laughter]

SONNENFELDT: When I got drafted, I was worried about what it would be like because I hadn't been to American schools. I was not really familiar with lots of things that I would have known had I gone to school in this country. But it all worked out pretty well. I was in the infantry, so the sergeants were sergeants; I'd seen that in movies, and it didn't particularly surprise me. But nobody kicked me around.

There was one corporal who was in charge of our barracks who somehow, I don't know why - maybe it had nothing to do with my being German or anything else, but he tended to be harsh. He called me in and read me the riot act for this or that, maybe not having my shirt buttoned when I hung it up near my bunk there in the barracks, and so on. But basically, I can't really think of any uncomfortable or nasty episode that I encountered, either before I went in the Army, or when I went in the Army, except what is normal in the Army-

Q: Yes, well?[Laughter]

SONNENFELDT: Which, you know, isn't a bed of roses!

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: The next step was getting infantry training at what was then called Camp Blanding, near Jacksonville, Florida. This is also where I got my citizenship, because one of the things that went along with the immigrant visa and serving in the military was to get citizenship around a year after you arrived in the country. So I became an American citizen in the U.S. District Court in March or April of 1945, just about a year after I'd reached the U.S.A.

I applied to officer training school when I was three-quarters of the way through my basic training in Florida, but I didn't make it. They didn't say why; I don't know to this day why I didn't, but then a lot of people didn't. I was told to apply again. So I applied again and didn't make it.

Q: How did you find it? You know, I haven't gone through it. I was in the Air Force, but as an enlisted man, anl know the training cadre is?well, it's a different breed of cat. Here you were, coming out of Germany and all. How did they treat you?

SONNENFELDT: Well, they treated me fine. Actually, before I ever went in the Army, an Army intelligence captain stationed in Baltimore came to see me because they thought I had only recently come out of Germany. (Of course, I had spent nearly six years in England.) So they asked me a lot about things that I didn't know about. So I'd had some contact with Army intelligence.

Q: Yes, yes.

SONNENFELDT: I tried ?in fact, my parents helped in talking to him about the area where we had lived, and so on. But when I reported for the draft, I don't know that there was any special treatment that I noticed, from my standpoint.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: Entering the Army, of course, meant that I was propelled into the American culture, even more than had happened in the six months or so since I had been in this country-

Q: Oh, yes, yes.

SONNENFELDT: -and especially living in a mental hospital, where my parents were psychiatrists in Baltimore, I didn't get exactly a typical feel for the U.S.

Q: [Laughter] One might say that it was a pretty good preparation for the military!

SONNENFELDT: Yes. The Army was a new experience. Obviously, I mean it was a new experience for lots of other people, as well; but in some ways, native-born Americans knew a lot more about the sorts of things that you do in the Army. They'd been in camps as kids, many of them, and so forth.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: But personally, I don't think I had any particular problem. We did have a pretty tough basic training course in Florida, initially. The first few weeks were just routine things, but then, you know, field exercises, shooting, and so on. So the adrenaline began to flow. I wasn't always entirely with it because I might not have understood some piece of American slang or something like that; but, you know, I adjusted, and it was fine.

Q: Yes. Well, this is, of course, early 1945, when we were beginning to run out of infantrymen for our campaign in Germany, towards the end [of the war in Europe].

SONNENFELDT: Well, I got to basic training when the Battle of the Bulge had only just ended. So while that was being fought, I followed the news every day, as I had as a kid in England. It was just one of my habits, which I've carried on to this day. But the question in training was that we weren't sure what was going to happen to us, whether we were going to be replacements in what remained of the European campaign, or whether we were going to be sent to Asia. What happened in my case, and the cases of some of the other people in this particular group of trainees - which incidentally came from all over the country - was that word came down that we would be going to the Pacific theater.

This would be the first time I had close contact with black people in the same unisomething that was not yet very usual.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: I was sent to advanced jungle infantry training in Alabama, at Camp (now Fort) Rucker. That seemed to confirm that a bunch of us were being trained to be sent out to the Pacific.

Q: Yes, getting ready for the invasion of Japan, essentially.

SONNENFELDT: Right. And of course, there was still island-hopping going on in the Pacific.

Q: Yes, yes. Okinawa and Iwo Jima.

SONNENFELDT: We had jungle training to the extent that there was jungle in Alabama. We seemed to be mostly crawling through wet earth, like they had to in Georgia. But anyway, that seemed to be what was happening there. So I had another two months or so of jungle training, by which time the war in Germany was really drawing to a close.

Incidentally, it was also during that time that President Roosevelt died. I remember coming in from an all-day march, firing exercises, and so on, and hearing in the evening that he had died. For me that was - well, I guess for everybody - it was a big shock. Nobody had known any other president.

Q: Yes, yes.

SONNENFELDT: I wondered what was going to happen. Nobody knew Truman, or about Truman, at least not in our crowd. So, you know, it was all a little baffling, what was going to happen; and I wasn't exactly a student of the Constitution. At the end of that phase of training, I got home leave, and then reported at some place in, I think, Camp Meade, near Baltimore, to be sent out by troop train to the West Coast and to Asia.

Q: Yes. That was about when, when you -

SONNENFELDT: This would have been at the end of April or early May of 1945.

Q: So the war was still going hot and heavy in the Pacific-

SONNENFELDT: Well, it was certainly hot and heavy in the Pacific, and there was still fighting in Europe. In fact, as I have since discovered, some of the heaviest fighting in Germany took place around the little town where I had grown up and which my family had left in 19339. That's another story, which I caught up with only much, much later.

But anyway, the war in Europe was drawing to a close. The Russians were advancing; we were advancing. I can't remember when the meeting [of American and Russian forces] on the Elbe was, but it was probably fairly close to that time, and things were clearly drawing to a close. At the time, there was all this talk about a redoubt that the Nazis were preparing in the southern part of Germany-

Q: Bavarian redoubt, yes, yes.

SONNENFELDT: ?and Austrian Tyrol. Nobody could tell exactly! In any case, it was made pretty clear, when I finished this advanced infantry training and proudly got my expert infantry badge, that I'd be likely to go off to war to Asia.

Q: Yes. Well then, what happened? I mean, you report to Camp Meade and -

SONNENFELDT: Well, I reported to Camp Meade and got on a troop train, which took, I don't know, five days?a beautiful trip by the time we got past the mid-west and into the mountainous area. That train, maybe they juggled some of the cars around at different places, but it was a pretty slow-moving train. It ended up in Fort Ord, California, which was a staging area for replacements. There were some units starting to be transferred from Europe actually, or starting a little later; but anyway, these were individual replacements. So I was just waiting there at Fort Ord for maybe a week before I got orders, and a bunch of other people got orders, to get on another troop train. It went, I think, maybe to some military establishment in San Francisco.

Q: Probably Camp Stoneman.

SONNENFELDT: It could be, but I was there for just a very brief stop. We just had our duffle bags, and I think a day or so later, we got loaded onto a troop transport.

Q: Nobody had talked to you, looked through the records, and said, "Hey, here's a pretty good guy for our occupation forces in Germany?"

SONNENFELDT: Well?you know?nobody had talked to me about that, although the forms showed my German background. I had asked myself whether I should say something when I first heard that I was going to go out West and to Asia. I just couldn't bring myself to do it, because I figured the war would soon be over in Germany, and I didn't want to look like I was trying to avoid the Pacific war and get over to Germany. As I'll tell you in a moment, I ended up in Germany anyway, after a while. So if the military noticed my German background, they didn't say. It was a time when they were already taking most of the green recruits and getting them ready for what promised to be a quite lengthy war in Asia. Whatever the plans were, I don't know; but nobody mentioned it to me, and I chose not to mention it - my German background - to them.

Q: So what happened?

SONNENFELDT: Well, I got put on a troop ship, which traveled for?I don't know, at least three weeks maybe, with stops at Eniwetok and a couple of other places. One morning we were anchored in a bay, and it was Leyte, which had been taken by our forces fairly recently. I don't think it was totally occupied yet. But anyway, we were there and waited. You always wait in the Army! Then we took off.

Q: Leyte being in the Philippines.

SONNENFELDT: Yes, I guess it was Leyte Gulf - I can't reconstruct it precisely, but I don't recall signs of a big recent naval battle. Anyway, I ended up in a large tent camp in Quezon City, on the outskirts of Manila. I think it was a sort of suburban Manila, but it was muddy as hell, and practically everything was destroyed. I can't remember exactly when Manila was recaptured by the U.S. [February 1945]; but in any case, it was a pretty soggy neighborhood. So I was driven there by truck from the pier wherever our troop ship landed, in what was left of Manila harbor. I was taken out to this camp and given a bunk in a tent.

I didn't know what exactly was going to happen until somebody came along and said, "Well, you're an infantryman, but we need you to drive a truck - right now, while you're waiting!" I really hadn't ever learned to drive! It wasn't the sort of thing that happened in Europe, even when one was 18. So I got maybe a half-hour driving lesson. The idea was to off-load the large convoys of trucks carrying various kinds of material from cargo ships in Manila harbor, and take them to some depot and storage dumps, all to back up the eventual invasion of Japan.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: I did that for some time, driving a 6-by-6 truck. I didn't get any additional infantry training. I'm not even sure that I carried a weapon. I kept doing that for several weeks. I'm trying to get my dates more or less straight because at some point while I was doing that, the report came over AFN (Armed Forces Network) that a totally new bomb had been dropped on Japan - the atomic bomb. I guess I heard a little bit of Truman's announcement on AFN. Then I guess we got the Stars and Stripes Pacific edition the next day. We're in August, 1945, now.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: I must say, all the troops that I was with figured that this was going to mean the end of the war; and there was a lot of relief among these troops that weren't, obviously, going to be in the first wave of any planned invasion of Japan. In fact, we weren't all that sure exactly where our forces were by that time. I mean, there was Okinawa; there had been this terrible fighting on Iwo Jima, and so on. (Now I've got to be careful to transplant myself back to that time, rather than what I've studied with some care subsequently in connection with the dropping of the atomic bomb.) But anyway, I don't think we had any real idea of where our troops were or any idea when there might be an invasion of Japan's home islands. But everybody figured that that's what was going to happen. Then this bomb came along, and two days later another one.

Q: Yes, at Nagasaki.

SONNENFELDT: In Nagasaki, right. I had studied physics in England. I think I mentioned in our earlier installment that I had worked at the University of Manchester (after I had finished high school in England), in the physics department, which had been one of the leading physics departments in England. In fact, Rutherford and his team at Cambridge University, who split the atom - an ingredient of what eventually led to the atomic bomb, among other things - had originally been in Manchester. So I had sort of brushed past quite a great tradition of physics. I tried to figure out from what I read what the atomic bomb was; and all I know is that we saw the mushroom cloud pictures in Stars and Stripes a week or so later. People were pretty sure this was going to be the end of the war, and there was a lot of relief, and certainly I was relieved.

Q: I have to ask the question in view of later things. Was there a lot of introspection on your part of should we have dropped the bomb and all?

SONNENFELDT: No, no, no. I really can't say that there was. You know, we weren't watching television; we weren't watching newsreels; we were watching still pictures. We saw a huge cloud, and people, and then there was reporting in some articles in Stars and Stripes, because all this was carefully controlled and censored in those days. Whatever occasional bit of AFN radio that we got, it just said that the town, the city was destroyed, and there were huge casualties. So no, I can't say that I had these epochal concerns at that point. I was more concerned about whether this meant the war was won - it was going to be over. I don't recall any great philosophical discussions about it with my colleagues.

Q: Well, I mean, with your colleagues, in view of Iwo Jima and Okinawa and the battles there, was there sort of a feeling that any invasion of Japan, the mainland - Kyushu and Honshu - was going to be a pretty nasty campaign?

SONNENFELDT: Well, yes. There were some veterans around who were back in the Philippines. There was a big R and R (rest and relaxation) area not too far from Manila, at Baguio, where there were veterans who were getting a break from combat. Some of them somehow intermingled with us. We occasionally got a pass to go into Manila itself, and there were USO (United Service Organization) clubs and whatnot. I mean the town was in total ruin. There were some soldiers who had been engaged in fighting all the way up from New Guinea, and they talked about the bloody campaigns. So I think the general sense was that invading Japan was going to be a bloody mess.

In fact, I remember standing in the chow line one day with my mess kit in our tent camp, and suddenly there was some firing going on. Then word got around that some Japanese had come out of some caves in the nearby hills and had started shooting. Fortunately, they didn't hit the chow line [laughter]. We got an object lesson of tenacious Japanese, or maybe they didn't know that the U.S. had captured the place, or whatever it was. But I think the general assumption was that an invasion of Japan was going to be a pretty bloody mess.

Q: Well then, what happened?

SONNENFELDT: Well, what happened was that the war ended. This gets us into September. We heard parts of the surrender ceremonies on the USS Missouri via AFN.

The point system was soon instituted by the military - the point system being a way of calculating each soldier's time in service so that whoever had served the longest would get home the earliest. Of course, I'd been in the Army for only about six months; so it was clear to me that I was going to be very low on the totem pole as far as getting back home was concerned. I went to see a personnel guy in the unit that I was attached to. I guess he must have been at regiment level, which was way in the stratosphere as far as I was concerned.

Q: Oh, yes!

SONNENFELDT: He was an enlisted man, a sergeant, I guess. I told him (I'm not quoting directly, but reconstructing), "I have low point score as far as getting home is concerned. I don't know how much of my personnel record you have here, but I am German-born and speak German and know quite a bit about Germany. I know from Stars and Stripes that there's an occupation underway there, and they are short of troops. My brother's over there working on the Prosecution staff at Nuremberg, so he is doing something useful in the occupation. Since I'm going to have at least a year to go before I can possibly even think of being qualified to get out of the Army, isn't there some way you can somehow get me to Germany, so I can do something where I can be useful?"

He said, "Well, you know, you're dreaming! This is the Army!"

I said, "Well, I know, but my hunch is that they're pulling a lot of troops out of Europe very quickly. I've also read that in the Stars and Stripes. We are going to be occupying the country and having fewer and fewer troops there. I don't know what's going to happen over here, but if we end up occupying Japan, I certainly don't know any Japanese. Or maybe we're just going to stand guard over these huge supplies here, and then I think it's a waste of what I can offer."

He said, "Well, I understand what you're saying, but?I'll see what I can do."

I said, "Well, thanks."

About ten days later, my name was called out in our tent at seven in the morning, I think, as we had just gotten up and were ready to do our daily chores, which were next to nothing - guard duty, essentially. I think we were still unloading some ships, because it's very hard to turn this process around.

My name was called out. There was the sergeant, and he said, "Guess what! I sent a telex to a guy that I know in personnel in some higher headquarters, and told him about you; and they said that if I wait a week or two, there's going to be a new re-enlistment program coming out for the military, in order to prevent the military from being totally (whatever the right word is) decimated."

Sure enough, about a week later they posted information on the bulletin boards about a program that encouraged people to re-enlist for one, two, and three years. If you enlisted for one year, you'd be sent home, get two weeks' leave, and then would be reassigned to something. If you enlisted for two years, you would be sent home, and would get a month's leave; and three years, I can't remember. So I went to personnel and said, "I see this is up there now. Do you have the forms?"

They said, "Yes, we're getting them tomorrow."

So I filled out the forms and re-enlisted for one year and a month, I guess it was. The orders came near the end of September of 1945 for me to report. In fact, the orders, which were oral first of all, said, "You're to report at pier such and such in Manila at five a.m. tomorrow morning. Get yourself packed, and we'll get you there." There were some other men who had also chosen this option. "We'll get you guys there in a truck so you can get on a troop ship. You'll get a bunk on a troop ship, or a hammock, or whatever it is. You're going home, and you'll be reassigned when you get to the other side."

That's what I did. We had about a two-and-a-half week trip from Manila to Los Angeles. This was one of the early ships, I discovered later, that was racially intermingled, in addition to which there were all these high-point veterans that were on this ship, going back to the States to get out of the Army. They were all getting some kind of bonus. So this ship was one vast crap game!

Q: [Laughter]

SONNENFELDT: I didn't have any money. I was going to get a $250 re-enlistment bonus, something like that-

Q: Yes, yes.

SONNENFELDT: I spent time watching these people, practically rolling dice for their farms, cars, wives - and millions of dollars must have passed on that ship. So I got back to the States and got some piece of paper ordering me to be at Camp Meade, Maryland, in two weeks and three days, or something like that.

In the meantime, I got a troop train assignment, and we crossed the country; and I was taken to Camp Meade, which has a spur from the Pennsylvania Railroad. Meade is near Baltimore. My father or mother met me there in their car, and I went home to Sheppard Pratt Hospital, where they still were physicians, for a couple of weeks. Then I had orders to report at Camp Meade two weeks later, which I did. From there, I got orders to report in New York to a troop ship. I guess I took a train that went from Camp Meade up to New York. The ship went over to Le Havre, France, and there was a troop train there. I didn't know where I was going, but I was directed to get on a waiting troop train. It went through France and on to Marburg, Germany, which was the big, central replacement clearing-house for the American zone in Germany.

Q: Yes, yes, sure.

SONNENFELDT: So I got my first glimpse of all the destruction in northern France and Germany, and ended up in Marburg, Germany, where we all got off. I looked around to see what I was supposed to do next, when a guy came up to me and called me by my name. It turned out to be a man who I'd been in basic training with, in Florida. I can't remember his name. But he recognized me, and he said, "Hey! We've been waiting for you! You're going to the CIC (Counter Intelligence Corps)."

I said, "What's the CIC?" and he said, "that's the Counter Intelligence Corps."

And I said, "Well, I don't know anything about intelligence."

He said, "Yea, well, we'll make a Counter Intelligence Corps guy out of you, a special agent. You have to report to the headquarters of the CIC in Bad Nauheim, and then they'll work out your training, and then you'll get assigned, and you have totally probably ten months here before you'll be due for getting home again."

So I went through all of that, reported, and was sent to Oberammergau in Bavaria, which had some months earlier been turned into what was called the European Theater Intelligence School. It was an old "Luftwaffe" (German Air Force) base or something like that. I was to be there for six weeks of training. We're now getting into maybe late November or December of 1945.

So I got put into some unit; the class was just forming. The first couple of weeks were supposed to be about Germany: the Nazi party and history of it, the different sub-units of it (the Army had manuals for this); and also the general policy of the U.S. about how you try to hunt down people above a certain rank in all these organizations and arrest them for further examination. A lot of these arrests had already happened, because this is six months after the end of the war. I found the classes (there were about 30 people) boring and ill-informed. The manuals were okay, although I obviously knew a lot more than the authors of the manuals.

Q: You knew a lot of it.

SONNENFELDT: So I approached a few people there, none of whom I knew. Some German-born people had somehow gotten into this program and into this school. I said, "How would you guys like to sit down in the evening with the manuals, and I'll go through those with you, because I think I know more than these captains or sergeants who are teaching the course?"

Gradually, I think we put together maybe ten or twelve men, and we sat around in one of the classrooms, and - based on the manual, but also on my own recollections - I just essentially went through all this material. A lot of these men, particularly those who had been born in Germany, had some knowledge of their own. So we had a seminar. One day, a lieutenant came past there, stood in the doorway, and listened. After it was over, he put on a monocle and said, "You, Sonnenfeldt!"

I said, "Yes."

He said, "Well, I'm Lieutenant Kraemer, Fritz Kraemer. You have a remarkable gift for teaching! We really ought to have you come to this school and teach."

I said, "Well, I?you know?you'll have to fight that out with the headquarters of the Counter Intelligence Corps because they've got me assigned after this is over."

Then a day or two or three later, he came back and said, "Well, assignment is assignment, but I want to see more of you because you obviously have something to offer. You're just like a guy that I became very friendly with in the 84th Division when we were still in Louisiana, and then he came over here to Europe, and his name is Henry Kissinger, and I want you to meet him because he is also a very gifted man."

Q: [Laughter]

SONNENFELDT: So that's where that connection was made, in late 1945 or early '46. Anyway, that particular training was over after a few weeks. We learned how to investigate people, how to establish informants, how to arrest people, and interrogate, and so on. I think they actually cut the training program short because they needed people in the field because of the rapid demobilization of our forces.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: I went back to Bad Nauheim and was assigned to a sub-region of the CIC in Fulda, right near the Soviet Occupation Zone. It was famous later because of the Fulda Gap [a break in the mountains through which, it was feared, the Soviet Army might attack westward]. So I reported there, and they assigned me as the number-two CIC agent in a county seat, a "Kreis," Kreis Lauterbach.

I was to replace a guy who had been in the CIC for much longer (and had been in it already when the fighting was still going on), and he was due to go home. So I got quick on-the-spot training and more about the techniques of operating a CIC office in a place like that. There was a Military Government team there also, a very small team. So I really had several challenging and fascinating months. I was transferred to several county seats during the time that I served there.

In this early phase of the occupation, we tried to find whatever people in what was called the "automatic arrest" category who were still missing. The term was from the basic occupation directive and referred to individuals above a certain rank in the multiplicity of Nazi organizations. We got instructions from higher headquarters to look for a particular individual whom they had also tracked through intercepting mail and telephone calls, and so forth, who was wanted for some major war crime or other serious offense. So I did Counter Intelligence Corps work.

But then, by about January or February of 1946, the Cold War had really gotten started, and particularly in the areas bordering the lines between the U.S. Zone and the Soviet Zone. The U.S. Military Government initially had relied very heavily on Communists to help them administer these rural areas, and also to tip them off if there was a hidden Nazi somewhere in the system. I think by maybe January of 1946, we were ordered to be very cautious with Communists and, in fact, where they had formal positions, to dismiss them now because they were likely to be Soviet agents or Soviet spies.

So my job began to change from being totally focused on "the three Ds" (denazification, democratization, and demilitarization, which were the goals of the early occupation), to include, also, alertness about Soviet agents or Soviet espionage. We actually had liaison with Soviets on the other side of the zonal border because we were transferring a lot of returning POWs (prisoners of war) who wanted to go to their homes in the Eastern [Soviet] Zone, and we were still doing some things more or less cooperatively, such as cracking down on black-marketeering, smuggling, and other crimes. So there was somewhere, up far above me, a team for liaison with the Soviets, and the Soviets also had one across the border.

Q: Were you involved at all with the forced repatriation of Polish persons - you know, people who were being sent back to the Soviet Union?

SONNENFELDT: No, not where I was working. I had no Soviet POWs that had fought with the Germans-

Q: Vlasov.

SONNENFELDT: -with the Vlasov people in the counties that I worked in. In my area, there were two problems. One was that we had several DP (displaced persons) camps run by the UNRRA [United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration]. These camps were used to house and take care of the refugee stream that was still coming from the East, people from all over the place. By and large, the Jewish people who came into these camps - survivors from concentration camps, or survivors (broadly speaking) of the Holocaust; some of them had been underground - wanted to go to Palestine. Whether they were really Zionists or not, I don't knoit's hard to tell. They weren't under our jurisdiction unless they somehow got outside the camp; and that created a problem because they were black-marketeering, they were doing all sorts of prohibited things. That did get into our jurisdiction because we had been taught that black-market rings could also be agent rings, could be ex-Nazi subversive rings; and therefore, we needed to pay special attention to that.

Now, there was a lot of activity by different Jewish groups from Palestine or from wherever - the Stern Gang, the Haganah, and others. They were trying to recruit people, Jewish people, anywhere, but especially in the UNRRA camps. The UNRRA camps weren't guarded like concentration camps. On the contrary, everybody was trying to be very careful not to replicate that atmosphere, although camp is camp; so it isn't exactly paradise. But the recruiters did manage to get quite a few people by just wandering in there, or acting as refugees themselves, and then getting out of these relatively unguarded places, and trying to get them down to Trieste or some other place, where they could get on a ship and go off to Palestine. I think they were even taking some overland. That was something we were supposed to stop and prevent, on orders from our headquarters, due to the British prohibitions of immigration into their Palestine mandate area.

So I had some heart-rending encounters with Jewish refugee groups that were picked up by some of our troops and sometimes by German police, and brought to my office; or I went to see them - 10, 20, 30 people - that had been picked up during the night. They had noticed my name, and figured that I was Jewish. They were appealing to my conscience or my solidarity, or my compassion (whatever the right word is) to let them go. And, you know, I had orders to stop them! The upshot of it was that I had to have our Military Police (what little we had left of military people - but I made sure that it wasn't German police) take these Jewish people back to their camps. They may have escaped again later.

So I had that problem. I think in some instances, there were suicides; I didn't have that, fortunately, but it was a painful dilemma.

Incidentally, as for the German police, they had been screened and re-trained by my predecessors from the CIC and the early Military Government troops. They were mostly local residents, and the population, by and large, respected them. But the people who had recently come to the region had run-ins with them.

Q: It was a very difficult period then.

SONNENFELDT: Yes. Our second problem was quite different: that is, Czechoslovakia had been restored by that time, and the Czechs were expelling the Sudeten Germans. This is still an issue in Germany now. In one of the counties where I was the CIC agent, every two weeks we got 1,800 people who had been expelled from the Sudeten area, and the local Hessian peasants were not exactly hospitable to them.

Q: No, no.

SONNENFELDT: The local people didn't want extra mouths to feed; they didn't want people to stay in their houses, and so on. So we had problems getting the locals to accommodate these people. Of course, the Sudetens, were frightened and uneasy. They weren't sure whether they should try to go home or what was going to become of them; they certainly weren't received with hospitality. So that created a lot of friction and tension in the population. Also, we saw a potential feeding ground for whatever residual Nazi groups might still be there to recruit people into an underground movement. So from our standpoint, this was not just a humanitarian issue, but also a security issue.

Q: Well, the Sudeten Deutsche were sort of a breeding ground for at least the right wing, and they later -

SONNENFELDT: Later, they organized. They're still around, and they're still active. This issue drags on and on, because a lot of these immigrant groups or their descendants are in Germany, and they want the so-called Benes Decrees [mandating their expulsion from Czechoslovakia] abolished. And they want to be compensated like other refugees by the Czechs. I think the Czechs have agreed to do some of that, but they don't want to let these people or their descendants come back. Some of the Sudeten Germans want to claim their parents' or grandparents' properties in this rim around the present Czech Republic. So this remains both a domestic German and a Czech-German political issue. At that time, it was essentially humanitarian and potentially a subversion issue. So those were problems that posed dilemmas back in 1946.

Q: Well, it's a very complicated world. By 1955, I was a refugee relief officer, and you certainly got a full feel for all these various movements that were happening within, well, Germany and elsewhere.

SONNENFELDT: Yes.

Q: Had the "Fragebogen" (questionnaire of the Allied military government used as a basis for denazification) been started at that time?

SONNENFELDT: The large-scale use of the "Fragebogen" came later, and was used by the German authorities as they became increasingly responsible for administering what became the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). I think the first batch of "Fragebogen" were sent out in early 1946, and eventually covered practically the whole German population in the Western occupation zones.

When I was in Hessen, in 1945-46, we had a denazification program which was essentially administered by the Military Government, but the Military Government was so thin when you got out to the rural areas that my colleagues and I in the CIC around there participated in this effort. Above all, our job was to exclude individuals with active Nazi involvement from positions of authority.

As I mentioned, we picked up people who were of a rank which were required to be picked uthe "automatic arrest" category. We then sent them on through our military channels to internment camps. The "Fragebogen" system was the German denazification system, with the five levels of complicity. It was fully implemented after my time. We basically operated a) on the basis of captured lists of people to be automatically arrested because of their ranks and level of leadership role in the party system and its affiliated organizations; and b) we acted on information tips from whatever source that somebody in our jurisdiction had been a very active Nazi or had been involved in persecution activities. Those people we arrested and put into our chain of command. Sometimes the local German police helped us find these people and get them, but they were in our chain of command during my time there.

In our zone, we were aiming to have elections for municipal councils and mayors by February or March of 1946. After that, we expected to have Kreis, or county, elections.

Under the system used in most of the German "Laender" (states) that became part of the German Reich in 1871, the county manager, the "Landrat," for centuries was part of the central administration of the provinces within each "Land." The Landrat tended to be appointed; but even when they were elected (as they are now), they were also subordinate to what now is the Interior Ministry in the German "Laender." In 1946, we didn't have that kind of structure because the higher-level administrative structures were not yet in place.

In any case, we were in the process of starting a bottom-up exercise in democracy. We were, therefore, also authorized to license political parties at the local level. This I think got speeded up because of the installation of the Communist regime in the East. Our effort was to devolve onto the Germans increasing, although still modest levels of authority in local places. So I really spent quite a bit of time preparing for these elections, which happened at the town level while I was there.

We clearly did our best to keep former Nazi activists out of the lists of people we cleared for political and administrative roles! We used German informants who had helped us with making personnel choices earlier. By mid-1946, we no longer used Communists as informants, because of concern that they would try to place pro-Soviet people into the system.

We also licensed some relatively simple newspapers so the population could be kept informed about the preparations for elections as well as other news. (In larger towns and cities in the Western zones, dailies, weekly magazines, even illustrated ones, and monthlies gradually appeared, but distribution to rural areas was at best spotty.)

As I said, these developments in the West were pushed along because the Soviet zone was being

steadily turned into a Communist-run outpost of the USSR. The Cold War, in other words, was in its early stages. My role, apart from still hunting down fugitive Nazi war criminals and big shots who were traced to our remote farmlands, was to support the effort to devolve modest but increasing levels of authority to qualified Germans via local elections and appointments.

I can't remember now whether we also did this at the county level by the time I left. But doing it at the town level was both instructive and challenging for me. We also had to re-start the school system. This meant doing something about the textbooks that were totally polluted with Nazi material - even the mathematics textbooks. And we needed teachers who had not been Nazi activists. Fortunately, some teachers had been trained in the 1920s. We also appointed men who had returned from American POW camps.

Q: I would have assumed that you would run across the thing that I certainly observed - and that was?you know, sort of a switch?within the German population. They had been sort of trained to tell on people if anything went wrong, and they were quickly ready to point the finger at?

SONNENFELDT: Others, yes.

Q: I mean you got a lot of that, didn't you?

SONNENFELDT: Yes, well, we had a lot of informants. Some proved reliable, others less so. And some who had Communist backgrounds or affiliations were helpful at first, but as I already noted, later on were suspected of being Soviet agents. Also, as you know, the Germans were meticulous document-keepers of official orders. But some of our informants were engaged in vendettas, and our rules indicated that we should use more than one informant when we were clearing someone for a significant job.

Q: They had the Berlin Document Center.

SONNENFELDT: By the time I got there, a lot of our local documents had been pretty much gone through by the Military Government and my CIC predecessors. But if we had people that seemed to have moved to the area after the war, we had to go through the Berlin Document Center - for example, if we got some tip or the mail-intercept system produced something suggestive that there was another story from the one the person was telling us. When we started the school system, we were looking for teachers.

Some came forward and said that they were teachers. They had documents showing that they were trained teachers. But then our informants sometimes said, "That guy was really one of the most poisonous Nazis." We had to judge whether some of these charges were the result of old feuds, and make judgments regarding their validity.

You know, there was quite a bit of that. In a rural place - I had maybe 70,000 or 80,000 people in the first county where I was assigned - to get things started, to get food supplies into the towns and also to other places that had in the past relied on food supplies from the region, to get schools started, to get a hospital started, to get physicians that were qualified, nurses that were qualified, and then the mayor's office, the local police, and then the county system - it was a fascinating experience, I think, at the worm's-eye level.

Q: Yes

SONNENFELDT: I want to mention one other aspect of this, which wasn't part of my official role. My brother, Richard Sonnenfeldt, whom I've mentioned, had been in the OSS (Office of Strategic Services). He's three years older than I, had participated in the invasions of Italy and southern France, and then had been picked up by General Bill Donovan, the head of the OSS. Once they got into Germany, Donovan wanted an interpreter and someone knowledgeable about German psychology and history. He somehow found my brother; so my brother joined the OSS and remained with Donovan through the end of the war.

Shortly after the end of the war, the decision was made to set up the international war crimes trial in Nuremberg. Donovan, as head of the OSS, was asked by President Roosevelt, I guess, to do the preliminary work on the prosecution and on the indictments. Since this was an international agreement, it involved the four occupying powers (the U.S. Great Britain, France and the USSR). My brother stayed on with Donovan and went with him to Nuremberg. He then stayed on when Justice Robert Jackson and his people came, to prepare and conduct the trials. At first, my brother was mostly an interpreter, but he then became one of the principal interrogators. He interrogated most of the Nazi leaders there that had been assigned to the U.S. to prosecute.

So I was in Hessen, and he was down in Nuremberg in Bavaria. Maybe every other weekend, I went down there from Fulda by jeep, and later I became senior enough to get somebody to fly me down in a Piper Cub, to see him. You know, we hadn't really seen each other at all since he was interned in England in 1940. I'd seen him only once or twice, briefly, in the States after I got there in 1944. So I went down to Nuremberg and spent two or three days with him and saw the trial at work. He took me into some of his interrogations of Nazi leaders and witnesses. Of course, that was fascinating in itself. For me it meant seeing, on the one hand, the fate of the Nazi leadership unfold, and on the other hand, the beginning of the process of reconstruction and rebuilding of Germany, at the grass roots.

Q: How did you feel? I mean, considering your background, having fled from Germany under Hitler and coming back there, was it hard to make the adjustment, or to operate as an American and not as -

SONNENFELDT: I've been asked this frequently. In June of 2000, I was back in my hometown, Gardelegen, with my wife and some of our children and grandchildren. I met with a high school graduating class, and I was asked how I felt - whether I had a sense of revenge, or what emotions I felt.

I have to say, in 1945, I felt that I was coming to Germany as an American soldier, although I had only recently become an American citizen myself! I felt that I was coming as an American soldier, and that I had a job to do! I really was not trying to "get" anybody. Now, of course, my CIC assignments were not in the part of Germany where my family had lived.

I was stationed in a different part of the country. But still, I wasn't there to try to get revenge against anybody. I wanted to implement the instructions we had. If somebody said, "This guy is an SS man," and we picked him up, I interrogated him. I wasn't bullying him; I wasn't whipping him; I wasn't trying to pin something on him. I wanted to prepare my required interrogation investigative report and send it up the line so this guy could be dealt with.

No, I wasn't happy as a clam coming home to Germany at all. The duties made it very clear in what role I was there. But I honestly can say, I really didn't feel a sense of revenge. And of course, this applies also to my later dealings with Germans when I was serving in the State Department and the National Security Council. I did feel, obviously, that the Germans had to be treated with great care because of their history and background.

You know, I basically tried to do my work. I was interested in re-starting the schools, for example: getting rid of the Nazi materials where we could, and if necessary, just getting some very preliminary text materials for the schools, and getting the Nazi biases ("bias" is putting it mildly) out of the history books or the geography books. We printed some texts on the old-fashioned machines that we had-

Q: Mimeograph machines, yes.

SONNENFELDT: Mimeograph machines. I didn't want to see any Nazi writings in the schools. If I came across things, or people tried to sneak something past me that wasn't exactly Nazi but was full of German grievances (going back to World War I, "encirclement," and all that), I said, "We start from scratch." But vis-ï¿½-vis individuals, I think I did what I was instructed to do, and that was it.

Q: You left Germany when?

SONNENFELDT: Before we end this conversation about my time in the Army in Germany, I want to note that I also remained in touch with Fritz Kraemer, whom I had met in Oberammergau. As the time drew near for my finishing the CIC assignment and leaving the Army, I talked to him on the telephone. I told him that I was getting ready to go home and resume university.

He said, "No, you can't do that! It's your duty to come down here to Oberammergau and teach here; you're so gifted; and in the meantime, we are a big center for information. You should be demobilized here in Germany and become a civilian."

I said, "Well, why don't you see what you can do." As plans stood, I actually would be getting back to the U.S. a few weeks too late to get into the academic year starting in September of 1946. The universities, Johns Hopkins in my case, were so overcrowded with veterans that they couldn't take people in mid-term. I would have had to wait about nine months before I could go into the next academic year. So I was open to the suggestion of going down to Oberammergau.

Kraemer called me back after about a week and said, in his heavy German accent, "The bureaucracy 'ist schrecklich.' [Bureaucracy is just terrible!] You're in the Army, and I tried everything, but you don't have a college degree, and they can't give you a civilian appointment without a college degree to teach at this school, and so on. So, you'd better go home, and we'll stay in touch," as we did, eventually, when he got back to the U.S. in 1948.

I think I left Germany in September or early October of 1946. I was demobilized practically as soon as I got back to, again, Camp Meade. By that time, Meade had stopped being a replacement center; it was a demobilization center.

Through a variety of circumstances (since it was too late to get back into a full-time university program), I managed to find a job in the State Department.

Q: All right. Well, we'll pick this up, getting a job in the State Department, and something about Kraemer, too.

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Today is September 25, 2000. Hal, let's start. In the first place, you want to talk a little about Kraemer's background because he is an important figure in sort of helping form the diplomatic establishment later? I mean his background, and did you meet with Kissinger briefly at that time?

SONNENFELDT: Well, I saw Kissinger in Oberammergau a few times, and then he also came back to the U.S. and was demobilized. It's kind of a funny story that's been mentioned many times. Henry had attended CCNY (City College of New York) before he went into the military. Fritz Kraemer - this German-born officer, not quite an aristocrat, who had served with Henry in the same Division, and considered him a person of great promise - Kraemer told Henry, "Gentlemen don't go to CCNY."

Q: [Laughter]

SONNENFELDT: Kissinger had, I think, been majoring in accounting. And Kraemer says, "Gentlemen don't become accountants. You are a budding statesman." So Henry ended up at Harvard, and I ended up at Johns Hopkins. And we stayed in touch, too.

Q: Okay. Now, what about Kraemer and his background?

SONNENFELDT: Well, I've forgotten some of the details. Kraemer was an American citizen of German birth. I think he was born in 1908 [he died in 2003], and had a German education. His father, as I understood it, was either a civil servant or maybe in the military in World War I, and ended up being one of the governors (or whatever the precise title was) in the Baltic states before they became independent of Russia. (They were occupied by the Germans at the end of World War I.) I gather he was a pretty strict and autocratic governor. In any event, this is just to show the German nationalist milieu from which Kraemer came. I think Kraemer studied law at German universities. In the 1920s or in the early '30s, he went to Geneva, where international lawyers had a haven of sorts because of all the international agencies

Q: The League of Nations forming and all that?

SONNENFELDT: Yes. I don't know exactly where in the League of Nations he worked, but I believe he had a degree from the university there, and he wrote scholarly articles. I guess he went back and forth to Germany, but he was very unhappy when Hitler came to power in 1933. From the standpoint of a German nationalist, a Prussian nationalist, Hitler was a radical, extreme figure - not to mention that he was an Austrian. So I think Kraemer was unhappy about Hitler from the start, in a general way, and more explicitly as time went on, as the nature of the Nazi regime became more obvious.

Sometime in the late 1930s, he came to the United States, not as a refugee (because I don't know that he would have qualified), but perhaps on some sort of academic visa. I think he continued to work in international legal matters, perhaps at Columbia in New York City. His father, I guess, had died; his mother was in Germany at the modest estate that they owned in the Rhineland. Meanwhile, Kraemer had married a Swedish woman slightly older than himself. They had a son who stayed with his mother in Germany at that time.

In any event, Kraemer became an American citizen and joined the U.S. Army quite early - maybe he became a citizen as a result of that. But he joined the Army as an enlisted man, maybe in 1941 or '42. He was by that time almost 35 years old, which was nearly beyond the draft age. He went through training and was assigned to a division that was forming (I think it was the 84th Division) and was, I think, involved in the famous Louisiana Maneuvers-

Q: Oh, yes, where Eisenhower showed his stuff.

SONNENFELDT: -where they didn't have any equipment, and used fake, papier-mï¿½chï¿½, or cardboard imitations!

Q: [Laughter] Broomsticks for machine guns.

SONNENFELDT: Then, of course, the U.S. got into the war. Kraemer came to the attention of the commanding general of this division because of his German background and because of his wide knowledge and his very energetic manner: loud voice, vigorous, great physique. I'm not exactly sure when - maybe 1942 or '43 - Henry Kissinger ended up in that division also. That's where Kraemer noticed him and was impressed by his talent, and where Kraemer told Henry about what he should do after the war. (I mentioned in our earlier tape that Kraemer said "Gentlemen don't go to CCNY, and gentlemen don't become accountants.")

Q: Well, now, Kissinger becomes an important figure later on. Henry Kissinger and you were of similar background. Did he have any kind of reputation or anything that you heard, or was he just another one of the -

SONNENFELDT: In the Army? Kissinger?

Q: Yes, yes.

SONNENFELDT: I really don't know, but Kraemer noticed him. I guess Kraemer also, at some point, brought him to the attention of General Bowling, who much later became G2, IntelligencDeputy Chief of Staff of the Army, after the war.

Anyway, both Kraemer and Kissinger went to Europe when that division was sent, and went through the remainder of the war. I think Henry was assigned to interrogating prisoners. I guess he had been up in the front lines and captured a number of Germans, but there was a big interrogation project underway during the war. Kraemer got a battlefield commission of some kinhe was a lieutenant when I met him. He and Kissinger became friendly. Kissinger ended up in the Counter Intelligence Corps (I'm not exactly sure how he got to that from prisoner interrogation). He was put in charge as a special agent of the CIC in what later became the state of Hessen, near Wiesbaden (which is the capital of Hessen). But he kept in touch with Kraemer, who in the meantime had been assigned to the intelligence school at Oberammergau. Kraemer set up the library there, and made himself a kind of a general encyclopedia and factotum for all sorts of American officers in the European theater - generals, colonels, and so forth.

As I mentioned before, that's where I ended up meeting Kraemer, after I was transferred from the Pacific to Europe after the end of the war in the Far East. I ended up taking some courses there because I'd been assigned to the Counter Intelligence Corps. I thought the classes were inadequate insofar as they concerned recent German history and what the function of the CIC was - in trying to weed out Nazis and not get people with a Nazi past appointed to local German jobs, and also looking for whatever people above a certain rank were still on our lists as missing and requiring to be arrested for purposes of interrogation, and in some cases, because there were accusations against them.

Kraemer had noticed me at this school because I had started some impromptu tutorials on the Nazi party, its history and organizations; and we became friendly at that time. I think I mentioned in our previous conversation that Kraemer wanted me to become a teacher at this European Theater Intelligence School because he thought I could do more useful things there in training newcomers who were not that well acquainted with German affairs. It wasn't possible for me to do that because I had already been assigned to a county in Hessen. Our troops were on their way out, and our ranks were thin. I qualified for the post by language and background and getting through intelligence school in Oberammergau.

I was assigned to the northeastern part of Hessen. I met Henry Kissinger maybe once, briefly, at Oberammergau when I was still there in the school; and then maybe a few more times when I visited there. I can't remember when Henry returned to the States, probably sometime in late 1945 or early '46.

Then, as I said, beginning in early 1946, U.S. forces began to shift focus, not away from the continuing German functions we had, but toward Communists and Soviets. Things became dicier and dicier in our general relations with the Soviets, but also more specifically on German issues. I was assigned to an area of Hessen that was right up against the Soviet Occupation Zone. So what military we had left there were more alert about who was coming across from the East. Until that time, we had relied on Communists to tell us who the bad Nazis were. I think in some instances these Communists had come back from hiding or from concentration camps, and they were given some interim jobs in the local German administration that we and the Military Government people were starting to set up. That practice was gradually discontinued because it was assumed that they were working with and for the Soviets.

Then Kraemer wanted once more to try to get me, after I was discharged from the Army, to be assigned as a civilian to the Oberammergau Intelligence School. But the administrative people there said that, because I didn't have a college degree, they couldn't really pay me what I should be getting in that job. That would have been more than I made as a special agent of the CIC; but anyway, it just didn't seem to work out. I left Germany in the early fall of 1946, and I was demobilized very soon after that.

Q: Yes, and then you went to college?

SONNENFELDT: Well, it was too late for me to enroll at Johns Hopkins, because the university was filled with returning veterans studying under the GI Bill of Rights. They really couldn't take people after the academic year had started; so I had basically a year to wait before I could get in there.

My brother, who was still on the American Prosecution staff at Nuremberg, knew a couple of State Department people who were associated with the U.S. Prosecution at the war crimes trial. I went to see one of them (I'm sorry I can't remember his name), in the old State Department building.

Q: The Old Executive Building, I think it was.

SONNENFELDT: Yes. In those days, it was called the State-War-Navy Building.

Q: Yes [laughter], it shows you -

SONNENFELDT: In fact, General Pershing [commander of U.S. forces in World War I) still had an office there.

So I went to see this fellow. He said he wasn't sure what job he could find for me for just a year, but he'd look. Then a few weeks later, I got a letter from somebody offering me a job as a mail clerk and translator in a division of the State Department called by the inimitable name, the Division of Foreign Activity Correlation (FC). It was a division that was partly an offshoot of a part of the OSS. It picked up many loose ends from the war and its aftermath.

In fact, there's one man here at The Brookings Institution in Washington who was in that division at the time (now this is 54 years ago): Brad Patterson, who has just published a book. He later became Cabinet Secretary in the Eisenhower administration and has written books about how the government runs or is supposed to run.

So I got a job as a clerk in FC with a civil service grade of CAF-3 (Clerical, Administrative, and Finance-Civil Service employees designation), GS-3 (General Schedule). It paid $1,800 a year, later raised to $2,10at that time, the most that I had ever earned.

I got my little desk in the mailroom, and they got lots of mail from all over the place. There was a woman there and maybe a little team that was scanning German diplomatic documents that had been either captured or had been turned over to the U.S. from German embassies in Latin America, from countries that had been at war with Germany. I think Brazil was one, and they got all the documents and files of the German embassy in Rio de Janeiro. We got stacks and stacks of papers.

In addition to sorting mail and getting it distributed to the various parts of this division, they had me translate captured German diplomatic documents, mostly for the purpose of identifying names of German officials whom our investigators wanted to interrogate. I started reading these German documents. Actually, I was much more interested in their contents because they contained German reports on attitudes in Brazil, rumors about what the Americans were doing, and so forth.

Q: I might just for the reader note that during World War II, the State Department and the FBI concentrated heavily on Latin America, and the Germans were trying to stir things up to no particular avail. But it was sort of the only playground that the State Department had?

SONNENFELDT: Also of interest to me: Eleanor Dulles [a State Department officer, whose brother John Foster Dulles later became Secretary of State] had a desk in that division, and had a considerable role in our German occupation policy development. Since I had only just returned from my own hands-own experience in Hessen, I occasionally put in my thoughts. Relations with the Soviets were increasingly difficult, and Secretary of State James Byrnes had recently delivered his famous Stuttgart speech in which, inter alia, he announced the termination of reparations shipments by the Germans from the American Zone of occupation. I made an effort from my modest vantage point in FC (at 505 - 22nd Street, NW) to get word to our people in Frankfurt to include the small industries in the rural counties where I had done my CIC stint among the early ones to be taken off the reparations lists.

I spent not quite a year in that office. So at least I got a whiff of the State Department, and saw names that later became famous. I was actually there in the summer of 1947 when [Secretary of State] George Marshall made his Harvard speech, in which he announced the American aid program which came to be known as the Marshall Plan.

I had no connection with Secretary Marshall because I was about 17 layers down, but at least I felt like I was in an organization that was very important; and then, of course, it was in the Truman administration.

I commuted from Baltimore by train, because my parents had settled in Baltimore and were practicing medicine there. I lived with them, really the first time I had ever stayed with my parents since 1938, when I left them in Germany (except for the few months from the time I arrived in this country until I went into the Army). And then I left the State Department and went to college in the fall of 1947, at Johns Hopkins in Baltimore.

Q: When you went to Johns Hopkins, did you have a target in mind of what you wanted to do, and could you talk about your courses at that time?

SONNENFELDT: Yes. When I finished high school, or the equivalent of high school in England, I got a job; this was when I was 16. I got the "school certificate", which was the final examination to graduate from high school in England in those days. It's got a different name now. Somebody from the boarding school that I attended knew someone in Manchester, England; and they knew somebody in the university at Manchester, and so I got a job there in the physics department as a laboratory assistant. It had been a very famous physics department because Rutherford and his team started in Manchester and moved to Cambridge, and split the atom.

But Manchester retained a great tradition in physics, going back to the previous century. My only problem was that I had had no physics courses at all in my high school. I had some chemistry. They wanted me to do fairly menial things, but it was a job. I think I got one pound per week; my parents by that time were able to send me maybe four pounds a month. This was $16 or $17 in those days. For a month or so, I stayed at a hostel in Manchester. I saw these young physicists working there at the university who were exempted from military service because they were doing some war-related work, and I got interested in physics. I started taking an evening course and a weekend course in Manchester, in physics and advanced math, for almost the two years that I was there.

As I came across the Atlantic in 1944 to rejoin my family for the first time since 1938, I began to wonder whether I would ever make a great scientist. I was interested, but I had not really shone in the evening courses I took in Manchester, and I began to question that. On the troop ship going over to the Philippines, I took an Army correspondence course in integral calculus, and that kind of fascinated me, but I wasn't being creative.

So I was thinking about this more and more - especially after my Counter Intelligence Corps experience in Germany, my involvement in setting up the first local administrations and the first elections, with the Soviets right next door. And I decided that I should change from physics to modern history and political science. That's what I majored in at Johns Hopkins, but I didn't know what I was going to do with that at that particular time.

A man named Mose Harvey, who was teaching the general history course (which was required at Johns Hopkins), worked at the State Department (in those days, State Department officials were permitted to teach). He held a fairly senior job at State, and came over to Baltimore twice a week to lecture on modern history. He never got beyond the French Revolution, but I started talking to him a bit. I was very much interested in history; I always had been, even during my interlude of physics, calculus, and so on. I started talking to Dr. Harvey, and I'd talked to other people there at Johns Hopkins about things that they were interested in and I was interested in. Actually, my English education had been so good that I managed to get through my whole Hopkins curriculum in three years rather than four. I'd had a lot of history in England, and I had a language, German, and I also had French; so I was able to get through in three years. At that point, in 1950, I stayed at Hopkins to take a Master's degree in political science. I wrote about the new German constitution and the federal system under the Basic Law of the Federal Republic of Germany.

Q: This is the post-World War II constitution?

SONNENFELDT: Right, the one that was worked out in the Parliamentary Council in 1948 under general guidance, but not specific intrusion, of the occupying powers - including the U.S. - and was proclaimed in May of 1949, at which time I was still at Johns Hopkins. In September 1949, the Germans held their first national elections for parliament, and then the new Bundestag elected Konrad Adenauer, by one vote, as the first Chancellor.

After I graduated in 1950, I spent some time during that summer in Paris at a course run by the Carnegie Endowment, covering developments in Europe and what had just become the proposal for the Coal and Steel Community. Then I went on to Germany to stay with some friends of my parents, who had survived the war in Cologne. That was near Bonn, so I went to Bonn a few times. The Germans were just putting together their government. Adenauer had started as Chancellor, with a Cabinet, and somebody I knew was a friend of one of Adenauer's assistants. I went to see him, and told him that I wanted to write a Master's thesis. He spoke English; I guess he had been educated in the States or in England. I thought I wanted to write about the Bundesrat, the upper house of the German parliament. By that time the German government, including the Bundesrat, had been in existence for exactly one year, in the neFederal Republic, working under the Bonn Basic Law (Constitution).

I came back home to write my thesis and get the Master's. Hopkins didn't think much of Master's degrees. They thought people should get Ph.D.s (Doctor of Philosophy), and they regarded a Master's degree as only an interim step for a Ph.D. But I did that anyway; and I wrote this thesis on the German upper house, its history, comparisons to the U.S. Senate (which is quite a different institution), and so on. The Bundesrat is to this day a very important institution. So I had become a political scientist. But I continued to be interested in history.

Then came SAIS (the School of Advanced International Studies, in Washington, DC). SAIS had been an independent school founded in about 1944 for training people who would go to work in international fields, including the Foreign Service. One of the founders, Paul Nitze, is still alive. Christian Herter (later Secretary of State), also was involved. I decided to go there during the summer in 1951, after I got my Master's degree. Incidentally, the Korean War had started, and there was some question whether I might get drafted again because I was still only 25.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: I came over here to Washington and decided that, the way things were going, I'd better do an intensive course in Russian, which I did. Then I took some courses that concentrated mostly on Soviet domestic affairs, Soviet foreign policy, and international communism.

Q: This is at SAIS?

SONNENFELDT: At SAIS. At that time, it was located on Florida Avenue, in a building that had formerly been used as a girls' school. And, lo and behold, the guy who taught the course on Soviet foreign policy was the same fellow who had taught the history course in Baltimore, Mose Harvey.

I think Mose came from Georgia; he was educated at Emory University and had been involved with Lend-Lease during World War II. He ended up in the State Department, but also served as an adjunct professor in the Johns Hopkins' history department. By the time I met Mose, he was the head of the Division of Research for the Soviet Union (DRS) in what was then called the "R" (Research) Area - the precursor of "INR" (Bureau of Intelligence and Research). A man named Park Armstrong was the head of R at that time.

Like the FC division in which I had served, R was also an offshoot from the OSS analysis section that had been located in an apartment house on 23rd Street, in Washington. INR, R Area, and the State Department got part of OSS, and the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) got other parts of it, including the covert work that the OSS did.

So I really beavered away at Russian language over the summer, hours and hours and hours of it, and began to get some degree of fluency in reading and understanding, less so in speaking.

Harvey taught the course on Soviet foreign policy at SAIS. He was very dogmatic, and I sort of rebelled a bit when I heard him talk about some aspects of the subject. I guess we'd call him a "hawk" in latter-day language; he was something of a contrarian in the State Department and had his disputes with the senior people at State dealing with our policy toward the Soviets. I argued with him in class, sometimes at a very high pitch on his part; I was deferential. But one day after one of these bitter arguments, he waved and asked me to come to the front of the room. He said, "How would you like to come to work with me when the academic year here finishes?"

I said, "Are you sure? I thought you were angry at me!"

"No!" he said. "I like people that sound off and disagree."

Q: Could you give me an idea of how you saw the thrust of what you were getting, and how you felt about?what were the Soviets after in foreign policy at that particular time?

SONNENFELDT: Well, we'd been through several crises with the Soviets by that time: the Berlin Crisis, the whole division of Germany in a much more rigid fashion than had been envisioned at the Potsdam conference; the Korean war had started; and the Soviets had tested an atomic bomb. (In fact, I was on a student ship going to Europe in June 1950, and I thought we were all going to get called back on account of the Korean war, which we weren't.)

Mose Harvey was of the strong view that the Korean War was a precursor of an attack in the West, or maybe an effort to divert us from Soviet plans for attack, or use of Communist parties, the peace movement, fifth columns, and so on, to acquire additional satellites. [end of tape]

Q: Yes, you were saying that Harvey fit it-

SONNENFELDT: Yes, he fit it all, the attack on Korea, into the Marxist-Leninist ideology and doctrine, and he was steeped in the literature from Das Kapital on through Lenin and Stalin, Central Committee and Party Congress Resolutions.

My questions at least had to do with just how profoundly the Soviets were really committed to those doctrines, and how much of their behavior, in fact, was that of an ambitious, assertive national power which had won a war. It was a matter of balance, not a question of ignoring Communist dogma and/or doctrines. I can't remember on which particular issues I may have argued with Harvey; but that was, as I recall, one of my questions.

There wasn't any silver lining in either one of these views of the behavior of the Soviets. Of course in those days, theories of totalitarianism were very much in vogue. The Soviet system was sort of lumped together with the Nazi system. These different theories developed in the academic world, but also in various studies done for the Congress, and then various authors pursued the ideas. Scholars disputed whether these were different forms of totalitarianism. They would, of course, be put to the Left in this country, or the Center Left, to question whether the Soviet system should be in any way compared with the Nazi system. So there was a lot of pot-boiling in the intellectual community. You know, in 1948 we had a Wallace ticket [Henry A. Wallace ran for President].

Q: Oh, yes!

SONNENFELDT: Wallace had come to Johns Hopkins. He wasn't permitted to give a campaign speech on the campus; but he gave a talk just off the campus for which he, Henry Wallace, had maybe several hundred people there to listen to his left-wing theories about how to deal with the Soviets. Some of that was echoed in this course that Mose Harvey taught.

Anyway, Harvey said he'd be very interested in my coming to work at the State Department. He was head of DRS (the Division of Research and Analysis for the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe). It was quite a large division. I said, "Well, I've been in the State Department months before in a very lowly job, and I think I'd be interested in that." So we went through that academic year of 1951-52. He had somebody send me the forms to fill out, the application Form 57, which asks all the details of one's history. I sent those forms back in July or August of 1952.

When I finished at SAIS, I didn't get a new degree, because I already had a Master's, and I was hoping to do a Ph.D., actually, writing on the Nazi-Soviet Treaty - the Ribbentrop-Molotov Treaty. I'd begun research on it, started to write, and was hoping some day to finish it. It became a very popular topic among historians, so the subject has been dealt with from every conceivable angle by now, or even years ago.

Q: Oh, yes

SONNENFELDT: So I first went to work for a translating outfit here in Washington to do Russian translation, just to keep plugging away at that. I translated mostly technical materials that could be bought in stores in Moscow. We had a very active program - our government did, and some universities did - of buying Russian books and journals. The government (the Commerce Department, I think) had some contracts for getting those things translated. So I went with this translating agency to wait and see what would happen to my State Department application. I had a job, at least; I can't remember what the salary was, but it was enough for me to rent a little room and bathroom here in town. My parents were still living near Baltimore, but it just was too much to drive back and forth, and so on; so I decided to live here, at least during the week.

I kept plugging away with my Russian language. The other translators in that organization had much deeper background in Russian and Soviet history and affairs than I did, and I learned a lot from those people. Then maybe in September or October, I got a notice from the State Department saying that they were actively considering my application. They sent me a long security form.

Q: Oh, yes.

SONNENFELDT: By that time, we had the security investigation system in the Truman administration, because of Alger Hiss [a State Department official convicted of spying for the USSR] and all the concerns about Communist spies. I started filling in the form, and sent it back just before the 1952 presidential election. Then I got a notice saying that I had the job in that division! Mose Harvey had plugged for it. I still needed to go through several more procedures, including the medical exam.

Then the election came, and the question arose, with Eisenhower and the Republicans winning - whether there was going to be a personnel freeze, as there sometimes was in those days when a new administration came in. But Mose Harvey said no; he didn't think that was going to be the case in the R Area in the State Department, because they were all career professionals. There weren't any political appointees (although maybe the INR Director, Park Armstrong, was; I'm not sure).

Mose said, "go ahead," and he said they would set a date for me to start at the beginning of a pay period. They set a date in December of 1952; I had nothing to do with it. This was during the transition period between Truman and Eisenhower. I was to be given a GS-7 pay rating. They were hoping to get me a GS-9 because I had two years toward a Ph.D. But in those days, a Master's degree got you a GS-7, and a Bachelor's got you a GS-5. I was going to be paid $4,200 a year. That was absolutely beyond my comprehension!

Q: Well, to put it in context, at that time a salary of $10,000 was considered to be tops.

SONNENFELDT: A GS-15 (top civil service grade) made $10,400.

Q: Yes, and that was big money in those days!

SONNENFELDT: Yes. Well, it soon ceased to be big money because of inflation. In any event, if there was a personnel freeze, I didn't hear about it. I reported to work on December 16, 1952. (In fact, I later learned that I was the last State Department employee hired under Secretary of State Dean Acheson; a hiring freeze was imposed shortly after the Eisenhower administration took over.)

A few days before the inauguration of the new administration, Acheson said farewell to a huge gathering of State Department staff who stood outside at the back steps of the "New State" building. A week or so later, the new Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, greeted a somewhat smaller crowd in the same setting. His call for "positive loyalty" toward the new administration got mixed reactions.

Q: We're talking about a critical period, because of Senator Joseph McCarthy's attacks on the government, especially the State Department. Since you were dealing with Russian affairs and all, and you had this very unhealthy situation of Senator McCarthy and his minions going around attacking the State Department, did this hit you at all? Or hit your area?

SONNENFELDT: No, it didn't hit me then, as far as I can tell. But it hit me later, after McCarthy had left the scene. There were people in the State Department Security Office (which, incidentally, was an outgrowth of the Division of Foreign Activity Correlation, FC, wherI had worked in 1946-47) - there were some people, whether they were McCarthy acolytes or not, I don't know; but they suspected Communist penetration at various times.

Q: This is Scott McLeod, he was the heaviest -

SONNENFELDT: Well, he came in with the Republicans as Director of Security at the State Department. And there was a fellow named Otto Otepka who was in Security (SY)-

Q: Oh, yes. There had been a steady leak [from that office], I think, to McCarthy-

SONNENFELDT: Just to jump ahead, I got in trouble because I saw some press people, which was more or less strictly not allowed, at least for junior people. I became friendly with two or three press people in Washington in 1953 or '54. That stirred a lot of concern, I guess, because they noticed it in the Security office; and they kept watching me, and tapping my home phone, and so on. But that came later. I don't think I had any problem along those lines in getting hired, but they investigated me, I assume, as was the practice for new employees.

I also had a problem that never was cleared up at all, and I only found out about it much later. But it didn't stop me from getting into the State Department, and getting security clearance. When I first arrived in this country in 1944, the Immigration officer at the pier in New York asked me, "Do you intend to stay in this country and become an American citizen?"

I answered, "Yes, of course. My parents are here. I do intend to become an American citizen, but you know, if there is ever a Jewish state in Palestine, it might interest me, because of what happened to us as Jews. But my present intention, clearly, is to be an American, a good American. I expect to serve in the military."

This guy dutifully wrote all this down. It apparently showed up many years later in somebody's review of my files, perhaps for an update of a security clearance. But I was never told; I was never asked to explain this. Then, sometime in 1958, somebody denounced me as an Israeli spy. Why, I have no idea! In any event (I'm jumping way ahead), this seemed to ring a bell somewhere in the State Department Security Office. Somebody had seen a record or a note from the FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) when they did my background check - maybe for the CIC, or maybe for when I came to the State Department, although the State Department usually did its own security clearances. So it was McCarthy-era stuff; but it wasn't, as far as I can tell, McCarthy directly attacking me.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: It was an interesting and fascinating period; of course, we'd been through the Alger Hiss trial and other cases involving allegations of pro-Communist activities. There were hearings in Congress for Owen Lattimore (my professor at Hopkins, everybody's professor at Johns Hopkins) led by Senator Pat McCarran, a committee chairman eager to spot a traitor.

So there was a lot of that going on. But for me, it was a terrific time to get into the Soviet business seriously in the government, because things between the Soviets and the U.S. were not in good shape. They had taken an initiative early in 1952 toward the Germans, to propose German unification and neutralization; and that caused certain vibes in Germany. When I got into this Office of Research, I was assigned to the foreign branch of that office. Questions of what the Soviet intentions were with regard to Germany, what was going to happen to the Korean War, how strong was the alliance between the Soviet Union and China, what was going on in Eastern Europe, and the Soviets' split with Yugoslavia - there were lots of things going on.

Q: Oh, yes!

SONNENFELDT: In those days, the sources from which we analysts worked (at least at my level - I guess we may have had some fancy intelligence), were essentially what we could get in the way of open sources from the Soviet Union. There was a very intensive radio-monitoring program that we did jointly with the British. Every morning we got a thick, yellow-covered book reprinting pages and pages of texts of broadcasts from Radio Moscow and all their different radio services that had been monitored, also the regional Soviet radios, and some newspaper translations. The Commerce Department had a separate program for newspaper translation - the Joint Press Reading Service - which had people in Moscow. They translated newspapers as soon as they came onto the newspaper stands every day, and sent either telegrams back or the packages back. So we got all this stuff.

Those were essentially our sources, plus whatever conversations our diplomats had with Soviets here and there, which were not very many because we didn't have that many people in touch. We had a chargï¿½, Elim O'Shaughnessy, in Moscow. (We had broken ambassadorial relations, I guess, when the Soviets kicked out Ambassador George Kennan in 1952.) Although we didn't have an ambassador there, the embassy was working. But our staff in Moscow were pretty much ostracized. I guess they went to a few diplomatic events, National Day observances, and so on; and occasionally they saw a Soviet leader, but usually not much more than a Vice Foreign Minister or someone of similar rank.

The person-to-person contact with the Soviets was very slender. We didn't have exchange programs; we had defectors and we had refugees. There was a big program of interviewing people who had come out at the end of the Second World War, who had fled from the Soviet Union toward the end of the war and after the end of the war, and they were in UNRRA camps in Europe. They were eventually released from those camps, and they found places to live, including in the U.S. There was a major program run by Harvard and maybe MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) - I can't remember the consortium of universities involved - to interview these people about life in the Soviet Union, going back to the 1920s and the '30s. For the most part, this was material that we didn't have, because (even though there were Western correspondents and some scholars there), the Soviet Union was basically closed; it was a totalitarian state. We had materials from those interviews from which we hopefully could project into the more current period (by then, the early 1950s) some ideas about how the Communist party functioned, and how the secret police functioned, and so on.

Q: If I recall, during World War II the Department of State, the Foreign Service officers, were not enthralled with the Soviet Union.

SONNENFELDT: No.

Q: But you had the White House, particularly Eleanor Roosevelt, who in a way tried to put on hold, or at least eliminate, skeptical reporting about the Soviet Union. At least I've heard this. Did you feel any of this? Or was this-

SONNENFELDT: Well, everybody's working off the same materials. Even the more dated ones provided significant insights into the Soviet system.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: In the Moscow embassy, they were working off Pravda and Izvestia and other newspapers, and we were working off Pravda and Izvestia; and they got the radio broadcast monitoring books, and we got them, and so on. But they had occasional conversations, and there were rumors in the diplomatic mill over there. I think that at the time that I joined all of this in the fall of 1952, the general line toward the Soviets was guarded and skeptical. I think in the case of a man like Mose Harvey, it was more than skeptical.

I mean, they were still trying to digest the meaning of the Korean War. That was also the time when the Soviet-sponsored peace movement began to get going, and Communist front organizations and so on. The Soviets had started to become a bit more active in what used to be the colonial areas of the British and the French, although initially Stalin himself in a couple of interviews had questioned whether the "imperlialists" were really letting go of their colonies. The Soviets were very skeptical about the independence of India and other post-colonial countries. They thought that was all just fake, that they were stooges of the imperialists. By 1948-49, before I got to the State Department, the Soviets began to be more active in what later came to be known as the Third World, and active in leftist Labor movements. There were Communist or pseudo-Communist parties. Front groups began to develop in various countries: in India; a little bit in the Middle East; and Africa, which at that point was still mostly colonial, but was beginning to de-colonize also.

So that began to concern us, and some people felt that, whether Communist or otherwise, the Soviets were setting out to become a global, imperialist power. Of course, China had become Communist in 1949. At that particular time, they were friendly with the Soviets, although we soon learned that even then there were some underlying frictions; but they still were pretty close. It was the general assumption (now borne out by the Soviet archives and various other materials) that the Korean War was started by the North Korean leader, Kim Il Sung, with Soviet support, maybe even as a Soviet stooge. In fact, it was more complicated than that; there was also Mao Zedong's support. After the Chinese came into the Korean War in 1950, and Soviet MiG fighters and MiG pilots were involved almost from the start, it all looked like a coordinated Sino-Soviet war with the U.S. But the long, bloody deadlock eventually led to an armistice after Stalin's death in 1953. Korea remained split along the 38th parallel and remains a major trouble spot.

Q: I had the job during the Korean War - I was sitting up on an island in the Yellow Sea, monitoring Soviet pilots who were attacking American planes.

SONNENFELDT: Well, there you go, yes. So by 1952, these attitudes began to form fairly clearly, but there were differences in emphasis and differences in degree. I know that Harvey had differences of opinion with Bohlen-

Q: Chip Bohlen-

SONNENFELDT: Chip Bohlen [Charles Bohlen, a Russian affairs specialist and U.S. Ambassador to the USSR], and maybe with some of the other State Department Foreign Service people.

There was a clear distinction in those days between policy and research, and we researchers were supposed to call the shots as we saw them. But that didn't mean that the Soviet Desk in the European Bureau and the other more senior people didn't have their own ideas of what was going on in the Soviet Union.

Then, of course, Stalin died about six weeks after Eisenhower's inauguration, on March 5, 1953. There had been some sort of routine, Cold War-type exchanges between them - though officially, it did not come from Stalin, because he didn't have a government job [he was First Secretary or head of the Communist Party]; but President Voroshilov, I guess, presented congratulations. There was pretty much a Cold War environment across the board.

So the big issue became, just a few months after I got to the State Department: How will this develop now? Could there be a Stalinist system without Stalin? Who were his heirs? Of course, there were heirs announced almost immediately: Malenkov and Molotov and Beria, the second triumvirate. Were they going to be able to rule this place, govern this place, and were they going to be maybe more aggressive, because it was generally accepted, even by people who had the deepest concerns and suspicions of Stalin, that he was a cautious guy and that he wasn't going to expose himself or the Soviet Union.

So the earlier idea, that maybe the war in Korea was a precursor to a march westward in Europe, didn't really happen in that form. There were large Communist parties in France and Italy, which were very pro-Soviet, although underneath, some differences were beginning to bubble. These parties were financed by the Soviets. And there was the world "peace" movement, and the World Federation of Trade Unions, and the student groups and other "front" organizations. So there was a lot of Soviet-directed machinery around that could undermine Western governments and populations. But I think that the idea of a Soviet attack against the West was still there. And of course, that had led to the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty in 1949. After the start of the Korean War in 1950, the signatories added the "O" to it, and NATO began to put together a military organization with coordinated forces. But it was still in its infancy. So there was a lot of uncertainty about just what the death of Stalin would mean.

There were plenty of tea leaves that the expert Kremlinologists reviewed. I wasn't quite an expert yet, but I was learning to read between the lines. I was learning that it was important to compare what they said on day "x" with what they said on day "x" minus ten years, or five years, or three years, or two years, or one month, to see what shifts there were or what signs of disagreement there were among the leaders.

When Stalin died, I was given the task of tracking unusual moves by the Soviets. What happened during March of 1953 was that the Soviets apparently worried that their enemies would take advantage of the confusion resulting from Stalin's death and might take some aggressive action against them. In the months after his death, and while they were obviously maneuvering among themselves (Beria got sacked, Malenkov got thrown out for various reasons, and then eventually Khrushchev began to ascend), I made a long list of statements that they made that sounded softer than they had before Stalin died. There always were arguments: whether these different formulations had already started in 1951 or '50, or even '48 and '49, whether it was on Berlin, or on German unification or on the endless and fruitless disarmament talks. In those days, they were really just talks; nobody expected that you'd actually do something, but talking about disarmament was one of big activities in the Cold War. It was a tool of political warfare. The Russians wielded it with considerable skill and noise because they had their "peace" movement: people marching in the streets during the Korean War; there was the attack on the U.S. for allegedly using biological warfare, and so on. It was a big propaganda weapon, and there were constant competitive disarmament proposals, mostly to abolish nuclear weapons.

So I started keeping a loose-leaf notebook (no computers in those days), and dutifully wrote down every day what I thought might be a conciliatory move, or a softening move. There was a whole mass of them: for example, some people were able to get visas to visit the Soviet Union (which had previously not been possible); or maybe some newspapers were permitted to have one more correspondent in Moscow. Mose Harvey didn't think very much of this because he thought it was all a trap, anyway; the Soviets weren't going to go soft. Nevertheless, every week we diligently put together a list of things that departed from what had been, more or less, the norm in the Stalin period: use of words, things they said about the U.S. or about relations with the U.S., things they said about Yugoslavia (their relationship had become very nasty) which sounded like some sort of overture.

Q: Oh, yes!

SONNENFELDT: One of our concerns after the split with Tito (the Yugoslav leader) in 1949 was that the Soviets might try some kind of action through the Serbs to break up Yugoslavia. There were some signs that maybe the new rulers in Moscow were throwing out some verbal come-ons to the Yugoslavs. I thought there might even have been a secret visit.

There also had been the question of who attended Stalin's funeral. Funerals, you know, were great opportunities for Kremlinology, as was the lineup of dignitaries on the mausoleum in Red Square during the annual May 1 parade after Stalin's death. He died on March 5, 1953, so May 1 was the first opportunity to look at the leadership lineup. As I recall, the funeral procession had been a bit confusing. We clearly could not send a prominent person to represent the United States at Stalin's funeral. Our Ambassador, George Kennan, had been thrown out of Moscow in 1952. Our charge, Elim O'Shaughnessy, marched in the procession wearing a borrowed formal suit, trying all the way to prevent the striped pants from dropping to the ground.

Q:[Laughter] Yes.

SONNENFELDT: Of course, our military attachï¿½s looked closely at the weapons that the Soviets were parading.

So it wasn't only that it was a new job for me, but I was getting propelled into what was our main absorption and concern in the foreign policy arena. I really got quite stimulated; and I worked with extraordinarily able, knowledgeable, and thoughtful people who had been at it a lot longer than I had.

One of the people who came to work with us temporarily in 1953 was a man who had been close to Truman's Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, who, of course, was no longer there. Secretary Dulles knew him also, but because he'd been so close to Dean Acheson, he was advised to spend some time in the Soviet Research Office. He himself had gone to Columbia, where he had gotten a certificate in Russian studies. This was Marshall Shulman. I don't know whether he's in your oral history series or not; he later worked again in the State Department.

Q: No, [he's not].

While he was with Acheson, Marshall was also, to some extent, his mouthpiece - not the official public spokesman, but Acheson's contact with journalists around town. We became quite friendly. I wasn't married yet. In the summer of 1953, it was hot as hell, and he invited me to stay in the basement of his home in Alexandria, where it was cooler.

Q: Oh, yes. This was a big deal!

SONNENFELDT: So we spent a fair amount of time together. Through Marshall, I was introduced to Henry Brandon (a British journalist in Washington), Peter Lisagor (a Chicago Daily News reporter whom Marshall had known when he, himself, was a journalist before the war), and several others. Since I was working on Soviet affairs, they were interested in talking to me; and since they knew everybody in town, including people in the White House, it was a wonderful way for me to find out what was going on in town, which I didn't in my little office cubbyhole in that converted apartment building there on 23rd Street.

I guess the Security people got wind of the fact that I knew journalists, and they started watching me, and then tapping my home telephone.

When Fritz Kraemer came back from Oberammergau, sometime in the late '40s, we picked up our friendship again. He started working at MSA (Mutual Security Agency), which was the Marshall Plan Agency, and eventually ended up in the Pentagon as a guru over there. We used to have long telephone conversations in the evenings, and they were mostly in German.

Kraemer liked to speak German, although he spoke English perfectly - with a heavy accent, but very fluent, sophisticated English. Still, he liked to speak German. I hadn't really spoken all that much German, except during my period in the Army in Germany. Whoever was tapping my phone apparently got suspicious about my long conversations with somebody in German. They started putting cylinders (in those days) on their listening machines, to tape our conversations. A man whom I came to know later, who worked in the Security office, told me at some point, "You know, there are stacks and stacks and stacks of transcripts of your conversations with Fritz Kraemer, and translations of them; and somebody's been going through them in the Security office to see what they amounted to."

Actually, Kraemer did practically all the talking (he was a very voluble guy); and I did very little. So all this later became part of my security file. It kicked around through the '50s. I don't think they ever really got anything out of it that led them to do anything more than just store the transcripts, and maybe write some notes on the(I don't know what the hell they did with them) - until later, a guy who was not in my office, but in what by then had become the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, denounced me as an Israeli spy.

This guy claimed that he had seen me give the plans for the American invasion of Lebanon to some Israelis at a cocktail party at the Israeli Embassy (where, incidentally, I'd never been).

Q: This is 1958

SONNENFELDT: Right.

Q: July 1958, yes.

SONNENFELDT: He had, I think, maybe denounced me some time before that. But anyway, that was supposed to be the real proof that there was something suspicious going on. In fact, a) I'd never been in the Israeli Embassy; b) I had nothing to do with Lebanon - I was a Soviet analyst - so the notion that I could have gotten hold of war plans for landing in Lebanon was ludicrous. Even if I had been working on Lebanon, I would never have seen any war plans!

Q: Sure, sure.

SONNENFELDT: But anyway, that accusation fascinated Mr. Otepka, in the Security office. So this stuff was accumulating, as well as these conversations with Kraemer. I don't know what the Security people had on Kissinger and me. I think Kissinger finished his Ph.D. in 1954, and he got some consulting jobs here with the Army's research office, Office of Research and Operations, a semi-private organization. All the services had them, and still have them: CNA (Center for Naval Analyses) is one now for the Navy, and the Air Force had RAND (a contraction of the term research and development), and the Joint Staff had the IDA (Institute for Defense Analyses), and the Army had ORO (Operations Research Office). All of these were affiliated loosely with some university. ORO actually was affiliated with Johns Hopkins University.

So Henry came down here more frequently, and we would meet more often because he'd stay with Kraemer. Then he asked me to come up to Harvard once or twice to give a talk in his course on world politics. In those days, this was permissible for government officials: you just put in a form [saying that you planned to speak at a seminar.] I don't know whether Kissinger got drawn into the periodic telephone-tapping that was going on - you know, in those days, just the updating or renewal of a security clearance frequently involved the use of wire taps!

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: It was just a routine way to do that until much later, when they had to get warrants for wire-tapping. It was just a routine thing. The upshot of all of that was that while there was a security ripple running through my career before I ended up in the White House in 1969, it continued after that. J. Edgar Hoover [Director of the FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation)] had a whole list of "suspicious" people that Kissinger had hired for the NSC [National Security Council] staff, including me.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: This security "ripple" finally went away in the '70s; but it had rattled around for years. It all started, I think, because of this thing I had said about a Jewish state, when I was interviewed by the Immigration officer in New York in April 1944, when I arrived in the U.S.

Q: [Laughter]

SONNENFELDT: But it didn't stop my career. It came close once or twice, I guess. But I got started in the State Department in December of '52, and gradually crept up the ladder. There was something called "Wristonization" [integration of the Civil Service and the Foreign Service] that came along in 1954-55.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: I was a civil servant, and I didn't want to be "Wristonized" and go into the Foreign Service, partly because my wife (we were married in October 1953) was professionally active, and because my parents were alive. I had left them at age 11, came back very briefly before going into the Army, and was gone again for two years. They were getting older, and I just didn't feel that I should go abroad again. So I decided to stay a civil servant, which wasn't the healthiest thing to do, because Under Secretary Loy Henderson, who managed a lot of personnel issues, basically wanted to have the wholState Department, except maybe the Legal Advisor's Office and one or two other units, in one personnel systethe Foreign Service. They were doing nothing to encourage civil servants to stay.

Q: Oh, I [remember] that.

SONNENFELDT: So I had a period of maybe two or three years when I wasn't promoted, but then after that, promotions came pretty steadily.

Q: Well, this is probably a good place to stop.

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Today is November 14, 2000. All right, let's pick up with the change when Dulles came in. Was there a palpable change from your perspective, or not?

SONNENFELDT: Well, my perspective on January 20 or 21, 1953 was kind of a worm's-eye view. I was low down in the R Area, which didn't have any policy responsibilities. I don't think Dulles expected to have much contact with it, except maybe with the Director, Park Armstrong. Then perhaps some of the senior people in the R Area gradually did have some contact with the political appointees who came in with Dulles.

As I mentioned earlier, of course, one of the things that perked up everybody's ears was when there was a gathering to greet the new Secretary of State and his team on what were then the back steps of New State (of course, by now it's all part of the State Department Building), where a week or two earlier there had been a farewell to Dean Acheson and his team. Dulles made remarks about expecting "positive loyalty" from all the people in the State Department. No one quite knew exactly what he might mean, but people looked around and wondered. But you have to remember, by this time we were well into the various loyalty programs and the new security programs instituted in the Truman administration; and we were also in the McCarthy period. So people, I think, wondered what exactly this "positive loyalty" meant. That statement was widely reported in the press. There were questions about whether it meant a further clean sweep of people from the previous administration, at least at policy levels. I think things settled down in that regard before too long, and the career people went about their jobs.

We, in the R Area, went about our job, which was to gather as much information as we could, mostly in those days from unclassified or very low classification sources, to figure out what the Soviets were up to. We were watching very carefully how the Soviets reacted to the new administration. Of course, shortly after the new administration came in, Stalin died, on March 5, 1953. So we were quite occupied with figuring out what was going on in the Soviet Union, and what was going to happen in the Soviet Union; we were trying to tabulate as best we could whatever possibly looked like some indication of how they expected to deal with the United States. I don't know of any instance where there was any sort of pressure on us to come up with particular slants to the information, nor were there any efforts to figure out what the Secretary of State or the other high-level people might like to [hear].

George Kennan and "Chip" Bohlen were not in Dulles's inner group. I can't remember when Kennan left the government. He had been Ambassador in Moscow. The Soviets PNGed him (declared him persona non grata) because of some remarks that he made comparing the Soviet Union to Hitler Germany - at least ostensibly, that was the reason. He had left by 1953, although, of course, he had been such a formidable figure in the State Department when it came to U.S. policy toward the Soviet Union, and U.S. policy more generally, that there undoubtedly remained certain reverberations of his influence. President Kennedy appointed him Ambassador to Yugoslavia in 1961.

Bohlen was nominated to be Ambassador to Moscow, mostly at President Eisenhower's behest. His nomination got held up for months by McCarthy-type critics, but it was finally approved and he went to Moscow around April of 1953. In 1956, Dulles recalled him and had him posted to Manila.

Marshall Shulman was another Sovietologist who had worked closely with Acheson as a speechwriter and advisor. He knew Secretary Dulles: he had worked with Dulles during the negotiations for the Japanese Peace Treaty in 1951, and he knew him in other connections. But he had been close to Acheson, so he was sent to our office in the R Area for a while. He had originally been a Sovietologist. He eventually left the State Department to go to Harvard, I think, and work on a Ph.D. dissertation.

So there was some turnover in personnel in the Soviet field. I can't remember how long it took to get the first Eisenhower administration ambassador to Moscow. But it made no particular difference to us in the R Area who the ambassador was. We were doing our thing of trying to figure out what was going on in the Soviet Union and what it meant for us.

Q: Was there a feeling, a sort of an initial burst of expectation, when Stalin died that things might change? Or was it pretty much, things will go on as usual?

SONNENFELDT: Well, I think there was some expectation that there would be some changes.

There was also an expectation, which essentially proved correct - that there would be a struggle for power - that there had been signs of maneuvering in the top leadership for quite a while. There always were. Despite the fact that this system claimed to be monolithic and they all claimed to be good Communist Bolsheviks, they were, in fact, constantly engaged in infighting. Of course, people had been executed; and there was the "Doctors' Plot" (Stalin's charges that certain doctormost of them Jewiswere conspiring to kill him). So there were all sorts of signs of uncertainty in the leadership before his death; and then the way the death itself was handled, the way the announcements were made, suggested internal divisions.

When Stalin's death was made public, there was the famous TASS reference to avoiding "panic and disarray." These were pithy words suggesting that there was indeed some disarray. There were three people who followed Stalin by agreement: Malenkov, Molotov, and Beria (the secret police chief) - and that arrangement proved not to be stable later in the year.

So the expectations were 1) that there would be uncertainty in Moscow, an2) that there might be some changes. For us, the question of Soviet ties to the Korean War was very much on our minds. Even though the Berlin blockade had long been ended, there were still all kinds of maneuvers around that. There had been Soviet atomic bomb explosions, and the question of the hydrogen bomb. So there were lots of things going on that marked that phase of the Cold War.

There was a question of who should represent the U.S. at Stalin's funeral. I think it turned out that our chargï¿½ in Moscow, Elim O'Shaughnessy, who had been there since Kennan was kicked out, went to the funeral; and I think Jacob Beam, a career official, joined the delegation; but there wasn't any formal representation. There must have been some kind of a formal condolence note.

Our office, called DRS (Division of Research for the Soviet Union) in those days, started a list of things Soviets did and said that suggested that they might be looking not for some grand settlement, but to cool the temperature in relations with the U.S.. There had been some signs of this earlier. Before Stalin's death, he'd given a couple of set-piece interviews, and there were some suggestive phrases. Earlier in 1952, there had been two Soviet notes to the Western powers offering a unified Germany, provided it was neutral; but the proposal had many flaws concerning the election process and other issues. In Washington, it was not taken particularly seriously. In Germany, there were some people who thought that there might be some opportunity, and it still rattles around in German historiography in debates whether the Germans were deprived of an opportunity to re-unify. But we remained dubious. I think, actually, it was only after the Eisenhower administration came in and after Stalin's death that a reply was sent to Moscow.

In our office, we had also done some analysis and raised questions as to the Soviet initiative's seriousness. But in many western governments, including ours, there also were judgments that Moscow was attempting to complicate western plans to include German military forces in the emerging European Defense Community (EDC). In Germany, the Social Democratic Party (SPD) opposed these plans, and Moscow may have hoped to strengthen this opposition.

Eventually, the question of Germany's future led in early 1954 to a meeting in Berlin between Dulles and Molotov, the Soviet Foreign Minister. By that time there had been changes in the top Soviet leadership: Malenkov had been demoted and Beria had been arrested. We found out subsequently that Beria had tried to move on German issues as well, but on his own, with some kind of initiative. It's been pretty well documented by historians. We didn't know about it at the time, although there was some intelligence suggesting that he showed up in East Berlin at some point in this period. But eventually he was arrested and executed. So there were changes, but Molotov was Molotov, and he was tough-

Q: He'd been around for a long, long time.

SONNENFELDT: And he continued for many years, but in lesser roles. There were some things that started happening in '53 and '54. One of them had to do with the still-pending Austrian peace treaty. That was actually a reason for convening the Berlin Conference in January or February of 1954. That led to certain steps which ultimately in 1955 produced the state treaty that settled the Austrian question. Austria became neutraan outcome which some people in Germany saw as a precedent for them. Among them were those who thought Moscow's 1952 notes should have been taken more seriously.

There had been squabbles over Trieste with the Yugoslavs. Of course, by that time Yugoslavia had split from the Soviet Union and had been expelled from the Cominfor(Communist Information Bureau) by Stalin. So Yugoslavia was no longer an actor on the Soviet string, as it were, but it was still a problem in terms of relationships in Europe. Eventually, the Trieste issue was resolved to the satisfaction of Italy and Yugoslavia, and approved by the major powers, including the U.S. and the USSR.

There were a few other things, like Soviet officials' visits back and forth, not only to the U.S., but to other countries; more of low-level exchanges, and so on. I can't remember all of them, but I had collected perhaps a hundred of these rather tenuous occurrences. As Kremlinologists, we counted many cases of phrasing being changed in Pravda or in the magazine Bolshevik, later called Kommunist, the major authoritative publication.

Soon after Stalin's death, Prime Minister Churchill proposed publicly that the wise thing to do was to meet with the new leadership.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: Dulles didn't like that idea at all. There have been some stories we didn't know about (we weren't anywhere near that level), that Eisenhower, I guess by temperament, wasn't altogether opposed to Churchill's idea. After all, Churchill was a great figure and a great hero; and Eisenhower had worked with him during the war. But I think Dulles didn't like the idea of getting the president personally involved in summitry. You know, we still had something of the old tradition that the president oughtn't to be on the front line of diplomacy.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: So nothing much came of that. Churchill, with his experience and his view of the world, I guess, figured (as he said in World War II when he backed the Soviets after the Nazis invaded Russia), that if for the sake of defeating the Nazis, he'd have to eat dinner with the devil, he'd certainly do it with a long spoon - the famous saying.

Q: [Laughter]

SONNENFELDT: I don't think that Churchill, having done so during the War, had quite the same inhibitions of dealing with Stalin or his successors that our people did. We have a somewhat different way of looking at this phenomenon of unspeakable dictators, and just exactly what to do with them.

Q: Well, too, was this a certain reflection of Dulles, who at least is purported to have been rather, "either you're with us or against us"? I mean, you know, they go back to his Presbyterian elder background and all of that.

SONNENFELDT: Yes, well, I think there was something to that. He said at one press conference, "You can recognize neutrality, or neutralism, but you don't have to hold it to your bosom and call it good." I don't think the word "nonaligned" was yet in use; but neutrality between good and evil was not something that Dulles was prepared to countenance.

Interestingly, just to skip right to the present, there was recently, in the year 2000, a report on UN (United Nations) peacekeeping operations by a former Algerian Foreign Minister, Brahimi. One of the things he criticized in that report was the neutrality of the UN forces in Bosnia. He said that you have to distinguish between good and evil in these situations, and the UN cannot be agnostic, or something of that sort.

Q: Yes, yes.

SONNENFELDT: So anyway, Dulles had his doubts about neutrality, and he certainly had his doubts about the moral worth or any notion of moral equality with the Soviets.

There were others who worried about the Soviets getting nuclear weapons, and how to deal with such weapons in the hands of the Communists. Over the years, that led to more active disarmament or arms control talks, but really not to any concrete measures in the Dulles period.

Q: Well, looking at the Soviets in this transition thing, were we seeing, I mean, you know, you were talking?I'm trying to sort of get inside you. You know, you're looking at it, and granted, you're way down in the hierarchy, but were you seeing any signs to be optimistic, or was it?

SONNENFELDT: I don't think that?first of all, we weren't supposed to be optimistic or pessimistic.

Q: Well, yes, yes. But [laughter]

SONNENFELDT: We were supposed to call it as we saw it. I can't say that I saw anything more than what I would call Soviet tactics - verbal tactics or other kinds of tactics - to buy themselves some quiet. The words I was groping for earlier were "panic" and "disarray", and I will insert them when you send me the transcript of our talk.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: That is what a TASS dispatch referred to after Stalin's death, to buy themselves some time to somehow straighten out where things were headed in the transition; and I think they felt a little queasy without the grand old man [Stalin] up there telling them what to do, even though they'd been around for a long time.

Q: Yes, yes. He was a hard taskmaster.

SONNENFELDT: So I don't think that they were looking to pick a fight with us. I think they were probably quite willing to see some sort of a deal on Korea, which always had some potential for escalation. I think we noted that. We saw that there might be some movement on Austria coming along (this is a little later); and one or two other things I felt had some promise, but not for a settlement! Then there was Stalin's proposal for Germany floating around, as it continued to do for a long time, where again there was some seeming flexibility.

But my judgment wa(I guess there were some differences of opinion) that any sign of flexibility at that point by the Soviets on these by then well-understood, contested, confrontational situations - any sign of flexibility was essentially a tactical thing and did not hold out promise for rolling back the reel, as it were, to some more cooperative relationship. SI wasn't afraid that there would be a war, although there had been the debate whether the start of the Korean War (in 1950, when I wasn't yet in the government) portended a more aggressive Soviet role, all around, including in Europe. That resulted in the formation of NATO. The North Atlantic Treaty had been signed in 1949, but the "O," the organization and the SHAPE (Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe) headquarters, the military part of it, didn't come until after the Korean War started.

There were still disagreements as to Soviet intentions, but I think there was (and I shared it) a sense that we were at that point where the Soviets were trying to sort out their own situation, and they wouldn't have been particularly eager to get involved in a big fight with us. But much of their policy was aimed at slowing down and disrupting the increasing Western consolidation through NATO, the various institutional arrangements in the economic and financial areas, and, in Europe, what became steps toward the eventual European Economic Community.

Q: What about your relations between the research side and the Soviet Desk at this point?

SONNENFELDT: Well, I personally was a relative newcomer.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: I got to know some of the people on the Desk, but I had nothing in particular to do with it. The people who had been in our shop longer obviously knew the people on the Soviet Desk and the Foreign Service people who were specialists in Soviet Affairs. In fact, there was an arrangement between the European Bureau and the R Area that our office could have one or two people in Moscow for a year or two, to be on the ground there, to help with analyzing the Soviet press and especially the provincial press, which was one of the major sources to try to gather information, and they knew each other.

Q: And inhale the atmospherics too.

SONNENFELDT: Yes, and they took some trips in the hinterland together. But I think the stuff that we produced in the R Area, in our office, was ours. You know, it might have been discussed with some people on the Soviet Desk; and we talked about the interpretation and assessment of whatever it was that we were concerned about. We published these things on a weekly basis, and some special papers whenever they were ready, not necessarily regularly. When I say published, these reports had some security classification, maybe "confidential", occasionally "secret". But they went out as our INR papers. The Desk was a consumer?and if they disagreed, I guess they sent memos to their own people and to us, disagreeing with our views.

Later, as I climbed up the ladder a bit and got more involved in the formal estimative process in the intelligence community (which was run by CIA but in which all the agencies were represented), we talked with our colleagues on the Desk and maybe in the Policy Planning Staff, to get their views on the particular issue that was the subject of a National Intelligence Estimate draft, in the interagency process. But we did not make any commitment that their view would be our view.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: But there was more contact with the policy side. Then much later, as I stayed on in the R Area, later INR, I had fairly active contacts personally. I became a Branch Chief and then Division Chief, and then eventually the Office Director, and I had wider contacts because I wanted to know what was going on in the policy area, so that I could somehow integrate that more into my thoughts about what we were reading or getting through some fancy intelligence and other sources. I used to stop in regularly to see Tommy Thompson when he had come back from Moscow, where he'd been our Ambassador (and then he became Dean Rusk's Special Advisor for Soviet Affairs), just because I felt that the input of experienced people who were sitting across the table from the Soviets on this or that issue was important.

There used to be something of a divide which affected not so much the Sovietologists in the State Department, but a lot of the people who were dealing with the Soviet Union. Because they had to negotiate something, they might have had participants from the Sovietological communitbut in practice, they gave weight mostly to what they heard across the green table. We in the R Area gave weight mostly to what we read in the publications, what we got through CIA and through NSA (National Security Agency). We were really cut off from a lot of what went on at the negotiating table; so there was a bit of a mismatch as to what people gave weight to. I remember talking to one person (this was later), who told me such and such and such and such happened at the negotiations, and that they had a dinner one night, and Soviet counterparts said this, that, and the other.

I said, "Well, it's interesting; but it doesn't really square with what we get through our sources."

He said, "Well, you know, that's the problem. That's just propaganda stuff. You guys pay too much attention to that. What really counts is what these people tell us!"

I personally took the view that what they tell you often has a very particular purpose. Or an American listener may have some predisposition, and interprets what he hears as something that may confirm his views. All of it was important as part of the information pool that we sought to weigh. In INR, we were getting what Soviets were saying to each other through their own publications or by other means, and what they were saying to their own people as part of ruling them, governing them. But in other reports, we also saw what they were saying over cocktails with an American diplomat. What carried more weight? In analyzing true Soviet intentions, ambitions, objectives, I never quite settled it in my own mind. But, once I moved over to the policy side, I gradually paid more attention to what - (of course, we were then dealing with the top level, from Brezhnev on down) - I paid more attention to what I was hearing than to what my former colleagues and the CIA people were assiduously collecting and analyzing from their sources. But I still tried to make use of their insights.

Q: Well, also there could possibly be almost a two-track system, not on purpose, but what you were getting maybe from the people talking would be sort of their thoughts going around; whereas the bureaucracy, which is extremely important in ruling, was cranking out its orders. You know, I mean, who knows?

SONNENFELDT: Who knows is right! A lot of content analysis, for example, of the vast amount of printed stuff and radio broadcasts and later TV broadcasts - they were all translated but sometimes kept in their original language; there's a huge amount of material - we went on the theory that this was all conscious stuff. If there was some kind of a strange formulation, it was always a guessing game whether it was a deliberate effort to obfuscate and mislead, again because it was so ordered; or whether it might actually reflect some movement that they were signaling through some obscure form of words; or whether there were differences among the Soviets themselves. We could detect differences among them. We all heard Malenkov, going back to '53, sayin(I mean, we read his statements; they were widely printed at the time) that a nuclear war would spell the end of civilization.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: But that was not the Soviet line-

Q: No.

SONNENFELDT: -because you can't have an end to history under the Marxist-Leninist ideology! History goes on. So here comes the Soviet leader who says, "The subjective man, by launching the nuclear war, can stop the objective process of history."

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: Well, Khrushchev called him on it, said something different about what a nuclear war would mean. He said he didn't deny that it would be extremely damaging, even catastrophic, and we should avoid it; but it wouldn't end the world. But, you know, this was a theological dispute. That wasn't presumably the only reason why Malenkov was demoted and sent out to be the director of a power plant, after having been at the very top and near the top before. So we tracked that stuff. The Sino-Soviet conflict, which began to develop in the '50s, often centered on this sort of orthodoxy, even though there also were less esoteric disputes.

Q: Were you seeing any indicators of this at the time?

SONNENFELDT: Yes! We saw differences between the Soviets and the Chinese, including on the question of nuclear war, as a matter of fact, but on a whole host of other issues. A colleague of ours, long since back in the academic world, Donald Zagoria, was at CIA doing the same sort of thing that we were doing. He produced a thick volume, classified at the time, in 1956 or '57, showing the symptoms of major conflict and disputes between the Soviets and the Chinese. It was later published. CIA took out some classified material, but then released it, and it was a sensation at the time.

You know, I was conservative; I accepted the notion that Marxist-Leninists had disputes, and even killed each other over them. But in the end, they believe in the same thing; so we ought to be very careful before we assume that there was a real conflict between the Soviet Union and China. A lot of other Sovietologists of what you might call the "hard line" school thought this conflict was unlikely, or may even be a trick to lull us into some false sense of security.

Q: Well, were you looking at the Yugoslav breaking away as being an indicator of how something might happen? In other words, was this seen as something completely extraneous to anything else?

SONNENFELDT: No.

Q: Or was this seen as something that, I mean certain things happened to Yugoslav-Soviet relationships, so we should start looking at those things happening in other countries?

SONNENFELDT: Well, that was obviously a subject of controversy. Eventually Milovan Djilas wrote about it; he was a close associate of Tito's.

No, I think the Soviet-Yugoslav break was a major surprise, in a way. Maybe some Sovietologists or some experts on Yugoslavia didn't think it was a surprise because they believed it was inevitable that sooner or later they'd break up. What is interesting - what I certainly did not realize or expect at the time (it actually happened before I got in the government) - was that apparently the real reason why Stalin, in effect, threw Tito and Yugoslavia out of the Cominform, (which was the new edition of the Comintern or Communist International, which had been suspended or abolished during World War II as a gesture toward the West) was that he felt that Tito was being too aggressive in fanning the Greek Civil War, and over Trieste and other issues. Stalin feared that the result would be that the Americans, who might otherwise have left Europe or would leave Europe, because Americans don't like to stay overseas, would come back and stay there; and Stalin was totally opposed to that. So he thought Tito might drag him into a war; he thought Tito might make permanent the American presence in Europe. I think that concern was more deeply rooted than the ideological differences. There might have been psychological and personality differences between the two as well.

Q: Yes, yes. Tito had shot down some American planes that flew over.

SONNENFELDT: Yes, that was in the Trieste area.

Q: Yes, this is not a benign period!

SONNENFELDT: No. Well, by that time the Soviets had also shot down our planes - we had lost a couple of espionage planes.

Q: Yes, yes.

SONNENFELDT: But the fundamental point was that those people who were inclined to believe that there were serious problems developing between the Soviet Union and China later in the '50s pointed to the 1949 Tito-Yugoslav example as demonstrating that such a thing could indeed happen, and wasn't just a ruse, or wasn't just something that would ultimately be resolved because they all were Marxist-Leninists.

There were, incidentally, some gestures from the post-Stalin leadership to Tito to see if they could at least normalize if not restore their relationship; and Tito was somewhat receptive, although there had been all these Titoist trials in the satellite countries, and people were executed left and right because of their alleged "Titoism." Later, it was also an issue in the case of the Viet Cong or of North Vietnam.

Q: Well really, '54-55, there was Dien Bien Phu and all. I mean this is not -

SONNENFELDT: The question is, was this all a Soviet-directed grand strategy of global expansion? There were people who said, "Well, this conflict has its own national roots in Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh, and so on; just as the Chinese revolution, while it was supported by the Soviets, had its own leaders and national roots; as Tito did in Yugoslavia; and therefore, one shouldn't rule out that beneath the veneer of Marxist-Leninist unity and the international Communist movement, there were substantial differences of perception of interests, and that there was resistance to Soviet domination of their own national parties."

Well, I came around to this view late in the '50s. I'd been skeptical of it because I thought Marxism-Leninism would be the glue that bound them together. Then, as it turned out, there was more conflict among Communists than between Communists and capitalists!

Q: Yes, yes. Well, I mean part of the thing was we were to some extent caught in our own rhetoric-

SONNENFELDT: Right.

Q: That this is a big vast conspiracy, and they're all together. I mean, it was pretty hard not to subscribe to that.

SONNENFELDT: Yes. And there's a vast amount of literature, including some official literature, that took that general view. The Congress published all sorts of hearings and studies, not only the House Un-American Affairs Committee, but other committees. It, of course, had its echoes in this country: there was a Communist party here, there were branches of the world peace movement, and various other Communist "fronts", as they were called; and there were Americans who attended the big rallies they had.

Q: Yes, and Youth groups another one.

SONNENFELDT: CIA financed a lot of people to penetrate those organizations -

Q: Yes, yes.

SONNENFELDT: The International Student Union, for example, and the World Trade Union Organization, which was communist-dominated. There was another union group that wasn't. So yes, I think the notion of a relatively monolithic communist movement, a goal-oriented operation supporting the Soviets in whatever issue came along - whether it was atomic weapons, the world peace movement, the marches and the rallies that were all over the place - that all suggested a movement that was centrally directed, and maybe centrally-financed as well. But I think the proposition that, underneath all of that there was, in fact, a propensity for division, was valid. In my case, I think I got there certainly by 1960, but it was slow.

Q: Well now, you were with INR. Well, I mean you were in the Research Area. We're really talking about the early Dulles period. What happened? Did you continue in there?

SONNENFELDT: I continued there until 1960. I had become rather specialized in Soviet disarmament policy, or it was called "disarmament" in those days. You know, we had these constant meetings through the UN, and I actually participated as a Soviet expert in a delegation led by Harold Stassen at meetings in London with the British, French, Canadians, and Soviets. They met for several years in a row in the mid-'50s. In 1955, before a four-power summit, the Soviets published a grand scheme for staged disarmament. But these were all negotiations about words, not about the details of actually doing things. In the 1960 presidential election campaign-

Q: This is Kennedy versus Nixon now.

SONNENFELDT: Right, at the end of the Eisenhower administration. There was quite a bit of criticism around the country that we weren't doing enough for peace, that we had millions of people in the military and elsewhere, and that everything that we did was focused on war, but not enough on peace, not enough on curbing the nuclear arms race. There was the "Pugwash movement" [named for the site of a pro-disarmament conference in Pugwash, Nova Scotia] and so on. A lot of Americans were restless. So Eisenhower decided to do Nixon a favor, give Nixon a little help. By Executive Order, he created the U.S. Disarmament Agency [later called the Arms Control and Disarmament Administration, ACDA] in October of 1960, shortly before the election to show that-

Q: It's a little late in the campaign [laughter].

SONNENFELDT: -that he was serious about curbing the arms race, and his administration was serious, and the U.S. was serious. Over some resistance on my part, I was shifted from INR to that smallish agency, which had maybe 40 or 50 people when it was set up, initially under Edmund Gullion, a senior Foreign Service Officer.

Q: Before we leave INR, during the Eisenhower time, I think of that wonderful gentleman, Scott McLeod and all in the Security office. Did you feel any problem, I mean you or any of your colleagues, with the Dulles time? I mean, was this a -

SONNENFELDT: Well, I told you that I?began to get some reverberations of security problems by the State Department security people.

Q: This was during the Truman time, wasn't it?

SONNENFELDT: No, I just got to State in the last month of the Truman administration. I mean, my first reverberations of possible security issues were maybe in the mid-to-late 1950s. I was told that maybe it had to do with my knowing some journalists and going out to lunch with them occasionally. So there was a file being kept on me. Then I heard that they were also tapping my phone, office phone, or home phone, which I assumed they would do anyway to people like me who held high clearances - so it didn't particularly disturb me.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: Except for what seeped through in the gossip, I don't think I had any special problems. However, as I told you, there was the "Wristonization" personnel program in the State Department-

Q: Yes, in the mid-'50s.

SONNENFELDT: And I remained a civil servant, rather than integrate into the Foreign Service. There was some effort to get rid of these "indigestibles," as Under Secretary Loy Henderson called them, or at least induce them to go elsewhere. It occurred to me in retrospect that, in my case, they didn't say "leave", but the promotions didn't come very fast, if at all, in the mid-'50s. I think I was stuck at GS-9 or maybe GS-11 for several years. This security question must have played a role in that. I don't think it was Scott McLeod (the Director of the Security office); I think it was a fellow named Otepka, who was in the State Department, who was the linchpin of these allegations against me.

The Director of INR, Hugh Cumming, was always very polite and friendly to me; but I understood that he had some problems about my being around, partly because of my Civil Service status, and partly because there was some unresolved security issue. It may have been my acquaintance with journalists. But what happened, in fact, I discovered early in the Kennedy administration, when I was excluded from a meeting in the Pentagon in 1961. It was explained to me that there was a security clearance issue, and I heard more stories like that. Finally, after Roger Hilsman became the Director of INR in the Kennedy administration, I said, "Look, I want this cleared up, whatever it is."

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: I finally managed to get an appointment with Otepka, and I learned that somebody had denounced me as an Israeli spy and had alleged that I had given our plans for the U.S. Marine landings in Lebanon in 1958 to the Israelis, at a cocktail party at the home of an Israeli Embassy officer. Nothing had ever been said to me about this until I forced the issue, three years later!

In his interrogation, Otepka showed me a bunch of documents that related to that allegation and asked, "Did you ever, have you ever seen this, have you ever had this in your possession?"

And, of course, I hadn't. I had nothing to do with Lebanon. I had nothing to do with war plans. I had nothing to do with the Israeli Embassy! But there was this guy who had concocted this, and he apparently had denounced some other people in regard to other things. His denunciation was on file in the Security office.

Eventually, I was given a polygraph [lie-detector] test, which I passed with flying colors. Otepka then took the position that, well, that's fine; polygraphs, of course, make mistakes. But he did put some document in my file stating that I had passed this test, subject to the usual limitations of this instrument. Eventually - because some of these security clearances that I had held had not exactly been withdrawn, but they may have been suspended - the Defense Department named a panel of three people to review my case. I remember that Paul Nitze was one of them, Adam Yarmolinsky was another, and the third one I can't remember. But they went over my case and cleared me! That was in 1961.

Q: Whew!

SONNENFELDT: That was it! Even then, there were still occasions when my phones were tapped, because that was a routine thing - a telephone tap was an investigative device just for upgrading security clearances. The laws were changed later, in the Nixon administration.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: I can't remember now what happened to Otepka, but I think he may still be there.

Q: Well, he was put into ? exile. He was sitting at a desk with no phone in an office, and left to languish there ?..

SONNENFELDT: Something like that, yes. Anyway, going back to my work, and my appointment to the U.S. Disarmament Agency, which John McCloy headed when Kennedy became president. I became quite friendly with McCloy, and I went to Moscow with him in 1961. His instructions were to try to get some movement on arms control, and also to talk to Khrushchev about the still-extant Soviet demand to turn West Berlin into a "Free City". We actually agreed to reconstitute a disarmament forum in the UN, which the Soviets had boycotted for months.

Another of McCloy's tasks was to create a permanent agency to replace the organization that had been established late in 1960 by President Eisenhower's Executive Order. I decided to leave the agency when the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency was established by Congress. I asked to go back to INR; and I did that in late 1961, which is when the security questions that I've just described surfaced.

I went back to INR and had a very nice career in INR after that. I became Division Chief for Soviet foreign policy; then Deputy Office Director, and Office Director in maybe 1963-64. I was very much involved in the Cuban missile crisis.

Q: We really haven't covered the short time you were with the arms control thing in 1959 or so or?

SONNENFELDT: Well, that was 1960-61.

Q: So we'll talk about that. One other question I'd like to ask, because you've mentioned a number of times about the Wriston program in INR and the feeling that you were sort of the odd man out, that you weren't Foreign Service? If we would talk a little about the feeling in INR, that maybe it would be a good idea to have people who had some depth of experience in there, rather than Foreign Service officers who may come from the field - but they don't have the history.

SONNENFELDT: Right. There were others in INR who were in the same boat as I, and there was some recognition that a permanent, or at least long-term group was an asset, in addition to the Foreign Service officers on short assignments.

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Q: Today is December 15, 2000. You want to talk a little bit about INR and the staffing during this '59ish period or so, with the division between Civil Service and Foreign Service, your impressions at that time?

SONNENFELDT: Well, I came there in December 1952 to the Soviet and East European Research Division. I can't recall exactly, thinking back 50 years, but I think virtually everybody was a civil servant. They did have a program, at least in our Division, of rotating some people to the embassy in Moscow to do work similar to what they did in Washington, but closer to the action and with less delay in getting the newspapers, provincial newspapers, and journals, which we got by mail or slow pouch. And they would be there in the climate, in the context, and so on. They, of course, developed friendships in the process with the Foreign Service people. Maybe some of the other divisions had somewhat similar arrangements. I think the bulk of the people in the R Area were civil servants. Some of them had been inherited from the OSS' Research and Analysis staff, and others had gone over to CIA when it was established.

When the Eisenhower administration came in, with Dulles and his team, I think there was some feeling - I think Under Secretary Loy Henderson, who of course was a career Foreign Service Officer, had a strong feeling - that there ought to be essentially a single personnel system in the State Department, and that people who worked there, with the exception maybe of the Legal Advisor's Office and some other places such as the library, should be within the Foreign Service system.

The Wriston Commission (named for its chairman, Dr. Henry Wriston, the President of Brown University) made its report in 1954. It recommended that the two services, Civil Service and Foreign Service, should be integrated. The idea generally was to offer opportunities for integration into the Foreign Service to people in Civil Service status, not only in INR but elsewhere in the Department. I think this might have involved some slight loss in grade and pay level, but essentially they would be in the same career level. Then with some additional training, it would be called "lateral entry", and with overseas service, as was the vogue and the pattern in the Foreign Service. There was a lot of push to get moving on this process in order to get this consolidation. While they understood that this might be difficult for some individuals, or that they might may not be qualified, for whatever reason - health, or maybe other standards that had to be met for Foreign Service Officer positions - the Department leadership felt that the overall pattern ought to be moving toward a single personnel system. Well, many people chose integration, including some from the Division that I was in, including some of the senior people, one or two who had served in Moscow.

But there were some who didn't integrate, and I didn't join the Foreign Service then for essentially personal reasons. I had been away from my parents, my family, for six years after the family was divided in the late 1930s, and I was at school in England. I finally rejoined them in 1944, and almost immediately I went into the Army for two years in the Pacific theater and then back to Europe. I just felt that I shouldn't to be in a position where I was going to go abroad for lengthy periods of time again. In addition, my wife was professionally active as well as politically active, and I felt that she should be able to pursue her career. Those essentially were the reasons why I chose to remain in the Civil Service.

Q: Did you feel that there was a discrimination [against those who chose to remain civil servants]?

SONNENFELDT: Well, it was made clear that it would be best for people making that choice to get out of the State Department and find other employment. I mean the pressures were not overt, but you could sense that that was the preference, and it came from on high. I think Under Secretary Henderson was the main source of it. I think the Director of INR (I don't recall whether it was still called the R Area) was himself a senior career Foreign Service Officer, and he had a lot of sympathy with the idea of having an integrated system. In INR this also meant that Foreign Service specialists, expertand sometimes maybe not even very expert - would take positions in INR just as a matter of regular rotation and assignment. There was a long-time Deputy Director, Allan Evans, who was getting on in age-

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: ?and I don't think he chose lateral entry, but several of the Division chiefs did. So yes, it was suggested that those who didn't choose to join the Foreign Service - I think they were called "indigestible" - that I was among those, and I should consider maybe finding some work elsewhere. But the pressure didn't bother me. I'd been subjected to all sorts of pressures in my young life-

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: -before that time, so I was fairly sturdy in that regard. But then these various security allegations came up, that I mentioned in our conversations before.

Q: Yes, you did.

SONNENFELDT: It wasn't clear to me whether that was part of the pressure-

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: -or what exactly was going on. I didn't know what was going to happen on that, because whatever I knew about the security allegations, they were phony. You know, there was somebody who had a grievance of some sort, or was a professional denouncer, who was evidently behind this. So the combination of the "Wristonization" business - this purification, as it were, of the State Department personnel system - and these periodic indications that there were some security concerns about my activities and conduct made it a not terribly pleasant place to be.

Nevertheless, I decided to stay, although I toyed with the idea of looking at other jobs. For the next few years, it also meant that the promotions weren't coming, that they sort of dragged their feet. I'd had one promotion after coming in as a GS-7 in 1952. I think the starting wage was $4,200, and I had risen to the rank of a GS-9, which paid about $5,000. So it wasn't all that easy, for example, as far as having children.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: I got married in 1953, and we wanted to start a family. My morale wasn't the greatest, and somewhere in my files there are some draft letters of resignation, and I looked around. But anyway, it ended up that I stuck it out. Somewhere along the line, the heat was taken off, although not completely, on this lateral entry business; and I got another promotion. And I kept plugging away at my research activities in the field of Soviet affairs and particularly, Soviet foreign policy, and had acquired a certain amount of status and reputation as doing well.

In the meantime, above me and alongside me, people were starting to move into the Foreign Service and get foreign assignments. By that time, I had been there three, four, five years, and a lot of crises were going on with the Soviet Union, and various other activities. The institutional memory I had accumulated was helpful in turning out assessments in the Research Area and in dealing with other parts of the intelligence community, mostly CIA for National Intelligence Estimates and some other joint products. But there was a lot of personnel movement. Eventually it settled down, and I didn't regret having made the choice to stay as a civil servant.

We had two children by the late '50s [and a third in 1963]. In addition to the children, my wife was active in her professional work. I got involved more and more in interesting undertakings on the policy side, because they wanted judgment and advice on what the Soviets were up to, or what I thought the Soviets were up to - nobody knew for sure! I got involved in some interesting international conferences, serving on the American delegations as a specialist or expert on Soviet intentions. I eventually became a Branch Chief.

The longer-term question regarding INR remains to this day: that is, just exactly how it fits into the State Department. How significant is its output, which may become an input into the policy making-process, even though there are now lots of Foreign Service people now who have plenty of informal contacts-

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: -in the policy bureaus of the State Department. I confess I haven't kept up with it in detail. But I know, from friends who have been Directors or Assistant Secretaries in INR, that a great deal depends on the Secretary of State - how much he or she really wants this kind of input, especially if it doesn't exactly fit with his or her preconceptions; or if sometimes the judgments that come out of INR don't necessarily support a particular line of policy, and suggest some of the negatives that might result from a particular line of policy. Just as we speak, we've had a resignation of the Assistant Secretary of INR, although maybe for other reasons-

Q: Stapleton Roy, yes.

SONNENFELDT: Yes, which I think, in part at least, reflects this ambiguity (I don't know the precise reasons; he was going to retire anyway). There have been other Directors or Assistant Secretaries that had close relationships on the policy side. I think, also, over the years, this rather thick wall between research and policy - that is, the effort to keep research objective, policy- oriented but not policy-directed - was hard to maintain. The idea was that the analysts in INR and CIA and other places are supposed to call the shots as they see them, whether this helps an advocacy for a particular policy or doesn't. Sometimes this causes irritation among policy- makers. INR, after all, was part of the State Department; the researchers were supposed to be loyal supporters of policy, once it was decided. Well, they weren't, in the sense of automatically accepting all the premises and assumptions. In my time in INR, there were many differences with Vietnam policy, or at least with assumptions about Hanoi's goals, capabilities and endurance. But most of it was kept out of the media.

Q: Yes. Well, of course, in objective terms, that should be the role they would play.

SONNENFELDT: Right. So, you know, it wasn't always possible, and because, in effect, once you got more Foreign Service people in INR who were policy people, and tried to make them into sort of virgin analysts who had no policy preferences?[it was more difficult to maintain the wall of separation between research and policy].

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: That's not easy, you know; it's not easy to do! So this kind of ambivalence, I think has persisted. I don't know that it's a great liability, but INR always struggles for its budget. It does some other things in helping the State Department coordinate with other agencies in intelligence matters, and it processes sensitive intelligence, and briefs the senior people in the Department, and so on; so it has some other functions. The analytical and judgmental aspects of its work, the estimative assessment aspects of its work, maintain, as best as I can tell, a high quality; but it's not always clear just how much impact it has on the policy process, which ultimately is the purpose-

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: While you are not making policy, you are supposed to help policy-makers be as informed as possible and to have as many judgments available as possible so that they can then reach their conclusions as to what ought to be policy.

Q: Well, also, it serves in a way as a filter or a synthesizer from the output of the CIA -

SONNENFELDT: Yes.

Q: Which tends to maybe put undue weight on clandestine material or

SONNENFELDT: That's right. I mean, the CIA has had their own problems as to whether they ought to be objective judges, or mainly provide an input to the main operational business of that agency, which is clandestine operations. It's a complicated issue. In any event, I think that's about the best I can do on "Wristonization," which is now close to 50 years behind us.

I still think the intelligence analysts should have an input to policy-makers and, as long as they keep it quiet, ought not to be penalized. Incidentally, when I headed the Soviet office, I used to tell my staff not to become predictable but to exercise their judgment on a case-by-case basis. Predictability, I said, was a prescription for becoming irrelevant.

Q: Okay. All right. Well, then you were in arms control for a relatively short time.

SONNENFELDT: Yes, well, now let me go on to that because it's not unrelated to what we've been talking about.

Q: Yes, yes.

SONNENFELDT: Part of my functions or responsibilities in my job in INR was to keep close tabs on Soviet disarmament policy, and to watch carefully what they said and what they wrote, and also their behavior, mostly from a distance, in various of the UN disarmament forums when there were negotiations going on. They still were negotiations mostly about words because in those days there wasn't much real concrete arms control in treaties. There were a couple of negotiations that I was involved in on the analytical side in the mid-'50s, and they were actually concrete.

One was the establishment of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Vienna, which was given international supervision over what was called peaceful cooperation in the sphere of atomic energy. The Soviets were very much involved in that. The idea was to prevent the diversion of materials and technologies from the so-called peaceful side to the military side. There were all kinds of safeguards built into the IAEA charter. The Soviets were quite interested; in fact, they helped initiate what became Article 11 in the charter. This was something I tracked closely. U.S. and Soviet interests mostly overlapped.

Also in the mid-1950s, there was a treaty demilitarizing Antarctica, which was not trivial because it-

Q: No, and it worked!

SONNENFELDT: And it worked, and it has worked and continued to work. It was actually quite path-breaking in many ways. So there were some things that don't have much place in the history of disarmament because they didn't deal with missiles and aircraft and numbers of atomic weapons.

Q: No, but it shows there were areas of agreement.

SONNENFELDT: There were some areas of agreement. And the IAEA remains a major mechanism for preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons, although not always effective.

The rest of the efforts, however, had to do mostly with verbiage and posturing in order to gain international political advantage. The Soviets had the peace movement which they manipulated, and for that purpose they felt it necessary to make these grandiose disarmament proposals every year at the UN. Everybody pored over the texts to see if there was some little change there that maybe opened things up. But we were not really negotiating what later did become arms control arrangements - that is, very concrete measures that would actually be implemented. But anyway, for my sins, I became an expert on these matters as far as Soviet positions and writings and activities were concerned; and also because of that, I kept up with what the U.S. was doing in this field.

Actually, in the Kennedy administration there was the agreement after the Cuban missile crisis on the Limited Test Ban Treaty. The Nuclear Test Ban Treaty talks had a precursor in 1958 of a technical conference of scientists to look at what an inspection and control system would look like in the event there was a test ban. It was scientific, but on the political side it gave a bit of a push to what had been mostly propagandistic negotiations in the early and mid-'50s on a nuclear weapons test ban. Then in the Kennedy administration, the test ban got a major push in 1963.

There was concern about surprise attack in both the U.S. and the USSR. The U.S. still very much carried the Pearl Harbor attack in its mind. The Soviets had historic fears of attack, reinforced by their ideology. After 1957, as the Soviets got more and more strategic weapons (aircraft as well as missiles), there was growing concern in this country as to our vulnerabilities, and the doctrine of deterrence was developed.

In late 1958, I attended a conference in Geneva involving the U.S., the Soviets, the British, French, Italians and Canadians, on the prevention of the dangers of surprise attack. It brought together not only officials involved in these traditional and rather abortive grandiose disarmament negotiations, but strategists and people who were seriously worried about surprise attack. Some came from the RAND Corporation and various other think-tanks. I learned a lot at that conference about those aspects of what came to be called strategic stability and deterrence doctrine. Eventually, there also were more and more direct but semi-official contacts between the U.S. and the Sovietamong academics, think-tank people, and academies of science. This was started up in the late '50s.

Well, in the presidential campaign of 1960 -

Q: This is Nixon versus Kennedy.

SONNENFELDT: Yes, Nixon versus Kennedy. Kennedy and other Democrats made a big issue of the fact that we weren't doing enough to try to stop the arms race and prevent some disaster just through the sheer accumulation of more and more weapons. They said the Eisenhower administration had really not done very well in this, and there should have been more creativitalthough, as I pointed out, there were, in fact but very quietly, some non-trivial contacts with the Soviets.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: At some point, President Eisenhower decided that to meet some of this criticism and, I guess, to help Nixon meet it, there ought to be a separate organization in the government to deal with disarmament. So by Executive Order in October of 1960, pretty close to election time, he established the U.S. Disarmament Administration. It would have required legislation, which couldn't be passed at that time, to establish it as a separate agency, so it was established within the State Department, but as a sort of autonomous agency.

Q: The feeling at the time was that the politics were such that if you tried to put it through Congress, you couldn't

SONNENFELDT: Right, you couldn't, and it wouldn't even have been wise, in my view.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: But anyway, they were scrounging around the government to find some people that they could put into this new Disarmament Administration, because they wanted it to start up and be visible, maybe even before election day; but even beyond that, disarmament policy-making was diffused around the government -

Q: Eisenhower in his farewell address had shown that he was concerned about the military establishment.

SONNENFELDT: Well, he had been for a long time, and he chose his farewell address to warn about the growing influence of the "military-industrial complex." But anyway, there were people scattered around different agencies that staffed these various conferences that I've referred to, and did some policy-making for instructions to American negotiators or participants in the conferences. There were some in the State Department, some in the Defense Department and some people in the CIA who did much the same sort of work that we had been doing in INR, which was tracking Soviet policy, but also working with people that followed very closely Soviet military developments, which obviously were a major ingredient of all of this. This also involved the Russians' shooting-down of the U-2 (Utility-2, jet powered reconnaissance plane), which also happened in 1960-

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: It led to a rather hairy period in American-Soviet relations, when U-2 pilot Francis GarPowers was shot down over the USSR and was tried by the Soviets, who also captured much of the U-2's special equipment.

Q: Which caused the Paris summit meeting between Khrushchev and Eisenhower [to be aborted]-

SONNENFELDT: Right. Precisely. Anyway, I was told that I would be assigned to the U.S. Disarmament Administration. I didn't particularly care for this because I didn't think disarmament was headed anywhere very much, other than a lot of words being ground out in different communiquï¿½s and statements. Essentially I was told, "This is your assignment, and you'd better go!" In fact, the old security business cropped up again. I don't know whether Hugh Cumming, the Director of INR, was still in place, but whoever it was, in effect said, "Well, you've been told, 'This is where you're going,' and if you don't go there, maybe you're not going anywhere." Perhaps it wasn't that blunt.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: It turned out that the SY (State Department's Office of Security) people, who were periodically listening to my telephone calls, heard one in which I was complaining to a friend of mine that I was being assigned over there even though I didn't really think very much of the prospects of disarmament; and I wasn't sure whether this was a way of getting rid of me once again in INR, or whether they really wanted someone that?anyway, so I ended up over there. Ed Gullion, a prominent career guy, was the temporary head of it at that time.

Q: He went rather quickly to Africa, didn't he?

SONNENFELDT: Well, later he became the first U.S. Ambassador to the Congo. He had been somewhat involved in disarmament negotiations, but also in Vietnam, and he had had a varied career, and was well-connected. We got started trying to do something about U.S. disarmament policy. Then the election came, and Kennedy was elected. Gullion knew Kennedy socially, as he knew just about everybody else in town.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: He was told to keep the effort going because the Kennedy people had raised this whole issue in the first place - that there were thousands, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands, [of] people working on war and only fewer than a hundred on peace; and so this was the U.S. Disarmament Administration. Kennedy was quite interested in it right from the start. The idea developed in the transition period before Kennedy's inauguration that relations with the Soviets were bad because of the U-2 and some other things, and that we really needed to find a way to get a new disarmament forum going again with the Soviets, to pick up some of the threads that had been tattered in the previous year. John McCloy was brought in to head thDisarmament Administration after the inauguration in 1961, and I guess Gullion stayed with him for awhile and then eventually left.

Q: Yes. John McCloy was one of the sort of the grand men of the -

SONNENFELDT: "Grand old men of the establishment." He was the head of "the establishment," in some people's views. He'd been the U.S. High Commissioner in postwar Germany, and had lots of experience in World War II in the War Department. He was prominent and prestigious, and even though he was a Republican, he was nonpartisan in his government service. His task was not only to see if something could get re-started with the Soviets in terms of disarmament talks, but also to establish a permanent Arms Control Agency. So he rather enjoyed that.

The first thing that happened after the Kennedy inauguration was that McCloy was told to go to Moscow with a team and meet with the Soviets to see if we could create some new forum (the old UN forums had broken down), and also work out a general basis for such a forum - that is, not exactly a charter, but a sort of substantive basis for what this new forum, which would still be under the UN, would be doing, with an agenda for them to negotiate. So he took me along in the group (he knew me somewhat from some other contacts).

Needless to say, for me, going to Moscow for the first time in 1961, after having worked on the Soviet Union for almost 10 years, was a great fascination. McCloy also took along some people that he had brought in, and some other experienced people from the government, among them Adrian "Butch" Fisher, who had been the State Department Legal Advisor in the Truman administration. It was quite a potent delegation.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: There were also a couple of newcomers, young people who came into the Kennedy administration at fairly high levels, who thought they were going to save the world, but didn't quite fit into the work-

Q: As with every new administration, yes.

SONNENFELDT: Yes. But a couple of them didn't quite fit into the daily grind, and I think they were politely asked to go back home and assume their new positions at home. So the delegation took a little while to get trimmed down to the right size. We had these very intensive talks with the Soviets about a general statement on the goals of disarmament. It involved a lot of haggling because the Soviets had a long history of advocating general and complete disarmament of everything, but they were very short on how you would inspect and control it.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: So it went on and on and on. Also, of course, since the late '50s, we in fact had been in a Berlin crisis because Khrushchev had proposed establishing West Berlin as a free city.

Q: Yes, oh, yes. It was a very serious one.

SONNENFELDT: It became more and more serious because prestige was involved in the Soviet case; and of course, there was complete resistance to this in West Berlin and Germany. With the Kennedy inauguration, the Soviets didn't let up, and Kennedy felt tested early on in his administration. There was a general theory that that's what Soviets do with new presidents anyway, to see what kind of a person they had to deal with. So John McCloy, with his German experience, was also instructed after we got there, by Kennedy personally and, I guess, by Secretary of State Dean Rusk, to go talk to Khrushchev about the Berlin business, and to warn him that if there was going to be any pressure or any unilateral action, that would be very serious. Actually, while we were there, Kennedy issued an order to mobilize 150,000 troops.

Q: Oh yes. Yes, I remember - It was?the public feeling was involved. This was a serious time!

SONNENFELDT: Yes. I wasn't so much involved in the Berlin thing, but McCloy eventually ended up having a meeting with Khrushchev in the Crimea, where Khrushchev was vacationing. We were there in the wintertime. So this was a good experience for me, to have hands-on contacts with Soviet officials.

Q: What was your feeling of sort of coming face to face with the Soviets on their own home ground?

SONNENFELDT: Well, you know, I'd seen a little bit of this at the Surprise Attack conference in Geneva; and, also, back in the Eisenhower administration, I'd gone with Harold Stassen for two years in a row to London, where this UN disarmament committee was meeting. A senior diplomat named Valerian Zorin headed the Soviet delegation. (He became famous in the Cuban missile crisis, when he was the Soviet UN representative.) I met a lot of younger Russians, Soviets, who were on that team, who later became very senior people in the Foreign Ministry. So it was interesting to me to see some real Soviets in the flesh. I had met some when I was stationed in Germany in the Army as a CIC (Counter Intelligence Corps) agent right on the border with the Soviet zone, and we had some liaison with the Soviets. But this was for me extremely helpful to see these people in the flesh, and to listen to them and get acquainted with them and see something about their style and mentality, because I really hadn't been exposed a whole lot to that.

Well, the long and short of that is that eventually we came up with an idea of what a new forum would look like. It would be enlarged to have more members from the Third World. The Soviets didn't just want to confront four Western powers, as they had been doing in the five-power Disarmament Committee.

That was related to another thing that created a crisis in 1960. Khrushchev wanted to have three Secretaries-General of the UN in order to prevent the West constantly putting a new guy in there and dominating the UN.

Q: The Troika.

SONNENFELDT: Right. He blocked the UN for a long time; and there was a Congo crisis in the 1960s, which got the Soviets and us pitted against each other. It was kind of a tough period. But anyway, we reached a compromise on what a disarmament forum might look like. This had to be approved by the UN General Assembly (UNGA) in due course. And we also eventually agreed on a big, long document on general and complete disarmament, which we haggled out word for word and sentence for sentence. Arthur Dean got involved in this because McCloy was concentrating more and more on getting this new agency established, which eventually happeneit became the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency.

That's another thing. There were people on the Hill who thought the whole disarmament business was kooky and might lead to unilateral disarmament, and what we really needed was to control arms rather than to talk about general and complete disarmament. So the compromise name for this agency was the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA).

Q: Oh!

SONNENFELDT: I had by that time become one of two or three policy officers in what was still called USDA (Disarmament Administration). I left behind my pure analytical and research role and mentality. It was interesting to devise policy approaches and how to implement them.

Q: Did you feel, I mean, looking at it, sort of putting on your personal INR hat, were we headed towards anything? I mean the United States. Was this a holding operation, or was there a feeling that, you know, maybe this will get somewhere?

SONNENFELDT: Well, I don't know. I didn't have a feeling like that. There were some very devoted disarmament people who had been at it since the Baruch Plan [1946 plan presented to President Truman]. There was a fellow named Bob Matteson who was very close to Harold Stassen. Stassen, of course, was also rather committed to the prospects of disarmament. He got in a big fight with Secretary of State Dulles because Stassen just lurched ahead of government positions and caused a big uproar in Europe in 1958, the spring of '58. I thought this arms control effort was going to be a very long haul in terms of really getting something concrete that meant anything, and it all was happening in the context of pretty multifaceted strains in U.S.-Soviet relations.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: Kennedy had had a two-day summit meeting with Khrushchev in June of 1960, and it went badly.

Q: In Vienna, and it went very badly.

SONNENFELDT: Of course, Khrushchev tried to bully him, or fool him.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: Certainly on Berlin. We were also beginning to have problems, serious problems over Laos, involving also the Chinese. We hadn't really quite caught on yet to the fact that the Sino-Soviet relationship wasn't what it looked to be at the superficial level. It was not a time to have much hope that things would move on agreed disarmament. On the contrary, they all seemed to be moving in the opposite direction. But they did have some general talk on the subject.

There are many other things that happened in this time period that I think, in retrospect, were seminal in leading to the eventual collapse of the Soviet Union. These are afterthoughts of mine, reflections that I put together recently. Somebody wanted me to reflect on that time in government, in the context of my getting an award from my university as an alumnus.

The sixties were an interesting and fascinating period, but also quite ambiguous. There was this business of talking to the Soviets about disarmament; and the U.S. was on the verge of installing a significant bureaucratic institution for just this subject for a time when things might look less troubling and less dangerous.

But Kennedy had campaigned against Nixon and Eisenhower in 1960 on the basis that there was a so-called "bomber gap" and a "missile gap". He called for the country to get moving again, not only in the domestic area and in terms of its prestige around the world, but also in not letting the Soviets get ahead of us. They had launched Sputnik [the first satellite sent into space], and had tested some intercontinental ballistic missiles. The USSR had also broken a nuclear test moratorium, and they were testing nuclear weapons again. So while McCloy and others were supposed to get moving on the arms control side, there were a lot of belligerence and dangers at the same time. The Kennedy people found out after they got into the government that there really wasn't a gap, and if there was any gap at all, it was in our favor. Khrushchev had been bluffing.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: Later in 1961, the Deputy Secretary of Defense, Mr. Roswell Gilpatrick, was sent out to make a speech to tell the American people, and everybody else who wanted to listen, including the Soviets, that the fact was that we were better off than had been thought, and that we were really moving ahead of the Soviets, both in numbers and in quality of missiles. I think this is one of the reasons that eventually led Khrushchev to deploy some missiles in Cuba that could reach much of the U.S. The truth was that the Soviets did not have the resources to race us in intercontinental missiles, though eventually they did that, at great cost.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: So, there was a lot going on. But, back to ACDA: eventually a draft statute was put together and sent up to the Hill, which made some amendments and added the phrase, "Arms Control." Congress also wanted to create an advisory committee for this Arms Control Agency to make sure that it wouldn't just be staffed by a bunch of strange people-

Q: Peaceniks [laughter].

SONNENFELDT: Peaceniks?I don't know if the word was yet invented-

Q: No.

SONNENFELDT: ?but anyway, there were people who were obsessed with guilt because of Hiroshima, and so on. Congress wanted to have a rather tough man, not exactly as a supervisor, but a monitor of what the agency was doing. That was all put into this statute. I think by October 1961 or so, the Arms Control Agency was established by Congress.

Mr. William Foster, a very prominent, respected Republican and a former industrialist who'd been in the Defense Department, was the first head of the Agency. His appointment was a way for Kennedy to tell the more skeptical Republicans that he had two tough guys in this arms control business. John McCloy was made the head of this advisory group, the General Advisory Committee.

In the meantime, a friend of mine, Roger Hilsman, had become head of INR. He approached me and asked me whether I didn't want to come back to INR. I figured that that's where I really still belonged. I had enjoyed the experience of being in a more policy-oriented job, and also being more exposed to high-level Soviets. I think in October or November of 1961, I went back to INR, with a promotion and a rather friendly and sympathetic Director and a Deputy Director, Thomas Hughes, who later became Director when Hilsman became Assistant Secretary for Asian affairs.

They were all people that I knew. They also finally forced a resolution of the security allegations that were still there somewhere in the files, and that re-appeared occasionally. They arranged for me, finally, to be interviewed and confronted with what I was being charged with by Otto Otepka and the Security Bureau. The SY people gave me that lie detector test, and the upshot of it was that eventually I was cleared. I mean, you never get permanently cleared, and I guess some of that stuff still remained in my files. In those days, you didn't have legislation that enabled you to look at your own files and insist on their being purged of [false information]. [end of tape]

My work in INR, as it had in ACDA or USDA, involved military issues and military clearances. There was a panel in the Defense Department which included Assistant Secretary Paul Nitze (who knew me personally); and Adam Yarmolinsky, who was close to Defense Secretary Bob McNamara; and a third person. They went though all the security allegations against me and, in effect, said there was no substance that they could find. So I had all the clearances, and that really put me on a path in INR to move up. I became a Division Chief. By that time, INR had been reorganized, and what used to be a Division became an Office, and what used to be an Area became a Bureau, and so on. So 1961 really began a period in which I was able to build on my experiences, and I had a good career in INR through the rest of the decade.

Q: We'll go to this, but one question, so I don't forget it. You went to the Soviet Union for the first time; and one of the things that's always struck me is that everybody, almost everybody, who went to the Soviet Union saw the Soviet Union, and the [system, the whole] thing didn't work. But we tended to build it up. I mean there was obviously the military side. What was your, sort of, what were you coming back with?

SONNENFELDT: In 1961, the McCloy delegation had our own airplane, and we were greeted, treated as VIPs, and had motorcycle cops and limousines and all that stuff. I can't remember now whether most of us stayed in a Russian hotel or whether we were housed at the American Embassy apartments. I know McCloy stayed at Spaso House [the American Embassy residence] with the Ambassador, Tommy Thompson. Anyway, the city looked pretty dilapidated coming in from the airport. I forget the details now because I was subsequently in Moscow so many times with visiting American delegations and VIP treatment, and we were put up in "dachas" (guest houses) in the Lenin Hills.

Moscow looked pretty run-down; but it was also clear that VIPs, including, of course, most of the Soviet leaders, didn't have to put up with a lot of this inconvenience. They were driven down the center of the roads; there weren't all that many cars, but mostly trucks there. I must have stayed on my first visit at the Ukraina Hotel, where the water didn't flush, and where there was just a tiny little bit of soap, and the towels were ragged, and so on. We're talking about 40 years ago now, roughly. The U.S. was also in a different phase of development then, and we saw some fairly primitive things in this country, but there was just no comparison, just in terms of the general things one saw there: the fact that lots of people were on bicycles, and the long lines at shops. But it was also clear that there were class distinctions, that there were places, like the National Hotel, where the ordinary people weren't allowed and where there were some better-dressed and groomed people. The boom in hotel construction happened later. I think the fact that there was a distinction between a small, elite group of people and the vast bulk of the rest of the population in a place like Moscow bore in on you very quickly, and the generally dilapidated conditions.

I don't know that that changed my view as to the nature of what might constitute the threat from the Soviet Union, because I had been reading much material which indicated that they were putting all their best resources into military power, and that the consumer and the average people were several levels below that, in terms of attention by this workers' and peasants' state that they talked about. Of course, there was some beginning recognition in the Khrushchev period that things needed to be tended to in the Soviet Union - well, he was bluffing mostly on the military side, because I think they had really come to recognize that, despite all the hoopla and their great, much-publicized activities in space, they were falling behind, and they had to do something about that somehow. But all of that emerged more clearly after the Cuban missile crisis, when things improved a bit in relations with the U.S. for a little while.

Q: You're back in INR. When did you come back in INR?

SONNENFELDT: I think it was October or November o'61. As soon as ACDA went into business I went back there?I'll just mention one thing if you've got a moment-

Q: Sure.

SONNENFELDT: One thing I did do: a teaching job became vacant at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies-

Q: SAIS.

SONNENFELDT: SAIS, where I'd been a student, and where I'd met Mose Harvey, my eventual boss in the State Department, who taught a course on Soviet foreign policy. Then, when Mose was "Wristonized" and sent abroad, his Deputy, Boris Klosson, took over teaching that course. Then Boris was "Wristonized" and sent abroad; and I was approached by the Dean to see if I would like to teach the course at SAIS on Soviet foreign policy. I started doing that in 1957, in the evenings once a week. The State Department had no objection to this at all. It does now and had subsequently, but at that time, they said, "No problem - just don't use classified information."

I agreed. We all used the FBIS (Foreign Broadcast Information Service) unclassified books of translated Soviet and East European media. I had this teaching position for what turned out to be 13 years, until I went to the White House and just couldn't manage it all. That helped me enormously in terms of keeping up with the academic literature. It was great for me to see young people, some of whom later came into the government, including the State Department, and I really enjoyed that. Actually, I think it helped my work in the government because I was just forced, even though I read a whole lot of stuff, to broaden my vision and connections in the field a bit to people who were real scholars, which I had no pretense of being. I frequently asked the students to write two-page memos on an issue or event in the news. One of my motives was to teach students likely to join the State Department some day how to write crisp reports.

Q: Excellent. All right. Well, we'll pick this up next time?1961, and you're back in INR.

SONNENFELDT: Yes.

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Q: Today is January 13, 2001. 1961 - you're in INR again.

SONNENFELDT: I am in INR again. I'd been in ACDA (the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency) with McCloy; and then, when the statute that set up the U.S. Disarmament Administration was passed, I went back to INR when Roger Hilsman, the new INR Director, asked me to come back. I returned to the same Soviet-East European Office that I had been in. I can't remember now whether I went back as a Branch Chief or as a Division Chief, but anyway dealing with Soviet foreign policy and also with Eastern Europe. It must have been some time after the summer.

Q: Yes, right. You were doing it from '61 to about when?

SONNENFELDT: I stayed there until I went to the White House, the National Security Council staff, on January 21, 1969, although actually I started working in the transition for several weeks before that.

Q: Okay. Let's talk about '61. First place, let's talk sort of internally. Did you sense a different mood, use of INR? I mean Roger Hilsman came and was very much a Kennedy man and activist and all that, and did you-

SONNENFELDT: Well, he certainly was an activist and was well connected in the Kennedy administration. I don't know how well acquainted he was, if at all, with Secretary of State Dean Rusk. He actually may have known him because Rusk had been in the State Department in the Truman administration, and Roger may have been around then. Anyway, he was well-connected; and he certainly wanted to have a voice in policy, not so much as a policy-maker, although at heart that's what he wanted to be, but in having a product from INR that was relevant and responsive to the needs of the policy people, including the policy people at the top. And yes, that mood transmitted itself, at least to the Soviet office but also to the body of INR. Then of course, Vietnam and Southeast Asia became more and more a U.S. concern; and more U.S. involvement ensued from that. The Research Office dealing with Asia later became very much tied into the policy-making process and into the debates about our policy toward Vietnam. Then Hilsman, himself, eventually went on to become the Assistant Secretary for Asian, Far Eastern Affairs, whatever the bureau was called. [the current title is now Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs].

Q: Yes. Well, at the beginning of '61 relations weren't great with the Soviet Union. I mean, you'd had that sort of disastrous Vienna meeting with Kennedy and Khrushchev; and the Berlin issue - would there be a peace treaty and all - was heating up, and that. I mean the reserves were called out, and I'm-

SONNENFELDT: There was all of that.

Q: You must have been, as you were looking at this, there must have been a lot of figuring out. I mean what are we facing now, I mean with Khrushchev?

SONNENFELDT: Well, I think that the Kennedy administration came in very much concerned with our relations with the Soviets and very much concerned about our not doing as well as we should. In the campaign in 1960, Kennedy raised questions about a "missile gap" and a "bomber gap". The idea of getting America moving again was central to Kennedy's programs - at least they thought it was a good political tack to take - but their perception was that we were in serious difficulty with the Soviets. The Berlin crisis had been going on, and we had earlier in 1960 the U-2 episode. So relations were in pretty bad shape. Also, somebody showed John Kennedy a long speech that Khrushchev gave at an international Communist movement meeting in, I think, October of 1960, a very famous speech.

Q: Was that the Twentieth Congress?

SONNENFELDT: No, the 20th Soviet Party Congress was in 1956, when Khrushchev's secret speech acknowledged Stalin's crimes. The speech I referred to was delivered at a gathering of the international Communist movement that met periodically. It increasingly had become a forum for Soviet and Chinese dispute, and eventually more than dispute on just theoretical grounds. But Khrushchev made a long speech in which he talked extensively about wars of national liberation. Kennedy had made his principal cabinet people - not only those dealing with foreign and security questions - read that speech by Khrushchev because he thought that was going to be the key problem, in addition to the threat of missiles, that we were going to have to face.

The speech suggested a Soviet push, and at that time it was still believed to be a Sino-Soviet push, to contest the United States all around the world, including in Southeast Asia. The Administration then produced programs which Averil Harriman was put in charge of, for counter-insurgency traininit wasn't called counter-terrorism, that's the term we use now. This was very much in the mix in the Kennedy administration.

Some of us felt that Khrushchev's speech might actually have as much to do with the emerging contest with China as with a threat and challenge on a global basis to the United States. The Russians and the Chinese were beginning to contest each other for leadership in the international Communist movement, and in the Third Worlin Africa and elsewhere. But in Kennedy's view, Khrushchev's speech represented a big challenge and was sort of a "Mein Kampf." I remember that Secretary of Defense Bob McNamara read the speech, and there was also an article in the Communist Party's main political journal. It was widely considered to be an authoritative policy indicator for the Communists.

McCloy was sent to Moscow to try to get some disarmament talks going again. They had been disrupted in 1960, when the Soviets had walked out; it was part of Khrushchev's effort to have three Secretary-Generals in the UN, because he felt the one that they had was too pro-American. He wanted UN Committees to be equally composed of pro-Soviet, Western, and third-world members. The U.S. had rejected this.

Q: So-called troika.

SONNENFELDT: That's right. McCloy was sent to see if he could get something started again in disarmament talks. But it was also Berlin crisis time, so McCloy also had instructions to talk to the Soviets about Berlin. This was before the Kennedy-Khrushchev Vienna meeting. McCloy actually saw Khrushchev in the Crimea, and ran into pretty much a stonewall. This coincided with the mobilization of American forces and the call-up of reserves shortly after Kennedy became president. It was a pretty dicey time, or so it seemed.

Q: I mean, here you are where the Soviets are up to something, at least in our perspective. I was wondering, you know, I mean you arrived on the scene there. And what, how you perceived it, and what?

SONNENFELDT: Well, in Moscow, I still was in my Disarmament Administration time. We had long talks, basically talks about talks, not about substance, although the words sounded substantive. Something called "general and complete disarmament" was the issue of the period; it was a Soviet term, and, of course, it was completely out of reach. The effort was made to get some kind of a joint U.S.-Soviet statement that would be a broad basis for the next round of meetings on disarmament under UN aegis. Some progress was made on trying to constitute a new forum other than the five-power one that had operated in the '50s, which became four Western powers against the Soviet Union, which they now rejected. They wanted a three-part committee of East, West and in-between. Eventually that was constituted in Geneva. In fact, a descendant of it still functions in Geneva to this day, 2001.

But it really was not terribly serious. In fact, in some ways it created more tension than progress toward a less strident relationship, because disarmament lends itself to demagogy, to accusations of bad faith, and so on. In those days it really didn't amount to a helluva lot. The meetings were polite enough. It was my first extended experience on the ground in Moscow, which was of interest and instructive for me as a Soviet specialist.

Then there was another issue, which we didn't really realize and get involved in in Moscow or subsequently in the Disarmament Agency. I don't know whether McCloy was fully informed. The point was that Kennedy had been wrong in his 1960 judgment that the missile balance and the strategic force balance between the United States and the Soviet Union favored Moscow. The United States was, in fact, in numerical terms and in some qualitative ways, ahead of the Soviets. The Kennedy administration discovered this quite early in the administration. They decided, especially after the Vienna summit meeting (where it was thought that Kennedy had had the worse of it in his encounter with Khrushchev), to go public with a new assessment of the balance in strategic forces. The Deputy Secretary of Defense, Roswell Gilpatrick, was sent out to give a speech in about October of 1961, to say, in effect, "it ain't so."

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: That speech is on the record. I don't have the details of it in mind, but it was a very important move.

Now in the meantime, also, in my view at least - and there's some corroborative evidence from witnesses of it - the Soviets, in analyzing the camera they captured when they shot down the U-2 in the spring of 1960, realized the effectiveness of our intelligence collection activities at that time. Nowadays, we'd sneer at it this technology! But still, the resolution of the cameras was, I think, better than the Soviets had expected. I think that Khrushchev and his people began to wonder what we really knew (this is some months before Gilpatrick came out and made his statement on strategic forces). I think the Russians must have figured that these earlier U-2 operations and other American intelligence operations gave us a much more realistic appreciation than what Khrushchev, himself, since 1957 (and a lot of Americans critical of the Eisenhower administration) and others, were saying: namely, that the Soviets were leaping way ahead; and that we were getting into greater and greater danger;. and that we needed to put more money into strategic forces. We had all these civil defense exercises; that went on into the Kennedy administration, for that matter.

I think this picture - when the Soviets did not get what they had hoped to get by pressure and by their triumphalism over their strategic breakthroughs, Sputnik, and missile tests, and so on - when they did not get what they wanted in Berlin, and various other things that were happening that were not very positive for the Soviets - I think this sowed the seeds for the eventual Khrushchev decision to station missiles in Cuba.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: That is, they realized that we were not behind, and were probably going to be increasingly ahead in strategic missile forces, and that they would have to add huge amounts of resources to keep up with us, and they would have to greatly improve and increase their production in these fields. I think this is where Khrushchev got the idea that he needed something to threaten the U.S. more directly than he was able to do with his strategic forces - perhaps something like the U.S. did with its intermediate-range missiles in Britain and Italy and Turkey during the time when we did not yet have intercontinental missiles. I don't think all of these things came together that early, certainly not in my mind. But I think it turned out that our relationship, both on the face of it and at some depth, was bad and perhaps even dangerous with the Soviets, because Khrushchev, while putting pressure on Berlin, was not getting what he was looking for, and, in fact, was running risks of war, which basically he didn't want.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: But he wanted to bluff or utilize the fear of war and the threat of war to squeeze concessions out of the U.S., not only in regard to Berlin, but also on other international issues, from the Congo to wherever. He was also establishing his position in Cuba, right on our doorstep. Now all of this, I think, had a Chinese angle that I've already mentioned: that it wasn't only that he was contesting the U.S., but that he was contesting the Chinese by trying to at least give the appearance of accumulating power and strategic advantage. I think he was getting himself into quite a complex situation. I don't think we realized that at the time.

Q: Well, again. What were we getting in INR? How did you find the information that you were getting about developments in the Soviet Union?

SONNENFELDT: The bulk of it was still unclassified information from the literature, their publications, which were assumed to be under strict control and, therefore, some indication of what the regime was doing or wanted to do. Sometimes, when there was a deviation in these ritualistic formulas that they used, it was a question of whether they were deliberately trying to deceive, or to make it appear there was some dispute, or whether there really were some differences among different leaders, who had influence on the different publications. That remained a very big source, as did their broadcasts.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: We had the Daily Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) report, sometimes a half-inch thick, every day for the Soviet Union and their Union Republics and Eastern Europe. These were big sources. Obviously, CIA was doing various things with espionage; some of it has become known. We also had access to a Soviet military journal, Military Thought it was called, through a man who basically got copies of it to us, which our government analyzed very carefully; and we used the RAND Corporation and one or two other outfits that specialized in these areas.

There were the secret U-2 overflights of the USSR, which produced information. They obviously couldn't penetrate the minds of Soviet leaders, but they could get data on military dispositions and some economic conditions in the Soviet Union. Of course, we had to stop the U-2 flights after they were exposed when Powers was shot down in 1960, but then we began to get satellite intelligence somewhat later. Our sources were a collection of things.

The State Department and CIA had a program of interviewing people who had been in the Soviet Union: some refugees, some defectors, and others. It was a mix. There were also many levels of security clearance, and very few people actually had all the clearances to put the whole picture together. We had diplomatic contacts with Soviets in various places, at the UN and Geneva, and so on. It was a collection of material, the bulk of which, however, was, in effect, in the public domain. It was just a matter of getting hold of it and collating it, and that took a lot of manpower in those days.

Q: Was there any pressure on INR to come up with a point of view about what was happening?

SONNENFELDT: There was always pressure of various kinds; but I think on the whole, people maintained their integrity, whatever pressure was exerted. I think the advent of non-career people, like Hilsman and his Deputy, Tom Hughes, in running INR in the early '60s removed any inclination of senior Foreign Service people - who were assigned to INR for a period of time and then went back to their other assignments - to separate themselves excessively from what was happening in the policy bureaus. For example in my case, we were part of the intelligence community, so we participated in the drafting of National Intelligence Estimates, some of them very long-range and some of them, special ones, geared to a particular crisis situation, whether Berlin, or later Vietnam, or others. While we stayed in touch with the Soviet Desk and with Ambassador Thompson, who was the Secretary of State's Soviet affairs advisor-

Q: Tyler Thompson?

SONNENFELDT: Llewellyn Thompson.

Q: Llewellyn Thompson, yes.

SONNENFELDT: And also Chip Bohlen, one of the recognized Soviet experts. We stayed in touch with them, but they understood that we were to reach independent judgments, by and large. They didn't always like it. But I made a point (especially when, a few years later, I became head of the Soviet-East European Office, but even in my Division Chief days) to give close attention to what their judgment was on the issues that we were discussing with our intelligence colleagues, but to maintain our independence in the judgments we made. So yes, there was some pressure, mostly indirect.

In the Vietnam period, the tendency in INR was to be very dubious about what the administration was doing. In the case of Under Secretary George Ball, the in-house critic or devil's advocate (whatever you want to call him, I think it was a matter of conviction, not just lawyerliness), the INR product was very helpful to him because Allen Whiting and some others in that office were very sympathetic. That was their view; and I don't think the top people in INR (Hughes later, Hilsman and Hughes jointly before that) were telling those INR people what to write; and they certainly weren't telling them to accommodate the policy preferences.

Q: Was there much consultation, you know, in the early '60s between you dealing with the Soviets and the people who were dealing with the Communist Chinese, I mean, to try to figure out what [was] going on between these two?

SONNENFELDT: Well, you know, the Soviet and the China specialists in INR were in adjacent offices physically on the seventh floor, which was, coincidentally, the floor where the State Department's leaders had their offices. The China specialists followed it closely; and CIA had followed it closely for a long time, and had some very substantial experts. In fact, the first big paper on a Sino-Soviet split, or potential split, or emerging split, was produced at CIA in the Office of Current Intelligence by a man named Donald Zagoria. He became a professor at Columbia. It was a long study, examining in the most meticulous fashion every statement, every utterance, every rumor, every inference. He came up with the proposition that this relationship was not going to be stable and was going to be more and more difficult. That's about 15 years earlier than the time we're talking about.

Yes, we were keenly interested in the possibility of a split. Of course, by '61, '62, some of this became more and more apparent. In fact, after the Cuban missile crisis, Mao was very critical of Khrushchev's concessions. More and more of this was buried in esoteric publications and utterances, and the rumor mill became more and more obvious and clear. Yes, we were keenly interested.

Now, the policy inferences to be drawn from that weren't, strictly speaking, our business in INR. Secretary of State Dean Rusk and a lot of others were very skeptical about what was being put out on the Sino-Soviet split; they were interested, but they were skeptical. They thought maybe it was a deliberate ploy by the Russians and Chinese to mislead us. Therefore, while we had some contacts with the Chinese - rather formal ones because of various issues about missing people - it wasn't really until Nixon came in that the inferences were drawn from this Sino-Soviet gulf that was widening and deepening every year, that led to the opening to China. But that was ten years later, and it took a Republican president to do it. In the period we're talking about, the early 1960s, it was much more a matter for experts, not only in the government, but there were scholars who were tracking the relationship and were publishing things about it. I think on the whole, the policy people in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations were skeptical about making too much of this.

Q: I've talked to people who were in Berlin, particularly during the early '60s when the Kennedy administration came in. They were very leery of Kennedy because by this time, we had developed a set of rules on how you handle every - sort of a theology about Berlin. There was a feeling early on that Kennedy's group came in, and they wanted to do something, and they might get soft on Berlin. Was this, you know, I mean this is part of your business as you're looking at the Soviets. I mean, was this a concern?

SONNENFELDT: Well, Eisenhower carried in his briefcase to the 1960 Paris summit with Khrushchev (which was aborted because of the shooting down of the U-2) some options about Berlin, because that was one of the big issues.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: Some of those options were considered too conciliatory. This had to do with a free city and with access arrangements, and so on. When Khrushchev stomped out of the meeting in Paris, there was some relief among some people who thought that Eisenhower might have gone a little soft if he had met a solid front there from Khrushchev on Berlin issues, because Eisenhower had with him these options that didn't sell out to the Russians, but were somewhat more conciliatory. In regard to Kennedy, there may well have been such suspicions. But what Kennedy actually did was pretty militant.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: He did some very overt military things, such as calling up reserves and greater readiness, and so on. I think he himself was leery about giving anybody a reason for saying that Democrats are "soft", and that every war in this century had been started under a Democratic president; and by God if we don't look out, that through weakness, and through giving the wrong signals, we'll get us into another one. Then there was this missile-balance issue that I mentioned: as soon as the President realized that we were, in fact, not in the bad position that he had at least claimed in the campaign, the Kennedy people went public with it, to reinforce confidence and reassure our allies.

I think Kennedy got something of a bum rap on the Vienna summit with Khrushchev. I wasn't there, but I read the reports they sent back from there, and I think we wrote an analysis in INR. This was fairly routine because, as so often, we weren't there; we didn't meet these people; we didn't see the chemistry. Yes, it was a bad meeting; but the idea that Khrushchev had really kicked Kennedy around and bullied him is a bum rap - he tried, but he didn't stop Kennedy from sending Gilpatrick out to discuss the strategic balance and getting increasingly tougher on Vietnam. Now there are disputes about that among historians, about the results of this phase.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: In the spring and summer of 1961, Kissinger wrote in the Reporter Magazine very critical articles about the Kennedy administration's position on Berlin, and related it also to the administration's position on Laos, where Kissinger and others thought that they were not as tough as they should be. This related more to the Chinese than to the Soviets, but also included the Soviets. In the end, nothing was given away on Berlin. Indeed, in the end, Khrushchev had to withdraw his free city proposals. Then there were years of disputes about access modalities. That wasn't really settled until the 1971 Quadripartite Agreement on Berlin access.

I will say that, because we were nose-to-nose and there was a tank confrontation at the sector line, Berlin was seen by many people (including many in the administration at the time) as a potential flash point where either through bad judgment or some incident, things could really go seriously wrong, and spread.

Q: I think most of us sort of in the trade looked at Berlin as being the place where - You know, I mean including maybe an uprising in East Germany or something like, you know, the issue

SONNENFELDT: There were lots of things. There was the refugee issue, the flow of refugees from Communist East Germany, that led to the erection of the Berlin Wall.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: Actually, Dean Rusk, at the time the Wall went up (this is also jumping ahead chronologically) was rather relieved, I think. He practically said so. The steady flow of refugees was stopped, and the potential of incidents, or East Germans or Soviets coming after them into West Berlin and maybe starting something that way, was foreclosed by the Wall. So there was a certain ambivalence among American officials. You know, nowadays it's said that things were simple during the Cold War.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: We knew who the enemy was, and we knew what to do. But the issues of how to deal with that enemy, how to treat him, were complex and often very controversial. The Germans and the three occupying powers weren't always in agreement.

Q: Well, I mean, you know, there's been the feeling for a long time that to have a divided Germany and a divided Korea wasn't that bad a thing [laughter]. I mean, they were two powerhouses that were-

SONNENFELDT: That's right, although in our case, we were steadfastly verbally in favor of German unification, but we also saw certain advantages of the division. Now, our European friends - the British and the French, the Italians, and others - could have lived with a divided Germany forever. That was evident 20 years later, when the U.S. gave the strongest support to re-unification.

Q: Yes [laughter].

SONNENFELDT: There's a Frenchman who said, "I love Germany so much that I prefer two of them." So there is all of that in the mix as well. But we had a lot at stake in West Berlin. You know, we were identified with it as a place of freedom, not as a free city, but as democratic. Willy Brandt, the Governing Mayor of Berlin, was a great hero at that time. Berlin was an issue of prestige, and psychologically a key place. There were some people who said, "You know, it's very foolish to tie yourself to a place that's an island in geostrategic terms, and in which you can't possibly defend yourself without enlarging a conflict."

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: But I think the Kennedy people were really rather emotionally tied to Berlin, as demonstrated when the Wall went up, and when Vice President Johnson was there. And, of course, when Kennedy went there ("Ich bin ein Berliner.")

Q: The Wall went up in sixty-three. [editor's note: thWall went up in August, 1961]. Well, let's go to the missile crisis of '62. Were there any harbingers of this, or not?

SONNENFELDT: Well, as I said earlier, in retrospect, I think there were. We should have asked ourselves more seriously what the Russians were doing, and what Khrushchev would do when the basic notion that they were way ahead of us in the missile field was officially reversed by us [in the Gilpatrick speech], and he was confronted with the issue of what to do about it in order not to lose all his momentum. I think we - I, and others who were working this problem - maybe we should have been more thoughtful about it. But there was a military relationship between the Soviets and the Cubans, which we tracked very carefully. I can't remember when we got the first reports that they were sending some medium-range bombers, IL-28s (Ilyushin), to Cuba, which we didn't think were that much of a problem, but were demonstrative. We had fighters and were able to watch them pretty carefully through reconnaissance and other intelligence techniques. But Cuba was becoming more and more of a Soviet military position, not just ideological and political. Actually, there was a lot of friction between the Soviets and Castro on a whole variety of grounds. [end of tape]

I can't give you the dates of studies that INR, CIA, and the intelligence community wrote. Of course, in INR, Cuba was an issue that fell partly in my office, the Soviet Office, and partly in the Latin American Research Office. The same was true in the State Department policy bureaus. Of course, it came together at the top; but the Soviet relationship with the Cubans was tracked closely.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: Then the Russians started transferring some surface-to-air defense missiles to Cuba. That was a qualitative move, a change of the type of military equipment that had been going there. They flew reconnaissance flights down our East Coast to Cuba, outside our territorial limits, and we watched. Then in the summer of '62, there were beginning reports and rumors and questions about whether they were moving something more than fairly modest numbers of mid-range bombers, but possibly missiles. In that respect, there were questions and disagreements. Some people were convinced. Kennedy's new head of CIA, John McCone, thought so.

There were people who theorized that the Soviets weren't going to send SA-2s (surface-to-air defense missiles) to Cuba unless they had something very important to protect. They speculated whether there was more military stuff going in there, including missiles. I think we laid on extra U-2 spy planes to keep an eye on it. The first indications?as always, disputes about how to interpret them?began to come in the late summer of 1962, or a little later than that. This has all been written up by innumerable people.

Q: Well, was it coming in to you, too?

SONNENFELDT: We were certainly getting all the intelligence that other people were getting, but, you know, we weren't photo-interpreters. We had to rely on people who interpreted. They thought the pattern of how air defense missiles were deployed resembled what the Soviets did in places where they had offensive missiles. Then, beyond the technicalities of also interpreting what were the scratches on the ground, there was the question of whether the Soviets would ever do such a thing!

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: There were people who said, "Well, you know, Khrushchev may be a temperamental guy, but he must know that if he does something like that, the U.S. will react very sharply-"

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: "And that the Soviets are inherently cautious." This is what was always said about Stalin, although by now Khrushchev, I think, had pretty much disabused people of that general theory - that the Russians were always cautious and precisely judged the risk factors in what they were doing. I mean, already in the Middle East, their arms relationships with the Egyptians and the Syrians had gotten them close to potential conflicts there. They had been quite aggressive in handling our aircraft operations around their periphery; and in Berlin they had been quite provocative on a very sensitive issue for us; and then the excursion into Cuba, and into the Congo, for that matter, and other things. There was some question whether Khrushchev really was in the Stalin mold of great caution. I'm not even so sure how cautious Stalin should be viewed as having been. So there were debates about whether the Soviets would do such a thing as put offensive missiles into Cuba, and would take the risks and chances right at the doorstep of the U.S. But there were people who were worried how we would react if something like this came to light. A lot of this uncertainty, I guess, transmitted itself to the Soviets. Of course, they had people around here that listened in to everybody.

Starting in 1962, we had a Soviet ambassador here, Dobrynin, who was very skillful in making contacts in the high levels of the administration and among the Washington in-groups of journalists and others. He was, I think, for the Soviets a very productive source, maybe a confusing source, of American thoughts and preferences and ideas that he reported back directly to Khrushchev. I'm sure it was kind of a difficult time all around, for the Soviets to determine what was going on here with Kennedy, and for us in determining what was going on in the Soviet Union. People (by and large, I mean the pros, the old hands) were reluctant to accept the notion that the Soviets would do something like putting missiles in Cuba. But Senator Kenneth Keating of New York made a big speech in the Senate, before we had confirmatory intelligence-

Q: Yes, yes.

SONNENFELDT: -but apparently based on rumors and Cuban refugees. He persisted in making an issue of it. Then, of course, the intelligence community was confronted with indisputable evidence (i.e., via U-2 and satellite photos) and made the judgments that it did - late, but nevertheless, in time - before these missiles became operational, and before all of them had been shipped into Cuba. Their identification was based on intelligence that showed footprints in Cuba identical to those that they were watching inside the Soviet Union for this type of missile.

Q: Well, were we looking at Khrushchev and one, trying to figure out, I mean from the intelligence point of view, what made him tick, almost a psychological profile, and the other one was his stability within the Soviet government?

SONNENFELDT: Yes, of course. I mean this was the core of Kremlinology - to see what the situation in the leadership was. During Stalin's time, people tracked potential splits and divisions in the Politburo, and so on. After Stalin's death, this became a fine art as well as science because there wasn't this prestigious, tough, old fighter at the top, but the next generation of successors, who came in right at the start in 1953. Malenkov wasn't shot, but he was exiled, basically, and demoted; Khrushchev worked his way to the top; Beria, the chief cop, was executed. There was a lot of turmoil in the leadership before Khrushchev began to sort of stabilize his position.

But the questions of who's on top and who's against whom were very much a matter of constant concern. We weren't so sure when this problem developed in Cuba, and a lot of study has been done since. Khrushchev's son has since written about it at length; and people have made practically a cottage industry out of re-playing the Cuban missile crisis, including on the Soviet side, and a lot of archival material is now available. In those days we weren't sure, but we suspected that Khrushchev was pretty much on his own in running this missile deployment (he obviously needed some people who actually moved the missiles, physically), but it wasn't clear to us how it really stacked up in the Politburo. Of course, anything that leaked out of the Politburo in the end always showed a substantial majority, if not unanimity. But I think those reports didn't really get in deep enough, because our intelligence was good, but it wasn't so good that you could really penetrate in the depths of it. But by the time of the Cuban missile crisis, Khrushchev appeared to us as something of an adventurer-

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: -somebody who wanted to be sure that everybody realized that the Soviet Union was a great power, and a global power, as we'd say now. Soviets said, even Foreign Minister Gromyko would say, "There's no problem anywhere in the world which can be settled without the Soviet Union," and so on. So I think Khrushchev was seen as something of a risk-taker.

What I think we missed, in my vie(this is hindsight, although I had some feelings about it shortly after the missile crisis was over), was that Khrushchev wasn't moving from strength; that in fact, he was in a contest with the Chinese, which was getting more and more serious; and that his own situation vis-ï¿½-vis the U.S. was not as strong as he had believed, or we had believed, or others had believed; and that he was, therefore, looking for ways of demonstrating his power or at least of buying time.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: My view at the time was somewhat different from other people's views, which linked the Cuban crisis very closely to breaking the logjam in Berlin. That is, they felt that Khrushchev wanted to threaten us with missiles in order to make clear to us that we couldn't escalate a conflict over Berlin without a risk of serious damage from several directions to our homeland. My feeling at the time was that he was trying to make up for the ground that he lost after bluffing with his strategic missile advances, starting in 1957, and having been discovered as a bluffer. We announced it to him in the Gilpatrick speech, but we announced it in other ways as well. He needed something to tide him over so that he wouldn't have to pour huge, additional resources into what had now become a real race in the offensive area. I thought that was a more weighty reason for his going into Cuba than trying to break the logjam in Berlin.

In fact, I recently gave an extemporaneous talk at Johns Hopkins in which I suggested rather boldly that the eventual collapse of the Soviet Union, not quite 30 years later, was foreshadowed in Khrushchev's getting the Soviet Union into a major and continuing arms race with the United States, which economically bankrupted them-

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: There are a lot of different aspects to it. But anyway, that was my feeling at the time when the crisis was over. But while it was going on, we didn't have time to speculate at great length about the deeper meanings of it all.

Q: Were we seeing, again from your perspective, an impact on Khrushchev's authority and all after the missile crisis, because here he had put up, and they basically backed down? I mean their qualifications, but I mean basically, he didn't come out of this very well.

SONNENFELDT: I think we assumed that it was going to mean trouble for him politically. There were several incidents, and rumors and reports that there was a group of people organizing against him and getting ready to remove him; and a lot of people were talking and jabbering that they supposedly had such information. I think we got some stuff through our clandestine sources that suggested that.

As I have said, theorizing about Khrushchev's motives and intentions went on throughout the crisis. But once the offensive missile deployments in Cuba were established without doubt by our intelligence, we went into crisis mode. INR obviously didn't make policdespite the inclinations of its Director, Roger Hilsman, to help out in this respecbut we concentrated our analytical products on the growing information flow and on assessments of probable Soviet responses to the several U.S. actions that were being considered.

We were also under siege from the press, which in those days had virtually complete access to the State Department building. Alert reporters quickly noticed when lights were burning all night in Soviet Affairs and some Latin American offices, as well as in the executive offices on the seventh floor. We were obviously sternly instructed to keep our mouths shut. The prominent diplomatic correspondents who smelled a rat held their fire when requested, but still tried to gather information for later use.

We got read-outs from the specially-created "EXCOM" and were aware that President Kennedy would address the nation on Monday evening, October 22, 1962. We gathered that collective speech-drafting was underway. Ironically, Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko was in the U.S. for the annual UN General Assembly meeting, and he was meeting with both the President and Secretary of State Rusk about the usual agenda. We heard that on Cuba, he assured each of them that all Soviet activities regarding Cuba were defensive. From what trickled down to our level, we wondered, and wrote in a brief analysis, how much and indeed whether Gromyko knew what was going on in Cuba.

As it happened, my wife and I had an engagement in New York City on the weekend before Kennedy's speech. We saw our friends, and then I did a quick turn-around, leaving my wife in New Yor(where she was waiting to meet her mother who was returning from a trip), just beyond the range of the Soviet missiles in Cuba, as I calculated. I urged her to buy a battery-operated transistor radio (our first) so that she could listen to President Kennedy's speech.

Once Kennedy had spoken, we analysts in INR looked for Soviet reactions, public and private. As regards the latter, private channels were proliferating beyond the formal governmental ones. We had prompt access to the formal letters going back and forth, but much less so to personal diplomacy, either authorized or volunteered by journalists, academics and businessmen. The official U.S. position, insisting on Soviet withdrawal of offensive missiles already deployed and the turning-around of ships bringing additional ones, was elaborated by Adlai Stevenson, our Ambassador at the UN. As Kennedy's speech had made clear, the U.S. was imposing a "quarantine" around Cuba. This produced lively polemics by the Soviets in New York, Moscow, Washington and in all the other channels.

Before Stevenson's main address, Hilsman took me along to an Oval Office meeting where the text was being mulled over. I was struck by how much time and effort, from the President on down, was being devoted to precise wording and even to the rhythm of the speech. Whenever someone came up with an especially felicitous phrase, there was praise by the President and then by Mac Bundy, speech-writer Ted Sorenson and court historian Arthur Schlesinger. The latter two eagerly contributed their own preferred formulations. Somewhere in the back row, there was an NSC staffer who cautioned the drafters about accuracy and a legal expert who made sure that no threats were uttered that might contravene international law. Inevitably, as the group dispersed, someone (maybe Kennedy himself) came up with the old saw that this had been "the most distinguished gathering since Thomas Jefferson dined alone." Stevenson eventually got full TV coverage of his UN presentation, including especially his dramatic clash with Soviet Ambassador Valerian Zorin.

The days and nightsome nights spent on a cot I had transported from home to my officrushed on. I hunt-and-pecked away at my typewriter as I tried as best I could to figure out and report on the pattern of Soviet behavior, especially when the first encounter between the U.S. Navy and a Soviet missile-carrying vessel would occur.

Along with several signals in the corridors of the UN and elsewhere, we received some indications from the journalist John Scali (who had been in touch with a Soviet KGB officer who masqueraded as their Embassy's press officer) that a deal might be had if we could do something about our missiles in Turkey and give commitments not to invade Cuba again (a la the Bay of Pigs). Scali evidently contacted half the EXCOM on this.

But as the week following Kennedy's speech drew to a close, my memo(subjected to close scrutiny by Hilsman) began to sense a pattern of Soviet second thoughts. Soviet ships challenged by U.S. destroyers were turning around. I took a night off and sneaked away with my wife to watch the opening of the film, "The Longest Day," at the Ontario theater.

After a few nights sleeping on my cot in the office, I went home for the weekend, having written a short memo analyzing Khrushchev's hard-nosed public letter to Kennedy. As I was dropping off to sleep in my bed at home, the phone rang: our Duty Officer was calling to say that there was a private letter from Khrushchev which seemed to unravel the "knot" about which Khrushchev had warned publicly. I rushed back to the office, and was told that Bobby Kennedy had already urged the President to ignore the public letter and to respond to the private one. This, of course, was not our call to make, but as I recall, the memo we wrote concluded that the private letter was indeed the more valid message. The U.S. response became known as the "Trollope Ploy."

Much was to follow in the weeks and months to come to formalize the deal that got the Soviet missiles withdrawn from Cuba. We did what we could to feed judgments about Soviet intentions to John McCloy, who headed the post-crisis haggling with Mikoyan, his Soviet counterpart. My colleagues and I could then begin to devote time to reflecting on what had happened, what it meant for the future, and why the pre-crisis National Intelligence Estimate had on balance concluded that Khrushchev wouldn't run the risks which he ended up running.

As it turned out, one of the follow-ons to the missile crisis was a substantial improvement in Soviet relations with the U.S. Kennedy's American University speech in 1963 led to the Limited Test Ban Treaty being negotiated, along with the U.K. It wasn't really much of an arms control treaty, since underground tests continued. It was an environmental treaty, because it ended atmospheric tests. There was some feeling (and again, in retrospect, in my case a stronger feeling) that perhaps Khrushchev was trying to cool the frictions with the U.S. a bit, after suffering the setback of the missile crisis and basically having to give up on his efforts to create a separate regime in Berlin via the free city proposal. Maybe he wanted to gain some time. Not long afterwards, Kennedy was assassinated, and there was some worry in Moscow because the man who was caught had lived in Russia.

Q: Oswald, yes, and -

SONNENFELDT: Oswald. So they fell all over themselves to assure us that they had nothing to do with the assassination. Of course, there still remains a matter of speculation just what motivated Oswald, and who was behind him, and so on.

I think Khrushchev never really recovered from the missile crisis. I believe it's not just the fact that he lost face, and that the U.S. denied him a close-in missile threat against our homeland. We still went through our own Vietnam-era trials and tribulations, so it's not definitive in terms of a permanent American ascendancy in that sense, but he had again gambled and lost. I think that clearly was something that other figures in the Soviet Union saw. Of course, after some earlier attempts, when they got rid of him in 1964 (kicking him out of the top position), they used words suggesting adventurism, and so on, as part of the indictment of Khrushchev and the reason for his replacement by Brezhnev and others.

Now, how closely we tracked it and were able to predict it in terms of timing, I think that was at best only a fair amount. All I can tell you is my personal situation: I asked for a sabbatical from INR, because I wanted to spend a year at Columbia and write something about Khrushchev, while I was also working here in Washington, at SAIS. My sabbatical was approved, and it started with the academic year of 1964-65.

Q: Oh!

SONNENFELDT: Two weeks after I started, Khrushchev was out!

Q: Out.

SONNENFELDT: I was asked to come back to State at least for a few weeks, because one couldn't tell what was going to happen, and they wanted the full staff in place.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: So, you know, I'm not going to claim that I foresaw the collapse of the Khrushchev regime!

Q: [Laughter]

SONNENFELDT: I think there was general agreement in the NIEs (National Intelligence Estimates) of the period; and other work that was produced, I think, indicates (although I haven't gone back to review it) that there were a lot of indications that Khrushchev's career was declining.

Q: Did you find in dealing with this, just in general? in dealing with the Soviet Union, one talks about the Kremlinologists. I mean these are the people who've been dealing with this. I'm not sure, maybe I'd be unfair of saying; but I take it you weren't a Kremlinologist as

SONNENFELDT: I wasn't trained as one. I learned the art, and how to decipher the signals.

Q: You learned the art; but I was wondering whether there was sort of a priesthood of Kremlinologists within the government, including the CIA, the [Soviet] Desk and all, and whether this was sort of a difficult group to get around because they held the sacred books, and they

SONNENFELDT: Well, they did. I mean, there was one thing about Kremlinology: you had to remember everything! You had to even remember where a comma was in a sentence, because if it was removed, it might change the meaning. You had to have all that stuff in your head, and some people (this is before the computer age) had huge collections of index cards with statements on everything that one could cross-check. But content analysis isn't the only part of Kremlinology. It also involved the history, and the early connections of these leaders with other leaders in their earlier days out in the boondocks. Some of the disputes were carried on in allusions to Communist theological clashes 50 or more years earlier.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: But the Kremlinologists did not always agree with each other in their interpretations, and there were disputes between the research analysts and those people who were concerned with actually dealing the Soviets, which we weren't. I mean, we knew a few Soviets; and occasionally, one of our people would be assigned to the embassy in Moscow, or, as I had been, would be part of a U.S. delegation that negotiated something or other with the Soviets. But those whom we met were mostly diplomats, with scripts that had to be closely sifted.

There was one conference in 1958 where we dealt with some people who weren't diplomats, but scientists. But the officials who dealt with the Soviets day-to-day didn't always agree with what the Talmudic scholars of Soviet literature and statements were reading. There was actually a certain friction, in that the people who heard things from the mouths of Soviets personally thought they had a better feel for what the Soviets were up to than the people who buried their noses in the thousands of pages of statements and broadcasts and journals. On the other hand, those latter people thought, "Well, these guys talk to diplomats. What do they know?" or, "Those Russian diplomats are just misleading our people." So there was a certain amount of friction between the people actively involved in dealings with the Russians, and those who were buried in the books, in the Kremlinological science and art. I think those factions probably were more evident in the academic world, where people developed theories and had kind of a stake in their theories of Soviet behavior or the behavior of individual Soviet leaders.

I told my staff analysts in RSB, (INR's Office of Research and Analysis for the Soviet Bloc), "Do not become predictable! Don't develop a stake in a particular theory, or people will ignore what you send them because they'll figure they know what you're going to say anyway! Call the shots as you see them. Of course, there are some basic underlying theories that we need to work with, but don't make yourself predictable!" I felt that was not our business. Our business was to acknowledge that we may have been wrong somewhere, or to change our minds when warranted. "It might be confusing to the policy guys, but call the shots as you see them; and if something doesn't fit, acknowledge it!" That was my philosophy, but you know, I had nothing at stake in terms of being personally associated with a particular theory of Soviet behavior.

Q: Yes. Well then, you did finally get your year of sabbatical, did you?

SONNENFELDT: No! I never did! It lasted about two or three weeks. I'd gone up to Columbia for the seminar that I had agreed to do, and I had started making an outline about what I was going to write about Khrushchev; and I was teaching a research course here at Johns Hopkins, being sort of a helpmate to people who were working on their Ph.D.s. Then Khrushchev was kicked out on October 14 or 15. On the same day, the Chinese tested their first atomic bomb.

Q: One other thing happened.

SONNENFELDT: Change in the British government.

Q: Yes, I remember Time magazine showing three things happening.

SONNENFELDT: Yes. Well, the State Department asked me to come back. I think at the time, it was as Deputy Director of the Office there. The idea was that maybe in three or four weeks we'd get some idea of how things were going to develop and whether I could be dispensed with for awhile, but I never made it back to my sabbatical.

Q: [We'll stop here and] we might start then the next time, with the fall of Khrushchev and the aftermath of that.

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Today is April 30, 2001. Hal, Khrushchev fell October 15, 1964.

SONNENFELDT: Yes.

Q: Okay. Well, you were brought back as Deputy Director of? was it INR?

SONNENFELDT: A part of INmy office was the Office of Research for the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. R-S-B. I think I was Deputy Director at that time.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: I can't remember exactly when I became Director, but it was soon after my aborted sabbatical, in the mid-'60s.

Q: What was the sort of the initial reading when Khrushchev went down?

SONNENFELDT: Well, as I recall it, there had been all sorts of mumblings and rumblings out of Moscow. The rumor machine and occasionally, I guess, the intelligence people picked up some more juicy indications of some sort of conspiracy against Khrushchev. I think with hindsight, a lot of this has been reconstructed, and it didn't really look as that much of a surprise, because it'd been brewing for a variety of reasons, and he was accused-

Q: We've seen the man weakening and-

SONNENFELDT: Yes, and then when it did happen, they accused him of harebrained schemes. You couldn't tell exactly which ones they were talking about, whether it was the Cuban missile crisis or the domestic courses-

Q: The virgin wheat business and

SONNENFELDT: Whatever the issues were. So there clearly was developing a majority of people in the Politburo and in places where such decisions are made, and a consensus that he should leave. One of the interesting changes, of course, was that they didn't throw him in jail; they didn't shoot him. They let him retire.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: He was seen later from time to time. He was also able to smuggle out or permit the smuggling out of his memoirs, which eventually were published in this country and elsewhere.

So his ouster wasn't a total surprise, but obviously whenever these things happen, you wonder what's going to happen next. Brezhnev became his successor, but they really didn't name a single leader. They weren't willing or prepared, or maybe there were compromise decisions not to have a single individual, so that they had this troika of Brezhnev as First Secretary, General Secretary of the Communist Party.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: And Podgorny as President of the Soviet Union, and Kosygin as Prime Minister. Just exactly how the power was shared among them is hard to say. I frankly haven't looked back at the period, so I can't recollect too precisely what our analyses were, except that we were facing a cast of characters that wasn't new. And that also included the top military people, and, in the Party, the Secretariat. And then the KGB.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: We'd known a good deal about them, and they'd been seen by Western people, including Americans. But it was a change, and the general assumption was that some of the more adventurous and, if you want, erratic behavior of Khrushchev's was going to become more apparatchik-like, and maybe more predictable.

Q: Yes. Well, in a way I would think it would be, say, somewhat of a relief because when you have one person calling the shots, and particularly one person who does seem erratic, this can be scary! When you've got three apparatchiks doing it, they're not going to stick their necks out too faat least for a while.

SONNENFELDT: Yes. I think when you have several people, you have to assume that one or the other can't easily pull off things that carry a great deal of risk. On the other hand, there also is maneuvering among them, or you have to assume there's maneuvering among them; and they also have their followers scattered through the system-

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: So one or the other of them, or maybe two of them, may want to manufacture or bring about some kind of a foreign crisis

Q: Oh!

SONNENFELDT: -or lean more heavily on the notion that the U.S. was out to get them, and the "imperialists" were always mobilizing for this, that, and the other. There was a dynamic arms competition going on. I don't think one can assume that a more collective setup necessarily is a guarantee against risky behavior. We did have some fairly difficult times - I wouldn't exactly say close calls, but still we had some interesting moments in the era after Khrushchev.

Q: Yes, yes. Well of course one of things being, as we're seeing today with our relations with China, that when other things fail, the nationalist card. You know, [to say] "we've got an enemy who's doing nasty things to us", as the Chinese seem to be doing, you know, is a good solid way of gaining popular support.

SONNENFELDT: Yes. I think in China, as I think in the Soviet Union by the mid-to-late '60s, there wasn't much left of communism as a mobilizing idea, but there was still some. In China, there's very little of it now. I think something like national pride, reminding people of the terrible humiliations that they say they suffered for a long time, is a mobilizing force.

But the Chinese leadership is also uneasy about excessive nationalism because they're afraid that they can't control it, and it might even turn against them. We saw this at the demonstrations against the U.S. Embassy in Beijing, after the accidental American bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade (in the 1990s Balkan War); the regime got a little itchy.

In the case of Russia, in terms of ideology or values that people are eagerly attached to and that have a mobilizing effect, I think by this time, they were getting more and more moribund. I guess they still thought of themselves as a leader of some global movement, and still thought of themselves as being a kind of model for the Third World. They had various sorts of programs with the Africans and others to help them get into the industrial age. Of course, the Soviets, the Russians in particular, also had a strong racist streak; so there were problems in their relations with a lot of these people, including the blacks from Africa studying at Lumumba University in Moscow, for example, who complained, and then-

Q: Well, just about this time, I was a chief of the consular section in Belgrade. I remember there was a mass exodus of African students from Bulgaria, who had been going to Sofia University and all, suffering some of the same thing, except they could get out! They came out and said, "The heck with you! We're tired of being called black monkeys by the Bulgarians." So I mean there's some-

SONNENFELDT: Yes. There's that in the Russian/Soviet case. There was always the issue of the Russian women being attracted to some of the blacks, and this produced anger.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: So I think that - again in retrospect, 25 years before the collapse, which no one really predicted - we still saw ourselves in the long twilight struggle that Kennedy had talked about. We didn't think, any of us, at that time, that we would witness the dissolution of the Soviet Union that happened in 1989, '90, '91. Certainly with hindsight, I think some of the signs of this society losing its momentum and its sense of mission, some of that was present.

The three leaders who took over after Khrushchev were not particularly inspiring people. I think Kosygin was probably the most effective of them, as a bureaucrat and in the economy. They obviously had political skills in their terms, or they wouldn't have landed where they did. But matters weren't all that clear at the time. We still saw them building missiles, and we still saw them active in their arms programs with Syria, Egypt and Iraq, and so on. In fact, we were just a couple of years away from a serious Middle East Crisis in 1967-

Q: The Six-Day War, yes.

SONNENFELDT: The Six-Day War, when there was a time when it was far from clear what the Soviets would do. So there were still some rough times to come.

Q: Yes, and also, later, the increasing expansion in Africa, which are -

SONNENFELDT: Well, that too had already begun. They'd been cautious about it initially, but they did see some parts as fruitful for asserting themselves and playing leadership roles; and they did bring a lot of African students to the USSR. A lot of the post-colonial regimes, especially in francophone Africa, were left-leaning, including toward Communism. Many of those people had been educated in Paris and metropolitan France. So the Soviets saw that as an opportunity.

I think also by that time, this became a source of competition with the Chinese, who were picturing themselves as the leaders of what we came to call the Third Worland as an example of a down-trodden society which was finding itself, and becoming gradually an economic and social model. We hadn't had Deng Xiaoping yet. And they still went through a lot of their own trials and tribulations. I think a lot of what we used to call "the Sino-Soviet offensive" in the Third World, in fact became more and more matters of rivalry and competition between the two of them, as to who was leading the world communist movement and who was leading the revolt against the imperialists. So here again, I think with hindsight, the Soviets got themselves activated in areas that really presented no great gain for them, either strategically or otherwise, and I think this contributed eventually to their over-extension and downfall.

Q: Did you have within the ranks of your unit or Bureau those who thought that there was a division between the Chinese and the Soviets or/and those who felt that they were really close together?

SONNENFELDT: Yes, but by the mid-'60s, I think it was widely sensed that there was something not right in the Sino-Soviet relationship.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: It hadn't reached its worst manifestations of hostility. I may have mentioned earlier in these conversations that the CIA had had a major study on this subject. It was sanitized and published by Donald Zagoria, who has by now long been out of the government, but at that time he worked at CIA. He pulled together a lot of the material on Sino-Soviet conflict as early as the late '50s, 1957, 1958. We all read this assessment, and we all saw the sources it was based on. There clearly were some rough arguments between the Soviets and the Chinese. I think someone like Mao didn't really consider Khrushchev a great leader. They had arguments over nuclear weapons: the Soviets had helped them station some on Chinese territory, but they argued over the Chinese nuclear program, and on a great variety of things. I think by the mid-'60s, there were still debates in the West about whether Marxist-Leninists could really have a falling-out - although, God knows, anybody that knows something of the history of Communism knows what controversies there were in these parties.

Q: Yes, Menshevik, Bolshevik, the whole thing-

SONNENFELDT: It was becoming more apparent, but not as apparent as it was toward the end of the '60s and, of course, during the '70s.

Q: What about?we must have been looking rather closely at what the Soviet Union, particularly this new team on board, their attitude towards the war in Vietnam.

SONNENFELDT: Yes. When Kennedy first became president, he made people read a speech that Khrushchev gave at an international Communist conference in November of 1960 on the national liberation wars and so on. Vietnam was seen to be an example and evidence of the Soviets pursuing this kind of warfare against the West, against the U.S. At that time the Chinese seemed to be generally on board with them, also.

But we did begin to get snippets of material indicating that there were differences or suspicions between them in regard to Vietnam. The Chinese seemed uneasy about how much the Soviets were in evidence in Vietnam; and disputes emerged over time about the Soviet arms shipments through Chinese territory, for which the Chinese wanted to charge various kinds of toll payments. And I think they also wanted to inspect some of the material to see if they could learn something for their own military. Here in Washington, however, I think Vietnam came to be seen as very much Soviet-supported, and also Chinese-supported. But then came indications of some differences.

There was a strong strain of opinion in the Johnson administration that we should be talking to the Soviets more than we were about Vietnam, because it was thought that the Soviets might not really want to get themselves as deeply involved as they were becoming, and might have been concerned about the U.S. broadening the war a great deal more. In general, Averil Harriman, in his senior role dealing with Vietnam, was to some extent associated with the view that the Soviets might, for one reason or another, be willing to help us end this war. That notion persisted for some years, and there were probes of Soviet intentions.

When I went to the White House in 1969, in the Nixon administration National Security Council (NSC) staff, we started some conversations in 1970, '71, '72, with the Soviets who dealt with Vietnam. The Soviets were very polemical. Nevertheless, I think they had begun to lean toward the conclusion, more or less, that the war was not doing them any good, and that it interfered with other relationships that they wanted with us, especially the investments they were eager to attract for Siberia. Then I think it also got caught up in the increasingly acute and intense Sino-Soviet dispute.

Q: What about the Middle East. We're talking about?well, the Six-Day War. This is when it looked like things - it's one of those things that's sort of forgotten. We talk about the missile crisis of '62; but actually '67, it looked like both the Soviet Union and the United States were beginning to gear up for doing something.

SONNENFELDT: Well, we were backing opposite parties.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: The Soviet arms shipments to Egypt and Syria?it's a complicated story, and I assume you're getting oral histories from people who were much more directly involved than I was. In INR, I was watching the Soviet side. The Egyptian blockade of Israel, in the south, seemed to have some Soviet support.

Q: Straits of Aqaba [Tiran] and that sort of thing.

SONNENFELDT: Right?and the kind of intelligence the Israelis were getting stirred up their concern as to whether they could really count on American support. This led them to, in effect, preempt, what we'd call preempt, against the Egyptians in particular. The Israelis attacked first, on the assumption that if they didn't, they were going to be attacked.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: They wreaked a lot of havoc on the Egyptian air force, which was partly Soviet-supplied. The interesting thing was that the Soviets were nowhere to be found. They sort of backed away, didn't want to get caught in the middle. I mean they verbally supported their Arab friends, and were very critical and made threatening noises toward Israel, but they didn't really want to get directly involved. But we thought we saw at some point, several days into the war, that once the Israelis had also attacked Syria, which had come in on the side of Egypt, the Soviets got edgy. [end of tape]

The fighting spread to Syria, as the Syrians came in on the side of the Egyptians. We thought we saw some signs that the Soviets were getting disturbed themselves, as the Israelis advanced into Syria; I felt maybe the time was coming for efforts to get this thing to shut down, but I was not directly involvecertainly not on the policy side.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: I recall the uncertainty, but I have never really been able to discover how valid the signs of Soviet concerns were, in terms of actual intelligence that we had. As a matter of clear signs, we couldn't tell about the Soviets. I, personally, didn't think the Soviets wanted to get involved in the war, which might then bring the U.S. in.

This situation produced these negotiations between the U.S. and the Soviets, which eventually resulted in Resolution 242 (UN Security Council Resolution 242), which is still one of the bases of Israeli-Arab relations. It eventually ended the war, and also led to a meeting between Johnson and Kosygin, who was considered their head of the governmennot of the state, but a counterpart to the President of the United States. They had this meeting at-

Q: Glassboro.

SONNENFELDT: Glassboro, in New Jersey, which helped produce the stand-down in the Arab-Israeli War, the Six-Day War, and also involved the first really extended high-level discussion between the U.S. and Soviets on strategic weapons. I didn't participate in that meeting. While they were up there, I was in Washington, trying to keep track of what was going on and what the Soviets were saying at home, and so on. Glassboro was sort of a precursor, with still many, many disagreements, fundamental ones, for what, by 1968, a year later, were supposed to be the Strategic Arms Limitations Talks, or "SALT" talks, as they were called. Then those talks were postponed because of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August of 1968.

Q: Yes, '68.

SONNENFELDT: In '67, Defense Secretary McNamara went to Glassboro, but I can't remember now whom Kosygin had with him. But it's interesting enough, in light of what happened later, that McNamara tried to persuade the Soviets to forego their anti-missile programs. They were devoting quite a bit of resources to them.

Kosygin became quite indignant, saying that "the Soviet Union cannot be deprived of its defenses. The Soviet people would never understand how their defenses could be traded away. Historically, the Russians defended themselves and defeated their enemies, as they did Napoleon, and Hitler, and they could never give up their defenses; it's against their constitution," and so on. So he was adamant about their not foregoing their missile defense program. It added to pressures here on the Johnson administration, to also get into the business of missile defense.

Not too long after Glassboro, the Johnson administration did, in fact, announce a major U.S. national missile defense program stretched over many years, so that both sides were starting to work on this. There are, of course, all the theories about deterrence that got involved in this issue: that is, the theory that if someone builds a more or less impregnable defense, that he will feel that he can launch a first strike against the other side and then absorb the retaliatory strike because he had missile defenses.

Q: Yes, yes.

SONNENFELDT: That's why this defense came to be called "destabilizing." Nowadays (2000, 2001, 2002), there are constantly echoes of that debate in current controversies. So the Glassboro meeting was a major event. And the Six-Day War was also, because for both sides, there were elements of danger which both we and the Soviets sought to avoid.

Q: What did you feel about during this quite critical time because there had been a word that the Soviets were moving up to a DEFCON (Defense Condition), the equivalent to a?they were alerting their airborne units and all? How good did you feel that our intelligence was that you were getting back?

SONNENFELDT: I couldn't judge it, how good it was. You know, we got what we got!

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: I was, in that sense, not a great intelligence expert. I was an analyst, an estimator. We had people more adept at and more experienced than I with the military matters and the technical intelligence relating to them. As I said, there were signs that I didn't know the details of, even though I was head of the Soviet INR office, but this all gets into compartmented intelligence.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: There were signs that the Soviets were getting restless, that I referred to, and which led to the Glassboro summit.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: You know, I think the military has to take everything seriously, even if it's still not entirely confirmed. But anything that looked like it might foreshadow some sort of intervention, or possibly be something to lead us to stop the Israelis, we had to take seriously, in the sense that this could escalate into a full-fledged war. That, of course, was the theory in those days: that, with the Soviets, you have to avoid fighting at any level, lest it escalate.

Q: Escalate, yes.

SONNENFELDT: I didn't have the sense in that situation, as I recall it now, that we were on the threshold of war with the Soviets. I thought more that there was maneuvering. They were maneuvering; we were maneuvering; we were helping the Israelis replenish their forces. We weren't really directly involved. We also lost one of our intelligence ships in the Mediterranean, off the coast of Israel

Q: Yes, the Liberty,

SONNENFELDT: Liberty, yes, heavily damaged by

Q: By the Israelis.

SONNENFELDT: That's right. So that raised some mixed feelings in the U.S., and it still rattles around nowadays, as more and more documentation and data is declassified.

But I think the Johnson administration wanted to get this war stopped. My sense of it was that the Soviets certainly didn't want to end up losing face or losing their special relationship with the Arabs, which had become quite a major thing in the Khrushchev period. But they also didn't want this affair to run out of control. Somebody in Moscow must have said, "Look! These are all Ilyushins. It's our weapons, and they've been defeated by the Israelis, supported by the American imperialists." I think this must have weighed on them. Maybe some people in Moscow (I don't know that there's evidence) would have said, "Well now, our prestige is at stake, and we've got to escalate," or others would say, "Wait a minute. This really may run out of control. We'd better find a way to end it.'"

Of course, UN Resolution 242, which came out of this situation, was interpreted by the Soviet Union as requiring the Israelis to give up all the occupied territories. This is rather different from the way the Israelis or we interpret the language of 242: that is, the resolution states that Israel must withdraw "from territories occupied" in the 1967 war, to "secure and recognized boundaries." The drafters of the resolution deliberately did not call for withdrawal from "the territories occupied" in the war (as the Arab states had demanded), or from "all the territories occupied," as the Soviet Union had insisted. The Israelis could read the careful language, and they weren't about to relinquish all the occupied territories and return to pre-war lines. That issue is still kicking around, and unresolved.

Q: Rather closely followed, really the next year, was the, what was it? August invasion of Czechoslovakia?

SONNENFELDT: Yes.

Q: Coming up to this we were seeing a real change in Czechoslovakia, the so-called Prague Spring, and all that. Was your office looking at this and getting concerned about what the Soviets were going to do about this?

SONNENFELDT: We noticed?couldn't avoid it?some of the rumblings in Eastern Europe, and certainly in Czechoslovakia with the "Prague Spring." I think few of us had any doubt that sooner or later the Soviets would move in to squelch it.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: But it was going on, and it seemed, too, that there were some disputes (as indeed, it turns out there were) among the Soviet leadership about just how to handle it. There may have been some underground dissidents in the Soviet setup who sympathized with what was happening in Czechoslovakia. We saw a lot of Soviet military moves, mobilization; and of course, they had troops in Czechoslovakia itself. There had been the Hungarian case (the 1956 Soviet invasion of Hungary) and the East German case (putting down uprisings in 1953). But we also, I think, tended to think that they would try to get the Czechoslovaks to back off, in order to avoid another Budapest-type, Hungary-type invasion. The Soviets also sent word to their Warsaw Pact satellites to prepare for action-

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: -because they were concerned about the reactions of the international Communist movement, particularly the large Communist parties in France and Italy and smaller ones in Western Europe, whom they considered as assets. So I think there were some questions in Moscow: how far to permit this to go, and how and when to stop it if it couldn't be stopped by simply manipulating the politics of it in Prague and elsewhere.

But the acuteness of the issue was sort of up and down through the summer of 1968. I remember I had been asked by Deputy Secretary Nick Katzenbach to join him in a small delegation going to India, because we wanted to establish some regular consultations with the Indians. He wanted me to go along as a Soviet expert to explain to the Indians our perceptions of what the Soviets were up to, particularly in the Indian area, the Indian Ocean, and in other respects. That trip kept being delayed. We had several dates in July and August when we were going to go to New Delhi. The trip kept being postponed because we couldn't tell what was happening in Czechoslovakia. It dragged into August. I guess Dean Rusk, the Secretary of State, said, "Well, people have got to take vacations. So if you have vacation plans, go on vacation; and if something should happen, we can all get together."

Indeed, I went to Rehoboth Beach, Delaware, with my family. I was playing poker with some neighbors and other friends on the night of August 21, 1968, when I got a phone call from the Department. They said, "it looks like it's starting, and Secretary Rusk wants to see everybody in the morning." This was unusual, because we weren't ordinarily included in those meetings. I think maybe Tom Hughes was the Director of INR at the time. He called and said, "You'd better get back," which I did. We did, indeed, have this meeting with Secretary Rusk on the morning of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, which was already the end of the day in Europe.

It's kind of an interesting story, I think. On the one hand, people felt down because this appeared to be the end of a somewhat promising development inside the Iron Curtain. But Rusk said, "Look, I don't want any one of you to go around with your heads hanging in grief or shame. This is none of our business. This is their business! It is a demonstration of the utter weakness and failure of the Communist system, but they're the ones who have to deal with this! We are not going to get involved in this. We're not going to encourage the opponents by mobilizing forces."

The German government at the time, a coalition government headed by Chancellor Kiesinger, was extremely concerned that nothing be done on German soil that would appear to be provocative vis-ï¿½-vis the Soviets. Kiesinger didn't even want the intelligence alert to be heightened in Germany, a neighboring country, because he was worried the Soviets would pick it up and misinterpret it and maybe lash out. So Rusk didn't write off the Soviet crackdown, but he didn't see anything that we could do except issue the protest statements, which we did jointly with the Allies. But he didn't want to widen it and turn it into an East-West conflict or a NATO/Warsaw Pact conflict.

Q: Yes, we'd also learned our lesson since '5[the Soviet invasion of Hungary]

SONNENFELDT: Right, right.

Q: -Where accusations had been made that we encouraged it and then did nothing. I mean-

SONNENFELDT: Maybe on the first or second day after the invasion, there were some Soviet claims that they had discovered weapons planted by the NATO imperialists in various places in Czechoslovakia. They started to make this sound as though this conflict wasn't an internal (i.e., domestic) matter in Czechoslovakia at all, that the population were still loyal Communists, but that trouble was stirred up by the West. But they didn't really push it very hard. The U.S. government's reaction was severely criticized here later, in the media and elsewhere, and especially among the various groups that were associated with the "captive nations" campaigns (non-government organizations opposed to Soviet domination or control of Eastern European countries).

But we also had Vietnam on our hands. Rusk and, I guess, President Johnson and maybe Walt Rostow (who was National Security Advisor at that time) didn't really want to expand this conflict. In fact, I think Rusk said, "You know, in the longer run, this is going to hurt the Soviets much more than maybe even the Czechs who suffered, because it will create big problems in the Western Communist parties, and will show the bankruptcy of communism as a system." Well, there was a certain logic to that. But there was still a sense, somehow, that at the very least, we ought to take some countermeasures - not military - which we actually did: sanctions and various forms of ostracizing the Soviets.

It was now August-September of 1968, just two months before the U.S. presidential election. Johnson had already said he was not going to run again. There had been an announcement that meetings would start between us and the Soviets on August 22, on the strategic arms limitations. I think Johnson (like presidents coming to the end of their terms) was legacy-conscious, and I think he had expectations that those talks might make some progress. But obviously, those meetings couldn't take place; and they were all canceled. It was to have been a summit-level meeting, to get the SALT talks underway. So the White House had a certain ambivalence about it; but obviously, in the circumstances, they couldn't do anything. The White House also decided not to submit the recently-signed Non-Proliferation Treaty to the Senate for approval.

We watched very carefully to see whether there were any signs of the Soviets taking special measures around the Czechoslovak borders with the West: Austria, Germany. Then, of course, most of the Czechoslovaks' political leadership were transported off to Moscow. The Russians installed a puppet regime in Prague, and the crisis sort of simmered down. The Russians kept their troops in place. It gradually became part of the landscape, the Czechoslovakia that had tried and failed to free itself.

Q: As I recall, it did have a?strong effect on the French Communist party in that some of the top people, this is next to the 1939 pact, the Ribbentrop-Stalin Pact - some of the intellectuals peeled off at this point-

SONNENFELDT: Yes, and the Italian Communist party too.

Q: Yes, and so it never, I mean, this sort of ended in a way. I mean there were other things, but the bloom was certainly off the rose at that point.

SONNENFELDT: I think the bloom was off the rose. I think the French Communist party was conflicted. They had a long tradition of backing the Soviets. So they were still there, and they were still quite a major party and very much a factor in French elections, not so much because they were pro-Soviet, but because they were a big protest movement. They appealed to socialist sentiments in France and in Italy. But I think the ability of the Soviets to command their behavior and their conduct and their support, in relations with us, for example, was damaged quite severely, at least for the time being. By and large, I think our counter-measures (I mean ostracizing the new puppet regime in Czechoslovakia, and punishing the Soviets in various ways - economically, by cutting cultural exchanges, and so on) - I don't know that they had a great deal of effect on the Soviets, if any. But the Soviets, of course, wanted all this to be forgotten very quickly, and were very eager to get started on the arms control talks that had been postponed.

In the 1968 presidential election, I would guess the Soviets probably preferred Humphrey to Nixon; but in any event, they got Nixon. They had their very able ambassador, Anatoly Dobrynin, here in Washington. He had come just before the Cuban missile crisis, and had developed all sorts of contacts in our political system. Our Federal agencies were watching that to some extent, but this was really more for the policy people and the FBI. But during the transition from Johnson to Nixon, the Soviets (through Dobrynin and maybe one or two other people) picked up some threads of contact with the incoming people, including Kissinger. I don't know that they talked directly to Nixon, although Nixon was well known in the Soviet Union. He'd been there in '59, and was Eisenhower's Vice President, but considered anti-Communist. (Actually, I think Kissinger deals with this in his memoirs). The Soviets, through Dobrynin, suggested that it would be helpful in the development of American-Soviet relations if Nixon could include in his inaugural address some language indicating that he was interested in talking with the Soviets.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: Now, Nixon had already said (in the Republican Party nominating convention in Miami, in the summer of '68), that he wanted to see us move from an era of confrontation to an era of negotiation. He was suggesting maybe the Cold War ought to be attenuated a bit. Also, President Johnson, during the transition, apparently wanted to re-start or to start the arms control talks that had been postponed or canceled in August, at the time of the invasion of Czechoslovakia. Johnson's people approached the Nixon people to get support for doing this. Nixon did what George W. Bush did on North Korea in 2000, and what other presidents have done in the past: he basically took the position that this was still Johnson's presidency, and he could not get involved in this.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: What the Nixon people were doing, what Kissinger was doing (and that started during the transition, when I was being transferred to the NSC staff ; Larry Eagleburger was involved; others were involved) - they were trying to sort out their priorities, obviously including policy toward the Soviet Union. They didn't really want to get precipitated into a negotiation that had been scheduled and prepared earlier, and they wanted to review all the issues first. Obviously, Vietnam was the prime concern, and Nixon had said during the '68 campaign that he had a secret plan.

Q: I think this might be a good time to stop here-

SONNENFELDT: Yes. Right. Good.

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Q: All right. Today is May 29, 2001. Hain 1969, the Nixon administration is coming in. How did you sort of get connected with them?

SONNENFELDT: Well, in two ways. The State Department made up a list of people that it was prepared to assign to the National Security Council (NSC) staff. Kissinger had been named National Security Advisor, and I don't know whether he had asked them for a list, or whether this was just a routine thing that they did in those days, and maybe still do; and I was on that list.

But apart from that, I had known Kissinger since a few months after the end of the Second World War, because we were both in the Counter Intelligence Corps (CIC) in Germany at that time and we had a mutual friend, a man named Fritz Kraemer, of German birth, who had been in the same division with Kissinger. Kissinger had known Kraemer longer than I had, and Kissinger was sort of his protï¿½gï¿½. I was sent by the CIC to take a quick course at Oberammergau, which the U.S. Army had taken over at the end of the war. It was a quick course in investigative techniques, and included something about the German and the Nazi organizations, the people who were still subject to automatic arrest, and various things associated with the CIC. That's where I met both Kraemer and Kissinger, in early 1946.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: Kissinger was already out in the countryside in charge of a town or a county in the German state of Hessen. I was likewise given responsibility for a county in another part of Hessen, and that's how we became acquainted.

We stayed in touch over the years through Fritz Kraemer, who eventually came to Washington. After his Army service, Henry went to Harvard. I came back to the U.S., and after a brief stint of service in the State Department in 1946-47 (scanning captured documents and sorting mail), I went to Johns Hopkins. We kept in touch, and through the years, we met from time to time. When I became a member of the State Department full-time in 1952, Kissinger was writing on various subjects, including his famous book on Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy; and he asked me to look at some of his chapters.

So we had a professional relationship as well as a personal relationship. My wife and I met occasionally with him and his wife. When he was invited by Nixon to take the job of National Security Advisor, he asked me whether I would be willing to come and work for him. That was the second way in which I got involved in the NSC.

I actually wanted to think about that idea, because I was then chief of the Office of Research and Analysis for the Soviet Bloc, in INR, and had some prospects of further promotion in the State Department. I discussed it with some of my colleagues in the State Department, who weren't so sure that going over to the NSC was all that great, and suggested that maybe I should not do it.

But anyway, Kissinger was a friend, and he asked me to do it; and Larry Eagleburger had become, more or less, his Executive Assistant, and he urged me to do it as well. Sometime in December of 1968, that is, during the transition, I had a long talk with Henry at the Hotel Pierre, where Nixon's transition team was quartered.

Q: This is up in New York?

SONNENFELDT: Yes, in New York, at the Pierre. Henry said that he would want me to work on the Soviet Union in the NSC staff, and also on Europe. The two activities had been combined in the Bundy and Rostow NSC staffs, in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. Kissinger was inclined to maintain that combination, with maybe one senior person (the position he was offering me) and a couple of assistants. That sounded challenging to me. It really was going to put me into the policy sphere, where I had dabbled as new Research officer, but we analysts weren't supposed to really get into policy too much. That prospect sort of sealed it.

Starting I guess in about mid-December of 1968, I went up to New York periodically for conversations with Kissinger about Soviet policy and NATO policy. The transition group was mostly spending time on Vietnam, inevitably, and on reorganization of the NSC system to make the NSC staff, itself, and the Advisor (at that time still called Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs) stronger in making and implementing policy. Nixon had indicated that he wanted to have a strong White House foreign policy operation, even though he had selected William P. Rogers, whom he had known from the Eisenhower administration, as his Secretary of State. So there was a lot going on at the Pierre on an array of issues.

Kissinger asked me to write an informal paper on what I thought ought to be done in relations with the Soviet Union. I did that, and then came the holidays, and I went on vacation with my family. Then gradually, we got ready to take office after Nixon's inauguration.

Q: Well, in your paper what were you suggesting?

SONNENFELDT: Well, actually, he and I had talked about this a bit. The Johnson administration, obviously, had a policy toward the Soviet Union. Johnson had had a long meeting with Prime Minister Kosygin (who was really the number-two man, because Brezhnev was the Party Secretary, and then their President was the number-one). He had a long meeting with Kosygin about the Middle East-

Q: This is at Glassboro?

SONNENFELDT: At Glassboro, right, but they also talked about arms control, military issues, what later became known at SALT (Strategic Arms Limitations Talks), and also about the possibility of a treaty arrangement to prevent the construction of anti-ballistic missile systems. The reason for that latter discussion in the Johnson administration was not so much what has lately become the key word - that this was going to be the key cornerstone of the whole military relationship between the U.S. and the Soviet Union - but the fact was that the Johnson administration's anti-ballistic missile system did not have strong support in the Congress, and was being whittled away. In any case, the arms control subjects were on the agenda. Then in 1968, the Soviets invaded Czechoslovakia, and that put a hold, really, on everything that was going on.

My point in the memo to Kissinger was that if we moved in our relationship with the Soviet Union, we ought to have a broader strategy of what we were trying to accomplish, and not just pick raisins out the cake where it was possible to maybe make a narrow or limited agreement. I thought that Nixon, with his reputation as being strongly anti-communist, would actually have some bargaining leverage vis-ï¿½-vis the Soviets, even though our deep involvement and very divisive involvement in Vietnam did not make 1968-69 one of the more optimistic periods in American attitudes. I thought we ought to approach the Soviets in a more general way, take our time before we actually began any formal meetings with them (the State Department wanted to move ahead more quickly), and see how much we might be able to get from the Russians in the way of help in ending the Vietnam War.

Unbeknownst to me, Nixon and Kissinger had already talked about normalizing, or trying to normalize relations with China. I also put into my brief paper the possibility of having perhaps a more positive relationship with the Chinese, since it was obvious that they and the Soviets were deeply divided. Although this hadn't happened yet, later in 1969 they almost came to blows in their border region. So I thought that with a new president, there might be an opportunity to open some avenues of at least consultation. Nixon had said so in his acceptance speech for the nomination of the Republican Party.

Q: By this time, it was sort of general wisdom within the State Department and policy people, that there really was a difference between the Soviet Union and the Communist Chinese.

SONNENFELDT: I think by this time it was accepted. It took a long time, as I said earlier in our taping. Toward the end of the 1950s, the Sovietologists began to see many signs of frictions, as did the Sinologists. It was generally not accepted as real, or maybe as a big ruse to mislead the U.S. But above all, I think people felt that two Marxist-Leninists states could not really have a falling-out with each other, even though, of course, Marxist and Leninist regimes had a long history of internal strife, of people being purged and slaughtered by the thousands.

Q: Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, that whole thing.

SONNENFELDT: Right. But by 1968, they were openly berating and accusing each other, and they competed openly too. The Chinese were obstructing Soviet military shipments to Vietnam. There were lots of things going on; so it was pretty obvious. However, even though that was accepted by many people (including, I think by this time, by Dean Rusk, who had been the most skeptical about a Sino-Soviet split), nevertheless, in the State Department the feeling was that we should be very cautious with the Chinese. While we had had certain formal contacts between our ambassadors, which were actually publicized (first in Prague, between Alex Johnson and the Chinese representative there; and then in Warsaw, by Walter Stoessel, our ambassador to Poland, and the Chinese ambassador there), the State Department was always meticulous in briefing the Soviets about our talks with the Chinese in order not to lead the Soviets to believe that we were trying to gang up on them with the Chinese. Whatever the motivations for that may have been, that approach was endorsed by very high-level people, like Ambassador Thompson; and I think Ambassador Bohlen had similar feelings. So we briefed the Russians (that is, the State Department did), even though the Soviets must have had the tapes of these conversations from their listening devices, anyway-

Q: [Laughter] Yes.

SONNENFELDT: -since the discussions took place in Prague and Warsaw! While they accepted the Sino-Soviet split, our senior officials still tended to think that the Soviet relationship was the more important; and that the desirability of finding various opportunities (or "islands of cooperation," as they were called) with the Soviets was a desirable policy. They felt that we shouldn't make the Soviets believe that we were trying to encircle them somehow by ties with China on their Far Eastern front. But the split itself, I think, was widely accepted by that time.

Q: Did you get a feeling with Henry Kissinger at that time, of one that I've sort of had the sense of, that he saw the United States as not being able to sort of sustain a confrontation with the Soviet Union? In other words, it was sort of almost a cut your losses and try to get the better, rather than we shall overcome, or not? I mean at that time.

SONNENFELDT: I'm not so sure. It was certainly a bad time because we, as a country, were torn apart. We had the unending Vietnam War, although one of the early efforts made by the Nixon administration was to figure out a way to gradually extricate ourselves from Vietnam.

Kissinger tended to get pictured as a Spenglerian who would become pessimistic about the survival of the U.S. I think it was more the situation of the period, in Nixon's case as well - that we had to do something to get out of this Vietnam mess, which was dividing the country. So Nixon had a modest olive branch that he put forward toward the Soviets during the election campaign. He figured he had some leeway to do it because he was a certified anti-communist from way back.

I think the other reason was that having constant contact with the Soviets, possibly working with them on a few things that might actually produce some agreements, might take some of the wind out of the sails of the peace movement, which was rampant all over the place.

Q: This was sort of in a way?this was sort of the reality of when you came in - you have to do something about this.

SONNENFELDT: Yes. I think so. I think Kissinger agreed with that. But, of course, in the back of Nixon's mind (and I think somewhere in the back of Kissinger's mind, but Nixon had already written about it in Foreign Affairs, the magazine of the Council on Foreign Relations, in 1968) - in the back of Nixon's mind was also the idea of getting in touch with the Chinese, and therefore, maybe putting some pressure on the Soviets from the eastern side. It was all still very much in an embryonic state. They were trying to get some flexibility and mobility and maneuverability into American foreign policy, which had become relatively handicapped by the Vietnam war, and then by the fact that we couldn't talk to the Soviets after their invasion of Czechoslovakia; and we really didn't have any kind of relationship with the Chinese, and the Europeans were uneasy about the Vietnam war. While NATO existed, of course, there wasn't the kind of vigor in that alliance which had been the case in earlier years. Nixon and Kissinger felt that they wanted to get some room for maneuver and some opportunities to widen the scope of our diplomacy. The Soviet part of this played a role in their minds, clearly.

Q: Well, when you moved in after 20 January 1969, what sort of apparatus did you have to deal with? I mean, here you have sort of European as well as Soviet Affairs.

SONNENFELDT: Well, I had two or three people on my staff (maybe two, maybe we added another one later). But the style of the Kissinger NSC staff - and this has been written about now in several projects on the evolution of the NSC staff since the early days of Truman and Eisenhower - Kissinger ran a pretty tight shop, in the sense that he was going to be the only one who was going to deal with the President. He didn't know Nixon very well at first, and he wanted to establish himself with Nixon. The NSC staff in the Bundy and Rostow era in the '60s had had some direct contact with Kennedy, and then even more with Johnson, mostly on Vietnam, but on other issues, as well. [end of tape]

Henry really didn't want to encourage that. He wanted to be the sole contact with the President. At the beginning, he didn't even establish a Deputy position. Alexander Haig, who came in as a military assistant, was not a Deputy. He was still a Colonel at the time (as it happens, I had met him earlier in a couple of contexts). Haig became a Deputy when Kissinger started his many secret missions for talks with the Vietnamese and other travel, and somebody needed to hold the fort back in Washington.

In any case, the weight of policy formulation moved into the NSC staff, and it created quite a bit of tension and friction with the State Department. It didn't make life easy for people like myself. There were also several others who had been assigned to the NSC staff from the State Department, whose salaries were still paid by the Department.

At the start, a whole flood of Study Memoranda were requested by the National Security Advisor from the agencies involved - State Department, Defense Department, CIA, a couple of other agencies - on different aspects of foreign policy, including China, the Soviet Union, Vietnam (although most of that had been done during the transition, on defense-related issues), and lots of other topics. While the State Department fought very hard to maintain the chairmanship of the interagency committees, it became pretty clear that the center of gravity had shifted over to the White House. A lot of these studies kept a lot of people busy. They played some role in policy formulation, but essentially, Nixon felt so much at home in the foreign policy field that a lot of decision-making occurred in the White House.

The meetings of the NSC (National Security Council) itself were often sort of formal sessions in which people were able to state their views and certainly did. But then Nixon never made any announcements on policy decisions at an NSC meeting. He listened to the discussion, participated in it, and then at some point, a memorandum or a formal National Security Decision Memorandum (NSDM) was drafted. He fiddled around with it, and that was then proclaimed from Mount Sinai as the policy of the government. Sometimes the agencies weren't happy, and sometimes they just accepted.

I was active in that process, as were my colleagues who were responsible for Asia and other geographic and functional areas. We helped on the drafting of these NSDMs (National Security Decision Memoranda). Ultimately, Kissinger and I guess Haig, or maybe somebody else in his immediate surrounding, worked on them and then got them to Nixon, who then issued them. Then our function, and my function in particular (but that of the others as well) - our function became to see that these policy decisions were, in fact, carried out. That, too, involved an interagency process, and that was chaired by the State Department (or, in the military areas, by the Defense Department). We participated and tried to keep things on the path which the President had indicated.

Q: You know, you're sitting there. How do you find out? I mean, it's a vast bureaucracy, and things are happening way beyond this. How do you find out, you know?

SONNENFELDT: Well, I guess in practice, when instructions started, say, going out to our negotiating teams, wherever they were, they were supposed to be cleared in the NSC staff. If we had a serious problem, we could try to negotiate with the State Department people who were responsible; and if that was blocked, we took it to Kissinger or Haig, who acted as a de facto Deputy, and then escalated the discussion.

There was an interagency group in which Elliott Richardson, the Under Secretary of State (as it was still called in those days), represented the State Department. That group sometimes met in a rump session to try to iron out some differences. Telegrams were supposed to be cleared with us, and we also were on the distribution of State Department traffic (whether we got everything, you never know; but I think we got most of the important things); and then just through conversations, and so on. But there were problems when the State Department didn't quite seem to follow the line as we had interpreted it in the President's decision, whatever might have been at stake.

It took quite a while, for example, preparing for the Strategic Arms Limitations Talks (SALT) and the negotiations on the ABM (Anti-Ballistic Missile) Treaty, where the process was as I described it. There were big studies, and so on. Eventually, after discussions and debates at different levels, followed by formal NSC or Deputies' meetings, a directive came out of the President's office, which then had to be translated into a detailed negotiating position to use with the Soviets.

The State Department was really quite impatient. Bill Rogers, the Secretary of State, wanted to get started quite early in these negotiations with the Soviets. Nixon and Kissinger just wanted to bide their time, see what was happening in Vietnam, and not rush into these things. They wanted to string the Soviets along a little more, keep them guessing; make them and not ourselves the demandeur, even though, as I was saying earlier, we had a very problematic relationship with the Congress and with the public here because of Vietnam and the peace movement. The prospects for congressional funding of a missile defense program were dim, with at best two, but more likely only one site likely to be authorized.

I had to assign one of my assistants - and somebody else in the NSC staff who was more technically involved (my area was political) also had one of his people - to participate in the interagency process that developed the instructions for our negotiators on the Strategic Arms Limitation and the ABM Treaties. Of course, after a while, the famous "back channel" was developed between the White House and the Soviets, which supplemented and sometimes circumvented the formal instructions. That worked through Kissinger and the Soviet Ambassador, Dobrynin. Nixon and Dobrynin met, and by spring of 1970, there were some agreements made in that channel, which were then somehow put on the formal negotiating table, the front channel. Our people were quite disturbed when this happened without their knowing about it. Sometimes they had problems with the substance as well as the process.

Q: Were you, while you were dealing with Soviet Affairs, aware of this back channel?

SONNENFELDT: I was aware of a lot of it, but to this day, I'm not sure what else may have occurred in these conversations and in the written exchanges between Brezhnev and Nixon.

Q: But you knew something was happening there?

SONNENFELDT: Yes. Well, I knew when it came to the cases that I've just described, the negotiations on strategic arms and on the ABM Treaty. I did know that because I was directly involved (along with one of my, as I say, more technically-competent NSC staff colleagues) in working with Kissinger, so that when he talked with Dobrynin, he was on solid technical grounds. But our official delegation was quite upset to discover that a lot of the issues that they were working on in the front channel had, in fact, been dealt with behind their backs. The Soviets often seemed to have kept their chief negotiator better informed about what was going on in the "back channel" than we did. I think Kissinger, in the meantime, has expressed some regret that we weren't more meticulous in letting our own people know what was happening.

Q: Did you find that you were being asked this, "Let's get together for lunch," type of thing with people? State Department finding out what is going on at the NSC through your colleagues at the State Department?

SONNENFELDT: There was some of that, but the "back channel," that was sacreincidentally, not only with the Soviets. But either at lunch or when we ran into each other at meetings, we talked. I think others on the staff talked also. In my case, this was mostly about the Soviets. There were all these old Moscow hands in the State Department, some of them at quite high levels, who officially outranked me. It was awkward when there were some issues that I knew they had not been kept informed on. I didn't consider it my job to violate the confidence of the people that I was working for at that time. So it caused some friction. I think the NSC staff people who dealt with China had somewhat similar problems with their colleagues as that opening got underway in 1971.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: It wasn't easy. Of course, you'd known these people all your lives. It eventually evened out. The big "back channel," of course, was the secret talks on Vietnam that Kissinger was conducting; and eventually it included somebody from the State Department because the Secretary of State complained about it-

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: It was a system that suited Nixon; it was his style. He didn't think much of the State Department, in general; and he was terribly worried about leaks. And it suited Kissinger's style of conducting diplomacy; and in a way, it suited the times, because the journalists in the Nixon White House, by and large, were seen as anti-Nixon, and the "back channel" was less likely to leak.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: Henry, however, cultivated some media people, and it caused some problems for him with Nixon. There was also a rather tightly-run operation on some issues with foreign governments. Representatives of some foreign governments knew more about what we were trying to do than our own colleagues did in other parts of our government, and than the people up on the Hill did. But it was Nixon's and Kissinger's style, as I say; and it was a function of the period.

Q: During this time from '69 - you were with the NSC from '69 to when, by the way?

SONNENFELDT: 'Til early '74, just about five years.

Q: When you were looking at 21 January 1969, how did we view the Soviet Union at that time? I mean, where was the Soviet - what was motivating the Soviet Union? Where was it going? You know-

SONNENFELDT: I think we still had a rather traditional view - that is, that they were accumulating power, military power; that they, despite Czechoslovakia and other rumblings in Eastern Europe, wanted to continue to dominate the Central-Eastern European empire. They were trying, while they had opportunities, to drive some wedges between us and our European allies. But we also saw them being active in different parts of the world. In Cuba, of course, this was nearly seven years after the missile crisis, but their forces were still there; and we had a few altercations with the Soviets because they seemed to be violating the agreements made in the Kennedy administration about what kind of forces they could keep in Cuba. They were active with their arms sales. They were very much involved in the Middle East. They were beginning to have their problems with China. All in all, I think we saw them as an ambitious growing power. Comparisons were often made with the emerging imperial Germany, trying to show the flag in lots of different places around the world. The Soviets also were building a rather imposing navy.

I think what we underestimated was the economic weakness of the system. I think Nixon recognized this to some extent, because he was dangling some economic goodies before the eyes of the Soviets. We eventually had a negotiation, which was intended to give the Soviets most-favored-nation (MFN) treatment and also to settle (on rather favorable terms) the old lend-lease debt that they still owed us from World War II.

So I think we saw them as a serious problem for us, but also as potentially helpful in Vietnam, helpful only in the sense that they would further curtail their military supplies, which were already being curtailed because of Chinese obstruction. This business of the Soviets helping us on Vietnam was very much an idea in the Johnson administration, and Averil Harriman was convinced that that could be accomplished. In 1969, I think we were a little bit more sober about that prospect. But President Nixon regarded the Soviets as our main problem in the world, apart from Vietnam and the conflict in the Middle East (in which the Soviets were involved), which was continuing at that time. It wasn't the Palestinians, but it was Israel and Egypt and Syria and Iraq and Jordan.

Q: Then towards the end of your time there we had the October War of '73.

SONNENFELDT: We had the Yom Kippur War; we'd had the '67 War. There was repeated air combat between the Israelis and the Egyptians-

Q: War of Attrition really.

SONNENFELDT: At his start in the White House, Kissinger had kept his hands off the Middle East, and I think Nixon wanted him to keep his hands off. Then gradually, especially after the Yom Kippur War, or really during the Yom Kippur War in 1973, he got much more involved. It had been a big subject in one of the summits between Nixon and Brezhnev earlier in 1973, when Brezhnev came over here in return for Nixon's having gone to Moscow in 1972 for the first in their series of summits. As he had been in Moscow, Brezhnev was very critical of our Vietnam policy, but even more so of our Middle East policy. He kept warning that this issue was a tinderbox. When the Yom Kippur War broke out later that year, it looked, in retrospect, more like Brezhnev's warnings had been a threat. The Soviets were deeply involved there.

Actually, however, whenever there was a war or near-war in the Middle East, the Soviets somehow evaporated, and this caused them a lot of problems in the Arab world. They provided the Arabs with lots of military equipment and training. They seemed to egg them on, very anti-Israeli, and made it appear that they would be actively on their side if war broke out again. But the Soviets never were activexcept that they pulled out many of their nationals before the Egyptians launched their attack. We discovered this later.

During the Yom Kippur War, I was with Kissinger, along with several other people, in a long meeting Kissinger had in Moscow in October, 1973. We settled on a UN resolution that was designed to end that conflict. So the Soviets were involved quite a bit, generally not constructively. But at crisis times, they were the partner that we were able to deal with to calm things down. This time, the result was UN Resolution 338, which built on 242, with which the Six-Day War was ended, but which never led to a full-fledged peace deal.

Q: Was your analysis, as you're looking at this, that if things looked or reached a real confrontation level, such as over the '73 War and other times, that the Soviets would back off, more or less? I mean-

SONNENFELDT: Well, we weren't sure. We weren't sure whether they would or not. My personal impression was that they backed off when things got hot. I also felt, over time, that the Soviets' reputation in the region suffered.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: In the '67 War, when the Israelis were doing well, and particularly when they were starting to do well against the Syrians as well as the Egyptians, we thought we saw some Soviet uneasiness, and we were getting a bit concerned. In '73, the Egyptians, of course, were doing very well at the start. We had the problem of re-supplying the Israelis militarily, and there were some internal disputes in the U.S. government about this.

When this war started, the press bombarded Kissinger, especially in his press conferences, with questions about, "What's all this detente about? Here the Russians or Soviets are right up to their ears in egging on the Egyptians, supplying them with military stuff," and so on. Kissinger found himself on the defensive because this sort of thing was not supposed to happen between the U.S. and the Soviets.

I was not sure. After we'd been in Moscow to negotiate Resolution 338, there was a letter from Brezhnev that Dobrynin delivered by phone here one night. It warned that the Israelis had to stop the fighting, or the U.S. and the Soviet Union ought to, in effect, make them stop. The Israelis were supposed to stop, according to the draft resolution that we and the Russians had worked out in Moscow, which was later adopted by the UN Security Council. But they kept fighting, almost surrounding an Egyptian army near the northern end of the Suez Canal.

At that time, I was in a group that met all through the night of October 25-26, 1973, when this Brezhnev message arrived. It was actually delivered only orally by Dobrynin at first, and all we had was based on a telephone conversation. We didn't have a formal letter. We weren't sure what they were up to. But some intelligence indicated that their forces might be on the move at Soviet air bases, to help the Egyptians; there were also reports of Soviet naval moves in the Mediterranean. I wasn't sure what was going to happen.

So the U.S. went on a heightened state of alert. It was not the highest alert, or even near the highest, but still noticeably higher than it had been, to send a warning signal to the Soviets. Then it turned out that they?backed away. They got something out of their maneuver, because we agreed that they could have some observers on the ground in Egypt, and we would also have observers in the Sinai peninsula.

All told, during this tense period I was not sure whether we were close to Soviet intervention. I couldn't quite believe that they would want to get themselves directly involved in this conflict; but I thought that it might be a domestic issue in Moscow, to see their Arab allies defeated by the Israelis yet again, with American help; and this could produce some perhaps-not-quite-rational behavior on their part. I guess I toyed somewhat with the notion that, if we showed them that we were not going to tolerate this, they would back away from military action. But it's never been fully established how far they really were going in their preparations, or whether they were just doing things as a feint that would look to us as though they might intervene. They had a particular ship that we were watching carefully in the eastern Mediterranean; and they were active in moving their airborne troops, which we were able to detect through our intelligence.

I thought we needed to take some precautions. In addition - something I was not that directly involved in - I thought we needed to get the Israelis to stop their effort to fully encircle the Egyptians.

Q: Yes, they had the Third Army trapped

SONNENFELDT: That's right.

Q: On the east bank of the Suez Canal.

SONNENFELDT: Kissinger went to see Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir immediately after our Moscow meetings. We flew to Israel to tell her what we had worked out with the Russians, but I think Henry might also have winked a little bit at her and indicated that she had just a couple of days, maybe, for Israeli forces to continue, but then they'd have to stop. (I was not in Kissinger's meeting with Gold Meir.) The Israelis kept going. The Soviets evidently started getting very itchy. They probably suspected that our finger was in this, and that's what produced this rather threatening message from Brezhnev, and maybe some of the Soviet military moves. So it was an uncertain time, including in what was becoming Watergate Washington.

In retrospect, I don't think the Soviets would have wanted to get involved, either with the Israelis themselves, or least of all, with us. They weren't ready to have a big conflict with us. Of course in our case, we were ending our direct involvement in Vietnam, and not very gloriously. We were getting out from under that, and we weren't looking for a conflict with the Soviets. But there was enough there to cause concern-

Q: These things could always get out of control.

SONNENFELDT: Yes.

Q: What was our reading internally in the Soviet Union about the Brezhnev group. Was Brezhnev really in charge of calling it and the role of the military and

SONNENFELDT: We saw a lot of him at the meetings in Moscow. Kissinger went to Moscow in between summit meetings on several occasions, and I went with him. I had also gone in the early summer of 1972 with our Secretary of Commerce, Peter Peterson, for negotiations on MFN (Most Favored Nation treatment) and lend-lease. So I had seen a lot of Brezhnev, and I had the feeling that he was pretty confident. Occasionally, while we were in meetings, he'd pick up a phone and call somebody. From what he was saying (not so much on trade questions, but on the arms control business, and on Vietnam and maybe on the Middle East), he seemed to be talking to Grechko, his Defense Minister, and it sounded as if Brezhnev was on top. Everybody in his presence was deferential; so he looked like he was pretty much in the saddle. But when things were moving in our talks, he did check with some of his colleagues, sometimes within our earshot.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: As in the earlier case of Khrushchev, the signs began to mount that Brezhnev was in trouble, not so much from the military, but within the political leadership. Then we did notice later, when Ford became President and we met in 1974 in Vladivostok with Brezhnev, that he was physically not in good shape. Of course, he lived on for quite a while longer, but he didn't seem to have quite the vigor and the confidence. Still, I think, since there wasn't any obvious alternative to him at the time, no leader around whom the others might have jelled, I think we thought he was pretty well in the saddle.

Q: Were we still playing the art of Kremlinology, watching this Grechko?

SONNENFELDT: Yes, but you know, the policy-makers believe only what they see and hear themselves-

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: At least the non-Soviet expert ones. But the Sovietologists were busy as bees, looking for signs (and there clearly were some signs) of maneuverings. They weren't so much against Brezhnev, I don't think. (This has all been written up in the meantime, because a lot of this has been publicized.) The Kremlinologists were busy. The Soviet Union had opened up a little bit more, so there was a bit more access than in the old days to some quite high-ranking people. And they had also started to develop more think-tanks in Moscow, particularly one dealing with the U.S.A., headed by Georgy Arbatov.

Q: Canadian-American Institute [Institute for U.S. and Canadian Studies].

SONNENFELDT: Right. Arbatov and their people came over here quite a bit, and some of our people went over there. In those days, we gradually began developing contacts among American researchers, American scholars, Soviet scholars, and some Soviet officials. It wasn't anything like it became later, but our Sovietologists were able to get a bit more first-hand information than they had in the past, when they had to pore through broadcasts and newspapers and books and journals, checking key phrases. The intelligence people occasionally picked up some snippets of conversations. But yes, Kremlinology was still quite an active profession.

The problem with the Sovietologists - those who were really buried deep in this stuff with their heads in green eyeshades - was that what they produced wasn't always particularly relevant to what was on the minds of the policy-makers. Later, policy-makers were able to make better use of what they were able to discern about Soviet internal politics and maneuvering. The group of officials active in designing policies, and our other officials and high-level people who had dealings at the highest levels in the Soviet hierarchy, were briefed on things that they should look for: how someone like Party Secretary Suslov would act in the presence of Brezhnev, how Premier Kosygin would act in the presence of Brezhnev, and so on; and how they were aligned across the table from us. All these things were of interest. The policy-makers and policy-executors became a bit more familiar with the Sovietologists' tools of the trade.

Q: Did the Soviets have the equivalent of an NSC?

SONNENFELDT: No. Brezhnev had a foreign policy and national security advisor nameAlexandrov-Agentov. He was smart and spoke English well, and he had some high-level connections. There were two or three others whom we saw on German policy, which was very important to them. They had two or three people in Moscow who were experts, but they didn't have a structure like our NSC. Of course, they had the Politburo and the Secretariat of the Politburo, which had foreign policy experts. In that sense, they did have a sort of structure, but it wasn't quite the same as ours, and it was pretty much embedded in the Communist Party. In thParty Secretariat, the secretary in charge of international relations, part of his brief was dealing with foreign Communist parties and Communist-run governments. But the other part of his brief was to work for the Politburo on foreign policy issues. So they had a structure, but it was more focused on the party than the government. Their Foreign Office had influence only if the Minister was a member of the Politburo, although some Soviet career ambassadorin Washington or Bonhad a direct line to the Kremlin.

Q: Did Berlin play - was Berlin pretty well settled by the time that

SONNENFELDT: Well, no. We still had various altercations, but mostly on the access routes to the city, which was completely surrounded by Communist East Germany. There was, in our second year, the quadripartite negotiation on Berlin (involving the U.S., USSR, Great Britain and France) because there had been an accumulation of incidents. By 1970, the Nixon-Brezhnev contact had been made and a new government formed in Germany, headed by Chancellor WillBrandt (a coalition between the Social Democrats and the Liberal Democrats). Their Ostpolitik (Eastern policy) became more active. Then Berlin became one of the serious sources of friction. We felt, and I guess the Soviets felt, certainly Germans did, that we ought to do something about those tensions.

There was no longer the old Khrushchevian effort to establish West Berlin as a free city, and make it sort of a formal enclave. But the Berlin Wall remained. An agreement was reached in the early fall of 1971, the Quadripartite Agreement, that regulated more systematically the way access was to be handled between the Western zones and West Berlin. It also stipulated that West Berlin could not function as the capital of Germany. The Germans, actually, had moved some official functions to Berlin, mostly for reasons of subsidizing Berlin activity and business. They had some governmental offices assigned to Berlin. The Bundestag, their parliament, and its committees met there periodically in the old Reichstag building, and so on. The Soviets always complained bitterly that the Germans were violating the idea that the Federal Republic of Germany was not to be governed from Berlin.

The Germans considered Berlin a "land" (state) of the Federal Republic, but it did not have the same rights as the states that made up the rump of the Federal Republic of Germany. So periodic frictions and incidents occurred. The Germans became quite active in their relations with the Soviets. That became controversial in partisan terms in Germany after Brandt became Chancellor.

Q: Now this is Ostpolitik.

SONNENFELDT: Yes. The CDU (Christian Democratic Union), which had led the German government for so long, and the CSU (Christian Socialist Union), the Bavarian branch or Bavarian associate of the Christian Democrats, were very suspicious that the Social Democrats were giving away too much to thSoviets. They were very suspicious of Brandt, himself, and of his close confidant, Egon Bahr.

As for the U.S. government, we wanted to keep things quiet. We didn't want to see the West Germans go too far in their relations with the Soviets, but we understood that, for their own political reasons, they wanted to have a more normal relationship. We didn't want to have incidents on the Autobahn if we could possibly avoid it.

Then there was the broader question of how to deal with East Germany, the GDR (German Democratic Republic). Of course, the East Germans were originally ostracized by the West Germans, but the West Germans gradually normalized relations with the East Germans. Both became members of the United Nations. We began to have contact, and eventually we and other NATO countries also established diplomatic missions in East Germany, in effect, accepting that for the foreseeable future, East Germany was going to be separate from West Germany. There were the Berlin Wall, and the mined tracts in the East along the border with West Germany. We accepted that they were separate countries. Now this was in the mid -'70s. Fifteen years later, it all changed.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: There were some rumblings in those days, mostly in Poland, but also elsewhere: Czechoslovakia after '68, Hungary, and Romania were problems for the Soviets. We had dealings with Romania quite early in the Nixon administration. The President made a big state visit to Bucharest in 1969, not because we found their leader, Ceausescu, so delicious and likeable, but he was a thorn in the side of the Soviets. He became something of a channel, occasionally, for us on Chinese and other matters.

But Germany looked as though it was going to remain divided. Brandt thought so, and we thought so, and pretty much everybody else did too. The division seemed to suit everybody. The West Europeans weren't particularly keen on German unification, although we signed annual NATO and other communiquï¿½s that declared this as our goal.

I would say that after the 1971 Quadripartite Agreement, to go back to your original question, Berlin was a less acute problem. There were incidents from time to time, mostly having to do with access rights, and the Soviets were getting annoyed and irritated at the Germans for having too many official activities in West Berlin. But it really was not a big issue. It remained an issue, of course, but it was episodic. There were a lot of subsidies to keep West Berlin going, and it cost the West Germans a lot. Increasingly, West Berlin became not just an isolated outpost, but a very modern city compared to East Berlin and the rest of East Germany. So it was often held up as the symbol of what you can accomplish in a democratic system and in a free market society.

The big issue in Europe became the Soviet SS-20 medium-range missiles, which started on our watch, but became much more pronounced later on.

Q: Well, what about the Helsinki negotiations during the time you were there? Should we just - do you want to start talking about that?

SONNENFELDT: Well, let's quickly say something about that and then maybe continue next time.

Q: Yes, yes.

SONNENFELDT: Years earlier, in 1954, prospects began to develop for West Germany to become part of NATO, because the proposed European Defense Community (which would have included West Germany) had been vetoed by France. The EDC had been seen as the way to include some West German military forces within the context of a European forcwhich is kind of interesting because as we talk now, in 2001, the Europeans are trying to recreate a European force.

Q: French wishing it again.

SONNENFELDT: But at that time, in 1954, the French vetoed the EDC. The Germans then, as a result of various agreements, were to become NATO members in 1955. In answer to that, the Soviets threatened to create their own alliance in the East, but they also proposed an all-European security conference in which these alliances would all disappear. That was not acceptable to us or to our NATO allies.

This particular Soviet proposal was sort of a typical Soviet propaganda ploy, but I think it did, in fact, have some substance, in their minds at least, because they were quite anxious about the West Germans re-arming and becoming part of the Western (NATO) alliance. This rattled around for years and was a stock proposal by the Russians.

Then, after the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in '68, they really gave it a lot of emphasis. By that time, even despite Czechoslovakia, there had developed a certain interest in Europe in perhaps having some sort of an all-European forum, but not at the expense of NATO. The Scandinavians were interested in it; some of the smaller Western European countries were interested in it. Other West European countries were evolving and improving their relations with the Soviets. We were starting to pursue a policy called detente; it was in its early stages. So the Soviets revived this proposal. It still proved to be unacceptable, and we were really not interested.

NATO, as a result of the 1967 Harmel Report (I had been the U.S. representative in drafting this document) had expanded its agenda from largely military issues to discussions of political relations with the Warsaw Pact countries. The North Atlantic Council became the NATO body for dealing with the Soviet proposals.

In the spring of 1969, when NATO observed its 20th anniversary here in Washington, it was obvious that there was some interest in Europe in having a forum to discuss issues with the Soviets and the East Europeans. In fact, some Europeans maybe saw it as a way of weaning the East Europeans away from the Soviet Union a bit. We had a very active and observant, skillful Ambassador to NATO in Brussels at the time, Harlan Cleveland, who had been named to that post during the Johnson administration. (He was replaced by Bob Ellsworth later in the Nixon administration.) Cleveland thought that it was probably going to be difficult for the U.S. to block some action on the Russian proposal. The NATO anniversary meeting was mildly responsive.

Two years later, a preparatory committee was created, including both Easterners and Westerners, to set an agenda for a broad East-West conference. The general sense was that this shouldn't deal only with security issues, but should also deal with what we'd call human rights issues. So there was a major new agenda item added, having to do with freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of movement, and so on, which was more of a Western agenda. I don't think the White House was that keenly interested in it, but we sort of came around to it.

Q: You had the feeling, I mean, that Kissinger really

SONNENFELDT: Right, only mildly

Q: That whole thing was not verl mean he just wasn't very interested.

SONNENFELDT: Right, it didn't seem very important to him. But I felt, I have to say, that we had to move in this direction. By 1973, we were having negotiations with the Soviets on arms control and summit meetings, and others had talked with the Russians since the 1960s: the French had a consultation agreement with the Soviets; West German Chancellor Brandt had the Ostpolitik, and so on; the Italians had some contact with the Soviets and East Europeans.

Q: Let me just stop here to-

SONNENFELDT: Yes. [end of tape]

The upshot of it was that there was a preparatory meeting in Helsinki in 1973, and a full conference to negotiate a text then convened in Geneva; and we had our representatives there. The NATO Council became the coordinating mechanism for the NATO members to agree on common positions on the different agenda items, or "baskets," that they were discussing in this conference.

Later in 1973, the Soviets started calling for an all-European summit meeting to give this conference some momentum and impetus. Willy Brandt seemed to be interested in having such a meeting. We weren't very keen on having a huge gala summit at that point. Kissinger, because of Middle East problems, really wanted to use the prospect of a possible all-European summit meeting as an inducement for Brezhnev to behave himself as far as the Middle East was concerned. Kissinger was linking progress on two unrelated issues - this is where the word "linkage" came into common usage. We were also trying to slow down the Brandt government as far as any summit was concerned. We weren't saying no; we weren't saying yes, certainly; we wanted to keep the idea afloat and keep it hanging out there as a carrot for Brezhnev.

But some European leaders thought this European conference (it came to be called the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, or CSCE), had an intrinsic importance in reducing tensions across the Iron Curtain and opening the Iron Curtain to some extent. So there was something of a difference between our approach and those of some westerEuropeans, as well as that of the Russians. The neutrals of Europe were also parties, and they liked the idea of a summit.

I think the historians and journalists who have subsequently written about this have still not quite caught the shift, the subtle shift in American policy. Initially, we didn't like the idea because we thought the Europeans were going to be hard to keep in line because of domestic pressures in their countries. We were concerned that there would be all sorts of unnecessary divisions and arguments between us and the Europeans, and also among the Europeans. But I don't think our opposition, or Kissinger's, was as hard as is often pictured. I mean, Kissinger certainly wasn't an enthusiast. But eventually the thing became a reality, and we worked very hard to influence the draft. In fact, our delegates to this conference played an increasingly active role in the drafting of all the complicated clauses in the various "baskets," and the U.S. became a key participant in the work on what became the Helsinki Final Act, adopted in 1975.

In fact, toward the end, the Germans became concerned about the Soviet-proposed language about "permanent, unchangeable" borders - specifically, that national borders were inviolate and couldn't be changed by force or any other way. They worried on two grounds. Genscher-

Q: It was Hans-Dietrich Genscher, the Foreign Minister.

SONNENFELDT: The German Foreign Minister and his intimates there in the Bonn Foreign Ministry, and I guess Chancellor Brandt until he had to resign in 1973, but also his successor, Helmut Schmidt - they were concerned that the draft language about frontiers in the document that they were negotiating would ultimately make it impossible to reunite Germany, because borders were going to be fixed and inviolable. The West Germans were also thinking ahead about the European Economic Community, and that someday it might become more of a sovereign entity. So they wanted to have some language that was more flexible on frontiers. But the Soviets stonewalled, as did some others in Eastern Europe.

So the Germans came to us for help. Kissinger and I, as it happened, were visiting in Bonn. Genscher and two or three of his people took us on a boat ride up the Rhine for a Sunday afternoon coffee-klatch in one of those old castles there. They said they had tried repeatedly to get more flexible language into the proposed document, and they really needed us to put our weight behind this. We reached some understanding with the Germans that we probably couldn't do it in the precise section of the draft document where the language about borders was then placed, but that we could try in some other part of the document to indicate agreement that national borders could be changed if both parties, or all affected parties, were willing to do that, and did it by peaceful means and in conformity with international law. The Germans thought that was a good idea and was worth trying. Then we took it up with the Soviets, through the "back channel" first, and eventually at the negotiations in Geneva itself, to see if we could get this kind of language into what became the "Helsinki Final Act." We succeeded, and got it into the Preamble.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: The Germans were very satisfied with that. This was a case, one of several, where the Americans played a major role behind the scenes in getting the Helsinki agreement wrapped up.

Q: So we were much more involved positively than.-

SONNENFELDT: Right.

Q: Often you get the accounts that Kissinger was more or less negative

SONNENFELDT: Yes, but I think mostly for tactical reasons. It also is the case, you know, that back in Washington, the administration (the Ford administration by that time) was severely criticized by the right wing of the Republicans for selling out - selling out on frontiers, and selling out on a lot of things to the Soviets. There were critical editorials and op-ed columns, notably by Bill Safire (who'd been Nixon's speechwriter, but by that time was writing his own column in the New York Times), but also by lots of others. So I think there was some understandable caution in how far we should go with this. We actually decided in 1975 that the negotiations had gone far enough, that we'd gotten a lot from the Soviets on different issues - freedom of the press, freedom of movement, and so forth. So we held a major summit meeting in Helsinki to sign it.

The interesting thing, and the ironic thing is that - despite the opposition to the Helsinki Final Act by many organizations in the U.S. concerned with the plight of oppressed peoples in Eastern Europe - the East Europeans themselves proved very skillful in using the language of the Helsinki Final Act to improve their situations. For example, the "Charter 77" movement in Czechoslovakia-

Q: Yes, we're talking about the opponents to the regimes within the East European

SONNENFELDT: Right. Many East Europeans were very skillfully using the Helsinki wording to form organizations and to express themselves; and dissidents in the Soviet Union did that as well. I don't go as far as a lot of other people do, that is, to say that the Helsinki Final Act was the basic reason why the Soviet empire in Eastern Europe collapsed. I think there were many reasons for that collapse. But it is interesting that, contrary to most of the criticisms - that we'd sold out to the Russians, that these East European "satellite" people had been enslaved permanently-

Q: Because you knew the Yalta Agreement [and how it was condemned as a sellout to the Russians]-

SONNENFELDT: -in fact, the Helsinki Final Act turned out to be one of the catalysts-

Q: Yes, yes.

SONNENFELDT: -that contributed, at least, to the collapse of the Soviet empire in Eastern Europe and of the Communist regimes in Eastern Europe. I say there are many factors.

Q: In other words, economics, the whole thing.

SONNENFELDT: Yes, yes, yes.

Q: Well, all right. Well, we'll stop at this point. There were two other questions I would like to raise about this '69-74 period when you were at the NSC. One was how the recognition or opening to China played in the Soviet Union, from your perspective. The other one is about the whole Watergate business and your perspective and what happened at that point.

SONNENFELDT: Yes, okay.

Q: Great.

Today is July 27, 2001. Hal, we're still at the NSC, '69-'74. Again, how did the opening to China - I mean, you're dealing with the Soviet Union. Did you have any sort of input beforehand of saying, "Okay, this is, you know, helping develop manufacturing the China card," or did this sort of come out? How did it come out to you?

SONNENFELDT: Well, I had very little direct involvement in the actual opening to China when it began concretely with the secret Kissinger trip to Beijing in the summer of 1971. I had had some involvement in discussions early in the Nixon administration, when there were thoughts that had been foreshadowed by Nixon's famous article in Foreign Affairs in 1967.

Q: Prior to his becoming President?

SONNENFELDT: Right. In early 1969, there were thoughts about how we go about getting some more flexibility in our policy toward China, and get more contact with them, and so on. One of the National Security Study Memoranda was sent out by the NSC staff to the various government agencies involved. Several weeks of study produced very modest recommendations because, in fact, the State Department (in general and traditionally) was extremely reluctant to get involved with the Chinese; they were focused on the Soviet Union. State didn't object - in fact, they couldn't object - to years of rather formalistic, ritualistic contacts that we had with the Chinese through our ambassadors in Czechoslovakia and then in Warsaw and one or two other places; but they were not eager to do much with the Chinese. They also de-briefed the Soviets on those contacts, to assuage their suspicions. So the agencies came up with some very modest ideas, but they were certainly not eager.

But there were some mild signals sent from the U.S. to the Chinese. The one I've always liked involved an issue of importing Chinese pig bristles for shaving brushes. That was banned by American trade legislation at the time. One of the so-called signals that was sent early on in the Nixon administration was to lift the restriction or to reduce the tariffs on pig bristles. There were one or two other things. I don't recall the details because it wasn't really my area. Kissinger and Nixon were not only secretive toward the rest of the government, but within the White House staff setup and the National Security Council staff setup, there was a good bit of compartmentalization. While I had some general idea of what was happening, I really wasn't directly involved with the opening to China.

Actually, several of us were in San Clemente with Nixon in the summer of 1971 when the announcement was made that Kissinger had been in Beijing and was coming back and was going to give a press conference there. After Kissinger had finished with his China visit, I put together some things that hadn't made sense to me before that; and I realized what was going on. From my own standpoint regarding our relations with the Soviet Union and the reaction of the Soviets, the relationship between China and the Soviet Union really was very difficult and very bad; and, in fact, they had almost come to blows less than two years earlier-

Q: Well, it had come to blows as a matter of fact-

SONNENFELDT: In fact, they did-

Q: ?over the Ussuri River, or whatever it is.

SONNENFELDT: Right, the Ussuri River and border issues. They kept up the polemics: there were major differences between them on the Vietnam War; the Chinese interfered with Soviet military supplies going through China to North Vietnam, and so on. So their relationship was really pretty bad.

My own sense of it was that if something was going to develop with China, we couldn't really tell at the time, even though Kissinger's talks in Beijing had sort of laid out an agenda and prepared for a Nixon visit. The President's trip to China took place in February of 1972, while we were also working on the first Nixon-Brezhnev summit. My feeling was that this contact with China would give the Soviets something to think about; that maybe they couldn't rely much longer on a situation of major hostility between the U.S. and China; and that this could be of some help in getting the Soviets to play ball on some issues that we were interested in. That was rather a simple-minded view of this emerging triangular relationship, as it was later called.

Q: Well, in the first place, in the NSA, or in NSC, or even State Department, was there anyone sort of given the job of looking at the China-Soviet relations and watching that closely, or was this sort of, you know, both sides, both the Soviet experts and the Chinese experts were kind of doing their thing, and it was kind of put together haphazardly?

SONNENFELDT: Well, looking at that Chinese-Soviet relationship was, of course, a major matter in the intelligence community. Donald Zagoria, one of the CIA's leading experts on China and on China-Soviet relations, had written a study at CIA in the late 1950s which collated a huge volume of material, mostly public material, but also inferences from what was happening in Sino-Soviet relations. That was eventually declassified and published as a book and caused quite a stir. Zagoria was later a professor at Columbia University. His was the first major study on Sino-Soviet tensions and frictions and potential enmity. It was very controversial because it ran right against the standard theology that Marxists may quarrel, but they stick together. So all through the '60s, when I was still in the State Department Bureau of Intelligence and Research and running the Soviet Research Office there, we spent a lot of time tracking whatever we could in Sino-Soviet relations. It was obvious that they were getting worse, and it became quite public in what they were saying to and about each other.

Now in policy terms, what that meant for us in the Johnson administration, when Dean Rusk was Secretary of State, and I think also in the Kennedy and Johnson NSC staff under McGeorgBundy and Walt Rostow: there was still some skepticism about how far the Sino-Soviet rift was really going, and considerable reluctance to even think very much about the policy implications of it. It really became a central question only when Nixon became President. He had already written publicly about it. Kissinger hadn't said anything very much publicly about Sino-Soviet relations, but it was obviously something that appealed to both of them. Without the profound Sino-Soviet tension - friction, conflict, division, gulf, rift, whatever you want to call it - then almost coming to a serious military clash, which posed all sorts of issues for the United States in 1969 - I think on the policy side, the implications for American interests and American policy were not, in my view and certainly not in my recollections, seriously addressed until the Nixon people came in.

Q: Yes. Well, did you find - '71 you were in there and you gave your initial reaction to this. I mean, did this become, sort of, within the NSC or within the agencies supporting you, a major leit motif or whatever it is? How do we play this China thing? Or was it just another factor or not?

SONNENFELDT: It was a very major thing! It was also controversial in the country here, because it was mostly interpreted, I think, that Nixon was really seeking a way to get out of Vietnam somehow, to break open that alliance, and maybe to get Chinese help in that, since the Soviets didn't seem to mind our being stuck in Vietnam. There had been theories about getting Soviet help in ending the Vietnam War when Averil Harriman was handling it in the Johnson years.

By 1969, it was becoming a major issue. And of course, their cover had been blown; the Sino-Soviet tension was now semi-public. Not every part of it was public, but in 1971, the fact that Kissinger had visited China was made public. At that point, it was a major issue of discussion. There were people in the Congress who were skeptical about China. There were still theories that the apparent conflict was all a big snow job that the Soviets and the Chinese were putting on to lure us into whatever flawed policy we would then conduct. But I think there were signs that the Soviets were really quite uneasy about the situation. On the other hand, it also has to be said that Nixon and Kissinger, to the extent that I had any input on this, did not seek to deliberately humiliate or provoke the Soviets.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: I thought, first of all, that was a dangerous game to play-

Q: It was very dangerous.

SONNENFELDT: -but they wanted another string to their bow. The opening to China wasn't just a Soviet-related initiative. It also had to do with the fact that China was a big country and was someday going to be a major actor, and we were on opposite sides of the Pacific Ocean, and we needed to have contact with them. So it wasn't only the tactical considerations involved in Vietnam or an effort to get more room for maneuver in our relations with the Soviets. I think there was an underlying view as well: that is, that the U.S. really cannot do well in world politics, and in particular, in advancing its Pacific region policies and interests, without having some kind of relationship with China.

Q: Well now, did issues bubble up? Say, okay, now we've got this new relationship. I mean I'm coming from your [perspective] or from the NSC. Maybe now is the time to raise this issue; maybe the Soviets will be more forthcoming. I mean, was this part of your calculations?

SONNENFELDT: Well, we were watching. We were watching whether the Russians would be suspicious and maybe more difficult to deal with, or whether they were maybe trying to avoid having our relationship with the Chinese become intimate and detrimental to their own interests. They couldn't tell where the United States was going to be in case some conflict should break out between them and the Chinese.

Q: You're sort of talking about a time when they really weren't getting on-

SONNENFELDT: Yes, their relationship was very bad! And it wasn't getting any better.

There had been times in the past when Americans and Soviets were taking tentative soundings of each other about maybe doing something jointly about the Chinese nuclear program.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: Some of this is in the public domain now-

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: -because of freedom of information requests, documentation, and other information that has been obtained by historians and experts, and some has been released. But, you know, when Nixon was at the summit with Brezhnev in May of 1972, at the last meeting, Brezhnev slipped Nixon a proposal which amounted to a semi-alliance between the U.S. and the Soviet Union against China. It wasn't that crude and blunt, but that was the essence of it. It was a proposal on the prevention of nuclear war. Nixon said he'd look at it, and later, after that summit meeting, we worked with it and massaged it and took out the obvious anti-Chinese implications and the anti-Chinese sting.

The Soviets were still apparently hoping that they could draw the U.S. into some sort of a de facto alliance or coalition against the Chinese; but of course, by that time, the American relationship with China was becoming more interesting. Eventually, we were able to put some intelligence-gathering equipment in China, especially some devices to monitor Soviet compliance with the nuclear test ban, which had been signed in the Kennedy administration. So we actually developed something that might be called a moderate or modest U.S.-Chinese relationship (nowadays we'd call it a "strategic partnership.") But we and the Chinese more or less agreed that the Soviets were a mutual problem. It had different aspects for the Chinese because they were neighbors, but both we and the Chinese each had difficulties with the Soviets; and therefore, we sought to work together, not crudely, crassly, or obviously, but still working together, to contain the Soviets.

Q: Did you - you're sort of getting down to kind of the personal level. I mean you're part of a cadre of Soviet experts who'd been dealing with this, and all of a sudden this China relationship opens up. I think one of the things that [I've found] as I've interviewed people involved with this, is almost the infatuation of so many of the people who got involved in the opening, including Kissinger and Nixon in a great political capital and this is used; but did you feel in a way your nose is a little out of joint, that maybe they were putting too much into this China relationship?

SONNENFELDT: Well, my nose wasn't out of joint, because I thought it was, all in all, a sensible strategy. I was a little uneasy about the sort of romanticism toward China that developed, not just in the government, but elsewhere in the U.S. There were people in the media, in the Congress, and elsewhere, who raised cautions. They said, "Hey, China is a totalitarian dictatorship; and okay, the Soviets are a big threat, and it makes sense to have some relationship with the Chinese. But it's a pretty bad lot there, when all is said and done. They're unreconstructed Communists, and they just took some horrendous actions against their own people" (what would be called human rights violations now), "and they are still committing them," and so on.

I think I tended to be sober about the new relationship, but then I wasn't treated until a bit later to the charms of the Chinese people that Nixon and Kissinger were dealing with. I mean, everybody was impressed with Zhou En-lai, and also to some extent with Mao Zedong and some of the others. Those Americans who started to have contact with them were impressed by their sophistication, compared to the Soviets for example, and their subtleties. You can read all that in Kissinger's memoirs, and to some extent in Nixon's memoirs.

I didn't have that exposure until later, when I went on a couple of trips to China with Kissinger. Unfortunately, Zhou En-lai was out of commission by then, but I did meet Mao and Deng Xiaoping and some of the other senior people. It was interesting to me how they differed, in style and their general demeanor, from the Soviets that we were dealing with. But I have to say, I don't think I became enamored of the system there in the PRC. It was obvious when you set foot in China - there was some press comment on this at the time of Nixon's visit to China - how regimented the society was: if only when everyone was wearing the same clothes, at least in Beijing.

The press couldn't get outside Beijing. It was clear that this was a very tightly-run system in China vis-ï¿½-vis the population at large. I believe some commentaries pointed out that this was at least as forbidding and totalitarian a regime as the Soviets. But national interests override these sorts of thing. Those were some of the comments from journalists and gurus in what's now called the think-tank world, who had their hesitations. I would guess there were similar reactions in the State Department also, maybe less so from the old China hands, who finally could be put to use. Chinese language skills and all the Chinese area knowledge became something that had practical utility, because we set up a liaison office in Beijing and had contacts with Chinese officials on a broader and more regular basis. So some people who had been looking at China from afar, or through Taiwan, got to be very much in demand to deal with what gradually and steadily became a pretty broad relationship with the Chinese, even though we continued to have fundamental differences with them.

On the Soviet side, as I say, they were uneasy about it. Brezhnev gave us long lectures about how difficult and inscrutable the Chinese were. He said he had a brother who knew them better than he (Brezhnev) did. The brother just said that he could never understand these people, anBrezhnev himself agreed. There was sort of a "yellow peril" [racial fear] aspect to all of this; and he never quite stopped trying to wean us away from the Chinese and reminding us that we had a common interest in dealing with these hundreds of millions of people.

Q: Well, when you went with the Nixon-Brezhnev meeting, in '72 was it? Was it in Moscow?

SONNENFELDT: Yes.

Q: Did you find, because this China relationship is new and also other relationships, did you find your Soviet counterparts sort of with their time when they sort of get together and say, "You know, what's happening?" you know, I mean trying to sound you out because I would imagine they would be nervous.

SONNENFELDT: Well, they didn't want to show their nervousness, but there was some of that. Dobrynin, the Soviet ambassador here in Washington, was very agile. He was the Washington end of the Soviet part of the "back channel" between the White House and the Kremlin. Now, I can't vouch that he didn't try to find out from his conversations with Kissinger and one or two others what really was happening in U.S.-Chinese relations. The Soviets were keenly interested, and suspicious. They were uneasy and tried to follow as best they could what was happening in American-Chinese relations. I assume their espionage and intelligence apparatus tried to get as much information as they could so that they could get some grasp and grip on just how much substance there was to the American-Chinese relationship, or whether it was just something intended to needle them.

As for Brezhnev: I may have forgotten or be mistaken, but I don't think that there was a serious conversation between Nixon and Brezhnev in which Nixon tried to explain in detail what he was about with the Chinese. It came up, and Nixon, earlier in his term, had made a public statement about the five mutually-balancing powers in the world, which were the United States, the Soviet Union, China, Japan, and Europe. He already treated Europe as though it was a unified whole. Nixon's notion was actually quite extraordinary in the early '70s, because he seemed to put our European allies in the same category as the Chinese Communists, the Soviet Communists, and our Japanese allies. He was remarkable, also, because of his sense that power balances in the world are the best guarantee for peace. This is a controversial subject in American politics and American historiography. That was what Nixon was saying when, in fact, "balance of power" as a notion was something of a dirty word in this country. It was what the Europeans used to practice and as a result, they constantly had wars.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: But as Nixon seemed to see it, we were not going to fall into that trap. In fact, starting with the American Revolution in the late eighteenth century, we had played a very skillful balance of power game ourselves. But it was a dirty word, and to some extent still is - the "classic balance of power" which produced constant wars.

So, I think Nixon wasn't looking for a unique or special relationship with China, and he wasn't giving up on having a tolerable relationship with the Soviets in which there was some mutual interest and mutual benefit. After all, the Soviets were the more powerful of the two, and were the nuclear giant opposing us. The Chinese at that point were in a very, very modest stage of their development; so the Soviet Union was the major factor. I think the administration tried to play a cautious trilateral game involving China and the Soviet Union and, I think, hoping to get some benefits in terms of the policies of both China and the Soviet Union toward us. The idea, as was repeatedly said, was that we want to have better relationships with each of them than they have with each other.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: That was a sort of mantra at the time. Now, in the Bush administration, as we are speaking here in 2001, some people are asking what happened to that great Nixonian-Kissingerian wisdom, having better relations with each of them than they have with each other. At the moment, it doesn't look that way. The Russians and Chinese have a new treaty; they do this and that with each other; Moscow sells arms in huge quantities to the Chinese; and we have difficulties with both of them. I think that notion, of having better relations with each of them than they have with each other, was not just a slogan, but I think was a working strategy at the time.

Q: Well, did Kissinger, in early days of when this relationship opened up, talk, sort of to the NSC, particularly those dealing with the Soviet Union and trying to lay it out, so don't - You know, here's what we're trying to do?

SONNENFELDT: The NSC staff didn't have meetings, where, you know, it was show-and-tell time where everybody was briefed or informed. A lot of it was by osmosis, and some of it just came up in conversations, despite the fact that Haig was the Deputy, and was a military man. There may have been a staff meeting or two; but after the first days in the White House in January 1969, where they talked about where we could park and where we could eat in the White House canteen, and so on, there wasn't really group therapy or indoctrination.

That was partly because there was some real compartmentalization, even within the NSC staff. I mean, the Middle East portfolio was contained pretty tightly, although I got involved some because it involved the Soviets. The Vietnam portfolio was maintained very tightly. It was also politically a very sensitive issue, obviously, both in our domestic politics around the country and between Kissinger and the other senior White House staff people. It was a huge issue in the Nixon administration, combining eventually with Watergate in creating severe difficulties for the Nixon administration.

I stayed on the NSC staff with Kissinger longer than almost anybody else. One or two others who were there from the beginning then also moved, as I did, to the State Department when Kissinger became Secretary of State. There clearly were things that I wasn't told and didn't know about. I was half-seriously accused of having my own intelligence system to figure out what was going on. In fact, I think Kissinger said something about this in the third volume of his memoirs. It wasn't because I was unusually inquisitive, but because, at the time, the Soviets were still pervasive in their international involvements. Having come from the State Department, where I'd dealt with the analysis of Soviet foreign policy, I became very much involved in regions like Africa, the Middle East, Asia, and of coursLatin America and Cuba.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: The Soviets were every place. You couldn't really give full treatment to Soviet foreign policy without knowing something about what was happening in these other parts of the world and about our relationships there. So I tried to keep my eyes and ears open on the NSC staff, so that if there were a Soviet angle that impinged on our direct relationship with the Soviets, I wouldn't be blindsided. But the NSC staff was not organized in such a way that everybody knew about everything that was going on.

Q: Well now, how - what was the feeling that you were getting about the Kissinger- Dobrynin connection? I mean, how did you view Dobrynin as - I mean, were you well plugged into what was happening there? Or, I mean, it was a very important relationship.

SONNENFELDT: I was sporadically plugged in. Sometimes it involved passing pieces of paper back and forth and looking at Soviet replies or Soviet pieces of paper. When that happened, generally I and my little unit handled it. That was done mostly by Bill Hyland, a CIA Soviet expert who had come to work with me in, I think, April of 1969. He eventually had a very good career of his own. In 1973, after the NSC, he became head of INR in the State Department in the Kissinger period, and then moved back to the NSC in 1975, as Deputy National Security Advisor. In 1984, he became editor of Foreign Affairs.

When there was something formal in the Dobrynin channel, documents going back and forth, we usually got a look at them, and we also had some opportunity to make an input into something that Kissinger was going to give or say to Dobrynin, on some issue that was in play in more formal front channels.

On many of these issues, of course, Kissinger and Nixon did not keep the State Department informed. In the case of China, that was more difficult to do, because a lot of expertise was over in the State Department. There was also Soviet expertise in the State Department, but Nixon relied a lot on his own instinct and experience.

But anyway, policy-making was more tightly held in the White House, in the NSC staff; and the Dobrynin relationship, likewise. Dobrynin has discussed this at great length in his own memoirs, and Kissinger has also to some extent in his memoirs. Whatever official exchanges were put on paper are now becoming available through the Freedom of Information Act and other ways, but not every word they said to each other. Conversations were not necessarily recorded by either of them. They rarely had an additional person there, although they did on occasion; but this "back channel" was a significant way of communicating with the Kremlin. I think Kissinger and Nixon, Kissinger and Haig were convinced of that. [end of tape]

We really couldn't tell what Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko may have known. Eventually he became a Politburo member and got to know more. Then there was Kosygin, the Prime Minister: just what did the Kremlin or Brezhnev share with him in these communications back and forth? But Dobrynin was a key link in this channel on many issues. You have to give him credit that he established himself in such a way that this intensive relationship could be maintained. He was a diplomat, and a shrewd one.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: Ambassadors many times tended to get circumvented by higher-level face-to-face meetings and nowadays by telephone calls and e-mails. He was clearly a key part of the communications net between the White House and Brezhnev.

Q: Was there any concern on your part or any of your colleagues about Dobrynin, as far as being a good messenger?

SONNENFELDT: I wondered sometimes whether he really understood everything that was said to him - precisely as it was said. He was quite good and fluent in English, but I sometimes wondered. But I couldn't pinpoint it. I think that Kissinger or Nixon, obviously, were very much interested in being sure that Dobrynin sent back to Moscow precisely what they intended to convey. Whatever efforts they made at verifying this, it was not easy to do, even with intelligence methods: what he reported, and what he commented on what he had been given, clearly was very important. Subsequently, when it became known that this active "back channel" was operating there, there were State Department people and members of our own SALT negotiating delegation who found themselves circumvented through this channel. They were worried about how solid a channel it was in terms of getting real messages through to the other side. I think papers have been written about the dangers of this informality in the "back channels," compared to having note-takers, skilled interpreters, and so on, who could make sure that there was no misunderstanding.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: It didn't keep me awake at night, but sometimes I wondered, when I heard Dobrynin talk, just how perfect his comprehension actually was.

Q: Well then, look too from the Watergate thing. I mean you were there during that. I mean, from your perspective, how sort of, what was the effect in stabilizing? I mean, what was happening?

SONNENFELDT: Well, as the Watergate investigation blossomed, as it developed and grew, you obviously wondered how much attention the President was able to give to other issues. It turned out that he was quite extraordinary, in fact: that he did remain very active in foreign policy (and Henry Kissinger did as well), and took foreign trips and was directly involved in negotiations. It became an increasingly difficult climate because things seemed to be closing in on the President in late '73 and '74. Of course, I went back as Counselor to the State Department in early '74. There too, you had to be concerned about where this was all going to end and what would happen. We also had the Agnew crisis right at that time-

Q: Oh, yes!

SONNENFELDT: - so that there wasn't an obvious successor when Vice President Agnew had to resign. Nixon selected Congressman Gerald Ford, who fortunately had no serious difficulty getting approved in the Congress to be the Vice President. The widespread feeling that the top of the government was gradually getting immobilized, and that things were getting very difficult for the President, was very uncomfortable, especially if you'd worked with him and you were, as I was, not within the innermost circle, but in a circle.

I personally got dragged into this situation in a peculiar way. In 1973, when Watergate was coming into fuller and fuller bloom, the Secretary of Commerce, Pete Peterson, was let go by the Nixon administration. I had been in Moscow with Peterson in 1972 on a trip to work out trade relations with the Soviets, and I had been the NSC representative with him in several meetings with the Soviets in Washington. When Peterson was dismissed, the responsibility for East-West trade and economic relations with the Soviet Union was transferred from Commerce to George Shultz at the Treasury Department. Secretary Shultz wanted me to come to the Treasury Department, and he proposed to create a special Under Secretaryship for this job of dealing with the Soviet Union, in which he was quite interested.

In 1973, I went to Moscow with Secretary Shultz on a trip to meet with Kosygin and Brezhnev. The American business community had great expectations about doing business with the Soviets in the petroleum sector, and in various other areas as well. So Shultz wanted me to come to the Treasury as Under Secretary. I figured that after spending four-and-a-half years in the NSC staff, it would be a good move for me - in fact, better in many ways than I might expect as a career guy [civil servant]. I checked it with Kissinger, who wasn't enthusiastic; but he said, "Okay, if that's what you want to do, go ahead."

I was then formally nominated by President Nixon to be Under Secretary of the Treasury. When my confirmation hearings were held by the Senate Finance Committee in the spring of 1973, several people came out of the woodwork to accuse me of ancient security charges that I think I described before - charges that I was an Israeli spy and so on.

Q: Yes, that sort of thing.

SONNENFELDT: In the course of these hearings, some of my accusers were asked to testify, and they regurgitated the whole business. Senator Russell Long, the chairman of the Finance Committee-

Q: From Louisiana.

SONNENFELDT: -which was responsible for this, wanted to see my security file in the State Department. Based on past practice, the State Department said they wouldn't make my file available. They offered to make available a summary; they'd be prepared to send the head of the Security Office up to testify, or to send the Committee a memo to point out that these charges were a fabrication. But the Senate Committee insisted on getting the documents, or getting to look at the documents or letting a designated Senate staff guy go through my security file.

Well, all this was happening at the same time as discussions of broader issues relating to the provision of documents from the White House that the Watergate investigators in Congress were demanding. The administration people, the White House people who were involved in that Watergate issue, were fighting the release of documents (eventually, you know, the courts got involved). They didn't want to create some new precedent for making documents available to Congress, and therefore, they would not let my file go to the Senate Finance Committee. I told Senator Long, "You can look at anything you want, as far as I'm concerned, but it's above me! It's a big policy issue! I can't decide what to do about this!"

So my nomination hung in the Committee for seven months because of this problem, that they couldn't get the Sonnenfeldt security file! I don't mean to exaggerate this, but it was unusual. Nowadays, nominees get held up forever, but seven months was almost a record at that time. Even The New York Times published an editorial calling for action on my nomination!
Eventually, a deal was made with Senator Long: he would get my nomination voted out in his Committee; it would then be withdrawn, and I would be nominated as Counselor of the State Department. That's what happened. The Foreign Relations Committee held a hearing and approved my nomination as Counselor, and I was then confirmed by the Senate. But that whole process took a long time, and it was certainly influenced by the overall Watergate controversy in the manner which I've described.

But in any case, during the Yom Kippur War, when the U.S. went on a modest military alert in October of '73, questions were raised about whether Nixon really had been involved in this decision, or whether Nixon wanted to create an international crisis in order to save himself from his troubles with Watergate. Henry Kissinger got beat up on in a press conference the morning after it leaked that some of our forces had gone on an increased alert. He became very angry about that charge, asking what was happening to this country and to this capital, when people who have profound responsibilities for the national interest get charged with playing crude politics.

So this kind of thing, questions about how complicit Nixon was, dragged on and on through 1974. We had a gasoline crisis, an energy crisis because of the Arab boycotts, so there was a confluence of problems, plus the fact that the Vietnam War was coming to an ugly end for us. Everyone said, "there isn't really a foreign policy problem," and in a sort of practical sense, there wasn't. Everything was functioning; we had meetings with other countries, and so on. In June of '74, a few weeks before he resigned, Nixon went to Moscow for a summit meeting. We actually negotiated the essence of an additional test ban treaty, the underground nuclear test ban treaty, at that meeting.

Brezhnev kept saying that he just couldn't understand how anyone could do this to their leader, who has been such a successful president and achieved better relations with the Soviet Union. "But we don't understand what the American political system is doing here," he would say. Of course, it was awkward for our allies, who were watching this and wondering. We had a NATO summit a little earlier in '74, in which Nixon participated, and they were wondering how long they would still be dealing with him. They didn't know Gerald Ford particularly well. Everybody realized he would become the president if something should happen, if Nixon was to be impeached. It was unclear; certainly foreigners had difficulty tracking all of this.

So we got some vibes about this at the upper reaches of the foreign policy establishment in the government. People tried to pump us: how we thought it was going to come out; what was going to happen? Would we be handicapped in meeting our commitments? What if somebody attacked? What if the Soviets attacked? And NATO, and so on? What could we say, other than to say, "commitments are commitments!" It began to become awkward. However, it has to be said that in the end, there wasn't any serious damage to American interests during this whole tragedy, even as it got closer and closer to its final outcome. I mean, our withdrawal froVietnam was going to happen, one way or another; we were going to get out.

However, the aftermath of Vietnam turned out to be not nearly as apocalyptic as many of us thought it might be - namely, that the word would spread around the whole region that the Americans were a paper tiger, or a giant with clay feet, as Nixon said at one point. There was a problem in Cambodia that Ford had to deal with early on. But the region itself didn't collapse into Communism - no falling dominos!

On the contrary, the Indonesians had slaughtered their Communists and complicated the Chinese relationship with Indonesia for a while. Our own relationship with China continued to blossom. They were more interested in the weight of the country than the individual president. The historians will have different views of just what all of this Watergate controversy did to American interests. My own judgment, to this day, is that - while it was a very difficult and uncomfortable time, especially if you'd worked as closely as we all did work with President Nixon in the White House setting and on the various trips with foreign visitors and foreign policy decisions - it was very difficult and sad, because he was very gifted in the fields that we had to deal with. Nixon was skillful and knowledgeable, with good foreign policy instincts. But the number one implication of Watergate in foreign policy terms, security terms, I think is very difficult to measure as a negative. Of course, when you go fast-forward sixteen years later, the Soviet Union collapsed.

Q: Maybe those are the ones for their side.

SONNENFELDT: I don't know whether all our troubles extended the life of the Soviet Union, or not. That gets to be very speculative stuff.

Q: Well, to sum up. You didn't feel particularly that gee, we've got to, considering all this Watergate stuff, let's not put this forward, or something like that?

SONNENFELDT: Well - no. In the Yom Kippur War, there was what in the Clinton administration came to be known as the "wag-the-dog syndrome." You know, it's this movie about a president staging a military conflict to save himself.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: I think in the Clinton administration's handling of the Kosovo crisis, there was some concern about people saying,"this is all a wag-the-dog thing."

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: We didn't want to go to war in the Yom Kippur War. We got some intelligence and a rather threatening message from Brezhnev in late October of 1973, so we felt that we needed to do something with our military forces, just to make sure the Soviets understood that, if they had any thought of intervention in the Middle East, whatever our domestic problems were, we were still able to pursue our foreign policy interests.

Q: So basically this is a response rather than an initiative.

SONNENFELDT: Yes, and it was a modest response. If there were initiatives that might have been taken if Nixon had been in full power, and the whole situation hadn't become as difficult and as preoccupying as it did, I really can't think of one.

On the other side of the coin, as I was mentioning, in mid-1974 in his last summit meeting with Brezhnev, President Nixon didn't hesitate to make the agreement barring underground nuclear tests. It wasn't a big-deal agreement, but it was not a trivial agreement either. It still needed some work afterwards, which was done; and it was eventually ratified by the Senate. Some people said, "Well, Nixon's just trying to show how indispensable he is to maintain relations with the Soviets; and then he went on this trip to the Middle East, where he was cheered by millions; and he went to Vienna, when he was near the end of his tenure; and he probably did that because of the impeachment proceedings." People were saying that his activities were staged somehow, to show how indispensable he was, but it didn't stop the process of policy-making here. He probably had other considerations, in addition to his own fate, in undertaking those foreign policy initiatives toward the end of his tenure; but we weren't going to pressure anybody or go to war with anybody, anyway!

Q: No.

SONNENFELDT: I don't think there was anything of significance, one way or the other - positive or negative, defensive or offensive - that we decided we shouldn't do because it would look like it was Watergate-related. But there isn't any question that, because of the preoccupations with Watergate, there might have been something of significance that we might have done - I can't think of what it was - that perhaps was shelved until things were clearer here.

That may also have affected what some other governments were doing. I think these "what-ifs" are very difficult to pinpoint, at least for me. We are talking about nearly 30 years ago. It's hard to identify a case that was either clearly one of not doing something because of concern about Watergate, or a matter of doing something because of Watergate, in order to parry the domestic attack on the President and show how important he was.

Q: Were you able to sense on the part of Kissinger and Haig, their getting more involved with the White House? I mean, you know, the domestic-

SONNENFELDT: Well, Haig had left the NSC to be Vice Chief of Staff of the Army, and then he came back to the White House as Nixon's chief of staff, so he was deeply involved with Nixon! As for Kissinger, I can't really testify to his particular involvement, but he still was National Security Advisor, in fact, as well as Secretary of State. General Brent Scowcroft was Kissinger's Deputy; Haig was the chief of staff, so the three of them were very much around the President as the clock ticked.

This is something that Kissinger and Haig really would have to answer. Both of them have written extensively about it and given interviews on just how all of this affected their day-to-day relations and contacts with the President.

But Kissinger was often at the White House. There were meetings of the interagency committees and other sessions. There were crises: the Yom Kippur War in October of '73; the energy crisis that spilled over into '74; and there was the end-game in Vietnam, which was difficult. So there were plenty of things going on that required attention. I think the set-up wasn't exactly normal, but I think it functioned. In fact, after the change in Vietnam's economic reform program, there was some discussion, in which I participated, about the fact that, despite all the Watergate and impeachment problems, the foreign policy system and the security system functioned.

Now there is another track on this, which is attributed to then-Secretary of Defense Jim Schlesinger. It is said that he gave orders to the military not to accept any direct White House orders to do one thing or another unless the order came through him. There have been some stories floating around during the last year or two about anxieties in some quarters that Nixon would do something rash to protect himself, involving the military. I don't think that's ever been documented, although it has been written about by journalists. I personally don't know anything about that, and I don't know anything about orders from the White House. In my position, I wouldn't have gotten the order to mobilize the forces anyway.

But I can't think of any instruction or guidance or suggestion to do things in the foreign policy realm that looked like they were phony, or were done for this extraneous reason of protecting Nixon, or ginning up crises that could have been avoided.

Q: Okay, well, we'll pick this up the next time at 1974, and you were named the what? Counselor?

SONNENFELDT: Counselor?Yes, okay. Good.

***

Q: Okay, today is August 7, 2001. Hal, in 1974 you became Counselor of the State Department. What, in your case, did the title, "Counselor of the Department of State" mean? I interviewed, oh, 15 years ago Douglas MacArthur, and he had that title under Dulles and Eisenhower, but he was sort of an inter, you know, with a few other people-

SONNENFELDT: I think he also went to a lot of official funerals, because the name "MacArthur-"

Q: Oh, yes!

SONNENFELDT: -it made a difference. I don't mean to downgrade his substantive involvement. Basically, my role as Counselor was much the same as my role on the NSC staff in terms of the responsibilities and issues which I covered, which included East-West relations; relations with the Europeans; NATO; some aspects, particularly the more political aspects of arms control; non-proliferation; and so on. We had an understanding and divided up the seventh floor (policy-making) responsibilities between the Counselor's office and the Under Secretary of State for Policy, Joe Sisco. Maybe Phil Habib was still Under Secretary for Policy for a while - I can't remember exactly. But anyway, the Under Secretary is really the number-three job in the Department. At that time, I think it was already called Under Secretary, but for a long time before, it had been called Deputy Under Secretary.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: We had just one Under Secretary for Policy, and other people on the seventh floor were still called Deputies. Essentially Joe Sisco, who had that job, covered all the rest of the world, and of course he wasn't precluded from getting involved in the things that I concentrated on. But it worked out that he was plenty busy with the Middle East and various other issues. So I essentially took my brief from the NSC over to the State Department. Of course, for a while Kissinger was both Secretary of State and National Security Advisor.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: But even so, the people I left behind who had worked with me in the NSC staff did have some different responsibilities from the ones that we had in the State Department, because they were still, in part, presidential staff.

Q: Yes. And you had?you were closer, sort of, to the operational side?

SONNENFELDT: Yes. I worked more closely with EUR (Bureau of European Affairs) and the Politico-Military Bureau, and ACDA (Arms Control and Disarmament Agency), and the interagency process, as far as relations with the Soviets, NATO issues, and some of the crises that we contended with, such as the energy crisis. I wasn't an energy expert; but the energy problems involved relations very prominently with the Europeans in early '74, after the Yom Kippur War. I did much the same kind of work that I had done in the NSC staff, for example, in preparations for Nixon's summit meetings with Brezhnev.

Nixon and Brezhnev alternated as hosts of annual summit meetings, starting in 1972 in Moscow. Brezhnev had been in the U.S. in 1973, and then Nixon, even though his clock was ticking [impeachment proceedings], went ahead in June of 1974 for what turned out to be his final visit to Moscow as President.

Q: You're talking about the Watergate business?

SONNENFELDT: Yes. Despite Watergate, Nixon went ahead in June to go to Moscow. I staffed that summit visit with my own tiny staff in the Counselor's office, in conjunction with the Bureaus in the State Department and the NSC staff, of course, under Kissinger's guidance. My responsibilities in substance were essentially quite similar to what I'd done in the NSC staff.

Q: Well, did you find yourself?we'll get down to some detail, but did you find yourself?it seems like in a way you were almost running in competition with the EUR Bureau; or maybe competition's the wrong word, but doing the same, some of the same thing because you're no longer in the advisory thing; you're over in the action.

SONNENFELDT: Well, the situation was delicate. By then, Arthur Hartman had become the Assistant Secretary in EUR. (He had even more experience afterwards when he served as U.S. Ambassador in Paris and Moscow.)

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: He felt that EUR should have its traditional responsibilities, but we managed to work out a modus vivendi to manage the State Department business of drafting telegrams, and by what route the telegram gets to the Secretary of State for approval it if was sufficiently important to require his attention. If I hadn't been there as Counselor, it might have gone through the Under Secretary for Political Affairs, who probably would have just let the European Bureau write it, and then initial it and send it on. Anything to do with the Soviet Union was an EUR function, and we no longer had a Special Advisor to the Secretary of State for Soviet Affairs, like Tommy Thompson had been in an earlier period. I sort of was that, but Kissinger was sort of his own special advisor on Soviet issues. But that was certainly one of my responsibilities, to concentrate on Soviet affairs. So I think we worked it all right. I don't know whether you've interviewed Arthur Hartman-

Q: I have.

SONNENFELDT: -and how he saw it. I know it was sensitive. I know that Kissinger's style, of sometimes circumventing some people who ought to be in the line of action, came into play. On occasion he'd try to manipulate the situation. But I think Art and I worked it pretty well together.

Q: Well, did you have - I mean talking about that, did you and Arthur Hartman at some times almost work off to the side and keep each other informed when maybe Kissinger was not - you know, sort of going his own way, maybe not for any reason except this was his style.

SONNENFELDT: Well, I think Art had his own eyes and ears. He'd been in the Foreign Service for a long time, so he knew pretty much anybody that was of consequence around the building, including in the front office [Secretary of State's office]; and I had my contacts. We talked, and we tried to keep up with what Henry was doing. There was this myth around the State Department that I had a very, very special relationship with Kissinger, and that I sneaked in by the back door to operate behind the backs of the Bureaus, which wasn't really so. I did have a special relationship with Kissinger, but not really for the purpose of circumventing anybody. We talked from time to time about how things were going, and especially during the tough Watergate time. American interests didn't cease because the president was encumbered by dealing with a serious problem. So Kissinger and I had that sort of relationship.

And I tried not to get involved in complicated maneuvers of doing things behind the backs of people who would find out about it anyway. But there were "back channels," and I knew some of what was going on, but not all of it. There was the relationship between Kissinger and the Soviet Ambassador, Dobrynin. Some of it seeped out in one way or another, and some of it came to me maybe in chats with Kissinger; some of it got to Hartman through the grapevine. So let's say it was a little unstructured way of doing things.

Q: Well, with Dobrynin, were you able to sit down and talk with him, or was he pretty well reserved for-

SONNENFELDT: He was pretty well reserved for Kissinger and Scowcroft, who was Kissinger's Deputy National Security Advisor until he succeeded Kissinger as the full National Security Advisor. I dealt more with Dobrynin'Deputy Chiefs of Mission (DCMs). For example, in preparation for the summit meetings, as you know, you always pre-cook the statements that would be issued in the final communiquï¿½. In the cases of the three summit meetings o'72, '73 and '74, I worked with whomever the DCM was. One actually was Yuli Vorontsov, who much later became the Russian Ambassador here. We fiddled around with the language for the communiquï¿½ and whatever else was being cooked up. The leaders always wanted to issue public statements at signing ceremonies for whatever agreements they reached. You know, we had 11 or 12 signing ceremonies in front of television cameras at the 1972 summit in Moscow.

Q: This is the detente period, wasn't it?

SONNENFELDT: Yes, it's called the detente period. We had problems with the Soviets, but it was part of the challenge in lots of meetings and "back channels." The plan for the '74 summit, when I was Counselor, was to issue a Ford-Brezhnev communiquï¿½, but the centerpiece of that summit meeting was going to be a draft treaty on underground nuclear testing.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: The technicalities of it were being negotiated in Moscow by an American team that knew something about the technical issues, and a Soviet team. So we just had to prepare some references to it in the communiquï¿½ and the final statement, and there were other issues we covered that I've forgotten now. On this sort of thing, I dealt with the Minister at the Soviet Embassy.

Q: Did you and maybe the Minister at the Soviet Embassy feel a little bit frustrated that your principals were carrying on?

SONNENFELDT: I had a feeling that Dobrynin may have been more forthcoming with his immediate subordinate than Kissinger was with his. I can't tell for sure. Dobrynin had made clear that he could communicate directly with Brezhnev and the Kremlin. In fact, one of the hopes was that he would circumvent Gromyko [the long-time Soviet Foreign Minister], because Gromyko, although he was respected as a professional, was also a naysayer and a very hard-to-move sort of a guy; and ultimately, he didn't have much authority.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: He did become a member of the Politburo, but still didn't become the president.

Q: He didn't become the president or something like that.

SONNENFELDT: He got all those titles, but you know it wasn't real power. He clearly had influence because of his long memory and his long involvement. Dobrynin made it sound as though he'd communicated directly with Brezhnev, and then if the Kremlin decided to inform the Foreign Minister, that was their business. But I think Dobrynin cut in his Minister, at least to some extent, possibly just to protect his backside against the KGB (Komitet gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti-Soviet Committee of State Security) people who were operating in the embassy. Whether that Minister had access to the message that Dobrynin would send to the Kremlin, or whether it played back via Foreign Ministry channels to their embassy, I don't know for sure. So I wasn't really frustrated about Kissinger's separate conversations with Dobrynin, as long as he kept me generally informed so that I wouldn't be going off on some tangent, and that really worked pretty well. We did have some people around the State Department who conducted their own policy, sometimes because of ignorance because they didn't know what was really going on.

Q: Well, did you get a?you know, I'm trying to catch the atmospherics. I mean, here you'd been working and kind of used to working with Henry Kissinger and his style of operation; but what about some of the others - the staff assistants and other advisors and around this? I mean did you get any feeling that there was, I mean, sort of a court atmosphere?

SONNENFELDT: No, I'd say that idea was exaggerated. I think that Kissinger's immediate staff - Jerry Bremer, Larry Eagleburger for a while before he became Deputy Under Secretary for Management - they played it close to the vest, because they knew that Kissinger was very sensitive about some of his operations. But they also sent warning signals if something we were doing at the next level down wasn't in consonance with what Kissinger had been thinking or doing, to the extent that they knew. I'm not sure that they necessarily knew everything either.

Now I think this business of the "court," in the sense I've just described, you could say it's something I would doubt. But there's a very interesting thing that was not understood at the time, and to some extent isn't understood yet by people who write about this. Kissinger had a voracious appetite for virtually all elements of U.S. foreign policy: Latin America; Africa at some point; Asia; the Middle East very much; Europe; the Soviet Union; and so on; plus some of the functional issues like energy. He was less interested in economics. During his Secretary of Stateship, I think he delivered something like two dozen major speeches around the country. He did feel that it was important for the country to be aware of the major issues and our approach to them.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: Kissinger has written in his most recent book about the need for public support for policy. I don't know how much he really felt that that was all that necessary. But in any case, he made a couple of dozen speeches; they were all on a particular topic or group of topics. In preparation for that, he didn't just use the speechwriters in the Policy Planning staff, which had become the speech-writing shop. (Winston Lord, another close associate of Henry's, was the head of that staff.). But he did draw on people whom he respected around the building, those he thought had good judgment and experience; and they got in on the speech-drafting, in actual meetings with the Secretary. If he found somebody who had particular insight, he didn't hesitate to deal with that person, regardless of his or her rank. I once made up a count toward the end of our tenure there, and actually found that there must have been about 200 people in the Department who had had direct contact with the Secretary during the nearly three-and-a-half years that Kissinger was Secretary of State (September 1973 to January 1977). By "contact-"

Q: Yes, yes.

SONNENFELDT: - I mean they participated in a meeting, and actually had a chance to say something-

Q: Say something, yes.

SONNENFELDT: -Or they had a chance to make a contribution to speeches, or to help out on one of the many trips that Kissinger took to different parts of the world. So my feeling was actually that in some ways, Kissinger had more contact with regular State Department staff than some other Secretaries of State did.

Q: Yes, because looking at the histories of other Secretaries of State, they often were surrounded by the coteries-

SONNENFELDT: Yes, it was layered.

Q: And didn't reach out as much - very interesting. So tell me, what was your impression of our relationship during this time with the Soviet Union? Did this seem like a good developing one, or was it one to be treated with caution, or was it more in PR (public relations) than really in substance? Or how did you feel that? I'm talking about what is called "detente" or such.

SONNENFELDT: No, we resisted the term "detente," you know, because it got confused with "entente."

Q: Yes. [Laughter]

SONNENFELDT: I remember early on when this word kept being used in the press, I actually looked up the origins of the term. It comes from archery, but the diplomatic definition was "a temporary interlude of lessened tensions in a generally hostile situation."

Q: Yes, which isn't a very -

SONNENFELDT: Now, that actually was the fact.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: But since "detente" was confused with "entente," it sounded more like a condition that actually existed, one of relaxed tensions, which was indefinite and permanent.

Q: Yes, yes. Yes, I know.

SONNENFELDT: In retrospect, I think the Soviets in the '70s began to recognize that they had serious problems in their economy, that their military had the overwhelming call on resources, costly resources, very much at the expense of the civilian sector. I think the Soviet leadership - and perhaps some of the younger ones that came to the fore later on in the '80s and when Gorbachev got there - began to realize that the Soviet Union was falling further and further behind the industrialized West. [end of tape]

There even came to be signs, which were noted, that some of the developing countries in what was called the "Third World" were beginning to get into a more advanced industrial and technological phase in their development, which in the case of the Soviet Union was not very much in evidence, except for the military and the space program. So that was one thing. Brezhnev was eager to get Western investment. There were people in the West who were interested in investment, especially in petroleum, gas, and other areas, as Brezhnev told Peter Peterson and me, when Peterson was the Commerce Secretary. As I mentioned previously, after the 1972 Nixon-Brezhnev summit, I accompanied Peterson to Moscow on a delegation he led to modestly normalize trade relations. Brezhnev talked about getting billions and billions of dollars of investment from the West and from the U.S. to help build up Siberia, and so on. So I think that was one aspect of "detente." And I think we thought we had some leverage, and Kissinger thought that we had some leverage, vis-ï¿½-vis the Soviet Union.

The second factor is that Eastern Europe was uneasy, in countries long dominated by the Russians. There were problems with Poland in the '70s, and simmering problems in other parts of Eastern Europe.

Then there was our new relationship with China. The Soviet relationship with China was very shaky, to put it mildly. And there were various other factors affecting our relationships, among them the arteriosclerotic condition of the Soviet leadership, including Brezhnev himself.

So I felt that there was some business to be done with the Soviets to quiet them down, and to limit what I used to call their "imperial drive." I didn't think there was any grand deal to be made with them, because a grand deal would have meant carving up the world, which wasn't our way of looking at it (although that was sometimes attributed to Kissinger). So I think, as was demonstrated during that time, that there was opportunity to do some beneficial business with the Soviets.

But we had a problem. We had a constitutional crisis. I'm talking about Watergate in combination with Vietnam. We didn't know how the Soviets were going to read that, and how the rest of the world was going to read that.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: For a while, we had hundreds of thousands of people demonstrating in the streets against Nixon's actions.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: Our society was looking like it was falling apart. The civil rights movement, which Nixon was not hostile to in terms of its objectives - there were some problems about the marches, which had a distinctly anti-administration quality. The U.S. looked like it was in its time of troubles-

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: -of serious troubles. You know, we couldn't tell where it was all headed.

Q: And we had the energy crisis too!

SONNENFELDT: And we had the energy crisis on top of it. The economy had problems; there was a mounting inflation rate. There would be more inflation later on.

So there were some real questions about how strong we really were in our own right, even though fundamentally we were stronger than the Soviets. I think, in a way, you had two wounded countries. I think they, as it turned out, were terminally wounded; we were only temporarily wounded before a new burst of effort and activity and growth. This to some extent, I think, brought us together to do some things that ultimately were mostly on the margins, but still-

Q: But still, I mean it helped set a certain stage.

SONNENFELDT: Yes.

Q: Well, were there forces, people really, within our administration, who were saying, "Let's start messing around with Eastern Europe or with the various nationality problems in the Soviet Union?" You know, I mean let's keep

SONNENFELDT: I don't think those kinds of initiatives went very high into the administration, but there certainly were people around who argued for more aggressive actions. CIA had its operations, and some of those were ended by the Church hearings [Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearings chaired by Democratic Senator Frank Church of Idaho]. The CIA financed some groups, not so much to penetrate into the Soviet Union and organize opposition, but to encourage it by broadcasts, and encouraging "samizdat" (self-published papers of people questioning or challenging the Soviet Communist regime).

Q: This is a self-publishing -

SONNENFELDT: Yes, right.

Q: In other words, the underground newspaper type of

SONNENFELDT: Yes, so there were things of this kind going on. Regarding Eastern Europe: Nixon conducted a rather active policy toward Eastern Europe. He was criticized. Of course, later on in the Ford administration, the Helsinki Final Act was signed in 1975. It was severely criticized by people who had been in the administration, or even some that were not in it, as giving away much too much to the Sovietgiving away concrete matters like guaranteeing frontiers in exchange for unenforceable promises.

Q: Drawing the line and curving up the lines.

SONNENFELDT: Right. But Nixon had visited Romania. He didn't necessarily like President Ceausescu, but Romania was the big dissident in the Soviet bloc. While he didn't want to encourage any open warfare between Romania and the Soviet Union, Nixon certainly wanted to encourage the individualism of Romania. He went to Poland; President Ford also went to Poland, where everybody knew that beneath the surface, there was quite a bit of resistance bubbling, not just against the Polish Communist regime itself, but against the Soviets. Nixon visited Yugoslavia, which had already split with the USSR; but it needed strengthening, both regionally and within Yugoslavia. So he had an active East European policy, which despite the awkward appearances of ceremonies with Communist rulers, was really treading on the Soviet turf.

I was personally very much involved in all of this. We wanted to make clear that better U.S. relations with the Soviets in some fields were not at the expense of the East Europeans. Then I got caught in a controversy over the so-called "Sonnenfeldt Doctrine," that started up in 1976, roughly.

Q: What was that?

SONNENFELDT: There was a leaked reporting telegram written by a Foreign Service Officer (later Ambassador), Warren Zimmermann, who was then in EUR (the European Bureau). It described a seminar that I had led on short notice at a Chiefs of Mission meeting in London in December of 1975.

Q: Is this one of these European Chiefs of Mission [meetings]?

SONNENFELDT: Right. This one was during the Ford administration.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: Assistant Secretary of State for Europe Hartman felt that there ought to be a session on Eastern Europe, which hadn't been on the original schedule, and Kissinger had something else to do during the only free period on the program. So Hartman asked me if I could lead a discussion. I said I could, but to check it with Henry to make sure it's all right with him, which was done. (Kissinger has this slightly wrong in the third volume of his memoirs.)

But in any event, we had this discussion, which I led off extemporaneously. I made some points about Eastern Europe being a very dangerous place because - while the Soviets were indeed in charge - underneath, there were all sorts of elements that might at some point get quite explosive, and might produce a very vigorous Soviet intervention, which could perhaps even spill over into a wider conflict. So I considered the situation in Eastern Europe quite dangerous, and I said so in my comments. I said that, hopefully, someday there would be a Soviet leadership that would recognize that they needed to give the East Europeans more leeway and have a more natural relationship with them. I made the mistake of using the word "organic" in that particular talk because I meant it as synonymous with "natural" - which is, in fact, a dictionary meaning of "organic;" the other meaning being "part of a whole."

Well, Warren Zimmermann (sadly, he is now dead) wrote a very elegant but very synoptic, condensed telegram weeks after this meeting, just to send it to the ambassadors for their records and to have something in the record of the State Department about this Chiefs of Mission meeting. His report summarized not only my discussion but several others, including one at another seminar in which Kissinger really blew his stack about domestic problems in the U.S. and how they undermined the country's foreign policies. Well, that one telegram included this word "organic." Then it was leaked by somebody in the Pentagon, by one of Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld's people. Rumsfeld had his quarrels with Kissinger then. Now they're good friends, genuinely good friends. The leak was picked up by the syndicated columnists Evans and Novak, who doctored the text and printed some excerpts in a column published in April 1976. They claimed that I said that there was the danger of World War III in Europe because of Soviet dominance of Eastern Europe, and that what really ought to happen was for Eastern Europe to become an organic part of the Soviet Union.

Q: Ooh!

SONNENFELDT: That column came out on a Monday morning in April of '76, just as the Republican primary campaign was underway between Ronald Reagan and Jerry Ford. It was also the day on which Newsweek started serializing The Final Days, the book-

Q: The book by Woodward?

SONNENFELDT: -by Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, about the last days of the Nixon administration, which had Nixon and Kissinger kneeling on a carpet and praying together. This particular column by Evans and Novak, with a catchy headline and the idea that the East Europeans should be dominated by Russia, caught the attention of a lot of the East European-oriented groups in the U.S., and also of some people in the Senate. They immediately raised hell and contacted Kissinger, saying, "This was a shocking statement by your close confidant, Sonnenfeldt!" Bob Funseth, who was then the State Department's Spokesman (he happened to be a close friend of mine in graduate school), went to Kissinger that morning and said, "Sonnenfeldt really ought to get out in front of the press, because that clearly isn't what he said. He should correct this immediately, because it's going to create a firestorm."

Kissinger was preoccupied with all kinds of details in The Final Days, and he said, "no, Sonnenfeldt's had enough publicity for one day already." So I didn't meet with the press and had no chance to clarify Evans' and Novak's misrepresentation of my position - which in fact was 180 degrees away from what they wrote!

This controversy began to bubble along; and it wasn't until several weeks later that I finally got to testify in Congress to correct what had been rendered in the Evans and Novak column. A few newspaper editorialists - including Cy Sulzberger in the New York Times, who had written a very nasty op-ed column about this, and the Washington Post - when they actually read the Zimmermann telegram, which was not a verbatim report but a synopsis, eventually wrote columns correcting their original analyses.

But the so-called "Sonnenfeldt Doctrine" became an issue in the Reagan-Ford Republican primary campaign, and later an issue in the Carter-Ford presidential campaign. It became an issue in the second televised debate between Ford and Carter, when a reporter raised the question of whether the Soviets were in control of Poland. Ford responded quickly, saying, "No! No! No! They don't control Poland!" - which in a sense was correct, but made it appear as though Ford didn't understand what the Soviets were doing in Eastern Europe.

Kissinger's only comment at the time, or during that period was, "If there was going to be any doctrine in my administration, it wasn't going to be called the "Sonnenfeldt Doctrine!"

Q: [Laughter]

SONNENFELDT: Anyway, he did sort of stand up for me. But the "Sonnenfeldt Doctrine" is still rattling around.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: I'm sorry about this distraction!

Q: Oh, no! It was very

SONNENFELDT: Going back to your question about the condition of the Soviet Union: there were things going on in Eastern Europe; and the Soviets, while we were still in office in the '70s, had serious problems in keeping discipline in Poland. The situation in Romania they didn't like; but as they saw it, Romania at least was a dictatorship which had control of its own people; the Romanians were just running their own show. But Hungary and Poland were bubbling. Czechoslovakia after 1968 was kept in line; East Germany remained under control; Bulgaria was off to one side. But Poland and Hungary showed signs of restlessness! Then, after the Helsinki Final Act was adopted in 1975, there was more restlessness inside the Soviet Union. So I think there was a combination of issues, which did represent some opportunity for us to make some progress in relations with the Soviets, in order to reduce somewhat the severity of the confrontation. There were periods of great tension that were yet to follow: the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan; and there were some nuclear alert situations in the beginning of the Reagan administration in the '80s.

I think there were serious systemic weaknesses showing up in the Soviet system, more than we actually recognized, although I think we had a sense of it, at least I think I did. If handled with care - not provocatively, which might provoke the Soviets to do something drastic, which we'd all regret - these strains could lead not so much to a loving, friendly relationship, but to an ebbing of the tide of Soviet power. This is hindsight now; at the time, we got some signs of it. (Reagan, later in the '80s said it.)

Q: Well, this represents something interesting, because I've talked to people who have said that one of the concerns with Henry Kissinger was they felt he was so much of a, almost a Europeanist in coming out of the European background, that he didn't see the United States as being able to sort of hang on, and that he was trying to cut his losses. The time was almost-

SONNENFELDT: It was Spenglerian.

Q: Yes, the time was really on the side of the Soviets. Did you have any; did you get any of that feeling?

SONNENFELDT: I had some of those feelings earlier - when they beat us into space with Sputnik in 1958, and when they seemed to be getting stronger militarily; and their role in the world seemed to expand. They had a global navy which exercised and showed the flag; they were active in Southern Africa; they were active in East Africa; they had Cuba; they tried to get entrï¿½e into Latin America, even though they had their very severe problem with China. Somewhere in the records is a paper which I wrote sometime in the '70s, which made the point that I thought the Soviets had serious problems, systemic problems, but that that didn't mean that they couldn't lash out and be dangerous; and that we had our own troubles at the time.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: In fact, I said there was sort of a law of simultaneous troubles.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: It really took a while for us to regain our confidence. Carter talked about U.S. "malaise."

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: It was not until some time into the Reagan administration that this mood of uneasiness in our own country dissipated.

But on the Soviet side, the leaders were these old guys who, one after another, died. It wasn't until Gorbachev came along that there seemed to be some chance for renewal, and even then, you couldn't tell exactly. Kissinger, I think, was widely assumed to be a sort of historical pessimist. There were people who called him a Spenglerian; and I think some people thought this of Nixon as well. As you know, Nixon in 1971 had made his statement about a five-cornered world in which he envisioned the U.S. as one of five major powers - the United States, Russia or thSoviet Union, Europe, Japan, and China - with each of the powers balancing each other. He thought that this was really the best way that you could expect to have some sort of peace. People said, "Ah, this is the old balance of power, which always has led to war in the past; and then you get three against two, or whatever divisions; and this is not really the American way." There was a latent hegemonism or isolationism in the U.S.

Even before Kissinger ever became famous, there was an article by Paul Nitze in Reporter Magazine, reviewing a book of Henry's. I can't recall which book it was, but it was known that Henry had written a doctoral dissertation about Metternich at the Congress of Vienna; that he seemed to be a great admirer of the Austrian Chancellor, Prince Metternich, and of German Chancellor Bismarck; that he admired these old-style power-balancers in nineteenth-century Europe; and that he seemed to have some questions about the real strength of the United States. Incidentally, I think the speeches that Kissinger gave as Secretary of State, which I mentioned earlier, were to some extent intended to counter this image of him as a historical pessimist, and to show that the United States was vibrant and vigorous, but also had interests that it needed to pursue, and that its government needed public understanding of those interests.

I think Admiral Elmo Zumwalt was one of the people who wrote about this later. But when he was still the Chief of Naval Operations in the early or mid-1970s, the story was told that on the train on the way back from an Army-Navy game in Philadelphia, maybe in 1973, Zumwalt was talking to various people, and that he was making comments about Henry's fatalism and pessimis(I don't know whether Navy had lost; it must have lost, so he then may have been in a bad mood).

So there was that idea, and there was the fact that Henry was European-born and was more interested in Europe (however, you know, he got very deeply involved in the Middle East).

Q: Oh, yes.

SONNENFELDT: He was involved in Vietnam; eventually he got involved in China, rather romantically involved with China; he got interested in Africa, partly because of problems in Angola, with the Cubans and the Soviets there in Angola; and he was interested in Latin America, even while he focused on Europe. Incidentally, Kissinger was quite suspicious - despite what Nixon had said about Europe as an eventual great power - he was suspicious about European unity, West European unity. He'd written in the '60s that as far as he could tell, given the history of Europe, the only organizing principle of a united Europe would be opposition to the United States. And I think some of that idea is still occasionally echoed in what he says.

Q: Sorry! [Laughter] Yes.

SONNENFELDT: So, whereas the State Department was very strongly in favor of European unity, there was an instance when the president or chairman of the European Commission had come to Washington on a visit and had had the expectation of meeting with President Nixon. Bob Schaetzel was then our Ambassador to what was still the EEC (European Economic Community). They showed up at the White House, and there was nothing on President Nixon's schedule. Schaetzel blew up in smoke and never forgave Henry for it, or Nixon for humiliating a very prominent European, to show that the White House just wasn't with it. The State Department had been very strongly involved in the arrangements for this visi(The incident was a mix-up in the schedulnot intentional.)

Q: Oh, yes.

SONNENFELDT: I am, I say, maybe, because I came from the State Department, but -

Q: Of course, Arthur Hartman was there at the beginning as a young spear-carrier.

SONNENFELDT: Arthur Hartman, the Assistant Secretary of State for Europe, and I had jointly conducted meetings with what was then called the Davignon Committee in 1973, during the so-called "Year of Europe." Kissinger had given a speech entitled "The Year of Europe" in early 1973. He wanted to revive our relations with Europe, because they had been rather neglected - because of Vietnam, our domestic problems, and our fascination with the Soviets and the Chinese. So he came up with a new prescription for American-European relations. It didn't focus much on the internal consolidation or unification of Europe, but more on what we would now call trans-Atlantic relationships. One of the results of that speech was an effort to define how best to consult between the United States and the emerging European entities. One of these was the Davignon Committee, which was intended to deal with foreign policy for the European Community (or European Economic Community, as it was then called). They were increasingly getting into overall foreign policy. So Art and I had a number of sessions with the Europeans on how to organize a consultative system between the U.S. and the EC. At that time, we were dealing with each of the member-nations individually, and they dealt with us individually. The Europeans were trying - and they are still trying - to work out their own decision-making procesand we did that together, and we eventually reached some compromise arrangements for consulting.

We always took the position (Henry really insisted on it) that if the Europeans were going to put together a united position to present to the U.S., we ought to be in on that process, because whatever they could put together was bound to be a matter of compromise. It would have to involve very long and detailed haggling among the different European countries. They would therefore be quite inflexible in dealing with us once they'd reached consensus. It might be even harder to deal with them than with the Soviets, because if we had a problem with their policy, the Europeans would have to go back to the drawing board. But the French said that the Americans should not participate in these earlier discussions because these are supposed to be European decisions. Well, of course, other Europeans told us not to worry about it; they'd let us know what was going on anyway. That was, you know, nearly 30 years ago now.

So, how European was Henry? He was obviously steeped in European history and lore; very interested in lots of different aspects of it; very skeptical about European unity, not that he wanted to foster intra-European opposition in the old sense. He also applied some of the techniques by which European diplomacy was conducted in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, for example, in the China case, and with the Soviet Union, or even if you want, in a minor way, with the Romanians or the Poles, and so on. But above all, with China. There was a complex set of relationships. It was said of German Chancellor Bismarck when he left office in 1890, that there was no one around who could understand the complexities of all his conflicting commitments to the Russians and the Austrians, and so forth. It wasn't quite that way with Kissinger, but still I think that Zbigniew Brzezinski was much clearer in his view of the Soviet Union when he came in as National Security Advisor in 1977. At the same time, Secretary of State Vance saw things in a totally different way from Brzezinski (they had serious differences)-

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: Cy Vance was eager to seek more of an entente with the Soviets than we had done. Detente still turned out to be a better word, even though we resisted it.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: I'm sorry this is very long-winded.

Q: Oh! No! No! This is just great.

SONNENFELDT: This is a reflection on the Kissinger persona and on Kissinger. You know, in later years out of government, he is still very much interested in Europe and is still very much welcome in the courts of Europe or among the upper-crust and political elites in Europe. He goes there all the time, gets awards, and his books get published immediately in their languages, and so on. So he still has these ties to Europe, and I think is to some extent reconciled to something like the EU (European Union) developing there now. But he continues to have interest in China and much else. It's really quite extraordinary how broad-gauged a figure he is.

Q: Oh, yes! You know, one of the things that came up, when you mentioned the "Sonnenfeldt Doctrine," - it sounds a little bit like Evans and Novak were creating a club to beat the Ford administration over the head.

SONNENFELDT: So they were.

Q: It reminds me of Yalta [conference during WWII among Roosevelt, Stalin and Churchill]. I mean Yalta was considered to be a sellout, particularly for the Eastern European thing.

SONNENFELDT: Right. Well, I can't remember whether Evans and Novak used the term "Yalta" in that column and a follow-up column in which they reiterated what they had said; but the term "Yalta" came up constantly in this mini-furor. Sometimes it didn't strike me personally like it was "mini!"

Q: Yes. [Laughter]

SONNENFELDT: But yes, I think the Yalta business came up frequently. Now, I think Yalta has been misinterpreted in many ways. In many places the Soviets were already in control in Eastern Europe at the time. For example, they had troops in Poland and were heading west and southwest to the Balkans.

Q: Yes, the Red Army was there!

SONNENFELDT: Yes. But there are people who said at the time that the Soviets were in all these places, but the Russians were devastated by the war. Now would be the time to go after them and finish off the Communists, as long as we've gotten rid of Hitler. That had been Hitler's dream when he went to war with the Russians in 1941.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: In his bunker in Berlin in April 1945, Hitler, like Frederick the Great in the Seven Years War (18th century) kept waiting for the alliance against him to fall apart, which it actually did when Roosevelt died.

Q: Yes, yes. Well, the death of Roosevelt.

SONNENFELDT: Right.

Q: Hitler thought, well, this means a new chance.

SONNENFELDT: That's right. But the alliance held. Still, Yalta is mentioned as a "giveaway;" historians who try to put it into perspective don't get very far. I don't mean to praise all of Yalta. A lot of it was blamed on Alger Hiss [a senior State Department official later convicted of spying for the Russians].

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: There's little or no evidence of that. After all, Churchill wasn't exactly a pro-communist, and he was certainly a party. As for Roosevelt's health - supposedly he was no longer sharp; and all of that. So there was a lot of controversy about Yalta. Liberation [of the "captive nations" of Eastern Europe] was the theme of the Eisenhower campaign in 1952. John Foster Dulles promised to publish all the documents. But that didn't quite happen.

Q: "Roll back the Iron Curtain."

SONNENFELDT: My point about East European policy - not just at my 1975 discussion with the ambassadors, which was mis-characterized, but even earlier - was that it was going to be very difficult to break up the Soviet empire, but that someday it would come under great stress. It was explosive because the Communist regimes in Eastern Europe were, by and large, detested by their people. In order to counter that, the regimes played on the national sentiment in Poland and in Hungary and in Romania. Nationalism was precisely what the Soviets tried to wipe out in these countries-

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: -in order to maintain their domination. I was expressing a hope. Some time before I went to the White House, or shortly after, I gave a talk at a meeting at Ditchley House in England. Somebody found some notes on that talk, which were almost identical to what I said in 1975 to our ambassadors. I had said this was a very dangerous situation, and the Soviets were lousy imperialists. They could only repress or suppress these people and build up explosive forces in these countries, and they really ought to be able to let these countries have their autonomy. I said the Russians should make some sort of a deal so that these countries would not be a threat to them in the traditional sense of a military corridor of attack against the Soviet Union. Their autonomy would mean they weren't going to blow up or revolt against Communist dominance. I was attacked severely by many Sovietologists for even suggesting that there could ever be Soviet leaders who would be prepared to loosen their grip on Eastern Europe; that this was absolutely central to their whole personality and identity!

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: Well, on that one, I feel I came out all right - because that's eventually what they did, under Gorbachev.

Q: Well, of course they did it and then destroyed themselves.

SONNENFELDT: In the process, yes, partly because they eased their grip on their "satellites" so late. There was a prominent Sovietologist named Leo Labedz, who's dead now, who was vehement in rejecting the idea that someone like me could even suggest that the Soviets could ever have any other notion than a totalitarian empire. Several others were similarly affronted by my even entertaining such a notion. Well, it did turn out - not because I predicted it necessarily (I didn't predict precisely how and where it happened) - but it turned out to be a remarkably peaceful-

Q: Very remarkable, yes.

SONNENFELDT: -devolution of the Soviet empire. It still gnaws at the Russians' insides because they lost their empire and their position in Central Europe. I think it's part of the problem we have now in dealing with Russia, which is led by former KGB men to boot, who have memories of power-

Q: The glory days, yes.

SONNENFELDT: The memory is alive at this point.

Q: Well, one of the things I might make a note of here is that Evans and Novak were newspaper columnists. At least from my point of view, I found them particularly vicious, rather nasty, and untrustworthy columnists, but they had their own role to play, which was essentially, I suppose, quite right-wing, but also looking for trouble.

SONNENFELDT: I knew Rollie [Rowland] Evans much better than I knew Novak. In fact, I virtually didn't know Novak at all at that time. I've come to know him a little bit since then. Evans I'd seen around town and at social occasions, and so on. I was told this particular column was mostly a Novak column; and it was just a few words that were taken out of context or changed. But their phrase - "a permanent organic union" - was really the opposite of what I was saying. I shouldn't have used the word "organic," and I said in my testimony in the Congress that I'll never use it again, because it does have several meanings. But Evans and Novak were making trouble - no doubt - in an election year.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: There was this mood running about this being the end of Nixon, and the Ford administration being too soft on the Soviets, too eager for detente, partly because of Kissinger's positions, which were suspect in some places. There were some people in the government, mostly in the Defense Department at the time, who felt that we were being too eager in negotiating with the Soviets. In the 1976 primary campaign against Ford, Reagan ran a strong anti-detente campaign (whatever he meant by detente), and some of his people did as well. Ford, of course, won the Republican nomination in the end.

Q: You're talking about the primary then?

SONNENFELDT: But I think there had been damage done on this issue in New Hampshire, where the Manchester Union and its publisher, William Loeb, were influential. Loeb was very responsive to these kinds of charges and allegations and criticisms. I think Evans and Novak did see themselves as digging out skullduggery in the government, one way or another, and especially when it came to being "soft" on the Soviets-

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: -and soft on the Communists. So whenever they could find something along those lines, they ran with it. Of course, a large number of newspapers that printed their syndicated column-

Q: Including The Washington Post.

SONNENFELDT: The Washington Post. The newspapers didn't take responsibility for the column; it was a syndicated column. I never quite forgave Rollie Evans. Novak, I think, is unscrupulous, or he was. It's getting to be an old act, and when I see him on CNN (Cable News Network) nowadays, he's combative; he's almost a caricature of himself.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: Evans should have found some way to acknowledge that this was a bad call on their part. But anyway, personally I didn't suffer, except my soul suffered, because I was a conscientious, life-long opponent of Communists, even in England as a young guy when I lived in Manchester and got acquainted with some extreme left-wing people there during the war. My hostility to Communism went back to that time. The last thing I would ever have dreamed would be to advocate the permanent incorporation of Eastern Europe into the Soviet Union. So I felt badly. This controversy also brought out some anti-Semitic overtones.

Q: Yes. Well, this is always - it sort of underlies these things!

SONNENFELDT: Kissinger, of course, was Jewish, so he got hit by some of it.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: In previous years there had been the grain deal, where the Soviets had managed to make us believe that they were in serious food trouble. Nixon decided (or the Secretary of Agriculture decided) to sell them grain, but we sold it at a reduced price because our experts thought the Soviets were really in serious need of it. Then it turned out that the Soviets had plenty of grain themselves, and the price generally dropped. This was called the "Great Grain Robbery." It was attributed to Kissinger, not so much to me, but to Kissinger, who was seen as too eager to deal with the Soviets. In some instances, there were clear overtones or undertones of anti-Semitism involved in the complaints. That was painful. Some of the Eastern European-American ethnic groups had that element in-

Q: Oh, particularly the Polish.

SONNENFELDT: In some of their own publications, it was thinly veiled. But in Warsaw, itself, there was talk about "the Jews in Washington." It was rather ironic, considering Nixon's own tapes with his anti-Semitic remarks, how many Jewish people were in the Nixon entourage, from Henry Kissinger to Leonard Garment to Bill Safire, who left later; and others, like myself, on the NSC staff.

Q: Yes, yes.

SONNENFELDT: But there were some mutterings around Eastern Europe that the "Jewish mafia" was selling out to the Soviets, including with cheap grain. That pained me. In later years, there was actually an entry in one of the authoritative encyclopedias of diplomacy about "the Sonnenfeldt Doctrine," which is well-balanced and is okay. But it was a nasty thing; it was painful in the sense that it was wrong and mischievous. It caused a diversion that was totally out of order and unnecessary, given the troubles that we had anyway because of all the other unhappy circumstances in the mid '70s.

Q: Okay. Well, I think this is probably a good place to stop here. There are a couple things I'd like you to talk about. I'd like you to talk about while you were doing this, from '74-'77, I guess, the Helsinki Accords, and how you saw that [and] the impact, the actual impact, as you saw it, of Watergate, and you've talked about, and other things there - whether Chile ever came up or not - maybe that-

SONNENFELDT: Well, I can tell you now that I had nothing to do with Chile, but when the Chilean political leader was killed in Washington, there was a guy in town here who immediately blamed Kissinger for it, a fellow named Barnet-

Q: Who?

SONNENFELDT: Richard Barnet, whose best friend was in that car.

Q: Yes. This is when, oh, well, I want to say, not Achillia, but something like that [Orlando Letelier]-

SONNENFELDT: Yes.

Q: Was killed on Sheridan Circle.

SONNENFELDT: Yes, yes. Have you interviewed Dave Popper [former U.S. Ambassador to Chile]?

Q: No! I've tried to get him, and he says he's done one, and I've never been able to -

SONNENFELDT: Well, he was Ambassador to Chile. I think Nat Davis [also a former Ambassador to Chile] might have been involved also.

Q: Yes, I'd like to get Nat Davis, but he's off. Well, then I'd also like to cover the Ford administration, I mean the changeover - if you saw anything there.

SONNENFELDT: Yes.

Q: And just one other sort of - oh! And the energy crisis and just how -

SONNENFELDT: Just - are you taping this.

Q: Yes, I am.

SONNENFELDT: All right. Well?talking about the Ford administration, we might talk very briefly about Alexander Haig's leaving the Ford administration to become SACEUR (Supreme Allied Commander in NATO) in I guess, late 1974, after he'd been Chief of Staff for Ford in the transition.

Q: Yes, yes. And then, energy and then, you mentioned something, which goes back, but I think it makes an interesting story, about Nixon's early trip to Paris and about the art and the children and all this, if you - okay?

SONNENFELDT: Yes.

Q: Great. [end of tape]

Well, we have a certain amount of things to do before we move on. Let's start with the Helsinki Accords. In retrospect, did these become more important than they were felt to be at the time? What was the thinking?

SONNENFELDT: Well, the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 was rather controversial in this country, mostly on the right of the political spectrum. It was seen as permanently legitimizing the borders that the Soviets had established in Central and Eastern Europe in the post-World War II period, in exchange for what were considered to be rather insubstantial, even if nice-sounding, propositions concerning freedom for journalists, and other sorts of freedoms-

Q: Freedom of movement-

SONNENFELDT: Movement, religion, and so on.

Q: Freedom to express an opinion...

SONNENFELDT: The Final Act, adopted in Helsinki in 1975, was the end-product of bargaining that had gone on for years. Actually, the Soviets, back in 1954, had proposed an all-European security system when the issue at that time was the entry of West Germany into NATO, which took place in 1955. Their scheme excluded the U.S. and Canada. The Soviets tried to throw a series of obstacles in the way of Germany's joining NATO, but the idea of an all-European security pact was generally seen as a Soviet propaganda maneuver, and really didn't get much serious attention. The Soviets revived this idea periodically; in particular, they revived it in 1969, shortly before NATO was to observe its twentieth anniversary here in Washington, in April of 1969. There was a fair amount of interest among the European allies and some of the neutrals (especially in the Nordic countries) to take up the Soviet proposals on security in Europe. The general instinct in the Nixon White House at that point - very early in the administration - was that this is more of the same: the Russians had just invaded Czechoslovakia in August 1968, and various sorts of sanctions had been applied. Now the Soviets were trying to deal themselves back into polite company.

But in any case, in its 1969 summit meeting in Washington, NATO decided to probe a bit more to see what there might be to this proposition of convening a conference at an all-European level that would include all NATO and Warsaw Pact members and neutrals. By 1973, there was a Preparatory Commission, and NATO countries had made substantial changes in the agenda that the Soviets had put forward. The Soviets were really trying to negate NATO, or what they claimed to be the division of Europe into blocs. NATO's proposed changes in the agenda involved a whole variety of issues relating to various freedoms - freedom of movement, freedom of communication, freedom of religion, and so on - all the conditions that were, in fact, not present in the Soviet bloc and in the Soviet Union, itself. NATO was also seeking to soften a good deal of the verbiage that the Soviets had put in about the dissolution of blocs (read "NATO.") At some point, Moscow conceded that the U.S. and Canada had to be part of any deal.

The Preparatory Commission process went on for a couple of years. It actually turned out that, in the course of those negotiations, there were some East Europeans that didn't always observe discipline as dictated from Moscow on particular issues. The draft paper became a long, long document covering of a whole lot of topics: economic relations, confidence-building measures - that is, pre-announcements of maneuvers, and limitations on the size of maneuvers, and observers for maneuvers - and so on.

In the end, it got to the point where everybody, more or less, was getting tired of haggling on and on and on about every sentence. The Soviets had wanted to wrap this all up with a grandiose summit meeting, again, for purposes of status. The West Germans (led by Willy Brandt, who had become Chancellor of the Federal Republic some years earlier) and some other countries were actually quite interested in this. The Nixon administration, and Kissinger in particular, had wanted to use a grand summit-level windup to the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) as a lure for the Soviets to be more constructive in the Middle East and various other areas of interest to us, to hold that out there as a possible reward for them. In any event, by 1975 it had reached the point of wrapping it up. By that time, Gerald Ford was President. The document proclaimed at the meeting in Helsinki is known as the Helsinki Final Act. It was not a legal document; and everybody made a point to say it was a political document. As such, it didn't require ratification by the U.S. Senate (and it probably wouldn't have been ratified in this country).

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: What was really quite remarkable, I thought, was the vigor displayed by many of the Western leaders who showed up there: Helmut Schmidt from German(Brandt had had to resign due to a spy scandal), Giscard from France, and others, including, of course, President Ford. Their vigor and assured manner contrasted sharply with the peculiar lassitude, or whatever one wants to call it, of the East Europeans. The East Europeans stuck together in a cluster and mostly talked to each other. Of course, they were polite to the Westerners, and the Westerners were polite to them: the Western leaders tried to engage them in conversation. The planned order of seating might put a Westerner and an Easterner and a neutral sitting together, but the Eastern Europeans really were self-isolated. They somehow felt uncomfortable in this company of Western leaders, and even with neutral leaders. Amusingly, President Ford found himself sitting next to East German boss Honecker.

The most interesting thing, despite the criticism and concerns about the Final Act in this country and some other countries, was what happened later. Immediately after the Helsinki meeting, President Ford made a special point of going to Poland and to Romania, to make very clear that nothing should be construed in that Final Act as meaning that the United States was writing off Eastern Europe and leaving it to the Soviets. He was quite deliberate in showing the American interest in that part of the world, as were some West Europeans.

What was interesting and important was that, as time went on, various Eastern European dissident groups developing, especially in Czechoslovakia and Poland, were using language from the Final Act to justify what they were doing. It really hadn't been anticipated that people would be courageous enough, and regimes would be permissive enough in Communist Europe, to let that sort of thing take place. Then, eventually, some Russian dissidents also proclaimed that they based their appeals on the terms of the Helsinki Final Act. While that didn't necessarily deter the Soviets from cracking down, the Final Act did become more than just one more conference document.

In addition, as time went on, there were follow-up conferences (after I had left the government) which added detail to many aspects of the Helsinki Final Act. And of course, they created an organization to oversee its implementation (OSCE). The organization exists now; it's not a particularly potent organization, but it does play a role now in being a human rights monitor, overseeing treatment of minorities, and mediating disputes between members.

Q: It's helpful in Yugoslavia, for example.

SONNENFELDT: For example, that's right.

Q: And sort of an observer.

SONNENFELDT: The Russians have come back, occasionally, to say that the OSCE is really the organization that ought to be beefed up to be the security organization in Europe, replacing NATO, although I think they have pretty well dropped that now.

It's worth noting that, here in this country, some people who had been severely critical about the supposed "sellout" to the Soviets changed their mind when they saw that the Helsinki Act was, in fact, doing some good. Now there's an argument among historians and participants in these developments more than 20 years ago, as to whether and how much CSCE/OSCE contributed to the collapse of the Soviet Union and of the Soviet bloc. I think historians will have to sort that out in due course.

Q: Yes, it probably did. Several said that, you know, this was not "the" critical, but it was "one of the." It began to sap the strength of the authoritarian regime.

SONNENFELDT: Yes, I think it helped. There were many other reasons that led to the collapse of the Soviet empire.

In any event, the only other thing I can say is that the weather in Helsinki was absolutely magnificent in August of 1975. The Finns had brought their most beautiful girls into Helsinki to serve as guides for the many large delegations. The mood, actually, was pretty good. President Ford delivered what I thought was perhaps the best speech of his presidency, at least up to that point. I had had a little bit to do with drafting it, but that wasn't why I thought that. I thought he delivered it well, and it had a lot of resonance in the big hall there, filled with delegates. So the physical surroundings for this occasion were memorable. I guess a lot of people who went back to their countries tried to figure out what the impact will be. For the leaders from the East, Helsinki was a unique event.

Q: When the negotiations were underway, what was your reading on this, you know, getting down to the personal? What was your reading on this and the group you were dealing with?

SONNENFELDT: Well, as I said, the U.S. government had never been particularly keen on the idea of an all-European security pact - particularly since it had started as a pure propaganda exercise, or even a Soviet political warfare exercise. The Nixon administration was skeptical, quite skeptical, when this proposal got tossed back into the game early on in the Nixon administration. As I said earlier, it was seen largely as a gimmick to get the Soviets back into some kind of relationship with the West after they had invaded Czechoslovakia. But the attitude here in the administration was not particularly welcoming.

Harlan Cleveland was still our Ambassador to NATO in 1969, held over from the previous administration before Bob Ellsworth took his place as an appointee of the Nixon administration. Cleveland thought that, tactically, it was not wise to turn the Soviet proposal down flat, because there were West European governments that were interested in it. Some politicians in Western Europe were quite positive about trying something like that idea. So the U.S. position was not totally negative, and the NATO position was not totally negative, as we met here in 1969, and thereafter.

An agreement was then reached to have a Preparatory Conference by 1973, in Helsinki I guess it was, and we went along with that. The State Department was very hard at work trying to change some of the draft language. That's what diplomats are supposed to do, to negotiate endlessly with NATO allies to change some of the terminology. They added a lot of what became known as "baskets" relating to freedom of expression, freedom of movement and so forth, in order to make the document more congenial and of interest to the West, rather than simply rebutting the Soviet thrust to break up the alliances and replace them with something very amorphous. That was clearly not acceptable.

As I intimated earlier, I think that in a tactical sense, Kissinger and Nixon saw it as opportunities for leverage, and also as a way for NATO members to work together on a project, as the detente period began to evolve. I didn't like the term "detente" then, but anyway, it's used.

Q: Part of the vocabulary.

SONNENFELDT: Right?as "detente" evolved, this was part of the agenda. It wasn't easy, but it actually worked out quite well. It became complicated later because of the multilateral negotiations on Mutual and Balanced Force Reductions, which were largely a product of American domestic politics - for example, the Mansfield Amendment, that annually called for reduction of U.S. forces in Europe. We thought it was a good idea to have a negotiation going with the Soviets, so that when people urged us to reduce forces, we could always say, "no, look! We're negotiating about that. Don't undercut our negotiating position." So I think the MBFR talks were used in the Nixon administration and in the NSC staff, and in particular by Kissinger, as an opportunity for tactical maneuver.

Q: Some years ago, quite a while ago, I think, I interviewed George Vest -

SONNENFELDT: Yes -

Q: Who was in, who was doing some of the negotiating.

SONNENFELDT: Indeed he was. He was experienced and shrewd.

Q: He said that he would get reports, sometimes from the East Germans and all, saying, "Well, you know, Henry Kissinger is a?I understand Henry Kissinger isn't that keen on this. He's more interested in MBFR (Mutual and Balanced Force Reduction) and all that, because he was talking to Dobrynin - "

SONNENFELDT: Yes.

Q: Maybe it's part of the thing, but he felt that he was being undercut by Kissinger.

SONNENFELDT: Well, you know, this was one of these cases where the real policy of the White House was a bit different from the way the State Department saw it; and that's, of course, part of the story of the Nixon administration-

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: The communications weren't always particularly good, and many times were not good, because Nixon didn't trust the State Department. So there were two layers: one, where the State Department people tended to take this very seriously, professionally, and George Vest is an excellent negotiator. But there was a second layer of instances when Kissinger was talking to some foreign visitor or somebody-

Q: I think it was particularly with Dobrynin.

SONNENFELDT: Maybe, but it was not just Dobrynin; Kissinger had contact with top people in other countries.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: Kissinger originally was not enthusiastic about the CSCE project, and he made some disparaging comments about it, though not about Vest personally, who was a respected officer.

Q: Well, also it was a matter style, too, wasn't it? Please correct me, but I get the feeling that if Kissinger wasn't on the center stage on something...

SONNENFELDT: I don't think it was a personal thing. There was a strategy developing out of the White House in dealing with the Soviets; and of course, the "back channel," the famous "back channel," was the primary means of communication. And then there was summitry with Brezhnev, and then lots of Kissinger trips to Moscow, and also the relationship with Dobrynin here, which was part of the "back channel."

So I think CSCE was not such a main topic of his and Nixon's agenda. They wanted to end the Vietnam War; they wanted to get some help from the Russians in doing that; they got interested in some of the arms control issues; they wanted to reduce the negative Soviet involvement in the Middle East; and especially in summit meetings with Brezhnev starting in 1972, they wanted to take some of the wind out of the sails of the "peace" movement in this country by showing progress in relations with the Soviet Union-

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: -including on military issues. These included the Strategic Arms Limitation or "SALT" talks, the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, and later, MBFR to some extent, although as I mentioned, MBFR's main origin had to do with countering the Mansfield Resolutions. I think that wasn't always clear. Not that the people in the State Department were dumb - on the contrary; they were very smart. But they didn't always agree with the way policy was being handled by the White House. Communications just weren't very good until Kissinger, himself, became Secretary of State. Then, some of these strategies became clearer to the ambassadors and the senior officers in the State Department. They still weren't sure they knew everything that was in his mind. But then, when Ford succeeded Nixon in 1974, Ford's style was different from Nixon's. He didn't have a history of distrust of the State Department. Actually, it wasn't just Nixon who distrusted State: Kennedy referred to the Department as a "fudge factory," you know.

Q: Yes, right.

SONNENFELDT: So the style changed a bit, and there was more communication. Obviously, with Kissinger in the State Department, he used - actually much more than is commonly though- some State Department people whom he found to be intellectually very much on the alert and creative. He worked with many of those people, even if they weren't Assistant Secretaries. If he found somebody below that rank - maybe because the officer was helping out with a speech that Kissinger was writing, or for whatever reasoif Kissinger found that individual interesting, he would bring him or her into meetings, and involve this person in actions. So there was much more communication, obviously, between the policy-makers, the real policy-makers, and the implementing officials. Their views very often may not have been acknowledged sufficiently, but they very often did play a role in the policy decisions that were made, whether in the Vietnam negotiations or on the Middle East or whatever the case may be.

Q: Good. Well then, let's move to the Watergate. From your perspective in foreign policy, how did Watergate impact on our ability to deal? Watergate would be really '73-74, I guess.

SONNENFELDT: Right. It obviously had a corrosive impact. I left the White House to go back to the State Department in early '74. There had already been quite a bit of Watergate controversy in '73. The interesting thing was that a lot of foreign leaders and foreign governments, including the Soviets, didn't quite understand what this controversy was all about.

Q: I was in Greece, and they went, "What the heck was going on?"

SONNENFELDT: Yes, and, you know, most foreign observers thought this was a trivial thing.

Q: Everybody does it!

SONNENFELDT: Everybody does it, and why are you practicing regicide?

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: The Canadians used to say, "You Americans have a history of doing in your leaders," and so on. Many governments continued to want to do business with the United States on various issues. We had a stream of foreign visitors coming through. Nixon continued to travel. Of course, he was trying to demonstrate that he was an indispensable president. But obviously, it was, to put it mildly, a distraction.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: It was hard for foreigners to tell, and perhaps for some of our own people as well, whether some foreign policy initiative coming out of the White House was an effort to distract attention from what was happening on the Watergate front, or whether it had its own intrinsic merit. We saw similar questions raised in the Clinton administration when the Monica Lewinsky business was very prominent, the question of whether the White House was really trying to divert attention from Clinton's political problems.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: The movie, Wag the Dog-

Q: Wag the Dog came out just at the time, about creating a [diversion]-

SONNENFELDT: So there were such questions during the Watergate period, but all in all, I have to say that we worked away at our issues, and we found Nixon attentive. I still went to a feNSC meetings, where he was present; or I went on trips with him, for example, to Moscow, to the Soviet Union in the summer of 1974. This was within a couple of months of his resignation. We signed a treaty on underground nuclear testing, which had been prepared for that trip. These were "home and home" affairs. Nixon went first to Moscow in 1972; Brezhnev came here in '73; and Nixon went over there in '74. So despite Watergate, he went to the USSR, and went through our full schedule of meetings, including sessions in the Crimea with Brezhnev, at his Black Sea resort.

In fact, there was an amusing episode on that trip, when we went down to the house that the Soviet bosses used for their summer relaxation. There was a large swimming pool, and we were all standing around. Brezhnev and his interpreter, Viktor Sukhodrev-

Q: This is the sort of bald guy with a big mustache?

SONNENFELDT: No. This was Viktor Sukhodrev. He was a Shakespearean actor, Russian, but he spoke fluent King's English and American English. Anyway, they came and got a hold of Nixon, because Brezhnev wanted to talk to him. There were little side places for private conversations, but the rest of us were all milling around the swimming pool. We thought this was just going to be a short conversation, "hello, how are you, and explain the craziness in your country." But it went on and on and on, and some of our people got impatient. Kissinger and Haig wondered what in God's name was going on between Brezhnev and Nixon. Was Brezhnev somehow trying to push Nixon into giving him something, while Nixon was in such trouble at home? Or what was it? It may have taken an hour or an hour-and-a-half before they finally emerged. I have to confess I never knew all of what Nixon finally told Kissinger and others about what the subject was. It had to do mostly with China, a long-standing Brezhnev obsession.

I can't remember how much we talked about this before, but when Nixon visited the Soviet Union in May of 1972, he'd been in China earlier that year. American-Chinese relations were beginning to develop, much to the uneasiness and chagrin of the Soviet - which was one, but not the sole purpose of our China strategy. In '72, in the last hour of our meeting, Brezhnev had slipped Nixon a piece of paper, a proposal which would have amounted to a de facto alliance against China. Nixon looked at it and said, "Well, we'll have to study it," and so on. This paper was later changed into quite a different document, which was adopted at the '73 Nixon-Brezhnev summit in this country. It was the agreement on the prevention of nuclear war, which had some overtone of possibly being directed at China. (Documents declassified as we speak indicate that Soviet approaches to Nixon on this subject occurred before the 1972 summit.)

In 1974, while we were waiting at his swimming pool, we were wondering whether Brezhnev was back again on his China kick with Nixon in this private setting, hoping to extract something from Nixon. This was a peculiar episode because of some uneasiness, given Nixon's political condition by that time in the Watergate situation. This summit was in June of '74, and that's just a couple of months before his resignation in August. So it was-

Q: You weren't - I mean, it wasn't the old Nixon. I mean you were-

SONNENFELDT: Well, we didn't know! Nixon was a very shrewd guy. He didn't generally let people pull the wool over his eyes; and he had his understanding of the national interest, although he obviously was distracted by the Watergate business. I personally was also curious, since it was highly unusual that they would hold talks with no American interpreter present. The Soviet interpreter usually was very good about telling us what was going on. So there was some uneasiness about what in God's name were these two guys talking about. I guess there is a record of it somewhere by now, but it would be a Soviet record. I don't know whether the people who have been into the archives for that period have a record, and whether Viktor made a complete MEMCON (memorandum of conversation) of it, or kept some of it out of the memo, or had a separate one, or whatever. In our case, I think it would be whatever Nixon told Kissinger and Haig the subject had been. Then the trip went on.

But that episode is a digression from my point that Nixon really continued to do the country's business in foreign affairs, right up until the time he resigned. The CSCE discussion that we were talking about previously was going on. There were Middle East negotiations too, because we'd had the Yom Kippur War in October 1973. Nixon (contrary to some allegations) was very much involved in the decision-making about our involvement in extending military assistance to the Israelis. At that time, we had a somewhat tight spot with the Soviets, because they sent a rather threatening letter about the continued Israeli effort to encircle the Egyptian army, and they seemed to be threatening Soviet intervention.

Q: This is the Third Army that was being encircled.

SONNENFELDT: Right, right, and that was in '73, in October. We had an energy crisis, and so on. So there was plenty going on. It isn't that we were without a president. Of course, we had many additional crises, including Vice President Agnew's resignation, leading to Ford's designation as Vice President.

All these things were going on, and so was foreign policy, and so was defense policy. There is a story that Secretary of Defense Jim Schlesinger was worried that some wild order might come to the military from the White House, ordering some kind of a military action, as a diversion. I don't really know what the truth is, but Schlesinger supposedly has been talking about his concerns about that: his own orders to the military that there were to be no orders accepted from the White House by the military, without his personal approval. So there were obviously some things that couldn't be called "normal."

Q: Well, this is just fine. Well, during this Watergate period and after Agnew resigned, did you have any feel for how Ford as Vice President, who was coming out of the House of Representatives, was being melded into the administration on foreign affairs side?

SONNENFELDT: He was a good choice, I think, in many respects. He had enormous experience in the Congress, and had some exposure to foreign policy as well. I can't really say that I can recollect from personal knowledge his direct involvement as Vice President. He came to meetings. There weren't that many formal meetings of the NSC, the National Security Council, of which the Vice President is a member. I think he was briefed, and he was kept informed. Then, I think, as Nixon's resignation seemed more and more probable (I mean, it wasn't clear; it might have been impeachment), I personally wasn't involved in briefings, but I think Ford was kept informed of what was going on. How much direct involvement he had, I can't judge.

Q: You didn't have any feeling that, you might say, the bureaucratic system was gearing up to make sure that the presumptive new man was going to be brought up to snuff?

SONNENFELDT: Yes, I think he was being kept informed of foreign policy issues. He probably got intelligence briefings. I think Haig, who was the White House chief of staff, kept him informed. I assumed Kissinger had meetings with Ford. I think when he actually did take over, it was pretty smooth. Of course, we had to get used to some of the new stafI was State Department Counselor by then, but we worked closely with the NSC staff.

Ford kept most people in place, but there was some shakeup. WheKissinger became Secretary oState in '73, he also retained his position as National Security Advisor. General Brent Scowcroft became his Deputy. Scowcroft actually had his office in the White House, but Kissinger was still the National Security Advisor, and that was initially carried over into the Ford administration. Later, in October of '74, that was changed: Scowcroft became the National Security Advisor. Ford also named Donald Rumsfeld as the Secretary of Defense. Rumsfeld had been President Ford's chief of staff after Haig had gone on to become NATO Supreme Allied Commander. The staff personnel, by and large, were kept on board. There were a few additions that Ford himself brought on, more for his own personal staff. So I think it was a pretty smooth transition, with most of the principal actors staying on. There were changes eventually, at Treasury and other places; but the replacements were mostly insiders, rather than a whole lot of new outsiders coming in. And then, of course, the pardon figured in the situation.

Q: Ford's pardon of Nixon.

SONNENFELDT: Ford's pardon of Nixon. I, obviously, know nothing about what was going on in regard to the pardon. There are all these stories about Nixon being induced to resign in exchange for the pardon. I'm doubtful that that happened. But in any case, I had nothing to do with it. I think, however, the pardon did smooth the transition, at least as far as the functioning of the government was concerned.

Q: I must say, as just a government worker at the time, I said, "Thank God." I realized as a, you know, it may have, it hurt Ford politically, but it, you know, I have a feeling we would still be having the case.

SONNENFELDT: Yes.

Q: I mean it would have gone on and on and on.

SONNENFELDT: And then Ford, of course, brought in Rockefeller as his Vice President. He was well-informed on foreign issues, with much experience and many resources. Kissinger was very close to him. That, I think, strengthened Ford's presidency, although there were some Republicans who were not exactly Rockefeller Republicans. But nevertheless, given the stature of Rockefeller, his long-time interest in foreign affairs and his relationships with Kissinger and some other people in the government, I think the transition, given the trauma and the crisis that we had gone through, was a pretty smooth one.

Now, of course, the shock effect of Vietnam was still playing itself out, and Congress' action to withhold all arms support to the South Vietnamese, and then the collapse of South Vietnam. There were incidents such as the seizure of the Mayaguez, the ship that was captured by some Cambodians.

There were some difficult moments. But in addition, Ford, for example, again in my particular area, went to Vladivostok in November 1974 to meet with Brezhnev to continue that relationship. That was set up through the old "back channel" with Dobrynin and-

Q: Did you go there?

SONNENFELDT: Yes, I did go.

Q: What was the atmospherics there? The Soviets you'd been dealing with, were they kind of looking at this new guy and wondering what this [would mean]?

SONNENFELDT: Well, there certainly was that aspect. Of course, Dobrynin knew him because Ford had been a leader in the Congress, but I don't know that any of the other Soviets of consequence knew him personally. Obviously, they knew a lot about him from their intelligence sources, and from reporting from their embassy and other operatives in this country. The mood at that meeting was actually pretty good, except that Brezhnev either had the flu, or my own impression of Brezhnev (having seen him by that time over a period of several years) was that he was not in a particularly vigorous state of mind. But he was sufficiently vigorous, at one point, to get all his uniformed military out of the room while he was talking with Ford about some aspects of strategic arms limitation.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: Whether that was just a show, and the Soviet military knew what was going on anyway, or whether they really were excluded, I'm not sure. All in all, that wasn't an easy first meeting for Ford, because everybody was watching him, in Washington and then around the world; but it was, on the whole, a pretty good meeting. Of course, by that time, we had the additional strength of having a relationship with China, which had continued to develop since Nixon's first trip to China. In fact, Kissinger went directly to China after Vladivostok to brief the Chinese on the meetings, and to talk to them about whatever was on our American-Chinese agenda. That, you know, gave us a certain amount of strength, at least tactical strength, in dealing with the Soviets.

But I thought that Ford understood the issues well. We had a couple of U.S.-only meetings out in the cold, cold, Siberian-cold gardens outside this building where the meetings were held, in order not to be listened to by Soviet monitors. There were a few issues that needed to be decided in these negotiations. Our security people checked the shrubs for microphones. The issue was how to apportion missile launchers and warheads between the Soviets and us. One option would have allotted fewer launchers to us but more warheads. Ford rejected this because he foresaw criticism at home if we looked like we accepted a Soviet advantage. Ford, I think, was quite well up-to-date on the details. It was an okay meeting.

Q: Yes. I mean, you know, compared to some other times when sort of, you know, using the term as the handlers, these are the people who hang around and advisors; I mean you were kind of one of them. You talk about when Nixon and Brezhnev gone, you had Ford, compared to later when Ronald Reagan was president, you had some very uneasy people around him.

SONNENFELDT: Yes.

Q: I mean, in the first place, there were real ideological things.

SONNENFELDT: Yes.

Q: But I had even one person say that they really didn't want to let Nixon alone in the room with Margaret Thatcher or Brian Mulroney because-

SONNENFELDT: You mean Reagan.

Q: Reagan, I mean, because he would get so full of, he thought so highly that -

SONNENFELDT: I wasn't in the Reagan administration, but as an outside observer and with hindsight, I think a lot of the people that came in with Reagan were tough cold warriors. I had my sympathies with some of them. And so was Reagan a cold warrior who didn't mind tough kinds of words (nor did his speechwriters), like "evil empire," and so on.

I think Reagan, in his own way, was a religious man who believed in redemption.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: When he eventually came to deal with Gorbachev, later in the '80s, I think he reached the conclusion that maybe Gorbachev was the instrument of redemption for the evil empire, and he'd started dealing with the Soviets, even to the point of talking about the?well, virtually the abolition of nuclear weapons-

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: Because Reagan, I think, was, at heart, a nuclear abolitionist. That's where "Star Wars," as it came to be called, came in, and it's the source of the disparaging claim of missile defense as the idea of having a roof over the United States to prevent nuclear attack. I think Reagan was groping and looking for ways to prevent nuclear disaster from happening. I think he must have thought about the day when he was going to be confronted with pushing the button, without any other choice. I think he probably would have, if it had actually come to that. But he clearly wanted an alternative.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: However, I think he found it utterly distasteful, and he was looking for ways to avoid all that, to see if we couldn't rid the world of nuclear weapons. I think a lot of the people who had come in with him took only the anti-Soviet part of his position and his attitude, and couldn't quite bring themselves to realize the other aspects of it.

Coming back to Ford: the problem that Ford increasingly began to have, in addition to the collapse in Vietnam, was that the criticism of the Ford administration's Soviet policy began to grow. Concern about decline in the defense budget began to grow in some quarters of the American political class, as shown in statements by the Committee to Prevent the Common Danger. That group included a lot of senior people who had served in Republican and Democratic administrations. That really was critical. [end of tape]

They were really quite critical of the Ford administration and, almost by definition, of some of the things that were done in the Nixon administration with the Soviets. The criticism of the Ford administration: too much detente, too many giveaways, too easy on the Soviets, too many illusions. I personally got dragged into it with the canard of the so-called "Sonnenfeldt Doctrine," in which I supposedly advocated the incorporation of all of Eastern Europe into the Soviet Union, in order to prevent thosEast European satellite countries from staging a rebellion against Moscow. My actual views were 180 degrees opposed to that idea.

In any event, by the time the Reagan candidacy for the Republican nomination got going in 1975 and '76, and then during the '76 presidential campaign against Carter, Ford was on the defensive. I think he was unfairly on the defensive because of the image that had been created in many places, including in the Republican party itself. Ford did defeat Reagan in the primaries, although Reagan did quite well and laid the basis for his candidacy four years later against Carter. TheJimmy Carter picked up the theme in the general election campaign in 1976, charging Ford with having too much detente and not enough toughness. I don't know how much that actually contributed to Ford's defeat by Carter. I think his defeat was, to some extent, a function of people's uneasiness about Ford. Many different reasons have been analyzed by greater experts than I can claim to be. Despite the fact that there had been a smooth transition in very difficult times, despite the fact that we had left Vietnam on his watch (the war began before Ford became president), and relief in the country despite that tragedy, economic problems, and various other problems, I think everybody agreed that Jerry Ford was a decent guy, a nice guy. I think Ford's situation began to get tougher for him as the election approached, even though Carter was a guy who had come from nowhere-

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: -as far as national politics was concerned. He and his advisors, Brzezinski and some others, made Soviet policy an issue in the '76 campaign, on the grounds that Ford hadn't been tough enough, and that if there was going to be detente, it ought to be "real" detente and not a phony detente, and so on. I found that criticism painful because I didn't think that was the right view oJerry Ford. The hand we played was not the strongest at the time, although with hindsight, it was a lot stronger than we may have thought, because we're talking now about 14 years away from the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Q: I know.

SONNENFELDT: So there was much more inherent weakness in the USSR than we were able to discern at the time. Ford's political opponents were also not discerning it, because they thought the Soviets were getting stronger and stronger and we were getting weaker and weaker.

Q: Weaker and weaker, yes. All right. Well, I think this is probably a good place to stop.

SONNENFELDT: Okay.

Q: But we'll pick it up. We've really talked much about the Ford administration overall, but I'd like to talk about your time in when you were Counselor of the -

SONNENFELDT: Well, I guess we've got to come back to the State Department.

Q: Well, I'm trying to get down to, you know, what people were doing.

SONNENFELDT: Yes.

Q: And we'll come back there, and an issue you raised just at the very end about our appraisal of the Soviet Union at the time, and sort of your operation, and intelligence about the Soviet Union. And this is also at the time that we had been humiliated by the collapse in Vietnam.

SONNENFELDT: Yes.

Q: And how this affected our thinking and so -

SONNENFELDT: Yes, well, Mayaguez is what we were talking about.

Q: Mayaguez, yes. This is in -

SONNENFELDT: Early in the Ford administration.

Q: This was the ship that was seized by some Cambodians.

SONNENFELDT: Right.

Q: Yes. Okay. We'll pick it up next time.

SONNENFELDT: Okay.

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Q: All right. Today is November 21, 2001. Well, let's maybe before we get down to sort of what the Counselor was doing, what about, in the first place, what were you getting towards, while you were or during the Ford administration, about the Soviet Union, both intelligence and analysis and from the [Soviet] Desk? I mean, whither the Soviet Union?

SONNENFELDT: I honestly can't remember in particular what was coming from the intelligence agencies, and our own INR colleagues, regarding the long-term outlook for the Soviet Union. Certainly, no one was suggesting that it was entering a phase before a phase that would see its collapse. There were reports - and we had our own observations - of Brezhnev's declining health, and inevitable questions about who would succeed him. There were the usual debates about the state of the Soviet economy, and there were continuing controversies about the cost oSoviet military programs relative to GNP (gross national product), and relative to the economy in general.

By the end of the Ford administration (I don't mean the very end, but as we were approaching the '76 elections), our relations with the Soviets were not particularly good. They weren't deteriorating severely, but we had problems with them about Angola, with Cubans there and Soviet activities. By early 1976, the negotiations on strategic arms limitations were pretty well stymied. That was partly because of disagreements in our own government. While it was not a time of great advances in relations, it was also not a time of big-time setbacks in our relations. As for the prospects of the Soviet Union itself, it was sort of a murky picture. We did not, however, foresee an approaching collapse.

There were continuing incidents involving dissidents in the Soviet Union, and also, more seriously, dissidence in Eastern Europe, something that neither we nor the critics of the Helsinki Final Act had really envisaged. But in Czechoslovakia, and in Poland in particular, people using language incorporated in the Helsinki Final Act were forming protest groups of one sort or another. They were not exactly full-fledged opposition groups, but were on the borderline of disaffection. It looked more and more as if the Soviets didn't really have an answer to their long-term problem in Eastern Europe: that is, more and more disenchantment with communism, and unhappiness about being under Soviet domination. Of course, that became a campaign issue in the Ford-Carter campaign, in the debates later in 1976. There were signs of an eroding Soviet position in Eastern Europe, but nothing as dramatic as happened 12 or 13 years later. So as I recall, it's a pretty murky picture, where the Soviet Union was still seen, essentially, as our main challenger, opponent, and rival in many respects.

We did have the Chinese relationship, which was becoming not exactly warmer; but it was becoming helpful in dealing with the Soviet Union because of some of the military aspects in the relationship with China. So that was a plus.

Q: Yes. Well, you mentioned something about the State Department project. Was this just, or should, I don't know, was there something entitled State Department project? You had just mentioned this at the very end.

SONNENFELDT: No. I was referring to the fact that these oral history interviews are a State Department project.

Q: Okay. Well now, as, particularly, we're looking more at the Ford administration. What were you doing as Counselor?

SONNENFELDT: I had become the Counselor of the State Department in the Nixon administration, in 1974, and served as Counselor until March 1977. The Counselor doesn't have a specific job description; he's responsible for whatever areas the Secretary assigns to him, as a sort of a utility infielder on the seventh floor.

The arrangement was essentially that I would continue to deal with the issues that I had dealt with principally in the NSC staff, which included East-West relations; relations with Europe; NATO; and also some areas outside Europe, if they involved the Soviet Union. The Under Secretary for Political Affairs, obviously, wasn't excluded from those issues, but he would concentrate on the rest of the world. First, Phil Habib, and then Joe Sisco (both career officers) were the Under Secretaries. They of course had great expertise in the Middle East and other parts of the world, where I was interested but didn't have the expertise.

I worked most of all with the European Bureau, led by Assistant Secretary Arthur Hartman for most of that period. I had two or three people who worked with me in the Counselor's office. They were assigned to me by the State Department personnel people, and I'm happy to say that several of them rose to senior positions in later administrations.

Q: Who were they?

SONNENFELDT: Well, Robert Blackwill was the first assistant who was assigned to me in 1974, and he stayed with me for a year or so. He knew his way around the building and helped enormously with keeping me posted on what was going on in the Bureaus, and also making sure that we got all the materials we needed. Then he went on to various assignments, including senior posts on the NSC staff. Currently, as we talk (2001), he is the Bush administration's Ambassador in New Delhi, India. [In 2003, Blackwill returned to Washington to a senior role on the NSC staff, responsible for Iraq/Iran/Afghanistan.]

John Kelly was also assigned to me to staff political-military issues in which I was involved. He went on to a good career, was U.S. Ambassador to Lebanon, Director of the Policy Planning Staff, and Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern/Asian Affairs. And several others of my assistants had good careers. Anyway, they were exceptionally talented officers.

Jim Dobbins was an assistant of mine also. He had served at the UN as a speechwriter for John Scali, the journalist who had figured in the Cuban missile crisis, and who later became the U.S. Ambassador to the UN. Dobbins worked with me on pretty much everything I was doing, mostly on Western Europe, which was an area I was especially interested in. He went on to become Ambassador to the EU and Assistant Secretary for European Affairs. He's had some extremely important but really awfully difficult jobs. Right now, as we speak, he is the American representative dealing with the Afghan political groups, which is a very challenging assignment.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: Dobbins has done Haiti; he's done crises in other places, in the Balkans, and so on. He's a very gifted fellow. So I was really blessed with some very able people who helped me function in this job.

Another assistant I should mention is Leon Fuerth, who came from Political/Military Affairs and added real strength to my operation. He later became Al Gore's principal national security adviser in both the Senate and the office of the Vice President.

Q: Well, now, I was interviewing somebody, and I can't, maybe blessedly, I can't remember the name of the person, but who was dealing with Soviet Affairs at the time. I mentioned the fact that I was interviewing you, and he talked about this sort of dream team that you had working for you, and he referred to them in rather uncomplimentary terms because he felt that he was being bypassed. I really can't remember, but I mean, did you feel there was a problem that-?

SONNENFELDT: Well, I don't know who that individual would have been. I think people did feel they were being bypassed, but that wasn't because of me. That was the Kissinger style. He worked with people whom he thought he could work with. In general, though, if this individual was in the European Bureau, I think Kissinger thought quite highly of Art Hartman, who was the Assistant Secretary, and Soviet Affairs, of course, was part of the European Bureau.

There had for some time been a bureaucratic issue because, back in the Dean Rusk period, when there was at the upper reaches of the State Department hierarchy a senior individual who dealt with Soviet Affairs. I think some people on the Desks were not always kept fully informed. This also happened sometimes when "back channels," as they were later called, went back and forth between the Soviet leadership and the White House.

Now in our case: I don't mean to compare myself with either Chip Bohlen or Tommy Thompson, who held senior advisory positions in regard to the Soviet Union over the decades. There may well have been instances where my office had dealings with the Soviets, because that was the Kissinger style, it was the Nixon style, and Ford to some extent took it over as well, although that wasn't ordinarily his style. But it certainly was the Nixon style, and the policy people in State regional bureaus, especially EUR, resented not being fully informed. That was also true with the arms control negotiating teams from ACDA. That started when I was still in the White House, the "back channel" communications between Kissinger and Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin, and between Nixon and Brezhnev. There was a "back channel" that kind of paralleled and sometimes got ahead of what was going on in the front channel, the formal negotiations on SALT (Strategic Arms Limitations Treaty) and on the ABM Treaty. This really started in 1971 -72, but it continued after that. So the ACDA negotiators were sometimes put in the embarrassing position of not having been told of what was going on in the "back channels," whereas their Soviet counterparts apparently had been informed. So there were some resentments, and some people who were involved in this have since written books and articles complaining of the practice. But my assistants were all Foreign ServicOfficers-

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: They tried the best they could, without violating the edicts from the Secretary's office concerning secrecy. They tried the best they could to keep people posted.

Q: Well, was there, as often happens in a bureaucracy when your chief, in this case being Henry Kissinger, sends out an order, you know, "I want to keep this separated from this, or something," those who are, I don't want to use the term pejoratively because I don't mean it that way, but the apparatchiks, the people that he would know, this just doesn't work. It's all very nice, but you've got to keep people informed. So there is a sub rosa taking people aside in the men's room or something and saying, "You might look at this." I mean was this going on?

SONNENFELDT: Well, I'm not sure. It wasn't going on with me. I have to add to all of this, that I myself didn't know everything Kissinger was doing in the areas that I was responsible for! Moreover, he also sometimes used people - whether from the State Department or, when he still held the dual job of National Security Advisor, somebody in the White House - for tasks I wasn't informed about. Eventually, it often came to me through the grapevine. So that, again, was the Kissinger style. As I say, my assistants tried, without violating the rules of the game that governed these things in the Kissinger period, to keep people generally apprized so that they wouldn't go off on tangents that contradicted what was happening in these "back channel" communications.

In another area that wasn't particularly focused on the Soviets: when Kissinger became Secretary of State, he decided it would be a good idea to have a special, very quiet forum with the Foreign Ministers of the UK (United Kingdom), Germany, and France. This later became known as the "Quad" (quadripartite group). We used the regular, formal, and well-known meetings on Berlin, in which these four Western countries were obviously involved, for these discreet meetings, which were usually held shortly before NATO Ministerial meetings. There would be a separate discussion and a report to the other Ministers on what was going on in Berlin. But Kissinger would add onto that a very discreet meeting to talk about other issues, and that was kept very, very quiet. In later years, word seeped out; but we kept it quiet, because it would have been embarrassing if Joseph Luns, the Dutch-

Q: The NATO Secretary.

SONNENFELDT: -the NATO Secretary-General had found out that these discussions were taking place. We covered a lot of territory, including issues outside of Europe, in some instances.

Later, in 1976, we had the problem of Eurocommunism (growing Communist and leftist movements in western Europe), and worries especially about Italy and some other countries. There was the Portuguese crisis, when the left-wing party started taking over. This group of four Foreign Ministers met sometimes in between NATO meetings. The three European governments used what they called the Political Directories of their Foreign Ministries to staff these meetings, and I was the guy who worked with Kissinger on this forum. We kept EUR Assistant Secretary Hartman involved, so he knew; but the records of the meetings were held very closely, and shown to only a few people. Gradually, these things seep out, because the Europeans were not quite as tight about it as we were, and the grapevine brings it back around to the State Department. Some people in the Department worried that we were trespassing in their areas, and not telling them. I think this sort of thing still goes on, although it's generally known that it goes on. That wasn't particularly Soviet-focused though.

Q: No. Well now, I mean, we're talking about - let's talk a bit about Eurocommunism because you particularly, you had France, and you had Italy and Portugal. I don't know Spain. I don't know if it was a power, was it?

SONNENFELDT: Well, Spain was then approaching the post-Franco transition time. It wasn't quite there, as far as Eurocommonism was concerned.

Q: But anyway, Eurocommunism seemed to be a real threat. Did you find that the British, French, and the Germans were playing a more moderating role than say maybe Kissinger was?

SONNENFELDT: Well, they too were quite concerned about Eurocommunism. In the case of Portugal, we had some slight differences with the SPD (Social Democratic Party) in Germany, and to some extent with the French, but we kind of divided our labors. We had some differences with our ambassador in Lisbon-

Q: Frank Carlucci.

SONNENFELDT: Frank Carlucci. A lot of that has been published now, but in the end it all came out pretty well. But at that particular moment, it was a touchy business.

Q: But it was a very touchy business.

SONNENFELDT: Yes. In the case of Italy, of course, the U.S. since 1948 had a long history of intervening in Italian politics, and we gave money to some individuals or parties.

Q: We've certainly given a lot of the money to the Christian Democrats.

SONNENFELDT: To the Christian Democrats, and to some others. There were some questions as to what happened to that money. But there was a tradition, more or less, of the U.S. trying to tip the scales against the Communists or the left-wing Socialists. Some of those Socialists later became part of the Italian Socialist Party, and dropped their pro-Soviet and old-line Communist attitudes and policies.

I recall one amusing incident. The heads-of-government summit meetings that later became known as the G-7 (Group of Seven) meetings were started in 1975. They initially involved five major industrial nation(the U.S., Germany, France, the United Kingdom, and Japan). This group was something that Kissinger cooked up with Chancellor Schmidt, President Giscard of France, and Jim Callaghan of the UK, at a meeting held at the time of the Helsinki Final Act conference. We agreed to hold a five-power summit meeting dealing mostly with economic issues, but also with other issues. The first of these sessions was in Rambouillet, France. There was an issue about the Italians, who were not to be included. The Italians got wind of it, and they were terribly upset, as they always are, and with some justification. At that particular time, they were especially concerned that their government would become a laughing stock if they were excluded, and this would play into the hands of the Communists and the left wing.

Q: They had quite a respectable Communist leader, Berlinguer.

SONNENFELDT: Yes, but in any case, nowadays, different people take credit for different aspects of this. The U.S. managed to get the Italian Prime Minister (I think it was Rumor) into the meeting at Rambouillet. The Italians at the time held the presidency of the European Council, so we used that to get the Italians in. Japan was included because of its economic power, and it was part of the "Library Group" oFinance Ministers and central bank heads.

The second G-7 meeting was in Puerto Rico in 1976. It was called by President Ford because he was getting quite concerned about the Eurocommunist issue and some other problems. Of course, that affected Italy. In fact, we didn't tell the Italians why President Ford wanted to call this meeting. The Canadians, in the meantime, had also been added to the original five-power group, which made it seven, and it was subsequently known as the G-7. It had an economic agenda, but included various other related problems such as energy. But quietly, the original four (the Germans, British, French, and the U.S.) met in a room adjacent to where the Italians were, to talk about the coming 1976 election in Italy, and what each of us would try to do to exert some positive influence. So it was right under the noses of the Italians, but we never divulged any of that. We subsequently had follow-up meetings at my level to work out the details of what each of us would do, either financially or in other ways, to have some impact on the election.

That was part of the style of the period, but for the Italians, it established them as a G-7 member. Since my days, there have been repeated instances (e.g., the Contact Group over ex-Yugoslavia) and other situations where the Italians felt left out. There was the EU issue recently, when British Prime Minister Tony Blair had arranged an impromptu dinner, maybe a month ago in London, that didn't include the Italians; it was just the British, French and Germans. The Italians were in an uproar. Berlusconi, the current Prime Minister, in effect invited himself, and the other Europeans couldn't stop it. So this matter of recognition and participation is a chronic issue for the Italians.

Q: Well, what is the problem, I mean as you saw it at that time, with Italy being a member of this?

SONNENFELDT: Well, there was a problem in the mid-1970s because there was a strong Communist and left-wing party in Italy; so there were issues of how secure were things that you talked about. But I was very sympathetic to the Italians. I thought they had been good allies. There were problems here and there, but there were some very able Italians, including Manlio Brosio, who served as NATO Secretary-General, and others. Their economy was still rather shaky, although eventually they developed quite a sound and solid economy.

For some reason, people just don't take the Italians - or didn't take the Italians - terribly seriously. I thought that, if we needed to do things that we didn't want the Italians to be involved in, we could do it discreetly. But when these meetings became known forums, I thought the Italians belonged in the group, so I tried to do the best I could. There are a couple of Italian diplomats who've written their memoirs, who mentioned the fact that I was helpful in trying to get them involved. One of them, Egidio Ortona, who served as Ambassador in Washington for many years, was among the shrewdest, most charming and best-connected diplomats I ever encountered.

Q: Yes. Well, I remember; I think in his book, I can't remember, in The White House Years or something, Kissinger writes about landing in Italy and saying, really the only importance was to make the gesture of talking. I mean, that in a way, it was very dismissive.

SONNENFELDT: Yes, but-

Q: I mean this some of which is

SONNENFELDT: Nixon, on his first trip to Europe shortly after his inauguration in 1969, made a point of going to Italy. Seeing the Pope was his principal interest, because everybody regarded the Pope as a very influential figure with excellent sources all over the world. But he did meet with Italian government leaders, and his trip drew big crowds in Rome.

Q: Yes, and also American domestic politics.

SONNENFELDT: Right, and American politics. Italy, of course, is a domestic American political issue; at least, shortly before elections it is.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: But anyway, Nixon went to Italy at least twice during my time in the White House. But those visits were mostly in the form of gestures rather than for very serious negotiations or agreements. In later years, however, the Italians were actually key to the deployment of medium-and-intermediate-range missiles.

Q: Absolutely.

SONNENFELDT: Right.

Q: They broke that, sort of the opposition, which was a very important step.

SONNENFELDT: Right. So I think some of this is just sort of a carryover from earlier days. But in any event, I just wanted to add this little anecdote about the fact that one of our problems, in the middle and late '70s, was the strength of Communism and left wing crypto-communists in the political game in Italy. The Italians were our allies, and they became members of the G-7, but we couldn't really talk to them, at least officially, about their own domestic situation. In Puerto Rico, it turned out that we used the G-7, although Italy had become a regular member, as a means of consulting with our other European friends about how to cope with the Italian domestic political problem.

Q: Well, did we feel that the French Communist power had sort of reached its limit? In other words, while it was, with its trade unions and all, a powerful source, it just wasn't going anywhere, as opposed to the Italian one, which might end up in the government.

SONNENFELDT: Well, the French Communist strength was certainly a problem, but we had an easier time agreeing with the French government about the fact that it was a problem. In Italy, the lines were somewhat blurred.

When the Socialist, Francois Mitterrand, became President of France (after I left the government, in the early '80s), he included a Communist or several Communists in his government. This was considered a pretty serious problem. This was in the Reagan administration. Vice President George Bush was sent over there, and somehow he gave it a blessing or was reassured. But there was an ongoing issue with the French Left. I remember meetings with Mitterrand, when he was in the opposition, at the State Department in the mid-'70s, that I sat in on, discussions that Kissinger had with him, in which there was quite a vigorous debate about the wisdom of the Socialists playing around with the Communists, and forming a united front, and so on. Mitterrand gave his rationale for it. I have to say (and I think I told him when I met him many years later, when he was President) that Mitterrand's strategy, in fact, turned out to be quite successful in diminishing the weight of the Communists and in isolating them in the French political game by bringing some of them into the government.

But in the 1970s, we were very uneasy about that prospect, and our successors in subsequent administrations were also quite concerned about this. So the role of these two big Communist parties in Italy and France, and then others in Portugal, was a concern for us throughout all of these years, because we essentially saw them as Soviet fifth-columns.

Q: Yes, yes. Well now, while we're still on that subject, was there any feeling that somehow the face of Communism had changed? In other words, this Eurocommunism, was this a sort of a benign, Leftist, socialist type thing -

SONNENFELDT: I don't know.

Q: Or was this still a Soviet tool?

SONNENFELDT: I don't think we ever got to the point in my days in the government where we saw those movements as benign. We did see changes, not so much in the French party, which was pretty-

Q: Stolid.

SONNENFELDT: Stolid, yes. But the Italians were a bit more mobile in their political attitudes, even in the days of Togliatti (long-time Communist Party leader, considered a Stalinist), but certainly in the days of Berlinguer, and subsequently.

We still felt they posed problems, however, because we thought they were penetrated by the Soviets; and they were getting money from the Soviets, even though they were striking off on somewhat different lines. This is why the term "Eurocommunism" was used. Of course, we didn't think they were secure, and we were concerned that the Soviets would very quickly know what was going on on whatever issue. We still didn't like the idea of their joining the government, but they were in the parliament as elected members.

We had laws that excluded Italian and other Communists from coming into the U.S. But some people in this country, scholars and others, thought it was a good idea, since they were quite a strong factor in Italian politics, to bring some of them over here in delegations of parliamentarians (either from the European Parliament, where they were represented, or the Italian parliament), to acquaint them with what was going on here. But our hands were tied by our legislation. One individual in particular, the editor of the newly-founded Foreign Policy magazine, named Richard Holbrook-

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: -constantly came to us with schemes to have Italian Communist parliamentarians visit this country. We equally constantly had to say, "we can't do it." Under the law, thPresident had to certify that it was in the interest of American national security to let somebody in who was otherwise disqualified by the legislation. This issue got into the press, and it became sort of a running argument with Holbrook and others. The fact is, what was happening in Italy was very interesting. I became acquainted with a lot of these left-wing politicians later, Napolitano and various others, who eventually became ministers in Italian governments.

But it was early in the process of their evolution, and we couldn't quite bring ourselves to recognize the changes that were actually going on. Change in the French Communist party was much slower. In any event, the President in the mid-seventies could not certify that Communist visits served the national interest.

Q: Yes. We, also, with the Italians had our problems, as always, on the sort of, when you move into the artsy side - authors, playwrights, musicians, and all - many of whom came out of the Left and were-

SONNENFELDT: Well, and so they did in France and some other places as well.

Q: And this would always cause an uproar?

SONNENFELDT: Yes.

Q: And it was an old consular office, so I know you'd get [laughter]-

SONNENFELDT: [Laughter]

Q: Into these battles.

SONNENFELDT: But the fact is, we have a large Italian-American population. So relations with Italy, regardless of who exactly was in the driver's seat over there, were a fairly major consideration for the political side of the U.S. government.

Q: Well now, on the European Union, or it was the European Community, I guess?

SONNENFELDT: The EU was still the European Economic Community in those days, EEC.

Q: I mean, this has been a real cornerstone of our policy since the end of World War II, and that's the idea of getting Western Europe together in some way or another. This was developing, I mean, is this, you know, as we look through the spectrum, you see we're moving more and more towards what is now the European Union, but it's gone through various stages. How did we view [it] at that time? Were we beginning to be concerned that we might be creating at least a trade rival that's going to give us real problems?

SONNENFELDT: Looking at different levels, certainly in the trade area, and especially in the agricultural sector, there were concerns about the European Economic Community's and later the European Community's policies, and some concerns about some other economic aspects. Some people were worried about developing a "fortress Europe" on the economic side.

Kissinger had had quite a long background in his writings on this subject. Back in the '50s an'60s, in various books that he wrote, he was very cautious (to put it mildly) about the consolidation of Europe. He predicted many times that the major factor that would eventually tie the Europeans together, as they came closer and closer politically, was their hostility toward the United States, or at least skepticism about the United States. This would become the "organizing principle," as he called it. So he had his reservations about European integration (see his book, "The Troubled Partnership").

The official American policy was to advocate and support European consolidation, but there were problems with the European Commission on economic and trade issues, especially in the Kissinger period. I think to some extent Nixon shared these concerns. We know that Ford had his own very, very strong feelings and concerns about this.

In an effort to manage these issues, we tried to get some political consultations going with the Europeans as a group. It was very difficult. They couldn't really get themselves launched on this. During my days, if there was some issue that we wanted to coordinate with the Europeans at the political level, it would take the Europeans weeks to come up with a common position in their political committee - the so-called "Davignon Committee," named after the Belgian diplomat, "Stevie" Davignon, who led this political aspect. Once they agreed to their position, they would be totally inflexible. Kissinger kept saying, "we have to be consulted while you are putting your position together, or else we will get into a situation where you have a solid position that you have arrived at with great pain and effort over a long period of time, and we can't negotiate with you because you don't want to reopen the question in your own crowd. So the negotiations are even more difficult with you than with the Soviets."

Q: Yes, yes.

SONNENFELDT: Kissinger would say, "the Soviets at least have somebody who can just say 'let's make this adjustment, or that adjustment.' You Europeans have to go back to the table." So he was skeptical. It was a frustrating thing. I spent I don't know how many hours with the Europeans in various capitals in Europe, usually with Art Hartman (the Assistant Secretary for Europe) with me, trying to put together a modus operandi so that we could consult with each other on political issues. We really didn't get very far, at least while I was in these positions. Basically, we still dealt bilaterally with the Europeans to get things done. [end of tape]

Then there was one instance when thPresident of the European Commission came to Washington. I can't remember which EEC President it was, but our Ambassador to the EEC at that time was Bob Schaetzel. (He died in late 2003 or early 2004). Anyway, an appointment was made for the European President to see the President of the U.S., but for some reason, that appointment didn't show up on President Nixon's calendar. So the visitors waited in the West Wing waiting room in the White House. Finally, with great embarrassment, they were told that, unfortunately, President Nixon can't see the President of the Commission. This faux-pas caused a huge brouhaha with the Europeans, but above all with Ambassador Schaetzel in Brussels, who said publicly that this just showed that the White House didn't understand where Europe was headed, that it was in our interest to cultivate good relations, and this was an insult, and so on. I think this was a genuine accident, and not a deliberate effort to snub them.

But, in any event, the broad answer to your question is "yes." In that phase, basically, we approved the idea of European consolidation. In fact, we thought it was a great achievement that Germany and France had overcome the antagonisms of centuries.

Q: Stopping the civil wars...

SONNENFELDT: After World War II, and while the occupation of Germany was going on, the Schuman Plan and the Coal and Steel Community were significant steps, but there were problems. There were problems in our trade sector; and various groups in this country, especially in agriculture, were very skeptical. Then, at the political level, it proved to be very difficult to do anything collectively with the Europeans, so we continued to deal with them individually. This has changed somewhat in the intervening years, but still there are some real problems. To some extent, the Kissinger view that I mentioned earlier has been vindicated in recent years. I mean, some of the sharpest criticisms of the Bush administration, of alleged "unilateralism," and not participating in multilateral agreements-

Q: We're talking about Bush Junior.

SONNENFELDT: It's Bush 43, yes?some of the sharpest criticisms came from the Europeans.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: Sometimes you got the impression that they were doing things primarily because we didn't do them, or because we were opposed to them. But I don't really want to talk about developments after my time in government.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: They hadn't reached quite that point in the '70s, 25 years ago. On the contrary, the problem was that the Europeans couldn't sort out their own procedures on how to reach some kind of a position that we could then work out in common.

Q: Well, did you find that the intellectuals, the chattering class, whatever you call them, sort of the people who made comment on television or who write editorials and all this - I mean there's a distinct class, we have it in the United States - were they almost unanimous in being very skeptical about the United States?

SONNENFELDT: No, I don't think they were, if you're talking about France. In Italy, yes to some extent; in Britain, it wasn't unanimous.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: Many British intellectuals, including some from the Labour party, but not only from there, participated in the magazine Encounter, which in fact had been financed in the '50s and '60s through CIA, via the Congress for Cultural Freedom. There were strong anti-Communists in all of those countries.

So, skepticism toward the U.S. wasn't unanimous. Some significant figures weren't necessarily totally uncritical of the U.S., but they were basically with us on most of the important issues. On Vietnam, they were not so sympathetic because it wasn't going well, and the "peace movement" in the U.S. spread to Europe. But on the broad values issues - concerns about the Soviet Union and Communism - there was far from unanimous opposition to the U.S. You also have to remember that some people on the Left were not Communists, and some had even opposed the Communists in their home politics.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: In fact, the Communists hated them, because they thought they stole their thunder and weren't revolutionary enough in their attitudes; they were too much reform-oriented. Of course, many former Communists who had left the party and moved to other parts of the political spectrum suffered for that by being ostracized, or even worse in some instances.

No, I don't think we had a monolith against us, but there were some people in the intellectual community who were critical of the U.S. or the value system of U.S. life. Some of those people are still around. Some Europeans formed something like the American Council on Foreign Relations, to work with our organizations. But our own Council on Foreign Relations wasn't always a strong supporter of American governmental policies. Over time, more writings began to appear to counter the rather harsh left-wing polemics in the West European countries.

Q: Did you get any feeling about where President Ford stood on, say, the Western European issues and all?

SONNENFELDT: He'd been around Washington for a long time, and I think that, in general, his instincts were in favor of European unity - not necessarily in detail, but in general, I think he thought that was a good idea. He also felt that the Europeans were our major allies. I think Nixon had also felt that, although he was skeptical about some aspects of it. So I think Ford had quite good relations with European leaders. Together, they founded the G-7 forum, in which he was quite interested. In Helsinki, during those two or three days of ceremonies before the adoption of the Helsinki Final Act, I remember many occasions at which Ford had animated conversations with West European leaders. So I think his instincts on the whole were quite positive toward Europe, and also toward European unity. On details, he probably had reservations here and there.

Q: On Dobrynin, how did you find your relationship with the Soviet ambassador, Dobrynin, because there was this sort of Kissinger-Dobrynin axis, which - I mean were things happening you didn't know about, and was this a problem?

SONNENFELDT: I'm sure there are things I didn't know about. Again, my memory isn't that great, but I do notice from time to timfor example, both in Dobrynin's own memoirs and in Kissinger's books, that they wrote years latereferences to meetings that I don't think I knew about. I think I learned of the decisions that eventually came out of these meetings, because they had to be part of what we were doing. But I don't think I knew, and I don't know that many other people (except maybe Haig, when he was Kissinger's Deputy, and possibly Henry's own immediate assistant) knew when Kissinger and Dobrynin were meeting in the Map Room in the White House, or the special arrangements that were made for Dobrynin's car to have access to the basement garage of the State Department, so that it wouldn't be visible parked outside. I knew about some of those sessions. I may have sat in on one or two or three or four of them, but not on the dozens of them which were held.

Some of the Kissinger-Dobrynin talks, however, were by telephone. For example, during the Yom Kippur War, things got quite hairy between us and the Soviets in late October 1973. First of all, Kissinger led a small secret delegation to Moscow. I was in that group, which negotiated the text of what became UN Resolution 338, that we hoped would stop the fighting. But that involved stopping the Israelis, who were then in process of decimating the Egyptians. The Soviets were getting quite itchy about their allies, the Egyptians; the Soviets had supplied a lot of their military equipment. Kissinger and our group came home from Moscow via Israel, where Kissinger had a talk with Golda Meir, the Israeli Prime Minister. He told her, "you have another 48 hours, and then you've got to stop beating up on the Egyptians, because it'll get us into serious problems with the Soviets if you encircle the Egyptian Third Army and destroy it-"

-or take them prisoner, and so on. But the Israelis wouldn't stop. After we got back to Washington, we got this telephone call from Dobrynin. He was relaying a message from Brezhnev which was quite threatening in tone, urging the U.S. to stop the Israelis, or else put American and Soviet military forces on the ground in Israel and Egypt - the U.S. in Israel, the Soviets in Egypt. I forget the precise language. This was 'phoned in by Dobrynin. We held emergency meetings in the White House basement. One decision was to raise the readiness status of our military forces, as a signal to the Soviets that we weren't going to take any dispatch of Soviet forces lying down. Well, our answer was sent back via Dobrynin, and I think it was also done by telephone, as the fastest way in the middle of the night to get the message back to Brezhnev. It was generally known that this exchange was going on through this particular channel. In fact, it was reported in the press the next day.

I was closely involved in that episode because I drafted the proposed answer to the Soviets on a typewriter, while we were discussing the various possibilities. Eventually, the fighting petered out. That actually led to the first series of Kissinger's "shuttle diplomacy" trips to the Middle East.

Once again, the Soviets (as in earlier Middle East conflicts) really had maneuvered themselves, by the hoopla that they raised, into a position of being losers in that particular crisis.

Q: They were forced to step down.

SONNENFELDT: Yes. Some mild concessions were made, just as a matter of psychology, to allow some Soviet observers to go to Egypt, though not exactly to police the cease-fire that then came into force. Then we and the Soviets voted together to enact Resolution 338 in the USecurity Council. This is now is part of the Bible of the Middle East Arab-Israeli conflict, the language in Resolutions 242 and 338 regarding Israeli settlements in the disputed territories. Incidentally, this episode showed the advantages of having the "back channel," so that we could do these things as fast as we did. Dobrynin clearly had access to Brezhnev, a direct link, to get these decisions made. But some of the negotiation was done in a much more secretive way, and I'm sure there was a good bit of it that I wasn't aware of.

Q: Well, you mentioned you helped draft a response. What was our initial response?

SONNENFELDT: Our initial response was essentially to say, "no, no military forces; but we can talk about having some joint observers when this is settled." I can't give you the precise language. It's in the published literature: the crisis has been described by Kissinger and the documents are being declassified by the U.S.

Incidentally, this response later became very controversial. It is still criticized by some people who contended that this decision was taken illegally at an NSC meeting at which the President was not present. President Nixon was in his family quarters. There were rumors that he was drunk and in a stupor, and that Al Haig, who was then White House Chief of Staff, had carried to Nixon whatever the group that met in the Situation Room had decided to recommend. We called it the "Washington Special Action Group" - it wasn't an NSC meeting. The rumor was that Haig took our recommendations up to the President, and that he approved them; but that, in fact, President Nixon was not "with it." Some critics have written about the illegality of making all these decisions without the President actually being involved. The question still rattles around in some of the studies of the way this particular crisis was handled. The case has been well researched and written up, but I can't give you the precise language.

I see in my mind's eye the transcription of Brezhnev's phone call, which Dobrynin delivered. It was about a half-page. It was leaked, and I think it showed up the next morning in the newspaperincluding the particularly threatening language which Dobrynin said Brezhnev had used in his message: that "we cannot countenance this" or "we cannot tolerate that." This was pretty strong language, in diplomatic terms.

At the same time, we had intelligence indicating that a Soviet ship was passing through the Turkish straits with something nuclear aboard; and we also thought a Soviet amphibious ship that was normally stationed in the eastern Mediterranean was now heading toward Egypt; and we also thought we saw some movement among Soviet airborne troops - so that we weren't exactly sure whether they were just trying to bluff us, or what was happening. The U.S. Sixth Fleet was already in the eastern Mediterranean and already on a high state of readiness, even before our military declared a DEFCON-3 (Defense Condition 3) for many of our forces. This is not the very highest level alert, but it raises certain readiness levels.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: It looked that night (I think it was the 25th oOctober, 1973) that the situation was getting a little hairy, that the Soviets might be losing their cool. The "back channel" turned out to be a good thing: the fact that Nixon and Brezhnev knew each other and talked with each other; and that Dobrynin and Kissinger had this channel, and Dobrynin could get directly to the Soviet leader; and Kissinger, of course, could get to President Nixon. If we had had to work this crisis negotiation through complicated diplomatic channels, it might not have worked quite that smoothly.

Q: Well, I mean, essentially what we were getting to the Soviets with, really was, you know, cool it! We're working on this! I mean we're not trying to?we both want, essentially, the same thing and that is for these two forces to back off.

SONNENFELDT: Well, we certainly didn't want a war! I think our common objectives probably ended at that point. I think the Soviets, essentially, were still supporting the Egyptians; although I think there had been episodes, starting in 1956, where the Soviets didn't really actively help their clients. In 1956, the Egyptians weren't quite clients yet, and in-

Q: Sixty-seven.

SONNENFELDT: And in '67 (the Six-Day War) and '73 (the Yom Kippur War) - in the end, when things got hairy, the Soviets just weren't there to help them militarily. They'd sold or given the Egyptians a lot of military equipment and provided training and spare parts, but they were very quick to evacuate their nationals from the region, and in the end, they didn't really come in to help. I think this was one of the factors that eventually induced Sadat to make his Israeli pilgrimage, or in any case, to change policy and go to Jerusalem. This happened later, in the Carter administration.

I think Soviet influence in the Middle East gradually declined because, when the chips were down - whether it was the Syrians or the Egyptians, or the Iraqis later - the Soviets backed off. The Yom Kippur War was a dicey thing, because the Egyptians really made very fast headway when they first crossed the Suez canal and then the Sinai, attacking Israel. We were slow in re-supplying the Israelis with military equipment because of delays in getting the operation organized and some problems at Defense.

Q: Something we clearly support, yes.

SONNENFELDT: So for a period, the situation was hairy, until the Israelis then turned the battle around. There had also been a significant intelligence failure in Israel. They had thought that Jordan was going to attack Israel, but the attack turned out to come from Egypt; and the Israelis had to shift their military forces around to the west.

Overall, I think the Soviet position eroded, and then Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy really cut them out almost completely in the following years, until he left office in early '77. In the end, I think Soviet policy in the Middle East was a failure. It didn't consolidate their influence. They became resentful, and it cost them a lot. The Russians are still waiting to collect payment from Iraq for all the military equipment that they scattered around that region.

Q: All right. Well, this is probably a good place to stop, I think.

SONNENFELDT: Yes.

Q: And we'll pick this up the next time. I'd like to, we're talking about the time that you were the Counselor of the State Department, pick up the impact of the fall of South Vietnam and its effect. I mean, it wasn't on your plate, but it still had an effect. I don't know how much we've talked about it before, but I just don't want to miss it - our analysis of what the Soviets were up to in Africa.

SONNENFELDT: Yes.

Q: And the Soviets in Cuba, too. While we're chatting here, do you have anything else to add?

SONNENFELDT: Well, I think at some point, we should review this business of the so-called Sonnenfeldt Doctrine.

Q: Yes, but we've talked about the Sonnenfeldt Doctrine!

SONNENFELDT: Did we talk about it?

Q: Yes, we did.

SONNENFELDT: Okay, let's drop it. It's just one of those things, since my name is attached to it, and it crops up periodically. That was in the '76 presidential primary campaign between Ford and Reagan, and then with Carter.

Q: All right. And then we'll pick it up, and then we'll come to the role?well, the '76 campaign too, because foreign policy and Ford-

SONNENFELDT: The second televised debate, between Ford and Carter-

Q: Second debate, which I'm sure is etched in your memor-

SONNENFELDT: It is etched.

Q: Whenever you mention Poland. [Laughter]

SONNENFELDT: Actually, I was in New York with Kissinger at the UN General Assembly, and we were sitting in the American Ambassador's residence in the Waldorf Towers, watching the debate with Tony Crosland, the British Foreign Secretary. I think there were just the three of us. We thought that Ford had done very well overall, but we didn't particularly like that exchange in answer to Max Frankel's question about Poland. I think Henry later tried to call Scowcroft, who was with Ford, to see if they couldn't clarify what Ford had intended to say about Soviet domination of Eastern Europe.

Then I had to leave to meet somebody. I had just gotten into the car that was to take me to my next meeting, and when I turned on the radio, I found that this whole Polish debate had provoked a storm, and that Ford was in deep trouble over his statement about Poland not being under Soviet control. Many people think that it turned the election to Carter. When I saw Ford after the election, I kept saying, "You know, I still feel terrible about what I may conceivably have done to affect the election."

He said, "Oh, no, no, no, no! That's not really?don't worry about it. It's my fault," or words to that effect.

Q: Well, we'll talk about this the next time, as well as the other things I mentioned earlier.

SONNENFELDT: Okay.

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Q: Okay. Today is December 12, 2001. Why don't we complete the Poland debate? We didn't really say what the problem was. For somebody who wanted to know this, what was the issue?

SONNENFELDT: One of the journalists participating in the second televised presidential debate in the 1976 presidential campaign, Max Frankel of The New York Times, asked a question about Soviet domination of Eastern Europe. I don't recall exactly how he had formulated the question. Of course, the alleged sell-out of Eastern Europe had been a controversial issue in American politics since the start of the Cold War. The Soviet Army's presence in Eastern Europe led to Soviet-dominated governments in Poland and in other countries, contributing much to the start of the Cold War. In any event, in the debate, I think Carter answered first, and was critical of what he claimed was the administration's unwillingness to push the Soviets to free Eastern Europe. I think he also criticized the Helsinki Final Act of 1975, which had been condemned by many conservatives who felt that it gave too much to the Soviets. That theme was picked up by Carter's advisors.

Q: It solidified the borders.

SONNENFELDT: The critics of Helsinki claimed that it froze existing borders and political regimes in the status quo.

Ford then gave his answer, during which, at one point, he said, "There is no Soviet domination of Eastern Europe and of Poland." I guess Carter had mentioned Poland.

Frankel, following up on his question, asked Ford, "Did you really mean to say, Mr. President, that the Soviets are not dominating the people and countries of Eastern Europe?"

Ford reaffirmed his statement that the Soviets weren't dominating the region. And then they went on to other questions.

This exchange made a lot of people perk up their ears. The three of us (Kissinger, the British Foreign Secretary and I), sitting up there in the Waldorf Towers, thought that what Ford was trying to say was that the Soviets didn't dominate the minds and hearts of people in Eastern Europe, and that we did have active contact with these people. In any event, Ford's statement became an issue that the press and lots of others made a great deal of, claiming either that it showed Ford's incompetence or that it confirmed that we were really quite content with the status quo in Eastern Europe. As I indicated in our last conversation, Kissinger was trying to reach his deputy, Brent Scowcroft, to see if he could put out a clarification making the point that Ford's comment dealt not with the Soviets' physical domination of Eastern Europe, but with their failure to dominate people's thoughts and feelings. I gathered afterwards that Scowcroft had had something similar in mind, but that President Ford wasn't inclined to have himself corrected by his own Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs. So this misunderstanding just rattled around through the remaining few weeks of the presidential campaign. In the post-election post-mortems, the second debate was regarded by some, perhaps by many analysts, as a turning-point in that campaign.

Even earlier that year, in the Republican primary campaign in New Hampshire and elsewhere, Reagan had made very critical comments about the Ford administration's policies on Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. His critique was based on the Helsinki Final Act, and based directly or indirectly on the so-called "Sonnenfeldt Doctrine," which allegedly called for continuinSoviet domination of Eastern Europe.

I had been quoted from a leaked telegram reporting on a Chiefs of Mission meeting in London in December of 1975, as allegedly saying that I thought the danger of war over Eastern Europe was so great that the best thing would be for Eastern Europe to become part of the Soviet Union. In fact, this was 180 degrees opposite to what I said and to everything I believed! But the misquote got picked up in the press, and some Members of Congress and leaders of Eastern European-American organizations raised alarms. So the "Sonnenfeldt Doctrine" became a Republican campaign issue, and then later Carter picked it up after Ford won the Republican primary.

This was unfortunate, but maybe it would have happened anyway because of the way the Helsinki Final Act was condemned by conservatives in the media. In any event, American policy towarEastern Europe reappeared as a major issue in American domestic politics. Groups in various parts of the country whose members were oEast European ancestry were outraged about what I had allegedly said, and were also hostile to the Helsinki Final Act. I guess it cost the Republicans some votes in places on which they'd normally counted for support, because the Democrats had long been stuck with "selling out Eastern Europe at Yalta-"

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: For years!

Q: [Laughter]

SONNENFELDT: And decades! This shifted the politics around to some extent.

In the meantime, the very eloquently-written synopsis of the discussion at the Chiefs of Mission meeting in London in 1975, where I led a seminar on Eastern Europe, has been declassified and published. It was that synopsis (written by Warren Zimmermann, a Foreign Service Officer who was present at the meeting) which was leaked, with my comments completely distorted by the columnist who publicized it, Robert Novak.

Q: Yes [laughter].

SONNENFELDT: In any event, Warren Zimmermann's telegram reporting on my talk has been officially declassified, and I guess it will appear in some of these Cold War history volumes that are being published. His account is not a full verbatim text, but a very elegantly-written paraphrase and synopsis.

What I had actually said was that the East Europeans were in a strait-jacket, and it was to be hoped that someday there would be a Soviet leadership that would understand that the people of Eastern Europe needed to have a sense of identity, and had a right to patriotism like everybody else did; and that it would be positive if the Soviets would be prepared to allow a "more natural relationship" with their neighbors to the west. In another sentence, I used the word "organic" as a synonym for "more natural," by which I meant a more natural relationship. It turns out that I shouldn't have used the word "organic," because its other meaning is "part of a whole" - and that's what was taken, and distorted by my critics to mean that I advocated that Eastern Europe should formally become part of the USSR.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: This is what was criticized by a) the people who leaked the telegram, and b) the journalists, who were the only ones in town that saw anything remarkable in this telegram - but apparently not so remarkable that they didn't feel it necessary to change my wording. The lead in the article that Bob Novak wrote for the Evans and Novak column, in early spring of '76, was that a close confidant of Henry Kissinger urged, at a secret meeting of American ambassadors, that in order to prevent World War III from breaking out over Eastern Europe, the U.S. should advocate the "organic union" of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Of course, what I had actually said was that there should be a relationship in which the Eastern Europeans would have freedom. So that misinterpretation became known as "the Sonnenfeldt Doctrine."

I tried to correct the misunderstanding at a press conference held some days later at the State Department. I also testified in the House Foreign Affairs Committee, which was chaired by Rep. Clement Zablocki, a Wisconsin Democrat who had a large Polish-American constituency in his district. I tried to explain that maybe my use of the word "organic" was a poor choice, and I swore (with my right hand held up) that I'd never use that word again. I explained that what I had clearly meant, in the context of my talk, was that it would be in the Soviet interest, as well as in the interest of all the people of Eastern Europe, and of everybody else, for the Eastern European countries to attain a high degree of freedom and autonomy, and not be satellites dominated by the USSR.

But it seems you never can get rid of those misunderstandings-

Q: No, no.

SONNENFELDT: -and they persist even now, nearly thirty years later. In the summer of 2003, when Robert Novak was celebrating the 40th anniversary of his syndicated column, he was aske(by Larry King, on CNN-TV) what he thought was his best column. Novak answered without an instant's hesitation, "the column about the Sonnenfeldt Doctrine," which, he said, showed that the Ford administration was unwilling to challenge the Soviets in Eastern Europe.

In the meantime, serious observers have written about it, and written quite fairly about it. When this thing was first leaked, some columnists in the New York Times (Cy Sulzberger and others) had originally written indignant articles about the "sellout" of Eastern Europe by the Ford administration, and how finally the truth was to be known, that the "realism" of Kissinger's foreign policy meant that you deal with the Soviets, regardless of how they mistreat their neighbors. Those journalists retracted that charge when they saw the actual text of the summary of my talk, and also after I had responded to questions at a press conference and in Congress. But it's still around. It was an issue in the '76 campaign, to my deep regret, I must say. But Ford was always very generous about it when I saw him in later years, and I've told him I just feel terrible about it.

Q: Had you been aware of any - I mean I realize that this is between Kissinger and Ford. But were you aware of any, prior to all this thing coming up, of Kissinger spending a good bit of time working with Ford to explain the situation in Eastern Europe and all that?

SONNENFELDT: I don't know how much he had done that. But Ford had been in Congress for many years, and he certainly understood that Poland and other countries were dominated by the Russians. There must have been some discussions of it, because it became a campaign issue-

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: -first in the Republican primary campaign, and then in the 1976 general election. But I don't know how much time Henry may have spent with President Ford on this issue during the campaign.

In fact, we had struggled at the time of Helsinki, the previous year, when there was a very negative reception, at least in some quarters in the U.S., to the Helsinki Final Act. Critics charged that Helsinki simply confirmed the status quo in Eastern Europe, in exchange for vague Soviet concessions. Ford, like Nixon before him, had made several visits to Eastern Europe. In fact, because of the criticism of Helsinki, he made a special point of visiting Poland and Romania, which was the most rebellious of the "satellites." Nixon had done this also. Romania under Ceausescu was certainly not the most palatable, but definitely the most deviant of the East European countries. Both Nixon and Ford also visited Tito in Yugoslavia, to show that we had no hesitation going to Eastern Europe or Central Europe, and indeed, had no hesitation at the highest level of paying these much-publicized official visits. George Bush, as Reagan's Vice President, also went to Hungary and some other countries.

Of course, we recognized that any active effort to liberate these countries, by whatever means, would be considered by the Soviets as a threat to their vital interests. In the nuclear age, there wasn't anybody who was seriously inclined to conduct a policy of deliberate, conscious undermining of the regimes there and of the Soviets, although we supported Radio Liberty and Radio Free Europe and many other activities.

The remarkable thing (we may have talked about this before) is that after the Helsinki Final Act was signed, there were groups in Czechoslovakia and Poland, and even in the Soviet Union itself, who used the language and the terms of the Helsinki Final Act to their advantage in proclaiming their dissidence and organizing demonstrations, citing chapter and verse from the Helsinki Final Act as their justification. It surprised us (by us, I mean the people in the government at the time). Many other people also were amazed that these protesters had the guts to express their views publicly, and were using this supposed "sellout" document, or "the new Yalta" document, to buttress their displays of dissidence.

Q: Yes, well, I mean the Helsinki Accords, you know, might have been almost the straw that broke the Soviet camel's back. I mean it was, basically, a complete failure of the system, particularly economically, and in other ways too. But I mean this allowed movements to happen that probably wouldn't have happened if they hadn't.

SONNENFELDT: I guess Helsinki encouraged some dissidents; and some of their leaders were smart enough to cite the freedoms the Soviets had signed up to permit, to hold up these standards either when the local regimes tried to suppress them and their movements, or when the Soviets cracked down. So I think Helsinki actually contributed to the stirrings in Eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union itself, but in Eastern Europe in particular. The dam finally broke in 1989 on the Hungarian-Austrian border and in Poland, and then in East Germany itself.

Q: Czechoslovakia, too.

SONNENFELDT: Many factors were involved there, but I think it may well be that the Helsinki Accords were, at least in part, a contributor to these movements.

Q: Well, then, let's go back to?did the fall of Vietnam, how did that affect you, I mean, in dealing with your particular area, which was relations with the Soviets, and their thing? I mean, although it wasn't direct, I mean, this was a real setback for the United States.

SONNENFELDT: Yes, it certainly was a major setback: the pictures of our helicopters leaving from the roof of the American Embassy in Saigon, and then, after our withdrawal, the collapse of the South Vietnamese regime and the takeover by the North. We also worried about our POWs (Prisoners of War). Many of them, I guess all those that we knew about, eventually came home alive. Those who had died in captivity were turned over by the North Vietnamese as well, but many MIAs (missing in action) were never traced.

The expectation (which went back to the Eisenhower administration and the "domino" theory), that such a collapse would produce a wider effect in the region and would undermine the whole American position in Southeast Asia and adjacent areas, turned out not to be the case. In fact, in Indonesia - this is still a controversial issue - in Indonesia, there was a mass onslaught against the Communists. Indonesia had been one of the places that we worried about in case of Vietnam falling, as was Thailand. Well, as it turned out, those countries really didn't fall to the Communists, despite the pain and agony in this country and on the part of the South Vietnamese, and the troubles in Laos and Cambodia.

The other thing that's worth pointing out is that, before the collapse of the American effort, Vietnam had already become a major source of dispute between China and the Soviet Union. This was revealed in various ways. Many other factors contributed to the split between the Chinese and the Soviets, starting in the late '50s; it was probably beneath the surface well before that. But Vietnam became a particular apple of discord.

We had had the impression for quite a while that the Soviets were looking for some way for the Vietnam war to end. Of course, they wanted it to end on favorable terms to themselves (i.e., with the people that they had backed being the victors). But they were starting to back away from their large-scale support of the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong. In 1972, they were looking for some degree of what came to be known as "detente." We had bombed Haiphong and Hanoi just before the scheduled summit meeting between Nixon and Brezhnev in May of 1972; and there was some expectation that the Soviets might cancel the summit on account of the bombing, because we had hit a Soviet ship in the harbor.

Q: Kosygin was there, I believe.

SONNENFELDT: Even so, it turned out that they didn't cancel. Nixon didn't think they would, but we had prepared statements and taken other precautions in case they canceled the summit meeting. Some discussions at the summit meeting, which were very nasty, would seem to have been mostly for the record. Of course, the Soviets were eager to have economic relations with us, and they pulled a fast one on us in persuading us of their alleged shortages of wheat. [end of tape]

They are interested in economic relations; they wanted MFN [Most Favored Nations] treatment; and they wanted access to our government credit institutions, including the Export-Import Bank. They were also interested in arms control treaties, the SALT I Agreement and the ABM Treaty. The latter is now very much alive as we speak, or maybe not alive, depending on what the Bush administration may be doing in the next few days.

The Soviets had been through a near-war with the Chinese in 1969 - a very difficult, hostile relationship involving the contest for the domination of the international Communist movement and their role in the Third World, where they were competing in Africa and other places. It was a very testy competition, and I think the Soviets wanted some hedge, as protection, as it were, although their ties to the U.S. and the West Europeans were much less extensive than what developed in the post-Soviet period; but still, it was different from before.

Once the war in Vietnam ended, the Soviets may even have thought that the U.S. had been so humiliated that they could extract all sorts of concessions from us - that the U.S., just because of the loss of Vietnam, the questions that were raised about U.S. reliability and strength, and our domestic upheavalthe Soviets may have thought they could exploit our perceived weaknesses on the negotiating front by extracting various kinds of concessions from us. That was certainly a concern in some parts of the American body politic.

But in fact, the end of the war in Vietnam removed an issue of contention between the U.S. and the Soviets. As it turned out, even then it didn't help us very much in our relations with the Soviets, because we still had major differences with them in the Middle East. We almost came to blows, or may possibly have come to blows, at the time of the Yom Kippur War-

Q: In '73, yes.

SONNENFELDT: In '73. Then we began to have problems in Southern Africa, over Angola. So there were plenty of issues. The arms race, the so-called arms race, went on merrily, despite the arms control agreements; and the numbers of nuclear warheads increased astronomically on both sides after the 1972 SALT treaty. So we had plenty of problems. Vietnam, in any case, was no longer an apple of discord.

Not surprisingly, the fact that we were also cultivating relations with the Chinese is one of the reasons why the Soviets, I think, had incentives to have dealings with us. The Chinese, of course, because of their long-standing problems with the Vietnamese, eventually invaded North Vietnam and bloodied their noses. So it was a complicated-

Q: World.

SONNENFELDT: -game. But in any event, essentially, Vietnam was no longer on the U.S.-Soviet agenda in the mid-seventies.

Q: Well, you know, from your perspective, was there almost a feeling of a certain amount of relief that you got rid of this thing because you no longer were having to, [sigh] you know, always keep this war in mind? I mean this allowed you more room to maneuver in, and it was no longer this bone of contention, I mean, a burr under the saddle with our relations, particularly our NATO allies and all.

SONNENFELDT: Well, I think the greatest relief in the first instance came when it became clear that there wasn't any "domino" effect from the fall of South Vietnam, although there were incidents with Cambodia.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: But certainly there was no "domino" effect that benefitted the Soviets in that part of the world. We were less sure about the Chinese; but in the meantime, we had quite good relations with the Chinese, and they weren't anywhere as potent militarily as the Soviets. The divisions over Vietnam here at home continued even when the war was over. It certainly was a relief not to have body counts and news of losses. Gradually, the acute division in the country began to ebb, so in that sense it was a relief.

In terms of relations with the Soviets, by the mid-1970s, we were able to deal with some of the other issues and concerns that we had with them. We didn't have a great breakthrough that sealed a new and amicable relationship with the Soviet Union, even though we had summit meetings and lots of contacts and those famous "back channels," which helped when confrontations arose, as they did in the Yom Kippur War and over some other issues. At best, we were in a phase of detente with the Soviets - that is, some alleviation of tensions - but we were far from having a genuinely friendly relationship. Years later, continuing suspicions and tensions showed up in the Soviet attitude toward NATO and NATO enlargement, and their still ever-present notion of the zero-sum game: that whenever they lost something, we must gain; and our own idea that when the Soviets gain somewhere, we must be losers.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: Some of that lingers to this day. So we were a long way away from a relationship of amity. We shared some common interests in preventing, or trying to prevent, a nuclear war. This gave rise to various contacts between the U.S. and the Soviets, and some care in how we handled our weapons so that we didn't appear as if we were getting ready to jump them, and vice-versa. Vietnam had been a major irritant, perhaps even a potential cause of a clash between the U.S. and the Soviets. Vietnam was viewed here as an example of the Soviets becoming a global power of sorts, because it's pretty remote from the USSR, and they had a base in Cam Ranh Bay.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: I'm now talking from hindsight of the collapse of the Soviet Union. It wasn't that evident in 1976-77 that it was going to collapse the way it did only a dozen years later. I think maybe the mid-to-late '70s was about the zenith of Soviet power and influence. It gradually ebbed in the '80s, until the USSR did collapse in the late '80s.

Q: Well, what did we think the Soviets were up to in Africa during the time you were Counselor?

SONNENFELDT: The Soviets had become active in Africa in the 1950s, when independence got underway in the formerly British and French and other colonies. They saw opportunities there to establish themselves. I don't understand exactly what they had in mind, because it cost them money. They tried to woo these various countries. Many of the new African states had left-wing leaders, people educated actually in Europe, at the London School of Economics-

Q: [Laughter]

SONNENFELDT: -and in France at the Sorbonne or other universities. As a result, they carried a lot of the European left-wing or even Communist values and attitudes into Africa. The Soviets saw opportunities to increase the range of their influence. It also became a bone of contention between the Soviets and the Chinese-

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: -because the Chinese tried to portray themselves as the leader of the Third World, the model for the developing world. We didn't quite realize this at the time, but in fact, one of the reasons for both Soviet and Chinese activities had to do with their competition. To some extent, this came at our expense, to the extent that we lost ground and confronted increasing strategic ramifications of the Sino-Soviet rivalries. For example, the Soviets established some intelligence activities and listening posts in Angola in order to intercept our naval messages and other communications. That was a military problem. But it looked like they were also encouraging the Cubans to become active in East Africa and then in-

Q: We're talking about Ethiopia particularly.

SONNENFELDT: Yes, and then in southwestern Africa. It looked very much as though the Soviets were using the Cubans, or encouraging the Cubans, as part of their own effort to establish themselves, and perhaps to establish bases and facilities for their naval activities. Maybe this was in anticipation of the collapse of the South African regime (which didn't really happen until much later), but they were interested in the gold mines and various other assets. There were all sorts of theories, including the idea that the Soviets also wanted to threaten the trade routes around the Cape of Good Hope. There were maps that showed-

Q: Oil particularly.

SONNENFELDT: -oil in particular, but other trade as well, which they might affect by having some naval facilities. Speculation as to Soviet intentions became a kind of a cottage industry in various think-tanks. Most observers felt that the activities showed the continuing Sino-Soviet threat, although as I say, it was in fact mostly a competition between China and the Soviet Union.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: Obviously, we were worried about CIA and other reports about Soviet activities. In the last few meetings we had with the Soviets during the Ford administration, in 1976, we did raise, in particular, the Angolan issues and the Cuban presence in Angola.

For some reason I'd become something of a target for Brezhnev's jokes. There was a press conference when Kissinger was there with a bunch of us in early 1976, to make a final stab at getting a second strategic arms limitation agreement. A little press conference was held before our meeting began in Brezhnev's office in the Kremlin. One of the questions from the American press was, "what about the Cubans in Angola? Are you going to discuss that?" And Brezhnev said, "That's not our business. Ask Sonnenfeldt, and he'll give you an answer. But it's nothing that we have anything to do with."

Well, we did try to discuss this, and we did have some exchanges with them because it worried us. After all, we had lots of problems with the Cubans. We didn't particularly care to see the Cubans becoming an imperial power in Black Africa, using their own blacks and their black antecedents as a way of carrying their role and their system into formerly-colonial Africa. Angola, of course, had been under the Portuguese; and it was in rebellion for a long time. Then there was a rebellion against the rebellion. The conflict is still going on.

The Soviet and Soviet-sponsored Cuban actions in Africa fit into our general world view that the Soviets were an emerging global power, and that parts of Africa had become a place where they were going to assert their presence and extend their strategic challenge to the United States. In West Africa and the former French areas, such as Guinea and Mali, there were some Communists or pseudo-Communists in power; and then Angola; and in South Africa, the ANC (African National Congress) was heavily Communist; then Ethiopia; but Somalia, on the coast, was strategic. (The former Belgian Congo had been a problem with the Soviets for us in 1960. But it was less so in the 1970s, although its difficulties remained substantial.)

Q: Somalia, right on the Red Sea, controlled the Red Sea access.

SONNENFELDT: That's right. This led to some competitive arms deals over time between the U.S. and the Soviets. The Soviets started it, and we countered it later in the early '90s in Somalia. So it was a general concern.

Of course, when we tried to raise this in some formal fashion, the Soviets took the position that as far as the Cubans were concerned, that was Cuban business; and whatever they were doing was just economic, helping with road building, and so on. So we didn't get very far on this subject in the waning days of thFord administration, but it was a concern for us; and the fact that the Cubans were involved merely made the neuralgic issue of Cuba that much more neuralgic, because they weren't just confining themselves to their home island.

Q: Did we see, at that time, Cuba as being the surrogate of the Soviet Union, or did we see it being, sort of, doing its thing, but they happened to coincide with Soviet aims? Or how did -

SONNENFELDT: Well, "we" is a complicated matter. Some people didn't think that Castro was going to be anybody's surrogate. They felt that the Cubans used the Soviets, wanted protection from the Soviets. They were still chafing from what had happened in the 1962 missile crisis. In this view, what the Cubans were doing was consistent with Castro's own sense of mission and of his role in the world as a liberator.

But I suppose a majority of people, myself included, didn't exactly see Castro as a surrogate for the Soviets, but rather as doing the Soviet's bidding in exchange for whatever it was he was getting - protection, military protection for one thing. So we really saw this Cuban activism as part of the general Soviet expansionism in the global arena. At the same time, I think we all understood that there were frictions now and then between the Soviets and the Cubans, and that the Soviets were not keen on letting anyone, including the Cubans, drag them into a conflict with us, or into a conflict that they weren't interested in getting dragged into. So we figured that, while there was some mutual support, there must also be some friction. I guess CIA and others had some evidence of it.

Q: Did you see the Soviets, either through Cuba or on their own, doing much in Latin America, or was this sort of a self sealing area against the Soviets?

SONNENFELDT: Well, we were alert to it. There were some Soviet efforts to sell arms in central and South America, and there were some Communist or pseudo-Communist groups. We had problems in Chile with left-leaning regimes, and that caused other problems in those days.

Q: With Allende, and the overthrow of Allende-

SONNENFELDT: Right, and we'd had problems in Guatemala in the 1950s. The Cubans were active, and Che Guevara was rallying an anti-American revolutionary movement. But I must confess, I haven't thought about this and looked back. Latin America had lots of problems. The Soviet aspect of it was more of a potential threat than a real day-to-day worry, as it was in the Middle East and, to some extent, in parts of Africa. We were alert to manifestations of Soviet interest, and then Soviet involvement. There were occasional trips back and forth between Latin American leaders and Soviet figures. We assumed that the Cubans were instrumental in some of this. But the Cubans weren't that popular in Latin America in general, although they had their sympathizers. Of course, they had been excluded from the Inter-American system; and there were many sanctions in place, which were somewhat controversial - not quite as controversial then as they became more than 20 years later in the Helms-Burton Act [Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act].

But Latin America, as far as the Soviet angles or the Chinese angles were concerned, was more a worry that needed to be watched than a worry that was concrete and posed direct and identifiable threats.

Q: Did you find that, I mean, sitting there looking, I mean you're sort of one of the point people dealing with the "Soviet menace." Did you find that sort of our posts abroad and all were using the Soviet menace in Pago Pago to get whatever they wanted?

SONNENFELDT: No.

Q: I mean, did you have to sort of deal with this?

SONNENFELDT: Well, I didn't. First of all, annual reports were required about Communism and, I think it was still called "Sino-Soviet activities," in lots of countries around the world, including Latin America. So this stuff kept coming in over time. I did not deal with possible exploitation by local American organizations, including embassies. I think maybe some people in some posts may have tried to exploit these concerns for their own benefits. I didn't deal with that. It wasn't my particular responsibility. I guess it was the Under Secretary for Political Affairs in the State Department (Joe Sisco, for part of my time) and others who were watching this. Maybe we had conversations about what the Soviets were up to in Latin America; and there was an occasional NIE (National Intelligence Estimate), either on a particular country problem or on the region as a whole. I suppose the Soviet activities figured in some of the decisions that were being made on AID (Agency for International Development) programs and military-to-military relations with the Latin Americans. The U.S. had an Inter-American Defense College here at Fort McNair, and there were contacts between the militaries. I got invited a couple of times to the college at Fort McNair to talk about what the Soviets were up to in the hemisphere.

Q: Yes, yes.

SONNENFELDT: I was always a bit embarrassed because I couldn't think of anything terribly exciting to say. The colonels and naval captains and others from these Latin American countries knew much more about it than I did at the time. But I tried to talk in a learned fashion about it.

I did hold a general view, and I spoke and wrote about it a bit after I left the government: that the Soviets really weren't great imperialists. First of all, they were racists; and secondly, what they had to offer to these countries didn't really compete with what the West had to offer in terms of material benefits, the quality of technology, and so on. They were encouraging the emergence of old-fashioned industrial facilities-

Q: Steel mills-

SONNENFELDT: Right.

Q: And stadiums.

SONNENFELDT: Right. They built or sponsored eye-catching projects like steel mills and a huge reservoir on the Nile in Africa, and stadiums and things of that sort. They set up schools and colleges in the Soviet Union for students from former colonial areas. Some of this effort backfired when the Russians peoples' inherent racism showed up in often tense relations between Africans and Russians.

Q: Yes, Lumumba University did probably more for our cause than [laughter].

SONNENFELDT: Yes. When they were in those various countries, the Soviets usually stuck to themselves. I guess some of them learned the language of the country and did intermingle; but generally, compared to the British and others, they never struck me as a particularly competent group of imperialists.

Q: Now this is something, you know, talking to people who've served in places. The Russians and the Chinese both kind of did their thing, but they all came back to the compounds at night-

SONNENFELDT: Yes.

Q: And they didn't seem to really get out. I mean there wasn't the sort of a rapport that? wasn't perfect but we saw of the Americans, British, and the French, you know, who're, you know, more comfortable in this atmosphere.

SONNENFELDT: Well, when places like Togo and the Cameroons and Namibia and Tanganyika became independent states, they still had buildings that the Germans had built before 1914; and there were still people who spoke German from pre-World War I. I don't know whether the Soviets have left much of anything behind. The Aswan Dam is still standing, but it hasn't brought great benefits in Egypt. The British, of course, left language and institutions, as well as physical properties.

Q: And the French have maintained their culture. Many Africans still look upon France as being home, I mean, the seat of culture, and all that.

SONNENFELDT: Of course, the Soviets weren't in Africa for a very long time, and they weren't, strictly speaking, running colonies the way the British, French and Germans had in Africa. But they didn't bring culture with them either, as the Spanish and the Portuguese did in the Western Hemisphere and in Latin America. So this was a rather shallow form of expansionism.

Q: Yes, in the Middle East, despite the left-wing governments and all, there seems to be within the sort of the Islamic world a natural repulsion of the Soviets. I mean -

SONNENFELDT: Well, the Soviets mistreated their own Muslims. Also, the Soviets ran away several times when conflict loomed in the Middle East in various Israeli wars, but especially if we were in the picture! They didn't support their clients when they really got into trouble. That gradually sank in, and the Soviets really came to be seen as rather unreliable allies in the MiddlEast.

Q: And also their equipment wasn't very good either.

SONNENFELDT: That's true, of course, especially when compared to the Israelis' and then later on, to ours in the Gulf War.

To sum up, as far as my concerns as Counselor re Soviet actions in the western hemisphere: Cuba was the main concern that we had, because the Soviets were flying their airplanes up and down our coastline; we'd had a serious missile crisis in 1962; and we knew that Soviet forces were still in Cuba, running intelligence operations, and so on. There were a few people who worried about the vulnerabilities of the Panama Canal. That concern goes back to even before it was dug, and does not relate specifically to the Soviets, but in general as a major strategic asset of the United States. But then Latin America wasn't really very much on my official radar screen; it was more in the Inter-American Affairs Bureau that dealt with these matters.

Q: Something that came up, I believe during the Carter administration, was all of a sudden the discovery of the "Soviet brigade" in Cuba. Now, I mean, you were saying, I mean, this was sort of almost a made up issue, wasn't it? I mean we knew there were Soviet troops there.

SONNENFELDT: Yes. The Soviet troops were supposed to have been taken out at the time of the missile crisis, certainly the ones connected with the missile deployments. But we did know that some Soviet forces remained there, and we knew that, for the Red Army, this was a great place to serve. It was warm, and there were great beaches, and so on. Soviet diplomats liked it, even though it wasn't all that pleasant, specifically in Havana; but they liked the life style down there. So yes, we had a general sense of what they were doing there militarily. I can't remember why it blew up in the Carter time, because I had left the government. We did have a few episodes which were challenging. For example, in 1970 they put a submarine tender down there; we noticed it and thought it violated the understandings going back to the missile crisis. And as I said, they kept flying reconnaissance flights off our east coast-

Q: Bears.

SONNENFELDT: Bears down our coastline, which we tracked carefully. Sometimes I think they even notified us that they were going to do it. Occasionally there were some visits by Soviet naval vessels. But in Latin America, in general, as I've been saying: it was a concern; we watched it. But I don't think we really had any very specific, explicit, concrete problems that at least reached my attention. Maybe the people in the Latin American Bureau talked to Kissinger about it, or to the Under Secretary or Deputy Secretary, but I just didn't figure in that area, except to keep informed.

Q: Well, I think this is probably a good time to stop now. I think really in a way for the next and probably last interview, we might talk about after the election of '76, what you did then, and your feeling about how things went; and also how you, as being tied to Kissinger and all, were treated by sort of the Republican foreign policy establishment and all, and also the Brookings-

SONNENFELDT: The Democratic one too.

Q: And the [laughter] Democratic, and also the Brookings Institution, the role of that, as you see what's happening because I'm rather short -

SONNENFELDT: Well, we can talk about all of that. We can talk about the transition after the victory of Carter-

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: Because I had to brief my successor or successors about what was going on that I was involved in; and then, you know, we can talk about those subjects.

Q: Great.

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Today is January 17, 2002. Hal, let's talk about the election of '76. Carter was in; Ford was out. Let's talk about the transition first. How did that work for you?

SONNENFELDT: Well, it was very clear as soon as the election results were in that there would be a different team at the State Department. For years, I had told my wife that I planned to leave the government when I was 50, which would be in 1976. So I had, actually, long considered leaving the government at age 50, regardless of the outcome of the election. In fact, it would have been more difficult for me to leave if Ford had won, because the pressures for keeping things in place would have been considerable.

But anyway, I thought I'd had a very good career, despite some handicaps and bad moments. All in all, it was something that was extraordinary, when you consider that I grew up in Germany in a remote rural town, and all the other aspects of my earlier life. The decision to leave after the election was easy for me, because I thought a lot of people were going to come in with whom I'd had some policy differences in the past and probably would have in the future. In any case, as regards a serious senior job, they would have no particular obligation to me. I was a career Foreign Service Officer and a Career Minister, so I guess I could have stood on my rights to have some job; but, as these things normally go, I would just be walking the corridors of the State Department, with no meaningful role. So I was really prepared to leave, and I started making some arrangements.

May I also say that I decided very early on that I did not want to get into another large organization, government or private. I didn't want to remain enmeshed in bureaucracies and bureaucratic politics. So my idea from the start was that I'd like to have a home base in one of the research outfits around town. I wanted to stay in Washington, and my wife had her ties here. So I hoped to get a place to hang my hat in one of the think-tanks around town, but then also put together some kind of a consulting business. In the mid-'70s, a lot of companies had somehow burnt their fingers at one place or another around the world because of crises that they hadn't anticipated, and they were having legal problems and stockholder problems, and so on. Many of them were eager to at least make a record of having diligently inquired into situations where they were involved financially. It became a rather major activity in the American business community, either to set up an intelligence shop or a political-risk shop within a large company, or for regional experts and technical specialists to get together and form consulting outfits specializing in political risk, as it was called in those days. I thought that would be something I'd like to do. I needed money, because I had three kids heading for college, and I had been stuck in a government salary freeze for several years. Even though I was at the top of the pay scale, my salary had been frozen at $38,000 for more than four years (a substantial government pay-raise came into effect on March 1, 1977, just a week before I retired).

It took a while, as it usually does, for the Secretary of State to be designated, and then for the Secretary of State and the incoming White House to decide on the rest of the senior staff. Cy Vance, who just died a few days ago, was named Secretary of State, and Warren Christopher as Deputy Secretary. I knew both of them, Cy better than Chris. I knew that I would have disagreements with Cy on policy grounds, but I had a lot respect for him. Then it took some weeks for them to get around to designating others. I saw Vance early, before he'd been confirmed. We met at the transition office; and we chatted about things that I had been doing. Of course, he knew Henry as well.

He said to me, "Well, you understand that I'm going to choose my own Counselor," and he actually gave me the name, Matthew Nimetz, whom he knew well from New York through his legal work and otherwise. I didn't know Nimetz. "But," Vance said to me, "if you have any thoughts for a position, let me know; but you know I can't guarantee that you would get a job anywhere near as significant as the one that you have now, because of the change of administration."

I said, "Yes, I understand." And that sort of eased the situation.

He did say that "I'd like to be able to call on you," and that, in the case of Vance, was probably meant seriously, and not just a formality of the new boss showing you the way out.

I said, "Well, maybe it'd be helpful, at least for a while, for continuity and effective transition, to make an arrangement like that." So I stayed in the Counselor's office, as the Ford administration was still in office, and we still had some things going. But I began to get my papers and materials ready for storage. I didn't want to take any of them with me or give them to some institution. I got letters from my university, from the Library of Congress, and from others who were eager to have my papers; but I thought it would be cleaner and simpler to just leave them with the Department. But I went through some of this material. I didn't take anything out, but I tried to organize it so that the new people could refer to it. I went about my business until perhaps the middle of December, 1976, when some of the new people began to show up; the transition team was there as well. We were waiting for them to come along, and it was a relatively smooth transition.

What I most deeply regretted, and there continued to be reverberations, was the so-called "Sonnenfeldt Doctrine" that had caused Ford to get tripped up in the second debate with Carter on policy toward Poland.

Q: Did you mention this to Cyrus Vance? I was just saying that, you know?

SONNENFELDT: I don't even remember what I mentioned to Vance. I think I chatted with him about it at a meeting in New York at the Council on Foreign Relations, before he was picked to be Secretary of State. I certainly mentioned it to Ford when I ran into him here or there, and in subsequent years also. And he always said, "stop! You know, you don't have to worry about that! What I said in that debate was my judgment, my call, and you shouldn't have any feeling of guilt or remorse. It's just the way things happened."

But I don't think I talked to Vance about it, or he to me, once the transition got underway. I'm not even sure that he paid a whole lot of attention to it at the time.

Gradually, the new people got named. I knew many of those who were coming in; some I didn't know. And we began the process of talking about issues in which I'd been involved. Some of those people, like Matt Nimetz, had not really been involved too much in the details of foreign affairs.

Q: What was his background?

SONNENFELDT: He was a lawyer, but also quite interested in international issues. I frankly don't know the details, other than his law practice in New York. I think he was active in the Council on Foreign Relations. Fred Bergsten, who had been on the NSC staff with me in the Kissinger years, a hotshot and young, bright guy, was nominated as Assistant Secretary of the Treasury for International Affairs. He came to see me because I had been very much involved, in 1975, in setting up what came to be known later as the G-7 summit meetings. I had been what later came to be known as a "Sherpa," (the experts chosen to shepherd and coordinate preparations for the summit meetings), and Bergsten figured that he would be doing that at Treasury. So we talked about the origins of the G-7 and what kind of things we did. I also talked during this period with Les Gelb, who was going to head P(Bureau of Political-Military Affairs).

Q: Called Political-Military.

SONNENFELDT: Right. We talked mostly about arms control, especially nuclear proliferation and the stalled SALT negotiations. And I'm sure there were others I saw in the transition; I just can't recall.

Q: I just want to?but for somebody doing this, so they won't have to do too much research, you may have seen Sherpa, S-H-E-R-P-A, which was a term used for those who facilitated our leaders going to the summit - Taken from the Nepalese climbers.

SONNENFELDT: I don't know where it came from, whether it was even an American-invented phrase; but in any case, we didn't use it in 1975 and 1976. I think it came into use in the Carter administration.

Of course, these meetings would have to be pre-cooked to some extent, although I have to say that the original idea was that it should be more spontaneous among the principals. (I can't remember now whether we've talked about this in the past). It started with informal discussions among Giscard d'Estaing, Schmidt, Wilson and then Callaghan, Ford, and Kissinger and his counterparts. The Japanese were always expected to be part of it because of their economic and financial role, but they weren't really that much involved in the original planning. Normally, the bureaucracy doesn't really trust the political leaders with making important decisions, so they negotiate draft statements for the leaders to approve at the end, maybe leaving out a few details so the heads of government can say they count - but we really wanted this to be an open-ended discussion forum where the leaders could deal with serious issues. And that's more or less what developed, although not so much in the very first session in 1975.

In any event, it became clear very quickly during the transition that the Carter people were inclined to adopt a more structured arrangement than we had favored for this rather important and innovative institution. It was somewhat like de Gaulle's idea for a "Directoire" (board of directors), a world forum of the leaders of wealthy and powerful countries, which we had sneered at years earlier. So there was a lot of interest in that during the transition. Relations with the Soviets, of course, were still very much on the agenda; and some NATO issues and other concerns. I talked as freely as I could with my successors.

Q: Well, I was wondering, the National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, who had very decided views on relations with the Soviet Union, and you, had been sort of the Soviet Union man for some time, off and on. Could you talk a little about how you saw him and his, I mean, before he came on?

SONNENFELDT: Well, I had known Zbig for a long time, even from his Harvard days, and then when he was at Columbia, and then at various study groups. He had been in the State Department in the '60s, as a Council on Foreign Relations Fellow, I think. In any case, he worked quite closely then with Under Secretary George Ball, who used him as a brain-trust and an idea-man for speeches. I actually worked directly with Zbig in 1967, when NATO was going through one of its periodic reviews of its role, and what needed to be improved or changed or adapted. Bureaucratically, this was an EUR (European Bureau) function. I was still in INR when the NATO review came along, but I'd been very much involved with the European Bureau and Under Secretary Gene Rosto(not Walt Rostow, but his brother, Eugene Rostow, a law professor from Yale).

NATO set up a special group to look at its future roles. It was called the Harmel Study, named for the Belgian Foreign Minister at the time. Brzezinski very much wanted to be the American representative, but the European Bureau just couldn't accept that; they had their problems with Zbig. So the compromise was that Brzezinski and I would be the two political "commissars," as I said at the time.

Q: Were you considered counterweights, more or less?

SONNENFELDT: Well, for some reason, the European Bureau couldn't get one of their own people to lead this project, which would have been the appropriate bureaucratic way of doing it; and Brzezinski wanted it, so it got to be a bureaucratic hand-wrestle. Then EUR asked me if I would do it, and they worked it out with the head of my Bureau, INR. So Zbig and I were sort of co-leaders of this effort, and we went to Europe several times for meetings. Incidentally, this was at the time when NATO was moving its headquarters from Paris to Brussels; so we started in Paris, and ended up the discussions in Brussels. Zbig and I worked together really quite closely and very well. In most respects, we saw eye-to-eye, as we had in our earlier contacts before he joined the State Department.

My main problem with Zbig was that he was a very successful publicist. In addition to being a serious academic, he was very articulate and fluent. He'd already published two or three books and lots of articles, and he was very much in the swing of things. In those days, I thought Zbig seemed to feel that when he had articulated an issue and recommended a policy, that was it; and he didn't really know very much at that time about turning ideas into policies. He knows a lot more now, after years in government, but at the time, he seemed to think that you had a policy when he had enunciated it, and the rest of it was just sort of an automatic follow-through. I don't think he ever really worked in the endless drafting sessions at NATO, where usually you got the British, who were the most fluent writers, to do the first drafts, and then everyone haggled over words and commas. But apart from that, on the substantive issues, I think we worked well together on the Harmel study. I think he returned to Columbia before it was completed.

When Zbig became National Security Adviser in 1977, he'd been instrumental in getting Carter to run for President. They had met at the Trilateral Commission. Zbig and others, including Dick Gardner (who became Carter's Ambassador to Italy), were pushing Carter to run. It was almost a foregone conclusion that Zbig would end up as Carter's National Security Advisor, and I think we had several conversations during the campaign and the transition. I saw him in subsequent years from time to time-

Q: At the time when he was going to be there, did you have any sort of misgivings about his thrust towards the Soviet Union as a whole?

SONNENFELDT: No, I really didn't have any problems with his approach. We were both pretty hard-line. Relations with the Soviet Union hadn't gone all that well in the last year of the Ford administration. Zbig and Cy Vance had their differences. I couldn't tell about Warren Christopher, because I had no idea what his views were (he'd been in the Justice Department in the Johnson administration); but I expected that Zbig and Vance would come at issues from different vantage points. I had no notion about Carter. All I knew is that he sounded tough as nails on Eastern Europe, as he exploited the controversy about the "Sonnenfeldt Doctrine" in the campaign. But apart from that, I had no idea where he would stand. No, I had no problems with Zbig's overall approach. I might have had a specific problem with a concrete formulation, but all in all, I didn't have any big problem.

Q: As this transition moved towards January 20, 1977, what did you?

SONNENFELDT: Well, Nimetz hadn't been confirmed by January 21. So I guess Vance or somebody asked me if I could just stick around for a few more weeks until Matt Nimetz would come in. There was a gradual turnover in the appointive offices; some people were retained. So I stayed in the Counselor's office for a couple of weeks after the inauguration. Nimetz came down to Washington a few times, but I guess it wasn't appropriate for him to sit in that office until he was confirmed by the Senate.

In any event, the State Department Secretariat had several offices for outgoing political appointees (which I was at the time, even though I was a career guy), where I could sit while I put my affairs in order and did all the required paper work. So after a couple of weeks, I left my nice wood-paneled offices in the Counselor's suite and went around the corner to one of the Secretariat's offices. I can't remember whether my secretary stayed with me (she was going to retire), or whether they assigned someone to me. I was basically getting files cleaned up and ready for storage, and putting down some last-minute thoughts. At that point, since it was clear that I was leaving, I felt there was nothing wrong with my trying to put together a bit of my after-life.

Q: No.

SONNENFELDT: I'd actually had some calls from a couple of Wall Street firms, asking me whether I'd be interested in doing political-risk work. So things were beginning to take some shape. You know, if you've worked only very briefly in the outside (non-government) world, you wonder how that is going to work out. It turned out that I received a whole bunch of invitations to give talks. RAND asked me to come out to California as soon as I left the Department, to have a one-week de-brief of my experiences in the government, especially my contacts with the Soviet Union. So it didn't look like I would be stepping into some sort of a vacuum, but that I would be quite active, right off the bat.

So it was a mixture of just winding up, helping new appointees who were getting started if they wanted to know about particular issues, and looking ahead.

In addition, almost immediately, people started asking me to either do interviews or write papers about Kissinger, and I said, "No." For instance, a French publishing house wanted me to write a book in English, which they wanted to be the first to publish in French, about what it was like to work and live with Kissinger; and I said, "No thanks, I'm not writing a kiss-and-tell."

Q: Did you sense, you know as time moved on, I think one of the things that strikes me and please correct me if I'm wrong, but sort of the move of the Republican party, I mean, sort of the major power of the Republican Party over towards the right wing, more do-it-alone, not quite isolationist, but I mean it's almost like it kind of reverted back to the '30s or something.

SONNENFELDT: No, I don't think so, although there may have been some people who felt like that. Dean Rusk had at various times, during the Vietnam War and on other occasions, expressed his concern about a reversion to isolationism, especially because of our experience in Vietnam. But many Republicans, if you'd stop to think about it, sounded much more interventionist than Carter and Vance, if not Brzezinski. I couldn't tell about Harold Brown, the Defense Secretary, although I'd known him quite well. And the Republicans tended to be tougher on the Soviets, at least rhetorically, and also in legislation. Many of them were strong on NATO. No, I think the fault-line, if there was one, between some liberal Republicans and more hard-line Republicans didn't relate so much to isolationism, or to unilateralism versus involvement, engagement, and multilateralism. I think it had to do more with being tough on the Soviets. Of course, we were out of Vietnam by then, but we had some open issues with the Soviets: their intervention in Angola was still a problem, and we were still in the aftermath of Vietnam; the Soviets remained in Cuba, in the Middle East and beyond.

Some Republicans on the far right had been critical of Nixon's opening to China, but it was not a serious problem for Nixon and Kissinger. There were Republicans who worried about too much detente and not enough attention to threats and dangers from the Soviets. Some Republicans thought there had been too severe cuts in defense budgets, which were due mostly to congressional actions. But I think it would be a stretch at this point to think of them as isolationists. When you looked at Reagan and listened to Reagan, who clearly was very much in the running - he had given Ford a big battle in the 1976 primary, and he clearly had ambitions to come back the next time - there was, I guess, what one might call a certain strain of unilateralism, but not isolationism.

Q: No, no. What about within the Republican ranks? I'm stressing the Republican side only because...

SONNENFELDT: -because I'm a Democrat! And was a registered Democrat all along! So I wasn't a card-carrying Republican. Incidentally, during the Ford administration, the "Committee on the Present Danger" (meaning, the Soviets) was set up by Democrats who worried about our security situation.

Q: Well, but I was wondering whether you felt that within the, you know, having lost in elections, you know, this always, there's a lot of bitterness within the party. Was there a lot? Did this give rise to a lot of sort of anti-Kissingerism?

SONNENFELDT: Well, in some places, it may have. On the other hand, Kissinger had been a star as Secretary of State.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: He set up his own consulting company and was very successful. I remember one time, perhaps a year or more after we had left office, we'd been together at some meeting at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York. We walked down Park Avenue after the meeting was over, and suddenly people started gathering around us. "There he is! There he is!" People were coming to the windows and looking out to see who was walking past. I thought to myself, "my God!" [Laughter]

Q: [Laughter]

SONNENFELDT: He had become something of a popular hero. He did a few TV shows, which didn't turn out to get very good reviews; but there were two sources of criticism of Kissinger. One was people from the more conservative wing of the Republican Party, who were critical of Kissinger and particularly his policies on the Soviet Union or China, and maybe some other things as well; and on the other side of the spectrum, those who condemned his human rights record. They were mostly, but not exclusively, from the liberal wing of the Democrats.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: So there was a certain amount of muckraking, going through some past decisions on human rights and human rights-related issues.

Q: Yes. Chile, I'm sure it came up, yes.

SONNENFELDT: Yes, Chile usually came up fairly quickly. Then, of course, we were in a new era of freedom of information, so documents began to be released, and there were questions about what Kissinger was doing with his own documents, and so on. He had imposed restrictions on access to his papers; he obviously wanted them to write his own memoirs. All in all, he already was famous, and he became an even more famous figure in American public life, and remains so to this day, which is absolutely astonishing! And he remains a star around much of the world. That's also remarkable, unique.

Q: Sure. It really is!

SONNENFELDT: No other Secretary of State remained so prominent, unless you take Jefferson, who of course became President after he was Secretary of State. I think it's quite an extraordinary thing, how Henry became a public figure, and also a popular figure, among people who probably didn't understand most of the things that he philosophized about. Still, there was something there, some charisma, in addition to his obvious brilliance and sense of humor.

Q: Some stardom.

SONNENFELDT: Yes. Of course, being a star made him a target as well.

Q: Yes, yes.

SONNENFELDT: Some people thought taking on Kissinger was a heroic act. We see it to this day.

Q: Sure. Well now, as far as you're concerned, we're talking right now in the Brookings Institution. Did you gravitate towards this rather quickly?

SONNENFELDT: No, I was a Trustee of Johns Hopkins University-.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: And I had been at their School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) as a student and a part-time faculty member.

Q: I mean, as we noticed, your ties go right back to your arrival in the United States.

SONNENFELDT: Yes. ThSchool of Advanced International Studies was absorbed by Johns Hopkins in 1950 or '51. It had originally been established by Chris Herter and Paul Nitze and some others who thought the country needed such a school. They had problems as an independent institution, so Hopkins took it over; and I was one of the first students to come over from Baltimore to S-A-I-S, SAIS. I taught there in the evenings in the 1960s, when the State Department still allowed that. When I went to the White House in 1969, I just didn't have time to continue teaching, but I maintained close ties with the school.

When I got ready to leave the government, I talked to the Dean of SAIS, Bob Osgood, who'd briefly been on the Kissinger NSC staff with us. I asked Bob whether they could give me an office, which they had done in the past for various senior officials leaving government service. They'd given Dean Rusk an office when no one would toucRusk when he left office in 1969 (it was really a sad and disgusting thing, how he was ostracized). Osgood agreed to do that, so I went to Johns Hopkins, to SAIS for my first year in private life. I had hired an assistant and wanted to get my footing, to have a base where people could reach me and where I could do some writing. But I also felt that, because I was a long-time Trustee of Johns Hopkins, I shouldn't use the university's facilities for any extended period. Because it was all gratis, I felt there could be some suggestion of a conflict of interest. I resumed teaching a course that I had taught many years earlier, on Soviet foreign policy, and also taught a research course for Ph.D. candidates.

About halfway through that first year, I talked to the then-President of Brookings, Bruce MacLaury, and asked whether it might be possible for me to affiliate with Brookings, not as a staff member, but as a Guest Scholar, which was a category similar to one that they had at Johns Hopkins; I guess it was called Visiting Scholar at Hopkins. Within two or three days, Bruce called me and said it was a great idea, he wished he'd thought of it himself. So we made the arrangement for me to come over to Brookings as a Guest Scholar. I went there in 1978, and have been a Guest Scholar ever since!

Now Brookings had the reputation of being a "liberal" research organization, both on domestic affairs and, to some extent, on foreign policy. Brookings originally didn't deal with foreign policy; it began to work in that area during or after World War II. I knew it was very high- caliber, and I knew a lot of people there. But I wasn't exactly sure how my viewpoints and orientation would fit in with the ideological preferences of most of their staff. But then, I wasn't going to be on the staff; I would be on my own as a Guest Scholar, and would do some things with Brookings, give some talks, and participate in various Brookings activities.

Q: How did you make money doing that?

SONNENFELDT: Well, the thing is, I wasn't making any money. Brookings was very generous at the time: they provided an office and an assistant, and they gave me a small stipend.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: But almost from the beginning, I began to make some money - not huge amounts, but more than I had made as a government official. Within a month of my leaving the government, I had three or four consulting clients in New York, including an investment house of considerable repute, a bank, and another financial institution. So actually, I was getting paid on a monthly or quarterly basis, and I'd never seen as much money. I mean, it wasn't millions, but it was certainly better than my government salary. Soon I incorporated, since my accountant suggested that was best for tax and other reasons.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: So I became Helmut Sonnenfeldt, Inc., and I still maintain the corporation. That's how I made some money. It helped to have the cushion of a State Department pension, and also the great advantage of office space, plus the whole Brookings infrastructure (much less complex in those days than it subsequently became in the computer age). The infrastructure, the library, the fact that I was in the midst of people who were recognized experts in their own fields all across the spectrum, really, was a terrific asset to me. Of course, on many issues, I didn't know enough to have differences with their staff experts, or maybe I had so little knowledge that my differences were clearly biases or ideological. But it was terrific in terms of the stimulating work going on at Brookings.

I really felt, you know, that I had had a great government career, and I had the sense of playing in history a bit when I got near the top. But that was all rather narrow in scope compared with a place like Brookings, where interesting things were going on all around you, and there wasn't any question of who was going to get a chair at the table, everybody was invited to come and participate. So it was great.

Q: Well, did you find the atmosphere then and perhaps now, just to get a little feel for this, was collegial? In other words, if you wanted to find out about Japanese economy, you could talk to somebody on this without treading on their turf?

SONNENFELDT: Oh, yes! There wasn't any turf warfare to speak of, because most of the staff here were parts of research projects. So there really wasn't turf warfare, or maybe there was, and I just didn't get it. I had also made a resolution that I wasn't going to get involved in bureaucratic politics. If people didn't want to invite me to something, I wasn't going to-

Q: Pout [laughter].

SONNENFELDT: -pout about it. But they usually asked me to join in; in fact, I got too many invitations for some things that I just couldn't do or contribute much substance to. My interests were known, and I broadened them. I discovered very quickly, in the consulting business in New York, that expertise on the Soviet Union was all very well, but nobody had any great business interests there. The oil companies had been interested, and still were. But China was beginning to come up, and Japan in those days was the great behemoth of the international economy. So I found very quickly that, unless I became much more familiar with Chinese and Japanese and Korean affairs, and then South Asian affairs, I would be behind the power curve when it came to providing useful insights to my consulting clients.

Occasionally, I used a few graduate students from Johns Hopkins or other universities to help me prepare two-page memos for my consulting clients. I had told my clients that I wasn't in a position to write them long screeds, and that was long before the computer age. So I had four or five standby graduate students who helped me, particularly on issues where I wasn't familiar enough to bat it out myself on my typewriter. But none of that was for Brookings; that was for my private business, to use at meetings or to pass on to staff people at my clients' firms.

Q: No.

SONNENFELDT: But it did get me into a broader swing of things here at Brookings and at other research centers around town. There was AEI-

Q: American Enterprise Institute, which is sort of conservative.

SONNENFELDT: Right. American Enterprise Institute; and the Center for Strategic and International Studies, or CSIS, which was still part of Georgetown University at the time.

Q: Yes.

SONNENFELDT: -And the Heritage Foundation and others that invited me to come to their meetings. The Carnegie Endowment was then around the corner, at Dupont Circle. So there wasn't a day when I was in Washington that there wasn't some interesting discussion. I traveled often to New York and to the West Coast and other places, and abroad. So I was busy. But Brookings was a great base. I really didn't have trouble with the people identified as liberals. In some cases, I guess I'm liberal myself, but I valued above all the knowledge these people shared. For example, an economist named Joe Pechman, who's dead now, unfortunately, had been in the government (Council of Economic Advisers) at one time. He had been a leading tax expert since before World War II, and was one of the great originators or designers of various aspects of the American tax system. You can't find a guy like that in most places.

So I had no problems with ideology, and in those days, I didn't have any bureaucratic problems of a kind that you encounter in the government. There's one thing, though-

Q: Also in the academic world too.

SONNENFELDT: That's right. Academic politics can be very bitter and brutal. I knew several members of the Brookings Board of Trustees, some of whom had been Cabinet members or senior officials in the government, and I'd worked with them. Some of them were politically quite conservative, compared to the general tone that was attributed to Brookings. In those days, two or three of those Trustees encouraged me to speak out as much as I could and to be sure to identify myself with Brookings, because they didn't want Brookings to carry this image of being the great liberal or even left-wing think-tank. Generally, Brookings had been identified with that general end of the spectrum of opinion and attitudes, and these Trustees wanted to show that Brookings was open to apostates like me. All in all, I must say, it was a great way to start my outside life.

Some people observed my situation from afar; and over the years, a number of colleagues with whom I'd worked in the government came by and wanted to talk about how to do this. They were doing okay, but they were not as positive about their situations as I was. I guess the word got around somehow that I had lucked out.

Some people attributed this to my connection with Kissinger; but I had no regular, continuing connection with Kissinger, and certainly not with his business activities. That was not something I wanted to do. I'd worked closely with him for eight years, and even though we had a long-standing acquaintance, I wanted to be on my own. In fact, my own situation may well have been influenced negatively in some cases, and positively in many others, because of my connection with Kissinger in the White House and the State Department.

Q: Well, in 1981 the Reagan administration took over.

SONNENFELDT: Yes.

Q: At that time, a very conservative group, but, you know, eventually moved, as they all do, more towards the center. But was there any interest in you from that administration, or were they not?

SONNENFELDT: Well, Al Haig was the first Secretary of State. Haig and I were very friendly, and we still are. There had been some rather ugly maneuvering, and Haig very soon had his problems in the Reagan administration on various grounds. I don't recall whether he asked me whether I was interested in coming back. I must have told him as soon as his appointment was announced that it was great; that, as Vance had suggested, I was a consultant to the Department and still had my clearances, and I'd be happy to help out with some wisdom now and then. And I indeed did that, continuing as a consultant to the State Department until only about six months ago (in 2001), when my State Department consulting relationship finally lapsed, and the clearances along with it. However, I'm consulting at the Defense Department now, as I have for years; so I still have some security clearances.

In any event, among the senior Reagan administration officials, Al Haig was a friend; Bud McFarland at the NSC was a friend from the Kissinger NSC days; and I knew several other people who came in. Paul Wolfowitz was running the transition team for Haig in the State Department. I didn't know Cap Weinberger very well, but I knew a lot of other people at Defense.

My relationship with the Reagan administration was exactly as I wanted it: I was not in the administration, but I knew a good many senior people; I had the opportunity to put in my two cents-worth if I felt like it, and they had the opportunity to ask me for my two cents-worth if they wanted to. I knew almost all the senior people in the foreign affairs/national security area, except for the President himself. I felt very good about the Reagan administration, even though the damned old "Sonnenfeldt Doctrine-"

Q: [Laughter]

SONNENFELDT: -the "Sonnenfeldt Doctrine" had been prominent among the Reaganites' arguments in their anti-Kissinger stance in the '70s. I went about my business and had occasional contact with the administration, just in an advisory capacity. I was happy as a clam - outside the government, but enough on the inside to have a good sense of what was going on.

Q: Richard Perle is a name that comes up. Did you have much to do with him?

SONNENFELDT: Well, we have been quite good friends for many years. He, of course, had worked for Scoop Jackson (Democratic Senator Henry M. Jackson of Washington), whom I knew also from earlier contacts. Jackson and the State Department had had big brutal battles over Jackson-Vanik (legislation linking trade benefits for the Soviets to their performance in letting Soviet Jews and dissenters leave the USSR) and related issues, back in the '70s. I was involved in those arguments, but it was sort of understood: Richard was working for Scoop, and I was working for Henry. We haggled about various different aspects. There were also some major differences between Henry and Scoop, and Richard Perle, on some of the SALT (Strategic Arms Limitation Talks) agreements with the Soviets. So on the surface, it was a pretty hostile kind of relationship, but those tensions didn't carry over into my post-government career.

My wife and I had already been friendly with Richard and his wife, and we became even more so, as well as with two or three other people from Jackson's staff. When Perle went into the Defense Department in the Reagan administration, we had a very easy and good relationship. I didn't always agree with his positions, but I agreed with his positions more than I had with those of his predecessors in the Carter administration; although as I say, I had a high regard for Harold Brown.

Q: He was Secretary of Defens[in the Carter administration].

SONNENFELDT: Yes, in the Carter years.

My collegial relationship with Richard Perle has continued. I'm now on the Defense Policy Board, which he chairs [Perle later resigned that chairmanship]. This institution has existed for several decades now as an advisory panel to the Secretary of Defense. Richard asked me to join it, and Don Rumsfeld (Secretary of Defense) asked me to join it, so we get along very well. I don't always agree with Richard's more extreme positions, and he's a very tenacious, articulate person. He doesn't so much attack people, although some critics attribute that to him; he stays on the issues. At least in my view, he stays on the issues. He can be very polemical; he can be very tough; he's also a very shrewd bureaucratic operator, which he demonstrated in the Defense Department when he was Assistant Secretary for International Security Affairs. So all in all, that relationship was fine and is personally very good. Nowadays, Richard has become controversial in some quarters, but not with me.

Q: Well, this probably is a good place to stop, don't you think? Is there anything?

SONNENFELDT: Only one other thing I can tell you: in the first few days after I left the State Department, something got into me one night when I couldn't sleep. I decided maybe I ought to write down some thoughts about my career, and I went to my hunt-and-peck typewriter at about three o'clock in the morning, and started writing. I tied it all to what I did on January 20, 1977, the day President Ford left office and President Carter was inaugurated.

The Air Force had invited me to talk to a group of their generals on January 20. They didn't care about the inauguration (except for those who were actually involved in the ceremony). They provided a plane to take me to an airbase in Florida, to talk to them about the Soviet Union and U.S.-Soviet relations. And I went to Tampa and spent Inauguration day with them, watching the ceremony on television, giving my talk and having good discussions about how to deal with the Soviet Union. Then I flew back to Washington on this little plane later in the evening, when everybody else went to the Inaugural balls. As we started to descend to land at Andrews Air Force base, a whole bunch of red lights flashed on in the cockpit. I wondered what was going on. The officer came to me and said, "We're having problems with the landing gear, and we'll have to circle around several times." It's dark by now.

And I said, "Well, wouldn't it be a funny thing if, on this day, the day my government career is ending, if this damned plane crashed." I started thinking about lots of things.

In any event, eventually the gear came down and we landed safely. But all the emergency vehicles were lined up near the runway there at Andrews. I guess that few minutes, reflecting on my career and my life up to that point, spurred me to sit down and write. I wrote almost continuously for three days at home and in the office that I still had in the State Department, and produced maybe 60,000 or 80,000 words. My secretary, or someone the State Department had assigned to me, cleaned up the typos and the format for me. This paper was really intended for my family and my personal use. It wasn't written with any notion of publication.

So I keep getting badgered by my family to write my memoirs; and I keep telling them that I'm doing an oral history with you; and if they just wait, they can listen to it and then read the transcript. But I do have that particular document.

Q: Well, now, you know, there's a possibility, because we throw things together, because I view this more as repository, the niche thing being a unique thing. If you have it, do you have it typed up?

SONNENFELDT: I think it's typed up. I have to look and see where it is.

Q: You know, we could take it; and if it's in sort of clean type, we can scan it, if it's not in-

SONNENFELDT: I'll have to look and see where I've got a copy of it.

Q: Would you take a look?

SONNENFELDT: Sure, sure.

Q: Because we can have it scanned here.

SONNENFELDT: Some of it's very personal.

Q: Because we could meld that in, you know, oral history here or-

SONNENFELDT: Some of it is rather personal, and it's-

Q: But a certain, the personal side, if it's not, you know, personal, personal; but you know, I mean, what you did, I think this is important to capture the era and the time.

SONNENFELDT: I haven't looked at it in ages, but I'll have to see if I can find it.

Q: Do take a look!

SONNENFELDT: Well, let me see if I can find it. I think there were clean copies. We must have one at home, and my brother has one, and maybe the kids have it.

Q: Yes, sure. Well, see what you can do. Sure.

SONNENFELDT: Yes.

Q: Great!

End of Interview