

Timothy Naftali

My name's Tim Naftali. I'm the director of the Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum. We're in New York City -- it's October 4th, 2007, and I have the honor and privilege to be interviewing John Lehman for the Richard Nixon Oral History Program. Mr. Lehman, thank you for doing this.

John Lehman

Pleasure.

Timothy Naftali

I'd like to start by asking you about how you came to know Richard Allen and work for him.

John Lehman

I met Richard Allen when I was an undergraduate at St. Joe's and we were putting together a symposium on arms control and disarmament. And Dick was, at the time, at the Georgetown center. And this would have been like 1963, in that era, and Dick and I hit it off and I was very taken by his grasp of international affairs, and so he later asked me to come to work for him during the summer as a summer intern, and then later, when I went off to graduate school in England -- where I did an MA at Cambridge -- Dick had me work for him each of the summers between terms, so I got to know him pretty well working for him as a research assistant and drafter and general bag carrier. And then when he joined the Nixon campaign, he asked me to help on some projects. I was -- I helped in drafting and researching some of the foreign policy position papers and so forth. So that's where I met Dick. We became -- he was my mentor in many ways, and he was -- we were also good friends.

Timothy Naftali

From your perspective, tell us please the story of how he did not become national security advisor.

John Lehman

Well, it was very interesting at the time, because he had been the national security advisor to the candidate and ran the foreign policy and national security operation in the campaign, and he obviously had a very good relationship with the president and the president's senior advisers. But then when President Nixon was President-Elect Nixon, he -- as I understand it, Nelson Rockefeller strongly recommended that he take Henry Kissinger as his adviser. And obviously Nixon knew Kissinger, and I think he felt that Kissinger was -- would help in the image of a more centrist and eastern-establishment acceptable image, much more -- more from an age perspective than any political point of view. I don't think Nixon was concerned with the particular place on the ideological spectrum that either of them had, but Kissinger clearly was older, more senior, and I think Nixon probably liked very much the Rockefeller link, because the image was that Nelson Rockefeller was able to attract to him and keep on his personal staff the best in the fields, the most senior, capable advisers, and so I think Nixon liked the idea of getting Nelson's chief foreign policy advisor. And it seemed a natural fit because of the relative difference in age and seniority. And so they were both announced at the same press conference

with -- with Dick as the deputy to the deputy national security adviser. And so it was very clear that the president-elect wanted Dick Allen very much to be part of the senior advisory team, and -- but it soon became apparent that Henry was uneasy about having an alternative source of foreign policy advice, and so I think Dick could see the handwriting on the wall when the first assignment he was given by Henry -- having got the president's sign off on it -- was to take over the implementation of what was called the Woods McClintock Base Study, which was an effort in the previous administration to catalog all of the foreign bases that were sprawled all over the world, many of them obsolete because they were built at a time when we didn't have B-52s and didn't have ICBMs and required bases around the Soviet Union in order to keep nuclear deterrents.

So Dick was assigned to turn the Woods McClintock Study into a set of base closure recommendations or diplomatic renegotiation recommendations for the new administration. And it was kind of akin to being sent to China to find out what the Chinese think, interviewing every Chinese one at a time. And so that's the way Dick viewed it, and he -- he was a loyal trooper, but I think he tried to get the word into the president that, you know, he would like to be a little more involved in the policymaking. But it became very clear, and in talking to some of the people in the secretariat, when Kissinger would prepare the list of people for a particular policy meeting with the president, somehow Dick's name was never on it, and the president, I was told by Bryce Harlow a couple of times -- Bryce and the president said, "Well, where is Dick Allen? He knows all about this." And oh -- he was busy, he was always busy, and pretty soon they stopped asking for him. And so -- I mean, it was classic Machiavelli, if you will, classic palace politics, and you know, from Henry's point of view, you can see why he did not want an alternate source of foreign policy and policy advice, both from the president out to the bureaucracy and synthesizing the bureaucracy in to the president. So -- and I thought Dick handled it extremely well. He did not try to kick over the traces or -- he made his position known and saw that the word got to the president, but the president was, you know, not about to make a big fuss about it, and they offered Dick another job, but Dick decided he -- he saw what had happened, and he went off on his own. So that -- it was an interesting lesson in power politics.

Timothy Naftali

In the period where you were working for the campaign for him, was there a sense that there would be a change in China policy?

John Lehman

Yes, I think there was. As -- because -- of course, the reason that Dick had kept me involved in the campaign was also as a conduit to the group of Realpolitik thinkers at the University of Pennsylvania, headed by Robert Strausz-Hupé and Bill Kintner, both of whom later joined the administration. But they were the authors of Protracted Conflict, which was kind of a blueprint for -- it was sort of the next big stage after NSC-68 of how to deal with containment and a more forward strategy to keep the -- keep the Soviets deterred and on the defensive. And so I was a conduit for various inputs to draft speeches and foreign policy position papers that the campaign put together. And Strausz-Hupé and Kintner and the whole school of the Foreign Policy Research Institute at Penn was very much of the Realpolitik school, the realist school. And the enemy of your enemy is your friend, and they were strong advocates of using, diplomatically, the growing visible rift between China and the Soviet Union to advantage. So it was in the air, and clearly, I think everyone in the Realpolitik school, of which Kissinger was very much a part of, and Dick Allen was as well. They were not selling the -- what I guess is now identified as the Wilsonian or neocon view that our mission was to proselytize democracy

around the world. It was really to maintain a balance of power that would gradually become adverse to the Soviet Union. So developing relations with China was very much a part of that policy mindset, and it was in the air. Now, the dramatic breakthrough of actually going to China -- I don't recall ever seeing a paper or anybody putting that specifically as a recommendation, but -- and so that, you know, that was really was a product of Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger.

Timothy Naftali

Was arms control in the air?

John Lehman

In the sense that there was a growing concern that there was a strong school of thought in Congress that was becoming enamored of the idea that somehow there was a mindless arms race going on in which we were the engine, and we were proliferating and increasing the numbers of ICBMs and so forth, and so we should engage in arms control to cut -- to take the first steps that the Soviets would then follow. And so there was a concern at the time that the Soviets were building ICBMs and planning an expansion that would be very adverse to the United States, and that "arms control" and "disarmament negotiations" were being used as an excuse to engage, in effect, a unilateral reduction of American deterrent capability. And the belief that the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency should be used as a vehicle to reorient the debate away from unilateral reductions of these weapons, to a -- to try to create a regime where the Soviet Union could be made to see there were common sense ways where we should both be reducing the threat to each other while not disturbing the nuclear balance. Of course, to get that kind of agreement presumes that both sides have the same incentive to keep the status quo. If one side seeks to use the balance to turn, to undo the balance, the equilibrium, then doing this through arms control agreements is not going to work. You have to have a basic commonality of interest in -- before a treaty can codify it.

Timothy Naftali

We'll talk about treaties and Congress -- who do you -- who had this idea, though, that you can recall, of using arms control, or ACDA as a preemptive action against Congress?

John Lehman

Well, I think that -- that really came out of -- out of Scoop Jackson, John Tower, Dick Allen on the side. It was the -- one of the most influential partnerships, I think, in national security of that era was Henry Jackson and his allies in the Democratic Party and John Tower and his allies in the Republican Party. The creation of the Committee on the Present Danger was -- really came out of that kind of axis, if you will. The Jacksonian Democrats, the liberal, socially, domestically liberal, but very strong military, defense-oriented Democrats, led by Scoop Jackson, Paul Nitze, Walt Rostow, and people of that school found a common ground with John Tower and the National Security Center Republicans in the -- the House and the Senate. And it was -- it was they who -- who thought that the arms control agency should be used, and not just viewed as a kind of a talisman sitting there in the State Department to satisfy Hubert Humphrey and the people who had created it. It should be made use of to actively strengthen deterrents, and where possible through functional agreements on nonproliferation, incidents at sea, things that -- where there was a common interest, and to use it also as a key center to use the negotiations with the Soviets on strategic issues and ballistic missile defense, to orient it to a

more realistic view that, "Look, we are not going to allow negotiations to become a medium to bless a two to one, or three to two advantage," which the Soviets were headed for, or to bless the exclusions of weapon systems like the Backfire out of any strategic equation. So I think it did -- the bottom line is that the Jackson Tower axis in the hill, the bipartisan group who were strong, national security advocates, had more and more resonance with Nixon, particularly with the president, and Kissinger, who had a slightly different view of the uses of arms control negotiations, also felt, you know, he inherently was part of that mindset that the Jackson-Tower people held of arms control, but he also felt that the -- there was a real inherent, stabilizing value in getting an agreement, even if there were certain disadvantages to the U.S. at the time. And he argued at the time that, "Look, all that we're doing is recognizing reality." We're not building any new missiles and the Soviets are. So there's going to have this imbalance, they're going to have the superiority in any case, and so why don't we make virtue out of necessity and get a treaty, and then we can go on to another treaty, a follow-on treaty, to redress this imbalance that we're accepting in -- because what we're accepting is what exists. They're building SS-18s. They're building Backfires. There's nothing we can do to redress that balance, and so we should take advantage and show the world that we are believers in the arms control negotiating process. So it was not -- I don't think Nixon and Kissinger really saw eye to eye on that from the things I saw coming out of the Oval Office.

Timothy Naftali

Nixon was less enamored of these agreements than Kissinger?

John Lehman

Yes, I don't think -- I think Kissinger really felt that -- I think at that point, in the early part of the administration, he was a bit more pessimistic of the willingness of the American people to do what was necessary to redress the balance, and rather than allowing it to get worse --

Timothy Naftali

-- freeze it.

John Lehman

Freeze it, yeah. I think that's good -- that's the word -- the right word. Freeze it where it was before it got even worse. I don't think Nixon felt that way. I think, as it got closer to the '72 election, I think he saw more and more the advantages of having that achievement, of having a treaty. And so eventually he swung around to that point of view of supporting it, so it was by the time the '71 or so, I think Nixon was a strong advocate of getting the treaty and then using that as a base to redress things in the next round.

Timothy Naftali

Can I ask a couple -- one other question from the early period, and then we can move to your job. During the campaign, what -- was Vietnamization in the air?

John Lehman

Yes, very much so, because there clearly was a sense that the president would have a short period after election, and would be -- would have the honeymoon period to institute a new policy, and that that new policy had to point to a way out: peace with honor. And certainly Kissinger had become very much a convert, if you will -- maybe that's the wrong word -- but he was a believer in the views of John Paul Vann and others that felt that the United States never should have allowed the Pentagon bureaucracy and the Army institution to treat this as a positional, conventional war with large maneuvered divisions, with all the search and destroy and policies, whereas Vann had argued from the beginning that -- from the beginning of the war that this could never be won as a positional war. It had to be fought by the Vietnamese -- by the South Vietnamese, and they could win it and maintain their independence, but we had to give them the tools to do it, the training, the weapon systems, and Kissinger felt strongly that this -- the army had never permitted that, that even when -- I remember when the first time after the election that I went over there, they, which was in '69, it was clear that the Vietnamese were still -- they were using M1s and they did not have M16s, they did not have modern weapons. There had been no effort, really, to Vietnamize the conflict. So during the campaign, those ideas were very, I'm sure, very much a part of Henry's thinking at the time, and --

Timothy Naftali

What about Richard Allen?

John Lehman

Well, I think Richard Allen had not focused as much on Vietnam, but clearly he was of the view that -- the Westmoreland view -- of just sending more troops in was a hopeless effort. I think Dick believed that it was a very important -- I think both Henry and Dick shared the view that however inadequate the analogy of the domino theory, that if we cut and run, so to speak, that the rest of Southeast Asia would go very rapidly, and that this would be inimicable to the balance of power. Certainly, Dick Allen did not -- was not in any way a believer in the strategy that had been applied up to that point of the -- more troops and more divisions and more firepower could win the war. And Vietnamization was -- had -- there were many different sort of versions and permutations of what became -- what came to be called Vietnamization, but certainly in my recollection and the discussions we had at the time during the campaign, was that this was what had to be done, that there were big differences in how much remaining US forces should be there to provide security and airpower, especially. And I think that Dick was an advocate of a virtually permanent guarantee of airpower and resources, but not troops on the ground.

Timothy Naftali

How did you come to be legislative assistant?

John Lehman

Well, I came to be the legislative advisor and lobbyist for Kissinger, really by default because there was no such thing on the National Security Council at the time that we came in, and when Dick -- and I was assistant to Dick -- when he took over the base -- the overall base study, the -- that was all full of congressional relations because the Symington subcommittee, the foreign affairs committee, was holding a series of hearings -- a major series of hearings on foreign commitments and overseas commitments of which the bases were seen to be a central part. So I became a -- by default, when Dick

left the base study and the Symington subcommittee were really my portfolio. So I found myself spending half my time on the Hill on this -- what became a major onslaught against the administration's Vietnam policy. And this was sort of the forum for the -- the "end the war" group at the time. And so gradually, since I was the only one doing that, anything that came up having to do with Congress tended to end up on my desk. So it was a great opportunity for me, because Dick had a big portfolio when he left, and everybody else was so busy in the National Security Council on their own portfolios that suddenly when Dick departed, I was the only guy there with the inbox, so I ended up working on all the classified issues, the War Powers Amendment, and the European troop levels reductions initiatives. It became a very, very busy time. So it was a great experience for me. It was a great opportunity, because by default I was the -- I was the congressional relations person. So -- and I stayed as Henry's Hill advisor for -- until he left the White House, basically.

Male Speaker

Okay, stop there, and we'll change tapes.

Male Speaker

And we're back on.

Timothy Naftali

Mr. Lehman, you mentioned that you were a Naval Reserve Officer five years running, you went to Vietnam in the summers.

John Lehman

That's right, yes. I had been a Naval reserve intelligence officer and later became an aviator. And I did my summer active duty in Vietnam every year that I was on the National Security Council Staff. And it's -- it was invaluable to me, because I could both get to where I wanted to go, or where the action was, and yet I could be a lieutenant JG and not -- not get -- you know, get the snow jobs and the -- and the party line had I been a VIP and a senior -- or a senior officer. So it was very valuable to me, and Al Haig used to sort of point me in the directions that he wanted to check things out, and so I would get assigned to, usually the Naval units, sometimes the Marines and once or twice to Army units that were in the middle of the action, because it gave me an opportunity to really get a feel from the -- the troops' point of view, rather than the VIP visiting fireman point of view, and certainly those experiences impressed me very much, because by the time I -- my first trip over there was the summer of 1969, and by then Vietnamization was in full swing. It's not as if there hadn't been -- I mean, what the Nixon administration adopted was the point of view of many younger thinkers in the Army and in the Pentagon, and more senior ones like John Paul Vann, who had been advocating this. So it was in full swing by the time I first got there. So it gave me a chance each year to see the progress or lack of progress that was going on. And really, by 1972 -- I was over there during the Easter Offensive -- there was no doubt in my mind, particularly when I was over there in August of '72 with Vann, that Vietnamese -- Vietnamization had worked, that I saw firsthand the Vietnamese Army, the 22nd Division, the 21st Division, throw back what was as purely conventional attack. The guerilla war was over. After Tet, they had really shot their best bolt, and after the Tet Offensive, it became much more of a conventional war, and in '72 it was a conventional invasion by armored forces across the DMZ, initially, since it had been such a surprise it rolled back the South Vietnamese forces, because by then

all of the US forces were out except for the air support being given by the carriers and from the Thai - US Air Force bases.

But the Vietnamese regrouped. It started in April. The North had pushed the South all the way down, almost to Tu Chor, [phonetic sp] and in the Central Highlands, had taken Pleiku and Kontum, and -- but by August, they were pushing the North Vietnamese out of Vietnam; they were defeating them. They were beating them in battle after battle. They retook Pleiku. They retook Kontum. They pushed them back out of Hai Chor [phonetic sp]. I was there during the Battle of Quang Tri. They had taken Quang Tri very early on, and I spent a week with the Vietnamese Marines and they retook that in a very bloody, hand-to-hand combat -- they defeated the North Vietnamese Army, with, of course, American airpower support, which was pretty essential. But it was very clear to virtually everybody there in the US advisory group that Vietnamization had succeeded. Yes, there were continuing problems with corruption and political generals, but for the most part the generals were there because they were proven fighters. They really did quite a remarkable job. Then I was back the following summer in '73, and then in '74, when -- after the -- basically, the rug had been pulled out by Congress. And it was the most searing and troubling experience I've ever had in the government, because we really, I felt, as did, I think, everybody involved from Kissinger on down, but it was hard for me to spend three weeks over there with the Vietnamese Air Force and the Vietnamese Army, who had had the rug pulled out from under them, having won militarily on the ground, to have Congress cut off not just American military support, because that had been already withdrawn, but to cut off the funds, to prohibit ammunition, to prohibit any support whatsoever, cut off spare parts to the Vietnamese Air Force that we had just, you know, outfitted, it was a searing experience because -- I remember I was up in the Central Highlands at a fire support base, and over the A Shau Valley, I could see, through the binoculars, the Vietnamese -- the North Vietnamese -- building the highway so their tanks could go down south through the A Shau Valley, and you know, I said, "Why aren't you guys firing at these guys?" He said, "Because we're down to our last hundred rounds, and that has to last us for three months." And it was just tragic, because after all of the blood and treasure that had been spilled to reach that point, to have the US betray -- and there's no other way to say it -- betray its allies in such a way was heartbreaking. It really tested one's patriotism to be an American during that period, to see what the effects of that congressional cutoff was.

Timothy Naftali

That's what you witnessed in the summer of '74?

John Lehman

Yes, yeah.

Timothy Naftali

Before we return to this issue, two points from the earlier period. One -- and maybe you apocryphal but could you recall -- there's a story of how Henry Kissinger introduced you to Nelson Rockefeller.

John Lehman

Yes, well, I had met Rockefeller before, but one -- I mean, because he was vice president, so I had attended meetings with him and so forth, but one night, it was about eight o'clock and I went over to --

over to the -- Kissinger's office. My office was over in the Old Executive Office Building across the street, and I went over to the West Wing to bring Henry something he'd asked for, a piece of paper, and we were talking about it and Nelson Rockefeller walked in -- and Henry and he were very close, of course, friends -- and he -- they got talking and Rockefeller said, "You know, I'm -- I've got to hire a new policy person. I've had such a hard time getting good staff, and I read everyday in "The Washington Post" how you're running the whole government. You've got the sharpest staff ever assembled, the NSC staff is making all of the policy in town, where do you find such -- all these good people?" And Kissinger looked at me and he said, "Nelson, you have this all wrong. Look at Lehman here, an Irishman with a Jewish name. If I had it the other way around, I'd really have something." So, I mean, Henry had a -- still has a wonderful sense of humor. And it was as great experience working for him, because he had a terrible temper, but it was -- it was a great kind of safety valve, because he would blow his stack and scream at you, but then five minutes later, it was all over, and he'd go back to talking about the policy that you'd just recommended and had been screamed at for, so... It was -- I loved working for him. He was -- it was never a dull moment. He was a tough taskmaster, but if you had a good idea, he listened, and it went forward. And that was really satisfying. Dick Allen was a terrific guy to work for, too. I mean, he had a similar sense of humor, and -- but he was -- I think Henry had a little more kind of cynicism born of more experience and so forth. Dick was still very, very much a -- you know, he wanted to get things done, the right thing -- anybody who was -- who was not agreeing with doing what obviously had to be done should be gotten out of the way, and it was terrific. He was very energetic, and very, very bright. I mean he really cut to the chase on all of the difficult policy issues. I guess the biggest compliment that you could pay to Dick is the fact that Henry felt that he was potentially such an intellectual threat that he needed to be sent on to other things.

Timothy Naftali

On Dick Allen, you mentioned something as we started that you -- he initiated -- who initiated the list of leaks?

John Lehman

There had been a series of newspaper articles, one of which involved me, and I had -- being in congressional relations, I could see so much during that period, so anything that was embarrassing that came in a classified cable from the embassy in Saigon or whatever that would cast the Vietnamese -- South Vietnamese in a bad light, or some investigation of Thieu or something like that would immediately come out and appear in the "Washington Post," and we knew because, you know, the reporters, guys like John Osborne or the "New Republic" and the guys covering the Hill in the "Washington Post" were the guys who were writing the stories. And so you knew where they came from. And of course those guys, being pros, played both sides of the street. And while they wouldn't reveal their source, they would reveal where the source was. So we knew where the leaks were coming from. And at a dinner party, a private party where a bunch of staff -- Hill staffers were, I was decrying this inability to maintain security that -- and I said that Fulbright and his staff were leaking things -- anything that came to their hands that was embarrassing to the Vietnamese or the Nixon administration's effort. Well, unfortunately that appeared in "The Washington Post" the next day, and Bill Rogers, the Secretary of State, whom I've had -- I still have great admiration for -- he was trying to build, as one must with the chairman of the foreign affairs committee, the -- a relationship with Fulbright, and so he met with President Nixon in the Oval Office and said, "You've got to get rid of this guy Lehman, he's -- you know, he's shooting his mouth off, and this is so disruptive there's no way I can go back to Fulbright without saying that we've done something, because we've got to build this

relationship with Bill Fulbright." And Nixon furrowed his brow and he said, "Henry, what do you think about this?" And before Henry could reply, Nixon said, "Well, I'll tell you what I think. I think you should promote Lehman tomorrow." And so I heard the story because I thought I was a goner because I'd heard that Rockefeller -- that Bill Rogers was -- wanted to get -- hand Fulbright my scalp. And so afterwards, Haig -- Al Haig told me the story of what had happened in the meeting. But there was a growing paranoia about these leaks, and so I think -- as I recall, the president asked Kissinger and Kissinger asked Dick, although I'm a little fuzzy on the chain. I know I got asked by Dick Allen to put the -- to compile -- "Okay, you're getting headlines for saying they're leaking, show us the -- where is the meat here? Give us the citations." So I compiled a whole list of dozens of newspaper articles based on classified information. And it was a very thick compendium, and I gave that to Dick and I -- and it then went into the president, and that led to -- I don't know the exact sequence of who spoke to whom, but after that the plumbers were set up. And so I guess it's a kind of a historic document in that all it is is just a list of newspaper citations.

Timothy Naftali

This was in '69?

John Lehman

Yeah.

Timothy Naftali

So wasn't this a problem for Kissinger when he came up for confirmation? Wasn't there some concern about what questions he'd be asked about wiretapping when he was up to be Secretary of State?

John Lehman

Well yeah, I mean, that certainly was -- I mean, I was still working for Henry at the time, and in fact as head of legislative -- his chief legislative guy. I kind of -- it was Tom Korologos and I that really managed his confirmation hearings. And I don't know whether the wiretapping issue had broken then, or -- I don't recall it as having been a big issue in that confirmation hearing. I mean, the -- a lot of that didn't, I don't believe, come out until later in the whole Watergate sequence. I just don't recall.

Timothy Naftali

It was the summer of '73, so some of that was already out.

John Lehman

Yeah, but whether -- and it wasn't Henry that had ordered this. The wiretaps -- the later wiretaps with Mort Halperin's suit against him and so forth, I don't think were related to the taps that were put on by the FBI that led -- that were the big issue, the CIA and so forth. So I don't recall that being a particular issue with Henry in the confirmation. There are lots of other issues. I'll never forget one little anecdote that still impressed because I was up on the Hill -- right outside the caucus room is a men's room, right beside the elevator. And so I was talking to Kissinger during one of the breaks, and he had to go in and use the head, and so he's standing there using the head and I'm talking to him standing over by the

sink, and all of the sudden out of one of the stalls bursts this guy and rushes over and grabs Kissinger on the shoulder and starts screaming at him, "You're a murderer, you're responsible for millions of deaths, and you killed -- " I forget exactly what it was, and I was horrified, and I went over -- ran over and grabbed the guy and pulled him away, and Henry just was as cool as a cucumber. I mean, it -- he didn't even break flow, he just kept right on, looked at this guy as if he was what he was, a nut, and he never flinched or stopped anything. I pulled the guy away and Henry finished doing what he was doing and went over, washed his hands, and this guy was still screaming, and it was --

Timothy Naftali

You knew he'd do well before Congress then.

John Lehman

Yes, he was a -- he was a cool customer. He was not easily flustered, so I figured the rest of the hearings would be a piece of cake, but --

Timothy Naftali

Well, let's go back in time -- wanted to talk to you about Cambodia in 1970.

John Lehman

Yeah.

Timothy Naftali

Cooper-Church -- you have a tremendously interesting description of that era. Don't have time to go into the details, but let's talk about the [unintelligible]. What was the debate about letting Congress in on what you were -- on the incursion beforehand, and how to do it and when to do it?

John Lehman

Well, as I recall, there wasn't much of a debate because by that time, everybody in the White House was so convinced that anything given to Congress would leak that the basis for going into the sanctuaries in Cambodia was really the strong, strong recommendation of the chiefs who had been chafing under the -- seeing these sanctuaries where they could just duck over the border and regroup and store their supplies and have all their logistics and so forth. And certainly with Kissinger's view and the president's view that the Vietnamese had to be given a chance, this was to be the last use as -- they would be the last really American forces left before they all left shortly thereafter. And so since it was military and not political, they believed that they should keep it very tight, and not tell Congress, in effect, because they were sure it would leak and the North Vietnamese would get the benefit as they had so often in previous military operations that had been leaked. So as I recall, that was -- it was -- I don't recall any debate. I think certainly concerns were raised that this would certainly exacerbate relations with Congress, but I think that the president felt and Kissinger felt that this was a military, not a political operation, and so operational security had to take precedence over congressional relations. I think it was as simple as that. But I don't think anybody -- nobody that I recall ever thought that it would precipitate the kind of reaction in -- not only in Congress, but in the public at large that it did,

and led to Kent State and all of these other things that -- and as a result, I think that the president's advisors -- the domestic advisors, Haldeman and Ehrlichman from the stories -- I wasn't in the meetings, but stories that I have heard -- they really panicked, particularly after Kent State, and convinced the president that he had to end the incursion before the objectives were basically met. That certainly was Al Haig's view, as I recall it, and Kissinger's view.

There was great frustration that, having taken the heat, they pulled back before the real benefits were achieved. And -- but, I mean there's no question the firestorm that was erupted, I'll never forget having, you know, the White House at the time, they had to surround it with buses, bumper to bumper buses, to protect the White House from the -- from the -- all of the demonstrators. And I'll never forget having to -- all of us on the NSC had to dress like we were part of the demonstrators to get in, and we'd have to -- because otherwise you couldn't get through. If you were dressed like you were working at the White House, you wouldn't be able to get near the place. And so we'd go up and find a place where nobody was paying much attention, and you'd literally have to crawl under the bus to get through, and on the other side, quick, show your White House pass before you got bludgeoned. And then, working in the old Executive Office Building, where the old NSC staff was, you had to walk -- they had National Guard troops in the basement, and -- sitting down in the basement, and you had to carefully walk through the weapons and the legs to get to the elevators. And that was everyday for I don't know how many -- ten days or so -- I mean, it was -- that's when Nixon went out to the monument and talked to some of the demonstrators. It was -- nobody expected that. Nobody foresaw that there'd be such a tremendous reaction. Of course, after -- when Kent State happened, that was -- then it was understandable. But before then, the reaction was so strong that it surprised everybody.

Timothy Naftali

Can you tell us a little bit about William Rehnquist's role in helping fashion the argument for executive privilege when Congress reacted by trying to place limits on [unintelligible]?

John Lehman

Yes, Bill Rehnquist was the -- I forget the name, the exact title -- but he was the General Counsel, in effect, for the Justice Department. And so he and I really were the main task force to put together the congressional strategy and marshal the arguments on executive privilege. And Bill really wrote the briefs on that. His view of executive privilege, I think, has stood the test of time. The current administration would not like his views, and if you read those papers, I mean he -- I think he really understood there were very clear limits on executive privilege and executive power, but that those limits needed to be -- I mean the powers had to be actively defended all the time, that there was no clear delineation between the executive powers and the legislative powers in these regards, and that the intentions of the framers were -- they understood, when you read the Federalist papers, they understood that this was going to cause contention, and they purposely left it for politics to decide actually where the line -- the clear -- there was no clear delineation. There were overlapping -- there are in the Constitution -- overlapping powers over national security, and so it's left for events to decide. So Bill's view was always that it was essential to -- for the executive branch to defend its executive authority in national security, but not to take it beyond what clearly was constitutionally envisioned. So I was very impressed with his grasp of the issue and his willingness to speak up for the limits that really were there, because every president would like to have no limits. And I think in the current administration, and in instances in the previous administration, there -- the attorney general did not have the benefit of as good advice, I think, as Bill Rehnquist provided, because Nixon never really

made the kind of far-reaching claims to executive authority that have been made by some subsequent presidents.

Well, Bryce Harlow was considered the wise, political head in the White House, and I like Bryce. He was -- he'd been through a lot, he was Eisenhower's -- he worked in Eisenhower's congressional relations, and he was Nixon's head of congressional relations. I think Bryce was a very steadying influence, but I think a lot of his -- he was part of the club of the Russells and Stennises, and the kind of southern Senators and -- and the old House members that really ruled for so long because of the seniority system: they had almost absolute power over the -- the purviews under their influence, like armed services in the case of Russell and Stennis, and Carl Vinson virtually ran naval policy for many years. And Bryce was very much of that era. And he believed that, you know, deals could always be made, and that a combination -- grounds for common compromise, common interests between a Democratic Congress and a Republican executive could always be found. And in his day, while it tends to be exaggerated, that was usually the case. But Vietnam had polarized things so badly, I mean today's Congress, even though it's lower maybe ever in history at 11 percent favorable rating, and it's bitterly polarized on partisan lines, there isn't yet -- and hopefully never will be -- the level of bitterness, of personal bitterness that characterized the relations between Congress and the executive in those days. And it wasn't strictly on Democratic and Republican lines. It was, you know, the Clifford Cases and the "moderate" Republicans were aligned with the Fulbright wing of the Democratic Party, and the Jackson wing of the Democratic party were aligned more with the president. So it was not strictly -- it wasn't a bitterness along party lines, it was a bitterness along ideological lines, which is even worse. And I don't think Bryce -- I don't think he really got it. I mean, it was so -- it was the first time it had happened in anybody's memory. Never in World War II or the Korean War had there been that kind of animosity and bitterness that led to, you know, we're still living with the legacy of the criminalization that came out of that with the special prosecutors -- the criminalization of what was inherently a policy process -- all the whistleblower laws and the anonymous hotline Gestapo system that's now in place, and all of that came out of that bitter, bitter, bitter personalized Vietnam era, and Bryce -- I just don't think he got it. I don't think he -- his prior life so successful in guiding presidents, in dealing with -- with the [unintelligible] of the old system of seniority in Congress, whereas Tom Korologos and Bill Timmons, who worked for him, they got it, because they grew up in the more modern era of bitterness. So I think that, while Bryce was always a good, positive steadying hand, it was Tom Korologos and Bill Timmons that provided the best operational advice for the president's congressional relations.

Timothy Naftali

Did you play any role in the -- in the safeguard, in getting the votes for the ABM -- the ABM system, I mean?

John Lehman

Yeah, very much so, I was very much involved in the safeguard system in all of the legislative battles we had -- the trident, the trident submarine. That was as big a fight as the -- as the ABM. And the -- every issue was a big fight then. So -- but again, we worked out of -- the headquarters was the Vice President's office and Scoop Jackson's office. And John Tower and the Republicans, sort of their war room was in the vice president's office, and the -- the Jackson wing worked out of Scoop Jackson's office. So it wasn't Republican-Democrat, it was the sort of committee on the present danger: Democrats aligned with the Nixon administration -- not on everything, but on these big national

security votes like ABM and like Trident submarine and the Minuteman III, the MIRV, and the troop levels in Europe, the Mansfield Amendments. So in a way it was a healthier kind of battle, because it was not drawn along partisan lines the way it is today.

Timothy Naftali

Is that how you guys know Richard Perle? Wasn't he in Scoop Jackson's office?

John Lehman

I -- you know, I first met Richard Perle really outside of Congress and the administration, but at a conference at Airlie House, which was, you know, a big conference center outside of Washington. And I was very impressed by -- we spent a couple of days debating these issues in this conference, and we found ourselves on the same side of the issue in reinforcing one another, so we got to know each other socially, and then when I was working the Hill -- obviously I worked with him and Dorothy Fosdick -- he was really working for Dorothy, and she was the main national security person on Scoop's staff. And Scoop was so close to Nixon on policy issues that we never did anything without basically clearing it with Scoop.

Timothy Naftali

Wasn't Paul Wolfowitz in this orbit too?

John Lehman

Paul was brought into the orbit -- the original orbit was a poker group including George Will and Bill Schneider, and Paul had not yet come into the scene. He was recruited later by Freddie Clay when Fred was appointed head of ACDA, and that was, I think, around '72, '73. It was after the first SALT -- big SALT I battle. And Paul at the time was up at Yale, on the faculty at Yale. So our group really -- Bill Schneider at the time worked for Senator Buckley, and George Will worked for Senator Allen of Colorado, and of course, I worked for Kissinger. We used to play poker regularly, and we were good friends, social friends, and of course, we worked together because these were all key players on the Hill in getting these -- fighting these "end the war" amendments, getting ABM through, getting Trident through, and so it was -- it was an initial -- it was an interesting time with interesting people. And everybody, I guess, is still involved one way or another in policy issues.

Timothy Naftali

How did Jackson-Vanik affect the poker group?

John Lehman

Well, I think Jackson-Vanik was an issue that was not equally shared in enthusiasm. I mean, this was not a -- this was not an issue that the administration was particularly geared up on. It was -- Scoop felt very strongly about human rights issues, particularly with regard to Israel and with the Jews in the Soviet Union. And so that was an issue that -- I wouldn't say Jackson Vanik was an issue that the poker group took as part of its agenda in the way that the other national security issues were. It was really mainly a Jackson issue.

Timothy Naftali

How did the poker group feel about SALT -- about the way it had been negotiated?

John Lehman

Well, we were -- all of us were concerned about the SALT I agreement, that it had provided a -- it had codified a disparate balance that gave the Soviets a numerical advantage that could be translated into political leverage. And Kissinger knew of my views on it, and that's why he asked me to negotiate, see if I could negotiate with Jackson a deal to get Jackson's support. And so -- and that gave him plausible deniability, but everything I did with regard to offer and counteroffer I cleared with Henry and Al Hague, because they wanted to get -- they wanted to get Scoop to support it, and at the very least, not to block it, which Scoop had the votes to do.

Timothy Naftali

The deal involved the Trident, didn't it?

John Lehman

The deal involved the Trident, it involved the cruise missile, the commitment to go forward with the Tomahawk cruise missile, it involved -- there were a few other things -- I think development of the B-1 bomber. Because Kissinger's argument for accepting this imbalance was, "We don't have anything on the books, we inherited a bankrupt strategic system with no new initiatives, it's going to take us time to do this, and so this will give us that time to redress the balance." And so Jackson's view was, "Okay, that's what you say. Show me the money. Show me the commitment. Show me the decisions that are going to make this real." And so that's really -- that's really what the deal was they negotiated, that he would actually commit to do these things. And it's what led to something of a breach with Jackson later on, because Jackson signed on to SALT I, but then in SALT II, Jackson felt that Henry -- this is, of course, years later in the Ford administration -- had given away the Tomahawks and the backfire issue that he had pledge in SALT I to support to his dying day, so that was part of the --

Timothy Naftali

But you --

John Lehman

-- part of the rift.

Timothy Naftali

But you didn't agree with Kissinger's approach.

John Lehman

Well, you know, Kissinger -- I certainly agreed with, you know, Kissinger has always wanted or been tempted to want to have the favor of both sides in these debates. And so he liked to have plausible deniability that he was really for Tomahawk and pushing Tomahawk and pushing Trident. So I was in some ways a sacrificial -- I was the expendable person in that, "Well, that Lehman, he made this deal with Jackson." But I can assure you I did no such deal without Henry's blessing, and I thought that it was a -- it was a good deal. In order to get a firm commitment for the Trident and the Tomahawk -- which, as a naval person, I thought would be a tremendous benefit, more in its conventional than in its nuclear mode -- so I thought on balance it was a good deal. SALT I, as negotiated, limiting us -- limiting us to two ABM sites, leaving the Backfire free, accepting a three to two disadvantage in ICBMs was a bad deal, as such. But Kissinger was right in that there -- we had no programs underway to redress that balance. So, taking him on his word, it was the right thing to do. It was a good deal.

Timothy Naftali

Point question: I guess it was July of 1970, you're having these discussions with Rehnquist about executive privilege, and the president goes out in a press conference and basically says, "I will -- I'm keeping troops there because of my need to protect troops," which is a very narrow description of his ability to make foreign policy. You're upset by that, or at least in the book it's implied. Was Kissinger upset? Did he know the president was going to make that narrow claim?

John Lehman

No, to my knowledge this was something that came out of the domestic side of the White House. This was something that used to drive Henry and Al Haig crazy, that very often things would appear that did not come through Kissinger, and obviously came through Haldeman or Ehrlichman or one of the domestic side of the house, or came from the State Department, or somehow got into the president without going through Kissinger's filter. And this was clearly one of them, because we felt that this was going to lead to -- politically was a really weak, weak, almost laughable argument that would be made, even though, you know, you could construct a legal basis around it, it just wouldn't sell from a public relations point of view, and that, you know, this is one of the times when Kissinger used to just shake his head and keep -- and it was one of the reasons -- we chafed on the NSC staff about Kissinger and Haig keeping us totally separate from the rest of the White House staff. He really felt that very strongly, you know, keeping us out of the White House mess and that sort of thing. But he was right. He said that these people are going to bring this president down. And he said that in my presence a couple of times. He did not -- he really did not have much admiration for the domestic -- the top domestic guys on the White House staff.

Timothy Naftali

In your presence did he talk about the complicated nature of President Nixon?

John Lehman

No, I don't, you know, I did not -- I was not one of his drinking buddies, so I -- he didn't let his hair down quite that way. I mean, he would say things that were sometimes not complimentary, but overall, everything he ever said in my presence about Nixon showed a, I think, a very genuine respect, and -- as a kind of partner. He did not -- you know, he used to say things about everybody that could be taken

out of context to be very unfriendly, but there's no doubt in my mind he had a very deep respect for Nixon's grasp of policy and his intellect.

Timothy Naftali

Okay, and the last questions quickly. How did the Chilean action complicate relations -- congressional relations with the administration? To what -- in those days you didn't have oversight committees, but I assume you would tell the leadership about covert action, or maybe not.

John Lehman

Well, there were -- the senior leaders of congress were kept in the loop. And, in fact, I negotiated the ground rules for the foreign relations committee on the most secret and sensitive stuff, like at the time when the secret negotiations were going on on some of the intelligence matters. So there were always some people, the top people, usually the, you know, the Speaker of the House, the senior Republican, the chairman of Armed Services and Foreign Relations, they were briefed. They knew about those things. But there were no records kept, there were no notetakers allowed. I went to most of those meetings, and in fact, we had several, particularly on the Vietnam negotiations, where we briefed the whole Foreign Relations Committee. And no notes were taken, no staff was allowed except me and one Foreign Relations Committee guy. So they were kept in the loop, but it was the leadership that said you can't, you know, they were the ones who strongly advised not to generally brief the committees, Armed Services and Foreign Relations, and take it any wider than the top leadership. And by the way, that was the traditional way it was always done in the past.

Timothy Naftali

So they were -- were they briefed on Chile?

John Lehman

I'm sure they were, yeah.

Timothy Naftali

In your book, you mention that one of your strategies was to raise the profile of the Armed Services Committees to the same level as the Foreign Relations Committees.

John Lehman

Yes, right. Right, yes, we felt that the Armed Services Committees were where our -- the administration's supporters were, and that Foreign Relations had become, particularly during the Fulbright era, the sole forum for public debate in Congress and the televised hearings and so forth, and that we needed to build up Armed Services to at least an equal stature because they were basically where our supporters were, and that clearly that was where those who understood or specialized in, and had more depth of knowledge, of military and naval affairs were, so that's what we did. And we never briefed the one without briefing the other.

Timothy Naftali

You talk about '74 and the consequences of the suspension of aid to South Vietnam. You guys must have been working very hard to keep that alive.

John Lehman

Yes, yeah, that's right.

Timothy Naftali

Did you do anything wrong? Would you have done something differently?

John Lehman

We -- the key juncture was in -- well, particularly with regard to Cambodia, there was a proposal on the House floor and Jerry Ford was the Republican leader, and Kissinger -- I arranged a call from Kissinger to give -- with Jerry Ford to give Ford the ammunition to block it. And the delicate thing we were doing here was Kissinger had really made a deal with Zhou Enlai that there would be a negotiated settlement for Cambodia, in which Sihanouk could come back, the Chinese would stop the Vietnamese from supporting the Khmer Rouge, because the Chinese did not want to the Khmer Rouge, or especially -- and especially the Vietnamese to get control of Cambodia. And this deal had been negotiated with -- by Kissinger. And so Kissinger explained to Ford over the phone -- was a secure phone, I believe -- that this deal had been arranged for -- I forget the dates, but it was like was -- the debate was going on in, say, May, and said, "The agreement we have with the Chinese, I can't tell you any more than this, but this problem will be solved by September," or August, I forget the exact date. And so -- but he said, "We cannot have the -- you've got to stop this amendment," which was cut off all funds by July 30th or June 30th, the end of the fiscal year, or something like that. So Ford totally misunderstood and went out on the floor and said, "I have just talked to the White House, and they say they can live with a cutoff that is after the date that Henry had given them." So it just totally blew it, because we had the votes to block the amendment. And Jerry Ford gave it away.

Timothy Naftali

This is in '73?

John Lehman

Yeah, and so, the -- well, I'm not sure, was it '73 or '74? Because this was the Cambodia amendment, this was to cut off all support to Cambodia. I'm a little fuzzy on the exact dates, yeah. And then -- yeah, so it would have been '73. And so that was a key juncture, but the reality -- the larger picture was that Watergate, by then, had so crippled the presidency that we couldn't deliver the votes that needed to be -- to hold on to prevent these fund cutoffs. And whether tactically we did some wrong things I don't know, but the bottom line was that the president had lost all power, really, by then, and his ability to block things, his ability to use the carrots and sticks that presidents have to use -- to deal with the Congress was gone. And so -- and of course, the deal that Henry had cut for the peace settlement with the North Vietnamese also depended on a strong president because it depended on the threat to resume bombing if they violated the truce and invaded the South. Well, of course by '74 they knew -- late '74, they knew that there was no way the president was going to resume any action in Vietnam, so

they could move with impunity, which they did. And with the fund cutoff, it was handed to them on a silver platter.

Timothy Naftali

Last question. You witnessed, close-up, two different White Houses. How would you compare and contrast the Nixon and Reagan White Houses?

John Lehman

Well, I think that they're two very, very different people for sure. Nixon was very much involved in the details of national security, defense, foreign policy, and Reagan was not. Reagan really was a delegator. There was never any question which way the compass was pointing, but for instance in the issue of the 600-ship Navy when there were efforts within the administration to reduce the size of the Navy, cut the number of carriers, there was never any hesitation on Reagan's part. He would listen to me, and he'd hired me to do the Navy rebuilding and the other people in other parts of the staff, he wasn't interested in -- he'd listened to the Secretary of Defense, but he always backed me up in every battle I was ever in. I think Nixon was much more disposed to get into the details of every one of the battles, and he was very good, because he really had the depth and the experience base in it. But I think the -- one of the things that led to his downfall was that it was obvious, while he was fascinated by national security and foreign policy, he was totally bored by domestic policy, and he really delegated the domestic policy to his subordinates in cabinet. And so you might say he was not minding the store to the extent he should have because of his fascination with foreign policy and defense policy, which he was very good at. So a lot of difference -- I think that it was a lot easier, there was a lot more openness in the Reagan national security area, mainly because there was never anybody in charge for a long period of time in the Reagan years. It was a constantly changing set of players, and so the power really didn't reside in the national security advisor the way it did during the Nixon years. I mean everybody knew Kissinger was in charge for the Nixon years, and you went around him or through him at your peril. In the Reagan years, no one stayed in the job long enough to gather that kind of power, and as a result, there -- -- which we then developed further in the Tower policy committee, which was where the real platform and the Reagan national security policy program was honed and developed.

Timothy Naftali

Senator Tower.

John Lehman

Senator Tower, yeah. He was head of pretty much the same group, yeah. And was -- it actually included this -- Tower's group was the Republican policy committee in the Senate, but that was just the budget and the rubric under which this broader group met to develop the program in detail: the expansion to 18 divisions, the B1, and the support of -- the fleshing out of the whole national security program, so that we were -- it was well-developed, and it was in place, and of course, they put me in as the drafter in the Republican convention, so that the convention was word for word what had been developed in the Republican policy committee, which really included the Democrats from the committee on the present danger, so it was -- it didn't just come out of the blue.

Timothy Naftali

The 600 --

John Lehman

600 Ship Navy really came out -- was deducted from what the Navy has to do in different places in the world, what it takes to do each task, and what that leads to in the numbers of carriers and attack submarines. And then the strategic subs are a different add-on to that, and the total is -- came to 600. That's really where it came from.

Timothy Naftali

So when the last tape ended, you were mentioning making -- you were saying the consequences of this Reagan national -- the lack of a central player --

John Lehman

Yeah, I think a real problem with the Reagan approach to the National Security Council and the national security advisor was that there were so many changes and such a turnover in national security advisors, first with Dick Allen leaving and Judge Clark and John Poindexter, Bud McFarlane, all of them good people, but none of them had time, really, to build and hold a staff that could -- of the quality that could give the kind of coherence that Kissinger and his staff did. And as a consequence, there wasn't nearly -- because of the turnover, not because of any inadequacies of any of the individuals, but because of the constant turnover there was -- it allowed a lot of independent steaming, like Ollie North. And -- but luckily, you had strong cabinet officers, and a strong CIA director, strong secretaries of state, strong secretary of defense, strong service secretaries, so you could say you didn't need the kind of firm control that Kissinger asserted through the national security council.

Timothy Naftali

Why did that Tower -- old Jackson group turn against Kissinger? Because by the Reagan era, they're decrying Kissinger.

John Lehman

Yeah, well I think part of it was because they felt that in the SALT II, the effort to get SALT II, that deals that were done under the Nixon administration were not honored, specifically the cruise missile, the Tomahawk deal, the building of the -- rebuilding of the Navy, things like that. But a lot of it was, you know, I think, politics, and, you know, everybody -- when Carter won, many of the people -- many of Ford's people blamed it on Jackson blocking SALT II, which they had high hopes would turn the tide in the election. I don't think that is the case at all, but many of the Ford people blamed effort to block SALT II as the reason that Ford lost.

Timothy Naftali

You were out -- you weren't in the administration then.

John Lehman

Yes I was, I was -- at the time of the SALT II agreement, I was the acting director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, and I was at the NSC meetings, basically where they were blocked. And the blockers were basically Jim Holloway, who was the acting chairman of the Joint Chiefs, and Don Rumsfeld, and I argued against it, but the weight of ACTA in the scale was hardly very great, although they were disappointed, and President Ford particularly chastised me at the meeting for not being an advocate of arms control.

Timothy Naftali

Why did Rumsfeld block -- he --

John Lehman

Well, he felt -- and really he had first supported it, but then the chiefs convinced him that giving up the backfire and giving up cruise missiles, especially the Tomahawks, was a bad trade.

Timothy Naftali

And you agreed?

John Lehman

I agreed, yeah.

Timothy Naftali

Mr. Lehman, thank you for your time. This has been very helpful.

John Lehman

Pleasure.