



Charlie Rose interviews Zbigniew Brzezinski, Henry Kissinger and Brent Scowcroft

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Transcript of the [Charlie Rose show](#) of June 15, 2007, with guests Zbigniew Brzezinski, Henry Kissinger, Brent Scowcroft.

CHARLIE ROSE, HOST: Tonight, an extraordinary conversation with three foreign policy giants: Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, former National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft, and former National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski. I interviewed them in New York yesterday evening, at an event organized by the Center for Strategic and International Studies. The conversation took place at the Rainbow Room high above Rockefeller Center here in New York.

CHARLIE ROSE: We are at the top of Manhattan at the Rainbow Room this evening for a conversation about the future of American foreign policy with Henry Kissinger, former secretary of state, former national security adviser. Zbigniew Brzezinski, former national security adviser. And Brent Scowcroft, former national security adviser.

I want to begin this conversation with Henry Kissinger with this question, and which I hope everybody will respond to - where are we as we think about this time in American foreign policy? Are we at a special moment, which is being redefined? Are we creating a new world order? What are the forces shaping all this?

HENRY KISSINGER: We're at a moment when the international system is in a period of change like we haven't seen for several hundred years. In some parts of the world, the nation state, on which the existing international system was based, is either giving up its traditional aspects, like in Europe, or as in the Middle East, where it was never really fully established, it is no longer the defining element. So in those two parts of the world, there is tremendous adjustment in traditional concepts.

In Asia, the nation state still is extremely vital, and of course, then in Africa, a whole new pattern is emerging because the states in Africa reflected the preferences of the colonial powers when they were established.



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So all of these things are occurring simultaneously, and American foreign policy has to deal with all these aspects simultaneously, and there isn't a single recipe that fits all of them. And that is one of our dilemmas.

And another is that we are used to dealing with problems that have a solution and that can be solved in a finite period. But we're at the beginning of a long period of adjustment that will -- does not have a clear-cut terminal point, and in which our wisdom and sophistication and understanding is one of the -- has to be one of the key elements. And so all of these things are in play at this moment.

CHARLIE ROSE: Zbigniew, you said to me in a conversation last night on my program that there is a new global political awareness, which is central to

the future of America's foreign policy, how they recognize it, how they deal with it, how they plan for it.

ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI: That's right. I don't disagree with what Henry said, but ...

CHARLIE ROSE: Agree? Agree?

ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI: I don't disagree.

CHARLIE ROSE: You don't.

ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI: ... but my perspective...

HENRY KISSINGER: I've made great progress.

ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI: Don't be too optimistic.

HENRY KISSINGER: I take what I can get.

CHARLIE ROSE: Don't get -- don't get too excited, he says. The caveat comes.

ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI: The political awakening that is happening worldwide is a major challenge for America, because it means that the world is much more restless. It's stirring. It has aspirations which are not easily satisfied. And if America is to lead, it has to relate itself somehow to these new, lively, intense political aspirations, which make our age so different from even the recent past.

But the challenge that we face is rooted much more in the immediate problem, which we have partially created -- namely, we are the number one superpower today in the world. We are the only superpower. But our leadership is being tested in the Middle East, and some of the things that we have done in the Middle East are contributing to a potential explosion region-wide. And if that explosion gets out of hand, we may end up being bogged down for many years to come in a conflict that will be profoundly damaging to our capacity to exercise our power, to address the problems implicit in this global awakening, and we may face a world in which much of the world turns away from us, seeks its own equilibrium, but probably slides into a growing chaos.

So I think we're at a very critical stage, and I am personally very worried as to what might conceivably happen in the next 20 months. I'm optimistic after 2008...

ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI: But will there be a chance to make a turn and a change?

CHARLIE ROSE: Let me -- let me understand what you think might happen in the next 20 months that could have a profound influence on these ideas we are discussing.

ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI: Well, to be perfectly specific, the Israeli-Palestinian problem becomes very acute with Gaza dominated by Hamas. With

the possibility of the conflict escalating, not only in terms of Gaza but also the Hezbollah and Lebanon, with the continuing crisis in Iraq, which is very dynamic and unpredictable and which could get out of hand, and maybe even escalate and enlarge. Just think of what happened barely six weeks ago between the Iranians and the British and the sailors that were captured. Suppose they had been American Marines and they hadn't allowed themselves to be captured? I think we could have had a situation in which the president, rightly in my view, announces retaliatory action.

CHARLIE ROSE: He would have no choice.

ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI: He would have no choice, and I would support him. But that would then lead to other consequences, and before too long we could be involved in a conflict in Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. And there are some American statesmen who are publicly advocating American military action against Iran.

CHARLIE ROSE: Brent, as I suggested, you presided over the end of the Cold war along with the president you worked for and members of that administration, also the '91 war, which was successful because of coalition building and other issues. How do you see the moment we are at now, because it is fair to say, everyone knows you've been a critic of aspects of this war?

BRENT SCOWCROFT: I think along the lines of what my colleagues have said, this is a very different world. There are forces at work, which are new, like Zbig calls it political awakening. What has happened is that information technology has politicized the world's population.

For most of mankind, the average person knew what was happening in his own village and the next one, and nothing beyond that, and he didn't care, so that leaders were able to guide their countries almost irrespective of what people really thought because they weren't involved in it.

Now, everybody knows what's happening instantaneously. Everybody is within reach of a television set. And so they're all politicized, and they're all stimulated, and then they have these desires, pleasures, hates, resentments, and so on, and they're reacting instantaneously.

I'm not saying that's a cause of terrorism, but it certainly inflames it.

Secondly, you ask, are we stronger or weaker? The traditional measures of strength don't really apply so much ...

CHARLIE ROSE: Military, economic.

BRENT SCOWCROFT: Military and economic. And we're stronger than any -- any --

probably since the Roman Empire. But we can't do what used to be done with that kind of strength.

CHARLIE ROSE: Why is that?

BRENT SCOWCROFT: Because national borders are eroding, because of the growth of non-state actors. It's a different kind of a world. We are tied down by a tiny little country -- Iraq. It's amazing, given the disparity in military economic strength. It's a -- it's a world where most of the big problems spill over national boundaries, and there are new kinds of actors and we're feeling our way as to how to deal with them. I think it is less policy oriented than Zbig indicated. I think it's more systemic.

CHARLIE ROSE: Do we need to pay attention to America's credibility? Do you all agree it's suffered because of Iraq and other issues, and, therefore, it has to be addressed, or can it simply be addressed by doing the right thing on a range of issues?

HENRY KISSINGER: The important thing is to do the right thing. Then credibility will follow.

BRENT SCOWCROFT: Just to add what Henry said in historical terms. Perhaps the most troubling area in the world goes from the Balkans through the Middle East and in Central Asia.

CHARLIE ROSE: Right.

BRENT SCOWCROFT: If you look at the world's last empires, the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the Balkans, the Ottoman Empire in the Middle East, and the Russian and Soviet empire in Central Asia...

CHARLIE ROSE: If there's a war, that's where it's going to happen.

BRENT SCOWCROFT: Yeah. And now these -- these peoples are trying to discover who they are. Their boundaries are artificial. Their historical relationships are very different from what they are -- they're trying to discover who they are and to whom they belong.

CHARLIE ROSE: You talk about that, global Balkan struggle.

ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI: That's right. Well, I think there's a further dimension to it. I think Brent is quite right in focusing on that geographic part of the world.

CHARLIE ROSE: It really runs from the Suez Canal all the way over to the border of China.

CHARLIE ROSE: Brings in India, Pakistan, the Middle East, Saudi Arabia, as well as Turkey ...

ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI: Right.

CHARLIE ROSE: ... India, Pakistan...

ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI: I call that the global Balkans, because in some ways, it's similar to the European Balkans, which were internally conflicted, but had a suction effect on major powers, and that whole region is having that effect.

And I think we are really facing as a country the real risk of becoming bogged down in this larger spectrum of the global Balkans. And if we get bogged down, two things will happen. First of all, we're going to be largely alone. Most of the world will not be with us. A few client states, but that's all. And secondly, our global power will gradually be dissipated; our global standing will be undermined.

So we do face a very serious strategic, historical challenge, which we need to think through, and regarding which we need to draw some lessons, and be willing to change course.

CHARLIE ROSE: OK, let me -- Henry, but the lessons are what?

ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI: The lessons are that acting alone in a world that's alive in political stirring is to condemn oneself to isolation and probably protracted warfare of the kind that can be dissipating. The kind of problem that we face in Iraq is a little bit the kind of problem that Israel faced in dealing with Hezbollah. If the conflict, the theater of conflict enlarges, it's going to become more and more absorbing and more and more costly.

HENRY KISSINGER: The question is what does one mean by "getting bogged down?" We are there now. And consequences flow from that. In principle, one can say one shouldn't act alone, but once one is in the situation in which we are in Iraq, we have -- we cannot simply solve it by saying we should not get bogged down. Zbig and I have been putting on a performance on weekly television ...

ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI: Yes.

HENRY KISSINGER: ... and so we have the script fairly well rehearsed.

HENRY KISSINGER: And the issue really comes down...

CHARLIE ROSE: Yeah.

HENRY KISSINGER: Really, issue really comes down...

CHARLIE ROSE: This is mainly only about Iraq.

HENRY KISSINGER: How do we disengage from being the only power involved here? Can we simply pull out of there, or do we need a process of transition during which other countries get involved in the negotiating process and in trying to find a solution? There are other countries, for example, India, who have a great deal at stake in the radicalization of the Islamic world. So we are now there, and whether -- and simply withdrawing -- this is the real issue between Zbig and me, which I was hoping we would not get to here.

CHARLIE ROSE: And I was hoping we would.

HENRY KISSINGER: I knew -- I know it. I know that. But there is the real issue. And -- and my view is that we cannot conduct a debate about speed of withdrawal. We have to conduct a debate about what it is that we want to create there. To what extent, and interplay of diplomatic and military actions can -- can achieve it. And there, Zbig and I have different judgments.

CHARLIE ROSE: All right. Well, let's just have those judgments and I'll let Brent be the arbiter of who's right.

BRENT SCOWCROFT: I'd be happy to.

CHARLIE ROSE: Let me understand -- I'm serious, though. This is a serious question because of -- the resumes here are clear and respect among each other is clear, so what is it that we need to understand?

ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI: All right, well, first of all, one has to be willing to face the fact that what has transpired in Iraq is not exactly a very successful exercise.

CHARLIE ROSE: But I don't think anybody disagrees with that, do they?

ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI: OK, no, but it's important to reaffirm that, because that is exactly a symptom of being bogged down. And the willingness to acknowledge that helps to act as a restraint on the repetition of it elsewhere.

CHARLIE ROSE: Like Iran?

ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI: Like Iran. And there are people in this country -- not Henry, but there are some people in this country who are urging that, and we could stumble into that unless we're very alert to the risk involved.

Now, on that conflict itself, I think there is a legitimate question regarding how do we extricate ourselves. And it doesn't involve, in my judgment, just packing our bags and leaving, but a willingness to face the fact that this was not a very constructive enterprise is more likely to make us more committed, the notion of terminating the conflict or finding a formula for the Iraqis and for the region which enables us to disengage and avoid a repetition elsewhere. So there is a real choice here, a strategic choice. And I think we have to be very conscious of it.

BRENT SCOWCROFT: I think there's nothing more dangerous than mislearning lessons of history, and we do it perpetually. After the '30s, we said, "no more Munichs." And it got us in a lot of problems. Then we said, "No more Vietnams." Now if we say, "No more Iraqs," the next one won't be an Iraq. It will be something different. You can't learn lessons ...

ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI: No, wait a second. That's a great oversimplification. I'm perfectly willing to say no more Iraqs, which means no more unilateral starting of the war on false claims, false information, and a complete misunderstanding of the nature of the situation in the region.

BRENT SCOWCROFT: You know, we're not going to have another one exactly that way. But the real point ...

ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI: Iran.

BRENT SCOWCROFT: ... that we are where we are, and if we spend all of our time wringing our hands about how we got there ...

ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI: It's not a question of wringing hands.

BRENT SCOWCROFT: ... instead of what we do, and I think now to say we're bogged down, so let's unbog and pull out.

ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI: No, I didn't say let's unbog and pull out. I said, let's address the issue of how we deal with the Iraqis and how we deal with the region, recognize the fact that this is a misadventure, which it is in our interest to terminate and not to repeat. That's a rather important conclusion to draw, and a very important lesson ...

CHARLIE ROSE: You seem to be saying...

CHARLIE ROSE: It seems to me you're saying we need to learn the lessons of history.

ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI: That's right. Exactly.

CHARLIE ROSE: And not ...

ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI: And not disregard them. I don't think Vietnam was such a happy experience, either, frankly.

HENRY KISSINGER: I can testify -- I can testify to that.

ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI: Exactly.

CHARLIE ROSE: Yeah. You have personal experience.

HENRY KISSINGER: But the administration in which I served and in which Brent at that time served peripherally and wormed his way in ever deeper...

CHARLIE ROSE: You know, you know actually ...

HENRY KISSINGER: ... into the ...

CHARLIE ROSE: You know, actually, there are two different explanations of him working for you. His explanation was that you were looking for a Mormon, and he was a Mormon.

BRENT SCOWCROFT: Yeah.

CHARLIE ROSE: Your explanation is that you were looking for somebody who would say no, because you saw him say no to H.R. Haldeman.

HENRY KISSINGER: That's the truth.

(LAUGHTER)

HENRY KISSINGER: I saw him stand up under very difficult circumstances to somebody who was all-powerful, and -- at that time ...

CHARLIE ROSE: Right.

HENRY KISSINGER: ... and I wanted somebody with a little character.

CHARLIE ROSE: So the two of you were together in the West Wing...

HENRY KISSINGER: Let me make my point about Vietnam. When the Nixon initiation

came into office, there were 550,000 Americans in combat. And ending the war was not a question of turning off a television channel. And so, debating on how we got there and what judgments were made was not going to help us.

I was always convinced that decent people in the case of Vietnam, highly intelligent, decent people, got us involved because they had made, in part, a misjudgment about the nature of the communist system and the unity of the communist world and the degree to which the experience of Europe could be repeated in Vietnam.

That was not a moral issue. That was a mistake in judgment.

So we had the problem of how to extricate the United States. And we, after looking at various options, decided that to do it in a way -- the middle of the Cold War, that we did not lose control over -- over events. We withdrew gradually.

Now, I'm not going to go into whether this was absolutely right or not. But we face in this respect a comparable situation in Iraq. Not what mistakes may have been made in going into it, but how can we get out -- without -- and maintain the capability of contributing to shaping the kind of world that needs to be shaped ...

CHARLIE ROSE: So that's ...

HENRY KISSINGER: ... for the reasons that I gave earlier.

CHARLIE ROSE: That's the issue today -- how do we maintain our capability? How do we get out of Iraq so we can maintain our capability to shape the world as far as you're concerned.

HENRY KISSINGER: Iraq has to be made an international, and not just a national American problem. And I actually am somewhat encouraged by this foreign ministers' conference that took place at Sharm el-Sheikh, in which all the neighboring countries, plus Iran and Syria, plus the permanent members of the Security Council, and plus Egypt, participated. And I think that is a forum at which one could discuss an international status of Iraq that at least calms the situation enough so that it doesn't have such an effect that Zbig was talking about.

BRENT SCOWCROFT: You see, I think Henry's right there. If you look back at the first Gulf war, the Arabs sent forces, they sent money. So their interests in Iraq are clear, but they're nowhere to be seen now. Why? Because right now, it's dangerous to be seen as supporting the United States.

ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI: But -- but a deliberate or not deliberate can be argued forever, but the fact is, the premises on the basis of which the war was pursued were not accurate, were false. And the United States embarked on a solitary operation on the basis of a lot of additional erroneous assumptions, regarding what will transpire in Iraq.

CHARLIE ROSE: Or what to do after the toppling of Saddam.

ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI: Yes, precisely. So there are important lessons to be learned from this, given the fact that we're facing a continuing crisis in the region, whether between the Israelis and the Palestinians, or Hezbollah, or most important of all, Iran.

And I think it is essential that we do not stumble into a stupid war with Iran.

CHARLIE ROSE: Right.

ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI: Which would be devastating to us.

CHARLIE ROSE: We now see a kind of violence we have not seen between Hamas and Fatah in Gaza. Is that significant in terms of the larger picture? What if Hamas simply blows them away and takes control? What are the -- is that a serious blow for any effort to find some kind of Palestinian-Israeli peace, and, therefore, the creation of a Palestinian state?

ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI: Well, let me answer this one first. I think the answer, first of all, is yes. Secondly, we're dealing with a problem in which Arab nationalism, which tended to be until relatively recent somewhat secular in motivation, has now become increasingly religious and fundamentalist. And that makes it more pervasive, more difficult to deal with. And I think that's a problem we're facing with Hamas and the failure of the Fatah. But I think we also have to ask whether we ourselves were pursuing the wisest policy regarding this problem over the last several years.

CHARLIE ROSE: Whether we've exercised our power to influence?

ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI: We have exercised our power to insist on elections in Palestine, which Hamas did win. Once they won, we then engaged in a policy not only of ostracism, but by financial boycott, in effect of undermining it, and creating more tension and radicalism and poverty in Gaza, which was susceptible to exploitation by Hamas.

Could we have done otherwise? Hamas refused to recognize Israel, but it is also a fact that it declared a cease-fire, which is a kind of a de facto accommodation to an existing reality. I think it would have been wiser to pursue a policy of exploring the degree of flexibility, of dealing with them, trying to expand the cease-fire into some sort of security negotiations, and then eventually move towards recognition. I think the boycott, the ostracism, contributed to this climate, which is now exploding into escalating violence.

CHARLIE ROSE: With that happening, with the weakened government in Israel, is this a moment for the United States to play a larger role, and if so, what is it?

HENRY KISSINGER: Our primary attention should be on focusing where we go from here. On the Palestinian issue, we're in a strange situation that almost all the parties, with the possible exception of Hamas, agree on what a settlement should look like. What we are -- usually, you have parties and you argue about a settlement. Here you almost have a settlement, but you have no parties.

CHARLIE ROSE: But when you include that, you include the future of Jerusalem, as well as a right to return?

HENRY KISSINGER: No, the right of return, only to the Palestinian state. I think there is a sort of a general agreement of a settlement based on the '67 borders, plus the settlements around Jerusalem to be compensated by some Israeli territory. The right of

return of Palestinians to the Palestinian state but not to Israel, and the capital of the Palestinian state in the Arab part of Jerusalem, which remains to be defined what that is, in a negotiation. I think there's a considerable consensus emerging on both the Israeli side and on the Arab side, minus, perhaps, Hamas.

BRENT SCOWCROFT: I think we have to do more than be a broker now. Because both the Palestinians are weak and Israel is very weak. And I think -- I agree -- I agree with Henry -- 90 percent of the solution has been apparent since 2000. That doesn't mean it's not serious, the problems that are remaining, but they're -- they're -- they're solvable.

But I also agree with Zbig that we thought we could deal with Hamas being in the government by driving them out, and the result is a near civil war. The external head of Hamas, Mashaal, who is ...

CHARLIE ROSE: Right.

BRENT SCOWCROFT: ... who is in Damascus, he didn't recognize Israel but he says, "We must realize Israel is a fact, and it's a fact which we'll endure."

CHARLIE ROSE: So, that was an opportunity.

BRENT SCOWCROFT: Now the art of diplomacy is to take that and turn it into something.

CHARLIE ROSE: Why did we not do that?

BRENT SCOWCROFT: Well, because I think -- I think rightly or wrongly, we thought we can -- we can beat Hamas with Fatah. And it so far looks the other way around.

CHARLIE ROSE: I want to get to Russia just -- with you, but let me just understand Iran.

HENRY KISSINGER: I think Iran ought to be brought into the negotiation, and the proposition to Iran should be if you are a country that wants to participate in this region, we are willing to discuss an arrangement that (inaudible) your security, because if the cauldron in Iraq boils over, it's -- it will affect us all, if everybody pushes things to the extreme.

But we have to be careful in negotiating with Iran that we don't create the impression among the Arab states and the Sunni states that we are working on a condominium between Iran and the United States, because that will panic them and drive them into making their own arrangement.

ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI: Henry has mentioned the two aspects of the negotiating process, one pertaining to Iraq, and security in Iraq, especially after we leave; and the other one is a nuclear problem. There's a curious differentiation between these two in negotiations.

On Iraq, we're prepared to negotiate with the Iranians, more or less on the basis of symmetry, without special preconditions, because we both recognize we have a stake in finding some common approach.

On the nuclear issue, we have a very different position. We're insisting that the Iranians, as the price for negotiating with us, abandon something to which they actually have under international law, a right, which is to enrich up to 5 or so percent, which is exactly all that they're doing at this stage, because we are afraid that if they do that, they will gain greater capacity to acquire nuclear weapons.

But what we are saying to them, in effect, is give up that right in order to negotiate with us about the nuclear problem.

My view is that this creates an obstacle to negotiating process, because it creates an asymmetry. The Iranians have to pay a price for the dialogue. I think it would be much more sensible for us to take the position that, yes, we want the Iranians to suspend enrichment, at least for the duration of some of the negotiations, in return for which we are prepared to lift some of the sanctions we have adopted against Iran over the last 15 years, some of which are quite painful and quite difficult to the Iranians.

And that would make it easier for the Iranian regime then to swallow its pride and to say, OK, they're negotiating with the United States. They're suspending enrichment, but also because they've obtained some American concessions.

I think that would set the process in motion. And then we would see what happens. The fact is that one significant way the Iranians have a posture different from the North Koreans, the North Koreans basically are saying we have a nuclear program. We are seeking weapons. We have produced weapons. We're proud of the fact that we have weapons.

CHARLIE ROSE: Right.

ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI: The Iranians are saying, we're not seeking weapons. We don't want to have weapons. Our religion forbids us to have weapons. They may be lying -- we suspect they're lying -- but it creates an opening, because in these negotiations we could then say to the Iranians, you have these three postulates, then help us establish an arrangement whereby we are confident that while pursuing a nuclear program, you're not pursuing weapons. And I think there are some ideas on the subject that could then be fruitfully explored.

BRENT SCOWCROFT: But I think above all, what we need with Iran is patience.

CHARLIE ROSE: Yes.

BRENT SCOWCROFT: It's not for nothing that the Iranians are known as rug merchants. They are.

CHARLIE ROSE: Yeah.

BRENT SCOWCROFT: And they will negotiate and they will offer and they will withdraw and so on. We need great patience.

CHARLIE ROSE: Right.

BRENT SCOWCROFT: And we all need to stay together. Right now, the Iranians think they can play us off against the Europeans, against the Russians and the Chinese and

get ...

CHARLIE ROSE: But should we have, though, bilateral talks with them?

BRENT SCOWCROFT: Oh, I have no problems with bilateral talks ...

CHARLIE ROSE: OK.

BRENT SCOWCROFT: ... but I think on the nuclear thing, it should not be bilateral.

HENRY KISSINGER: First of all, with respect to patience, I'm all for it, as long as we remember that something is going on all the time. And we don't want the nuclear weapons to ...

CHARLIE ROSE: The more patient we are, the closer they get to a nuclear weapon.

BRENT SCOWCROFT: No, I -- I agree with that, but ...

HENRY KISSINGER: That's one thing to keep in mind. The second is -- and this is just a question of method -- we can speculate forever what combination of particular moves might break the deadlock. I think what we should at least attempt is to have a quiet negotiation with some high-level Iranian to determine where we're trying to go in this exercise. What are we trying to accomplish? And if we can agree on that, then we can be more patient, because we'll at least have the framework rather than ...

CHARLIE ROSE: But do we know who to talk to?

BRENT SCOWCROFT: Well ...

HENRY KISSINGER: But I don't want to have negotiations like a detective story, in which one side throws out clues and we have to guess at the answer.

BRENT SCOWCROFT: That was going to be my next point. You know, we have never recognized that Iran lives in a dangerous neighborhood. And it's not surprising that they want some protection. We have not been forthcoming about explaining a security relationship for the region, in which Iran can feel secure and thus maybe willing to do something ...

CHARLIE ROSE: OK.

BRENT SCOWCROFT: ... in our direction.

CHARLIE ROSE: Russia. Where are we today and what ought to be our policy?

BRENT SCOWCROFT: Russia right now is searching for its soul. It's trying to figure out what it really is. You know, since the days of Peter the Great, Russians have been maybe Europeans who didn't share in the enlightenment and the reformation, or are they Mongol Asians with the European veneer. And they've gone back and forth.

CHARLIE ROSE: But how will they decide?

BRENT SCOWCROFT: They're going to decide. We're not going to decide for them. We ought to make clear where we stand, but we're not -- they're not going to do what we

want them to do because we want them to do it.

ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI: We shouldn't overdramatize the current disagreements with the Russians. They are real, but they're not really all that threatening. And the notion that we're moving back to some Cold War I think is really an exaggerated judgment.

There are disagreements, but there are many overlapping interests, and this is the way we're playing it. And ultimately, this is also the way the Russians are playing it.

In the longer run, I happen to think that Russia really has no choice but to become gradually more associated with the Euro-Atlantic community. Because if it isn't, then it's going to find itself essentially facing China all by itself, facing the Euro-Atlantic community all by itself. And while it is awash with liquidity because of its present ability to export a lot of energy, that is actually a transitional arrangement. It's not going to last forever. There are already some indications as to what the time limit on that might be. And with its declining population, with people moving out of the Far East, with an enormously powerful China in the east, I think the real destiny of Russia is to become closer to the West.

And I happen to think that as the Ukraine moves to the West, towards the E.U., eventually towards NATO, it will pave the way also for Russia moving towards the West. Because it will become a logical extension of the same process, and it will eliminate any imperial ambitions. Because without Ukraine, Russia's imperial aspirations are essentially nostalgia, but it's not a real policy.

CHARLIE ROSE: Two quick questions and (inaudible) on Russia. One, is the expansion of NATO a good idea, or is it an ongoing good idea, and is it a good idea to put nuclear defense in Czechoslovakia or wherever else it might be?

ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI: I think if NATO haven't expanded, we would have a no-man's zone between the E.U. and NATO and Russia, and that would be very dangerous, and things such as, for example ...

CHARLIE ROSE: But did it make them more insecure?

ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI: I can't believe that the Russians really think they're more insecure because Estonia is in NATO. And we don't have forces poised in Estonia to attack Russia. So, I don't think that's real.

Now, what about the missile defenses? I frankly think that this was undertaken in a clumsy way, that this is a premature idea, that there is no real urgency about it at this stage, and for us to have pushed it the way we did, essentially engaging in conversation with the Czechs and the Poles about it, before either a serious discussion with the NATO or with the Russians, was not the best way to handle this problem.

HENRY KISSINGER: The problem is here is a country that has lost 300 years of its history, in terms of most of what was part of the Russian Empire in Europe, towards Europe, since Peter the Great, has been the -- the territory has -- it's no longer under Russian rule.

On the other hand, the Russian people, at least the ones I know, have pride in being a

Russian. And, therefore, they want to be taken seriously in international affairs.

CHARLIE ROSE: It's self-esteem.

HENRY KISSINGER: And, therefore, they want to get under their control the assets which they think are relevant to conducting foreign policy, and which they in turn interpret as a balance of benefits and penalties in a sort of a traditional -- traditional way.

The mistake we make with many people -- not just Russia -- is that we believe we have the model, and there is a sort of a condescension in our dialogue with other societies, which was especially painful in several administrations to Russia. I think in Russia, the Yeltsin period is not considered a period of great achievement, but a period of corruption and humiliation.

CHARLIE ROSE: Well, the Gorbachev period even less.

HENRY KISSINGER: And the Gorbachev period is conceived as an abandonment of historic Russian positions. So this is the framework, in my view, in which Putin operates. I look at what is going on now as the prelude to a negotiation. I do not believe that Putin intends to leave office in a Cold War atmosphere with the United States. But that is my ...

CHARLIE ROSE: So, he will not -- he will -- he will -- even though he said he's not going to stand for reelection, he will stand -- he will not give up office if in fact ...

HENRY KISSINGER: Well ...

CHARLIE ROSE: ... if certain circumstances are in place.

HENRY KISSINGER: If everything goes as it's now planned, or as it is now apparent, it will be the first peaceful transfer by constitutional methods of power in Russian history without the deaths of the leader.

CHARLIE ROSE: That's an interesting point. Do you agree with that, both of you, that Putin may very well not give up power?

HENRY KISSINGER: No, I think he will give up power.

CHARLIE ROSE: But -- oh, I see, you do.

HENRY KISSINGER: I think he will give up power.

BRENT SCOWCROFT: He will give up his office.

HENRY KISSINGER: He will give up his office.

CHARLIE ROSE: Become head of Gazprom.

HENRY KISSINGER: How -- yes, how will -- well, I don't know what he will do. And I don't think anybody in Russia can tell at this moment whatever the plan is.

CHARLIE ROSE: Right.

HENRY KISSINGER: Whether somebody not in office can actually exercise power. It's never happened in Russia before. So I don't know this.

I agree with Zbig that this is not a strategic confrontation. And it should not be talked into a strategic confrontation. We cannot give Russia veto over deployment of forces on NATO territory. But we have to understand their particular sensitivities, and, therefore, there should be a dialogue on these issues.

I think this proposal on the Azerbaijan radar station is extremely interesting, not as a substitute for what is going on in Poland, but as a state of mind that can envision Iran as a security problem with which we will deal jointly. That is something that in my view ...

CHARLIE ROSE: Right.

HENRY KISSINGER: ... ought to be explored.

CHARLIE ROSE: Let me turn to China. You have said in conversations with me before, China is the most important foreign policy challenge for America, the peaceful rise of China.

HENRY KISSINGER: Right. For this reason: Historically when there is a rising power like China, it has usually led to confrontations between the rising power and the existing dominant powers. And when you have a shift of the center of gravity of world affairs from the Atlantic to the Pacific, then you have an additional element.

On the other hand, that was in a period when national states were still the dominant feature. Now we have a whole series of problems -- energy, environment, proliferation ...

CHARLIE ROSE: Right.

HENRY KISSINGER: ... which go beyond the nation. And we also know that a conflict between major powers would be a catastrophe for which there is no compensation in anything you can gain. So the challenge is whether China as a rising country, the United States as the superpower, can develop a cooperative relationship in this period before nationalism becomes so dominant in China as a substitute for communism, and a kind of self-righteous isolationism in this country that substitutes China for the Soviet Union and (inaudible).

So overcoming these two temptations I think is a fundamental challenge to American foreign policy. And Chinese foreign policy transcending in its long-term implications even the crisis in the Middle East.

CHARLIE ROSE: China.

ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI: I think a great deal depends on how the United States resolves the dilemmas that it is currently facing regarding the problems that we talked about earlier. And if we can surmount them in the course of the next several years and adopt a policy that doesn't result in the United States being stuck into some prolonged adventure, then I think the American-Chinese relationship will probably go on relatively stably, because the Chinese themselves are cautious, calculating and have a

sense of patience, and also awareness of their inherent weaknesses as well as of their successes. So they're not in a rush to become the dominant global power.

I think the problems could become acute if the United States falters and gets actually bogged down into some much more consuming misadventure. Then I think the sheer attrition of American global domination will create circumstances in which the Chinese will be tempted to reach out for more influence, including in regions in which we have special interests, such as the Middle East, from which they already obtain a great deal of their energy. And that region will be seeking some new superpower patron.

CHARLIE ROSE: It is clear as they put this emphasis -- emphasis -- and I was just there, on peaceful development. I mean, every other word out of every other Chinese mouth is "development, development, development, development." And that's what they're talking about in terms of -- because they believe it enables them, with development, to have the kind of status they want in the world, and B, it enables them to deal with their internal problems, having to do with poverty, urban-rural as well as the environment.

BRENT SCOWCROFT: I think that's true. And I think the Chinese, I don't think, look out at the world and want to overturn the system.

CHARLIE ROSE: Yes.

BRENT SCOWCROFT: They have profited greatly by the system, since 1978 when they focused on their economic program. And I believe they're gradually realizing that they're dependent on the system that, as they run out of energy, for example, they have to reach out to foreign sources for energy, for raw materials. They have to reach out to the world for markets. They have to export. They have to maintain full employment. They've got a terrible population problem. So they need a stable world, in a way.

Who is the guarantor, if there is one, of a more stable world? It's the United States. So I don't -- I don't think we have these fundamental issues. We can't make China a friend, but we can behave to make them an enemy. If we decide they are ...

CHARLIE ROSE: Right. Right.

BRENT SCOWCROFT: ... they will be one. But I don't -- I don't see anything ...

CHARLIE ROSE: It's not what they naturally want to do.

BRENT SCOWCROFT: ... ordained that we're going in that direction.

CHARLIE ROSE: OK. Let me close with this one last question. If a new president comes to power in 2008, as he or she will, what ought to be the most important message that person can say in their inaugural address about America and the world?

BRENT SCOWCROFT: I think that we are a part of the world, that we want to cooperate with the world. We are not the dominant power in the world, that everyone falls in behind us. But we want to reach out and cooperate. After all, we're the ones that set up the League of Nations the U.N., NATO. That's the way we do business. That's the way we want to do business. We want to work with friends, with allies, with people of good

will, to make this a better world. That's message.

ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI: I think the next president should say to the world that the United States wants to be part of the solution to its problems and not, in part, the maker of their problems. And that the United States is prepared really to be engaged in the quest to get people in the world the dignities that they seek today, the social justice that they feel they're deprived of, and the common solution to global problems.

But secondly, I think the president has to say very credibly and forcefully to the American people that to do that, what I just said, the American people have to think hard about their definition of the meaning of the good life, that hedonistic, materialistic society of high levels of consumption, increasing social inequality is not a society that can be part of the solution of the world's problems. And, therefore, the president has to project to the American people a sense of demanding idealism. Idealism which is not based in self-indulgence, but on self-denial and sacrifice, and on this such an America is going to be credible to the world.

HENRY KISSINGER: I think when the new president is inaugurated, we will have gone through two years of self-flagellation. And I think he would -- should step up there with some confidence and say here are problems we see in the world. We would like to listen to a lot of other countries about what they think should be done. He should not pretend that he has all the answers.

I think an appeal to American idealism and willingness to sacrifice would be an important contribution, because what is happening now in many countries, not yet in the United States, but in many European countries, it's the inability of government to ask for sacrifices of its people. But maybe there's a lesson in what is happening in France, that the candidate who has the most demanding program, won with a surprising and overwhelming majority. And I think we have to transcend the current debate, and an effort should be made to achieve a bipartisan or nonpartisan consensus. And it should be a relatively short speech aimed at this objective.

CHARLIE ROSE: There are a lot of subjects we did not cover here this evening. Obviously, we didn't talk about Africa or Latin America, which are very important. We didn't talk about energy and the green revolution, and we didn't talk about global poverty and haves and have-nots, and rich and poor, the whole lot of other subjects we didn't have time for. And perhaps we can reconvene and do that at some time.

Brent Scowcroft Zbigniew Brzezinski and Henry Kissinger. On behalf of this audience, I thank you very much.

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