

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION  
SAUL/ZILKHA ROOM

ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI: AMERICA'S GRAND STRATEGIST

Washington, D.C.  
Wednesday, April 11, 2018

**Introduction and Moderator:**

MARTIN INDYK  
John C. Whitehead Distinguished Fellow in International Diplomacy,  
Foreign Policy  
The Brookings Institution

**Presentation:**

JUSTIN VAÏSSE  
Director, Policy Planning Staff  
French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs

**Panel Discussion:**

FRANCIS J. GAVIN  
Giovanni Agnelli Distinguished Professor and Director,  
Henry A. Kissinger Center for Global Affairs  
Johns Hopkins SAIS

DAVID IGNATIUS  
Columnist  
The Washington Post

MARY ELISE SAROTTE  
Marie-Josée and Henry R. Kravis Distinguished  
Professor of Historical Studies  
Johns Hopkins SAIS

JUSTIN VAÏSSE  
Director, Policy Planning Staff  
French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs

\* \* \* \* \*

## P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. INDYK: Good morning ladies, and gentlemen. Welcome to Brookings. My name is Martin Indyk. I'm the John C. Whitehead distinguished fellow in international diplomacy in the Foreign Policy program at Brookings, a very long title, almost as long as some of the panelists' titles that we have today as you'll hear.

I'm delighted to moderate this event, which is a joint event of the Brookings Center on the U.S. and Europe and the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies Henry A. Kissinger Center for Global Affairs. But we're not here to discuss Henry Kissinger today, or at least not directly. We're here to discuss Zbigniew Brzezinski and this wonderful new book called "Zbigniew Brzezinski: America's Grand Strategist."

It is written by a former colleague and great friend of Brookings, Justin Vaïsse. And he is back here to make this presentation. He went on himself to try to apply the ideas that he developed at Brookings as director of the Policy Planning Staff of the French Quai D'Orsay, the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, where he now serves. He before that served as director of research at our Center for the U.S. and Europe, as well as senior fellow in the Foreign Policy program.

Joining us on the panel to discuss this book is Frank Gavin, who is the Giovanni Agnelli distinguished professor and director of the aforesaid Henry A. Kissinger Center for Global Affairs at SAIS; and Mary Elise Sarotte, who is the Marie-Josée and Henry R. Kravis distinguished professor of historical studies at the Kissinger Center for Global Affairs at SAIS.

And we are joined by a good friend of my own and of Brookings, David

Ignatius, the prize-winning columnist for The Washington Post, who has managed to toggle his demands for appearances on MSNBC with this panel today, for which we're very grateful, David.

This is a great book. I love this book. And by the way, you can buy your own copy when you leave. Outside the doors there's somebody there to sell you one. And I'm sure Justin will be happy to autograph it for you.

I love this book because, in a way, as only a Frenchman could do, it focuses on the intellectual journey of Zbigniew Brzezinski from its very origins through what he calls the "Cold World University," his days at Columbia to his days in the White House and then, of course, beyond where he became such a dominant public policy intellectual. And throughout, Justin manages to weave a story of how ideas and their intellectual origins interact with the real world of policy. And in a way, that is what Brookings and SAIS are all about, and so it becomes a very interesting journey into the mind and actions of one of the most important foreign policy intellectuals and policymakers in our lifetimes.

So it's a consequential book and Justin has done, I think, a fabulous job, beautifully translated, describing and analyzing this journey.

So without ado, Justin, please. (Applause)

MR. VAÏSSE: Ladies and gentleman, you can imagine what a pleasure it is to be back at Brookings to see many familiar faces. And I'm very grateful for the Kissinger Center and Brookings, of course, but also for the panelists for agreeing to discuss the book. I think there are very different themes to be discussed. I'll try to concentrate on a few points in this short introduction.

Because beyond the fascinating life story of an immigrant who was born

in 1928, came when he was 10 years old to Canada first, and then to Harvard in 1950, became a citizen in 1958, so beyond this life story there's also the story of Washington and of the Washington ecosystem or the Washington milieu that people like Brzezinski and Kissinger pioneered. And that's part of the story of the book is how the U.S. foreign policy elite was rejuvenated, renewed, changed in the course of the '50s and '60s, and what had been the dominant caste at the time.

You know, a big influence on this book was Walter Isaacson's *The Wise Men*, which was a portrait of a group of policymakers who really created the American world in the mid-century: Averell Harriman, Chip Bohlen, John McCloy, Robert Lovett, Dean Acheson. These men really created the American world, but they were not foreign policy specialists. They were lawyers, industrialists, people from the business world, who by virtue of their business knew the rest of the world and knew how international relations worked. And thereby became advisors to Roosevelt, to Truman, and others, and, once again, created that American world.

These wise men gave way in the 1960s to a new group of people. This new group had studied international relations and international relations became a nascent discipline in American universities because of the rise of America to globalism because of the needs. So after 1941 and 1945 and the Cold War, the necessities of administering a far-flung empire for the U.S. drove Washington to fund what we came to call the "Cold War University." That's when things like area studies were created, when international relations really took off, simply because of the needs of Washington and through large funding grants to universities like Columbia, Harvard, and Stanford.

And indeed, that's the milieu where Brzezinski arrived in the 1950s. And one of the origins of the books is that I realized that in the 1950s at Harvard University

you had an amazing concentration of brilliant minds and people who would define America's relation to the world in the decades after that: Brzezinski, of course; Henry Kissinger, indeed; Sam Huntington; Stanley Hoffmann; Joe Nye, who was a bit younger, of course, but who came; McGeorge Bundy; and others.

And that milieu really created the interaction between academia and policy-making, which did not exist before. You had had the Inquiry by President Wilson trying to help him on settling World War I. But really the place where the cradle of that mixing of academia and policy-making happened at Harvard in the '50s and '60s, and Brzezinski indeed is a product of that.

And of course, what attracted him to that milieu was the possibility of having good scholarship, good academic standards, but then to gradually move towards policy-making, towards political responsibilities, et cetera. So what you had was really the rise of a new elite, very ambitious young men, immigrants -- Kissinger, Brzezinski, and others -- who really redefined the rules and reshaped the American policy elite.

You can see the gap with the old establishment, the WASP establishment which really disappeared with the Vietnam War, which was largely blamed on them, through, for example, the opposition between Kissinger, this ambitious newcomer with a Ph.D. and an accent on the one hand, and William Rogers, the Secretary of State, whom pretty much everybody has forgotten because he was, of course, eclipsed by Kissinger. And so you had this clash between the traditional WASP elite and the new elite. Or, the clash between Brzezinski and his Secretary of State, so to speak, Cyrus Vance, who was also a WASP, a man from the establishment.

And so what I'm trying to show in the book is that the rules that still apply

in Washington, young, ambitious academics or think-tankers, trying to make it to the policy world were really invented at that time. With the opening, also, of American diplomacy, the role of foundations, the role of newspapers, the role of Congress, which really rose in the '60s and '70s, opening a sort of in-between world where people like Brzezinski and Kissinger could thrive.

And so the arc of Brzezinski's biography is to move from being a well-recognized and appreciated academic in Soviet studies, indeed his book, *The Soviet Bloc*, was a must-read for anyone during the Cold War who was interested in the Communist world, to a more I would say think tank world with books like *The Technetronic Era*, which was more attuned to I would say new trends and almost fads meant to attract the attention of policymakers and also campaigns.

One important feature of this new world was that these men started advising political campaigns and trying to influence and advise them. And they were co-opted by decision-makers. Of course, 1968 is a crucial year when Kissinger advises, actually, several campaigns, but ends up, of course, advising Nixon and being picked as National Security Advisor for Richard Nixon while Brzezinski was advising Hubert Humphrey and lost. And that was an important moment in his career because he, the immigrant with the unpronounceable name, realized that Nixon had named Kissinger his National Security Advisor and so that it could also happen with him. And so he tells in one of the interviews we did, he tells of his shock at realizing how, you know, high he could climb.

After that Brzezinski did less and less I would say serious academic work and started working more and more on current issues. He created the Trilateral Commission in 1972 to 1973, along with David Rockefeller. And he was more and

more immersed in the Washington world.

If you like, the arc of his biography is becoming an American at Harvard, so it's basically Boston, New York, Washington. That is getting closer and closer to power. Having been denied tenure at Harvard in 1960, he was recruited by Columbia University, which, of course, was halfway to Washington, where he really thrived and made a big impression at the Council on Foreign Relations, in the media, et cetera.

And in the 1970s really rose to another level with the Trilateral Commission. And by I would say picking the right horse, so to speak, that is through the Trilateral Commission, being put in touch with Jimmy Carter, who no one knew at the time and no one would place a bet on, but, of course, who became the Democratic candidate in 1976, making Brzezinski his foreign policy advisor and ultimately naming him his National Security Advisor.

So the story I tell in the book is not just the biography of Brzezinski. It's also the story of how Washington was transformed over the course of the '50s, '60s, and '70s with the increasing importance of that in-between world, between academia and decision-making, where Kissinger and Brzezinski were pioneers.

In the Carter administration, the memory that many have of the Carter administration is one of failure, to be honest, because of the Iran hostage crisis, because of the failed attempt to rescue them in 1980, because of the invasion of Afghanistan, because of the high inflation which contributed a lot to Carter's defeat. However, if you look more closely, in the course of these four years many things were achieved, and Brzezinski was largely responsible for many of them: the Camp David Agreement, of course, and then the following year the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel; the normalization of relations with China, something that the Republicans at the

time could not have achieved.

So, of course, Nixon and Kissinger opened China, but they could not have gone the whole way because of the Taiwan lobby basically in the Republican Party. And so it took Carter and Brzezinski in particular to open this new chapter of Chinese-American relations, going all the way to sharing very important resources, like after the Iranian revolution placing listening stations in West China so to replace the lost stations in Iran to spy on the USSR. So a very deep connection.

But also, the Panama Canal Treaty, which would have been very difficult for the Republicans and which sort of fixed one of the biggest irritants with Latin America; or the Human Rights Policy. So, you know, one can discuss what the impact was, but indeed, putting the emphasis on human rights was one of the great features of the Carter administration which really made the USSR uncomfortable. And using the Helsinki process for this was seen as a sort of a strategic decision, not just a moral one, which was largely the way Carter saw it, but also a strategic one.

After the Carter administration came what I call the "Age of Authority." That's what Martin described earlier. It's the idea that Brzezinski, who lasted only four years -- so that's one of the differences with Kissinger is that, of course, Kissinger was here the whole time during two administrations, or three you could say between January '69 and early 1977, through Nixon and then Ford, and then also became Secretary of State. Whereas, Brzezinski was only there for four years as National Security Advisor. However, his importance and his prestige was great and he remained very active, teaching at Columbia, then at SAIS, being a fixture of the Washington landscape or scene, and having real impact, especially on NATO, on the issue of NATO enlargement.



I think if there's one single person outside the Clinton administration who was instrumental in enlarging NATO it was Zbig, as he was known by others, not only because of the public interventions that he did and the fact that he published on the issue and pushed for it, but also because he lobbied very concretely for it with the Clinton administration, with the Senate afterwards, et cetera.

He was also, I think, one of the most important figures in pushing back against the Iraq War and criticizing the Iraq War. Basically, Zbig advised all presidents -- the first political advice he gave was 1956 to Hubert Humphrey, who was then just a senator, and the last advice that he gave was 60 years afterwards, was in 2016, to Obama on the Middle East. And in the course of that he was in touch with all presidents except George W. Bush and Donald Trump after that because he never got along with Trump -- with George W. Bush. And indeed, took a very critical view of the Iraq War. And along with others, including Brent Scowcroft, was really at the forefront of pushing back against this.

But also intervened on many other issues. Israel-Palestine was very important in his eyes and the job. Dawn at Camp David, which was, of course, exclusively on Egypt-Israel relations rather than the Palestine issue as a whole, for him always had to be completed by another agreement, so he pushed for that very strongly. But also China, he was always interested in the role that China should play and could play in partnership with the U.S. And pretty much like his sort of half-brother, Kissinger, would take a very positive view of China.

So, you know, at the end of the day what accounts for his prestige, or why is he such an important figure? I think one answer is his longevity, you know, 60 years of policy advice, massive production of more than 12 books either by himself or

co-written with others, Huntington, or the book he did with Brent Scowcroft and David and others. So a constant stream of production and an insistence on thinking hard. That is to say, really being a strategist, you know, it's not really a trade. It's not really a profession. It's more like hygiene or a practice, like a physical exercise, you know, having real expertise, vetting all the possibilities, trying to project himself.

He was always interested in projecting himself. That is to say if you propose a policy, you have to have an idea of what the six months ahead or the years ahead have in store for you because otherwise your policy is made in a vacuum. And so he was nothing of a futurologist, but he was always interested in making predictions because he thought that it was the honesty of the analyst implied that the analyst would put his cards on the table and tell what the future looked to him.

Also, political independence was really important. He was a lifelong Democrat, but he was always very independent. So in 1972, for example, he really parted ways with the Democratic Party when George McGovern, who, in his eyes, was way too much to the left and had this sort of new isolationist approach to foreign policy, so he broke ranks with the Democratic Party at that time. He also supported George H.W. Bush, Bush 41, in 1988, because he considered the Michael Dukakis was just like George McGovern, was too much to the left. And so he didn't hesitate to break ranks with his family and always had an independent view.

He also was close, for example, to the views of some of the nascent neoconservative movement in the 1970s, but never shared all of their program. And indeed, he was, of course, at the other end of the spectrum on the Iraq War 25 years afterwards in the early 2000s.

So these things explain why he's such a dominant figure and why, also,

it was, you know, such a fascinating journey into prodding or exploring America's foreign policy-making to write this book. (Applause)

MR. INDYK: Thank you very much, Justin. We're just going to invite the other panelists up to the podium here and then we'll get underway.

Justin, thank you. It's very difficult to do justice to such an interesting and complex book in such a short time, but I think you've done very well. Let me just follow up with one question and then I'm going to turn to the panelists.

Your subtitle for this book is *America's Grand Strategist*. I think you would agree that there was another American grand strategist as well as Brzezinski, in many ways similar and in many ways very different, and that is, of course, Henry Kissinger. And even though I promised this wasn't about Henry Kissinger I think it would be interesting, if you would, because you certainly do it in the book, to compare and contrast the two. Because I think it illuminates the important differences between Zbig and Kissinger.

MR. VAÏSSE: Yes, it's a fascinating subject to compare the intellectual purchase. So the two men paid a lot of attention to history and, indeed, were very well versed in the history of international relations. But their approach was strikingly different in the sense that for Kissinger what mattered was relations among states, the role of great powers and great men, including himself, and also the idea that you had rules of international relations that did not really change that much over time and that in the Westphalian system you could see them pretty much constant between the 19th century and the 20th century.

And so he was interested more in sort of the immutable laws of diplomacy. Whereas Brzezinski paid much more attention to change, to other forces

than just great men and great powers. He paid a lot of attention to what he called social awakening, things like the Arab Spring. He paid attention to the media, to issues like climate.

So when the two of them met for the last time in December 2016, so a year and a half ago, not even, that was in Oslo, the two speeches really reflected that difference with Zbig, of course, paying attention to geopolitics and to the "Great Game," as the title of one of his most famous books goes, but also to other issues like climate, like economics, like social forces, et cetera. And I think it's in this -- it's really the heart of the contrast.

Also, Kissinger was more geared toward I would say the past, whereas, as I mentioned, Brzezinski was always interested in the future and trying to decipher, trying to analyze the world to come in order to make the best strategic recommendations.

MR. INDYK: Thanks, Justin. I'd like to bring the other panelists in by just asking each one of them, we'll start with Frank, what was your take on the book? What did you find most interesting from your perspective?

MR. GAVIN: Sure, and thank you, Martin. This was an amazing book.

I was actually happy you ended with the Oslo incident. I will tell you that Kissinger was very nervous about that. Olav Njölstad, who hosted it, is an old friend. And it turns out they actually had to flip a coin to see who would speak first. At that point, their rivalry had gone for that long and they actually flipped a coin.

I will also say Kissinger had mentioned to me after Brzezinski's passing that when you get to that age and you lose most of your friends, he said it affected it far more than anyone. I mean, and he got very personal about it. And it's very clear and it

comes through very nicely in your book about their parallel lives, which I think is interesting.

I mean, this is a tremendous book. It's really three books in one. It's a history of an extraordinary man. It's a narrative of the tragedy and triumph of American foreign policy in the second half of the 20th century. But the third part of the book I think is to me the most interesting, and that is about the role of ideas in policy. That is what I came away from them, who generated these ideas and how that changed in the 20th century.

Justin does an extraordinary job of charting how the United States moves from this establishment of financiers and lawyers and industrialists to this new type of person which Brzezinski and his constant shadow Kissinger represent: the savvy, ambitious, brilliant academic/policy entrepreneur. And I think perhaps the most jarring part of this book is Justin asking the question: how much do those ideas matter? And to what extent do the institutions that support and create these ideas, whether they be think tanks or whether they be universities, how they contribute to all of this?

And I think that is -- it's uncomfortable and awkward certainly for someone who's part of the Cold War University and for other people who are part of think tanks, but I think we should take this seriously and discuss it. And I think that part of the book really stood out for me.

MR. INDYK: Great. We will get back to this question of do ideas matter. Mary, please.

MS. SAROTTE: Yes. I just want to second what Frank has said, it is a remarkable book. I learned new things on every page, whether it was about the nature of the Cold War University or generally or specifically the story of how the United States

on Zbig's watch had a mole on the Polish military staff and used to give Solidarity advance warning of when crackdowns were coming, was foiling those crackdowns. And Zbig was horrified when after Reagan took office the Reagan administration failed to give information that it had to Solidarity and, therefore, enabled the military crackdown to succeed and a generation of leaders of Solidarity went to jail. And Zbig couldn't believe this, especially as the President was supposedly such a staunch anti-Communist. And, of course, this was all classified at the time, so he couldn't say this publicly, but he was very active behind the scenes.

That's just on of the many rich details that I learned from this book. And as a historian of the Cold War I thought I knew a lot, but there was a lot more to learn. So I recommend that you charge the table at the back of the room and buy the book. It is extremely interesting.

I had three bigger questions for you or for the table. The first was that I noticed you've changed the subtitle from the French to the English edition. A more accurate translation would have been something like Imperial Strategist or Strategist of Empire. That is not currently the subtitle. (Laughter) So I'm wondering if you think our American sensitivities are such that we couldn't bear that or if the translator twisted your arm. (Laughter) So I would just appreciate hearing why the title was finessed for the English language edition, first.

Second, just generally, one of the parts of the book that appealed to me quite a lot, and I'd like to give you a chance to talk more about this, is the way that you endorse Brzezinski's questioning of grand strategies. So you talk a lot about Kissinger and Brzezinski as -- you contrast them, saying Kissinger is the man who believes in this grand strategy and Brzezinski believes in the specifics, in the context, in the contingent

events. You can't just say, oh, he's a hawk, he's a dove. That's not how he worked. He looked at each case on its own merits. Sometimes he supported Republicans, sometimes he supported Democrats; sometimes he supported intervening, sometimes not.

This is a theme is near and dear to my heart that when we talk of grand strategies we're sometimes seduced by a siren song. Grand strategies have many frailties. You can miss the trees and the trees are important and the details in foreign policy. So I think you agree with that, but I'd be interested to hear you talk more about that.

And then third and finally, my personal research interest, as some of you may know, is in the end of the Cold War, the way that German reunification opened up a whole host of possibilities for political order in Europe and in the transatlantic world, and the reasons that we picked the transatlantic order that we now have, the reasons that we have the relations that we now have with Europe and with Russia. Why did we pick those when there were so many alternatives available at the end of the Cold War?

That's my own personal research interest and I was, therefore, interested to see in your discussion toward the end of the book about that period, the 1990s, that you raise questions about the wisdom of NATO expansion, which I sense must have caused some disagreements with your subject, to put it mildly. And I liked your phrase, your question, which in a sense you're asking the reader, but also Brzezinski, why should the United States reinforce rather than dilute borders in Europe after the Cold War? To repeat, why should the United States reinforce rather than dilute borders in Europe after the Cold War?

That was your question. I think it's a very trenchant one. I'd be

interested to hear more about it.

MR. INDYK: Justin, we'll come back for you to answer these very interesting questions. Let's hear from David first.

David, of course, I think of all of us on the panel you were probably the closest to Zbig and knew him best, but tell us how you reacted to the book.

MR. IGNATIUS: Well, what I really admire about this book is that I think it was faithful to what a complicated person Zbigniew Brzezinski was. He was at once a man of ideas and a man of power. He was a principled person who thought that ideas mattered. But, he was also very much a pragmatist. He believed that his relationship with Jimmy Carter had that personal relationship, the texture of it, had been central to what he accomplished as National Security Advisor.

I think it's that richness and complexity of Zbig's life and career that makes him interesting and makes him worthy of study in this book and I hope this is the beginning of people's discussion and debate about his career. As Justin says, he, in one sense, was committed and courageous. On the Middle East he was very early to stake out his view that Arab-Israeli-Palestinian peace was essential. He took enormous flack for it and he was attacked again and again, but he never really wavered from that. It was a genuinely courageous moment. We talked about *Profiles in Courage* and American politics. He was convinced this was necessary and he was willing to suffer a lot of criticism.

Same thing with his opposition to the Iraq War. He had been a hawk. He's the sort of person you would have thought would have supported the Iraq war, but he had evolved in his understanding about America's ability to use military power. So by the time 2003 came along, he said this is not a good idea. He was a rare person,



with Brent Scowcroft most obviously, who spoke out and said that this is not a wise exercise.

And at that time it cost him something as his insistence on the importance of Arab-Israeli peace cost him something. It cost him for a time a seat at the center table because everybody knew we were going to war, it just was an axiom of 2003 that this was going to happen. And Zbig said no, it's not wise, it shouldn't happen.

So I think the book takes him seriously. It takes the issues in this complicated life seriously. I think Zbig would have loved the question that we're talking about and that Justin focuses on, do ideas matter? And I think his answer would have been yes, but the power matters more, I think he would have said. I think that would have been his own assessment.

MR. INDYK: Justin, you want to respond?

MR. VAÏSSE: Yes, perhaps I'll pick one or two points. You know, indeed, the question over whether ideas matter is an existential one. (Laughter) Because, of course, for us think-tankers and to some extent academics, but academics are in a slightly position on this, I think, because the aim of, the objective of science is not just to nourish policy-making. You know, indeed, apart from certain disciplines, like political science, perhaps history and sociology and a couple of others, it's not the principal aim. Whereas think tanks are supposed to create policy-relevant research, certainly with academic standards, but still ideas that matter.

And so the question is -- so I was interested in this question my whole intellectual life, I would say. My previous book was, as you may know, a history of the neoconservative movement. It was out in 2010. And, of course, the question behind

studying the neoconservative movement was to what extent did ideas matter relative to other factors, relative to other variables as political scientists jargon has it.

And after that I wanted to focus on a more personal human level and see -- and answer two questions. One was where did Zbig's ideas come from? Because he was so influential it would be interesting, I thought, to understand by which processes did he form his vision of the world, his representation, his concepts, his strategy. Was it because of what he did in the academic setting? Was it because of what he did at Harvard? Was it because of what he wrote, the research he did? Was it because of identity? Was it because he was a Catholic American of Polish origin? So how much did identity matter?

For example, he was always extraordinarily hawkish on Russia and, of course, it's hard to think that that doesn't have a relationship with his identity. And he was always, you know, admitting that, that yes, he was harsh on Russia, and that's a segue to the question on NATO. But certainly others who were not Poles by birth were also hawkish on Russia. And then he had different views on Russia along his career, so identity doesn't explain everything. It's certainly part of the story, but it's not everything. So that was the first question.

The second question was how much of his ideas were transmitted into action, especially during the Carter administration? So it's not just being an influential intellectual, writing op-eds and pressuring the debate in one direction. It's also did he implement some of the ideas that he had formed before?

And so you're right, Frank, I got into the discussion, there's literature on this, how much do ideas matter to policymakers, how much of academic ideas are translated into actual policy, and the conclusion is more than mixed. That is to say

when you review things, especially on questions of security, my position is really one of a skeptic. That is to say I do believe that the representations, concepts, you know, mental images, et cetera, that we form in think tanks, academia, et cetera, matter. But they matter in a very indirect way, whereas templates, blueprints, strategies, et cetera, or, you know, we were just discussing game theory, think Thomas Schelling, for example, the Nobel Peace Prize and the way he sort of theorized the signals that could be sent to the enemy and the supposed influence it had on military operations in Vietnam, like Rolling Thunder, et cetera.

When you look at the evidence, at the end of the day you see that many times ideas would be serving more as window dressing or justification or ex post justification of policies rather than as real blueprints. So that's probably my take.

And Brzezinski himself was insisting that his intellectual capital was really important, but that academia had not given him, once again, templates or patterns or blueprints to actually apply. He was also insisting, however, that intellectual activity was important and how much depleted was his intellectual capital when he left the White House after four years, after four years of working, you know, 15 hours a day and not being able to sort of nourish himself.

Speaking for too long, so I'll just speak one or two other things. On the title, Mary, so in France if you want to sell a book, you should put "empire" in the title, you know, or "sex" or something. (Laughter) So it was easier for me to put "empire" than "sex," so I decided to put "empire" in the title.

MS. SAROTTE: Our President is helping you with that now.

MR. VAÏSSE: Right. (Laughter) And so that's why. And in English, somehow it didn't sound right. And I really hesitated using the term "grand strategy"

because it has a meaning in international relation literature. And Zbig was always, as you said, skeptical that such large visions were really useful. He was always very attentive to context, to -- yes, you're right.

For example, he was very hawkism on Vietnam and supported Vietnam and came to regret that afterwards. He was certainly generally hawkism during the Cold War against Russia. He was a dove on the Iraq War. He didn't defend the Iraq War. He was a hawk on the Balkans, especially in 1995 and 1999. He was a hawk on Afghanistan, but he was a dove on the Iraq War in 2001, 2003. He was a dove on -- he was a hawk actually on Libya in 2011. And he was much more dove-ish on Iran, et cetera.

So the point here about military interventions is just to reinforce the point you made, which is that, yes, he was really judging political situations on their merits, all of them.

MR. INDYK: NATO expansion.

MR. VAÏSSE: Yeah. Oh, NATO expansion. Yeah, because, you know, during the 1990s you had this big fight in Washington about NATO expansion and whether it was a good idea or not. And indeed, Strobe Talbott, our former boss, was advocating against this, especially 1993, 1994, and many were advocating for it.

George Kennan, for example, always was opposed to NATO expansion, correctly predicting that it would lead to a frustration and resurgence of an aggressive Russia. And he laid it out in terms that I think came out to be quite verified by what happened starting in 2007 probably with Putin's speech at the Munich Security Conference.

Zbig never had any regret about NATO expansion thinking that in any

case, Russia had to adapt to its new status and, so to speak, indulging Russia in the idea that it was still an empire would not have done much for the cause of stability in Europe. So that's a decision he never regretted to have pushed very aggressively in favor of NATO expansion, even though, of course, you know, one can wonder if that was such a wise decision. I'll stop here.

MR. INDYK: Thank you. Can we just get the others to focus on this question of whether ideas matter? Justin, you yourself have had the opportunity to take your intellectual capital into government and so I'd be interested to hear from you after the others about your own personal experience in that regard to the extent that you can talk about it.

But, Frank and Mary, well, I actually don't know, have you been in government? Have either of you served in the government? No. So you're more on the outside looking in. What is your sense of the relevance to policy of the ideas that you are generating?

MS. SAROTTE: I had the honor to serve as a White House fellow. My first day as a White House fellow was September 4, 2001. So the first week went okay. (Laughter)

And then after that I saw very much the maxim that was made famous by Henry Kissinger, which is that you accumulate your intellectual capital when you are outside of government because once you are inside government the events are so overwhelming that you're working on what you know. So that was my own personal experience and I was, therefore, very struck by your book, which in some way I thought went even further.

So Kissinger says, you know, you have this capital and then you're not

going to add to it, but at least you'll use it. I was struck, Justin, by your book, I believe on page 10, this is admirably clear. You see this in academic writing, you see the same thought, but expressed with a lot of hedging and waffling, and you've said very clearly to the question, "If we look at the social sciences we are faced with a striking conclusion they seem to have no impact whatsoever on policy-making." This is what you say on page 10 of the book. So, you know, how do you really feel? (Laughter)

So I'm wondering, actually, I would like to ask you now that you are in a position of authority in France if you still think the same way that the person who wrote this book thinks?

MR. GAVIN: So I have thought about this a lot. Justin, this book is influenced by someone who's a mentor of mine, Bruce Kuklick, who wrote a book, *Blind Oracles*, that people may or may not be familiar with. But essentially it makes this argument that particularly in the Cold War, a variety of enormous resources were put into creating this intellectual infrastructure to understand national and international security, including the sort of great wizards of Armageddon. And Kuklick's conclusion he comes to, with the exception interestingly of Kissinger and Kennan, is that there used to be thought that these ideas had a negative influence. And he said it was even worse, they had no influence whatsoever and it was a lot of hand-wiping.

Now, I actually think while that critique is important and should be recognized, I think it can be taken too far. And what one wants to ask themselves is in the situation that a policymaker like Justin and others face of radical uncertainty, complexity, of a world of second-best solutions, what are you supposed to do, throw your hands up on the air? Of course you want ideas to matter. If the choice is between throwing darts at a wall or just letting bureaucratic processes pursue path-dependent

outcomes, of course you would want a world in which the best ideas matter.

And there is no doubting that the translation effect is difficult, but I also think if, again, being a historian, you put this in a broader historical context, if you ask the extent to which ideas -- look at something like figuring out aid Africa, right? I mean, we have enormous amounts of knowledge about how to develop and deliver aid, when it's most effective, what kind of governance matters, how to put it -- which nobody would have known 100 years ago and is the result of academic research. You can, of course, turn around and say this is one of these hedgehog/fox things, I think, that many of the bigger pronouncements -- and I think Mary cautioned about grand strategy and Brzezinski's caution about grand strategy is well taken.

But I think that while we need to all be conscious of not overstating the influence of either the Cold War University or think tanks, to ask ourselves the counterfactual of what a world would look like where ideas were not being generated for better policy, could we do better? Could ideas matter more? I've been someone who's been very critical of social sciences and the historical profession for not doing better, but that's based on the idea that I think ideas do make significant differences in producing better outcomes. Not all the time because these problems are all, as Kissinger said, 51/49 problems. You can have wonderful intellectual processes that lead to disasters and really bad processes that lead to good policy outcomes.

But I think one wants to be very, very careful, and I don't think you do this in the book, you don't go anywhere near as far as Kuklick does, which I think is almost an anti-intellectual, it's all power, it's all process, it's all bureaucracy. I think both that's not true, nor should it be true.

MR. INDYK: David, you're a longtime observer of the interplay between

ideas and policy. What's your take?

MR. IGNATIUS: Well, two comments. As I watched as a journalist both Brzezinski and Kissinger, I was struck by Kissinger's attention to this day to his own reputation in a way that often led him to trim his sails a bit to avoid confrontation with a policy view. Henry wanted and wants to be an advisor to administrations that change, and so sometimes maintaining that role of continuity has been important to him.

Zbig was much more prepared to pick a fight, to say what he thought. He felt that -- I mean, his ideas changed and, as I say, the question of how much he thought ideas in the end were decisive is complicated. But he did believe in expressing them quite forcefully and bluntly, and he didn't care if that cost him in a way that I think Henry would never. He just is more attentive to that.

Make one other point about this. I had this wonderful, unforgettable opportunity in 2008 to sit with Zbig and Brent Scowcroft over a series of a dozen or so conversations to frame a book that was called *America and the World*, which was really just our conversations edited and boiled down. And the interesting thing about this was that two people -- one a Democrat, one a Republican; quite different personal experiences, intellectual styles -- ended up coming to almost identical positions on the major issues.

And the point I want to make is that book published in 2008 laid out pretty much the line that Barack Obama pursued in foreign policy. Let's be careful of additional Iraq-like adventures. That certainly marked Obama in Syria. Let's open to our adversaries, let's deal with Iran and the reality of Iran and try to engage Iran.

Zbig talked a lot about the global political awakenings, the thing that ended up being so visible in the Arab Spring. Zbig was very prescient as was Brent.



They both saw it coming and their advice would have been to engage it, not precisely as Obama did, but in many similar ways.

So here were two of the smartest people I knew about foreign policy coming up with pretty much the same description of the world and series of recommendations that then lead into the Obama presidency. And there is a broad sense that the Obama presidency, for all of his wonderful qualities, and many in foreign policy would not be regarded right now as successful. So that's a real paradox for me.

I have the greatest admiration for Brzezinski and Scowcroft. At the time each of their ideas seemed sensible. But as it worked out, and this is I think an interesting question really to think about, it didn't work out so well. Why? And that's something I wish I'd had more time to talk with Zbig about in the last few years.

MR. INDYK: Justin, do you have an answer to that?

MR. VAÏSSE: Yes. Listen, I do think that ideas matter. What doesn't matter that much is an end. And to be complete on the quote of page 10 is the idea that what I was writing is, "but if we consider the social sciences in a narrow sense, that is if we focus on the original theories, frameworks, and concepts developed by political scientists and historians and exclude those that merely confirm commonsense, we are faced with the striking conclusion they seem to have no impact whatsoever." So my point of my attack or where I tend to follow Bruce Kuklick perhaps a bit more than you do is really on these templates, blueprints, theories, et cetera.

Now, expertise, including economic expertise, you mentioned development, for example, was not only valued by Zbig, knowing what one is talking about, indeed, and cultivating that expertise not only is important to formulate strategy, but also does have an impact on the overall formulation of strategy. And here if I don't

buy, for example, that game theory had a direct impact on the Rolling Thunder military operation in Vietnam, then I buy at a larger plane the constructivist idea, that is to say the idea that representation, concept, and others in general infuse policymakers, infuse the foreign policy community.

For example, the words, the concepts that we exchange at Brookings, at SAIS, at AEI, in the *Washington Post*, in that milieu, they do matter and they orient policy-making in a certain sense. So you see my criticism has to do with a more focused interpretation of what social sciences offer.

Lastly, I would say that my conclusion looking at Zbig and discussing that with him is that policy-making and academia are just different arts. And you can be very smart intellectually, et cetera, on the academic side, it doesn't necessarily help you formulate policy. I mean, that's sort of a -- and we have, of course, many examples in mind.

But even if you take American presidents from Wilson to Obama, certainly you prefer presidents that have high intellectual capabilities. But did they always formulate the best policy? That's, you know, for anyone to judge.

MR. INDYK: So we should amend it. It's not that ideas matter, it's conceptual thinking and strategy, strategic thinking that matters.

Let's go to the audience and we'll take your questions. Please make sure to identify yourself, ask a question, so there should be a question mark at the end of your sentence, and wait for the microphone. So we'll take one back there first. Bill, yes.

MR. DROZDIK: Bill Drozdiak, Brookings. Congratulations, Justin, and welcome back, Martin.

MR. INDYK: Thank you.

MR. DROZDIAK: Projecting from your book, how do you think Zbig would assess our current predicament? Did you come across anything in which he might have anticipated the retreat of America from a global leadership role after 70 years following World War II and also the rise of populist nationalism, whether he feared that this would jeopardize democracy?

MR. VAÏSSE: Sure. His last Tweet, because Zbig took to Tweeting towards the end of his life and he had a very popular Twitter account, read, “Sophisticated U.S. leadership is the *sine qua non* of a stable world order. However, we lack the former while the latter is getting worse.” That was his last Tweet and I think the Tweet feed is still active and you can find it. So the idea is that certainly he was in favor of an active U.S. leadership.

And, you know, as for his reaction to Trump, he didn’t join the sort of “Never Trump” bandwagon or became excessively critical. What he wanted from Trump was a strategy, was the articulation of general ideas that would guide foreign policy. He was asking for an address that would offer a bold statement of his vision, including his determination to provide America’s leadership in the effort to shape a more stable world. That was his last op-ed in the *New York Times*, and criticizing America First and Make America Great Again as simple slogans that did not articulate any kind of policy.

And so, you know, from China to the current predicament of these days, that is Syria and should the U.S. strike or not, et cetera, I think what he would have insisted on was thinking hard about what exactly we want to achieve, what are the resources to do so, what are the predictable implications and consequences, and then

shall we strike or not? But as I mentioned earlier, he would come out as a dove or as a hawk depending on the merits of each intervention.

MR. INDYK: Just a note to other panelists, if you want to jump in on any of these questions, please feel free to do so. Yes, please.

MR. SHORE: Wonderful presentation. My name is Steven Shore. My question is, did Brzezinski ever wish to become Secretary of State? And if so, why wasn't it offered to him?

MR. VAÏSSE: No, that's an interesting question. I think he was, and he told me so, he was happy with the National Security Advisor job because he valued very much his direct relationship with Carter. Carter trusted him. Carter followed, most of the time followed, his advice. And indeed, in November 1980, when the results of the election came in, Zbig actually thought that Carter would make it and he was intending to stay in his job because he thought it would be better than being Secretary of State.

And also, remember that he was always someone who was controversial. He was attacked by many different parties and lobbies in Washington. He was contested. His hawkishness, for example, was the subject of much criticism among Democrats. Indeed, that's why I mentioned he was closer to the neoconservative wing of the Democratic Party in the '70s, that is at the very beginning of the movement, when neocons were all Democrats. That is to say very critical on détente, very critical of relaxation of tensions with the USSR, very worried about the evolution of the USSR power balance.

And that's what he brought the Carter administration, which was largely infused with the ideas with the evolution of the Democratic Party and the liberals in the U.S. after Vietnam. That is to say in a very, I would say, non-assertive type of

leadership. And even as Zbig told me once, a bit persnickety about Carter, about Jimmy Carter, saying that he had tendencies that were sometimes a bit persnickety. That's how he described them.

And so, of course, he was in opposition to that actually the first two years. But then more and more as the Cold War changed at the end of the 1970s and the tensions rose with what was happening in the nuclear race, in Africa, in Angola, in Ethiopia, et cetera, and then most importantly in Afghanistan starting in Christmas 1979, then, of course, it sort of veered his way rather than Cyrus Vance's way and sort of justified or vindicated him as a hardliner. And so that's why he would have stayed on, I think, as a National Security Advisor during a second term of Carter which never happened.

MR. INDYK: Let's take one up the back and then we'll come up to the front. Yes, please.

MR. SIEBENS: Thank you. James Siebens from the Stimson Center. I want to pull Europe into the conversation, if I may.

Something that Brzezinski talked about in *Strategic Vision* was that the unity of the West is not to be taken for granted. And he talked about the importance of pulling Russia and Turkey closer to the West. Would you please comment on the developments more recently and what Europe's position is on those two thoughts of his?

MR. VAÏSSE: Sure. So he always had a pretty positive view of European unity. He was a believer in European unity. He was always critical of the UK, interestingly, for not being more active inside Europe. And of course, you know, Brexit was not such a big surprise, or the vote, the June 2016 vote, was not such a big

surprise to him. So Zbig died in May 2017, last year, a bit less than a year ago, so he witnessed the Brexit vote and election of Donald Trump and a couple of other things.

So he was always a very big supporters of European unity, but he also had a very geopolitical view that in Eurasia, in the western part of that grand chessboard, to quote another book than *Strategic Vision*, that in order to avoid the domination of one power there should be connections with and should include especially the two important powers of that western part of the Eurasian chessboard, Russia and Turkey, into Europe.

Indeed, the current situation is not very conducive to that if we now talk about 2018 and the current situation with many more frictions since not only the Georgian war of 2008, but, of course, the Ukraine situation starting in 2014. And Zbig was always relatively moderate on that. He thought that Ukraine should be federalized and Finland-ized. That is to say should sort of make some sort of compromise with Russia and also should not join NATO. And on that he was really on the same line as Kissinger. The two of them saw eye-to-eye on the situation and perhaps delivering defensive weapons to Kiev, but certainly not going further in antagonizing Russia. And I'll stop here.

You know, not that much on Turkey apart from the fact that being one of the real countries, real nation states of the Middle East and of the region, it should be offered a greater role. Not necessarily into the EU, but at least recognizing the status of Turkey as an important player and force for stabilization in the region.

MR. ABURDENE: Justin, my name is Odeh Aburdene. Part of Brzezinski's soul was anti-colonial. He was anti-colonial. And just go back to his support of the Algerian uprising against the French in '55, '56. Did he talk to you about

this?

MR. VAÏSSE: No, not really. But indeed, in his last article that was for the *National Interest*, he insisted on that about -- it was an article on the Middle East and insisted on the colonial trauma. But no, we never talked about Algeria except that, of course, in his vision of '60s, '70s, and '80s this idea of the awakening of the subjugated people and the anti-colonial movement, independence, et cetera, loomed large, and was always integrated in his vision. And indeed, of course, he wanted to use that against the USSR.

For example, he did a trick with a colleague or a former colleague of yours, David, who was -- in 1958, so there was this world Communist youth festival that was happening in Budapest. And I'm forgetting, yes, it was in Budapest. No, I'm sorry, it was in Vienna, precisely, and so it was. And what he did was a stunt to sort of spoil, to sort of bring ants to the picnic of the Communist youth festival because all countries had been invited. And so he led a delegation of students to that festival and Gloria Steinem actually was the leader of the group, interestingly.

And him and Walter Pincus, yes, it was him -- sorry, my memory serves me badly -- were very active in trying to spoil and sabotage the congress. And what they did was they hung Algerian and Hungarian flags in the main place of the event and then fled and were not caught, managed to escape. But they had these huge Algerian and Hungarian flags to make clear that the anti-colonial fight against the French was sort of mirrored by the Hungarian fight for independence vis-à-vis the USSR.

MR. INDYK: Unfortunately, our time is coming to an end, so I want to ask a closeout question and get all the panelists to address it and we'll have Justin have the final word on this. But as we look at events of today, since events were so

critical informing Zbig's approach to the world, how do you think Zbig would have reacted? What would he have recommended that the American President do about the situation in Syria?

David, you want to start us off?

MR. IGNATIUS: Well, so two comments. First, generally, I think based on what Zbig said in the early months of Trump's presidency, it's fair to say that he regarded Trump with some horror. I mean, there shouldn't be any mistake about that. I think he genuinely disturbed by the person and the ideas. And I think he worried about the deconstruction of the world that he had worked very hard to build. Zbig, you know, took different positions, but the idea that there was this liberal international order, that there was this trilateral of power that you sought to draw other countries into that for the sake of stability I think he believed in deeply. I think that's something he shares with Kissinger is this idea of structure, of order into which events and countries should be drawn.

I think with Syria, he was so disturbed by what happened in Iraq that that obviously marked him, but I do think he worried that the outcome in Syria under President Obama had not been a positive one. I'd be surprised if he wouldn't have defended the use of military power a year ago. And he was still alive, I guess. I don't know what he said publicly. Justin, maybe you do.

MR. VAÏSSE: I think it was in the last week of his life and, no, I'm not aware that he made comments on that.

MR. IGNATIUS: But, you know, I think defending the norm against use of chemical weapons would have been something that he would have endorsed.

I'd like to think that he would have argued that simply being reactive



separate from a strategic idea of where you want to go in Syria would be a mistake. I want to think that. I don't have a lot of evidence, but I'm just going to posit that what he would have recommended is taking some military action with allies. I think he would have, like Trump, stress on working with France and other countries in whatever the U.S. does, but I think he would have said it has to be part of an idea about how you move toward greater stability in Syria as opposed to simply pop them.

MS. SAROTTE: I defer to the expert on what Zbig would have said. I note, though, one of the many interesting parts of your book is you point out the ways in which Obama ultimately disappointed Brzezinski and Syria was one of them. So even in the hands of a much more capable president, Syria is obviously a huge and intractable problem.

My guess is that if you could somehow ask him now he would probably say the real danger -- it's not realistic that the Trump administration is going to solve Syria and the short-term danger is actually a Donald Trump overreaction to what is happening in order to distract from Michael Cohen, Stormy Daniels. I'm not speaking on the basis of any information, but I can imagine he would very much like to bomb something to have something in the headlines other than Michael Cohen. (Laughter)

So I think that Zbig would have said the real immediate danger is actually here in Washington, not in Syria. An actual solution is going to have to wait for a different administration.

MR. GAVIN: So it's hard to know specifically, but I think three points that comes out of Justin's book made me think about how he would make the decision. First, I was very struck by how you showed Brzezinski far more sensitive to the changing nature of the world than Kissinger was, and whereas Kissinger solved things

in terms of great chess game set plays between great powers. And I think David's point earlier about the awakening, I think Brzezinski was far more sensitive to global changes that were going on and would have viewed this more through that lens.

The second point is that I think one of the reasons that Kissinger may have been more willing, how do I put this politely, to accept Trump as this darker vision of the world and international politics, which reading your book I think Brzezinski didn't have. He actually accepted some aspects of I don't want to quite say exceptionalism, but who the United States was and what it did in the world mattered quite a bit.

Which leads to the third. I was also very struck by how you said he did things on a very case-by-case basis. So it's very hard to predict what he would have done. I think Mary and David are right that if you had asked three years ago as opposed to now the answer would be different. But I think his greater concern and fear and worry would have been both this sort of increasing American retreat from the world and the kind of erratic reaction type of impulses that were shaping behavior that would lead to the actual decision today is hard to know. But I am struck that he would have put a lot more thought into it than I suspect we're going to get.

MR. INDYK: Justin.

MR. VAÏSSE: Oh, perhaps a very short word of conclusion because I think these were very good points, the danger laying in Washington rather than elsewhere, the idea that it was case-by-case, and that he should judge these things on their merit.

I think that, you know, to just continue on the point you were making, because he was an immigrant, because America endowed him with the possibility -- you know, the joke was that at the end of the '50s or early '60s when Zbig really started

to become famous, et cetera, the joke among his friends was that America is a country where a guy named Brzezinski can make a name for himself without having to change it. (Laughter) And he actually gave a brief thought to changing his name because it's unpronounceable or it's difficult to pronounce. And then he decided against it and it worked. He sort of didn't have to pay a price.

But the larger lesson around this was that he was an Americanist in the sense that you have anti-Americanism or you have Americanism. And he was very much an enthusiast of American power, became a citizen very enthusiastically, and always was on the sort of positive or optimistic side of protecting America. So in the debate -- so, you know, America has every 10, 15 years a debate about its decline. So there was a debate in the '70s, there was a debate at the end of the 1980s. You remember the Kennedy book, *The Rise and Fall of Great Powers*. And so on that debate Brzezinski was pretty much on the positive, optimistic side.

And then there was another debate after the financial crisis of 2008 and the aftermath of Iraq, et cetera. And he was again in the book that was mentioned earlier, *A Strategic Vision*, on the positive, optimistic side of things. And so I subscribe to what you said, Frank, about the contrast.

The other contrast with Kissinger, who has a much more Spenglerian -- and it's true, even if he doesn't like that to be mentioned or he denies that, a much more pessimistic view of things, of democracy, of the way democracy can be subverted. And here, again, we're back to the question of ideas and identity because, after all, you know, Kissinger's own youth largely predisposed him to think in these terms of pessimism on democracy, on the possibility of keeping the vital center, et cetera. Whereas Brzezinski bought the American dream, in a sense, and thanks to that I think

contributed greatly to America's relation with the world over the past decades.

(Applause)

MR. INDYK: Well, you'll have to applaud again in one moment. But I think that the passing of Zbigniew Brzezinski is the passing of a great American strategist, as Justin has outlined in his book, the likes of which we may not see again. And, therefore, this book is a great analysis and account of the works of this great strategic thinker. So I hope you will buy the book outside or on Amazon.

And please join me again in thanking not only Justin, but also the panelists for a great discussion. (Applause)

\* \* \* \* \*

## CERTIFICATE OF NOTARY PUBLIC

I, Carleton J. Anderson, III do hereby certify that the forgoing electronic file when originally transmitted was reduced to text at my direction; that said transcript is a true record of the proceedings therein referenced; that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to the action in which these proceedings were taken; and, furthermore, that I am neither a relative or employee of any attorney or counsel employed by the parties hereto, nor financially or otherwise interested in the outcome of this action.

Carleton J. Anderson, III

(Signature and Seal on File)

Notary Public in and for the Commonwealth of Virginia

Commission No. 351998

Expires: November 30, 2020