

**ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI
EXIT INTERVIEW**

This is February 20, 1981, interview with Dr. Brzezinski in his office at 1800 K Street,
Washington, DC. The interviewer is Marie Allen.

ALLEN: First, I'd like to ask you some personal questions about your background as a diplomat's son and your father coming from Poland. What influence do you think this particular background has had on your attitude toward world affairs and on your choice of career?

BRZEZINSKI: It clearly made me very interested in international affairs and pointed me in the direction of either diplomacy or foreign affairs more generally; or, at least, a study of international politics.

ALLEN: Because, did your father love the field?

BRZEZINSKI: Yes.

ALLEN: It was very much his one choice of career, too.

BRZEZINSKI: Yes. It was something that interested me and, of course, I grew up during the war years, which meant that foreign events were terribly important.

ALLEN: I've seen in print your story of the day that you learned that Poland had fallen. Could you recount that on tape? How old you were and what the circumstances were.

BRZEZINSKI: I have seen that story and I think that it was somewhat exaggerated because actually Poland didn't fall in a single day. It was overrun in the course of several weeks and, of course, it was extremely unpleasant; but also, at the same time, terribly exhilarating. One had a sense of struggle for something that one believed in and that was quite important.

ALLEN: Do you remember a particular day in which these events culminated finally and that your father learned...

BRZEZINSKI: Probably the capitulation of Warsaw, that would be one particular moment that was poignant. The other day was, some two weeks earlier when the Soviets attacked Poland stabbing it in the back and, thereby, sealing its fate. For that attack made the resistance to the Nazi's impossible.

ALLEN: Did your father tell you about these things?

BRZEZINSKI: Oh no. I followed them myself. I was a young kid, very young. But, I

read the newspapers regularly and I listened to the radio.

ALLEN: You were, what, eleven or twelve?

BRZEZINSKI: I was eleven.

ALLEN: Do you remember him talking to you about it afterward?

BRZEZINSKI: Oh sure. Yes.

ALLEN: Can you volunteer the--how he felt--you know, what his feelings were?

BRZEZINSKI: Well, you know, I don't want to get too much involved in this personal biography.

ALLEN: Okay. Let's go on then. What was the--you chose this career, a diplomat's career very early then. How did you get started? What were the first steps?

BRZEZINSKI: Well, in addition to being intensely interested in foreign affairs throughout my school years, in college I followed foreign affairs much more systematically and studied international politics. Then I went to Harvard and became particularly interested in Soviet studies and that became my major focus of interest. Then in the course of the later '50's I became more interested in the overall condition of the Soviet bloc and Soviet-East European/Chinese relations became something that I followed. I advised President Kennedy in the course of his Presidential campaign in 1960 on East/West relations. That got me interested, in turn, in the study of East/West relations and I did some work on that for the Council on Foreign Relations in New York. That, in turn, led to my serving in the State Department in the mid '60's on the Policy Planning Council, where I worked very much on East/West relations, particularly on the concept of peaceful engagement on building bridges which culminated in President Johnson's speech on that subject. Changing some of our basic priorities, for example, abandoning the notion that first there must be reunification of Germany and then detente. And accepting the notion that detente can someday create preconditions for German reunification. That, in turn, led to my working for Vice-President Humphrey as director of his foreign policy task forces in '68. That, in turn, made me aware of the importance of knowing more about Asia in addition to European problems into which I had branched out. So, after the defeat, I went and studied Asia. I went to Japan. I wrote a book about Japan's world role. That, in turn, led to the formation of the Trilateral Commission which worked on the relations between Europe and the United States. That, in turn, led to my meeting Jimmy Carter.

ALLEN: Do you remember the day in which you first met him and what the circumstances were?

BRZEZINSKI: I first met him at one of the meetings of the Trilateral Commission. He

was a member of it.

ALLEN: In New York?

BRZEZINSKI: In New York. I was one of those who selected him to be a member. Subsequently, in one of the Commission's meetings in Japan, he asked me, out of the blue, to take part in a press conference that he was giving, to accompany him to it. Which I did. And I became more impressed by him and it was then that I decided even though he had only two percent national recognition, not support, just recognition. I then decided, at that moment, to support him for the Presidency.

ALLEN: Was there a good personal chemistry between the two of you, do you think, from the beginning?

BRZEZINSKI: Yes. It was always a kind of relaxed and mutually confident relationship. Somehow we meshed well. And I just felt, you know, reasonably well with him and I think he felt the same way with me. Somehow or other we complemented each other. Somehow or other I also had the feeling that I understood him. As I worked with him in the White House, I was struck very often at how I could anticipate what he was going to say or how he was going to react. Almost unfailingly, I would know what he was going to say before he said it. Or, I could anticipate his reaction to a situation.

ALLEN: The Trilateral Commission, as I understand it, was dedicated to the expansion of these contacts with the three centers. Did Jimmy Carter, at this early point, believe in the importance of the tri-lateral relationship, do you think? It was not something that developed? He believed in it at that point?

BRZEZINSKI: No, I think he did.

ALLEN: Do you remember when you first discussed the job of National Security Affairs Advisor with the President?

BRZEZINSKI: Yes. It was in the fall after the elections when he was consulting me on whom to appoint to the different slots in the government and it was in that context that we, for the first time, talked about the possibility of my working for him--first, briefly by telephone and then, in the longer interview in Atlanta.

ALLEN: Was this the job that was your first choice or would you have preferred State Department?

BRZEZINSKI: Oh, I never wanted to be Secretary of State. People have never believed me when I have said that. I didn't want to be Secretary of State, prior to coming to Washington, and I didn't particularly want to be Secretary of State while in Washington. I always wanted the job of Assistant for National Security Affairs in the White House, for a very simple reason. It was a more important job. It was the key job. It involved the integration of the top inputs from State, Defense, and CIA. And, above all, it meant that you were close to a President whom I knew would be an activist. And, therefore, being close to him and working with him was centrally important.

ALLEN: You were quoted as saying at one point that you wanted that job to have more architecture and less acrobatics. Can you expand on what you meant by that?

BRZEZINSKI: Yes. I felt very strongly that we shouldn't have just a policy of maneuver which I felt our predecessors did, but a policy of building sustained, long-term relationships. And I think we did that. We did that in the Middle East for the first time in addition to Israel with Egypt and Saudi Arabia. We did that, above all, with China. And I believe that we have reinforced, in the course of those four years that we were in the office, relationships with Europe.

ALLEN: By maneuvering, do you mean well-publicized international trips? The appearance rather than the substance.

BRZEZINSKI: Either that, or sudden changes in relationships. For example, the sudden jolt to Japan which our predecessors inflicted on it without any warning, things of that sort.

ALLEN: So, in your view it was more important to build the substance?

BRZEZINSKI: Right. And, in fact, I believed that one of the things that history is going to give Carter credit for is that his policies had, in fact, a lot of substance. I think where he failed was in not communicating effectively the substance of his policies to the public and making the public appreciate how much is being done. He loved formal speeches and he wasn't good at them. And, at the same time, no one else could do it because if I did it the whole State Department would jump all over my back--and Vance couldn't do it and Muskie was not there long enough to do it.

ALLEN: So there was a gap in the communication role?

BRZEZINSKI: Right.

ALLEN: Thinking back to the early days of the Carter Administration, you were quoted as saying that there was a ninety day plan, foreign policy plan with several major things you hoped to accomplish in those first ninety days.

BRZEZINSKI: I don't think that's accurate. We prepared a ten point program for the four years, but no special ninety-day plan.

ALLEN: It's been a good while now and the paper records will provide a lot of the details, but are there several things that stick out in your mind that were high on that list of priorities at that time?

BRZEZINSKI: Yes. You know, Panama Canal treaties, Middle East, SALT, NATO revival; things that we actually did. Also, China. We had a goal to normalize with China by the end of '78 and we did.

ALLEN: Were there any things that were on that list that you did not end up addressing?

BRZEZINSKI: Well no, we addressed them, [but] there were a number of things that we did not carry out. We didn't get as much progress with North/South relations as we had hoped. We didn't, eventually, make as much progress towards peace in the Middle East as we had hoped. We didn't get SALT ratified.

ALLEN: The Panama Canal treaty ended up being, I think, the first major foreign policy effort. Why was that chosen first?

BRZEZINSKI: Because it had been lingering and hanging over our backs, and we felt that if we could get that behind us we could improve our relations with Latin America. And we would have a serious deterioration in our relations with the Latins if we did not get this out of the way quickly.

ALLEN: Was the treaty at that point pretty much concluded as far as negotiations?

BRZEZINSKI: Yes. Bunker and Linowitz concluded it, but the basic issues had been resolved.

ALLEN: What was your role? Did you have any effect on the final details of the negotiations?

BRZEZINSKI: No.

ALLEN: So, what was your role in relation to the treaties?

BRZEZINSKI: Relatively small, actually.

ALLEN: Did you primarily review them and advise the President concerning...?

BRZEZINSKI: Yes, but I don't feel I had a very major role.

ALLEN: Were you involved in explaining and trying to sell these treaties to the public?

BRZEZINSKI: Yes.

ALLEN: And that was, perhaps, the more primary role?

BRZEZINSKI: Yes. Emphasizing its strategic significance.

ALLEN: Were there particular things that stand out in your mind about that process? Particular Senators or Congressmen that you feel you were important in swaying?

BRZEZINSKI: No, not particularly.

ALLEN: There has been a lot of criticism about the, of course, there was a political storm that broke over the selling of the Panama Canal treaties. Do you remember pushing them at an early point in the administration because of the honeymoon period to get an advantage?

BRZEZINSKI: Yes. I felt that if we were going to get them ratified, we'd better do it fast rather than slow, so I did push. You know, in retrospect it is conceivable that we paid too high a political price for it and maybe it would have been better to leave them aside altogether. But it would have had to be altogether because leaving them aside and trying to get them ratified in the third and fourth year would have been impossible. So the choice was either to get it done or to let it go for four years. And we felt, all of us felt, Mondale, Vance, I, that we couldn't leave it aside.

ALLEN: Do you think, would there have been good advantages to us in addition to better relations in Latin American of having the Panama Canal treaties ratified? What are some of the advantages?

BRZEZINSKI: Well, it resolves a problem which otherwise would have been quite explosive.

ALLEN: There is some discussion in the paper that we might have gotten into providing American troops in the Panama Canal as a result of the unrest in the area in the last four years. If we had not concluded the Panama Canal treaties and kind of removed ourselves...

BRZEZINSKI: That we what?

ALLEN: That we might have gotten into a situation of having to send American troops to Panama.

BRZEZINSKI: I think it's quite possible that we would have had sabotage and conflict right in Panama, and we would have delivered Panama to the Cubans.

ALLEN: So the treaties, in addition to creating good relations, may have had the role of preventing conflict in that area. There were two advantages there. The Human Rights issue was something that was very important to the President. What was your role, your feelings about that issue?

BRZEZINSKI: I think I played an important role in that. In fact, when I got the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the President emphasized that. I felt very strongly that America had to be identified with an ideal. And, human rights is the essence of what America is about. And I feel very proud of my role in encouraging the President and others to make that a major plan.

ALLEN: How did that, as an issue in foreign policy, work, and how did it not work?

BRZEZINSKI: Well, it worked in some places. It didn't work in others. But, the point is that a policy like that cannot work uniformly. The world is very different place from region to region. In some places we have more leverage, in others less. But in some places, in quite a few places, we did a lot to improve the human condition. More generally, I think, we re-identified America with a certain basic aspiration--an aspiration which is very central in our time, namely that of freedom--and I think that was good for America.

ALLEN: Did you think in the Americas that we, perhaps, had more impact?

BRZEZINSKI: Yes. We had more impact in the Americas, Indonesia, and the Philippines than we had, say, in Russia. But then that stands to reason.

ALLEN: What do you think is--the immigration policy of the Soviet Union, of course, is shifted with time as I understand it. Sometimes they're freer, permit more people in, sometimes tighter. Do you think it had an effect on that policy?

BRZEZINSKI: No, probably not too much.

ALLEN: There were more internal things, you think, that...

BRZEZINSKI: Yes, the overall climate of the American/Soviet relations.

ALLEN: Were you heavily involved in the Middle East Peace Treaty process?

BRZEZINSKI: Yes.

ALLEN: What was your role, your particular bent that you brought to it, your, perhaps, advice on the process?

BRZEZINSKI: Well, I complemented Vance, I think, on it, in the feeling that peace in the Middle East was in America's strategic interest. And that peace in the Middle East, ultimately, was essential to Israel's survival. But the United States should base its policy in the region on its own estimate of what is needed, and it shouldn't simply follow the lead provided by the Israelis. That, as a consequence, some friction was unavoidable, but in the end the result would be beneficial both to the United States and to Israel.

ALLEN: What about the comprehensive versus the step-by-step approach? What was your advice?

BRZEZINSKI: I felt that we had a chance to move toward a comprehensive settlement if we moved quickly.

ALLEN: Do you think the President tends to prefer the more comprehensive types of solutions?

BRZEZINSKI: Yes, that was his inclination on this. You're absolutely right.

ALLEN: So, you're battling at least two problems in working with Middle East peace process. One thing, you're trying to establish a little more independence of the Israeli position so that you're at a more even-handed, perhaps, more middle of the ground role. I think I heard you say that. And second, you're trying to achieve a comprehensive solution of a very complex area.

BRZEZINSKI: I would put it a little differently. We were trying to achieve a comprehensive solution which would be compatible with our vital interests. These vital interests included preservation of Israel; however, it's our wider interests and our strategic reading of the situation that ought to be the point of departure for shaping our policies.

ALLEN: The personalities involved in that process, Sadat and Begin. Do you have any memories of specific incidents or conversations or turning points in the process flowing out of these personalities?

BRZEZINSKI: No, not particularly. I mean, there were a lot of personal contacts and occasionally frictions and arguments, particularly with Begin, but nothing particularly stands out.

ALLEN: This is the type of thing that's valuable in a tape recorded interview, of course, the paper records have the details of the meetings, the specifics of negotiations but, tape recording is particularly helpful to supplement the personal...If you remember specific mornings in which--or meetings, the trip that you took with the President to Israel in which the President spoke before the Knesset. That was a wonderful speech supposedly.

BRZEZINSKI: It went over very well and it was very well received. It generated a lot of warmth.

ALLEN: How did Prime Minister Begin react to the President's trip to Israel?

BRZEZINSKI: Well, he was very cordial and very warm, but I always had the feeling that there was something missing in the relationship between the two men which was present in the relationship between the President and Sadat. In that relationship there was real warmth. The President once said publicly to some State Department people about Vance, that he feels very well with Vance, very comfortable with Vance. And then he went on to say that, "I feel with him the way that I feel with Sadat. He always agrees with me." And I piped up and I said, "Yes, and you feel with me the way you feel with Begin." And the President looked startled and said, "Yes," evidently embarrassed, and laughed. But I think that was a clue. Sadat and the President just meshed well and accommodated each other. Begin tested the President more.

ALLEN: Do you think he was playing games with the President, trying to secure as much advantage as possible in negotiating?

BRZEZINSKI: Well, I wouldn't call it playing games, but he was certainly upholding his own interests and with great determination.

ALLEN: Which of the two men had the greater personal warmth?

BRZEZINSKI: Well, I thought I had already said that.

ALLEN: You said...well Sadat and the President had a much greater mesh of their personalities. Begin could be very warm in public...

BRZEZINSKI: Yes, but Sadat is a genuinely warm person. Begin can be very gracious and polite. I think politeness probably is the better word than warmth to characterize his outward manner. He's the kind of person who will kiss your hand or get you a chair. But, that's politeness. That's not warmth. Sadat is the kind of person who is more likely to give you a big hug and make you feel he's genuine.

ALLEN: Do you remember during the Camp David process--are there particular incidents that stand out in your mind that were, perhaps, turning points there?

BRZEZINSKI: Not as such, no. What I remember well is the President's tenacity--unwillingness to yield his determination. There were moments when he was very low and distressed that the whole thing might fall apart. But, it was his tenacity and outward serenity that, I think, held the process together and eventually led to success.

ALLEN: There have been some reports that the President, himself, did most of the negotiating there.

BRZEZINSKI: That is true.

ALLEN: And that is true.

BRZEZINSKI: Although, I think I have to give, also, quite a bit of credit to Vance. He did a lot of the work. And I would say, after the President, Vance deserves secondarily the credit.

ALLEN: Then you had the delegations from the different countries but there was not much contact for negotiating purposes among the lower level officials. It was Begin, Sadat, and the President who primarily negotiated.

BRZEZINSKI: That is true. That is absolutely true. And the President, himself, drew up the Sinai agreement including all of the consulates for evacuation and so forth.

ALLEN: Were these similar to the things you had recommended? What was your role there?

BRZEZINSKI: My role was secondary. I supported the President, particularly in the more difficult moments of argumentation. In terms of the agreement itself, I contributed to it but I don't think my role was all that decisive.

ALLEN: Do you remember the day when the President decided that he'd have to set a deadline on those negotiations by which they had to be concluded? What was your advice? Did you advise the deadline?

BRZEZINSKI: Yes. I felt very strongly that unless we were willing to indicate that we would suspend or break up the whole process we wouldn't get anywhere, so I favored a deadline.

ALLEN: Was there dissent in the American delegation there about that point?

BRZEZINSKI: Maybe, but I'm not sure from Vance. I say maybe because Cy generally didn't like deadlines, ultimata. Whereas, I was more inclined to feel that you would never get anywhere in the negotiations unless at some point you were willing to pose a less comfortable alternative. But I say maybe because I don't remember whether he did or didn't object to a deadline.

ALLEN: Was the President reluctantly brought to the deadline idea? Was this...

BRZEZINSKI: No, I think he, by then was psychologically preconditioned to accept it because he was frustrated.

ALLEN: Just from someone reading the print, the media, the print media about what was happening at Camp David there seems to me to be an aura of exhaustion with the long days, the days going into weeks, negotiating upon negotiating. Do you remember that?

BRZEZINSKI: Actually, days went by very fast. Also, there was a certain amount of relaxation. I played chess. I played tennis. The President played tennis. We went swimming. So that, I cannot say that there was exhaustion. There was frustration, irritation, ups and downs, and at some point a feeling that it would be better to break the whole process off. But, not exhaustion.

ALLEN: The negotiating sessions themselves then, perhaps, were not all day long marathon sessions. They tended to be more special--set in a short period of time.

BRZEZINSKI: Well, they tended to be sporadic and very intense, but sometimes they lasted very long. Sometimes they lasted until one, two, three AM.

ALLEN: Did you find that the attitude of Begin and Sadat changed during the process at Camp David?

BRZEZINSKI: Yes. There's no doubt that in the beginning they were extremely uncomfortable with each other--very uncomfortable. And Sadat, particularly, was irritated with Begin. But then, gradually I think there was some evolution in attitudes and also among the associates. Weizman, particularly, was effective in creating a good atmosphere.

ALLEN: Was it because of the proximity--the personal proximity?

BRZEZINSKI: Yes. The exposure, the dialogue, and then also the recognition that, unless there is some personal accommodation, there will never be any progress.

ALLEN: I'm going to hop on to another subject, the China thing...

BRZEZINSKI: Yes. We'll have to quit in about five minutes.

ALLEN: In five minutes?

BRZEZINSKI: Yes, because I have someone coming in at about a quarter to twelve.

ALLEN: Well, maybe I should ask you, then, what do you think is your greatest contribution in the foreign policy area and let you just pick one and discuss the one you're proudest of.

BRZEZINSKI: Well, I would say that, in a general sense, I would mention three positive and then maybe some negatives. On the positive side, I would have to say the normalization relations to China and the expansion of the relationship which is almost as important a story as the normalization because we could have normalized and simply stopped. Secondly, the modernization of both our strategic doctrine posture, the whole MX debate--the RDF [Rapid Deployment Force]. I believed that my contribution there was quite critical in initiating the process and, in the case of the MX, pushing it through all the way--pulling in, actually the Departments of Defense and State. And Defense was willingly pulled in and State was reluctant. Thirdly, I would say the initiation of the regional security framework for the Persian Gulf, the concept and all of the steps taken to actually introduce the American military presence into the region together with the firmer measures against the Soviets in Afghanistan and so forth. On the negative side, I think what I contributed was, and I've been reviewing the record recently and I was struck by it, some stimulus to an earlier display of American tough-mindedness, vis-a-vis, the Soviets. If I hadn't pushed I don't think we would have done it. In many instances I think we would have acquiesced. It's either a question of messages to Brezhnev or how we responded or how we reacted. I also objected to acquiescence to the Vietnamese expansion in Cambodia, and I objected to any recognition of Vietnam. I objected to recognition of Angola and to the establishment of normal relations with Cuba unless the Cubans released political prisoners and got out of Africa. I think if I hadn't taken these positions, we probably would have accommodated ourselves to the Cubans, Angolans, and Vietnamese. So, that is the range. Then I would say that actually contrary to the public image, I think the integration and coordination of State and Defense worked well. They're both better in the last several years than previously. Defense tended either to be an antagonist or to be independent from the process. It was integrated this time. And that's, largely, thanks to a very good working relationship that Brown had with me and with Vance. We worked very well together. If I had to single one out, I guess I would say China. Then, I mentioned earlier human rights, I contributed to that and I contributed to some of the impulse for moving rapidly in the Middle East. But, these weren't just my contributions. Others were involved. I guess in China I played the catalytic role.

ALLEN: One final question. You commented on Defense and State and that relationship. What about State and the NSC Staff?

BRZEZINSKI: In most cases it was pretty good, actually. It was bad on two issues, US/Soviet relations where people in the NSC always felt the State was too acquiescent and weak and I think rightly, actually. And secondly, not so much staff, but maybe more well, I guess staff also, but Vance and I had a different view of how to deal with the Iranian crisis. I felt that Iran was a strategic asset and we should not let it go. If there was an Iranian army and police, they should be used to protect our interests and not simply permitted to disintegrate and let the place fall into the hands of our adversaries.

ALLEN: Okay. Thank you. If you have nothing--you're going to make your appointment.

BRZEZINSKI: Well, if you want, at some point to follow something up fine.

ALLEN: I would like to.