WILLIAM J. CLINTON PRESIDENTIAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH NANCY SODERBERG

May 10-11, 2007
Charlottesville, Virginia

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TRANSCRIPT

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Riley: This is the Nancy Soderberg interview, part of the Clinton Presidential History Project. Thank you very much for coming to Charlottesville.

Soderberg: My pleasure.

Riley: We understand it has not been an easy day thus far, so we're going to take it easy today and get a couple of hours in. Then we'll start bright and early in the morning.

We had a conversation before the tape began running about the fundamental ground rules. The most important one is that this is a confidential interview. To ensure candor, no one is allowed to repeat anything said in the room. The second thing is a voice identification to help the transcriber. I'm going to ask everybody to identify yourself and say a few words so the person transcribing will know who's speaking. I'm Russell Riley, associate professor at the Miller Center. I've been heading up the Clinton project.

Soderberg: I'm Nancy Soderberg, the interviewee.

Strong: Bob Strong from Washington and Lee University.

Morrisroe: Darby Morrisroe. I'm an assistant professor at the Miller Center.

Bagchi: I'm Nitu Bagchi. I'm going to be doing the note-taking today.

Riley: When did you first come to know of Bill Clinton?

Soderberg: I had worked on the 1984 [Walter] Mondale campaign and the [Michael] Dukakis 1988 campaign. So I was very politically active; I worked for Ted Kennedy in the beginning. The same 200 people run these campaigns, so all your friends call you up and say, "You have to come work!" George Stephanopoulos had been in the failed war room of the Dukakis campaign where he learned the problems of not fighting back, and that helped him set up a better operation in '92.

George and I worked on the Hill: he was in the House, I was in the Senate. He called me. I, of course, had heard of Clinton. I wasn't particularly dying to go back to work on a third failed Presidential campaign. [George H.W.] Bush was at 90% in the polls. I didn't want to do it. He kept saying, "We need somebody who has done foreign policy before; you'll be perfect. The campaign headquarters will be in D.C. Come on, come on." So I finally went and talked to Kennedy about it because I figured he'd hear that they approached me.

He said, "You should do it." I said, "Why?" I think this is in the book. He said, "Because he's going to win." I looked at him as if to say, "There's no way. What are you talking about? You're such a romantic." He said, "Yes, I may be a romantic, but he's going to win." He had the whole theory pegged out.

Strong: When was this?

Soderberg: This was in March of '92. He said Clinton was going to move the party to the center, that Bush's polls were inflated. Clinton was much more conservative than I was. He'd just sent a lobotomized black guy to the death chamber. I believe women when they talk about affairs; they don't make that stuff up. I didn't see how he could win, given all those problems. But I thought, *Well, it will lead to something.* So I made all these demands on George: I want housing, I want to travel, I want this. He called me on a cell phone from a cab in Los Angeles, and said, "Will you take it?" I said yes. He said, "By the way, the campaign is in Little Rock." Click. That's how I got to Little Rock.

So I went down in June of '92 and set up the foreign policy shop. I was the director of the foreign policy campaign.

Riley: Did you have a preference for another candidate before?

Soderberg: No, not really. I don't even remember who else was running at the time. I guess [Gary] Hart—

Riley: Bob Kerrey, Jerry Brown?

Soderberg: No, I hadn't really paid too much attention. I was just sure I didn't want to do another campaign. It's brutal when you go on those campaigns and lose. I thought, *Why? Three times, you're out.* I was ready to get off the Hill. You outgrow being on the Hill, and I'd been there for six years. I was definitely ready to do something, but I didn't know quite what. I thought, *Well, it will lead to something*—it never occurred to me it would be the White House.

Morrisroe: Before joining the campaign, did you have an assessment of the positions Clinton had staked out on foreign policy?

Soderberg: Yes, you get addicted to the politics in Washington. He gave a series of speeches at Georgetown University, and I'd read those, and I had followed the news and listened to him. On foreign policy, I agreed with him. I thought he was pretty centrist, sensible, and more activist. Bush bragged about the vision thing, but he clearly didn't have it. I can still remember looking at the Bosnia situation and saying, "We have to get involved there."

I can't remember what they cut and what they didn't cut from the book, but Bob Hutchins, who was the NSC [National Security Council] advisor for Europe at the time, in '91, was up on the Hill for some reason, and I was peppering him with questions. Why don't you guys get involved in this? They were very cocky. He said, "We can't solve all the world's problems. Let's leave this one to the Europeans."

There were a couple of things Clinton naturally felt he wanted to get involved in. I liked him immediately when I finally met him. Part of it was his own instincts, but having worked on a number of other campaigns, I knew that what you need to do in a foreign policy campaign—if you're not an incumbent President or Vice President—is demonstrate that you can go to the mat with the incumbent on foreign policy and you're not afraid to challenge his views. We picked three issues: Bosnia, Haiti, and China. We actually did two of the three. China we ended up doing a 180 on.

Morrisroe: Can you tell us about your first meeting?

Soderberg: That one also is in the book. I don't remember the exact date in '92, probably early June. It was in New York. He was being briefed on a meeting with [Boris] Yeltsin. So it was in New York, and there were too many people in the room. I can't remember who it was. The hardest thing about running a campaign on foreign policy is keeping all the people who want to be helpful and want to be National Security Advisor out of the room so you can actually get some work done. Everybody who wanted to be a player ended up worming their way into this meeting.

I didn't really say much. I came in. I remember him coming up to me and saying, "I'm really glad you're doing this, and thank you for coming." He was standing just a little closer than I'm used to. He's so personable. This man has such a presence when he walks up to you. He's immediately in your personal space. You have to feel his presence and engage him. I liked him immediately; he's smart and interested. I didn't say anything in the briefing; it was pretty much other people doing it. He just got it, you could tell.

One of the things that drives me crazy about Clinton's record is the perception that he didn't know anything about foreign policy, was a novice. It just isn't true. This is a man who had been deeply immersed in it all his life, thought about it deeply, was smart, and had the basics down and then some. He'd been there. He was an activist as a trade-promoting Governor of Arkansas. On the academic side alone, he had done quite a bit on it. He instinctively understood America's power and how to use it, brilliantly.

Riley: Did you bring to the '92 campaign any foreign policy lessons from the earlier two campaigns you'd worked on as mistakes not to make?

Soderberg: "Don't wear a helmet in a tank" would be number one.

Riley: You managed to succeed in that, didn't you?

Soderberg: I kept him out of those tanks. I knew how to do it; I'd done it twice. You have to take on a couple of the positions of the incumbent and show that you can be—You have to pass the Commander in Chief test, which is "Never make a mistake in foreign policy." Make one

mistake and you're dead; it's as simple as that—you can't pass that CINC test, the Commander in Chief test.

Riley: Mistake meaning factual mistake or mistake in politics?

Soderberg: Usually factual. The politics of these things are different. You can have a political position that's not popular and still pass the CINC test. But if you make a mistake, it questions your capability, particularly back then when the Cold War had just ended. People weren't sure what was going on, so the nuclear button question was certainly very relevant. *Does this person have the ability to handle a nuclear crisis?* That was still in the back of people's minds.

So we mapped out a very proactive effort to do that. It was basically to get positions on all the key issues, some of which he could agree with Bush on, some of which he had to challenge him on. So you basically start the briefings during the campaign. Clinton had started these well before I got to the campaign. But he needed to understand how the defense budget worked, what he would cut. You always have to have a working knowledge of the key defense positions, one or two that you'd support or not support. You have to have a broad sense of what you would do with the big powers—China, Russia, Iraq—and what you would do with the crises of the day, which at the time were Haiti and Bosnia.

You don't have to know the insignia on the shoulders of the military, but you have to know not to guess. Then there's the whole politics side of it: you have to have a position on every possible ethnic group—Armenian-Americans, Irish-Americans, Polish-Americans. So you have that. We understood from other campaigns that there are all these wannabe's around. So we set up a very effective system of dealing with them, and being in Arkansas was an advantage, because very few people actually made it to Arkansas since there are no direct flights. So we didn't have to deal with too many people who showed up wondering where they were going to get to be Ambassador.

We had a pretty effective Washington-New York group that met with people and got position papers. Some of it's busy work, but some of it's actually useful. It's a great way to keep people involved, and sometimes you actually use the papers. Other times it's just a way to keep them involved and feeling like they're positioning things. You have more help than you can possibly use on a campaign, but you don't want to upset people by turning them down.

Strong: When you say you set up the foreign policy shop in Arkansas, how many full-time professional people would that have been? A lot of it would have been contacts with the kind of people you're describing.

Soderberg: Initially it was me and an assistant named Brooke Darby, who is now with the FBI. She was a student of Tony Lake, who recommended her. I think I'd met her once.

Strong: When you started, what were the positions of Lake and [Sandy] Berger in the campaign?

Soderberg: We set it up so that I would be the one full-time staff person running it, and Tony and Sandy would be the two senior advisors who were mentors of the whole effort. The three of us talked a hundred times a day and decided what to say and how to say it. I would do the leg work and run it by them. They were the two senior foreign policy advisors. Tony was the

eminence grise wise man side of it, and Sandy was more the political gutsy—have to do this, have to do that. Their combination was actually perfect, because we had someone who had the more academic side, but the other one had the political side, and the two merged. It worked really well.

Riley: Was anybody else important in the foreign policy area as you came in? One of those Georgetown speeches was a foreign policy speech. If you weren't yet on board, who would have—?

Soderberg: I had nothing to do with it. My understanding is George and Tony and Sandy wrote it, but I can't remember.

Riley: Your sense, then, is that basically that exhausts the people, at least on the inner circle.

Soderberg: Yes, they were the inner circle. When [Albert] Gore came on, he and Leon Fuerth joined that circle. Michael Mandelbaum was definitely very involved in Russia early on. He might have had a hand in the Georgetown speech. Have you interviewed him?

Riley: No, we haven't.

Soderberg: For the early period, he'd probably be worth talking to. He wanted to be National Security Advisor and got upset that he didn't get it and became a critic.

Riley: We'll want to ask about that later.

Soderberg: I don't remember whether he was involved in the Georgetown speech, but he might have been. Then, as issues came up, we'd call in people we needed help from. I called most of my friends. That's actually where George Tenet came in first, in intelligence. Sam Nunn and Les Aspin did the military briefings, as did Admiral [Jonathan] Howe, who came in and endorsed him. Bill Lind did a lot of the defense budget. A lot of people on the Hill helped. I brought Jim Steinberg in. Most of these were people I thought should ultimately be in the administration. I had to work in a way to get them in a briefing. Most of them did end up in the administration.

Strong: By the time you joined, the primary season was over. There were already established positions about most of the foreign policy issues that he was answering press questions about.

Soderberg: Broadly so. He'd laid them out broadly in a speech, and he had taken a few positions with various ethnic constituencies. But for the most part, it gets much more intense once you're the nominee. In the Democratic primary and caucus process, you don't really have to get very specific. There are a couple of debates, so you have the broad level, but people don't push you the way you might get pushed once you're the nominee. It's a little different now because the primary season is so early, and it's going to be over so quickly that I think they're going to get pushed a lot more right now.

The one I didn't agree with was his Irish position, and Clinton actually got this wrong in his book. He gave me credit for writing the positions in April of '92. I corrected it, too, and I don't know why they didn't get the correction in. They sent me that part as it was being rushed to press and I corrected it, but they didn't get it in. I had nothing to do with it and would have opposed it

had I been in the inner circle at that time. I had to walk a fine line, trying to square the circle there. But actually in the end he was right and I was wrong.

Strong: Everyone would have opposed it. It's a curiosity why he made those commitments.

Soderberg: No, it isn't; he wanted to win the New York primary.

Strong: He didn't have to say yes to [Gerry] Adams. He could have just said yes to the outside—

Soderberg: A group of people got to him very early, mostly Bruce Morrison, who made a strong case for it. I didn't think we were ready to do it. Ultimately, a year later I did. By December of '93, I had been convinced it was right. But at the time I thought it was premature. But he always had an instinct to be active. We can talk about the Irish issue later; that's a longer story.

Strong: Are the Presidential debates the busiest time during a campaign?

Soderberg: Yes, yes. It's that so much rises or falls on that. You have to get ready with positions on everything. I wasn't in the actual debate prep, though. There's a debate team who takes that over, because it is so completely, fully—you can't do the campaign and the debate at the same time.

Strong: Aren't you supplying that team with the positions?

Soderberg: Yes, you run around and get everybody to write papers. Then you boil them down, and they get sent to the debate team, and they often will go to a third level of edits to boil it down to what they think is actually useful. Actually, Clinton was easy. He was so smart, and we weren't really worried about anything. By the time of the debates, it was so obvious that Clinton knew what he was doing that nobody was worried about Clinton making a big gaffe on foreign policy. The broader question was whether he conveyed the aura of being President. That's not answering questions; it's the whole body language. It's a small gesture of interest. It was more him connecting with the American people versus George Bush looking at his watch. That says it all.

Strong: At that stage, was he carefully reading these briefing materials and sending you back comments—"I don't want to do this. I want to go further there"?

Soderberg: Always. Usually those were in discussions. I sent the library mounds of these papers from the campaign where he was editing everything. Nothing would go out that he hadn't seen. He always made sure that he actually believed in this position. He would come back and say, "I don't believe that; I'm not going to say it." I remember he always wanted to endorse the lifting of the arms embargo against the Bosnians, and we wouldn't let him do it. He was so argumentative about it. Then we had to get Gore on the line, and Gore and Leon [Panetta] said, "No, you're right, he can't do it." He always inched towards it, but I think the farthest he went in the campaign—I remember researching this point for my book—was that we should "consider" doing it. But he always stopped short of doing it.

There were some political decisions he wanted to endorse such as building the F-15 or F-16. It was one of the systems we had decided we didn't need. You always have some you need, some you don't need. That was on the "don't need" list. It was built in Texas, and he really wanted to win Texas. I was with him at the time on some plane, somewhere in the campaign, when George Bush endorsed it. He was furious: "I wanted to endorse that! Now it's going to look like I'm following him because you wouldn't let me do it." He was so angry. He was very engaged in it.

Strong: Engaged on both the substantive and the political side?

Soderberg: Sure, he's a political animal. But I never saw the man, in my eight years of working for him and eight months in Little Rock, make a decision that he didn't firmly believe in. Sure, he's a political animal, but he also always made sure that he thought he was doing the right thing.

Strong: Commentary on the campaign all says there were lots of foreign policy commitments that were hard to accomplish or had to be delayed or backed off from. Is that a fair picture?

Soderberg: Actually, I don't think it is. I wrote an article in the *Washington Post*—in early '94, I think—because I was so furious about this. It was my first op-ed. I was at my book group. I had dinner with a women's book group once a month. I remember getting a call from him.

Riley: This was when you were still in the White House?

Soderberg: Yes, I had written that article, and I thought I'd better send it to him. He called me in the middle of this dinner. It didn't matter where you were; he thought you were going to be available. I remember having to step out of the book club, and they all said, "Wow, that's really cool." He was editing the thing. He made me put something in, I think about the Middle East. I had forgotten to put it in. He really focused on it.

In effect, what happened with foreign policy is that there was no rule book after the Cold War. Clinton had the right instincts, but you get to the White House, and all these people say, "You can't do it because it's always been done this way."

Bosnia was a perfect situation. There are all these EU [European Union] and UN [United Nations] envoys running around, lots of busy work, little progress. It makes you think you're actually going to get to the big picture. It took us two and a half years to figure out that's not going to work. You have to let the current system wear itself out.

You can't come in and just change everything as a new President. So you just go along with it for a while. It took us two and a half years, essentially, to figure out the new rules of the post-Cold War era. Nobody gave us a book when we came in. The old way clearly wasn't working. The world had fundamentally changed. The way you do business has to change, but how you do it took a while.

So it did take us a long time to get [Jean-Bertrand] Aristide back, but we did it. It did take us a long time to get peace in Bosnia; we did it ultimately. China is the one where we tried only MFN [most favored nation] for the first year, and then basically realized that the relationship was bigger than human rights, and we should broaden it and essentially endorse the Bush position. So we had to do a 180 on that. But pretty much everything else he said he was going to do, he did. It

just took a while, and the process was a little off and messy. Democrats aren't very disciplined with the press. Too many people spoke to too many people too often. There wasn't a well-oiled, disciplined machine of who talks and who says what and what the message is.

The Bob Woodward book is a perfect case. There was never any kind of edict that went out: "If Bob Woodward is writing a book, here are the three people who are authorized to talk to him, and anybody else who does is fired."

Then you would have been able to control what that story was about. But nobody thought about doing that. So consequently everybody talked to Bob Woodward, because it's a rush to speak to the famous Bob Woodward when he calls you: "Wow, I must be really important, I'll take that call."

Riley: I want to dial back to the early stage and ask one policy question and one biographical question. Were there policies you inherited or things in the mix when you first went to Little Rock that you felt were not the right direction and that you had to fix?

Soderberg: Not really, no. Tony and Sandy and I see eye-to-eye on the world, with the exception of the Irish peace process issue, where I thought he had gone too far in calling for an envoy and the visa. But I agreed with the general sense that we should be involved. There really wasn't. Part of this is Clinton, as well. He had a pretty good instinct of what he wanted to do. You don't spoon-feed Clinton anything. It's not like some candidates where you say, "Here's what you should say," and they say, "Okay, I'll go say that." He's not like that.

Riley: Tell us about what it was like to go to Little Rock.

Soderberg: I resisted because I didn't want to leave my apartment. I was in the middle of remodeling my apartment, and I just didn't want to go. I didn't want to leave my house and my friends. I worried I was going to miss too much.

In a way, it was great because it's the only way you can cut out your life. If you're in Washington, you say, "Oh, I'll try to make that dinner." It's just too frustrating, because you're never going to make it. Or you get there, and you're called out. When you're in Little Rock, you didn't have to fight it because the only people you knew were on the campaign, and they were on the same schedule—from 7:00 in the morning until 11 o'clock at night, regularly, and that's all you do. So it was easier there. You didn't have to deal with any other distractions.

It ended up being nice. I had grown up on the east coast but went to Tulsa, Oklahoma in my junior year in high school. They're very similar societies: small town. I like little towns; they're fun to get to know. The people could not have been nicer. That town loved Bill Clinton, so people were always being nice to me about everything. I found a funny little apartment in the risky part of town, but everybody was really nice. I was never there anyway, so it didn't really matter. I didn't mind it at all. I liked it.

Riley: Your piece of the action was to stay in Little Rock and manage the activities there. Sandy and Tony were on the plane?

Soderberg: No. Actually, one of the negotiating points I had with George was to not do that because I had done that for two campaigns, and I didn't want to be stuck in that. So we rotated around. I definitely traveled a lot. So did Tony and Sandy. A lot of the point of traveling with him is so that you're there right away when questions come up. We tried to have one of us with him, because if you're on the road and something happens, you have to be right there to say, "Here's what to say. Here's what's going on." You have to be on the phone and able to hand him the three points. So usually one of us would try to be there. That was fun; I loved it.

Riley: Do you have any particular recollections of being on the road with him?

Soderberg: Oh yes, a million. It's crazy on a campaign plane, because FAA [Federal Aviation Administration] rules go out the window. People are sliding down the aisles on trays as you take off. I forget what they called it—skiing or something. They're playing cards, running around. Nobody wears their seat belts. You get to feel the crowds.

I can still remember the moment I felt Bill Clinton might actually win. It was in mid-August. We were on the back roads, the really back roads of Texas. It was about 120 degrees out. We were, of course, late—like four hours late. These people had been out there for hours waiting for us. They had signs, "Give us four minutes, and we'll give you four years." Whole families were out there.

Then we'd go to these rallies, and increasingly they were—I'd been to a lot of campaign events, but this was just different. All of a sudden, we could feel that these people saw in Clinton somebody different. That's when I finally said, "Uh-oh, he might actually win this." You could just feel it. It never stopped.

I can remember it up until being in the War Room, two weeks before the election, talking to Ricki Seidman, who was on the political side. She was doing all the numbers for the Electoral College. She looked at me one day and said, "There's no way we can lose; we have it." I didn't want to say that to anybody, because I'd jinx it, but that's probably the one I remember.

I remember being screamed at about the F-16s or -18s. That was the first time I was screamed at. Everyone says the first time you get screamed at, you know you're in the inner circle, because he won't scream at you if you're not. So there's a mixed message there, but I guess it was good news.

Riley: You said your principal role when you were traveling was to be there in case some foreign policy issue came up. What were you doing otherwise? Were you working the crowds with him? Were you talking to the—

Soderberg: No, I was on the phone. I was working all the time. There are position papers to put out, letters to answer. I'm writing press releases. There are constantly documents to put out and questions to answer. I'm constantly on the phone with the team back in Little Rock saying, "Do this, do this." There are a gazillion phone calls to answer. I didn't have anything to do on the road; I never had to do anything at the events. You go look at them just for fun, but mostly I'd be in the back on the phone.

Strong: When does the flood of people seeking jobs in the new administration start? Is it well under way in the campaign, even when the poll numbers are more questionable and people aren't sure?

Soderberg: It starts early, early, because the way you make sure you get a really good position is be on a campaign early. A lot of people start early on the campaign because they believe in the candidate, too. It's not all self interest. But you can see it's already happening now. People are lining up with various candidates.

Strong: When was Clinton starting to talk about it?

Soderberg: I don't really know, because I wasn't paying attention. But everyone noticed when George Stephanopoulos left the best job on Capitol Hill to go work for Clinton; I think it was in September of '91. Wow, really? Clinton? That's interesting. George is very liberal, and Clinton was not. At the time, everyone knew he was probably one of the best political minds out there, and the fact he went to do it made people say, "Wow, that's going to put that guy on the map."

I guess Clinton had recruited Sandy somehow. I don't know how Sandy got there. They'd known each other forever, so I think it was a constant stream of friendship. Then Sandy recruited Tony in the fall of '91, so it was pretty much lined up by the fall of '91. It's a year earlier now.

Morrisroe: Were there people seeking to influence Clinton on foreign policy who you and others on your team thought were leading him astray and you sought to either intervene in advance, or be there when they were with him? Not necessarily people on the campaign.

Soderberg: There are always—

Morrisroe: Were there people who were problematic for you?

Soderberg: I can't remember which campaign this happened on. I can't remember if it was Clinton or Dukakis, but I think it's fairly standard. Somebody was holding a dinner in New York City, claiming to be doing it for the campaign, and invited all these people. It had nothing to do with the campaign. I remember hearing about it and thinking, *What?* That kind of thing you get a lot, people bragging about what they're doing. Or, "Oh I sent a memo in on some issue." Okay, so what? A lot of people send memos, but nothing happens to them. So it's more the self promoters. They're just annoying.

For me, sitting there in Little Rock, I didn't have to deal with too many people who were a problem, because everybody knew Tony and Sandy were the big names. They talked to me, but I didn't really have to worry about it too much. Most of them knew Tony and Sandy, so they would call them. They had to do it more than I did, which was a blessing. It's lovely not to have to deal with all the wannabes. But for the most part, whenever I needed any help from anybody, there was a bevy of people I could call. I don't remember any personality who was really unhelpful or trying to do some rogue things.

The only really dumb thing was Pierre Salinger sending me a letter by Fed-Ex from Muammar al-Qaddafi. At this point his Alzheimer's, I think, had set in, and he really wasn't himself. I didn't know that. I knew him because he was Kennedy's press secretary, and I worked for Ted

Kennedy. Once you're in the Kennedy world, you get to know all the Kennedy people. I called him and said, "Pierre, what are you doing?" It was a long letter written in English from Qaddafi, and he doesn't really know how to write our kind of letters. So it looked like a six-year-old had written it. I called him and said, "Can you imagine?"

Qaddafi was basically saying, "Look, I can't deal with George Bush. I want to deal with you." He sent him one of his Green Books. I called Pierre and said, "What are you doing?" I'm sure it was a lot meaner than that. Like those poor travel agents today. Can you imagine the press running a story that Qaddafi wants to—at that point, he was still on the terrorist list, he had blown up an airline killing 189 Americans in 1988, and he was proliferating weapons and not really on the good-guys list.

"If that leaks, what do you think it's going to do to the campaign? Are you crazy? Go away. I'm not going to do anything with this letter." I just put it in a box. I showed Clinton the Green Book, and he said, "Can I have that?" [*laughter*] I think I gave it to him; I can't remember.

There were dumb things like that, but that's the only one I remember. Pierre was just trying to be helpful, but he should have known better. At that point I don't think he was too well.

Riley: What would you say was the prickliest issue, the most delicate foreign policy question you had to deal with in the campaign?

Soderberg: The hardest one was Bosnia. It was the crisis of the day. Over that summer there were concentration camp-like pictures of skinny people behind barbed wire, and it was demanding action. What should you do? You don't really have the resources to figure out what to do when you're on a campaign as opposed to being in the White House where you have people who can actually draw up military plans. But you have a pretty good array of experienced people you can speak with.

But developing those positions was really hard. We wanted to take them on, but we didn't want to sound too aggressive. So we ended up coming up with a plan in July of '92 where we would use air power, and I think an embargo, military force—a very responsible suggestion of military force. The Bush administration just dismissed it. George had tee'd up a question—I think it was Senator [Carl] Levin—to one of Bush's… I think it was the Defense Secretary. He said, "What about this type of position?" not identifying it as Clinton's position. The guy endorsed it. That was brilliant. That's where George is really good. Basically he could say, "Well, your own Secretary of Defense just endorsed this."

They were getting lazy. That's also when I knew that they were getting too cocky and lazy. [Marlin] Fitzwater came out and dismissed it without having read it, not coordinating with what the guys on the Hill were doing. I don't think it occurred to George Bush until about two weeks before the election that he might lose, I really don't. I think there was this *noblesse* privilege that they assumed they were going to win, and the hick upstart from Arkansas was not really credible.

Riley: After a candidate becomes the nominee, is there a point when you're given security briefings or something like that from within the sitting administration?

Soderberg: Not until you're the nominee, and then the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] shows up. It's hilarious. It was really funny. I was just sitting there. I didn't know this was going to happen, but after the campaign I got a phone call saying, "We're here." "Who's here? Who are you?"

"Can we come talk to you?" I think they finally told me they were the CIA, and I said okay. But they had set up, without talking to anybody, in this little hotel in Little Rock, no better than a Motel 6, a whole room that they could use to produce the PDB [President's Daily Brief]. They just started briefing Clinton; it was great. Before that, traditionally, once the nomination has been given to the opposition, the CIA director will go and brief the candidate. It was a big deal who was going to get to go to that. It was really ridiculous.

I think that's when Warren Christopher started making a bid to be Secretary of State. He asked to be in on it, but he hadn't been involved in the campaign at all. As a way to avoid the fight, Tony and Sandy both said they would not sit in on it and said I should sit in on it—which I thought was ridiculous since this was way above my pay grade, in my view.

But they explained, "It's all going to be prepared beforehand; you're just there to take notes." So it was Leon Fuerth and Dave McCurdy and me and one other person I can't remember. I think it's probably in the book, and [Robert] Gates. Gates clearly wanted to keep his job, and this was his job interview, and he did a great job. He came down with reams of handwritten pages on a yellow legal pad, and that's what he spoke from. He was very engaging, very interesting, very good.

I actually ended up getting the notes for that briefing declassified. Most of it got cut from my book, but they're in the library if somebody ever wants to look at them.

Riley: That's the Bush Library?

Soderberg: No, Clinton. I sent all my papers to Clinton; they're in the Clinton Library. That's a campaign document, so it's down there somewhere in my file. I think I have about 15 boxes down there if some future scholar wants to go plow through it.

Riley: I'm sure they will.

Morrisroe: Count on it.

Soderberg: It's really interesting. I took extensive notes, and they're all in there about what they covered and what happened.

Strong: One other campaign question. In the campaign, Clinton is talking about, I don't know whether they called it globalization then. He's talking about—

Soderberg: Two sides of the same coin.

Strong: Yes, the need to adjust to the new world economy. What kind of reaction was that getting from the foreign policy experts you were dealing with? Were they ignoring him on that set of interests and speeches, or were they engaged?

Soderberg: At that stage it's actually less the other foreign policy experts than the press, Tom Friedman and others who write what they really think of this. They'll go around and interview other people. You have a small group you bounce it off. The economic piece of it, I guess at that point was probably Bob Rubin. I don't really recall who was doing the economic side of it. I dealt with just Gene Sperling, who had also been on the Dukakis campaign. George just re-collected the Dukakis campaign.

I don't recall any huge resistance to it, because it was about time somebody started thinking about it. The NAFTA [North American Free Trade Agreement] issue was a lot tougher and how you deal with trade in that context, how you bring those barriers down.

Strong: Did Clinton want to do NAFTA during the campaign?

Soderberg: Yes, NAFTA was one of the more contentious issues, actually. It was one of the more unpleasant experiences for me, because we spent all this time trying to get the speech going and thought about it, and then he just holed himself up in the room, not talking to any of us, dialing Bill Bradley and some other people about it. He wasn't comfortable with the position we'd given him. He had to go out and give the speech, so he just said, "The heck with you." He holed himself up. We had no idea what was going to be in the speech, none. I was supposed to go out and brief the reporters about it afterwards.

We had said we'd put in labor provisions and environmental provisions, and then he'd stuck in a third one. I can't remember what it was now, something about import surges. It wasn't in any of the documents we'd prepared to brief reporters on the speech. I don't know what I said, but it didn't get into the press, not a big deal. He understood instinctively that the Congress wouldn't agree to a deal that wasn't stronger on labor and environment. He also understood that Bush hadn't done a good job on that piece of it.

I remember one briefing in Washington on NAFTA, where there must have been 25 people around the table. It was ridiculous. I remember Hillary [Clinton] was there. It was one of the few times I saw Hillary in some of these discussions. For the most part, she didn't participate in the foreign policy discussions, but she was there for that one. It was just awful. There were six different positions, and no one knew what was going on. I think Gore was there too—too many people in the room to have a discussion. Also, when you have that many people in the room, it's going to be in the papers the next day about who said what. So everyone shut down and didn't say much, just listened. It didn't really work.

The globalization piece of it, I remember, the National Economic Council was a done deal before I joined. It was all in the "Putting People First" proposals. I remember asking how this was going to work. "We have no idea; we'll figure it out later."

So when we won, we said, "Okay, now what do we do?" So they figured it out and merged it with the National Security Council model and had some joint staff. It actually worked pretty well. [George W.] Bush, in my understanding, has pretty much kept it as we had had it, and it's always a good endorsement when it survives another administration, particularly one of a different color.

Strong: When did you start thinking about what you would like to do if the campaign succeeded?

Soderberg: I don't remember. You don't let yourself really have that discussion because you're afraid you'll jinx it. I hadn't worked in the administration before; I was only a creature of the Hill. So I didn't know what were the good jobs and what weren't the right jobs. I had an instinct that I wanted to keep the team together. I always assumed that the four of us would go to the White House somehow.

Strong: Four being?

Soderberg: Leon. I probably just assumed I'd always go to the White House. But I don't remember considering any other jobs or even talking about it. We didn't really sit down and talk about it. I do remember a conversation in December when Clinton was scrambling to get his Cabinet together, trying to get Tony to admit he really did want to be National Security Advisor. He kept saying, "I don't know, I don't know. I'm sitting down here, and I'm not going to push it if you're going to say no." I wasn't really involved in it, but Clinton did ask me on occasion what I thought about people. He asked me about both Tony and Sandy.

Sandy first and foremost thought Tony would be a better National Security Advisor, at least for the first term. I think he always had it in mind for the second one. I think it served Clinton well. But it was at that point that I said I wanted to go to the White House. You're in the inner circle; you want to stay in it. The only place to do that is in the White House.

Riley: You had a formal position in the transition, right? What was that?

Soderberg: I don't remember, deputy director, something like that. You had it in your book. I read through this book. It's very well researched.

Riley: Do you remember what you were doing during the transition?

Soderberg: I wanted to leave. I remember whining to Sandy right after the election. Tony went off to his farm, pretending he didn't want a job. So it was initially me and Sandy and Leon for much of the transition. Then of course we roped Tony back. He pretended to disappear for a couple of weeks. Sandy is the one who called me and said, "You have to stay in Little Rock." I said, "No, I want to go home." He said, "Oh, stop it, imagine you get to be with the next President of the United States and see him every day for the next three months. I'm sorry, that's a privilege, stop whining."

I thought about it for about a day and said, "Yes, you're right." It was great. It was actually one of the most interesting periods to be there. I did see him every day. The craziness in Washington was busy work: who's going to do what and transition teams and this and that. I got to do the substance with him.

Riley: So at that point you were principally a National Security Advisor in residence.

Soderberg: Yes, although Sandy was the National Security Advisor during the transition, and I was the deputy. But I was the one who went to see him every day with the PDB and tried to manage whatever was going on. Tony eventually reemerged—I can't remember exactly when.

Riley: During this period is the President-elect focused on foreign policy issues?

Soderberg: Very much so. We had a couple of major decisions to make. The PDB guy started showing up every day, and they would agree to answer his questions. They didn't change, it was Bush's PDB, but if he had a question, they'd come back with them. He started asking a lot about the economic stuff, so they started putting economic stuff in the morning briefings and ultimately that became part of the PDB during his Presidency. I don't know if they're still doing it. My guess is probably yes, you can't avoid it now because it's such a big issue.

We had several big briefings. The key issues were what we were going to do on day one and how to deal with it. Haiti was the first crisis. Well, Somalia was the first one, and then Haiti and Bosnia were what we were planning to do. The Haitians decided they all wanted to come to Bill Clinton's Inauguration, so 400,000 ripped off their roofs, and they could see this. We knew that thousands would die if they got on those rafts and came.

I had known Aristide from working with him with Ted Kennedy, so I talked it through with him. Then Clinton got on the phone and had a really lovely conversation with him. I have notes on all these in the transition notes as well. Once you're President-elect, the whole world wants to talk to you.

It's amazing who thinks they should have the right to talk to you and who doesn't. We made a series of phone calls, and we had to make a bunch of phone calls to Aristide getting him to tell his people to stay home. That, of course, fueled all the flip-flop things back and forth, which really wasn't right because ultimately we did do it. But you just couldn't do it overnight. That didn't really sell with the press, but I still think it was true.

The only blip during the transition was he gave an interview with Tom Friedman; I think it was at the Governor's mansion. I was there, Dee Dee Myers was there, and George Stephanopoulos was there. Tom asked Clinton, "Could you ever deal with Saddam Hussein?" He said, "I believe in deathbed conversions, of course. At some point, if he changes his behavior."

Tom ran with a front-page story, "Clinton can envision normalization." Clinton said, "What?" Martin Indyk, whom I had brought in to do a lot of the Middle East stuff, called me and said, "You guys are in trouble." I said, "What are you talking about?"

So George called Friedman and told him to back it off. He went to his editors, and they wouldn't: they ran with the story. For whatever reason, we hadn't taped it, and that was a mistake, obviously. The press office made sure they taped everything from then on.

That was a mess. That fueled the "He doesn't know what he's talking about" rumors. To this day I think it was unfair of Tom to do that piece, but he was looking for a story. He's a great reporter, so it's hard to challenge him. I think Tom eventually sent us the paragraph where he said it, or it was in the story. We had to eat a couple of days of bad stories about that.

Morrisroe: You mentioned the conversations that Clinton starts having—phone calls he's getting from world leaders and others at this point, after the election. How do those and other foreign diplomats get channeled through a campaign, just as a practical matter?

Soderberg: I did it. It wasn't a surprise that Clinton won. We knew he was going to win. So we had said, "Here are a few things you have to do the day after the election." This was more Tony and Sandy. I'd never done this before, so I had no idea, but they knew what was going to have to happen.

They basically said, "You have to do a statement on foreign policy continuity: 'I'm not the President,'" this sort of standard stuff. We had written that ahead of time. Clinton had reviewed it, and he gave it the next day. We had given him a list of people he was going to have to talk to—the whole world calls to congratulate you. How do you decide which ones you're going to take? We had given him a list. Here are the leaders you should talk to on the first day and over time. Some of them called; some of them didn't call, so we'd have to call them. It's all in my notes. I went through all this for the book because I had all the information.

It was the heads of the major European—the Russians, obviously, and the Saudis and other Arab countries. We made a point of having a few unusual ones like an African, a Latin American, and an Asian, so it wasn't just all Europeans, to try and show that he was going to engage the world more broadly.

I think it was [Nelson] Mandela, probably [Carlos] Salinas of Mexico. He had agreed to meet the Mexicans during the transition. Traditionally you meet the Canadians and the Mexicans first. We flipped it and met the Mexicans first and not the Canadians, partly with the NAFTA issue.

Strong: When did the White House tell you what they were going to do about Somalia? Or did you read it in the paper like everybody else?

Soderberg: It's quite an extraordinary story when you think about it. To me, it demonstrated that the Bush administration didn't quite grasp the fact that they were leaving office in three months. They essentially agreed to send 25,000 troops to Somalia with no consultation with the next President of the United States. I found out about it from Clinton's press person, Steve Rabinowitz. He was out jogging Thanksgiving morning and called me. He said, "What's going on in Somalia?"

I was trying to take the day off. I said, "I don't know." So I started calling around. I called the White House and got Brent Scowcroft. I said, "What's going on in Somalia?" "Oh, nothing, we haven't decided anything. Happy Thanksgiving."

I said, "You're in the office on Thanksgiving? That's a bad sign." Then I started calling some friends of mine in the press. They said, "No, they decided to send 25,000 troops." They gave me the whole story: they'd been up to the UN, gotten it done. I called Scowcroft back. I said, "You can either tell me what's going on, or I'm going to have to tell the press that you've sent 25,000 troops to Somalia without consulting with the next President of the United States. And I don't think that's in either of our interests." He finally said okay.

In his defense, it wasn't final, final, final, but it was pretty final, and they hadn't talked to us about it. We came up with some way to finesse the issue of when we had been briefed. Scowcroft sent a whole team down to brief us on it. It was very clear to us right away that there was no way these guys were going to be out by January 20. Scowcroft said, "Don't worry; they'll be out before you get here."

That was so naïve. We eventually realized that we were going to have to have a whole plan here. I was furious that they would do that without consulting us first, but we decided it wasn't in anybody's interest to have that out in the press. It never got out in the press, actually; I was surprised.

Morrisroe: Had they been consulting you regularly on other things? Did you have a regular phone call with somebody from NSC and your operation?

Soderberg: If we did, it would have been Sandy. After that, they started briefing us much more regularly. Nothing much happens after the elections; everyone just takes a break, so that might have been part of it. And it was Thanksgiving. The idea that they would do that without talking to us—even if it's that we're not part of the decision-making process—to have it in the press before they say, "By the way—and we'd appreciate it if you'd support it."

Strong: He even made a visit to the White House, one of the courtesy visits, while that decision was—

Soderberg: When did he go there?

Strong: Just before Thanksgiving.

Soderberg: And they didn't mention anything then. It's just not smart. I think they were in denial. I ended up having to deal with the crisis in the press, but Sandy went in and tried to fix the whole problem with Scowcroft. There was no resistance, they did immediately. That got their attention and made them realize, "Maybe we should start talking more regularly to them." That's the only problem I heard of during the transition.

Strong: I have a broader question. Presidents or Presidential candidates can't talk freely to Tom Friedman because they have to think about what they're going to say. They show up in a room, there are a lot of people there. What they say is going to leak. Who do they have unguarded conversations with?

Soderberg: Very few, very few. Because you don't know who's going to change their mind, write a book. I think it's one of the hardest things to do, to find people you can have unguarded conversations with.

Strong: Who do you think Clinton had unguarded conversations with?

Soderberg: I think his wife, first and foremost. She was his best political advisor. I think the troika who got him elected: Stephanopoulos, [James] Carville, and [Paul] Begala. Once he got to the White House, you have an inner circle to do it with: the key White House staff, the Chief of

Staff, the National Security Advisor, the economic advisor, you just have to. Okay, if they go talk—you don't hire people you can't trust in those positions.

During a campaign, it's—I can't remember now. Certainly he had unguarded conversations with Taylor Branch. I'm dying to see Taylor's book because he was there all the time, in and out. That's coming out soon, isn't it?

Riley: End of next year, I think. I'm not clear about that. We talked with Taylor about this last year.

Strong: Is it one volume?

Riley: I think so. Many of the press reports on that are inaccurate. He doesn't have the transcripts. I think he made tapes driving back to Baltimore of his impressions of their conversations. So they would be pretty contemporaneous accounts. I'm dying to see it.

Soderberg: Taylor was always coming in and out. I think he speaks with Vernon Jordan. So there were ten or so people he had those kinds of conversations with. I think he has said he relied on [Howard] Paster and others for that kind of support. Clinton was more open initially. You get burned a few times and you stop.

Riley: You've already mentioned a couple of occasions when there were way too many people in the room. Was that a persistent problem for the campaign and the early phases of the White House?

Soderberg: No, actually, precisely because it was in Little Rock. The only one that was a problem was the NAFTA briefing. So no, it wasn't. During the campaign, we'd bring in briefers on the issues of the day. We'd schedule it wherever Clinton was going to be, and we'd fly the people in. If you weren't invited, you didn't show up. There were a few people bent out of shape, but we didn't advertise what was going on. People can't be upset about not going to a meeting they didn't hear about. It would be after the fact, so they didn't feel too bad about it. It was pretty controlled.

During the campaign we'd have briefings on Bosnia and other issues of probably two or three, maybe four briefers on a subject, max. Often two or three. It would be me, Tony, Sandy, Leon or some combination, not even all of us all the time. So, pretty small. If it gets bigger than that, it doesn't work.

Riley: Maybe I'm mistaken, but I don't remember hearing Al Gore's name in the list of people you said he had unguarded conversations with. Was that a purposeful omission?

Soderberg: No, that wasn't intentional. He probably did. I think, actually, they were very close.

Riley: By your experience in the other two campaigns you had worked in, using those as a baseline, was Clinton's relationship with Gore, and was the Gore staff's integration into the Clinton staff during the campaign, unusually close?

Soderberg: Well, let's see, in '88 we had [Lloyd] Bentsen, and I think Dukakis and Bentsen got along pretty well. I don't remember Bentsen's staff showing up. I just don't remember. My memory on these things is pathetic. I think what was different about the Clintons and Gores is that they hit it off personally. Their wives hit it off. They were just so much alike that they could identify with each other. Often you choose as your Vice President someone who fills out your résumé, whether you like him personally or not. In this case, it did both. I think that fostered an unusual camaraderie between them and their wives.

Leon and I had worked together in the Senate, so we already knew each other and I trusted him. That was easy. So it was probably a little more collegial among the staff as well because we're pretty easy-going people, and the egos were in healthy check. I knew Leon. Leon's a difficult person for a lot of people to work with, but I never had that problem with him.

Riley: Why is that?

Soderberg: Why is he difficult?

Riley: Yes.

Soderberg: They don't understand he's a curmudgeonly, touchy guy. You just have to not take it personally and stand there with him. A lot of people get turned off by that. I love the guy; he has a heart of gold. But if you don't understand Leon, you might get a little turned off by some of his curmudgeonliness.

Riley: You said you were surprised that Warren Christopher was designated Secretary of State.

Soderberg: Yes, I was. He hadn't been involved in foreign policy at all during the campaign. I didn't object to it; I didn't know him. I was also new to the process. Looking back on it now, it was obvious he was in the running for it. I had worked for two losing campaigns, so I had never seen the process of who gets a job. I don't think anybody else was surprised. I was just because he wasn't engaged in the foreign policy issues.

But I think Clinton had a deep respect for him and trusted his judgment. He'd provided a steady hand for Clinton. He thought a steady hand in foreign policy would be useful.

Riley: Did you have a picture of a Secretary of State other than Christopher when that process was unfolding?

Soderberg: Sure, you go through names in your mind. I don't even remember—Nunn, I think, was in there for a while. They bounced between Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense. I was just assuming it would be someone from Congress. I didn't really care. It wasn't something I had strong feelings about one way or another. I was focused on the White House. I was just watching the whole process. I think I had assumed it would be someone from the Hill. A lot of the Hill people had really gone to bat for Clinton.

McCurdy had wanted Defense, and when he didn't get it he went off in a huff. Everyone thought he would come back around and take one of the other jobs. Maybe I assumed he would be it. I don't remember the exact mix.

Riley: Aspin?

Soderberg: Secretary of Defense.

Riley: Was that a surprise to you?

Soderberg: No, he turned out to be an awful Secretary of Defense, but he was a really good member of Congress, very thoughtful. He and Nunn were essentially Clinton's two mentors during the campaign, on the campaign positions, on foreign policy. Les was really good at it. They got along. He was nice, smart; he just couldn't manage when he got there.

Strong: During the campaign and transition, did you get calls from Kennedy? Did you stay in touch with the people you knew in his office?

Soderberg: During the transition?

Strong: Or the campaign.

Soderberg: The campaign. I called them all the time for information and help. "What about this? I need this. Can you get me that?" Sure. They're all my friends. I relied on them for a ton of stuff.

Strong: For a quick collection of information.

Soderberg: Yes, can you send me this document? The Hill is extremely helpful—not just Kennedy's office, but all my friends across the board. You enlist Hill staff to help you. They have quick, ready access to information and can send it to you.

I don't recall Kennedy calling me much except for the Irish matter once we were in office. He didn't pick up the phone too much except about the Irish issue. I remember that. He might have called to congratulate me or something like that. Now I have a framed memento in my office from when I was announced—a *Washington Post* article on who's who. He signed it, a funny thing. He sent it to me; it was nice. Kennedy is an amazingly supportive guy. Once you've worked for him, you're friends for life. But I don't recall him calling me and pushing things, except for the Irish stuff. I could be wrong, but I don't remember it.

Riley: Were there any other appointments during the transition period that you were watching that you played a part in or that you remember reacting strongly to one way or another?

Soderberg: I wasn't a part of it. They kept it through the transition team in Washington. I really wasn't a part of it except for lots of gossip and calling people—everybody was calling me saying "What about this?" I don't know. I honestly don't know. It was a blessing to be able to say I didn't know so I didn't have to talk to people.

Clinton asked me a couple of times what I thought of people, and I was around at the mansion when people came. It was hilarious. People were coming in and out of the mansion right and left. You recognize them, obviously. You figure, *Hmm, they're not there to talk about the weather.* So I knew who was on the list, because I'd see them coming in and out of the mansion.

I think it was a mistake to set a deadline for Cabinet selection. You just get too rushed. That's what happened with Jim Woolsey. Clinton wanted a neo-con in the administration, and he was put up at the last minute. Clinton looked at me at the time and said, "I know that's a mistake." And it was, it didn't work out, and Woolsey ended up becoming a critic. Clinton just stopped seeing him because he didn't find him particularly useful, whereas Woolsey understandably took it personally and said, "This guy doesn't care about intelligence." It just wasn't a good situation all around.

Madeleine [Albright] was the other one I talked to quite a bit during the campaign. She had gotten me my first job in politics; she was a professor at Georgetown, and I stayed in touch with her. When Clinton started running I kept putting her in all the briefings I could think of because I knew Clinton would like her. Clinton loved her.

She would call a lot about whether she was going to get the UN job. We talked through which one. There are six power jobs, and she ought to get one of the power jobs. It's deputy at State, deputy at NSC, the UN, and a couple of others. When she got it, Clinton called her, and I immediately called her and said, "Get your girls down here. Here's what's going on." I helped her get everybody down there, so that was fun.

Tony was no surprise, Sandy was no surprise. Clinton thought about making Sandy National Security Advisor, but Sandy made it clear he wanted Tony to have it. There were certainly others pushing for jobs who didn't get them. I mentioned that Michael [Mandelbaum] wanted to be National Security Advisor. I think they offered him something at State on Russia and he turned it down, which I never understood. McCurdy is the other mystery. I think he wanted Defense, and they offered him CIA. I can't remember now, but it's easy to find out. Do you remember that?

Riley: It sounds right.

Soderberg: I'm pretty sure. I was stunned that he didn't take it. Then, of course, he lost the reelection and disappeared. Had he taken one of those, he would have had a real career. I never understood why he didn't. I had hired his staffer in my office to be my deputy. McCurdy was very influential in the campaign, and Clinton really liked him. It wasn't really my choice. I was told that McCurdy's guy was going to be my number two. I thought, *Oh, great*. The guy turned out to be great, Mike Chapman.

Riley: Was Nunn seriously considered for a position, or did he take his name out of circulation early?

Soderberg: I don't know. The only thing I remember Clinton saying about Nunn is that he was a homophobe, and it would be difficult to put him at Defense. That's the only comment I remember. I assume Nunn wanted Defense, but Clinton was more comfortable with Aspin. Frankly, Nunn probably would have been better, given what happened to Aspin. But I don't know if they ever considered anything else for him.

Strong: What kind of hours was Clinton working at this point? Was he up late at night?

Soderberg: Same as the White House. He works all the time.

Strong: So it's always the same. He didn't really take much of a break after the campaign.

Soderberg: No, which was a mistake. They should have taken a break. He went right into it. I don't remember him taking any break after the campaign. Did he?

Strong: I don't think so.

Riley: I don't think so.

Soderberg: I think around Christmas they did go somewhere.

Riley: They probably went to the Renaissance meeting.

Soderberg: Which for them is a vacation. Not my idea of a vacation, but it is his.

Morrisroe: I have a question. You mentioned the decision to move on the Cabinet early and first. How does that affect the policy-making and the appointments in foreign policy during the transition, when the key Cabinet and senior appointed positions are, if not decided on, at least publicly finalized before the White House staff operation? It's more commonly done in the reverse. Did that give people like Christopher and Aspin and others—?

Soderberg: Did he have a Chief of Staff at that time? Who was it—it wasn't Leon. Who was his first Chief of Staff?

Morrisroe: [Thomas F.] McLarty.

Soderberg: Oh, Mack, right. He had Mack in place.

Morrisroe: But I mean in terms of foreign policy White House staff. Just in the area of foreign policy, I'm curious to what extent that enhanced, say, Christopher's or Aspin's role in terms of making sub-Cabinet appointments in their own department when the Cabinet Secretary was chosen so early.

Soderberg: When was Mack chosen? After that?

Riley: That designation didn't come until fairly late—or the acceptance didn't come until fairly late. My understanding is that Mack was approached very quickly and said he wasn't sure that was the right job for him, but left a long interval then where the White House staff was set aside in lieu of making decisions about the Cabinet.

Soderberg: I guess I would answer that it wouldn't have mattered when Mack came on board because he didn't know the players. Had you had a real Washington insider picking some of these people, it probably would have made more sense to do it that way. But essentially Clinton picked them all. He really did. I can remember being over there one day when somebody was telling him he couldn't find an Energy Secretary who was a minority or a woman. He said, "You can't tell me that. I have to get on the phone."

So he's on the phone saying, "There have to be some people out there," and he found Hazel O'Leary. He was so ticked to death and proud of himself: "See? I found one. Why can't you guys find one?"

I'm not sure that process would have been wholly that different if—because he was so invested in it himself. When the President is making the decisions, it's hard to stop him. I think the larger issue was just rushing it.

Morrisroe: I'm thinking more specifically about sub-Cabinet appointments. Usually if a Cabinet Secretary is coming in in January—as opposed to so much earlier—

Soderberg: Are you talking about the Chief of Staff or the Cabinet?

Morrisroe: The Cabinet.

Riley: The assistant secretaries?

Morrisroe: Yes, the sub-Cabinet positions in, say, State or Defense or foreign policy arenas. Maybe the fact that it isn't coming to mind means that it wasn't really an issue to what extent having the Cabinet posts in place gives the Cabinet Secretaries more authority over sub-Cabinet appointments than they might have otherwise.

Soderberg: I don't really recall the Cabinet Secretaries choosing their deputies. You have a bunch of people you're trying to place, and a bunch of political considerations you're trying to juggle. Christopher didn't pick his deputy. You consult with them, but you say, "How about this guy?" Who's going to say no when the President is on the phone saying, "How about this guy?" It's really hard to say no.

Morrisroe: So it didn't really have much of an effect.

Soderberg: That's the only process I've ever seen, so it's hard for me to say how—I'm not the best one to ask that question because I'd never seen it before or since. It didn't happen in '96 and I haven't been through it again. I guess I would say—if I had to guess—that had you picked a Chief of Staff to help work some of this through ahead of time, I'm not really sure it would have mattered, because you had a whole transition team doing it. They had as much knowledge: Vernon and Warren Christopher would know a lot more than any Chief of Staff.

So I'm not sure that a Chief of Staff designate early in the process would have been any different than the process he set up. The transition team essentially had them all. I forget who else was on it, but he put together a pretty sophisticated transition team.

Riley: One for personnel and one for policy, as I recall. A team for filling appointments and a separate apparatus for—

Soderberg: Yes, there was a team of transition people who went around and said, "Okay, what job, what job?" But there was a very small group of people who actually picked people, or at least the senior jobs.

Strong: You talked about Haiti. What was the conversation about gays in the military from campaign to Inauguration?

Soderberg: This one, again, I'd refer to the book a little bit. I can't remember the details. Clinton spent a lot of time thinking about this during the campaign and worked with Admiral [William] Crowe [Jr.]. He was convinced it was wrong and didn't make sense. He really underestimated the political obstacles of changing it. Colin Powell could have avoided having this get on the front burner so quickly, but he marched all the Chiefs in to a meeting with Clinton, all of whom strongly opposed it. It just blew up. We had no intention of putting this first on our list. It was put first on the list between a combination of that meeting—I can't remember if it was that meeting or the Congress that decided to torture Clinton over it.

It's interesting now; I think John Shalikashvili came out against it. It's certainly not going to last too much longer. It's not a sustainable policy, particularly when you look at other militaries that integrated the gays just fine. Our recruitment is so far down, we're firing gay Arabic speakers; it's just ridiculous. But it was a really unfortunate early event to have to deal with, because it fueled the chaos and killed the honeymoon really quickly.

Strong: Who should have been telling him what the political obstacles were going to be if they were underestimated?

Soderberg: Well, I think Sam Nunn probably did, but I'm not sure Clinton wanted to hear it. I don't know, I don't really recall. I wasn't too involved in the whole issue, to tell you the truth. Sometimes it's hard to predict those things. You can't decide what the Republicans are going to pick to push sometimes.

Strong: Did you, Tony Lake, and Sandy Berger have issues you wanted to deal with first?

Soderberg: Sure, we had a whole plan; it went up in smoke. We had a whole transition plan. For the historians out there, all of this is in the Clinton Library, the transition memos, everything else. We had a "first hundred days" plan. I don't remember exactly what it was, but it was trying to move the peace process along in Bosnia, move the peace process along in Haiti, trying to come up with a plan to hand the UN peacekeeping operation in Somalia over to the UN. Probably some arms control issues, I don't remember.

We had a whole agenda that we would have gone in with. Then reality hits, and none of it works, and it all blows up in your face. It's very hard to put into place a plan that's on paper.

Riley: Do you remember when your position was finalized, when you were made the offer during the transition period?

Soderberg: No, it was just always assumed it would happen. Once Tony took over and Sandy was formal, I don't recall, but I think I talked to both of them. It was more what the title was going to be, not what it was. They decided they were going to do "executive secretary," but there was some sort of statutory problem with me having that position. I don't remember what it was. So they created a new position called "staff director," and then switched it to "deputy" two years later. The role was always clear, but we played around with the title.

Riley: And the role was?

Soderberg: Essentially helping to implement the policies, troubleshooting, being the enforcer, following through, taking on key issues for myself. A lot of stuff Sandy couldn't handle. Sandy would do the big issues, and I'd try to do the other ones. It was not really very clearly defined; I was just an all-around troubleshooter.

Riley: When did you move back to Washington?

Soderberg: I came up on the bus with Clinton.

Riley: So you were in Charlottesville, and you went to Monticello?

Soderberg: Yes, I was here. Exactly, that was great.

Riley: You took the bus up, and you got to go back to your apartment. Had your renovations been completed so you were coming back to a very nice—

Soderberg: Yes, I did the renovations. I remember sanding the floors as I was packing to go to Little Rock. I did the whole thing myself. I knocked the walls down, I did everything. That whole trip was so emotional. There was some crisis on the way up there: Iraq was bombed. I was trying to figure out what to say about that on the way to the Inauguration. I remember walking around here thinking, *This is really cool.* We pulled into the Lincoln Memorial. I had arranged to have my family there to meet me. They came for the Inauguration, some of my siblings, my parents. I was so excited to see them.

My parents were totally into this campaign. They came down for Election Day. I remember coming up to the Lincoln Memorial and going to find them, and then watching that whole scene. It was just so emotional. Then you walk across the bridge with all those candles. It was just like, wow, this is unbelievable. It was such a great culmination of the whole effort. It was really extraordinary.

I decided not to go home that night because it was easier to stay in the hotel with everyone. Then I met my family for the Inauguration the next day. I had one of those Secret Service pins, so I got to walk down the parade route just before he did. I couldn't figure out how to get from Capitol Hill to the parade seats. So I figured, *Let's just walk, because there's no way we're going to get a cab.* All the people were saying, "You can't be there." "Yes I can!" So that was really fun. It was great.

Then we got there, and there was a coup attempt in Haiti. So we're all running around, Christopher and Tony and Sandy and I. What should we say? I had to draft a statement, and we put it out. Wow, this is real.

Riley: Did you go ahead to the White House to do that?

Soderberg: I don't remember, actually. I don't remember how we got it out. But I do remember walking up after that and seeing Dee Dee Myers in the press office and thinking, *This is really cool; there's Dee Dee Myers in the White House.* My office was in the White House as well, in

the West Wing. I got to sit there. I hadn't even seen it before. It was right off the Situation Room, Henry Kissinger's old office, so that was fun. I remember sitting down there and just bursting out laughing thinking, *Oh, my God. What do we do now?* It's a great feeling.

Riley: You didn't have anything, right? You go in, you have no files, no telephone directory, no pens or pencils.

Soderberg: Nothing, no. I think they left some pens and the computer.

Riley: You report in your book that the Situation Room is not quite as—

Soderberg: —Dr. Strangelove as you would expect. Yes. I don't know what it's like now, but it was pretty low tech. It had some computers, and cables came in from the embassies, but CNN [Cable News Network] half the time got more. The Situation Room is about a third the size of this room. That doesn't help the audio. It's not very big. It's one big table that seats about 12 people and about 30 chairs behind that.

There's a phone in the drawer where the President sits. I opened that and thought, *Ha! That's the red phone; that must be so cool.* It turned out to be just a regular phone. I was so disappointed—just a handy little drawer with a phone in it.

They have three clocks. One is always set to Zulu time, Greenwich Mean Time; military time is Greenwich Mean Time plus or minus however many hours, so it's always ten hundred Z, Zulu, so you know where you are any time in the world. They always had these different times up on the clock, Moscow or China. In theory, whatever crisis you were dealing with would have the time there. I remember sitting in every room testing whether they put the right time up. Bosnia time never once was up there. I don't know why, or who switched those clocks around.

Riley: It wasn't a sign that Bosnia wasn't exactly a problem for you to deal with.

Soderberg: No. It was just kind of cool to see the Situation Room.

Riley: A confession: John Ikenberry was a colleague of mine at Penn. I think you arranged for his class at Penn to come in at one point.

Soderberg: Yes, he and I were friends when I was in graduate school.

Riley: I can't remember if it was actually the Situation Room. Maybe there's a conference room outside the Situation Room?

Soderberg: No, that's it. I don't remember doing it, but I did it for a lot of people. I wanted everyone I know to come while I was there because it was so cool.

Riley: You're right. It doesn't stay lodged in your memory.

Soderberg: Yes, everyone I know. I couldn't believe that some people wouldn't take me up on it. "No, you really can come see the Situation Room." John, I guess, was one of the ones—I don't remember it, but if he took me up on it, good for him.

Strong: When other administrations first come in, people say the same kinds of things about the euphoria you describe. What did you think the four years were going to be like? Or, to put it another way, the President has won a plurality victory, not a majority victory. He's new to the Washington scene. You had this hundred-day plan that involved a number of the issues.

Soderberg: None of which I can remember.

Strong: Everybody knew: it wasn't hard to see what some of those issues were going to be. Did you think you were going to be working for a great President? Did you think this was going to be a problematic administration? Or do you not even stop and have those thoughts?

Soderberg: You don't really stop and think about it in those terms. You just think you're going to go in and change the world, and you're sure you can. You don't think about it in terms of history so much as how we're going to make the world a better place, and how can we do things better? We can do things so much better. It never occurs to you you're going to have scandals or anything like that. Of course every administration does, but your mind tells you *We probably will*; your heart says *No, that won't happen to us*.

Strong: What was the first day on the job when you felt like you had made the world better?

Soderberg: That's a good question. I don't know, I never really asked myself that. Probably the first day, because we were there. On the domestic side, there was a lot going on that we all felt really good about. The first day Clinton repealed the Mexico City policy, which I thought was wrong. A lot of the policies he did by Executive order, just moving things forward, trying to put the emphasis back on the—it just makes you feel good. You feel like, *Okay, that's real people we're helping. It makes a difference.* I felt proud of the administration's whole approach even though it wasn't anything I was personally involved in. You're very much part of the whole team.

Riley: Mexico City doesn't resonate outside in your world?

Soderberg: No, it does, very much. I didn't have anything to do with it. But it resonates all over the world. You realize people aren't going to die since we're not having these ridiculous policies. It makes you feel good that you're fundamentally changing people's lives. On the welfare side, all the domestic programs Clinton was moving would help kids and crime. Finally we have somebody who gets it. I had a really good feeling overall about that.

The first time I really felt that we were making history was the handshake between [Yasser] Arafat and [Yitzhak] Rabin on the South Lawn. I was so moved by it. I got to hang out with them before they went there. Everyone was giddy. Clearly you could tell there was this moment of imminent—I had nothing to do; I was just floating around for history. I wanted to meet Arafat. Then to watch it, it was really moving. That was probably the first time I said, "Wow, this is huge. The power of the Presidency is extraordinary."

Then you realize everything has gone sour when you have Black Hawk Down days. The highs are certainly very high. The restoration of Aristide and my own role in the peace process. Because you have a cease-fire in Northern Ireland, there are 200 to 300 people a year who aren't dead. You have no idea who they are, but they're out there, and that's a really good feeling.

I felt that way when I was working for Kennedy. You save someone's life; you get them out of jail. A call from Kennedy's office will get people out of jail or get Refusniks out of the Soviet Union, and you get to meet them. You realize you can actually have an impact. There's real power in Washington; you can really make things happen. You realize it's not you, but it kind of is you, because you're doing it. That's a pretty heady feeling.

Riley: Maybe this is in the book and I missed it, but when did Ireland become an issue for you? When do you first begin to grapple with that and develop an expertise in it?

Soderberg: I didn't know I had an expertise in it, but everyone kept asking me to do stuff. I'm like, "I'm not the Irish expert; go talk to those guys." Actually it turned out I knew a lot more than I thought, which is one of the things I tell students: you know more than you think you do. I absorbed more than I realized in working on Capitol Hill for six years and in other Presidential campaigns.

I did the issue for Kennedy for six years, and the whole country came through our office, because he's Ted Kennedy. So I knew all the players quite well, had been there a bunch of times. I didn't have any preconceived impressions of what we should and shouldn't do. I was open to new possibilities.

It kept landing in my lap for reasons I never quite understood, but I guess everybody figured I knew something about it and knew all the players. Part of it was that we were getting very stale responses from the career foreign service people who were saying, "No, no, hell no. Don't do it." Clinton felt there was more we could do, and he kept pushing us to do more. So I said, "All right, let me make some calls."

I called around and talked to people whose views I respected, and initially they said, "No, don't do it. It's not right." I trusted those people's judgment. Then all of a sudden they started saying, "Actually, you might want to think about it." That got my attention. That was in the fall of '93. Then the whole visa thing came.

Strong: Adams' requests were denied the first year.

Soderberg: I think we did it twice, and I was dumb enough—We got caught in the New York primary with [Rudolph] Giuliani, I remember—no, [David] Dinkins. I think it was Mayor Dinkins. I wrote some letter to Dinkins denying it. It never occurred to me that it was going to be part of the campaign, which, of course, was my naïveté. And that blew up—"You promised!"

Strong: It first happened in '93, the first year.

Soderberg: It was twice in '93, I think. I think they did it initially. Adams applied right away. In fact, I don't even remember any discussion about it. Then it became a political issue in some of these campaigns. I remember specifically. I think it was Dinkins who wanted to push it because he was running for New York Mayor. We said no quite perfunctorily, not realizing that the letter would be denounced by Dinkins as reneging on a campaign promise. But that stuff happens, and you're not going to change your position just because it's awkward in the campaign.

But then by the fall, I started saying, "Actually, I think we should look at this." You couldn't get any real conversation going with the State Department. They were apoplectic about it. So we formed a small circle of people who thought it through. We didn't really tell anybody what we were doing.

Strong: Who was in that circle?

Soderberg: Tony and I pretty much, Kennedy's office. Niall O'Dowd, from the *Irish Voice.* I forget the name of the newspaper; he's a reporter in New York. I didn't want to talk to reporters either, but he ended up gaining our trust, and that's how we worked it until we were ready to move. Once there was a real decision, the White House guys got into it. George, the Vice President got into it. The Cabinet got into it, screamingly, saying, "Don't you dare!" Clinton always knew he was going to do it. It was more, "Find me a way to do it respectably."

Stone: Clinton says there was a bigger fight over that in the Cabinet than anything else early in the administration. Is that fair?

Soderberg: I can't speak for the other fights, but it was huge. It was huge. Yes, Louis Freeh was apoplectic. Janet Reno was apoplectic. Warren Christopher—

Riley: What was their position?

Soderberg: Opposed to it, both—Louis Freeh was anti-terrorism, and Janet Reno the same thing. "You can't do this; it will send a message to our anti-terrorist allies." Warren Christopher was saying that it would ruin our relationship with Britain; they'd stop cooperating with us on Bosnia and Iraq.

I said, "No, they're not. They're not doing that as a favor to us. It's in their interest to cooperate on those two issues." As far as the terrorism message goes, I wasn't worried about Adams coming here and blowing up anything. I thought, actually, in the long run, if he came here and the President of the United States stuck his neck out for him, and he didn't deliver a ceasefire, it would enable us to go to the Irish-Americans and say, "See? This guy's a fraud. Quit sending him money," and undermine him further. It was that kind of win-win logic that convinced Clinton to do it.

There were all sorts of antics on the way to that decision. The weirdest one was the night before we were going to do it, some idiot decided to plant fake grenades all over San Diego with little notes attached to them saying, "Give Gerry Adams a visa or else." How dumb is that?

Strong: Then you have to get Gerry Adams to denounce the San Diego IRA [Irish Republican Army].

Soderberg: He said, "I never heard of these guys before." That's when I realized Adams had a sense of humor, because our interlocutor, Niall, said he had to wake Adams up at two in the morning, and he said, "What is it? Every time an Irish guy punches a British guy in a bar I have to apologize for that, too?" But he did it.

Strong: We need help from you in deciding what things we should definitely cover.

Soderberg: If there are things that you want to definitely cover, we should flip through the book. I meant to bring a book on my way out the door, but I forgot.

Riley: I think it's important to note that the book is there, and for the audiences who will be researching in the future, it's the point of departure and should be the first place they go. We'll do the best we can to fill in the gaps.

Soderberg: I hope somebody goes through the files. There's so much stuff in there. I left three books on the cutting floor when I wrote this book, and most of it's about the transition, the campaign—all that stuff I wrote up, and it got cut. It's all there, and somebody should look at it.

Riley: If that's not at the library, it ought to be. We'd certainly be happy to have it as an appendix to the briefing.

Soderberg: I could send you the unpublished chapters, if you want. That might be the easiest thing. I have them all on the computer. If someone's interested in this period, they'd be welcome to it.

May 11, 2007

Riley: It's day two of the Nancy Soderberg interview. We had a good time at dinner last night. There may be some follow-ups from some things we said there that I want to press you on. We had just gotten you positioned in the White House yesterday when we stopped. I thought a good place to start would be to ask you how you went about setting up your office and who you managed to bring in, what kinds of things you were looking for in the people you were trying to hire. Were the people you were hiring folks who had campaign experience with you, or did you have this rather conventional problem of needing to bring in some expertise of people who didn't have campaign experience and create some tension with those who had been around?

Soderberg: Actually, most of the hiring occurred during the transition; that's what you do during transition, you put your team in place. There were a couple of positions we hadn't filled by the time we got there, but for the most part, we had sketched out the senior positions.

Riley: You and Sandy and Tony were all in Washington?

Soderberg: By the time of the Inauguration, we were all there.

Riley: That's right. You said you took the bus up.

Soderberg: The thing that surprised me most was how few people we could hire. Most of the National Security Council is populated by people sent over from other agencies; they call it detailing. The number of open slots that we actually had a budget for was very few. So that was a shock. I thought, *Of course we can hire everyone*. On top of that, Clinton had promised a 25% staff cut, which was a dumb idea—talk about shooting yourself in the foot, particularly before you get there and know what you really need.

So we had to go through a process of cutting people but trying to get people in. We ended up relying very heavily on the career staff, because we didn't have to pay for them. We brought in a lot of the people who had worked on the campaign: Martin Indyk to do the Middle East, Stanley Roth to do Asia, George Tenet was doing the intel. Bob Bell was doing Defense. These were all people we had brought in during the campaign. Either I knew them or Sandy or Tony had known them. In some cases others, but for the most part, it was our network.

Riley: Given the importance of Tenet later, tell us a little bit more about his introduction to the Clinton operation and how this came about.

Soderberg: I don't really remember it. I assume he must have had a briefing that I brought him into. All the briefing schedules during the transition and campaign I think are in my files if anybody's interested. I kept pretty good files on who came where and what. George had originally worked for Representative [Ed] Feighan of Ohio, and we had done some work trying to prohibit Jordanian arms sales during the 1980s. We had worked together, he was a Republican; I was a Democrat. Rather, we were working for a Democrat or a Republican. I think George was more or less a Democrat from day one, but not passionately so. He just was a professional. He's just fun. He would come by and chomp on a cigar and joke around.

We did letters, and we got most of the Senate on them. Then he went to work for the Senate Intelligence Committee and rose to be staff director. We always stayed in touch, and he was always friendly and interesting and fun. He's just fun and very smart. So when Clinton was running, we brought him in to do some briefings on intelligence. I don't actually remember, and it's not in his book either—but that's my guess.

Riley: You would have been the person responsible for getting him in, or is this somebody Tony and Sandy would have known?

Soderberg: I think it was me. It was my contacts on the Hill. I had most of the contacts on the Hill. Tony and Sandy had extensive ones also, but they tended to be the next generation up. Having worked on the Hill and in politics, I had the younger generation. Those are the ones who have the energy to go work on a campaign.

Everyone loved him. He was really good, really competent, nice but tough. And when there was an opening over at the CIA, he went over. That was really his big break, going over as deputy. Then he tells the story of the accidental DCI [Director of Central Intelligence]. When Tony pulled out, Tony suggested him. It was a St. Patrick's Day party, and Clinton was on crutches. I can remember him calling me upstairs to talk during this party. Tony had just pulled out. He asked me if I thought George could do the job, and I said absolutely, and Tony had recommended him. So he gave it to him. That's George's story.

Riley: I interrupted you and got you off track about getting your office constructed at the outset. You said you were relying a lot on the professional staff there. These are area experts?

Soderberg: Yes, for the most part, they're detailed over from CIA, State, Defense—one or two from CIA, but mostly CIA, Defense and State. They're first rate, and it was good to have somebody who actually knew something. These were people who actually knew what they were doing, as opposed to the rest of us who were trying to figure it out.

We had to cut the staff of the NSC, and we started looking at some of the career staff. But that backfired on us, because they got upset that we fired some old-time staffers. I think they ended up trying to sue us. I don't remember what happened. It ended up being off in the legal department. But it was very awkward. It didn't start us off right with the career staff, either. This is more the clerical staff. The career staff don't expect to stay there; they rotate in and rotate out.

Ultimately, we did cut it down, and then I think we ended up plussing it back up again, not counting detailees. Tony said, "I'm not doing this, this is dumb; we're going to figure out a way to do what we need to do and let the politics fall where they may."

Riley: Who was communicating to you? Was Mack the enforcer on the 25%, or was Leon?

Soderberg: I don't really know; I wasn't involved in those conversations. That would have been between Mack and Tony or Sandy, Mack and Sandy. Mack and Tony set their priorities, and they had to go explain what we were doing. The White House budget was something like $1.6 million, very small, and within that budget we cut it. But we were able to offset it by taking career people in who were not on our budget, and therefore we could say we cut the budget. I don't remember; I think it was a finesse like that.

Strong: What was the daily routine like? Did Lake have a set amount of time he was spending with the President every day? Was he bringing other people into those meetings?

Soderberg: Well, it started out there would be a senior staff meeting, run by the chief of staff, and Tony or Sandy would usually go. If they couldn't go, I would go, but mostly the two of them went. Then they would have a staff meeting where we'd all get together with the senior directors every morning for about half an hour and go through the day.

Strong: Was that the schedule for the day, the—

Soderberg: More the issues, what's going on. Sometimes it was a small group in Tony's office; sometimes it would be the senior staff. I can't remember if we did it every day with the senior staff. I saw them every morning, just getting the day going, what's going on? What do we need to get done for the day? Where are the issues? More of the substantive agenda of what we needed to get done for the day—memos to the President, press questions, that type of stuff.

Then, we'd all go our own way to a gazillion meetings. We'd usually talk two or three times a day, depending on what was going on. At the end of the day, we'd check in. It was a pretty constant flow back and forth.

Strong: How much time would you spend with the President in a typical week?

Soderberg: It varied. Sometimes I'd travel with him. At the beginning, one of us—Tony, Sandy, or I—was always with him. It eventually got to the point when communications were so good that it ended up not being that essential. We started sending other people because it's so time consuming. So over time we stopped doing it as much unless there was a really big event going on where we had to do briefings for the press or something like that.

Stone: This was domestic travel and international?

Soderberg: Yes, we'd always go on international trips, because you have to sit in meetings. But if he's in California doing some rallies, you don't have to be there. For the first year, we probably did it pretty regularly. Then whenever there was a meeting with the President on certain issues or with heads of state, sometimes I'd go, sometimes I wouldn't.

I'd see him pretty regularly. That was back when you could just waltz in and out of the Oval Office. There wasn't a lot of control. Clinton liked having people coming in and out, so there was a lot more contact in that first year or two. Then it got a little bit more regularized, and I didn't travel as much.

I was working on certain issues that I would spend a fair amount of time with him on. I'd come to a Situation Room meeting or come down to the National Security Council meetings. I'd see him there—so, pretty often.

Riley: Yesterday I posed a question to you about the oversized meetings, and you said there were only a couple of occasions where you had—

Soderberg: During the campaign. Really just one, the NAFTA one.

Riley: From the outside, there's a perception of a lack of discipline in the early days of the White House, one manifestation of which is exactly this: the openness of the Oval Office. Did you see advantages to the President having the openness? Was that something he liked?

Soderberg: He loved it; it came from him. He wanted people to be able to walk in and tell him—he didn't want to be isolated. He liked having unvarnished views, and he liked the debate. He's a man who loves to hear the other side. Before he decides something, he'll argue the other side just to feel it out. He likes that.

But you get busy as President, so you don't have the luxury of always doing that. Foreign policy was less so. There wasn't as much competition on the foreign policy side as there was on the domestic side. So Tony and Sandy and me walking in talking about things was fairly controlled. I would never do it without talking to Tony about it first. It was a well-managed team and well coordinated. So if I was waltzing in and out, there was a reason for me to be there.

I think the problem was more on the domestic side. We didn't have a lot of freelancers coming in and out on the foreign policy side. Domestic policy lends itself more to that, because there are a lot more domestic issues and a lot more players. But everyone knew the three of us were running it; nobody else would waltz in and say, "Oh, let's talk about Haiti."

Riley: You have a porous office environment, and you're in there talking with him about a foreign policy issue. Are you likely to have a communications or a press person come wandering in, or somebody from the domestic side who's going to be seeing him next? Was there a sense that they felt comfortable weighing in on issues that weren't their issues? Or did the President routinely turn to Stephanopoulos or the intergovernmental affairs person and say, "What do you think about this?"

Soderberg: Yes, he would always do that; that's how he works. But the only one who was substantively involved in these discussions was George, and he always had something worthwhile to say. So he was always a welcome participant in them, and he's usually right. If things weren't going well, it was pretty obvious.

Haiti got fairly political because the Hill got involved. There were a lot of people trying to push on Haiti, but not in a way that drove us crazy, as I recall. You asked me last night what I'd like you to take away, and it's that the foreign policy shop actually was run really well. It's not the perception, and that's, again, probably my own bias. The issues were hard, and it took us a while to get them straight, but it wasn't a chaotic process, and it wasn't happenstance. It was pretty well run. Everyone knew that foreign policy was a little more complicated and that you didn't tread lightly into that area.

When it got very political with Bosnia and Haiti, we had to bring in Congressional Affairs, the press people, and the political people because it was a big crisis, and therefore we had to work a lot of sides. But Tony was always directing it. We didn't have a ton of freelancers coming in saying, "Do this, do that, do that." They had a lot of respect for him. Tony's a master of inter-bureaucratic struggles, and he knew how to handle them pretty well and had a pretty good relationship with everybody.

It was chaotic on one level, because there was so much going on all the time. It *is* chaotic when you're in government, because so much happens all at once. You have to decide ten things at the same time. But I don't recall big problems. There was just a lot going on at the same time.

Rahm Emanuel got involved in the Haiti issue a little bit. But it was more how do we deal with the Hill on this? How do we talk about this? Who should we involve? How do we get the Black Caucus behind us? Who's going to call whom to tell about this new policy? Who's going to call which constituents to do that**?** Then everybody would go off and do what they decided.

Strong: What was the routine for communication between Christopher and the President? Did they have a weekly meeting? Was there a daily memo, as there sometimes is, from the Secretary of State directly to the President?

Soderberg: There was a weekly memo. He could call him any time. They spoke regularly on the phone. I don't think there was a regular meeting, but any time there was a foreigner visiting, which was pretty often, he was there. There was a weekly lunch between the Defense Secretary, Secretary of State, and Tony to talk through issues. Sometimes the President would pop in on that.

Strong: Was there a conscious decision made that Lake wasn't going to do the weekly news shows and play that role?

Soderberg: That was one of the dumbest decisions he ever made. That was the fault of not having been in government for 12 years and not being a part of the 24-hour news cycle. One of the few arguments I consistently had with him was that he had to do more of it. He recognizes now that it was a mistake not to do it. It was a decision he made with Christopher during the transition with no consultation with anybody else. It was a bad decision, particularly since Christopher was not a forceful presence on television. You have to be out there selling your policies now. There's no other option. He finally started to do it toward the end, but that's not when we needed it.

Riley: Sandy, by virtue of being the deputy, was unlikely to have been in a position to do more of that.

Soderberg: Actually, Sandy did a fair amount of it. But it's not the same as having the National Security Advisor out there.

Riley: You said that Tony was "a master of bureaucratic politics." Was that learned behavior from earlier times in government, or is it something related to his temperament?

Soderberg: Sure, he learned it at the elbow of Henry Kissinger. He's the master. He'd been in government enough to see how it worked. He'd been at very senior government levels, so he'd seen all the games before, and he was determined not to have that happen. He wanted to get the job done. He comes from a Protestant background. You don't put yourself out and don't take credit. But in that job, you have to do both regularly. It just went very much against his entire being.

Morrisroe: One interesting area of staffing for the NSC during the Clinton administration was using shared appointments with other White House operations, with the NEC. Also, at some point, the NSC counsel shared an appointment with the counsel's office. Do you have any recollection of how those shared or dual-habit individuals worked out in practice?

Soderberg: The NEC we shared as a way of making sure that there was good coordination between the two. You had Bob Rubin and Tony running the two, and there was really good, healthy cooperation between them. I don't think they ever felt pulled in two directions. I think that's because Tony and Bob worked so well together. They would go to both meetings and write memos to both of them—not always. Sometimes there was clearly just an NEC issue.

The other one was the counsel's office?

Morrisroe: Yes, the general counsel. I'm not sure when this happened in the Clinton administration—whether it was from the outset or later—that the person who was the general counsel was also an associate in the counsel's office. That may not have been during your tenure.

Soderberg: I don't know. It would have made sense to integrate them both into it. It's a good way to know what's going on in another office, and it makes sense to integrate it. Alan Kreczko was both in the White House Counsel and in the NSC? I wasn't aware that that was new.

Morrisroe: After Iran-Contra, this recommendation was made in multiple administrations because they felt that there needed to be a connection between the counsel's office and the legal

advice the National Security Council was receiving either from—at that point it was just the principals who were giving legal advice. Then there was an NSC counsel created in the second part of the [Ronald] Reagan term. Then the link was made some time in Clinton.

Soderberg: It makes sense. You think it would create a tension between the various staffs, but instead it creates an automatic flow of information in a way that helps coordination. I never saw an instance when they were pulled in two different directions. I'm sure it could happen at some point, but if that's happening, you know you have a problem at the top. That person has to go and say, "Look, you guys have to work this out; I can't do it." So it forces problems to come to the surface more quickly, and it forces automatic sharing of information, which I think serves both offices well.

Morrisroe: Were there any other members of your staff who either formally or as a matter of practice maintained a close relationship with another specific White House unit, press or something like that?

Soderberg: Yes, the press office would do it—legislative affairs. I think the legislative affairs office might have also been part of the other one. The press office was speechwriting. I don't think those offices reported to the White House. In fact, I remember talking to Michael Waldman who wrote the book *POTUS Speaks*. I think one of Clinton's most brilliant speeches is the one I open my book with about the 50th anniversary of World War II at Normandy. I said to Michael, "Why didn't you put that in your book? It's one of Clinton's best speeches."

He said, "Because you guys wouldn't coordinate with us on your speeches." I said, "Oh, come on, that's so awful." I hadn't realized there was this tension over the fact that we did our own speeches and they weren't part of it. Apparently he was a little bit miffed about that, which I found out only a couple of years ago. Our press office was pretty integrated into the White House office, but we did our own talking points and press stuff.

Part of it is, I think, to keep control. Look at what happens in Bush. You get the "axis of evil" thrown in at the last minute with no review. That's the kind of thing you want to avoid in foreign policy. So you want to make sure that the National Security Advisor has control of what goes in the speeches. We had some brilliant speechwriters. I had never thought about it that way. Those were probably separate, formally, but there was a lot of interaction back and forth.

Strong: People in these interviews often say some of the things you've been saying: the outside impression was that we weren't well organized, when in fact we were. The outside impression is that we weren't keeping campaign promises, when in fact we were working hard on those issues and they did eventually come around.

What accounts for the fact that the wrong impression exists in the elite media? Is it a failure that you were not managing those impressions or are they unmanageable?

Soderberg: I think they are manageable, and the Republicans are much better at managing them. They're now controlling who's speaking to the press better; we had a lot of leaks, a lot of people talking about stuff they don't really know about. The whole gays in the military blowing up got off on the wrong foot. There was a lot of loose talk.

Strong: How much did you talk to newspaper writers and other members of the media?

Soderberg: Not that much, really. There was more as things got going. If I were working on an issue—and I got really involved in a couple of issues—I would do it. If there was a big crisis, sometimes I would talk to them about it. But for the most part I didn't do too much of it. I probably should have done more. Those of us at the top of the NSC structure probably could have done a lot more early on to help sell it. We probably didn't do enough.

Riley: Why was that? Is it because everybody shared the Tony Lake reticence about being out in front?

Soderberg: I didn't know any better. I was brand new; I didn't know what to do. A lot of it was that Tony didn't understand the 24-hour news cycle. But a lot of it was just a very young, inexperienced group of people coming into the White House and trying to figure it out. So it was chaotic and not perfect, and it does take a while to figure it out. We did make a lot of early mistakes in the way it was all handled. You can't really blame the press for reporting it that way.

But part of it on the foreign policy side was a false presumption from the beginning that a Governor from Arkansas couldn't possibly know about foreign policy. It was very hard to get over that. They were looking for—waiting for—mistakes to be made. I think a lot of it is also that in the post-Cold War era, trying to re-write the rules for the 21st century is a messy process, and it's not clear where you're going or how it's going to work out. Everybody has to learn a new system and a new way of speaking about it. They're looking for a new doctrine of containment to put everything into a neat box, and you can't do it. We tried to do it. We tried to come up with one phrase after another and—

Strong: When did that process start?

Soderberg: Right away. How were we going to explain what we were doing? We tried to come up with it. We had meeting after meeting about what should we call the doctrine. Tony gave a speech on enlargement, and that just produced snickers of inappropriate connotations. Then Madeleine came up with her "assertive multilateral," which we told her at the time not to use; we didn't like it. That stuck from day one.

You just can't do it. I think the best summary of Clinton's foreign policy is Sandy Berger's foreign policy piece in 2000. It's a very good piece about what we're doing, but there's no bumper-sticker description of it.

Riley: That came out in 2000, but you were trying to find something in '93, right?

Soderberg: He doesn't come up with a doctrine either; he just sums up what we had done in a very concise way. We repeatedly did that throughout the administration. But you have to read the whole article to get it, and they want—We say we're promoting democracy, but that doesn't get the other stuff: the trade integration, the nonproliferation, the antiterrorism. So you can't really put it all in one box, and that in itself is hard for people to get. "What are you guys doing?" "Well, we're doing a bunch of things."

So when Bush came in, he wanted to put it back simple. They were going to deal with the big powers, Russia, China, and contain Iraq (or else overthrow Iraq), and not deal with all this little messy stuff. "We're not going to do nation-building and all that." It didn't work.

Part of it was just that figuring it all out took a while and it was a messy process. The press can't be blamed for that. But when we started to get it right, they were slow to recognize that it was working. They just assumed it was not.

Riley: Who were you consulting in trying to develop a doctrine? Was that all done in house, within the administration, or were you bringing in some academics and grand foreign policy masters to help you think these things through on a regular basis?

Soderberg: We brought in a bunch of people, particularly when the perception was that we weren't in control. We started bringing people in, partly to explain what we were doing, but also partly to get some idea of how to talk about it. We reached out to a lot of neo-cons—who were the harshest critics—and others, to tell them what we were doing, to get their ideas. We started doing that probably six months into the administration.

It has its pluses and minuses: on the one hand, it's great to have people come in and talk, but they don't always get what you're trying to do. It's hard to integrate that into what you're doing, but it's healthy to do it, because they come in and tell you to your face how you're messing things up and how to solve your problems. You always get something useful out of it.

It would be on the public record who came in on those days. I don't remember who they were—people like Max Kampelman and some other luminaries, who were just brilliant. They didn't necessarily want to be in a position in government anymore, but they did want to be called and asked.

Strong: By coming in, you mean talking to NSC staff or talking to the President?

Soderberg: Both, but mostly to the NSC staff. The President might have popped in on a couple of them.

Strong: Did Clinton like those kinds of sessions?

Soderberg: Oh, he loved them, yes, but you don't have time a lot of times. We'd bring them into the Situation Room and talk for an hour or so. We did it a couple of times, and that does help. Then they get what you're trying to do. They understand it. They feel consulted and involved, and when people feel consulted and involved, they're less critical. They might even go out and say something positive.

Morrisroe: Was there an effort early on to bring in Congressional foreign policy leadership for similar types of discussions to keep them updated on what you were doing and what your objectives were? Any effort to try to incorporate them—or at least to keep them apprised?

Soderberg: I think probably yes, but I don't really remember. There was a whole Congressional office that constantly dealt with the leadership, and they were pretty good. Pat Griffin ran it. We worked very closely with him. You don't bring Congress people in to talk to

the National Security Advisor; they expect to see the President. So Tony would more likely go up there and talk to them. What could we have done differently? Probably more of that. We probably could have reached out more to Congress earlier on, but we did eventually do it.

I think eventually you go talk to Congress about a particular issue you're working on. It doesn't tend to be, "Hey, let's talk about a doctrine." It's more focused on Bosnia, Haiti, China MFN [most favored nation]. When you have an issue, then you talk to Congress. You go up and see them, or you talk to them on a phone, or you bring them down for a meeting. You lay out what you're going to do. It tends to be more issue-driven.

The President would regularly meet with the Congressional leadership. They'd come in the Cabinet Room. That was pretty regular. We'd usually all sit in and listen. Then if there was a particular issue we were dealing with, we'd talk to them individually about it. Sandy did quite a bit of that. Sandy was probably more involved in talking to the Hill than any of us.

Riley: One of the difficulties—and again, this is from an outside perspective—that the administration had at large was that there wasn't a deep pool of Democrats at that time who had executive branch experience to bring into the White House. There's at least some evidence that on the domestic side, having [Jimmy] Carter experience was somewhat of a disqualifier for bringing somebody in. I don't know if you have any observations about that.

The more general question relates to the fact that on the foreign policy side, that seems not to be true. In fact, many of the people who came in did have significant foreign policy experience with the Carter administration. Did that contribute something positive to the foreign policy team, the fact that there were people who knew their way around in a way that some of the other folks did not?

Soderberg: It's a problem when you haven't been in office for 12 years. The only people who had experience were the Carter people. Anybody much older than that wasn't really going to come back into government. I don't know why you make the distinction between the foreign policy and the domestic side, because it wasn't a liability.

Riley: It's a factual distinction: on the domestic side, you're hard pressed to find anybody who had Carter experience, and on the foreign policy side—

Soderberg: Why?

Morrisroe: In terms of the composition of the ultimate White House there were very few—

Soderberg: But we chose not to hire the Carter people.

Riley: They just weren't there. And on the foreign policy side—

Soderberg: I see what you're saying. Yes, that was a liability as well, because Carter's foreign policy wasn't particularly popular around Washington. But there you have to get people who have experience, so you're not going to have people my age running the State Department. I was 33 at the time. Those were the only people who could do it. It does help to have people who have

experience come into those jobs, so we did have a little more gray hair in the foreign policy realm, which certainly helped work through some of the issues.

But there was a 12-year gap. So the only government experience the rest of us could get was in Congress, which is why so many people came from the Hill. That's the only place anybody could get any kind of experience. The Hill is very good training. It makes you impatient; it makes you want to get things done tomorrow. But you need it to be tempered and balanced with people who actually know how the system works, because you do have to work the system, and it's slow. It takes a lot of work to get anything.

Riley: One of the potential side effects of hiring a lot of people with Hill experience is that you have a Hill-centric view of reality in the policy community. Did you find that to be true in this case? Was it difficult for you to come into the White House and shift your frame of reference to think—?

Soderberg: Actually, surprisingly no. You make the shift very quickly, because you're all of a sudden in power, and you can do it. Congress is an odd place, because you don't really do anything other than write legislation, give speeches, and vote, which is really different from actually making the policy and going out and doing it.

It teaches you very well about the issues, but not necessarily how to actually make it all happen. You're conscious of the Hill, and you're savvy about what the issues are, but you immediately shift over. It's interesting.

Riley: Was the shift also detectable back in the community you left? In other words, were you finding your contacts on the Hill receptive to direction from the White House because you're a Democrat and you're their buddy? Or were you getting constant reminders: "Wait a minute. You were never voicing that willingness to accept Presidential direction before. Why should I listen to you now?"

Soderberg: Well, at the time, the first year and a half, we had control of both the executive and legislative branches, and there was a willingness to work with Clinton early on. But they're still independent actors, and if you get something wrong, you hear about it right away, particularly because it's your own party. Like, "How could you be so stupid? What are you guys thinking?" A lot of those kinds of phone calls come in: "Why are you doing this? What about this?" These were, "We're here to help you" kinds of calls.

Then of course, when the '94 elections happened and we lost both Houses of Congress, the Democrats didn't have control any more. We were trying to deal with a bunch of Republicans who were trying to undermine us. We were not going to get a whole lot done.

Strong: If you went through the list of major national security issues in '93, '94—gays in the military, Haiti, Bosnia, China—is there one of them we should talk about in detail because it's not well understood in most of the existing commentary?

Soderberg: I think they've been pretty well covered. The Elizabeth Drew book is very good on this, very good. She did a first-rate job, talked to everybody. It's one of the best books on that

period I've seen. My book goes into a little bit. The [Bob] Woodward stuff gives you a running commentary.

Strong: Again, if the answer is, "No, there's a fairly good public record," is there one of those you were working on more than others, that you could add to our record?

Soderberg: Why don't I just go through them? That's the easiest thing.

Gays in the military is the one that hasn't been looked at that much. In the book, I go a little bit into why the chiefs were marched into the Oval Office to talk with the President about something when they already knew what they were going to do. It was actually kind of a set-up. I don't think anybody has really looked at that much. The whole role of Powell in this period hasn't been looked at as much as his role in the Bosnia situation, which I go into a little bit in this book.

Strong: Now the President wouldn't have been surprised that there were senior officers in the military who were opposed to this commitment he's made.

Soderberg: Right.

Strong: He was surprised that it was the full array of the chiefs coming to deliver this message?

Soderberg: Colin Powell was a hero. He was a Republican and he was leaving, so nobody had control over him and he could pretty much do what he wanted. He's the ultimate honorable American patriot, and I think he deeply believed that gays in the military was a bad thing, wrong, and he was going to stop it. And he did. He wasn't a constructive player on that, and he wasn't a constructive player on the whole Bosnia issue.

If you read his book, he's very passionate about this: "I saw the lessons of Vietnam, and when our time came for another Vietnam, we were going to stop it." He saw Bosnia as another Vietnam, and he was going to stop it. The number of times I sat in these meetings where he said, "Don't fall in love with air power; you can't do it, it won't work. You can do Bosnia, but you're going to do 200,000 troops. Don't talk about surgical this and that."

He wouldn't creatively think about it and effectively tied Clinton's hands, because you can't get this done if you don't have a Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman who will come up with options for you.

There was a sea change when Shalikashvili came in. I don't think Shalikashvili has ever gotten the credit he deserves for what he did. He was the unsung hero of the first term. He was an incredible, thoughtful, interesting, brilliant man who came up with options. Being Polish, he understood the value of getting involved in the Bosnia war and why it mattered. Powell never understood why it mattered. Shali did. He would say, "Okay, let me go back and get you options." He wasn't making the decisions for the President; he was coming up with options that could then be seriously debated and decided.

So once Powell left, that became possible, which is part of the reason the Bosnia stuff started moving. All of a sudden we had a military that would work with us as opposed to against us in

trying to come up with a plan that was actually workable. Powell was just wrong. We didn't need 200,000 troops, and actually air power did help in this case. He couldn't get past his own history.

Morrisroe: How would you characterize Powell's relationship with Clinton apart from substantive differences?

Soderberg: It was fascinating to watch. They were very pleasant to each other, joking, respectful, but it was such a dance of power going on right in front of us. We could see it. Powell's a gentleman, he's a polite person, he's very respectful, but he's also very forceful, and at that point he knew he could do whatever he wanted. At that point, Clinton thought he was going to run against him for President in '96. So to sit there and watch these dynamics—can you imagine how fun it was to be a fly on the wall then? Everyone knew Powell was thinking about running for President. Yet he was still wearing the uniform, and his Commander-in-Chief was sitting right there. Powell is a class act from top to bottom. But in this case he really felt strongly about it and was just going to throw a wrench into it.

Riley: Were there any issues on which he was genuinely helpful? You mentioned Bosnia and gays in the military where his positions were diametrically opposite to the President's. Are there places where one ought to look to see where he contributed something positive during your tenure?

Soderberg: He was good at day-to-day management. Certainly he was a voice of great knowledge when we were working through issues like Iraq. I'd say he was really helpful. He agreed with what we were doing on Iraq. I think he was still in office when Saddam Hussein thought about going into Kuwait again. He started moving a couple of battalions down towards Kuwait, and immediately we figured out what to do and got the no-fly zones going. Clinton went out there. He was just brilliant on those normal issues to do with the military. And of course he had enormous respect in the building.

But we always wondered what he went back and said. There was a lot of negative feeling towards Clinton in the military in the early stages because of the gays. I don't think Powell did anything to counter that.

Riley: Was there anybody in the Pentagon who was friendly?

Soderberg: Yes, all our appointees were friendly. It's one of the reasons why we need them.

Riley: Any of the permanent folks that you unexpectedly found as—?

Soderberg: Sure, once we got to know them and they got to know us, the suspicions rapidly melted away, and actually they realized we were doing some right things. Towards the end, the military really respected Clinton, particularly given what's going on now. They are furious about what's going on now. But Shalikashvili, certainly. We had a great relationship with Wes Clark.

Riley: But that came later rather than in the first nine or ten months. Or am I misreading?

Soderberg: They were around.

Riley: On your radar and helpful?

Soderberg: I can't remember the timing, but certainly when you start working these issues with various people, they get to know you and they like you. We had a lot of military staff on the NSC who helped pass messages back. So there were certainly exceptions to that. But you can't blame them. They hear about this guy coming in who's going to put gays in the military, and they've all been taught that that's a sin. They're going to be suspicious about it.

I don't think Powell helped on that front, particularly. Powell is not a malicious person; he just had deep-seated feelings that were directly contradictory to what the President was doing, which was wrong.

Riley: A story circulated in the press at some point in the first year about a junior White House staffer making some derogatory comment to a person in uniform.

Soderberg: Who knows who that was? That was Barry McCaffrey. I'm still mad about that. The fact that some kid walked by and harrumphed at him was awful, but I cannot imagine any White House staff person doing that. A lot of people are in that foyer. What's really offensive is that he went and told the press about it. What's that about? I think that's an act of disloyalty for which he ended up getting rewarded by being appointed one thing after another, which I never understood. I like Barry, I know him. But the fact that he went out and made an issue of that was extraordinary, a total act of disloyalty. And who knows who that person was? I don't know a person at the White House who would say that.

Strong: Were there other ways in which the dynamics of the Vietnam generation play out in issues and problems?

Soderberg: The right wing is still fighting the whole '60s battle. They can't stand that a '60s kid got in the White House, and that whole generational debate—cultural debate, really. They were at war with us just because they couldn't get over the '60s, come on. But I think there was really a culture war going on with him, and a lot of conservatives just couldn't stand the fact that a bunch of hippies were running the White House. I really think that's how they looked at it.

As far as how you're going to use the military to do this and get over Vietnam—beyond Bosnia, it really wasn't an issue. Haiti, where we used the military, Somalia, where we used the military, there was never any hint that we would get stuck there. In fact, we should have gotten stuck in Haiti, because it would have been a lot better off. We pulled out way too quickly. I think it was more an overreaction to the Somalia mess, not so much the Vietnam mess, that forced us out of Haiti too quickly.

Strong: Let's talk about Somalia. Who was following that issue carefully on the NSC?

Soderberg: Tony, Sandy, Richard Feinberg, Larry Rossin, and I. Larry and Richard were in the Latin America division. Larry was in Haiti with the UN for a little while, too. I had gotten to know Aristide from Kennedy's office and was his confidante during this period. If he didn't like what he was getting from us, he would call me and complain. I would talk to him pretty regularly. My take on what happened on Haiti is we were always committed to sending him back, but it took a lot longer than we expected.

It was the same thing with Bosnia. One of the trends you see, not just in our administration but in general, is when there's negotiation, a political process going on, little tactical gains make you think you're going to get the whole enchilada. So you don't want to pull the plug on it because oh, this one is going to lead to the final resolution. The Serbs would give us one little agreement after another while continuing ethnic cleansing. The Sudanese are doing the same thing right now. A little bit, but they're continuing—and in Haiti, they would give us a little bit, and we'd have all these negotiations. They'd come up and talk about agreeing to something and then renege.

There was a UN process going on. Again, you want to try to energize the process that already exists when you take office. You don't want to come in and say, "Let's start over." You want to say, "Okay, how can we help what you guys have already done?" There's always a lot of really good effort that has gone in, and you don't want to have it just disappear.

In Haiti, we kept trying to work with the Governor's Island Agreement and the UN. We'd have our own envoys, but we were just getting jerked around. It took us a year and a half, almost two years—well, a year and a half—to recognize that unless we put force on the table, it was not going to happen.

It was the same with Bosnia. It took us that long to figure out that unless we put force on the table, we were just going to get jerked around by the Serbs. Coming to that conclusion is hard. You want to be able to do it without using force. Throughout this period, I wouldn't hear from Aristide unless there was a problem. He would call and talk for hours about why we weren't getting serious about this, how he was getting frustrated. I'd say, "No, we're really serious about it; don't get frustrated. It's all frustrating, but we're really going to send you back." Ultimately we just had to take over the negotiations from the UN. We sent Carter, Nunn, and Powell down to Haiti to negotiate with them.

Riley: Do you know how that team was selected?

Soderberg: I can't remember. I think Carter was already involved, but I have no idea why Nunn was involved. I don't remember. I was probably around when it was decided but—have you already interviewed Sandy?

Riley: Yes.

Soderberg: I assume that Sandy came up with it. He was the front person on this. Powell had left by that time, but my guess is that sending a black guy to Haiti probably helped; you don't want a bunch of white guys going down. They were military, and you wanted a military person to talk to them, and that leads you to Powell. And to his credit, he was willing to do it. It's not a given you're going to succeed on these jobs. They were begging for more time at the last minute, but Carter—Carter is hard to deal with on these things, because he's very averse to the use of force, and as a former President, he doesn't want to take instructions from anyone. So that was a little tense.

Then they basically said, "Get out of there." I guess the Haitians had some intelligence in—I forget which fort it was, in North Carolina maybe? Anyway, somehow they got word that the 82nd Airborne planes had been launched. Someone on the base must have called some of the

Haitians. We think it must have been a Haitian soldier there who was talking to them. Then they realized we were serious.

The sad thing about Haiti is that Aristide was the one politician who had the political power to create a center in Haiti and couldn't do it. He fell into the trap of "You're either omnipotent and have all the power, or you're dead." That's how Haitian politics has worked for two centuries. He could have created a center, but he just couldn't do it. I had this conversation with him repeatedly to his face: "You have to create this center; what are you doing?" "On no, I'm trying, I'm fine." He just couldn't do it.

Riley: You deal with this a little bit in your book. There were reports originating from the CIA questioning his mental competence. Did you ever wonder yourself whether he was all there?

Soderberg: No, he's obviously all there. What happened was Brian Latell went up to Capitol Hill and gave a sensational briefing about Aristide—he's bug-eyed, he has this, he has that, he's on narcotics. I forget all the accusations, but "He's a psycho nut" was the essential message.

I called him into my office and said, "Tell me what you said." I already had the briefing. My friends on the Hill had called me and told me what he said. I said, "Can you just repeat it? Let me hear it." He sugarcoated it and downplayed it. We finally pushed the CIA to let us know what was behind these stories. It turns out it was not corroborated. It was very poorly researched and just wasn't accurate and true.

That's not to say Aristide doesn't have huge, huge problems, and I think he was involved in some of the murders and the corruption and other things he's been accused of in Haiti. But he's not a psycho nut. The fact that the CIA would do that was quite shocking.

Riley: Do you remember any other instances where the CIA was engaged in counterproductive ways?

Soderberg: We got into this whole issue of Guatemala and declassifying documents. For some reason I ended up doing all that and working very closely with the CIA. George was very helpful in this. I don't think he was at the CIA at the time; he was still at the NSC. Jennifer Harbury's husband had disappeared in Guatemala, and she wanted some answers. I thought she was entitled to some answers. So we started pushing for them and just hit a brick wall. The CIA had information about this individual, but they wouldn't pass it on to her. We kept asking why.

If you really dig, it was more that they just didn't want to give it to her than there was any real reason for sources and method or protecting information. So we set up a process to share information with her. That was fascinating, because they just didn't want to do it, for no good reason. That's where George came in and was very helpful. They trusted him, so when he said why? How about this? And he was very constructive in coming up with compromises. We made it clear from the beginning that we'd never push for anything to be released that could jeopardize sources or methods or anything sensitive, but that's not what this was about. George was very good about separating those two.

Then we started a whole process of declassifying all this information, and George ran it. We had a session where an interagency group would review whatever they did not want to release and

have them explain why. In those cases, a couple of times, they had legitimate reasons for not releasing it, but for most part, it was embarrassing, and they didn't want to have embarrassing information out there. That was a fascinating process. I think the government—it isn't unique to the CIA—hides behind the classification rubric so they don't have to have embarrassing information come out.

So there was a whole review of all the Guatemala stuff, and I can't even remember what the major issue was. But George was at the center of it. We ended up pushing an enormous number of documents out the front door. I think John Deutch was at the CIA at the time, and it was one of the reasons they didn't like John Deutch at the CIA. John took the brunt of that, unfairly—it was being driven by us, not by John. He was supportive of it, but he wasn't—and he took the hit for it among the agency staff.

Morrisroe: In the pantheon of issues coming up this first year—Haiti, Somalia, and others—how would you assess their significance to Clinton in terms of what he thought was important in foreign policy? I know that some of the things that happened in Somalia and elsewhere presented themselves front and center and had to be resolved. But in terms of your assessment of what he thought the most important areas were during the first year—

Soderberg: I think the most important areas at the time were probably Russia—how do you manage a transition to democracy in Russia? Getting that right probably had the biggest impact on United States security—getting the nuclear weapons detargeted, getting them dismantled, getting the Nunn-[Richard] Lugar stuff up and running. Managing that whole post-Soviet era was probably the most important thing Clinton was working on at the time. But you don't get to pick your daily schedule when you're President. You have to deal with whatever happens in the world.

What we had to deal with those first three years were Haiti, Bosnia, and Somalia. You can't choose that. I think Clinton probably spent more time on Bosnia than Russia. Tony asked me to review what happened in Somalia. There was just no senior-level oversight of the whole policy, because there was no disagreement. Why would we have a meeting if everybody agrees? That's a waste of time. So what's the issue? That was clearly a mistake.

Riley: So when the President, in that instance, gets frustrated at the moment this breaks loose—being blind-sided with Somalia—it really was the case that he was blind-sided by this.

Soderberg: By what?

Riley: By Black Hawk, by the perception of the mission being—

Soderberg: No, he knew. Tony had briefed him on what was happening. But I don't think any of us saw it coming that we were going to lose 18 soldiers in a firefight. We were all blind-sided to that extent. But he had signed off on memos and talked about it, so he knew what was going on. But he hadn't been integrally involved in discussing what was going on because he kept getting these memos saying, "It's on track, we're handing it off, it's over, we're out of there."

The whole idea was that we were going to hand this over to the UN as quickly as possible. Everyone says we cut and run from Somalia, but we were always planning to leave. In fact,

Clinton resisted putting an early date there. Congress wanted us out right away, but we said, "No, we're going to keep to the original timetable," and I think we maybe added a little to it. So it's frustrating that everyone says we cut and run from Somalia, when in fact we had always been on track to hand it over to the UN. We kept on that schedule and didn't cut and run. But the perception is that we cut and run, including from [Osama] bin Laden, who thinks did just that.

But the mistake most people who've looked at this, myself included, made is that we didn't have a political process to go along with the military strategy for going after [Farah] Adid. So we did it in a vacuum without any kind of political context in which to handle it. And at a time when our troop strength was pretty low—because we were leaving, and it was right at the time when most of our troops were out. The UN hadn't plussed up yet, so it was a really vulnerable stage when they chose to attack.

If you go back to how we went in, I was telling that story yesterday about Thanksgiving and not being consulted and Scowcroft saying don't worry, we'll be out by January 20. They didn't have any kind of political strategy. So we came in and had a strategy of handing the operation over to the UN, but not trying to solve the underlying conflict in Somalia. When the UN forces, I think they were attacked in June, 24 Pakistani soldiers were killed in June of '93. We had to do something. So we ended up being the ones on the ground who had to be capable of doing something.

I could remember, everybody was traveling and for some reason I was back at home. The military came over to brief this house they were about to attack because they thought Adid was in there. I can remember thinking at the time, *This is a little weird: they're attacking this house where we think this guy is. What's the overall strategy?* Then they attacked it, and he'd left and he didn't make it. It escalated in a way we should have been paying more attention to.

But at the time Powell was also running this show, saying, "We have this under control, we're doing it." You just assume they know what they're doing. You don't realize that in fact you always have to have a sanity check on these kinds of operations and say, "Let's review it," and ask the tough questions. We just didn't.

Riley: You refer to it in the book as Clinton's Bay of Pigs, right?

Soderberg: Yes.

Riley: What I'm trying to sort out is where the failings were at the Presidential level—or at the level of information getting to the President. That's why I phrased the question as I did about the President feeling blindsided by this. I'm still not sure I got a clear answer to that.

Soderberg: Everyone was blindsided by the fact that these guys got killed. He felt that we hadn't kept him fully informed on what was going on. In fact, we had, through these memos, but that's not—so we take a little bit of issue with the fact that he's saying he was blindsided, because he had been getting these memos. It's obviously our fault if he feels blindsided, so you get defensive about that. That's why I'm not saying yes, he was blindsided.

If you look at the big picture here, he should have been a lot more involved in what was going on there at the time. The reason he wasn't is the military was saying they had it under control.

Again, this is Powell. They weren't saying they needed any decisions. The interagency process all agreed that we were on track to hand over and get out. With everything else going on, if there's interagency agreement on something, what's the point of a meeting?

Riley: He was getting routine reports that weren't indicating any vulnerability.

Soderberg: Right. And the real issue isn't not involving the President more—that's a symptom of the principals not being engaged enough in what was really going on and asking the tough questions and leaving the U.S. military and JCS [Joint Chiefs of Staff], on auto-pilot as far as what they thought they were going to do to get this guy without stepping back and saying, "Wait a minute."

Had we had more interagency review and asked tough questions, would we still have approved going after these guys? Probably. But the fact that there weren't any meant that there was no—I'm not sure that all those meetings would have changed anything.

Riley: The inference in invoking the Bay of Pigs metaphor is that there may have been a change in Presidential behavior and receptivity to routine reports after that. Are you, in fact, saying that? I confess that I don't recall in the book whether you make that claim. Do you suggest that after Clinton has gone through this bracing experience, he leaves it having learned that he has to be more aggressive in shaking the trees for information, or in questioning reports from his foreign policy experts?

Soderberg: I don't know, actually. That's a good question. You're asking whether it shook his confidence in his foreign policy team. I don't know the answer to that.

Strong: [John F.] Kennedy came out of the Bay of Pigs saying, "How could I have done this? I've known all along that I should never listen to the experts, always talk to lots of people, and don't just take things for granted."

He made that comment to a variety of people. Later, of course, he fired people and changed some of the personnel at the CIA. But Kennedy said, "What I really learned was I have to pay attention, I have to ask questions, I can't just get briefed."

The commentary about Somalia—again, in some of the books about Clinton—ties in with other observations. He's spending a lot of time on the budget decisions; he's spending a lot of time on the domestic issues. After Somalia he's reminded, "Oh, I have to give more attention to these things because they can blow up and ruin my days."

Soderberg: That one did. If I remember correctly, after the Somalia thing, he began coming to NSC meetings more often. He was always receptive to memos and meetings. He was always a voracious reader, always read everything. But it has to. I don't really recall any specific instances other than he did start coming to meetings more often. He must have had that kind of moment, but I'm not sure I can give you any insight into it, although he did start coming to more meetings. That's the only thing I remember: he started showing up more.

Strong: More of the NSC principals' meetings?

Soderberg: Yes, just principals.

Riley: But you don't recall getting your memos more heavily dissected when they came back to you, or harsher questions to you or to the military people as a result of this experience?

It may not be. The predicate is that when you use the metaphor of the Bay of Pigs for people who do what we do for a living, it triggers these kinds of questions.

Soderberg: I would say in Clinton's case, it wouldn't trigger sharper questions on the memos coming back, but rather him participating more directly in meetings and pushing. I'd say he never again took the military's proposals without personally reviewing them and engaging them and getting involved in them. So, to that extent it was like Kennedy. He would always engage. Certainly when he got to the Bosnian stuff, he was into every possible plan and detail, and ever after that time, he reviewed very carefully what was going on. Certainly he reviewed what was happening with the Haiti operation very carefully.

Between Somalia and Haiti, I'm trying to remember the timing of the trip to Kuwait. I think it was somewhere in '94, '93 or '94 when he sent additional troops to Kuwait. Actually, that would be in your timeline. I can't remember what the timing of that one is. But if you look at the big ones, Haiti and Bosnia, certainly he was very intimately engaged in it, and it has to have been partly because of that.

Riley: Okay.

Morrisroe: You mentioned Russia, and you discuss Yeltsin and Russia in your book as well. This is one of the world leaders he first becomes involves with, has a kind of enduring issue with, develops something of an alliance with. Can you talk a little bit about his relationship with Yeltsin, and any recollections beyond what you discuss in your book about that first year, and the crisis Yeltsin faced and his response to that?

Soderberg: Clinton just liked Yeltsin; they were two peas in a pod. They almost looked like each other: they were gregarious, loved life, and had their own personal foibles. He just loved Yeltsin's guts. He just was gutsy, and Clinton was determined to do whatever he could for him. They had their differences. A number of times Yeltsin was clearly drunk on the phone. We learned quickly to call him only really early in the morning, his time.

One time we were over in the library in the residence, and he was on the phone with Yeltsin. It's Toby Gati and me, and he was holding the phone out so we could hear it. It was like "Rah, rah, rah, rah"—we couldn't understand a word. I don't speak Russian, but we couldn't even understand any of the words. But he ended up doing it and ended up making the right decision time after time. Clinton had a real affection for him and spent a lot of time on the phone with him, a lot of time engaging him, pushing very hard to include him in the G8, and sensitivities of NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] expansion. I wasn't at all surprised that he took the time to go to his funeral a couple of weeks ago. He just liked the guy's guts. Clinton likes gutsy fighters. He's one, and he sees it in other people.

There were some tough decisions going on there. How do you deal with an imploding Soviet Union? What do you do, how do you manage it and how do you support the democratic processes?

Morrisroe: Were there any memorable disagreements among the foreign policy team outside or within the White House about how to deal with these developments in Russia?

Soderberg: [Richard] Nixon wrote a letter to Clinton early on. I never saw it, but apparently it had a real impact on him. I don't know where that letter is, but someone should find it if you're interested in this period. Have you heard about that?

Strong: And they talked.

Soderberg: Yes. Nixon, actually, was very adrenaline. Nixon, for all his faults, was brilliant on foreign policy, and he offered to help Clinton quite a bit. He talked to Clinton a lot and helped him understand how to deal with the Russians and manage the relationship in a constructive way.

Strong: Those would have been conversations where there wasn't a note-taker, wasn't a memo?

Soderberg: But Nixon wrote a long letter to Clinton about it. I never saw it. Usually I could see anything, but nobody wanted me to see that one because they didn't want it to leak. I don't know what was in it. Have you already interviewed Tony?

Riley: Yes.

Soderberg: Tony knows what's in it. It really had an impact on Clinton. I don't know what it said, but I assume it's what he ended up doing: engaging and moving them forward. Michael Mandelbaum, I think, was still somewhat of an advisor in the early years before he got mad at us. But he, too, was recommending engagement. Nobody credible was saying we shouldn't do it. The decision to bring him into the G8 was not a universally accepted position with the other countries. And you always have problems with Congress not wanting to give aid—"They're communists; what are we doing?"—but those weren't particularly credible.

Strong: When Clinton spoke to foreign leaders, was there always a note-taker? Was there reasonably good discipline about that? Or did he have people he talked to on his own and conversations with other leaders that would pop up later on?

Soderberg: He was pretty disciplined about other leaders, because you have to schedule it ahead of time. You don't just pick up the phone and call, for the most part. He was usually pretty good. We'd almost always have a note-taker there, and there are pretty extensive notes. The Situation Room would usually manage the call and the note-taker. They would always have a note-taker there. It would be a rare exception if there wasn't. Clinton was very good about that.

Now, for all I know, there are 20 million of them that I don't know about, but I don't think so. I think he would have told us. He understood it was important, and you want a record of what was said. He understood that. He didn't fight that. Plus we made it pretty easy for him. The Situation Room would always hook up—a lot of them you needed a translator for as well. You can't just pick up the phone and start chatting.

Even when he could just pick up the phone and call [John] Major, he would still go through the Situation Room, just for tracking it down and organizing it—we'd usually schedule it ahead of time. For a while one of us would be in the Oval Office with him in case he had a question. My favorite picture is me leaning over his shoulder while he's on the phone with Yeltsin writing something down. He sent me a funny note about it.

The first thing I remember about being in the White House is standing in the Oval Office while he was on the phone with Yeltsin. The sun was streaming in behind the desk, and I just had this out-of-body experience looking down saying, "You're in the wrong place." Someone's going to tap me on the shoulder and say, "What are you doing? You're in the wrong picture. This is a dream." I can still to this day remember that feeling of, *Oh, my God. It's little old me alone in the Oval Office with the President of the United States talking to the President of Russia. Wow.*

Then you get back to work. But every now and then you have those "Gee! Wow!" moments.

Riley: Did you go to Vancouver?

Soderberg: Yes.

Riley: Can you tell us about that? Do you have any recollections?

Soderberg: I shouldn't have gone. All of us went; I just really wanted to go. That was one of the places where probably too many people went. Tony, Sandy, and I went. I should have stayed home—it wasn't right for me to go—but nobody had the guts to tell me not to. There were a few too many people on that trip, too, I think.

Riley: Canada is a popular destination.

Soderberg: Yes, but Strobe [Talbott] was the clearly designated Russia person and always was, through the entire administration. So he ended up being the one to sit in on the meeting. First of all, it's a beautiful setting. Vancouver's great. They went for a walk; then they had dinner. It was a small dinner, actually. There weren't that many people there. Watching the two of them at dinner was fascinating.

Then there was a big scandal because I think Clinton wrote down, "When the Japanese mean no they say yes," or something like that, and that got into the press and created a scandal with the Japanese. It wasn't actually the first time they met face-to-face; they had met during the campaign in June.

When I first met Clinton in the New York hotel, it was a briefing for Clinton on Russia. Then I went with him to the meeting with Yeltsin at Blair House in June of '92. It was Michael Mandelbaum; I think just Michael and me, actually. When Yeltsin was running for President, George [H.W.] Bush refused to see him, and Yeltsin always resented that, and he was not going to do that to Clinton.

It was a big deal that Yeltsin agreed to see us during the campaign. Clinton always appreciated that, because it made him look Presidential. It was in Blair House and was one of those moments during the campaign where Clinton clearly looked Presidential. It wasn't very long—it was only

a 15- or 20-minute meeting—but it was enough to get the picture. Clinton always appreciated that.

Then they talked a lot on the phone and got together again in Vancouver. You could tell they clearly hit it off. Yeltsin, I think, drank too much at dinner, which everyone noticed.

Riley: You'd been warned about this in advance?

Soderberg: Yes. Actually, it was funny. During the campaign, the CIA came up with this little DVD player. At the time, it was the hottest thing the CIA was developing. I think it might have been on the way to Vancouver—they gave us a video of the person we were about to see. We could see how they walk and talk and feel, and they gave us a bio. They were so secretive about these DVD machines, and we thought, *Wow, that's really cool.* Of course, ten years later, you can buy them anywhere. I'll never forget, *Wow, look, we have this right here.* It was a video we could watch of Yeltsin. I thought that was so cool, and now you can get them anywhere.

I think Strobe being in Vancouver solidified his role as the Russia person, and that carried throughout the whole term. Strobe really ran the Russian policy—not really in any disagreement with Warren Christopher or Tony. Clinton, I think, just trusted him and liked him. He was obviously very good at it.

The issue of who was going to be in the meeting was resolved by Strobe doing it, so they didn't have five other people who wanted to do it. I think they wanted it fairly slim. At the time, the issues were getting rid of the missiles, denuclearizing the missiles. Was democracy going to get solidified? It wasn't clear back then that any of those were actually going to work.

Riley: Your relationship with Strobe was fine?

Soderberg: Yes. I didn't really know him that well, but he was always really nice to me. I didn't have that much interaction with him other than sitting in on meetings and things like that.

Riley: But the NSC relationship—it's a little bit of an odd situation, isn't it, having a personal friend of the President with his own independent portfolio in the State Department?

Soderberg: It's very odd. Initially, Toby Gati was doing Russia, but she was moved out. I don't know if it's because she bumped into Strobe, but then Nick Burns took it over, and Strobe really got along with him. Strobe was just so good that I never heard any complaints about it, never.

And he had a direct line to the President, so you knew you were going to lose that battle. So what's the point? He was very good about keeping everybody informed of what was going on. But yes, it is unusual. Strobe is such a good diplomat that he just made it work.

[BREAK]

Riley: We've gotten through a lot of the first year, but we haven't talked very much about Bosnia. How did you start your process of educating the President about what was going on there? This would be in early days of the administration, assuming it probably began in the transition—

Strong: Or the campaign.

Soderberg: It started in the campaign. He's an activist in all aspects of his life, and he wanted to do something to solve the Bosnia crisis. He also immediately understood why it mattered. I think there was a debate in the country about why we should engage in Bosnia, why it mattered. He understood that of course it matters; it's in Europe. We fought two world wars there. It's clearly in our interest. You don't want the violence and instability to spread. That was a no-brainer for him. That famous quote from Jim Baker, "We don't have a dog in this fight" was wrong: we clearly did have a dog in this fight.

So he immediately wanted to be more active on it, and through a series of briefings and talking, he developed a pretty forceful position during the campaign. In a way, his position was formed well before he got into the administration. That was in July of '92. It was essentially the position we ended up implementing, albeit two years later. It took forever.

When we got there, we had inherited a series of on-going negotiations, and we couldn't just blow them off. We had to work with the UN: the Europeans had all these envoys floating back and forth, but they ultimately failed. We ultimately had to take it over, but the process of letting that go was painful.

We tried to do an embargo to keep the Serbs from getting weapons, and we offered some humanitarian assistance to try to make the current approach more robust. But it still failed to end the fundamental conflict, and the violence went on. The Serbs were still running roughshod. We could do all this stuff on the margins—a lot of time and energy went into it. Leon Fuerth took over the embargo. The first two years were frustrating, because we kept trying to do more, but the fundamentals just weren't right. It was not a situation where you could tinker on the margin. The killing just kept on.

Woodward made famous an explosion Clinton had on the putting green where he called me and Mike McCurry and Sandy to vent, "Why am I not getting good options, and what's going on?" What was happening was that by May of '95, it was clear that the policy wasn't working, and we had let it go for a year and a half. No, two years. We got there in '93, so it had been over two years of trying to use the structure we had inherited, and it just wasn't working.

Tony had started a process of trying to figure out an end game. How do you really solve this if we're serious? What are the options? It came down to basically bombing the Serbs into submission and negotiating a settlement on a multi-ethnic state. The other options were to just give up and let them divide into parts. We had lots of those discussions, but ultimately I think everyone pretty much agreed on this one. There was a lot of drama going on that has been told before: [Richard] Holbrooke confronting the President at a state dinner saying that he doesn't even know that you've committed to send 25,000 troops to withdraw. There's plenty of evidence that he did actually know. I don't know if it was in the front of his mind when Holbrooke talked

to him; I'm sure it wasn't. I'm sure Dick's portrayal of that is an accurate description of the discussion.

Then there was the famous putting green scene where he was furious at not getting options. What had really triggered that was the fact that Jacques Chirac had just been elected President of France, and he was taking all these very firm positions: "I'm going to go in and bomb them; I'm going to do this." Clinton wondered, *Why am I not saying that?* None of the Chirac stuff came to anything, but it made him look good for a while, and it got Clinton moving, saying, "How come I'm not coming up with these bold proposals?"

Sandy and I were shuffling around saying, "We're trying, we're coming up; we have a process in place." He said, "That's not good enough; I want it now." We said, "We're working on it." He was so frustrated and so ready to move. So when Tony came up with this plan—it was pretty risky. We would go and tell the Europeans we were going to do this, whether they were with us or not. The flip on "Don't ask": Tell, don't ask. That was the headline in the paper when it leaked.

Essentially, I think the Europeans were relieved because they didn't have to buy into it; they just had to let it happen. They said, "Okay, go fix it." There was a debate over whether to hand it over to Dick Holbrooke, because he's such a forceful personality. But he was so clearly the right person to do it. He and Tony have a very tense rivalry. So he was clearly the right person, and he did it brilliantly. That really ended the war, but it would not have happened without the U.S. taking it on and threatening the use of force. We just had to do it. That's the only way we could get the equation done.

It had been one of the more frustrating failures for over two years, to try something and have it not work. It's the classic, "We're going to do the negotiations." I talk about it in the Rwanda situation. After the Rwanda genocide started, everyone was focusing on getting the peace process back in place. They'd get a little progress, and think, *Okay, now it's going to stop.*

But it didn't end. So you do a little bit more. It's very hard to pull the plug on a negotiation: "Really? After all that, it's not going to work?" Admitting failure is one of the hardest things for policy makers to do. That's why people stay in a bad marriage for a long time: they don't want to have to admit failure and pull the plug. That's the short Bosnia version.

Strong: Did Clinton have lots of episodes where he got angry, or were those rare occasions?

Soderberg: It certainly wasn't rare for Clinton to get angry. He definitely has a temper. It's a hard job, you're tired, and it's frustrating. Bosnia was certainly the worst blow-up. He was just fuming; he had had it. It was the only time he called me in to vent like that, but there were certainly times throughout the process when he wasn't happy with it, but he was also busy doing other things. We always had something in place. There was always a process: so-and-so was going out to negotiate this or this. So we felt like we were doing things. It wasn't as if we were just sitting there ignoring the issue. I think by then it was so clear that it was not working. It was the fact that Chirac was beating him to the headlines that drove him crazy.

Riley: Can you dial all the way back to '93? Warren Christopher made a trip to Europe on this issue. Do you have an account of that?

Soderberg: I didn't go on the trip, so I don't know, but the reports of it were that he was really not forceful, not selling, not saying, "This is the United States' policy." It represented a very weak effort to do a policy that in itself was pretty weak, so it was a big failure all around.

Riley: Was "tell, don't ask" self-consciously intended to be a reversal of the popular conception of what had happened when Christopher went before? There was a sense that that was more a consultation mission than a sales mission.

Soderberg: Right, and in Christopher's defense, he almost had to do that and let it fail before he could say, "Okay, we're doing this." He had to say, "Here's a proposal; let's try this." But it was no accident that Tony did it and not Chris. That was awkward, because he was the Secretary of State, and his mission had not been a success. Then Tony did it much more forcefully, and it succeeded. The last thing the two of them wanted to do was set up a rivalry. I have no idea what Christopher really thought of the trip, but he was certainly a good gentleman about it and kept a stiff upper lip. If he didn't like it, he didn't show it.

Riley: It's not clear—if you're not there in the development—what percentage of this is a function of mission, and what percentage is a function of temperament and personality.

Soderberg: In this case, I think he was doomed to fail from the beginning because he was authorized to send a weak message. Have you talked to Tom Donilon?

Riley: We have.

Soderberg: He was in the middle of handling Christopher through this whole thing and certainly would have a very strong insight into it all.

Strong: To continue with Bosnia. While things are in Dayton, is it clear all along that the President and the administration are going to go along with the terms they're coming to? Or are there debates back in Washington about what's going to constitute an acceptable outcome? How free a hand does Holbrooke have?

Soderberg: Others were much more involved—this was such a high-level thing that I just stepped away. I had no role in this whatsoever. By then, it was all the principals and the President and Holbrooke doing it. I wasn't privy to it. In Holbrooke's book, he says he had some guidelines—but pretty broad guidelines.

Strong: He says when he needed them, Christopher and the President stepped up.

Soderberg: Yes, and there were certainly a lot of phone calls and meetings back and forth about what was going on. Everyone went out there. He wasn't left hanging out to dry. He knew what he had the support to do. The main thing was whether to preserve an ethnic state or divide it. It wasn't easy to make that sell and to push it, but I think everybody on the team felt strongly, as did the President, that they wanted to preserve it as a multi-ethnic state—which wasn't necessarily the given right answer. It's still not clear it's going to work in the long run.

I personally think it was the right decision, but it's not easy to get people who have just come out of a very brutal war to live together after all the atrocities that happened.

Strong: We're going to face the same question in Iraq.

Soderberg: I think the best thing the Bush administration could do would be to send Dick Holbrooke to try to solve Iraq. I don't know if he'd want to take that one on, but he certainly has the talent to do it.

Riley: What specifically about Holbrooke—

Soderberg: He's brilliant and tenacious, never quits. He takes something—I have a new puppy, and it will not let go of something. He just takes it and shakes it and won't let go. He's just good.

In a situation as volatile, as important, as Bosnia, I never heard any criticism of the deal Dick pulled. It's pretty much viewed as the best deal he could have gotten at the time. Is it perfect? No. But nothing's perfect. That was really one of the shining moments—he delivered it. It was not a given he was going to get it, not at all. It could have easily been a failure.

Riley: My assumption is that as all of this is going on, you're getting pretty graphic intelligence reports, including photographs and things of that nature, to help in your decision-making. How do you deal with the gravity of these things on a personal basis? At some point in this interval, some mid-level State Department people just resigned. Some of it was a bit of protest, but people also got the sense reading the press accounts that they simply couldn't take it any more. How do you take it?

Soderberg: The most painful period was when we saw the photographs of the mass graves. There's no way they weren't mass graves; you can see them. In fact, I think Madeleine released them at the UN as part of this debate, and said, "We need to do more." It's the same thing as the Rwanda genocide. You want to do more, but you feel like you're doing everything you possibly can, so what more can you do? You get up every day and try to do everything you can. It's really hard to step back and admit that what you're doing is just not going to work.

But when you have the market in Sarajevo being bombed and the mass graves, at some point you're forced to realize that what you're doing isn't working. In a way, it galvanizes you to say, "Okay, let's bomb them"—the ultimate decision. It's very painful, because you know you have the power to do something about it, but you don't know what will get you there. So it's painful, but it's also galvanizing. I remember when those guys resigned—I respected them. We weren't doing enough. I felt throughout this whole period that we were just going along with these wimpy European negotiations, and it wasn't going to work.

The realization that it wasn't going to work took too long, certainly. It's very hard to wave a magic wand and say, "Of course we should cut all this short and fix it." You have to let it play out before you come to that realization. Unfortunately, a lot of people died while we were dithering around like that.

Riley: You felt that the President was in the same position? His exploding on the putting green seems to be partly a result of frustration at seeing some people taking action that he's not taking. Presumably he was getting some versions of these reports too.

Soderberg: He was getting every report and was very focused on it. Not every report, but he was certainly getting a steady stream of all the relevant information. Chirac actually wasn't doing anything; he was just talking tough. But Clinton wanted to be out there actually doing something tough. I think the President constantly wanted to solve Bosnia, constantly. He spent a lot of time on it, worked it.

But even wanting to solve it doesn't mean the President can wave a magic wand and come up with a policy that solves it overnight. It's humans trying to work through these problems, and while you can see what the solution is supposed to be, how you're going to get there is not always predictable. You don't know how to do it. There's no guidebook that says, "Oh, here's how to solve Bosnia."

Trying to figure it out takes some time. You don't really know about these things until you write about them. Then you step back and think, *What does this all mean? Where could we have done something differently?* You try to write it objectively, so you're saying, "Here's where we did things right; here's where we did things wrong."

I come back to my earlier theme. If you look at the first two and a half years, the outside perception is chaos and failure. When you really look at what was going on, it's trial and error of very difficult problems for which there was no rulebook. It took too long on all of these things, which was frustrating. But in retrospect, I don't know how realistic it would have been to say, "Okay, we're going to come in and implement our July, 1992 campaign statement. Damn all you professionals who've been working on this; we're just going to bag the UN and EU reps who are flying around and have spent months and know the players."

It takes a while to develop the expertise and knowledge and courage to say, "This isn't working."

Strong: That's fair enough, and you do come around and get things done in Haiti. You come around and get things done in Bosnia. The one that doesn't fit is Rwanda. Again, there continues to be some debate among people who have written about when the President, when Lake, when senior members of the administration fully understood what was going on and how accountable they should be held depending on when and what kind of information they received. When did *you* fully grasp the dimensions of the killing?

Soderberg: The week of April 20, 1994. This was the hardest chapter of my book to write, because I was clearly in a position to do more to stop it, and I didn't. I spent a lot of time trying to figure out what happened and why. I had read Samantha Power's account of it. I actually took the time to get all the cables from that period declassified. I've given them to the National Archives, so they're in the public record now. I actually sat down and read the incoming and outgoing cables from this period. I tried to look at it as objectively as possible. It's impossible to be objective when you're part of it, but I tried to be willing to criticize ourselves looking at it.

Having done all that research, and having lived through it, and watching what's going on today in Darfur, too, I believe that no one expected a genocide to happen. When I asked the CIA briefers at the time the two Presidents were killed, they thought it would be tens of thousands of people. But a hundred thousand had been killed in Burundi the previous fall, and nobody even knows about that. We didn't really expect it. By the third week in April, it was pretty clear what

was going on, and by then about half the people had been killed, maybe less—depending whether it's 800,000 or a million. I think there were probably 200,000 or 300,000 killed by that time.

At that point we started thinking we had to do something. But again, everything was getting the peace process back on track. We almost had it. We had a little cease-fire. We're going to do this. We thought, *Okay, we have the peace process back on track, end of issue.* Nobody was saying, "We have to go in and stop the genocide"—nobody. The perception, if you read Samantha's book (and I've had this discussion with her), is that we knew genocide was going to come—there were plenty of signs—and we just ignored it. But we never even saw the famous genocide facts.

There was a meeting between the UN head, where the informer came in and said, "There's an arms cache" and asked permission to seize it, asked headquarters to seize it, and was denied. The same informer says there's a plan to kill a thousand Tutsis a minute—or an hour, I forget—clearly laying out the genocide. Then they went to meet with all the other Ambassadors, including the U.S. Ambassador. But the cable back from that meeting doesn't even mention the potential genocide; it just talks about whether we should get that arms cache—and then talks about the peace process.

So that was people's perception at the time: no one was conceiving there would be a huge genocide. The other factor is that no one felt it was our job to go in and stop the genocide. No one said, "Oh, we should do that." We did feel we should help some of the victims of it. So there was an active plan as of the end of April, early May, to try to set up pockets of relief for people fleeing the genocide. But there was not a sense that it was our responsibility to go in and stop it. It was our responsibility to get the Americans out and do what we could to help the people on the margins, but not actually send people in.

If you look today, after all that stuff on genocide, and the development of the Responsibility to Protect doctrine that everybody has agreed to sign on to—that it's our responsibility to help people—we've declared genocide in Darfur and nothing has happened three years later. Nobody is serious about Darfur, and it's three years after all this.

Now, where I came out in the book is if you want to prevent a genocide, any peace-keeping operation you send in has to have a built-in reserve force that can immediately stabilize something on the ground. So I came out with the view that our biggest mistake was halving the peacekeeping mission that went in the year before. It was supposed to be about 5,000. In the post-Somalia era, we were cutting and burning peacekeeping missions, primarily for budgetary reasons. Rwanda was certainly not on anybody's radar screen. So the decision was made, essentially at the State Department, to cut the thing in half without any real discussion.

The whole idea of putting more troops into a very volatile situation just sounded nuts at the time. A couple of thousand troops in the middle of a genocide? You're just going to get them killed, Somalia *redux*. So there was still all that.

Certainly, in retrospect, we should have sent in a stronger peacekeeping operation right away, but they don't act quickly. You can authorize 20,000 troops tomorrow for Darfur, and they're not going to get there for three months.

It doesn't work that way unless you're willing to put your own troops on a plane and get them there really quickly. It's not as if we had a plan to do any of that off the shelf.

Strong: You were at the UN when Clinton went to Rwanda and made the apology. So I guess that was not something you were part of. Did he do the right thing?

Soderberg: Yes, I think so, although it's not an apology. It's interesting. I took some time to read it, because I wondered what he actually said. It was portrayed as an apology, but if you read it, what he says is, "We should have done more, and I regret that we didn't."

He never says, "I'm sorry." I thought he had, so I was surprised when I actually read it. What he says is we should have done more to save these lives. There are certainly lots of things we could have done to save more lives more quickly than we did, and I think the fact that we didn't do more bears on all of our consciences and will to the day we die. It's just so horrible.

I remember going to Rwanda a couple of years after that, and it was just awful. We were there in '95, a little less than a year, about six months later. The bodies were still there, all hacked to death, the little children still with their clothes on lying in a church where they thought they would seek refuge. It's just awful to see it. That's on your conscience for the rest of your life. But when I look at it realistically, if this were to happen again, what would happen differently?

I think the difference now is the UN has learned never to send in a small force. You always put in a big force so they can move quickly. If people are in your care, you'll save them—so at least the 25,000 that were there. I can't bring myself to watch *Hotel Rwanda*. I have it at home, and still I can't bring myself to watch it because I feel so bad.

Riley: Is there something about Africa? Is Africa just not on our radar screen?

Soderberg: No, you know everyone says that. Certainly Rwanda is not something that you immediately say, "Yes, it's worth sending troops in." I compare it to Bosnia. It took us two and a half years to be willing to send troops to Bosnia, two and a half years when it was obviously on a lot smaller scale. But the same dynamics kick in: there's a peace process going on, let the UN do it. Then this happens, and there's no way the U.S. government is going to mobilize in a month to stop a genocide in a country we've had no engagement in, no particular interest in, and with no pre-set plan to do it. It's just not going to happen.

Riley: I also wonder about the types of systemic pressures that operate on a President to make him move the government in the direction of intervention. For example, in Haiti, as you've already indicated, you're not just getting reports through the foreign policy community that this is something that has to be dealt with. As you suggest, you have Randall Robinson on a hunger strike. You have the Congressional black caucus taking this on. So the systemic pressures on the White House are multifaceted.

Soderberg: Randall Robinson wasn't taking us on; he was protesting Haiti.

Riley: That's my point. I'm suggesting that in the case of Haiti, you had a very different set of pressures on the White House that didn't exist when it came to Rwanda. Am I correct?

Soderberg: Yes, absolutely none. There wasn't a constituency. The irony of this whole thing is Randall Robinson was chaining himself to the front gates about Haiti, not Rwanda; he never mentioned Rwanda. There wasn't a consciousness about it. How long did it take to make the decision to deploy the troops to Somalia—a month, probably?

Strong: Yes, weeks.

Soderberg: It takes a while to get it all together. Then you have to make the decision to do it. As far as I can recall—and I think most of the documents I looked at while writing the book would back it up—there was no serious discussion of sending U.S. or international troops to intervene to stop the genocide. I don't recall any. We were talking to that woman, Monica, who was almost killed and escaped and who had been into human rights. She came in to see Tony right after that. She didn't ask for it; she said, "Make the names public here." Everything she asked us to do, we did. But she wasn't saying, "Go intervene in Rwanda."

Samantha brilliantly weaves a very differently story about this. Historians can sift through this for the next decades, but from the inside, having been there, it's just not going to happen. What does that mean for the future? To me it means you have to get the African troops up and ready so they can be the first responders, because that's what happens around the world. The regional countries understand the stakes and are willing to put their own soldiers at risk much more quickly than is some other country far away.

Riley: Your answer mostly relates to the international relations community and what's possible in the defense community for dealing with this, quite apart from the domestic pressure on the White House from within the United States. Am I correct? In other words, you said it was too early, nobody was pressing for this, the conditions weren't quite right for anybody to take any kind of action.

Soderberg: No, that's not what I'm saying. I'm not saying the conditions weren't right for anybody to take action on this. There was no domestic pressure to focus on this, but even had there been, there certainly was a lot of domestic pressure to do something on Haiti and Bosnia. How long did that take? It takes a long time for the government to be prepared to send its troops anywhere; that's just the way it is.

Had the conditions been different, would we have done it? Probably not. Had it been in Europe? Had Bosnia blown up, and the Serbs started killing off all the Albanian population, would we have intervened? It probably would have taken a while, if you think about it. We would have sent envoys to try to negotiate it. The U.S. government doesn't send its troops as the first resort. Unfortunately, in the case of Rwanda, it all happened so quickly that by the time we got organized enough to react, it was almost over.

Samantha makes the point that if we had gone in at least halfway through, it probably could have saved 300,000 lives, and I think she's right. But by then it was slowing down, and you think, *We'll do this—*

Strong: She reports that some low-level officials in the State Department were talking about taking out the radio stations and cutting the propaganda.

Soderberg: We actually did have discussions about the radio station. When we started focusing on it; there were high-level discussions about taking out the radio. I can remember Shalikashvili talking about how to do it, asking if we could do it and how we would do it. Some of the things on the list were taking out the radio station, trying to get aid to the victims, and making sure that anyone who could get to safe areas would be taken care of.

As for the radio, I just remember it's really hard to do. They had trouble finding them because they were moving around. My guess is we could have done that earlier. One of the triggers now is hate radio. You try to take it out, but it's hard; it just pops up someplace else.

Riley: I have a general question about perceptions of the United Nations before you got there. You were working in the national security apparatus in the United States, but were you developing a sense about the United Nations as a valuable institution? Or is it not a valuable institution for dealing with these kinds of questions? What was the perception within the administration at this point, if there was a generic perception, about the value of the UN?

Soderberg: There was a general recognition that the UN was an essential partner in all these issues. As the world gets more complicated, you need to have someone to share the burden, so it was generally accepted that the UN was helpful, a good thing. That's contrary to the Republicans, who want it to just go away. There's a recognition that you need it. There's also a recognition that it's not a panacea, it can't do everything, it has problems. Certainly there was a lot of concern about some of the decisions they were making under [Boutros] Boutros-Ghali. The attitudes were clearly wrong.

Kofi Annan came to office with a deep understanding of the institution, how to reform it, how to work with it, and a willingness to work with us. It was a pretty upbeat period. I actually think history is going to be very kind to Kofi Annan. These scandals are a big nothing, and he's going to ultimately be considered an extraordinarily visionary man who got caught up in the *Fox News* cycle of criticism.

Riley: Do you have any comments about the uses of NATO or its reliability? You've said many times that maybe the biggest challenge for the Clinton administration was trying to figure out what the post-Cold War world was going to look like. Were you developing ideas about NATO's role in this new era, positive or negative?

Soderberg: Definitely positive. NATO was seen as a great stabilizer for Europe and a potentially great stabilizer for Eastern Europe. The question was how to manage expanding NATO to Eastern Europe without destabilizing Russia. When it came to Bosnia, it was the first time NATO did anything. Deterring the Soviet Union was a major accomplishment, but it didn't actually deploy or actually have to activate. Going into Bosnia, and Kosovo later, was a clear way for us to finally show that we didn't have to do it all ourselves. There was some talk about whether we really need NATO and what we should do with it.

The larger challenge is Africa. Should Africa be NATO's next training ground, to avoid another Rwanda? Get in there and train these guys so they can respond more quickly the next time one occurs. The whole expansion of NATO now seems like a no-brainer, but at the time it was not clear that it was the right thing to do. It wasn't clear that Russia wasn't going to freak out. It

wasn't clear that it would function. How big can NATO be and still be a functioning organization? But I think overall it has been viewed as very positive.

Riley: Were you developing ideas at this point about a common European defense identity? Was that even on the radar when you were in the White House?

Soderberg: I wasn't really too involved in that. Anne Witkowsky and Bob Bell were the ones dealing with that. I don't really know. If I had to guess, I'd say there was a great deal of skepticism about a common European defense, because when you actually look at it, unless we get involved, nothing happens.

Strong: Maybe it's time to switch to Northern Ireland, something that actually turns out quite well, and a place, again, where you play a larger role. I'm a little stuck about what kinds of questions to ask, partly because books have been written about it, and a *Frontline* documentary interviewed Clinton and Major and [Albert] Reynolds and [Bertie] Ahern. I think you were interviewed for that also. So there's a fairly good public account of what transpired and who did various things. Is that your impression? Is the public record on that issue pretty good?

Soderberg: I think the public record on this is very good. The rest of it is on the cutting room floor of my book. The book actually started out as a book on Ireland, so I had all my papers declassified, wrote the book, and then tried to sell it. Everyone said, "Too old. It's all been written, no market." So I have that book on the cutting room floor, and I'll attach it to the transcript if anyone wants the rest of the story.

Strong: I do have some questions.

Soderberg: My book got cut way back, so there are only about 15 pages of it. I think probably the best account of it is the Conor O'Cleary book that was written almost contemporaneously. He interviewed a lot of people; we all cooperated with him. I interviewed with him extensively. He was watching the whole process very closely. I think it's been pretty accurately portrayed there.

Clinton's book goes into it a little bit, as does mine. The only thing I noticed wrong with Clinton's book was when I mentioned I didn't have anything to do with the April '92 statements.

Strong: Why does Clinton care so much about it? He's not going to lose Massachusetts. This really isn't about electoral politics, is it?

Soderberg: I think it's both. Clinton says he was in Oxford when the troubles in Northern Ireland began, and he instinctively thought, *We're close to both sides; we could have a role here.* During the Cold War, that wasn't on anybody's radar screen, plus I don't think the IRA had evolved far enough to be able to make a difference. I asked Gerry Adams once whether, if Clinton had been President in the early and mid-'80s, he could have made a difference. He said, "No, we weren't ready." I think that's probably right.

I've always thought one of the reasons the IRA decided to give up violence was that they looked at their children and thought *Do we really want them to follow in our footsteps? Isn't there a better way?* The integration of Europe in itself has brought enormous wealth to Ireland. What 18-

year-old kid is going to pick life with the IRA versus a great job in a dot com when he can have a house and a car and a wife and children he can support? Not very many.

But if you don't have a job, that's a pretty sexy way to go. If you have no prospects of having a decent life anywhere else, that's pretty attractive, an exciting life, and it makes you feel good because you're a patriot, not a criminal.

That shift in the IRA and the shift in the economics all happened at the same time. Then you had Clinton. Without Clinton, it probably would have happened, but probably only about now. I think he sped it up by a decade—he provided the confidence. He enabled both sides to talk with each other with a modicum of trust that just was not there without the United States. They trusted what they told us, but not each other. So that enabled them to have a conversation and move things forward in a way that was not possible before.

Clinton instinctively wanted to get it done from day one. He wanted to get involved, see where we could use it. But I wouldn't underestimate electoral politics. He wouldn't have done it had it been wrong from a foreign policy perspective. I literally never saw Clinton make a foreign policy decision for anything but policy reasons. But in this case, you get the added benefit of all the electoral votes. It's not just Massachusetts; it's all the Catholics around the world. There are 40 million in America, and a lot of them are in the swing states of the Midwest. There are a lot of Irish in this country.

Strong: Yes, but those 40 million include lots of people who have only the vaguest idea who Gerry Adams is or the details of what's transpiring there. Then it has levels of activity. And again, connected with that, you're an analyst, a policy advisor. How do you get to the point of believing that there's a real possibility the IRA is getting ready to make a shift? What convinces you? Is it a single meeting, conversation, piece of evidence? Or is it a gradual process?

Soderberg: A couple of things. One, there's a split in Irish-America between the pro-IRA crowd and the peaceful crowd who supported John Hume, the SDLP [Social Democratic and Labour Party] leader, the peaceful party. I was definitely in that second camp and wouldn't have anything to do with the IRA crowd. We had a group of people on Capitol Hill every year who would do a "Friends of Ireland" statement and talk about it. Then the other competing group would have its own statement. Most of the people pushing for Adams to get a ceasefire and have U.S. support of that process were in the other camp.

We didn't talk to these guys. I didn't have any sense of it, and I didn't have a lot of time or energy for it. I had no intention of spending a whole lot of time on Ireland when I went to the White House. But it just kept coming back, and it ended up on my desk because I had worked for Kennedy and actually knew the players and the issues. Essentially, the career people had no flexible views on it. It was all, "No, no, no, don't do it. Our relationship with Britain is too important; it will upset them."

I started thinking *At least I'll look into it.* In the fall, I kept talking to John Hume and a few other people on the Hill. Bruce Morrison was very influential. Jean Kennedy Smith was now the Ambassador, and I knew her through Kennedy. You could tell something was different in the

fall. They did a week-long ceasefire, and everyone thought, *This is really great.* I said, "It's a week-long ceasefire! Give me a break. Come back when you're serious." Well, they did.

The two governments put forward a framework for the joint declaration that essentially got at the demands of the IRA because it gave them a peaceful way to get what they wanted. The demographics are such that they are, at some point, going to be the majority. So there was no reason for them to say, "Well, we have to have violence because there's no other way." That got my attention.

Within that, John Hume had been having secret contacts with Gerry Adams for almost a decade. It started in '86. He had kept Kennedy's office informed of those. So he kept me informed of what was going on. He knew what Adams had better than almost anybody outside the inner IRA circle. He would say: "Look at this—" I said, "Nah, I don't think so." Then I had lunch with John Hume in the White House, and he changed his mind. He said, "I think you should start looking at it. I think there's something here." That got my attention.

On the Hill, Kennedy was for it. He was never for it before. This was all John Hume going to his friends on the Hill saying, "Now I think it's time." So we had the pressure from the Hill, but it was a different group, not the IRA crowd. It was the other crowd that was all of a sudden for this. That got my attention.

Strong: Some of the accounts say Kennedy spending Christmas with his sister was a turning point for him. Did you hear that?

Soderberg: I don't know, but it was certainly right about then. Jean did come in. Jean and John Hume were the two who convinced him, and it was a huge leap for Kennedy. This is a man who has lost two brothers to violence, and who always stayed very far away from the violent side of it. So for him to endorse this was a huge personal leap. The fact that he did it got my attention as well. I had grown up in that environment.

Then I started looking into it, and I pushed the FBI and the Justice Department and the State Department for an analysis of what was going on. I told them, "Look, this is what I'm hearing." It just came back so harsh: no, no, no, no nuances. We could tell something was happening. It's how we missed the fall of the Soviet Union. It's always been this way; they don't listen to what's happening in the grass roots. And I did. I had all these friends in the grass roots, and I could just feel it.

It was obvious to me that there was something going on, and the fact that the U.S. government couldn't see it just made me more determined to do it. I ended up just doing it myself, with Tony's strong support. Sandy was involved a little bit, because all the Hill people were calling him. But mostly it was Tony and me and Peter Tarnoff, who was number three at the State Department and was a good friend of Tony's. We kept him informed of everything I was doing. But he wouldn't send it into the building because it would leak. He would just tell Christopher and, I assume, Strobe.

Strong: You did make the first trip to Northern Ireland with Clinton?

Soderberg: Yes.

Strong: What was that like? Was that his best foreign trip?

Soderberg: He says it is; I think it was. It was a real high on every level. The crowds grew during the day and you could feel it. I talked about the trip in Texas on the campaign bus, how you can just feel it, the crowds. They looked at this man, the first sitting President of the United States to go to Belfast. They couldn't believe that the President of the United States was taking time out of his busy work to come and see them. You could see that they thought, *Wow! This is really cool*. They were so appreciative.

Then he had stuck his neck out on the visa for Adams—for the first time in their lives, they could see a better life. Northern Ireland is dirt poor. The people live in tiny little houses and don't have jobs. The unemployment rate is huge. All of a sudden they thought, *Maybe my life is about to get better because the President of the United States is here.* And, in fact, it has gotten better because he did it.

The highlight was the night in the square when he lit the Christmas tree. More people came out than we expected, hundreds of thousands. They were all happy and couldn't believe this man had brought them a chance for a better life. At that point, the people were so much farther ahead than the politicians. The politicians still weren't even talking to each other. The fact that the people came out and said, "Yes, this is where we want to go" forced the politicians to think a little bit differently. It was so carefully planned. Every step Clinton took, and every hand he shook, was carefully choreographed. We were up until 3:00 or 4:00 in the morning.

I remember Chris Dodd calling me because we hadn't worked out Gerry Adams' handshake right. We had to move it from one place to another. It all worked out beautifully, but it was really difficult to orchestrate it. It was definitely a real high.

Strong: The press orchestration or the security orchestration?

Soderberg: No, no, the politics of it. We had to be even-handed. We didn't want to be too pro-Sinn Féin because it would upset the Unionists. You couldn't be too close to the Unionists because it would upset everyone else. We were going to have Adams meet us at the Mackie [metal] plant where Clinton was giving a big speech, but then the owner of Mackie found out about it and said he'd cancel the speech if Gerry Adams came. So we had to move it.

Adams wanted a public handshake, but we didn't. Finally we ended up orchestrating that Adams would just happen to be at a shop we were just happening to stop by. He came out and shook his hand. [*laughter*] It worked beautifully. I was petrified something was going to happen. It worked out brilliantly.

Riley: Something politically or something security?

Soderberg: No, I wasn't worried about the security. That's not what the IRA does. They're not going to blow up Bill Clinton. He's their biggest savior. There was a possibility that some hateful person from the other side could do something, but the minute we got there we realized the whole crowd was so excited about it. Protestant or Catholic, they still love America. They all have cousins here. Brady Williamson was an advance person who came in and did it all. He was

just unbelievable. He and I were up to all hours trying to figure out where the President should meet Gerry Adams.

Strong: Then what happened at Canary Wharf and the various setbacks that followed?

Soderberg: I still to this day don't know exactly what happened at Canary Wharf. I don't think Adams has ever told the story. In my dealings with Adams, he was honorable and honest and frank about everything he could and couldn't do. He never once lied to us, never once said he was going to do something and then didn't do it. He always did it. It was frustrating, because to get him to commit to do something was really difficult. But once he committed, he would do it.

He called us right before that happened and said essentially, "I'm hearing really troubling things. I think something bad is about to happen." Then two minutes later we heard about the Canary Wharf bombings. I made a mistake in telling the press about the call. Tony and I talked about it, and we figured they were going to find out, so we should just admit it. But then it blew up in our face, implying that Adams knew about the bombs ahead of time and was in on it, was lying to us. Just by his voice, I could tell he was trying to do the decent thing, to warn us, but it was something that was out of his control. I think he found out. He wasn't part of the decision to do it, but he found out about it too late to do anything. That's my guess, if I read his body language right at the time.

The one thing he always wanted to do was prevent a split in the IRA. He wanted to bring the whole thing along. At this point—right after this incredible trip, the end of November, early December—we were so close. Canary Wharf was in January or February. It was so sad. Dick Spring, the Irish Foreign Minister, was on his way. We were just about to get a date for something, but it was the last gasp of the hard-liners. Ultimately, all it did was kill a bunch of people and slow down the process. I think ultimately it began to dawn on the people who were trying to provoke the violence that the violence actually ended up slowing down the progress. I think they ultimately got that.

To Adams' credit, he ended up pulling it back together again and getting it restored that fall. It's predictable. There are always bumps in the road on these things. But when you're so personally invested in it, it's so depressing.

Riley: Can you tell us a little bit more about your perceptions of Adams personally?

Soderberg: You hear about Adams, and you think, *Oh, he's going to be this firebrand, wild guy, forceful and screaming*. But he's the most gentle, academic, soft-spoken— You think, *How does this comport with his background?* It's a real anomaly when you meet him. I got to know him pretty well.

He's funny, he's soft spoken, he likes to joke around a lot. He's very upbeat. He gets despondent and frustrated, but he never loses the big picture. He's a real leader, a visionary on where this is going. He gets it; he doesn't get flustered by the little things. He's an honest, honorable person when you deal with him. I would never have thought I would say this about somebody with his background, but I got to trust him, after a long time. In their minds, the Irish are freedom fighters, patriots, and they have an honor code they live by. They all do; it's very interesting.

Riley: Was there enough interaction to comment on his chemistry with Clinton?

Soderberg: I don't know; that's interesting. They met several times. I think the first time was on the Irish trip. I don't think he had met him before that. I can't remember.

Strong: It was after the Irish trip that he came to the White House on St. Patrick's Day.

Soderberg: Yes, but Clinton may have met him at one of the Capitol Hill luncheons for St. Patrick's Day—

Strong: The year before.

Soderberg: I think he might have. They may actually have shaken hands there. But they had a handshake on Falls Road in Belfast, and then they had a short meeting while he was there on that trip. That was really the first time they sat down and talked. I'm sure Adams was nervous, but he makes his case very passionately, and Clinton listened with empathy. He's a likable guy.

You contrast that with Ian Paisley, who comes in and lectures. Adams has the more gentle give-and-take. They always met in fairly structured situations. It wasn't camaraderie: they didn't have dinner, like with Yeltsin. But he did come to White House parties and would get to chat with Clinton a little bit there. But again, those are mobbed.

Strong: Then they talked on the phone toward the end of the Easter agreements, where [George] Mitchell was asking Clinton to call Adams and get him to do this, or call others. How big an investment of Presidential time and attention was this? Was this an issue he liked working on?

Soderberg: He loved it, yes. If you look at history, Presidents have more success on foreign policy because they have more control. The President gets to do it. When you have a domestic issue, you have to engage Congress, and it's a long process. It's harder to be successful on domestic policy that's really yours. Whereas on foreign policy it's one-on-one leaders who are all interesting. Clinton loves life and looking out.

As far as how much time he spent in relation to everything else he was doing? Not that much. But the fact that the President of the United States would spend this amount of time on the Northern Ireland question was so new. He went there, made phone calls.

Certainly in the early periods he was more engaged than any President had ever been, but it wasn't a huge amount of *his* time. We were doing all the work. But towards the end of it, to get the Good Friday agreement—I had left by then. I was doing the UN at that point. But he was just nonstop. He was up all night on the phone with these guys.

If you look at the combination of the amount of time Clinton spent on foreign policy versus domestic policy, it would still be more on domestic policy, for sure. But between the travel and the trips and the meetings and things like that, he was pretty focused. It's fun. Once you get those deals, it's a pretty big high.

Morrisroe: Your involvement in Northern Ireland gives you a unique opportunity to appreciate the development of Clinton's relationship with Major and the British. Do you have any

observations on that relationship and how it was shaped—in either good or bad ways—by Northern Ireland?

Soderberg: Ultimately it became a very close relationship, not just because of Northern Ireland, but as a part of it. It started out as a huge liability. Clinton loves the British. He was in Britain for some of the most fun times in his life. It started off on a really bad foot, because John Major's guys had done the whole password scandal and openly supported Bush.

I'll never forget: we were orchestrating who calls whom right after the election. He wanted to make sure he touched base with the Europeans. As I said, we threw in some nontraditional powers from some of the developing countries. Then, in the middle of this, Margaret Thatcher called and wanted to talk to Clinton. I said, "We haven't even talked to John Major yet; we're not going to talk to her first." I was on the phone saying, "I don't think it's going to be possible for a while; he has to talk to some current leaders first (including your own)." You can hear her in the background saying, "I'm not dead yet."

This woman! You have to be kidding: we're going to take your phone call before Major's? I don't think so. But we did make a point of putting in Major early, precisely to make sure that the press couldn't say, "You're not talking to the British, you can't deal with the British." They're a key ally; we obviously had to deal with them. Some of Clinton's political people put out some unfortunate quotes about the passport issue, but I never detected any hint of Clinton's taking it personally with Major. I don't think he really thought that John Major was personally orchestrating the passport issue. He thought it was awkward too. He has his own political advisors who go off and do things that he might not be aware of. He understood instinctively that he had to talk to the British.

So we did our early call with him right after the election, and it was all very cordial. Again, these transcripts all are in my files in Little Rock. I think they might have joked about it. It clearly wasn't going to be an issue. I think Major or somebody said something about it on that phone call, and Clinton gracefully dismissed it, a "no problem" kind of thing. Major was a very gracious person. They got along very well initially on Bosnia and Iraq. They worked very closely.

We had talked to the Irish throughout this process through their National Security Advisor, who at the time was Rod [Roderick] Lyne. Tony had kept him pretty informed of what we were doing. When Tony wasn't available, I would talk to him.

They never in a million years thought we were going to actually give a visa to Gerry Adams, and they made it clear that this was a big issue for them. They did not want it; they said, "Do not do it." It never really occurred to them that the U.S. would go against something they felt so strongly about, because we never had in all of history.

The morning that Clinton was deciding to do it, he got a long letter from Rod Lyne, the National Security Advisor for Major, about all the women and children the IRA had killed. He was asking, "How could you do this?" There was something about the Christmas spirit. I don't remember whether Major called Clinton beforehand, but I don't think he did; I think it was all

through his National Security Advisor. Then when we did it, it leaked that afternoon—in fact, it leaked before we had time to tell them we had done it.

I found out later Niall O'Dowd, the journalist I'd used to get to Adams, told me that they had called and somehow talked to me, and something I said had given them confirmation that we had done it. I don't even remember what I said or how it was, but somehow it leaked out. Of course, that didn't help either, that they heard about it from the press. Major didn't talk to us for days. We kept trying to call him; he just wouldn't take the phone call.

I'm assuming if there had been an Iraq or Bosnia crisis he would have taken it, but he was absolutely furious, couldn't believe we did it. The whole British Empire shook, really; they just couldn't believe that we'd done it. Over time, though, Clinton made a point of taking Major to Pittsburgh, where he had spent time as a boy. We flew them up on Air Force One, and they were so excited because their plane was a crummy little thing [*laughter*]. We were joking about that. Clinton really did a major charm offensive on him. Tony and I were on that trip as well. We were joking on the way back; Major is just a gracious person all around.

I ran into Major on a plane—probably in 1998, 1999, maybe a little bit later. It was before 2000, because I was still at the UN. He was up in the first class cabin, and I wrote him a little note saying, "I think you did a great job on the Irish question." He called me up, and we had tea. He said, "You're right, you did the right thing." Most of the British involved at the time and the State Department people have since come to me and said, "You did the right thing." They recognize that now.

After that Pittsburgh trip, Major got over his huff, but then, more than that, they started working closely on the issue, and they recognized that we did actually listen to what they had to say, and we would push Adams in a way they couldn't. Major saw the potential end to this conflict and threw himself wholeheartedly into it. They worked quite well with him after that. But that was a rough week.

Strong: I have one final question. Did you read Chelsea's [Clinton's] honors thesis on Northern Ireland?

Soderberg: No, and I was really surprised she didn't send it to me. I would have read it. Do you have it? She never talked to me. I would have loved to talk to her about it. It's interesting that she did it on that. It shows how important it was to her father. Have you seen it?

Strong: Yes.

Riley: We're at the point of taking a lunch break.

[BREAK]

Riley: We got your character sketch on Gerry Adams and Yeltsin. Were there other foreign leaders you witnessed with whom President Clinton had particularly good rapport? Conversely, were there some foreign leaders where the chemistry was just bad, or the dynamic was poor?

Soderberg: I think Rabin and King Hussein [bin-Talal] of Jordan were the other two he got quite close to. He fell apart when Rabin was killed. He really respected him and got quite close to him. You could see Rabin visibly struggling when he had to make peace with Arafat. He couldn't stand the fact that he had to be there with this enemy.

Clinton always talked about how he said, "You don't make peace with your friends; you have to make it with your enemies, even though it's really distasteful." He always talked about Rabin and conversations he'd had with him. He was just devastated when he was shot. It was like King Hussein—those two men really helped Clinton stay engaged in the Middle East peace process and gave him some very wise counsel. They had worked so closely together for so long, and then to have King Hussein come to the Wye Plantation when he was dying of cancer—you couldn't make up a more moving story. Those and Yeltsin were the ones he got to know quite well.

The Chinese are hard because they're hard to talk to: the language barrier makes a difference. He always had a lot of respect for Mandela. Mandela came to his Inauguration, and he came to the White House a couple of times. They had a nice rapport.

Someone he didn't like—nothing comes to mind. He likes everybody, that's the thing. Somebody has to have done something to him for him not to like them. I'm trying to think. I don't really recall—even someone like [Hafiz al-] Assad, whom he'd have to sit with for hours, he found interesting. He'd always try to see it from the other person's view. He has a lot of empathy.

Riley: From your perspective as a foreign policy professional, were there any subject matter areas that the President found particularly hard to grasp?

Soderberg: No, he can get everything. There were some where he didn't like the answers we were giving him. A number of times he said, "I don't like any of these options. Go back to the drawing board." I'd think, *That's it; that's why you get the big bucks*. He'd get frustrated by the options.

The man's intellectual capacity is bottomless; he could get anything. Now, I wasn't trying to explain global warming to him or anything like that. So I haven't seen him being briefed on absolutely everything. On the other hand, I've seen him talk about almost everything. He's a voracious reader, understands it. Always engages people, is really curious.

Riley: He's a big reader?

Soderberg: Yes.

Riley: Documents or—

Soderberg: No, he was always toting a book around. He used to bring a steamy novel on the flights, joke about them. But mostly he was reading history books and things like that. He always had a book.

Riley: Did you ever have to dissuade him from things he was picking up in books that were maybe contrary to your judgment about what he should be doing as President?

Soderberg: Not really. I remember him reading *Balkan Ghosts*. That was an eye-opener for him on the Balkans. You could take a book like that and realize that this has been going on for centuries and you could never end it and why bother? It's ethnic strife that's going to go on forever. You could read that book that way, but he didn't. He looked at it as helping him understand the challenges better, and he would process it and incorporate it into whatever we were trying to do.

I really don't remember any huge arguments with Clinton, disagreements on policy—unless they were clearly failing, and he just didn't like them. With most of the crises we were dealing with, it took forever to get them right, and it was frustrating for him. He would get tired and angry: "Why don't you solve this damn thing?" But he ultimately usually would go along with the policy sides of it.

Riley: Did you have occasion, either when you were traveling or working long nights in the White House, where you would have conversations with him about the state of the world?

Soderberg: Sure—mostly when we were traveling. He would play cards and joke around and talk. Usually when we were traveling, we'd get time alone with him, and he'd just talk about whatever, and think about this, or ask about your own life. He's a very gregarious, chatty guy, and doesn't need a lot of sleep. Usually when we were traveling on the plane, he'd either invite us up to chat or come back and sit for a while and chat around. He would get philosophical about this or that.

I remember one time he was reading the David McCullough book on [Harry] Truman. It put him in such a good mood, because he realized it took Truman two or three years to figure out how to shape the Cold War, the post-World War II era. He said, "Okay, I'm on par with Truman." That made him feel good. I definitely remember that discussion. It made him feel better.

He took a lot of solace in history, because you realize that the politics of some of these guys were a lot more brutal than what he was going through. The [John] Adams book, also by McCullough—what that guy was going through was brutal. It made him feel like he wasn't alone.

Riley: It sometimes seems as though the President was actively searching in his readings for parallels in history, to see, "What does this inform me about what I'm doing?" Did you get that sense?

Soderberg: Yes. One, he's just interested. He's curious and likes to read. But he also tried to put what he was doing into a historical context. It always makes you feel better, because you realize you're not the only one who has ever dealt with these issues, and nobody else has solved them either. Therefore, if you don't solve them, you're not going to be a total failure. But the historical

context also informs you how you might solve them. Unless you understand the history, you're not going to be able to move forward.

I don't think that's unique, though. This President probably doesn't do it, but a lot of Presidents do that. It provides solace to realize you're not alone in these struggles.

Riley: Was there ever a point at which you thought you had figured out what the post-Cold War paradigm was?

Soderberg: No. I would say after about two and a half years after the Cold War we got the mix of force and diplomacy right: you need to use force, not to fight a communist empire, but rather to back up negotiations in limited places. That was the new piece of it. The old use of force was still very prevalent. You have to contain Saddam Hussein. You might have to go to war here and there. But for the most part, there wasn't any existential threat to the United States. Therefore you had a debate: if it's not an existential threat, why is it worth our lives, our soldiers' lives, our kids' lives? Then you realize that limited use of force can contain some of these problems before they become—not necessarily existential threats, but big ones. Then we'd ultimately have to deal with a bigger mess.

The whole engagement was U.S. leadership to bring the world along on the big threats of terrorism, nonproliferation, the economic integration, how to manage globalization—and the whole trade issue, which we're still fighting with. This Doha [Development] Round is so stuck on agricultural issues. It takes Presidential leadership to get through those barriers and force new compromises, and to make sure that you support those who are most affected by it so there's not a disproportionate burden on those who are getting thrown out of work.

I referred to Sandy's article on 2000. I think it's a good summation of it; by two and a half years, we'd gotten it right. But by then we'd lost the Congress, so we couldn't do a lot of it.

Riley: As the President was being philosophical, did you ever get the sense that he wondered whether the implements available to a President were sufficient to deal with the kinds of problems that Presidents were confronting in the post-Cold War era?

Soderberg: Like what?

Riley: Sometimes for dealing with budget problems Presidents might say, "I need a line item veto." I'm not a sufficient expert on foreign policy; maybe I'll call on my colleague Bob here to see— It's an open-ended question about whether he ever bemoaned the fact that he didn't have the tools available to do the job a President had to do in the era he was governing in.

Soderberg: I don't recall that coming up on the foreign policy side, because you do have a lot of power, actually. A lot of it is diplomacy and use of force. You have to keep Congress involved, but you don't need Congress to act in order for you to be able to do something. On the trade side, he was instrumental in getting NAFTA through. He started that in the campaign. I don't think George Bush could have gotten that agreement through the Congress. Because they trusted Clinton to do the environmental and labor standards right, they ultimately squeaked it through.

He also got Congress on board with the economic integration measures he tried to promote. Where we didn't get things through was the comprehensive test ban treaty that went down. I was at the White House at the time, but I wasn't particularly involved in it. I don't really know what went wrong, why we would take it—it was 95 to zero. Something is wrong with that; it's not even close. I don't understand exactly what happened and why that big defeat came. By then perhaps he was viewed as too weak, or the Republicans just wanted to go after it.

Riley: This was post-impeachment, wasn't it?

Soderberg: I think it was '96, but I can't remember.

Strong: The administration didn't want to bring it up for a vote, but the Republicans counted and said, "We have enough to kill it."

Soderberg: That's what happened.

Strong: They brought it to the floor, and the Democrats said, "They're not going to stick us, so we'll all vote against it." But most Presidents do come around to having some reservations about the 2/3 Senate vote on treaties—not that they're proposing constitutional amendments. But they encounter an issue that seems to be a large hurdle they have to cross.

Soderberg: For the most part that's the beauty of foreign policy: you can get things done. From his perspective, the CTBT [Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty] was a failure, but he did end nuclear testing. Bush is playing with the idea, but my guess is he won't do it. He managed to do quite a bit on arms control with Russia, trying to secure the weapons of mass destruction.

The International Criminal Court was another blow. I never thought it was handled quite right: it was not brought up to the senior levels fast enough. It was stuck down with David Scheffer, and it was a little bit too late by the time the principals got in to try to figure out how to salvage it. That said, it had become such a bugaboo that I'm not sure they could have gotten it through anyway. It's a reality. In essence, our signing it did help others get it moving, and it's in force now that Russia has ratified it. People are going there.

I'm sure there are some, and if you ask me about them, I'll remember them. But when your policies are failing, everyone's criticizing them. There were a million other ideas on Bosnia and Haiti, but once it actually works, no one really does much about trying to undermine it.

Riley: You were at the Hofstra conference, and there was a panel there on the Presidency and foreign policy or the Presidency and war powers. There seemed to be the consensus among the panelists—and this is something that has come out in the scholarly literature since then—that with Clinton you really see a continuation of the imperial Presidency on foreign policy issues. Does that resonate with you?

Soderberg: Continuation from Bush?

Riley: From I guess as far back as you can trace it. The notion that there was a lot of unilateral action on the part of the President and the foreign policy community that presaged what has happened with George W. Bush.

Strong: There was more consensus by the 1990s that the War Powers Resolution was meaningless. There were various efforts on Capitol Hill in the late 1980s to try to fix it, but you could never get a majority.

Soderberg: How would you fix it?

Strong: [Lee] Hamilton had a proposal. Keep the mandatory reporting and combine it with a set of rules in the House and Senate that would allow a minority group of members who objected, to get the issue onto the floor for a vote. That was the basic reform package, but that never—

Soderberg: It will be interesting to see what happens now after Iraq. When this calms down, they'll end up revisiting that.

Clinton really wasn't deploying troops in a way that would force a very controversial war powers showdown. That's a post-Vietnam phenomenon. We sent—what?—20,000 troops to Haiti for a very short amount of time. They handed it over to the UN pretty quickly. That was controversial but short. It was over before they could galvanize any kind of opposition to it. The Bosnia issue was longer term, and it was controversial in that Congress hated it. We said it would be a year, which was crazy at the time. I think it was 10 years before the last one finally left. But there was some discussion of trying to force the troops out of Bosnia, I think, from some of the fringes, but there wasn't really any serious opposition to it in any kind of numbers.

We got out of Somalia before they had to worry about it anyway. The imperial Presidency only goes so far as you don't have to spend a lot of money and you don't have to deploy a lot of troops, neither of which Clinton did. So you can be an imperial Presidency in our system of government as long as you're not doing things that require major troop deployments for long periods of time or major commitments of funds. You can make peace treaties all you want. You can negotiate deals all you want. You can use NATO air strikes to a certain extent and in minimal fashion. "Imperial" implies it's on a grand scale of empire, and he wasn't doing it on an imperial scale.

Riley: Was there ever a point during your service in the White House when you became uncomfortable with the extent to which you were exercising unilateral authority over foreign policy? Did it ever reach into your level of discomfort as someone whose primary roots were on Capitol Hill?

Soderberg: You mean against Congress or the other allies, unilateral in terms of—?

Riley: Unilateral as against Congress.

Soderberg: No, particularly after we lost control. It's funny how your perspective changes very quickly: it's that pesky Congress, go away. [*laughter*]

Strong: There was clearly a debate among Democratic Party foreign policy experts about how we make judgments about when and where to use force. Are the Republicans having exactly the same kind of debate, and did that question after the Cold War become a broader kind of confusion, or did it still have a partisan flavor?

Soderberg: I think it was both. There was a legitimate debate in the country, not partisan, of what do we do now? We won, now what? Then there was partisan opposition to whatever we were trying to do, partly just because we were trying to do it.

Strong: If you chose not to use force, there would be partisan opposition to that, and if you chose to use it, there would be partisan opposition—

Soderberg: Right. They were just so ready to do anything they could to undermine Clinton. The use of force is always controversial. It wasn't all partisan. I think they generally didn't believe in it either. You saw it with Bush when he came into office. They basically pursued this "anything but Clinton" (ABC) policy. If we'd done it, they just weren't going to touch it: "We're not going to care about Haiti, we're going to pull out of Bosnia, we're not going to negotiate with North Korea, we're not going to do this, we're not going to do that. We're not going to do peacekeeping, we're not going to do Kyoto, ICC [International Criminal Court]; we're not going to do nation building. We're going to focus on the Big Power relationships."

If you re-read this stuff now, as I do (I teach it in my class), what they were saying is just so naïve. But they truly believed it. They thought we were wasting America's resources and never really understood the challenges of the new era. Bush is now beginning to come full circle and recognize that you need to engage in debate and work with the rest of the world and get them to follow us through leadership, not through brute force and intimidation.

Strong: You mentioned earlier that one of the things people had to get used to when they came in was the 24-hour news cycle, which hadn't been present in the 1970s when some of the people were last in office. Are there other changes in the political culture that characterize the 1990s? Some people say it's a more partisan era; some say it's an era in which politics has become more personal and nastier. Did you see that?

Soderberg: Politics has always been personal and nasty. If you go back to the Adams book, it's pretty personal and nasty. But the center dropped out. The bipartisan efforts of the center that existed when I was there in the '80s just disappeared. The [Newton] Gingrich revolution and the radicalization of the Republican Party has made it very difficult to get any kind of bipartisan effort going on anything.

They don't want to build, they want to destroy. They don't want to work together, they want to separate. Just watching Washington since I've been there—I got there in '82, went to the Congress in '85—it's a different place. It's just not nice. I don't know how my friends are still on the Hill. I would have left a long time ago. Now they're saying basically, "I have two more years to get my pension." I think that's part of it. [*laughter*] Well, it's real. They would leave if they—

Strong: Was that an intentional creation of Gingrich and the strategy he and his followers adopted, or did other things contribute to that shift?

Soderberg: I don't really know. I haven't spent a lot of time thinking about it—it has definitely happened, but as far as the causes—

Strong: Again, has the center dropped out in part because there's no great threat facing the country?

Soderberg: Well, yes, we can get away with not doing anything. So it doesn't really matter if we pass a budget, it doesn't really matter if we do this—in the short term. But in the long run, that's not a way to run a country. It's very shortsighted and costly. Somehow, between Bush the father and Bush the son, the Republican Party got high-jacked by the religious right and extremists. I think it's partly driven by this President Bush seeing his father lose because he didn't keep the base happy. At least that's one theory I think this President has bought into. So he has run this Presidency by constantly shoring up his right wing, and he will not do anything that affects that right wing.

It's the same with Israel. I think one of the reasons Bush has been so one-sided in support of [Ehud] Olmert is he sees his father's challenge to Israel on the loan guarantees as contributing to his first defeat. So he just won't touch those two things: keep your base and keep Israel right there. He just won't touch it—it was really a way of making sure he got reelected.

Strong: One of the commentaries about Clinton was he paid too much attention to the polls, was constantly asking what the public wants. In terms of foreign policy, he did a lot of things that were unpopular. Even though the American people, as you mentioned earlier, said, "We want you to do something about Haiti, we want you to do something about Bosnia," when it came to sending troops to those places, those moves were always unpopular in the polls. Did Clinton talk about those kinds of issues in connection with deliberations and decisions?

Soderberg: First of all, the fact that he would do things that were clearly unpopular goes to one of his strengths that I don't ever think got enough attention. He really did do that. He was willing to do the right thing and take a political hit for it if he was convinced it was right.

On the political side, he knew that if it worked, people would ultimately support it. So you take a short-term hit in making it happen, because if it works, who's going to object? I think he thought the political support would ultimately be there if he could get it to work. So you take a short-term hit for a longer-term gain.

As far as your question of whether there were times when he spoke about the politics of certain issues, it was always in terms of how to get it through Congress. That's different from the political. I think it's also because, for the most part, the American public couldn't care less about Bosnia. Most of them don't know where Canada is, much less where Bosnia is. So, if there's a poll issue on it, it's not real. Iraq is real, because it's affecting people's lives and costing lives and a lot of money, but Bosnia didn't affect anybody in the United States, really. It wasn't that expensive to do, and it didn't require a ton of troops.

One of the reasons you can be an imperial foreign-policy President is that most of these decisions don't ask for sacrifices from the American public in any significant way and don't really affect their lives here. So I think you do have great luxuries.

Now, when you're a George Bush and you go way too far and everything is such a mess, then people start caring. People are very nervous right now about what's going on. They don't really know what they want to have happen, but they know the war in Iraq is a mess. They're worried about terrorism. They know there are all these loose nukes out there, and the economy side of it is confusing to them.

Riley: The price of gas is up.

Soderberg: Yes, people notice that, and why is that? Because it's so bad, people are now starting to think about it in a way that's unusual. But for the most part, Americans expect the President of the United States to take care of foreign policy. That's what you get hired to do, that's your job: "I have my life to lead, so don't bother me any more." Does that answer your question?

Strong: In 1993, how big an impact did the first attack on the World Trade Center make in the White House? Was it talked about much? Was there a recognition that this might be the beginning of something new? Can we even recover—knowing what we know now—what it looked like then?

Soderberg: It was a big deal when it happened. I remember hearing about it, being briefed on it, sitting in meetings on it. Who's behind it, what happened? We didn't know Al-Qaeda existed at that time, and the decision was to track down the people involved and put them in jail. So it wasn't thought to be part of a larger Al-Qaeda network, because we didn't know Al-Qaeda existed yet. But it was definitely a wake-up call that we're a target, and that terrorism is here and it's likely to be here for a while, so we need to start focusing on it.

One of the things I don't think Clinton has ever gotten full credit for—even though it has been written about extensively—is how much he did on the anti-terrorism front and how much he really did prevent and tee it up. You can drive yourself crazy thinking about whether you could have prevented 9-11. But clearly Clinton understood the terrorism threat and did a lot about it. He tried to set up a system that would prevent future attacks. It escalated a little bit with the Oklahoma City bombing and Timothy McVeigh. Even though it wasn't a foreign terrorist attack, it showed just how vulnerable everybody was. If a Timothy McVeigh can do that once, what could terrorists do around the country if they wanted to?

Strong: Where were you when that news came across? What was your initial reaction?

Soderberg: I was in the White House, in my office. In the Situation Room, they bring up papers. One dot means, "Read it now." Two dots mean, "You really have to read it now." There really are two little red dots on it; it's goofy. I can't remember if it was a one or two red-dot one. Initially we thought it was foreign terrorists. But it became pretty clear pretty quickly that it wasn't. Then there was the whole manhunt to get them. It was a big deal.

I went with Clinton to the speech in Oklahoma City, and it was really moving. I'd gone to high school in Oklahoma, so I wanted to go. I was in Tulsa, but still Oklahoma. It was just a sea of families. The Governor or somebody had given them all teddy bears. There were all these sobbing families clutching teddy bears. A lot of people were killed; the numbers were pretty high.

Strong: Hundred and sixty-five.

Soderberg: That's a lot. It was quite moving. Clinton is so strong in those moments; he really empathized.

Strong: Is he scripted at those moments? Or are we seeing a more spontaneous speech from him?

Soderberg: His speech was scripted, but very him. He would have spent some time on it. He would rewrite a lot of the big speeches himself. I think it's very difficult to be a speechwriter for Clinton, because he rewrites so much at the last minute. It was very him. Then he did a lot of unscripted meetings with the families.

Riley: Were you with him during those meetings?

Soderberg: It was more milling with the crowd, so I was just watching. I wasn't that close, but I could see and hear what he was doing.

Riley: Do you recall any conversations with him around this time, maybe on the trip back: "Nancy, you have foreign policy; is this something we have to be paying attention to globally?"

Soderberg: He wasn't asking that question. He was saying, "This is a big deal, we have to get on it." He got it right away. He knew the terrorism threat was a major headache for everybody and we had to get on it. And it wasn't, "What do you think?" It was, "This is the future; we have to get on top of it." He always got it, and he always understood.

Dick Clarke was in the middle of all this. Dick has written his own book, which I think is pretty accurate from what I saw.

Riley: What level was he in your operation?

Soderberg: He was a senior director for—I think it was "transnational threats" or something; they changed the name of it. He did all the peacekeeping stuff and then terrorism. As terrorism grew, he increasingly took it over.

Riley: This was happening on your watch? It became a more prominent piece of his role?

Soderberg: Definitely. Dick got the terrorism issue in spades and was on top of it and devising ingenious strategies. I worked pretty closely with him for four years, and I could not have told you whether he was a Democrat or Republican. It took a lot to drive him out of the White House; he was a true public servant, just loved it, wanted to do nothing else—had no life except for it—didn't have a family. I don't even think he had dogs; he worked all the time. He was so good, loved it.

Riley: Could he be difficult to deal with sometimes?

Soderberg: Yes, but frankly, always for the right reasons. His had the most loyal staff of anyone in the White House. If you worked for Dick Clarke, you got trained, you got brought up. They would die for the guy. That says a lot to me about a manager. He tried to break crockery around the government on this issue, and frankly, they deserved it. So yes, he went around breaking all the crockery and annoying a lot of people. The reason he was at the White House was that he couldn't get along with the bureaucracies; they're slow. He's a perfect NSC person, because you

drive the bureaucracy, and you have the White House backing you up. So you have to get your phone calls answered. I never had a problem with him. He was smart, good, interested.

He mostly worked for Tony and Sandy. He didn't want to have to report to me, and that was fine with me. He wanted to make sure he was reporting to the top guys, and frankly, he should have been. I had no problem with that. I just think the world of him. He actually put this in his book—bin Laden. He keeps saying, "What is this? Can't we get him? Can we steal him from Europe? Let's catch him."

We were talking about this way back in '95, '96. I can remember having these conversations with him; he was saying, "Let's get this guy." Dick was on it. The thing about Dick Clarke is you never have to push him to do anything.

[BREAK]

Riley: We stopped on your characterization of Clarke. Is there more that you want to say?

Soderberg: I think Clinton has been unfairly criticized for not being on top of the terrorism issue, not doing enough. The Bush people clearly tried to blame 9-11 on him, and it's just absurd. This is a guy who was focused on it, dedicated to it, creative, understood the need to be after it. This whole idea of we were just doing it for law enforcement was ridiculous. We were trying to kill bin Laden. In my view, the only way you could have prevented 9-11 was to have invaded Afghanistan well before, and it isn't clear that even that would have stopped it because it was planned so well in advance.

Strong: Did the President make you read *Cobra Effect*? There are various stories that he became enthralled with the subject of genetically modified diseases that might be intentionally spread. He came back from one of his summers at Martha's Vineyard passing out copies of this book for everyone to read.

Soderberg: He probably gave it to Dick Clarke. I didn't get it. That's funny.

Morrisroe: One thing that hasn't come up yet is the normalization of relations with Vietnam. Is that something you were involved in? Can you tell us a little bit about how it came about and some of Clinton's considerations on that?

Soderberg: That was one of the issues I took on to manage, mostly because Tony and Sandy were busy with other things, not because I had any particular knowledge of it ahead of time. It was a very political issue, trying to balance the desires of the families of the missing to maintain the pressure on Vietnam to get more information about their loved ones versus trying to engage Vietnam and move it forward.

It was a very long, involved, complicated process of working with the families and the veterans groups to figure out the step-by-step process leading to normalization. I got involved with trying

to bring the veterans groups and the families on board with the plan to make progress on accounting, trying to clear up the cases in a certain category where we felt they had information that could solve it—working with Congress.

The decision really came down to when to lift the economic embargo as a first step. John Kerry and Bob Kerrey were instrumental in pushing Clinton to do it. Obviously, [John] McCain was part of it as well. Actually, it was mostly John Kerry and McCain, now that I think about it. I'm not sure Kerrey was that involved.

I have the notes from a fairly dramatic meeting with Kerry and McCain. (I think I had to cut this from the book, but I have all the notes from it.) They made an impassioned plea that enough progress had been made to go ahead and lift the embargo. I had worked out a scenario that we would do it in maybe another six months. Those two left the Oval Office, and Clinton turned to me and said, "I think we should do this." I said, "No, I think we should wait and do it a couple of months from now." He said, "No, I think we should do it now; they're right." And they were right. That was the time to do it, and we had a big ceremony.

In a way it represented the end of the Cold War, the end of the Vietnam War. Finally we could move on, begin to have a normal relationship with this country and not have it wrapped up with the war that had ended 30 years before. But it was very difficult for the families. A lot of them had really developed a life around this issue, and no progress was going to be sufficient for them.

It's interesting. You get in this world, and people have all these conspiracy theories. A lot of them still believe the POWs are alive. A lot of it is their personal families, too, so you can see why they're so engrossed in it. But Clinton made the decision that it was time, and Kerry and McCain were the ones who convinced him.

Morrisroe: Was there any pushback from appointees at State or the career people at State?

Soderberg: Oh no, they wanted to move much more quickly. We were the drag because of the political implications. The State Department people would have loved to move forward. That's what they do, diplomatic relations. One of the things you can always count on is the career people tend to take on the characteristics of their own agencies. The State Department never wants to ruffle diplomatic feathers. The Pentagon never wants to use force. Commerce never wants to do anything that mucks up business. OMB never wants to spend money. You can almost, without a doubt, predict their position when they come into these meetings—which is why a White House is important—to remind people that there's an agenda, and that they might have to think about these things in a slightly different way.

Morrisroe: The NSC staff is in a unique position to interact with and observe how these principals deal with the White House and with each other. Can you characterize some of the relationships that the people in the first term—Christopher, Aspin, then [William] Perry and Deutch—had with each other? Do any stand out as being particularly successful or problematic for those of us trying to appreciate what that decision-making dynamic was like between the principals?

Soderberg: In general, you mean?

Morrisroe: In general or specifically, specific relationships.

Soderberg: Aspin was problematic. Everyone loved him, but he ended up being the fall guy for Somalia. He just never got off on the right foot. Personally, he got along with everyone; he was a fun, nice, gregarious guy. Powell was always a little bit of the odd man out because he wasn't one of the new team coming in. He was always a little distant.

Otherwise, it was a surprisingly collegial group—which is not always good, by the way. A good fight over key issues is not always a bad idea. But for the most part, Christopher was very reserved and not particularly passionate about trying to do things, very cautious—which I think was frustrating for Tony after a certain point, although I think they remained pretty good friends for the whole time.

Sandy was the slave driver, trying to drive the interagency process. I think that's the toughest job in government, Deputy National Security Advisor. You end up having to work everything. It's a tough job. Sandy certainly had a temper and got mad at people, but I never heard anything other than high praise for Sandy and his abilities. They love the guy. But that doesn't mean you can't argue.

I can't remember who came first, Bill Perry or Bill Cohen.

Strong: Perry.

Soderberg: So Perry came after Aspin; he was a gentle soul. He could rise to anger if he felt something was really wrong. He did have a temper. But for the most part, he was on a very even keel. Jim Woolsey was definitely an odd man out for the first year—or however long he was there, a year and a half. He never got along with the team, just didn't quite get it. He was just increasingly ostracized and eventually quit. I think he quit—either that or he got fired.

John Deutch came in as director of the CIA. He had a temper, but he got along quite well with Tony and Sandy. He didn't get along with people in the building too much. Part of it is that he came right at the time we were doing a lot of declassification, trying to push them to change. He pushed them to change in a way I think was good, they needed to change. One of George's [Tenet] problems is that he never shook up the agency enough to bring it into the 21st century. Deutch tried to do that, and they hated him for it. So George, I think rightly, was trying to restore some morale in a very beat-up building. His book says there were about five different directors in seven years. That's not good for an agency. George had to start out doing that.

Bill Daley at Commerce—When Clinton was picking the Cabinet in Little Rock, as I was saying earlier, we had a lot of prima donnas looking for jobs. He turned to me and said, "What do you think of the Cabinet?" I said, "I think it's great; I think you picked really good, nice people."

He looked at me and grinned. I forget the line exactly, but he said something like, "Yes, I'm keeping the jerks out," or "I'm not going to hire any jerks; none of the jerks are going to be in my Cabinet."

He really did try to pick people who would work together collegially, and he tried to avoid the major egos you have in some of these positions. It made it a very nice place to work. I think the

downside is that collegiality is not a measure of a successful group. I'm not sure it was a good team just because they got along. But it was absent the grand fireworks that many administrations have.

Riley: We haven't talked much about the Vice President's role in the foreign policy arena while you were in the White House. Can you talk about that? Was he an ally for you? Was he an obstacle?

Soderberg: It's funny, because he played one of the most influential roles of any Vice President until [Richard] Cheney probably. He was always someone you could count on to get engaged and get involved. If we were having trouble focusing on something, we could go to the Vice President and ask for help, and he was always ready to do it. When you couldn't get the President, and you can get the Vice President to do something, that's pretty good. People knew he was very close to Clinton, so if Gore got involved, that was almost as good as the President. In that respect it was a huge plus.

I remember being annoyed a few times when we were trying to have a meeting on something, and Gore would get involved. He's longwinded and would go on and on. He talks in a way that's very sanctimonious. He doesn't mean it that way, I don't think, it's just the way he talks. It could be annoying, because it would throw you off, and you couldn't stop him, obviously. It would throw off your timing in your meeting. You usually had it orchestrated how you wanted it to go, and he'd plop down and say, "Now here's what I think about it." But he was always worthwhile to listen to even though it could be annoying. To have someone as smart as he is involved and engaged was wonderful on the Bosnia stuff, working it through.

I don't really remember anything in particular that he was crucial in pushing over; it was more that he was always a reliable go-to guy when you needed an extra push to get things done. He was always for a more active role in Bosnia. So anytime we wanted to push it, and Clinton was nervous about it, if Gore said he thought it was okay, then Clinton had less hesitation about doing it. That could be enormously helpful. Luckily, Gore was always on the money with what he was recommending.

He was hovering over anything I got involved in, like the Irish issue. When we were on the verge of granting the visa, Gore weighed in on it. And that helps if you're not 100% sure you're doing it right. I remember him coming on board once it got to a decision. I wasn't sure where he was going to come out. He ended up being for it, which gave everybody a lot of cover and breathing space.

Riley: Did he universally follow Leon's lead, or was he an independent actor?

Soderberg: I don't know the answer to that. I never saw him *not* follow Leon's lead, but I'm sure they had conversations that I wasn't part of. He certainly relied very heavily on him. The two of them thought very similarly. There was no question who was going to be National Security Advisor, which tells you what he thought of him. There's no way a guy as smart as Gore is going to take everything hook, line, and sinker, but I think broadly he would take Leon's advice. The trick of being an advisor is knowing what your guy wants. You're not going to give him advice unless you think he's wrong. But Gore's instincts were never that far off.

Riley: Did you ever see Gore disagreeing with the President?

Soderberg: Sure, they would debate back and forth. It was less "You're wrong," than "Hey, here's another way to look at it" and pushing certain things. I can't remember anything off the top of my head, but I can remember sitting around tables when Gore would suggest another way of looking at something. In those settings he spoke less to the President and more to the team. He had lunch with the President once a week, so if he were going to have a huge disagreement with him, he would voice it there. You're never going to have a big disagreement in front of other people.

I mostly saw the two of them interacting in the Cabinet Room and in the Situation Room. Mostly Gore would push a line of questions he was interested in and perhaps the President hadn't pushed on. The President would let him do it and just listen.

Riley: Do you have a sense about how their minds worked differently? They're obviously both very smart people, but you get the sense that Clinton's mind is very different from Gore's mind.

Soderberg: Yes, I think Gore's is more linear and focused and organized, and Clinton's is all over the map, more intuitive and feeling. Gore is more intellectual—not smarter intellectually; he just goes with his mind—whereas Clinton goes with his gut more often.

Riley: You mentioned at one point that there were a few instances during the campaign where Mrs. Clinton was involved in the issue areas you were involved in. Was she a presence on foreign policy issues in the White House and if so, how?

Soderberg: No, not that I ever saw. I don't know whether she was whispering things in his ear. I never saw it.

Riley: She did an enormous amount of traveling after the healthcare initiative broke down, a lot of it overseas. Was there coordination—?

Soderberg: Most of that was in the second term. When I was there, she went to China. It was very well coordinated. The NSC staff would brief her if she were going on a foreign trip. She would coordinate everything, do her talking points. She tended to focus on issues that weren't central to a war zone we were working on. It was more development, health issues. A lot of times she would take her daughter. She started traveling a lot after the [Monica] Lewinsky incident the second term. She did less of that in the first term. The one I remember is the China trip for the women's conference.

Riley: Did you go on that?

Soderberg: No, I was thinking about going; I can't remember why I didn't go. I should have gone. Everyone else did, and it was a blast, by all accounts. She's not someone who's going to go off the handle unbriefed or without instructions.

Riley: We haven't talked about the people at Treasury, and there are some very bright people there, and some overlapping issues. Did you have a piece of the Mexico peso crisis?

Soderberg: No. I was certainly there when it was happening. Bob Rubin is a saint by everyone's account. Clinton really understood that we needed to do something for the Mexicans, and Congress wasn't going to do it. Bob Rubin came up with a way to do it where we didn't need the Congress. It was brilliant. Rubin was a steady hand and wise counsel on everything. He wouldn't say much, but when he did say something, everyone would say, "Oh, that's so obvious. Of course we should do it that way." Of course, nobody else would think of it but Bob, but once he said it, everyone thought it was a good idea.

His deputy, Larry [Summers], was a bull in a china shop. We used to play tennis in the backyard there. You can imagine how aggressive he is on a tennis court. You could watch Larry mellowing over this process and cooling his heels so he could get promoted to Treasury Secretary.

There were a bunch of younger kids around them who were very smart, too, and I'm sure they'll be back as Secretary next time. But I don't know what it was like under Larry because I had left by the time he took over. Actually, I never heard about anything different under Larry; I think it worked quite well, which is why he got the Harvard job. He proved he could run a big organization. Most people didn't think he would be able to hold his temper, but he did, very well. So the presumption was that he had mellowed and learned his lesson and could do it.

Riley: What was it like after the '94 midterms?

Soderberg: Oh, so depressing. I've never seen more mopey faces around the White House; no one had expected it to be that bad. Why they didn't, I don't really understand. I think it was a wake-up call to Clinton as well, that he needed to take hold of things and couldn't leave anything to anyone but himself. He needed to reform the way he was doing things. That's when he started reaching out to people like Dick Morris; he realized he needed to reshape from top to bottom the way he did business.

Riley: Did you have people from the Hill calling you to see if you could put them in jobs? There were a lot of unemployed Democrats at that moment.

Soderberg: Yes, a couple of people, and we did place some of them. The more senior people I knew tended not to lose their jobs, or else they landed somewhere.

Riley: Can you assess the consequences of that electoral turn on the foreign policy dimension of the White House?

Soderberg: It made everything we wanted to do that much harder, trying to get dues for the UN, authorization for funding, any of those kinds of products. It just died down. Ultimately though, on foreign policy, the Congress ended up making a deal on the UN, ended up not cutting off our funds for Haiti or Bosnia—all their threats ended up going away. So it didn't so fundamentally affect us that we couldn't do our job. I think it was more on the domestic side that they had huge effect. The beauty about foreign policy is that ultimately you have to deal with it, and you have to support it. Even the most radical Congress eventually comes around to see that.

Riley: Were you at all involved in trying to establish or re-establish ties with the Republicans on the Hill after the midterms? With committee staffers?

Soderberg: I didn't really do much with the Hill. It's a full-time job trying to engage the Hill. I didn't really have too much to do with that at all.

Riley: Did you notice any particular attacks directly as a result of the change? Did you come into the office the next day and say, "Okay, items two, three, and four on the agenda are definitely off for a while; we have to recalibrate what's possible"?

Soderberg: I think that was more on the domestic side. We needed to get funding for our programs, but I don't recall any— This could be my faulty memory, but it's fall of '94, so by '95, '96, certainly you realize that any hope of getting the CTBT or arms control is pretty dead. They're not going to support it. But again, on other issues it was not the imperial Presidency, but the free Presidency in foreign policy to do a lot of things.

That doesn't mean we didn't have a ton of discussions with Congress on all of this, pushing on Bosnia and selling it. But ultimately it did come along. Sandy would probably have a very different view of that period, because he ended up having to work most with the Hill. He would answer that question, I suspect, quite differently.

Riley: There are occasional stories of Dick Morris making contacts with people in the White House or the government with ideas he was pushing. Did you ever get a call from Dick Morris?

Soderberg: Yes, I met with him a lot. When did he start coming, in '95?

Riley: Late in '94, within a few weeks after the—

Soderberg: Yes, but that was stealth for a while.

Riley: He was "Charlie" until about February or March.

Soderberg: Yes, and I don't think he actually appeared until later than that. I *would* meet with him. We had a weekly discussion. I can't remember what it was about now. We wanted to be very careful not to have the NSC dealing with pollsters. I guess there must have been some finesse about how you talk about foreign policy. He wasn't involved in any decisions, but I did have contact with him. I guess it was a communications—Don Baer, the communications director at the time, and Dick and I would meet regularly to talk about how to talk about foreign policy.

We would tell him what we were doing, so he could feed it in. There's no doubt in my mind he was whispering in Clinton's ear, "You should do this, you should do this in foreign policy. This would help." Clinton tucked those things away but didn't act on them until we had a chance to flesh it out and see whether it made any sense.

Riley: But the communications, to your recollection, weren't him suggesting initiatives you should take?

Soderberg: My guess is he probably did. He certainly had a whole pile of them in his back pocket. He would tell me what people were thinking and hearing and what was out there and the

mood of people from his polling. I think at that time it must have been Bosnia again: "Here's what we're thinking about Bosnia." But I can't remember the substance of it.

Riley: This was after '94. You'd just been through the period where Frank Luntz was feeding the Republicans all kinds of information about the terminology they ought to use for various things. Would it have been related to that? How we're going to phrase our engagement—

Soderberg: I would tell him what's going on, so he would have a sense of how it would be talked about. He would say, "Here's what the country is hearing about these types of things." I'm just trying to remember what the purpose of these meetings was. Have you talked to Don Baer?

Riley: Yes.

Soderberg: Does he remember?

Riley: I don't remember.

Soderberg: If I had to guess—and I should talk to Don about it, because he'd probably remember—it would be to make sure he had a broad picture of what we were doing in foreign policy so he could figure out how to suggest we talk about it. That was probably the cover. Below that, he would love to come in and have us do foreign policy his way. But he was smart enough to know that wasn't going to happen, and Tony didn't think it was appropriate for him to be meeting with him.

For some reason it ended up being me. I think once a week we'd sit down with a couple of other people in the room and talk about what was going on. I think the purpose of it ultimately was to make sure Dick knew in the broad sense what was going on so that when he was talking to Clinton he had an educated sense of what was actually happening. That's my guess at what the real purpose was.

Morrisroe: What effect did Panetta's replacement of McLarty—and the subsequent changes he made to management of the White House staff and access to the President—have on you or the NSC operation? How would you assess the overall success of Panetta's management?

Soderberg: I thought Panetta was superb as Chief of Staff. He knew Washington, he knew the players, he knew the issues, he was smart, Clinton respected him, and he knew how to manage. McLarty was the most beloved person on the whole White House staff, but he didn't know Washington, and he didn't know how to manage that type of political operation. So people welcomed the structure Panetta put in place. Mack is so nice, and he didn't want to upset anybody. Panetta couldn't have cared less who he upset. He had a job to do, and that's life, get over it. He's very efficient. So it put a structure in the White House that was long needed and put some discipline on Clinton's time. He was strong enough to enforce it. Everybody welcomed it.

Not that we didn't love Mack. Mack actually ended up in a much better position, addressing the Latin America issues he was ideally suited for. It was a void that needed to be filled, so it worked out well for everybody. Panetta imposed a structure on the White House that was sorely needed.

Morrisroe: Did these changes he made in imposing a structure limit in any way the access the NSC staff had to the President at that point, in terms of being able to walk in?

Soderberg: Yes, who could go in was much more controlled, and Leon said no to a lot of people who thought they could just walk in. If you weren't invited, you weren't supposed to be there. Most White Houses would have had that from the beginning. It took a little getting used to for everybody. I think it had more of an impact on the domestic side. We were a little more disciplined about it anyway. We had already pretty much decided among ourselves who was going and we saw that he was not triple-booked. It was others who did that.

More got done. We got memos back faster. The meetings actually began to start on time—people needed and welcomed the structure. To have the President actually on time, to get there when he was supposed to was helpful.

Strong: You mentioned at one point that you got caught up, maybe tangentially, in the investigation about illegal foreign contributions to the Presidential campaign. Is that something we should hear about? What's it like to be a staff member in those circumstances?

Soderberg: You're in a fetal position for six months, can't eat, depressed. I discovered margaritas made me feel better, so I used to have a margarita every night. That's the only thing that could get me out of the depression. [*laughter*]

Strong: Did you have to hire attorneys?

Soderberg: Yes, it's really awful, and it's one of the reforms that Washington should look at—but never will. The Republicans had initiated an investigation of illegal campaign contributions, sneaking donors in and out of the White House, the whole coffee issue. It was a complete red herring. There was nothing there; it was just a way of undermining Clinton. I had been the point of contact for Terry McAuliffe and the DNC [Democratic National Committee] when they wanted to bring a donor in to see Clinton.

If it was a foreigner, they'd call me and say, "Is this okay?" I'd check the person out. Terry tried to bring some fairly unsavory characters around. If there was a problem with the person, we'd say no. Terry always respected that, to my knowledge, and would pretty much do what we suggested. He was pretty good about checking.

But my name kept popping up on these DNC phone call records. They just assumed I had some nefarious role in this and ended up subpoenaing me to the Grand Jury. I had to turn over all the documents. I had been nominated to be in the UN in February of '97, and it held me up for a year. I did nothing for a year. I left my office in the White House and went over to a very nice office in the Old Executive Office Building and sat there for a year. I did some special projects, but I couldn't get anywhere. You go through all these investigations. You go to the Grand Jury, you do this, and then the Congressional committees were investigating as well, so I had to go testify to the [Fred] Thompson Committee. It was about what Chinese donor I had met. The whole thing was completely ridiculous.

I was scuba diving with a friend of mine in Honduras. I love scuba diving because nobody can bother you. Phones don't work, pagers don't work. So I come up from a really nice dive, and the

owner of this place, it's a small place, comes down and says, "The White House is on the phone. Is that *the* White House?" I said, "Oh, no." It's John Podesta calling me asking me whether I had sat next to an Asian donor in 1993. This is 1996. I said, "I don't know." How am I supposed to remember that?

Apparently a seating chart showed me next to this person. I have no recollection of going. We went to a million fundraisers. I had no idea who I sat next to. Usually you go late, you sit there, you eat, you leave, and you don't talk to anyone anyway. It was just awful.

Then, to make it worse, once that started to be cleared up, the FBI decided to investigate me for having leaked inappropriate information to Gerry Adams, which again was just ridiculous. But it was their comeback to me; they still couldn't get over the Gerry Adams visa.

Now, I think what happened was there was some conversation they overheard—it must have been me, because they thought I was the target, but I had no idea—taking to somebody in Ireland about something sensitive. I don't even remember what it was now. Trying to watch them investigate this was ridiculous. They couldn't find the report; they finally found it, but it was the wrong report. Or they couldn't remember if it was the right report. Or it was, "Have you ever seen anything like this document?" It was ridiculous, but that took another six months, and that was concurrent with this. So I was just going nowhere fast. It's the worst feeling. You're guilty until proven innocent in these circumstances.

Clinton finally recessed me while all this was still going on. Part of the problem was a staffer of Rod Grams, the Senator from Minnesota, had decided to make my life miserable. To this day I don't know why. I would answer all these questions, and there was just nothing there. How many more questions can I possibly answer? They wouldn't schedule it or move it or anything. So I got annoyed and finally said, "Forget it" and started looking for a job on Wall Street.

Then I decided I really didn't want to give this up, so I asked Clinton to recess me, which he did. Once you're recessed, you never get appointed. So I was looking for a job on Wall Street, thinking I'd do that until the end of the Congress and then go make lots of money.

[William] Richardson was up there, and he decided to leave to be Energy Secretary, thinking that would be a great platform for him to run for Vice President from before the Wen Ho Lee incident broke. So Richardson went to the Hill and said, "I want to leave a full team behind; you have to confirm her so she can stay." They confirmed me, so I stayed. But it's awful. These investigations are just terrible, and there were so many in the Clinton administration, so much wasted money.

I had no money, and I said, "I'm not going to hire a lawyer; I didn't do anything wrong," which is the classic mistake, because that's not what it's about. I talked to the White House counsel and said, "Can I get it *pro bono*?" They said, "Sure, if you get it from a friend you would normally go to for help."

So I called a friend I had asked for some legal help when I was getting evicted from my apartment. He put me in touch with a guy who did it all *pro bono*. All my other friends have hundreds of thousands of dollars in legal bills. I never understood why everybody didn't do it *pro bono*, because it's a prestigious thing for a lawyer to do. Everyone has to do some *pro bono*.

So they get a White House staffer to represent. The firm understands that. He was great, absolutely great. So I didn't incur any fees.

Strong: Did all that experience give you a special connection to what the President was going through in his own investigations?

Soderberg: Yes, you certainly have a lot more sympathy for what it's like. You don't realize how devastating personally it is to have someone challenge your integrity.

Strong: It happens in the academic world all the time. What you're saying is what other people in similar circumstances say.

Soderberg: This is another "wonderful Ted Kennedy" story. This had just started, and I really was a mess. Out of the blue, I picked up the phone and he said, "How are ya?" Of course you recognize the voice right away. I think his secretary put him on the phone. I just burst into tears, because you can't talk about it. He was on the phone with me for half an hour, telling me one story after another of his nightmares in life, like when he cheated at Harvard, when he blew the debate and he thought everyone was looking. He talked about everything but Chappaquiddick.

He said, "Look, you think everyone is staring at you through the eyes of the story that was just in the paper, or on the cameras. But it will end, and six years from now you won't even remember this as being traumatic. You'll just put it in a little box. Believe me, people don't go around looking at you for Grand Jury testimony."

He was wonderful; I couldn't believe it. It made me feel so much better.

Riley: Margaritas and conversations with Ted Kennedy. That gets you through.

Morrisroe: This might be a good time to ask about your observations of the Senator's relationship with President Clinton.

Soderberg: Good, really good. He's been a big fighter for Clinton's agenda on the Hill. I don't remember what he did on the welfare bill. Most of his interactions with him were on the domestic side. I think they have a lot of respect for each other. I never saw them interact too much, because usually they would do that off someplace else or at a big meeting.

I have a funny picture from them, the two of them and me. Kennedy signed it, "Bill, you owe me one." Clinton signed it, "For Nancy, I owe you a lot more than one." It was really cute.

I don't know the whole story of how Jean Kennedy Smith got her position. It just happened. They worked it, not through me. I think Clinton must have worked it directly, but that's not easy to do. I always thought it was payback for the mess he got her son into with that trial and everything, though it wasn't really his fault. I'm sure he felt bad about it. I always thought that was his way of saying, "I'm sorry." Not very many people could deliver an ambassadorship. Actually, she was a really good Ambassador. I was skeptical initially, thinking *What does she really know about this?* But she was fabulous, really fabulous.

Riley: Was there a conscious effort to be very careful about what you put on paper when you're in the White House?

Soderberg: Not initially, but after a time. You learn pretty quickly. I never thought of it, not once. If I ever go back in, I will be careful. Everything you do is open. When you're subpoenaed, you have to go through all your notes. They give you a list of about a hundred names that you're supposed to find. You find it on a piece of paper somewhere. You would have sworn you never talked to this person in your life, and then there are notes from a whole conversation. It's a problem for historians, because people are going to write down less and less.

Riley: Exactly.

Soderberg: And memories are terrible. It's hard to balance those two.

Riley: Do you get the sense that there's actually a governance problem there, if you're not keeping careful notes? Does it make it difficult to establish a continuity of thinking in moving from point A to point B?

Soderberg: If it goes too far, sure. I think people are less likely to keep diaries. The best are recordings from Kennedy's times. Just to have everything recorded would be fantastic.

Riley: That's not going to happen again.

Soderberg: No, unfortunately. In a way it should, because everybody takes notes at those meetings, and not all of them are accurate. They should tape them. Then you'd have an accurate record. Nothing you say in those meetings is secret, because everybody writes it down and goes back and puts it in their files. You have eight principals around the table, and at least one person behind them taking notes. Then they go back and share those notes with their staff. So it's a big circle of people who have the information, but there's no formal record of what happens.

Usually the NSC person would write the notes down and circulate them among the deputies or principals so everyone would have a record of what happened. You could challenge that record. But that record was usually pretty general.

Riley: Is it the case that even telephone conversations with foreign leaders are not taped?

Soderberg: Not taped; there's a transcript. There's a note-taker. It's a pretty good transcript, but not perfect.

Riley: Not shorthand?

Soderberg: It's usually the NSC director who deals with the issue. He would come over to the Situation Room and take notes.

Riley: I was unclear because I thought I heard somebody say at one point that there sometimes is a military staffer monitoring the calls.

Soderberg: Well, the Situation Room monitors them. That's usually a military staff person.

Riley: But they don't make tapes or notes or anything.

Soderberg: Notes, they do take notes.

Strong: Then those get printed and circulated?

Soderberg: They don't really get circulated—if someone asked for them, you could get them. We would occasionally ask for them if something came up. I think they'd circulate them to the senior people. I must have read a million of them.

Strong: If all the paper in the Clinton library were open, and you were writing a book about foreign policy in the Clinton administration, what files would you ask for? Where's the useful paper? There are going to be millions and millions of pages of it—

Soderberg: On foreign policy?

Strong: Yes. Would you want that collection of NSC minutes from the various meetings, or is that not going to get you very far? They sometimes keep what's called a Presidential handwriting file, a file of everything the President ticked off, initialed, or marked and underlined. Is that the way to get at it? What would you want to look at?

Soderberg: I just did it, so I got to look at pretty much anything I wanted. My files were very extensive. I'm a packrat; I kept everything. I had copies of all the DC and PC, deputies' and principals' committee memos—I have them all. When I was writing my book, I'd go back and refer to them, because I had kept copies in my own personal files of all of them. I had all the records over four years of the deputies' and principals' committee meetings.

Riley: You said you had your records deposited at the National Archives rather than sent to the Presidential library. That was in anticipation that you were going to stay in Washington and do some work with them?

Soderberg: Yes, it was so I could write my book. I got written permission from the President to write a book. It was going to be the Irish peace process book, which I wrote but never published. It turned into this book.

Riley: This was done while Clinton was still President?

Soderberg: Right. It was at the end of the Clinton administration, 2000.

Riley: So when they were boxing everything up, they just took the Soderberg boxes and—

Soderberg: —sent them to the Archives.

Riley: In Washington, DC, rather than on the airplanes going to Little Rock?

Strong: Are they in Little Rock now?

Soderberg: Yes.

Riley: When you wanted to get access to them, what did you have to do?

Soderberg: I went to the head of the Archives, Nancy Smith, and her staff—who couldn't have been more helpful. They gave me an office and my boxes, and I spent a year going in and out of the Archives, in their offices, reading my stuff. Then I would send it over to the White House to get cleared.

Riley: I'm asking this because there has been the delicate issue with Sandy Berger and his records. Were there requirements that people monitor you? You said you had a private office—

Soderberg: I didn't have a private office. Yes, there's always someone there. They monitor pretty closely; you have to leave everything behind you. It wasn't a private office. Nancy Smith either gave me her office or a desk somewhere. They never left you alone. They have pretty strict rules about it.

Strong: Using your own files would be one thing. I'm really more interested in the scholar—

Riley: It sounds like you want to use the Soderberg files.

Soderberg: It's a pretty good place to start, because they're pretty comprehensive. Tony and Sandy didn't keep much; they sent them all off to various offices. They probably have some, but most of their documents were staff documents. They didn't necessarily keep their own files.

It depends on what you're researching, obviously. The summary notes of deputies' and principals' committee meetings and the memos prepared for them are probably the most useful because those memos would give you the options. The NSC ones often would tell you what the positions of the other agencies are. So that gives you the broadest sense of where a debate was. The NSC memos are concise and short, and they boil down all these issues pretty quickly. I find them the most useful when you're trying to get your head around what's going on in a particular issue.

Then you can hear who says what in these meetings: The position of the Defense Department was this in this meeting, and here's who said what. It gives you a pretty accurate live history. That's probably the fastest way. I think the transcripts from the President and the foreign leaders could be quite interesting as well, because you have a first-hand discussion of it. That's probably where I would start.

Probably Tony's and Sandy's files would give you the rest of the broader debate if you needed it. Then if you're interested in a particular issue beyond that, go to the senior director's files on that issue. Dick Clarke has files on all this stuff. Clinton's term would be already at the Archives. I guess the Bush guys will go to the library where he's going to be. But if I wanted to do research on terrorism, what happened, what we knew, why we did it, I'd go to Dick Clarke's files. If I'm interested in defense issues, I'd go to Bob Bell's—and on from there.

You can go into the other State Department files, and you can FOIA, use Freedom of Information Act requests. But it's quite a lengthy process. I don't know what the process is going to be to get to these other documents. But they give you the biggest, broadest overview. That's what I would do.

Strong: If you looked at the speechwriters' files, would you find the President's handwriting all over drafts, things he was changing, inserting? Could you read his handwriting?

Soderberg: I actually could read his handwriting. A lot of people can't, but I had seen it enough over the years that I rarely had a problem reading it. Sometimes it's just simply illegible. But I assume you could look at them, unless somebody snatched them up and put them someplace else. A lot of times whoever wrote the speech would take it home with them.

Strong: Actually, those have turned out to be very important files that have been opened up in the Reagan Library, and it does give a different portrait of how involved and how significant his own contributions were.

Soderberg: And he was very involved and wrote a lot?

Strong: He was very involved and wrote a lot.

Soderberg: That's interesting, because that's contrary to the perception. I don't know what they did with Clinton's speeches, but he certainly wrote a lot of them himself and re-wrote them, so I assume they're in the files. The staff secretary kept a lot of this too, so I assume his files would be key.

Riley: You made a lot of foreign trips with the President, didn't you?

Soderberg: Yes.

Riley: Do you have any particular stories from those trips? Any favorite trips, we talked about the Ireland trip, any—

Soderberg: The one I remembered, when it was time for me to leave the White House, was a Middle East trip when he went to about six countries in three or four days. I remember being giddy, because every time we would land at these Arab airports, the same kind of British-style brass band would come out and welcome us with a red carpet. It just got to be goofy. If I have to see one more of those goofy-looking British style bands—I'd rather see an Arabian band. I remember thinking, *I don't even know where I am.* I just couldn't do it anymore. We were all getting a little punch drunk at that point, I think.

I don't remember whether this was on the same trip, but there was a peace treaty with Jordan. I want to say '94, but I think it must have been a little bit later. It was the most disorganized thing I've ever seen. We got there, and it was in the desert; it was really hot. It was on the border between Jordan and Israel. King Hussein, Clinton, and the Israelis were there. They had built up this platform in the beating sun. It was literally 120 degrees. It was so hot that all these leaders had to get sun glasses and hats, and the only sun glasses and hats that were around were—they all basically had to put on baseball caps. It was so undignified.

Here they are, making peace with Jordan in baseball caps. It was the worst picture. Clinton was so mad because it was so disorganized. I don't even remember whose fault it was, but I can remember just thinking, *This is not going to be a good day.* It was so hot. The tents, at least, had fans going. I remember sitting in a tent, then going back out and watching the ceremony. For

some reason, a bunch of them had mirror glasses on. So you had these leaders up there for this solemn ceremony, and they looked like a bunch of drug dealers with the mirrors and baseball caps. I was sitting there thinking, *Who advanced this?*

The only disaster I ever had was in Moscow. I don't know, to this day, what happened. Clinton and Yeltsin met, and something came out of the agreement. He didn't like the remarks we had prepared, so we had to rewrite them. Every staffer has a nightmare of the printer breaking as the guy goes out. Somehow you always just make it, just as the guy's going out, you hand him the thing. You always make it. I've never not made it. I panic and think of heart attacks right before, but the only time we didn't make it was this time. It was the worst day of the whole time I was in the White House.

We were sitting there re-writing this speech. Everyone was dysfunctional. Normally what would happen is the speechwriter and Tony would sit down and do a re-write, and it would be done. I don't know what happened, but for some reason Tony was in one room, Bob Boorstin, the speechwriter, was here, I was here, another typist was here.

Tony started trying to re-write this thing. We had ten minutes, which usually is enough, but you would usually sit down and type it yourself and print it and go. He was hand-writing it, and it had to be transcribed by this one secretary who was writing it. Then Bob sat down and said, "No, I'm going to do it this way. Don't mess up the old speech." I just shut down.

Erskine Bowles is screaming at me because the President is ready to go out: "He's standing here waiting for these remarks." I say, "They're coming, they're coming." Two seconds later: "We're on the stage with Yeltsin; where are the remarks?" I say, "I'm coming, I'm coming."

It was a five-minute drive away, too, for some reason. Then I get a call from Erskine saying, "He's starting, he has no remarks. Where are the remarks?" I say, "They're coming, they're coming." Then he says, "Forget it, too late."

So Clinton had to go out and wing it at this press conference with Yeltsin. It's the only time in my 20 years of being a staffer in politics that we didn't make it. There are not very many Presidents who could handle it, but Clinton knew exactly what he wanted to say. Nobody would have known the difference; it didn't matter, it was fine.

I remember Erskine coming, so sweet. He was so mad. He called me into his hotel room or some office afterwards and said, "Now, what went wrong?" I said, "We just didn't have enough time to talk to him between the last speech— He wanted to change it, and we didn't have time to change it. There were too many people in the room, and we just couldn't do it." I thought he was going to fire me on the spot. Not really, but it was just awful, the only time I didn't make it. Otherwise you always make it, although there's always a panic.

It's fun to travel around like that. You get your bags out at four in the morning, and then you get up and go—you're just in this bubble. The worst thing is to get left behind in the bubble, because there's no way you can catch up. I got left behind in the bubble once in Boston. I have a lot of friends in Boston, so I was meeting one of them. We were at the Garden for some sport event. I came out, and they were gone. It's the worst feeling in the world. You left without me? You

can't catch up. They're in a motor escort. I finally caught them at the next event. It's an awful feeling.

Riley: You see any great things when you were traveling, things that you probably would never see otherwise?

Soderberg: Actually the best trip I ever took was with Ted Kennedy to go see Petra, and the King gave us helicopters. So we went from Israel over to Jordan, across the border. We were standing there, and Kennedy said, "Where are the helicopters?"

"They're coming. The King promised, they're coming." We had to wait about half an hour, nothing. All of a sudden finally, you hear— He was furious at me because the helicopters weren't there. Then they showed up, and it was beautiful. You go down along the Dead Sea, then you land in Petra on these helicopters. Have you ever been to Petra?

Multiple: No.

Soderberg: You know what it is?

Multiple: Oh, yes.

Soderberg: It's unbelievable; it's just the way to do it if you ever can.

Riley: We should ask you about the transition between National Security Advisors. You were there. You were still in the White House when Tony left and Sandy picked up, am I right about that?

Soderberg: I was supposed to go to the UN. I wanted to get out of Washington. It's not a good idea to stay in the White House four years; you get too tired. So I wanted to do something different. I thought about trying to go do an overseas Ambassador, but I didn't want to leave the action. I had gotten to know Richardson; I was his point of contact for all his missions. I thought it would be fun to live in New York. I was supposed to go up to New York, just get confirmed and go up to New York, but it didn't happen. I left the NSC, but I was technically still getting paid, which was amazing. They basically paid me for a year while I went through this investigation.

So I wasn't really part of the NSC. I wasn't integrated into the NSC. I did a couple of projects and things like that, but I mostly helped Tony try to get confirmed, which was a really depressing experience. Then I did my own Grand Jury stuff and several projects. Sandy took over in January with Jim Steinberg. Have you spoken with him yet?

Riley: Steinberg? No we haven't; he's on the list.

Soderberg: He's great, he's very smart, too. All these larger-picture questions you're talking about, he actually thinks about, so you'll get answers from him on that.

Riley: He hasn't helped us out by writing a book yet, as far as I know.

Soderberg: He's not going to. I talked to him a lot about this book. He was great helping me think it through. He and I worked in Kennedy's office together. He had gone out to California, and I kept saying, "Come in the administration." He'd say, "I don't know."

When Toby Gati left the NSC, she went to run INR [Bureau of Intelligence and Research] at the State Department and was looking for a deputy. I suggested Jim. It was a little lower level than he was expecting. I said, "Just take it; someone will snap you up, believe me."

Six months, a year later, Strobe called me and said, "What do you think of Jim Steinberg?" I said, "I think he's the smartest man I know; hire him." Strobe immediately picked up how smart he was and put him in his spot of policy planning, which was perfect for him. But the two of them have very different styles. I was worried about it initially when Sandy told me, because they're both hyper. I thought, *Oh, man, where's the calm?* But actually, they both were very calm and were a great team and did a really good job. They're different in that Sandy's more outgoing and active and talkative. It's the difference between a reserved, New England Protestant and a Jewish guy from New York.

Clinton always got along with Sandy much better. Tony was always a little bit of a stern father figure for Clinton. He never quite joked around enough. Clinton respected Tony's judgment and wisdom a lot, and I think pretty much followed his lead on things, but he didn't have that warm camaraderie that he had with—he'd known Sandy for so long, too.

So it was a different style, but the substance was pretty much all set in motion. Sandy had been instrumental in everything that had happened, so I don't think there was any huge change in substance, a little bit difference in style.

Riley: Your sense is that it continued to work well for the President in the second term?

Soderberg: Yes, if not better, because he got along with Sandy—he was more comfortable with Sandy. Is there something you've heard to the contrary?

Riley: No, it's not a leading question.

Soderberg: I just wondered, because if there's something you've heard, I could comment on it. But I don't recall hearing, no, I think it pretty much continued—a lot of the same people were still there. The top changed, but not the middle. There was a lot of overlap in the staff of the NSC; it wasn't a sea change. I think the difference was more that State changed with Madeleine.

Riley: That was my next question.

Soderberg: She was more assertive and activist and tried to do a lot more on some level than Christopher did. So that was a new dynamic. But Sandy and Madeleine got along pretty well, and Madeleine is smart enough to know to check in and follow the ET rule: phone home.

I'm trying to think of who they didn't get along with, if there was anybody in that second term. Cohen was pretty easy to get along with. He was actually a pretty good team player.

Riley: What was your portfolio when you went to New York?

Soderberg: I was alternate rep for the UN, which is basically Security Council issues. I had the peacekeeping portfolio. So I did all the peacekeeping issues and visited almost every one of them. That was interesting. I loved it, it was fun. Richardson left shortly after I got there. He was there for the first half year and then went down to Energy. Then we didn't have anybody for a year because Holbrooke couldn't get confirmed. That was fun, running around doing my own thing.

Then Holbrooke came, and that was great, too. I couldn't believe what he was getting done. He kept saying, "You think I could do this?" I'd say, "No." "Well, I'm going to do it." "Good luck." Then he would pull it off time and again. He had a knack for the place. It was a privilege to watch how he did it.

Riley: When Richardson was there, there were some intimations of contacts about the Lewinsky business, because she was looking for a job in New York. Were you ever privy to those communications?

Soderberg: That was before I got there.

Riley: Then everything blew up in the White House and in Washington after you had taken off.

Soderberg: I think I was still there when it blew up. I was sitting around waiting to get confirmed.

Riley: January of '98.

Soderberg: Oh, I'd left by then. My only contact is that I had hired a secretary when I was in the White House—I had a couple of secretaries, and I needed a new one. Someone recommended a woman from the Pentagon. She was great. She came over and worked for me. The job Lewinsky got at the Pentagon was her job. So there were questions of did I hire her so that—

Riley: A conspiracy theory.

Soderberg: Tragically, this woman got cancer and died about a year later. She was diagnosed in October and was dead by December. Monica had pictures of her from the Pentagon, and she brought them over to give to us. Then we had a funeral for her, and she came to the funeral. She was just a nice, bouncy kid. I didn't think twice about anything. So when this whole thing blew up, my other secretary called me in tears, because she'd been asked by the investigators to talk to them about why we had cleared Monica Lewinsky. Her name was in the clearance. I said, "Just tell them the truth." What are you going to say about that, bringing pictures over of the secretary who just died? That was my only contact with her.

I actually was stunned that he would pull that off. I have to say, I never could quite understand it.

Riley: Did you think it had happened when you first got the news, or were you incredulous?

Soderberg: Both. But as I said before, women don't make that stuff up. The whole thing was just bizarre.

Riley: When you were in Arkansas did you pick up any of this stuff? Were you talking to people and getting reports that this guy was—?

Soderberg: No. He's a gregarious, touchy-feely guy. When those women give those press conferences, I don't think they make that stuff up. They just don't. I always believe them. So I just assumed they were true. But I'm not going to work for him because of his personal life. I thought all along those issues were Hillary's, not the country's. They had no business poking around there in the first place.

Riley: Were there missed foreign policy opportunities late in the second term because of the country's preoccupation with this?

Soderberg: No. People ask that a lot. My experience was that Clinton was more engaged in foreign policy than ever before because he didn't want to go home. Usually he'd read every memo you gave him, but not necessarily all the attachments. People were joking: now they'd come back with all the attachments with notes on them, spilled ink here, everything. He was clearly reading through everything and was much more engaged. It was an escape for him to do this. There's no doubt in my mind that he made all the decisions he did on foreign policy, keeping that separate. The guy is a very good compartmentalizer. It was just tragic errors that led to that.

It started with Janet Reno telling Ken Starr that it was okay to look into the sex life of the President because there was some "jobs for silence" pattern here. What planet is that on? And it went downhill from there. It's really sad to see, because it tarnished his image in a way that seems sensational now, but 20 years from now people are going to say, "Look at the record and not so much that." But it's pretty wild.

Morrisroe: During your UN tenure, how was Holbrooke's relationship with the White House and with the President?

Soderberg: Excellent. He didn't get along with the Secretary of State. They pretended to, but they didn't really get along.

Morrisroe: Personally or substantively?

Soderberg: No, substantively they actually agreed with each other. It was an odd arrangement, because the UN Ambassador is a Cabinet official. So technically he reports directly to the President. But technically the UN Ambassador takes instructions from Washington. It sets up a natural tension that's bound to lead to some friction. But Holbrooke was smart enough never to cross the line of not following instructions from the State Department.

Strong: Would he have been a good Secretary of State?

Soderberg: Yes, I think he may still be. He'll traumatize the department and demand excellence, but that's not so bad, to shake everybody up. He's brilliant; he'll get things done. I don't know if any President would have the guts to do it. You have to have a very strong National Security Advisor to work with Dick, but he'd be great, no doubt about it. I think he might have been Gore's if Gore had won.

Morrisroe: Did you have an opportunity, being in the UN, to better appreciate how Clinton was perceived by other world leaders?

Soderberg: Not better. It was pretty clear before I got there that they loved the guy. They loved him. He was respected. This is one of the things I'm writing my second book on. The world gets it when the United States gets it right. And we've gotten it wrong, very wrong, in the last six years. The world is turning away from us. They're trying to create regional blocks around the world to counter our power, and that doesn't really work either. You need the United States to be engaged. I think they're hungry for the United States to be engaged again in these struggles, but they're not going to follow us if they don't trust us, and right now they *do not* trust us.

The good news is that once we start getting it right, they will start trusting us again and following us. If you look at the Clinton years, he was the unrivaled leader of the world. People did listen to him. They did follow him. If he said, "We want this to happen," not everything would go his way, but for the most part, once the United States engaged in trying to get these issues done—the CTBT, the ICC, the arms control progress, Kyoto, the international agreements we did—it works. I think right now the world misses his enlightened engagement. They're hungry for it again.

I think the world wants an America that does the right thing. They got Clinton. Clinton got them. He's an ultimate empathizer. Clinton came to the UN right after the Lewinsky mess to give a speech at the General Assembly and got a standing ovation. They don't give standing ovations at the UN, and it was a sea of men out there, all giving him a standing ovation for guy solidarity. "Don't worry about Monica Lewinsky"— that's exactly what it was. I was there. I just burst out laughing.

I think the only other time that they'd given a standing ovation was when Mandela got out of jail and came as President. I think only one other time in history has it happened.[1] I happened to be there watching it, thinking, *This is hilarious.* Of course he loved it.

Strong: I suspect you're right. Over time, some of those scandals fade, and the policy monuments, the successes loom larger. And toward the end of these conversations we're interested in legacy reflections. The other thing that happens is that the accomplishments that looked like big deals when you were in the White House may look different 20 years down the line, and things that didn't receive quite as much attention look bigger with the passage of time. Are you starting to see that? How do you think Clinton's legacy will look?

Soderberg: I think it's going to look pretty good, particularly when you compare it to that of his successor, who I think is going to go down as probably the worst President ever. I'm not sure about some of the early ones, but he's made really costly mistakes.

Strong: Beyond Iraq, or is that one big enough?

Soderberg: That in itself. Yes, just the whole attitude. What has he gotten done? He's ignored Latin America, he's pissed off Russia, and he's gotten all of the old Europe angry at him—for what? We now have one more nuclear power, North Korea, than we did when he got in office.

[1] Editor's note: When U Thant gave his farewell address, then again when Annan gave his.

More missiles, more nukes. Iran's on its way. Bin Laden's still out there. There are more terrorists than there were before he got there, and the whole world is angry with us.

Riley: Other than that, it looks pretty good.

Strong: It helps Clinton to have that kind of successor.

Soderberg: Yes, you look at the difference in the results of how they handled these crises. Granted, 9-11 happened on George Bush's watch, but the whole issue of terrorism was very much part of Clinton's administration as well, and he was focusing on it. The way Bush has gone about fighting the war on terror has its good parts and bad parts, but the results are not good. It's primarily because his attitude toward the rest of the world, as I say in my book, is the superpower myth, the thought that we're the biggest power, we don't need the rest of the world, we can bend it to our will. Tough luck if you don't like it. It doesn't work.

I think when historians look back at the Clinton era, they'll see he was a young, inexperienced President who struggled with trying to redefine the rules of the road for the post-Cold War era, had a messy time doing it for the first two and a half years, and then from then on pretty much got it right on all fronts.

The Rwandan genocide will be a question mark forever: could he have done more? What should he have done? But when history looks back on the other post-Rwanda genocides, we're not going to do anything with them either. Look at Darfur; it's pathetic.

Strong: How will they look back at the efforts on the Middle East? Come close but miss?

Soderberg: And then have the whole thing implode. I think it will be judged as premature. It's hard to see what he could have done more to get a deal; it was premature. Arafat was never going to make it. I was reading George Tenet's book last night. Arafat could never have achieved his goal. His vision was to deliver the Palestinians to the Promised Land, and he was going to go down trying, never compromise. I don't think we realized that until the very end. We kept hoping he would do it.

I think the real problem in the Middle East was the death of Rabin. Rabin was the one person who probably could have kept it alive. Whether Arafat could ever have made the transition from guerilla leader to statesman is a big question mark. But the only way it could possibly have happened is if Rabin had lived, because he had the moral stature in the region to do it. Now what you're seeing is interesting: the Iranian question has flipped the balance of calculation in the Middle East. So the Arab countries are all of a sudden looking at Iran as an existential threat, and you have a Persian-Arab competition going on. Having flipped the power arrangement in Iraq—we put the Shia in power—has gotten everyone's attention.

So all of a sudden the Arabs are, *Whoa, better focus on this. So let's get this real estate issue with the Palestinians resolved; it's not worth it.* You're going to see a new revived Palestinian front from the Arabs, because they want to be freed up to focus on Iran. So I think you actually might get some progress. I don't think they'll do it under Bush, because they don't trust him to deliver it. But I think it's teed up for the next President.

Strong: What are the neglected things in the Clinton legacy that are going to grow in value over time?

Soderberg: I think the way he understood the challenges of globalization was pretty brilliant and prescient, and trying to do the whole global agenda that he initiated in integrating the regions will be seen to have been more visionary than perhaps it's appreciated to be now. The way he handled the transformation with Russia, tried to resolve some of the festering conflicts, beef up the UN.

Again it's hard to say, "Here's what he did; here's his legacy," because it's on so many different fronts. But if you have to sum it up, I think he brilliantly moved the United States from the Cold War into the post-Cold War, or 21st-century era—whatever it's going to end up being called. Yes, messy at the beginning, but then he got it and made America the leader of the world, kept us safe, strengthened the rules of the road around the world that keep us safe: nonproliferation, terrorism, trading rules.

He understood that you need to have global regimes in place, not because you love the UN, but because these are global challenges that need global responses and rules, international rules, often with the ugly UN to make it all work. He did it in spades while promoting America's values of democracy and liberty and freedom and those kinds of things. The fact that in the Middle East peace process, the ultimate deal between the Palestinians and Israelis eluded him—the books that have been written on it are all by participants who obviously have a record to defend. But I think they're right. Clinton did everything he could, and the time just wasn't there and the players weren't there.

Riley: To what extent was the legacy impaired by Gore's defeat in 2000?

Soderberg: I don't know. You would know that better than I.

Strong: It was indicated that 2000 is part of the controversy.

Soderberg: Most of the people look at it as a failure by Gore, not by Clinton. Gore had it handed to him on a silver platter, but over-obsessed about the Lewinsky thing. He lost because of picking [Joseph] Lieberman and not using Clinton.

Riley: My question is less about popular ratification than the interruption of momentum on a variety of fronts. The assumption is a Gore foreign policy would have been a continuation, to some extent, of a Clinton foreign policy. There's an easy analogue on the domestic side, which is the condition of the federal budget. Clinton's legacy of fiscal responsibility is still there, but the actual legacy—

Soderberg: No, it isn't.

Riley: The Democrats claiming the mantle of fiscal responsibility can be attributed to Clinton, but the fact is that the condition of the budget itself has been completely devastated by what happened in the subsequent election. So is there an analogue in the foreign policy arena? Because Gore loses—?

Soderberg: Sure. There's been no progress on global warming. There's a war where we don't need to be. Whether you could have prevented 9-11 is, I think, too hard to answer. The world's anti-Americanism—half the world thinks we're a threat. No progress on the Middle East peace process. It has stalled the progress on most fronts that Clinton built on in a way that's very costly.

I hadn't looked at it that way, but Clinton's legacy would have been much more secure and lasting if Gore had been elected, because it would have been built on and continued and strengthened as opposed to essentially blown up.

Riley: I guess it depends how you define the word legacy. Is legacy a function of outcomes, or is legacy a function of what is actually done in the eight-year period of time you're serving? I don't have any answer to that question.

Soderberg: A legacy by definition is what you're leaving behind. And if what you're leaving behind has been strengthened by a successor, it's stronger. That's why I'm not an academic. I like, "Here's the answer." You can go back and forth on this or that, but that's how I look at it.

Riley: Why don't we leave this to our political theory friends rather than solving it here?

Soderberg: I think part of this project is what is the legacy of Clinton? And I do think that over time it's going to be viewed as increasingly visionary and strong and correct. The personal foibles will fade somewhat from judgment of "Okay, that was that," to "Let's look at what this man did as President."

Riley: I think that's inevitable.

Soderberg: Yes, and poor Bush is going around saying, "I'm going to leave this to the historians. My legacy, I'm focused on that." I'm thinking, *Good luck. It's never going to happen*. He's never going to be viewed positively in history. At least I don't see it. I think Iraq is actually going to ultimately turn out okay down the road—but *way* down the road.

Strong: If everybody who worked in the White House did this kind of interview and gave candid answers about the President, and you were writing a book about Bill Clinton, whose interviews would you want to read? Who do you think had good access and insight into what was going on and what he was like?

Soderberg: George Stephanopoulos, who has already written his book.

Riley: Did you think that was a good book?

Soderberg: Yes, George had a major complaint with Clinton moving to the center, and therefore—since George was left—leaving George in the dust, essentially. But ultimately Clinton had to do that, and George's book doesn't reflect an appreciation of why Clinton did that so much as how his doing it hurt him. There's nothing more painful than having your confidant leave you. But I think it's a very accurate portrayal of what Clinton's like, particularly during that period.

I think his Chiefs of Staff would be very influential: John Podesta, Leon Panetta, and Mack, who was early on in the stages. But he knows Clinton very well, and I think Clinton would be very candid with him. I think Taylor Branch has a lot. I think Sandy and the national security team. Strobe Talbott knows him very well.

Riley: What did you think of his book?

Soderberg: Clinton's?

Riley: Yes.

Soderberg: I loved it; for me it's a walk down memory lane. I thought it was too long, classic; it needed a good edit. It was just a stream of consciousness that they rushed to the printers.

Riley: Hillary's book?

Soderberg: I haven't read her book. Which one are you talking about, *It Takes a Village*?

Riley: No, her memoir.

Soderberg: I remember it because the Chinese censored a little bit of it. I haven't read it.

Riley: Are there any other accounts you've read that you think are particularly good?

Soderberg: I think the Elizabeth Drew book is very good. Woodward books tend to be stream of consciousness of people who were talking to him and probably shouldn't have been. So there's not the analysis that a real history book should have. It's a great contemporary account of what's happening over the water cooler, but not a step back to analyze it. But his access is extraordinary.

We were talking last night about how when he did the first book about Clinton no instructions came down to us of who should talk to him and, "If you're called by Woodward, here's what you should do." Consequently, everybody talked to him, because then you can call your mom and say, "Guess who I talked to today?" So they're a good read, and they're a useful snapshot of what people are saying.

I think my book is obviously great.

Riley: We found it to be so.

Soderberg: I think Clinton's going to write more books, and I think he'll probably write more thoughtful, analytical legacy books.

Riley: You mentioned Michael Waldman's book, but only in reference to the—

Soderberg: That's a "how you write a speech" book. And as far as the other books that have been written—by Ivo Daalder and a couple of others—I think they're good intellectual analysis. But if you're looking for something from someone who knows Clinton's perspective, they didn't have that kind of access, although I think they're great books.

Strong: Did you read *Survivor*, John Harris' book on the Clinton administration?

Soderberg: I did read that. I thought it was really good. That was a really solid piece of work. I can't remember now what kind of access he had.

Riley: It seemed pretty good.

Soderberg: But not to Clinton, I don't think.

Riley: No, not to Clinton, Clinton did not talk. But he talked to staff.

Soderberg: It was a really good book, but again, not with access to Clinton himself.

Riley: Did you cooperate with Nigel Hamilton?

Soderberg: I don't know who Nigel Hamilton is.

Riley: He's a British biographer who wrote a book that was mostly focused on scandal, I think, in Clinton's early life. Or am I getting this confused?

Strong: It's going to be a multi-volume biography, and the first volume—

Riley: He has a second volume coming out on Clinton as President within the next year. His reputation is rather uneven, but I can't remember if the unevenness comes from his book on Clinton or from his work on JFK [John Fitzgerald Kennedy]. In any event, part of the reason I ask is that he was also at Hofstra, wandering around there, I think, making contacts. He was very interested in what we were doing, which of course I kept very much at arm's length. You said Richard Clarke's book—

Soderberg: Yes, I thought it was pretty good. I thought it was pretty accurate. Again, all of these books are through their eyes, and it's me, me, me, me. So it's hard to see them as objective, historical—but I thought it was pretty accurate, from my observations.

Riley: I always say at this point that we seldom exhaust all the possible topics, but we always exhaust the people sitting at the table.

Soderberg: Yes, I'm done. It's amazing; you get tired.

Riley: It's fun, but it's not easy.

Soderberg: It's fun, but it's tiring. You ask these wonderful questions and I don't know. I feel like I should—

Riley: Let me tell you, it's not a wonderful question if you have to stop and think, "I don't know."

Soderberg: No, they're good questions, but there are some things you just don't know because you weren't in the room. It makes you think about it differently.

Riley: The interviews serve two purposes: one is evocative of memories, and what we're trying to do is to stir memories of your own personal experiences. But the second is the analytic part. We have really smart people here who've lived this and who have unique qualifications for answering a lot of the more fundamental questions we have about politics and institutions. So we throw these things at you not because we have an answer we're measuring it against, but because we're actually looking for the answers ourselves.

Soderberg: Are you going to try and do your own analytical summary when you're finished?

Riley: It's not a formal part of the project. I hope to be able to take some time. I hope the institution can afford to have me do that; I hope to be able to. I've spent six years now working on this.

Soderberg: Yes, just going through these interviews is such an extraordinary window—

Riley: Absolutely.

Strong: Personally, working in Presidential libraries, I find you're overwhelmed by the amount of information that's available, once files begin to open up. It's where do you begin?

Soderberg: That's why your questions are helpful—

Strong: Where do you begin? These exit interviews, and those at the Kennedy and [Lyndon B.] Johnson libraries done by the National Archives are very good places to begin. People don't always remember things correctly, and the various interviewees sometimes have agendas. However, you need a starting point to begin to think about something as complicated as a White House staff, and these oral histories are absolutely invaluable for providing the guideposts to then go look at documents and perhaps do additional interviewing.

Riley: What questions do the people who were there have? Those are sometimes some of the most interesting ones to begin digging in. You've been very generous with your time.

Soderberg: It's been fun.

Riley: Thanks so much for coming here and participating. We learned a lot. Again, on behalf of my colleague Jim Young, they're probably going to put you through the paces at some point on Kennedy, but I don't know how or when.

Soderberg: I'll be happy to. Thank you for this book, by the way. It's a great chronology.