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U.S.–U.S.S.R. Information Competition
W. Scott Thompson

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US — USSR Information Competition

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I have recently been in this building three times as a speaker. Most recently, it was to defend the President's program in El Salvador. Previous to that, it was to oppose the nuclear freeze. And previous to that, a related issue on the freeze. This time I'm here as a good guy — the guy who did battle against the blacklists and all of that. But I committed the crime of not putting all of my Harvard friends on the blacklist (for which they are refusing to forgive me). But anyway, it's nice to be here.

I was in the Reagan administration for the last two years. As Chairman of the Interagency Information Committee, I was involved in drafting a number of presidential speeches. So I had a little better feel for the ebb and flow of the administration than I think USIA officials have normally had. I say that to open myself to any of your comments or barbs as we go along.

I want to do three things today, each with varying degrees of pertinence to your work. One is of a very preliminary sort — to talk about working in a government agency as a presidential appointee — trying to bring it up to speed in the information age with some of the implications thereof. Second, I want to talk about the more substantive effort to bring about greater coherence in government policy making in a complicated time when policies were undergoing a great deal of transition — how we could apply maximal amounts of information on the topics and issues. It turned out to be a lot more difficult than expected. And thirdly, I want to talk about what really interested me, and what I think will exercise your fascination in the longer term. Namely, how can information be used as a tactical and strategic instrument of the state to advance its interests if, in fact, it has a comparative advantage in that area, as I will argue the United States does.

I will foreshadow my arguments by saying that over the long term we ought to convert the competition with the Soviet Union from the realm of missiles

to the realm of information. By that I do not mean, "Let's talk, let's use the war of ideas rather than missiles." I'm very big on building up our nuclear arsenal, and I'll take on any person at Harvard on that issue, too. We've got to do that, and I think, in the longer run, we should phase that out as fast as possible when we have an equally effective or more effective weapon, which I think we do in our comparative advantage in the field of information.

In other words, I'm not wedded to the notion of a strong defense for its own sake, and if other things can do the job of protecting our security and advancing the notion of a world of nonthreatening states, then by all means let's do it.

Now for the first area I want to talk about. When I joined USIA, I was Director of Programs. The department was the policy planning element (we were in charge of all print media) and we had editorial guidance for the agency as a whole. As such, we had some responsibility toward the output in the field of communications for the whole U.S. government — insofar as anything was going to be addressed abroad. We also had the ability to beam messages to our embassies. We found, in a statute that had not had much exercise, that the Director of Programs of USIA could send out guidance (as long as it had a capital "G") to all posts. This could then be put out in newspapers and the like, and could be (in theory) different from the messages sent out by the Secretary of State to the Ambassador.

In one very important case, namely the Soviet gas pipeline, our guidance was indeed different. The reason we got away with it is that our message was the one the President wanted, and the Secretary of State's was the one that the foreign service officers and many other people wanted. I don't think it would be a sound and prudent exercise on the part of our agency to get involved in that game, that kind of contest, if it didn't have a higher backer.

We did find that we had a lot of instruments of communications. We often joked that I was one of the world's largest publishers: with 13 magazines and a variety of other communications media that we were (at least theoretically) controlling. Anyone who has worked in government knows you have very little control over anything, especially these days when Congress is in on the act and everybody seems to be writing his own foreign policy.

I might just mention a comment that Senator Sam Nunn once made — he didn't understand how anybody could ever do business with Washington. He said, "You know, if somebody comes from abroad or views us from abroad they must be confused. Each senator has his own foreign policy; the Pentagon has its foreign policy, and the State Department has its foreign policy, and the White House has its foreign policy, and you see everyone with a different policy; it's fairly bewildering." Even under a strong President such as Reagan, this is very much the case.

Now, the problems we had at USIA were more or less the problems you often hear about — for example, that the Voice of America transmissions from Munich were Dr. Goebels' old transmitters and vacuum tubes in a building right on a city street with all the noises coming in and being transmitted out. Really, it's disgraceful that this old junk hasn't been shoveled out. This is being corrected, but when I came on board, we were a long way from doing it.

The big problem was that there was no overall system concept for the use of information in the agency. There were a bunch of old constituencies. There was the "wireless file" — a house organ that put out a stack of speeches and some analysis every day. It was pouched abroad until they finally started telegraphing it. But the telegraphic bursts often weren't sufficient and the transmission would trail off at the end. Still, today, in the Middle East, you only get the first three-fourths of every transmission. We don't have enough money to start a burst for the last fourth. We "Wanged" 32 missions, mostly in Europe, for transmission. But even then, what we failed to do is much more significant. We weren't able to convince anybody who was in a position of authority that what we really needed was a concept of information that was in the late 20th century. Namely, not to transmit pieces of paper, like a *Time* magazine or *Newsweek*, but rather to make it possible to call up anything on a daily basis, and have access to anything.

The posts themselves, having much smaller resources, were ironically more into the modern age than we were at headquarters. Post personnel would, because of the scarcity of their resources, develop highly sophisticated means of getting to their audience by a Direct Response System (DRS) that was quite sophisticated. We look, for example, at the so-called AMParts list you've been reading about, the so-called blacklist, which emerged from my office. (Although there was never a blacklist in my office, there was a compilation of the names that had been

turned down, for a wide variety of reasons, including the death of the proposed "name.")

One of the first things we said was, "Look, you know it's very inefficient to send human bodies out to give speeches. We're sending 600 a year at an average cost of $1,600 or something like that, even though we're only paying them $75 a day in a very bare-bones per diem." That per diem never paid for my hotel bill when I was abroad as an AMPart. We said, "Well, how do we change this?" The answer is fairly obvious. You use telephones. You hook up an important person in Washington (whom you can't get out to the field) to a telephone and you have some interviewers at the other end.

In effect, what the agency was doing was simply facilitating. It was a revelation that we could do this sort of thing. And then, of course, we began to innovate. We found that we could have (and we would pay for) an uplink at our end. The other end would pay for a studio, and a downlink. For $10,000 we could broadcast by satellite an hour-long interview with an important newsmaker in Washington. Weinberger did it frequently for us, also the Secretary of State. So we were experimenting with these different methods.

Along came Charlie Wick last fall and he discovered that, in fact, we could institutionalize this in a more systematic way. The thought even went around that this could become, in time, an alternative to the nightly news. If the Americans could figure out a way of picking it up from Europe, we could tie all this together and have very substantial news inputs into the European media. In fact, now there is World Net, having people in Washington interviewed by USIA television and then interviewed in studios around the world.

Student: I'm sorry. I'd like to have you stop and give us some kind of larger context. What do you see your mission as? You're doing all this stuff. It's very interesting, but I need a larger sense of what it is you're trying to accomplish. What's your purpose?

Thompson: That's a very good question. Our purpose was to get America's story across. And that, of course, begs questions of how. Do you do this by blowing it up? Telling the truth? We always said, "Well, we're talking about America's stories." It was the voices of America rather than the Voice of America. We were sending out speakers, we were polling, we were spending several million dollars a year on polling to get information to policy makers — which I'll be covering later.

But to give you a sense of what my office did, I was on the same level as an Assistant Secretary of State, within a small bureau of 900 people reporting to me. This covered everything from the speaker's bureau to the research bureau, which had 60 researchers, 36 PhDs earning fifty to sixty thousand dollars — so that we thought we could get pretty good people. We had a policy planning staff. We had the magazine, all the print media. We had a foreign press center, we had guidance to the field, the 206 posts we had around the world. Our job was to get America's story out, to get all the news about America to all of our posts, to give guidance to our posts on how they should present United States' policy, culture, and politics.

We did this, obviously, in close coordination with the State Department, under the ultimate direction of the President. The Director of USIA is a special advisor to the NSC and is the head of an independent agency. As a head of an independent agency, he, of course, reports directly to the President, although in point of fact, he doesn't do that very often.

I have to tell you a "within-these-walls story." Last fall we were fighting the UNESCO issue, and I had a fair amount to do with the decision to withdraw from UNESCO. Charlie Wick, my boss, had nonetheless decided that MBow was salvageable. I'm not sure that Charlie was utterly conversant with the broader policy issues but he had met MBow, and thought he was a nice guy, so he sent me a cable telling me to "romance him." Now of all the people I wanted to romance, MBow was not at the top of my list, and I knew that there was an interagency review going on (of which I was a part) about whether we should stay in UNESCO. It got to the point where the President was going to make the decision to withdraw the United States from UNESCO. It looked as if it was really going to be catastrophic: the President's decision would be announced on virtually the same day MBow would arrive in the United States to be romanced by one of the President's closest friends. So I pointed out that we couldn't go against the policy of the President of the United States. Whereupon I was told that the United States Information Agency was an "independent agency."

So the meaning of words, and whether even these

very senior people understood the preliminary meaning of the words, can haunt us. That's why I was sort of taken aback. You asked a very basic question that a lot of people who are in a much higher position than yourself haven't asked.

I might add that the most interesting part of a job like mine was the interagency part. You get into a routine within the government: you have meetings, just incessant meetings, starting early in the morning, going to late at night, every single day, and the discretionary time and margin is virtually nil. The only sort of interesting thing I ever did, and had a chance to play around with, was interagency work. The problem with interagency work, the reason that you could play around with it, is that (as those of you who have had government experience know) interagency groups don't issue instructions. Agencies and departments issue instructions, and so you can be very creative in an interagency group, but it's all like academic work, it's highly theoretical; it doesn't necessarily lead anywhere.

The challenge in government is to get something done. The way you get something done is by taking the ball and running with it and just mowing down your opposition. Literally mowing it down, running over every obstacle. That's the only way anything *ever* gets done in government, in *any* government, in *any* administration. It's because somebody had an idea and he got a unique focus on it, had a bullet policy, and mowed everybody down in his path. That's the only way anything has ever been done other than routine system maintenance.

So basically we found that we could do electronic media; we could send people abroad electronically, in effect, amortizing it, at about one-fifth the cost. In the long run it was going to be a much tinier fraction than that. We found that there was great resistance to doing it that way, which we finally broke down.

I found that in an agency of 8,000 people, there was only one person who had ever studied communications theory. This was Bill Read who's a protégé of Professor Oettinger, a very gifted civil servant, who knew the subject, certainly from a Washington perspective, cold. And he was literally the only person in what was then called the International Communication Agency who even knew there was a theory of communication. I had Ithiel Poole come around. This is an appropriate time to say this, since he just died, to honor him for a small contribution of his wisdom among the many great contributions that he made. He gave a brilliant exposition and he made one point which will be very routine to you. But it was completely new to this group, and to our agency in Washington. Namely, repetition is the essence of communication. You want to have a predictable channel of repetition, wherein you use a predictable unit to report something over regular intervals, if you want people to respect it.

For example, Freedom House, even though controversial, has published a "freedom index" each year that now after 20 years has had a regularity. It has taken its raps when friendlier countries had to go down in the indications gauge. So now it has credibility when a country goes up.

Ithiel made this point, and this was just *absolutely* virgin territory to everybody from the agency. In the same evening, Ithiel proposed a journal that we're still trying to get out. I talked to somebody about that last night. You know, a theorist like Oettinger or Poole could go there and in one hour tell them more about communications than they had thought in their lifetime of working in communications!

As an example, I can cite the problem with missile deployment. In Europe it was our policy to do everything possible to support the European governments' decision to deploy the Pershing and the cruise missiles. There was a great deal of resistance to this on the part of the European populace. I will talk in the next section more substantively about how we approached this and what we did about it. I might say that one of the problems we found was that our own people did not know anything about the issues. So I convened a couple of working sessions in Europe and had all of our public affairs and the political-military officers of the embassies convoked to raise their consciousness level. We brought in senior speakers from the White House and the administration. We found that this actually made a difference as, in fact, did the seminars that we started, in which Tony participated with Oswald Ganley and others from Harvard to upgrade our communications theory. We now have run six or seven seminars over the last couple of years for 20 to 25 of our senior officers — a sector that adds up, really, to a critical mass of our people who now actually have the rudiments of communications theory with all the consequences that brings, God willing.

A last point about working in the bureaucracy: everybody is nuts! Being out of the govenment now,

I can tell you that I worked in a more peculiar agency than most. We often compared it to Wonderland. I don't know if we had a Red Queen, but it was often said that we had a Mad Hatter.

We had one very senior officer who had a habit of making discoveries that might have been very helpful if they hadn't already been discovered. For example, one day I was called in and told to drop everything because something had been discovered: it was called FBIS — the Foreign Broadcast Information Service. This officer would desperately and instantly like all elements of USIA to adopt the Broadcast Information Service because this was just so enormously important. He wanted me to look at it, and he pointed it out to me. I could have said that there were 270 footnotes in my doctoral dissertation at Oxford 15 years ago, using FBIS. So, you know, you learn to control yourself. (I guess I didn't learn very well.)

But you did get instructions like this, and then, if in fact, if you went back and interpreted them in a way that did not make the person issuing the instructions look like the village idiot, you would be called back in and a tape recording of the conversation would be played to you — to show you that you violated the instructions. All you were allowed to do is to say you were sorry, and to leave, and to promise that you would obey the instructions next time (which of course you couldn't do then either, if you wanted to protect your elders and betters). Such is not unique to this administration.

We all have our share of these types that come in by way of old friendships with people in even higher positions. It's very difficult to get anything done in Washington; you're dealing with a lot of crazy people who don't know a thing about the substance to which their time is devoted. It's a real problem. Sometimes you look at people in high positions, and you say, "It looks as if he's nuts, but I mean he can't be; he's in such an important position; look how big a car he's stepping out of; look at how much authority he has; he can't possibly be nuts." As if any of those things logically have anything to do with the simple question of whether he's nuts or not. The fact is, he's nuts! And very often that simple hypothesis is the correct one. I've now learned through the school of hard knocks that it's usually the correct one. Anyway, it got so that when I would deal with normal, sane human people, I thought they were insane and crazy. I am now readjusting my eyes to reality after two years in Wonderland. However, we did get a lot done and it was a useful experience.

Now, let's go on to more substantive stuff. Point two, policy in real time. How do you effect policy? At lunch today, one of the gentlemen said, "How would you effect something like a rumor going around like the one that led to the burning of the embassy in Pakistan?" Well, it's a real problem. How do you deal with it when you have only a radio? As someone else pointed out at lunch, what you really need is not just your own transmitters, which are completely inadequate, even when modernized. You also need very close relations with the local press. We don't do that very well. Press officers, information officers, in each embassy work with USIA. They're not plugged into the substantive, political reporting of the embassy in a serious and sufficient way. And that's something that I think ought to be corrected. It is my view that it would be possible for an agency within the U.S. government to develop a coherent world view that would reflect the administration in power, but would, in a sense, transcend it and be a link to the previous administration and the ensuing administration. It was our view that we should develop major themes to which the United States could commit itself without aberration from administration to administration, and I thought a useful one was . . . Yes?

Student: A coherent world view? Those words scare me a lot. Coherent, in a place like Washington? What do you mean, by a coherent world view?

Thompson: A world view — what's going on in the world. How do we relate to it? What are we trying to do?

Student: Whose world view? How can you do that? Your view?

Thompson: No. An overall, overarching, general hypothesis about the world . . .

Student: Russians bad, Americans good?

Thompson: Something like that. You could do a lot worse than that. Well, if there's not agreement on that one, you're not going to get far in an information agency that's trying to put a good light on the U.S. government.

Student: Okay, you mean within the government agency.

Thompson: If you let me get one minute further, you may see what I'm driving at. The theme we are trying to convince the U.S. government to use as its world view is: we are a politically active and militarily passive country — we are on the defense militarily and we are on the offense politically. This was after we got the President to sign off on the speech he then gave to Parliament in June of 1982.
I think that was the most important speech in the free world since Churchill's Iron Curtain speech. It was a very important speech. It ended the policy of containment.

One of these days, Harvard is going to wake up to the fact that the Cold War is back on. We actually had a world view. The President actually said that even the Soviet Union was not sacrosanct: "No country, even those with mighty nuclear weapons, could hold their people hostage against the forces of freedom." This is a highly significant sentence in what it bodes for a second term. And our world view was that we did not threaten anybody; that all American military manuevers are defensive; that in Europe when SACEUR directs NATO exercises, they are always exercises of a Warsaw Pact invasion and a NATO defense. And when the Warsaw Pact has exercises, they're exercises of a Warsaw Pact invasion of Western Europe, and never of a NATO invasion of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

Now, to normal, logical people, that says something fairly quickly and straightforwardly. When I was explaining this to my then 8-year-old daughter she had no difficulty at all understanding this concept as to who was threatening whom. I think there are certain universities where the professorate is known to have difficulty with this otherwise simple concept. But we didn't. We thought this was very elegant and very simple to show just by the very simplest facts that we were a defensive country. That we have a second strike rather than a first strike strategic capability. The Soviets have a first strike rather than a second strike emphasis in their arsenal. That would tell a simple and logical person something very basic about who's threatening whom.

So we thought, okay, let's relate everything to these themes. Let's understand that with the capital we're buying, when we sell people on the idea that we are a defensive country militarily, we want to buy something — namely the political offense. We're selling democracy; we're pressing it. Not our version. We're selling the notion that every country should have the right to have a democratic society and so forth and so on.

Student: Do you really think you succeeded in selling that notion?

Thompson: Oh, I didn't address myself to that. I was telling you what we were trying to do. No, I don't think we succeeded. But I do think we had a systematic concept for doing it. It would have required substantially greater resources and a much greater coherence within the government as a whole, and certain presidential speeches and a variety of things that we never got. But I think we got going on it, and I think there's a much greater currency in the world for it. I don't think anyone understood it at all three or four years ago. The fact is, now, 400,000 Italians demonstrated in support of our general view. The biggest demonstration in Italy last year was a "Movement for Religion and Freedom" or something like that, a conservative organization that had some Americans standing up, some Italians standing up, and some Germans standing up and saying we were a defensive military alliance and the Soviets were a threat. I think the idea is growing. You can hold truth down. There is a great deal of misinformation, which we will talk about, but truth was the goal, and I guess my point to you is we were trying to define a coherent framework of truth, not a set of clichés, but something that reflected reality. If it's going to play, it really has to relate to the disposition of your forces, to your procurement policy, to your diplomatic policy, and to everything else. And we thought there was a coherence there. Judge Clark gave a speech in which he said there were four legs to the foreign policy chair: military, political, economic, and informational. That was a first-time level of recognition. We thought of the role of information in national security and foreign policy. That was highly significant.

Student: I'd like to explore this a little bit more. You indicated just a minute ago, in answer to a question, that maybe one of the problems was trying to get some kind of understanding within the government. I'm wondering what kind of attempts were made to get some kind of internal consensus?

Thompson: You never find a problem at your own level. At the Assistant Secretary level, the so-called working level, we would get together. In fact, we had a club called the Teddy Roosevelt Club, and we met at my house every couple of weeks. We talked about these things, and it was a pretty coherent group of ex-academics and other types climbing up the

greasy pole and we knew where we needed to go. We really felt there was a problem of understanding on the part of some of the people above us who had problems of priorities and who really didn't have the attention span to think about concepts and so forth. Or, there were people pushing their own pet projects and these would collide. So, we failed in convincing our elders and betters that a coherent world view needed to be stressed, needed to be developed.

Student: So it didn't get outside of the agency itself then?

Thompson: No, it got outside. It got all the way through the White House and the State Department but there was never any settling on it. We never really came to grips with it, to make a government-wide policy to which everything else would relate.

Student: I'm sorry, about this coherent, you know, single view...

Thompson: Coherent, not single.

Student: Okay, I mean if it's coherent, doesn't that mean that no one should disagree with it?

Thompson: No, we were making no presumptions about people disagreeing. We were just saying there should be one foreign policy, and there will be one foreign policy, if it's as Kennedy said, if it's one of vitality. If it's intellectually honest and vigorous, it doesn't matter how much others disagree with it. This is not to silence the Senate, although one must say, I do think there is a constitutional issue in how much Congress has got into foreign policy making, but that's a different subject. We weren't even addressing the question of silencing anybody. That's a different issue.

The problem is, every time we came down to getting a coherent world view, what we, in fact, could get was, "Let Poland be Poland." Madison Avenue got mixed up with what we thought was a notion of a coherent world view.

Let me talk about the deployment issue. I was convinced early on that we had the support in Europe for the deployment, judging from some random polls. A lot of our European friends thought there was a mistaken attitude that Europeans were weak on this issue and wouldn't deploy. There was another view; I suppose it was most eloquently articulated by Paul Nitze, who was arguing that the Europeans would never allow the deployment under any circumstances. But if we forced it through — which was sort of a contradiction — if we forced it through, it would be the end of NATO and a catastrophe for the United States. He made that statement for the record in December of 82, just before going back to negotiate — rather oddly undermining his negotiating posture. His position was *that Europe wasn't going to give us any* support for it and he and I argued bitterly on this subject and about the relevance of the polling data — which I had in the meantime commissioned — to test this.

We found over and over and over again that when you actually broke the data down intelligently, the Europeans were eloquent on this score. You'd find three basic groups of people in every European country, and the numbers were reasonably consistent. You had a small group of unconditional supporters of American deployment, 10 to 18 percent; you had a large group of pretty hard-nosed opponents, 30 to 40 percent. The swing was the group of people who were conditional supporters, who would support us if there were arms-control negotiations going on at the same time. Well, as any of you who have been involved in polling and the study of public opinion know, the key then is to find out what are the anchors of that 30 to 40 percent. What are the correlations when you gave them further tests to find out what their basic foreign policy views are? Well, we found out they were extraordinarily pro-West and anti-Soviet, to use the artificial distinctions of polling. In every single test case, this group was very pro-NATO, pro-freedom, anti-Soviet, so forth and so on. What you had to do, obviously, was devise policies that affected the 40 percent who gave you a majority in favor of deployment, and just frankly write off that other 20 to 40 percent who weren't going to support you in any circumstances. And I think we had more success here than with any other thing that we tried to do in the two years I was down there.

I think we used the polling data we gathered reasonably intelligently. For the first time, the polling data were actually used to influence policy in a very significant way. Frankly, the administration would not have stuck with this policy if the polling data hadn't shown that we could get away with it. The support was there in the broadest sense. It was one

thing for the President-Premier of the Rhineland Palatinate (he's also the brother of the SPD shadow foreign minister) to say to us that you don't need to worry about the deployment. The German police know how to do their thing, you know. But we still had some worries. We knew we had the support and so we were able to persuade significant people of this — the NSC Advisor, the Director of Central Intelligence, the Secretaries of Defense and State, etc., and their principal subordinates, and I think it was very, very important.

Now, we had less success one level down in trying to carry out a coherent policy in the processing of information. I had a highly gifted deputy named Gerald Hursh-César, some of whose work you will be familiar with, who was the Director of Research. One bane of any policy maker's existence in Washington is personal politics. I must have spent half my time, especially the last year, trying to get people through White House clearance. The White House would give you a name for a job in your office, you'd interview him, you'd finally say, "okay, I'll take him," and you'd send him over to the White House for clearance and they'd veto him. And then you'd start all over again. It was an interminable process; it went on for months and months and months. They would check into your voting registration and everything else to make sure you were true blue and this is true of every administration. It was just very annoying. And in this case, Dr. Hursh-César had committed the unpardonable sin of working at the Democratic National Committee library as a consultant 15 years ago. This kept dogging him. We had six distinct victories defeating the bad guys, but they got him in the end. But he prepared an absolutely brilliant paper entitled, "Planning Public Diplomacy Programs." He developed policy grids. The problem identification, the action planning, the program implementation showing all the units. Then he goes through and he classifies exactly how you would go about it. How you would actually procedurally do this on a consistent basis so that you could allocate your resources efficiently and intelligently and rationally. There's a very large hit-or-miss quality to decision making and there will be as long as human beings are involved, but the agenda can at least be systematic; the allocation of resources can be reasonably systematic. And we found that none of this was, in fact, going on.

So we attempted to do this, even so simple a thing as a little grid that we applied to the Soviet use of "Yellow Rain." We put a Soviet positive, Soviet negative, American positive, American negative, and then categorized any policy as to whether it went into A, B, C, or D. Then you might say, "Well, in this kind of country, don't even try A-type undertakings. In this other country, Bs and As will both work. In this country and in this group of countries, As, Bs and Cs will work, you know, other things being equal." There are general types of data available to social scientists like yourself, myself, and we can reasonably agree on what these general types are and what we are trying to get at. I shudder to think of having to convince you that I would not be lying in describing the reaction from policy makers and senior civil servants to this grid, which is seventh grade stuff. The resistance on the part of the bureaucracy to doing anything in a systematic way — because it threatens them and their prerogatives — got downright nasty. It was very interesting to see who our allies were.

Student: Is the kind of situation you're describing one of education? Tony and others have talked a lot in terms of educating high level individuals about complex things like verification policies. In your view, is this something that's going to be forever and ever? I mean, are the right kinds of individuals there? Is it a question of people having different kinds of education before they go to key positions?

Thompson: I think that what we're dealing with is in part a time lag. Back when government was vastly smaller, human beings could get together as reasonable people to agree on priorities and do things with reasonable intelligence. Then there was a vast explosion of government, and certain parts of the governmental process became systematized so that you isolate the level and the amount of error that is possible to that over which a single individual can foul things up. But I think we're going through a stage where, say, the defense budgetary process has been systematized, where there's a discipline. At least you know what you're doing when you make a decision; you're forced to admit the consequences of your decision.

Oettinger: If it were that successful, then it might be that just as the folks in the Pentagon now manage to field weapons 20 years after their inception, you might be able to report on the Battle of Gettysburg by the year 2000.

Thompson: That's right, but that's just about what it is. You felt very beleaguered. You felt that you had little enough energy left from all the meetings to make an effort to do anything innovative and creative. Look at Richard Beal's efforts to make his process applicable. He is one of the most gifted people in the U.S. government. That process, basically what he created, now is a room with some computers. It's not yet a process that's been accepted, ingested by the system. And, in fact, there are lots of parts that are fighting it now. It's very frustrating. Washington is a gladiatorial contest.

Student: You touched on something in raising Richard Beal's name. I'll toss you a question that I've had on my mind. When he spoke to us recently he said the United States is not a credible nation and he used the example of the Korean airliner flight 007 situation. Basically, he said that once we knew that plane had been shot down, we would not have been able to successfully present that case to the world without corroborating data from the Japanese. I asked him, "Why?" "Why aren't we a credible nation?" I'd like you to speak to that question. It may relate to this policy issue of trying to use A, B, or C. Why aren't we a credible nation?

Thompson: Well, I'disagree with him in part. We're not a credible nation to a lot of European students. I think our polling data would show that if you have order rankings of preferred countries on the part of a scientific population sampling in Germany or Italy or any European country, you'll find that the position of the United States has stayed relatively constant. To those people, the United States is very attractive. We are the future, where they're going ten years down the pike, for better or for worse. But obviously the media, the students, etc., have a great deal of influence in creating international images, and this is what Richard was talking about. Vietnam was part of it, but it's much more than just that. We were the ones running the system and it's a lot of fun to take pot shots at the big guy. One forgets that even in countries where the Soviet Union is the preeminent political presence of major powers — countries such as Ethiopia, Angola, etc. — we are still a much larger trading partner. You know, there's a lag in these things.

A European diplomat, an ambassador now, back in Washington for the first time since he was the first or second secretary here in the mid-1950s, said "Good God, Scott, Washington was Rome!" And he said it in just that fashion. We were 50 percent of the world national product, and 80 percent of the telephones, 75 percent of the automobiles, and about 98 percent of the political leverage. *We* didn't know that. Back when the United States had military superiority, the world was basically a very safe place. I'd love to go back to those days. There wasn't any danger of the United States being attacked or anything like that. It was a great time. We didn't know how good it was. But obviously, it elicited a great deal of resentment. I spent four years in England as a student. There couldn't be a happier working relationship between two countries — the U.S. and Britain. There's a great deal of latent anti-Americanism now, and it's coming to the surface for the first time in an overt, sustained, and policy-problematical way.

Well, to close on part two, substantive improvements are being made: for example, the fact that we got a process rooted, that we got a National Security Decision Directive (NSDD) through, a policy paper. Now an NSDD is the highest thing next to a revision of the U.S. Constitution, practically. Let me tell you, I think it's just as hard. We went through a year of drafts. I took one of the drafts. I rewrote it myself, and I was mad at the gibberish that was being added — and that was before I realized the gibberish had a function. You know, in presidential speeches, every single word, every single cliché, expresses an institutional loyalty.

Let me give you an example of the problem with the type of communication here. I had a dogfight with an Air Force colonel who was representing the Air Staff. I wanted us to get credit for the fact that we had just made the decision to dismantle the Titan missiles, which would result in a 30-percent decrease in megatonnage in the U.S. nuclear arsenal. This was at a time when the Soviets were inexorably adding and adding. Ronald Reagan was reputedly not interested in arms control, but somehow he was going to make a one-third cut in our entire arsenal. Well, it's not *really* that, but it's a substantial cut. It is a one-third cut in our megatonnage, but that's an artificial measure. Nevertheless, it's *something* and that's what I wanted to get across.

I said, "Let's get as much mileage out of this as we can, all over the world. And let's show our full arsenal and let's just show one-third of it just breaking off, and show what the Soviets are doing. And,

by God, let's also make more of the 1400 missiles we're dismantling in Europe while the Soviets are putting them in." I thought this colonel was going to shoot me. He was protecting a very important institutional interest (which I don't have any moral problem about). The Air Force was trying to guard that possibility of going to big missiles and trying to match the Soviets, without throwing away that possibility in advance, in the world of public opinion and presidential rhetoric. So that's the kind of thing you haggle over when you're drafting presidential speeches, and that's why they come out the way they do.

Anyway, I think we are inexorably grinding our way toward an intelligent process. I think it's going to take five more years before you really can see it in place. I think this is independent of party. The guy who is really driving it and running it is a guy named Walt Raymond, a Democrat. I'm sure he's a Democrat. I don't think he'd admit it to me, but I've worked very closely with him for several years and I'm still working with him very closely. He'll be there when all the Reaganites are gone, and he's Special Assistant to the President and doing a damn good job. So we're getting somewhere.

I didn't say anything, incidentally, about disinformation. We added a unit to my office to work on Soviet disinformation which had become quite a cottage industry on their part. It goes in waves, and they'll go for a period without doing a great deal of it, but one of the gold mines that I had was Stanislav Levchenko. In most people's view, he was the most successful, and most useful, and certainly the most intelligent KGB defector the West has ever had. He was a consultant to me for most of the last two years, and gave us very interesting insights on how to use information. In fact, once at a lunch at the White House, a senior person asked him what was the biggest success of the KGB since World War II. And he looked shocked — as if, anyone could not possibly know. What is it? Well, the creation of the European peace movement. I think he's overstating it, but you know, the fact that he can say that is significant, knowing from experience how deeply he was involved and how deeply the KGB was involved. If he could revise the U.S. budget anyway he wanted, he said, "I don't really give a damn about MXs. What I would do is put at least $5 billion more on propaganda, which is information. This is where they are really weak."

He continued, "They're not afraid of your missiles, Scott. What they're afraid of is the truth. They're afraid of your words; they're afraid of your communications. What they're really scared of is that you'll get into their soft underbelly, which is their population, because they've never had an election. They wouldn't dare have an election. Their control is fantastic. Anything you can do to loosen that grip they have on their own people by way of communication, is the thing that they fear the most."

In fact it is interesting that when George Bush went to Moscow in November of 82 for the Brezhnev funeral, Andropov said to him — I'm now quoting Bill Saphire who, rumor has it, had an inspired, accurate source — Andropov said, "There are two things that I object to in your policy and if you get rid of those we'll be fine." And they weren't the Pershing II or the cruise missiles or the MX or anything else; they were VOA broadcasts and Project Democracy.

Now, because I'm way over time, let me just briefly say that I would elicit your views on a look down the long road to see what we can do with this enormous potential, this comparative advantage we have in the field of information technology. This is one, incidentally, where the U.S. government only has to oversee. After all, the driving force in this is not the government labs; it's private industry. Think about the Soviets' decision to close off direct long-distance dialing for obvious reasons of political control. A country that does that is making a decision about which direction it is going to go. Portugal made a very similar decision in the late 17th century and there was sort of an inexorable grinding downward for the next three hundred years, which might well be the results of the decision the Soviet Union has made.

Lauren Grand had a very interesting piece in *The Washington Post* just a few weeks ago on the computer revolution. He makes the obvious point that the minute you give private citizens any control over information, it won't be Big Brother watching you, it's going to be little brother watching Big Brother. Now, on the other hand, if you don't give it to him, you've got some consequences. How does the Soviet Union stay in the same league with us? It's barely there now. Doesn't this become a glaring discrepancy in the 1990s if in fact they continue like Canute to hold back the sea of computers and the sea of information from their people? My view is that this is the case — that they will be in an absolutely untenable position. But they lose either way: if they plug into the world of information, they become more like us

and we win; if they don't plug in, we win. But there's a catch. You know, you have to be playing a game to win, because you can throw away a win if you don't know you're playing a game. And that is usually what happens in the field of foreign policy. You don't know what your assets are and you don't use them and lose your opportunity.

We had a little study group that included the CIA, the USIA, and the Defense Department. We were looking at Direct Broadcast Satellites (DBS) and related technologies and trying to see at what rate the prices would come down to the point where DBS could become a practical foreign policy tool. When something costs five dollars, as opposed to five thousand dollars, and is small enough to smuggle in by the million, or easy to fabricate, it must be considered available to Soviet citizens. Every Soviet citizen is perfectly capable of making and hiding radio receivers, and sometimes transmitters. So if a Soviet citizen gets a personal computer, and wants to know what the latest samizdat is or the editorial in *The New York Times*, he's going to be able to get at it. The amount of resources that the Soviet Union will be spending to prevent that from happening is going to be quite extraordinary. We were trying to put some numbers to this. We haven't really got anywhere yet, and I hope that Tony Oettinger and others could start playing around with this just as a theoretical prospect. It seems to me that this is the logical way of getting out of this horrible defense syndrome that I think that we have to be in to remain secure until an alternative is found. I think that this is the alternative.

Student: There's something about the world view that you're describing that disturbs me a little bit — the sort of technology revolution or technology tidal wave and the information flood that will take place. I don't necessarily see that as opening up the Soviet society. I think that one could at least debate the point that the technology can be used to put more restrictions on information, to be more intrusive into privacy, to have better control over a population, rather than less. It seems to me it cuts both ways, and you're only describing one of them, so maybe you can speak to that.

Thompson: Well, that's true. What we saw in just talking about this informally was that there are obviously both trends. But the question is when is the crossover point in the costs and benefits. For us, it may be pretty soon. I have an eight-year old son who has mastered an Atari and a Commodore 64, and an IBM. This gives us in the next generation millions of young strategists at ease with the information revolution, using it to society's benefit. Compare this with the Soviet Union. Even back in the Czar's days, it was an untrusting society. There is one Xerox room in the whole Dzershinsky Square KGB headquarters. The reason the press thought the MIG-25 that went to Japan was so unsophisticated was that the software was relatively unsophisticated; the more sophisticated hardware was back at control. Nothing is trusted out of central's hands. That's an historic tendency in Russian policy. But you're getting to a point where the world is so utterly revolutionized by the computer that the Soviet Union is just going to be further and further away from world standards.

One of the key barriers is how long the military can stay isolated from the society. How long can it be really an independent variable as it has been hitherto to a large extent in Soviet society? At what point does the fact that the Soviet Union hasn't had a computer revolution begin to slosh over onto Soviet military capability? At what point does their ability to steal, and make intelligent use of, our computer technology, run out?

For example, take the President's Strategic Defense Initiative, which is 100 percent a function of the information revolution. The ABM we're talking about now is a completely different thing from what we were talking about in the ABM treaty in 1972. It's just a world apart, because there have been three generations of computers and several orders of magnitude collapse of size in that time frame. You are able to talk about it at all now because of the information revolution in what computers can do. The Soviets are really in a different league. So the question is: what are the constraints, what are the opportunities that this gives us? I just named a couple. And what are the options? Let me end on that.

Oettinger: It's an interesting point. One of the anomalies that keeps coming up in some of the arms limitation talks is this curious phenomenon of the Soviets wanting only U.S. names for their weapons, not Soviet ones. In a sense it's almost a complicity of the U.S. government in the Soviet's internal machinations to keep their own people from having some understanding of what their own weapons systems are like.

Student: I don't see that the pressures for change are necessarily there. The questions you asked about how long it will take are questions that your eight-year-old children will ask in a university setting. I don't see that this is going to be swept away by a tidal wave of information, not the way that society is structured.

Thompson: No, but I'm saying that the information revolution is what is now defined as progress in the West. Progress is how far along you are in the information revolution. Our most basic measure now is how much the grid is spread in a particular country. England is a wired society now. The Soviet Union is becoming progressively further below Western industrial society. And that is not just as a status symbol, but as a capable entity. And I'm arguing that there are thresholds. At some point its ability to cope in a world in which it is just so outclassed finally has to matter.

Student: Why?

Thompson: Well, it just ceases to be a superpower when its weapons are so out of date. Now, that's a fair amount of time off. Right now I'll give you an example. In 1975, when I was working in the Pentagon, I was astounded to find that the Soviets had a more advanced electronic battlefield than we did — despite the enormous difference in computer capability. That's because they were *using* their computers and we weren't. A mind-boggling thing. But there's a point beyond which even if we don't try to use our computers we are just so inundated by them, everything is so computerized, that we will be just light years ahead of them.

So we get to a point where we can orchestrate things in a fit of absent-mindedness better than they can with a great deal of societal exertion. Plus, the information retrieval capability of the Soviet citizen will make him a much more restive individual. We're already seeing that. Look what is happening in Eastern Europe. Look at Solidarity. Now we understand that East Europe is not the Soviet Union. There's a very real barrier there. But there's no barrier that is absolute. You talk to anybody in the world of Intelligence right now and he will probably agree with me that there are rumblings and things happening in the Soviet Union that look different from things in the past. A lot more information is getting through. And in East Europe there's a peace movement beginning. You have people who are using computers that they get from West Germany to keep track of things, and they are spreading the word. You had Solidarity tracts that were being Xeroxed by the thousands and millions in government offices in Warsaw — a situation far from the days only 10 years ago when people were typing up some samizdats with five carbon copies in the typewriter and spreading them around. In Eastern Europe at least they've got around that, and it's my view that anything that can happen in East Europe might happen in Russia 10 to 15 years down the pike.

Plus, there are things we can do. As they have crisis after crisis we can hike our price on our bailing them out. The next time they need to be bailed out because their agricultural system is so primitive, so badly organized, we can say, "Okay, fine, but we want you to start obeying the Helsinki accords which you've signed; comply with them." Or, "We want you to tear down the Berlin Wall." Or, "We want the ideas of freedom to circulate freely; we'll let Marxism-Leninism go all over the United States." Put it anyway you want. There are things we can ask for if they want something from us. We've sort of been just giving, giving with the preemptive concession mentality of the 1970s, and we can stop that. And I think we could open up Soviet society in reasonably significant ways, so it would cease to be a threat to the security of the rest of the world.

Student: One of the Reagan Administration's issues is technology transfer, trying to limit the sale of computers and electronic equipment to the East. It would seem that an extension of your argument would be to leak them all of the IBM PCs they want, all the obviously nonmilitary hardware. Why not let all that stuff seep into the system, knowing that a certain amount is going to be copied anyway?

Thompson: Let's make a distinction between sending them an infinite number of Timex computers and some advanced IBM ones; there's all the difference in the world. Yes, I think that's true. The more they get wired, the more information is going to flow and the more we can talk to each other. As Tony was saying, about SALT, I remember back in the SALT days we negotiated with the Soviets for almost 10 years on the basis of American numbers for American weapons and American numbers for Soviet weapons. On the face of it that would look as if the Soviets really were not very interested in arms control. And

judging by the results, one would assume they weren't, except control of our arms. But in fact that's not the whole story. Obviously there is the other part Professor Oettinger alluded to; namely, they didn't want their own people to know what the numbers were. And this was one way of preserving sort of a screen there. You can break that down.

Student: The Reagan Administration, as I understand it, is opposing the sale of a lot of hardware that falls in this category.

Thompson: No, I don't believe so. There's a real distinction here. We really feel that the only leverage we have for the 80s to slow down the Soviet military juggernaut is by the control of technology. Everyone says, "Yes, but you never squeeze it all off." The same way people say, "Gosh, missile defense systems will let through 10 percent of their weapons, which is a lot of weapons." Now 10 percent is somewhat less than 100 percent, and the same with technology. For every percent you can hold back, you slow down this inexorable military machine that's 13 to 16 percent of their GNP being ground into the military effort. It seems to me the only thing we have going for us — we're not to compete with them really as a practical matter — is to prevent them from using our technology. You can do that as a weapon of last resort.

Student: You mentioned the concept, or the potential, for direct broadcast satellite technology to be used to spread the American story. Given the success of the Soviets in blocking Radio Free Europe and Voice of America, could we not expect a similar effort to block DBS broadcasts?

Thompson: A Russian emigré told me recently, "You have to understand about the Voice of America. Every Russian listens to the VOA every day. Now there are exceptions, days that I didn't listen and days when my wife didn't, but not very many." By and large every day every Russian listens to some free-world broadcasts. "Now," he said, "maybe there are groups of people I don't know about who don't. You have to understand that Russians really do understand that their government is a bunch of thugs and that there is a world out there that has something better and different. You have to really understand that we are not stupid, we know this."

Okay, now they can jam. And again on the theory that some jamming is better than no jamming — everything exists at the margins. All change exists at the margins. The Politburo can keep control if they can keep half of the American or British broadcasts out of Moscow, which is the political center, whatever the percentage. They spend more on jamming than we spend on broadcasts. And that's just emitting noise, blunt noise. But they can't emit noise, blunt noise at all hours and at all times. People know and the word spreads; they're jamming today or they're not jamming today. They'll start jamming up there and not down here. You might miss a week, then you get another week. When people are that attentive, the word gets around.

Now, in respect to direct broadcast, I am absolutely stunned. I have a farm down in Virginia, about an hour from Washington, where I spend a lot of my time. You are beginning to see DBS dishes with about the frequency that you saw TV aerials in the mid-1950s. Now what are they selling for with all the attachments? $5,000? Something like that. $5,000 to a person who's hooked on television isn't a lot of money.

Oettinger: The price is dropping to the point where you can get these cute little steerable things. It's the coming thing to have.

Thompson: If, in fact, you get this order of magnitude by the end of the decade, and then, assuming no great breakthrough, you get another order of magnitude by the mid-90s you're talking about a $30 to $50 thing or the price of a semi-decent radio right now. You're not talking about a big deal. You're talking about that in a world where everyone does have television and obviously we're also talking about a collapse in size. You're talking about something that may well be the most important thing that ever happened in the history of man. It's simply going to plug the entire world into each other in a way that never happened and never could happen before and it just jumps right over political barriers. There's no way to control it.

Student: Why would the Soviets allow the importation of those little dishes?

Thompson: They won't, necessarily, but they can't hide the technology. And all we have to do is broadcast the instructions for creating one of your own. If you can put instructions on making Molotov cocktails on the cover of *The New York Review of Books*, why can't we broadcast instructions on how to make a DBS to Moscow? I don't know, there are a variety of ways of skinning this cat but the point is it's like keeping the automobile out of Russia. At some stage, you know, they can't do it. Or, the price they pay is going to be enormous. They want to have turnkey industries from Italy, if they want to buy some module from Germany. You can't have industrial systems in different centuries and have them plug into each other. They're going to be out of sync with anything they can buy in the world, and their standards are going to be primitive compared to everybody else.

Student: Yes, one superior alternative is that they'll start focusing their attention outside and say, "All right, how do we unify our people? The natives are getting restless, so what about a war *à la* Argentina?"

Thompson: That gets into the world of speculation.

Student: That's what we're doing.

Thompson: No, because it isn't speculation to say that the price of DBS is going to go down; that's an argument about timing — a "when" not an "if" question. Whereas whether, in fact, they will export their resulting tension may or may not happen. Sometimes it does and sometimes it doesn't. But that's something we can more easily compensate for, if they start playing around. I think we've now gotten wise to their moves, wiser than we've ever been in the past.

Student: Does it scare you? What bothers me the most is the internal tension; there are a million different reasons it could happen.

Thompson: There is a study going on about the breakup of the Soviet Union. The Soviets are always doing studies on the demise of capitalism. There are people in the Reagan Administration that might be interested in having a study done on the demise of communism, and think what a wonderful world it would be without this appalling threat to freedom. There could be terrible consequences but you don't stop fighting for liberty because it might have counter-productive consequences. You try to act maturely and responsibly at every stage and hope that you're not doing anything that imperils the freedom you've got. I think we've got a responsibility in a country like this not to go with a machine gun into Moscow. To go back to my earlier theme: we should be defensive militarily, but offensive politically, persuade them that it's in their interest to join the world of information, etc.

Student: Getting back to what you just said about being defensively militarily. How much do you or your agency worry about credibility of the U.S.?

Thompson: One of the points is, if there's a coherent world view, then everything you're saying contributes to reinforcing that view, rather than one side saying we're offensive and another side saying we're defensive, and people getting confused and thinking the worst. So, clearly, what you want to do is have as consistent a policy as possible, and we haven't had that in the past.

Let me give you an example. I was in Norway a couple of years ago lecturing for the U.S. Embassy before I was in USIA. I was met at the airport by a political officer who said, "Dr. Thompson, we want to tell you a little bit about Norway. Now Norway is much more left-wing than the United States, Dr. Thompson, and we know about you and we want you to know that even the most conservative Norwegian circles are well to the left of the most left-wing American circles that you might have heard about." As an ex-liberal Democrat and all that I bristled more and more. He said, "We just want you to know so you can interact with reality as best as possible." I went around lecturing in that country. What I was told over and over again with respect to deployment of cruise missiles in Europe, was that our embassy had never done a thing to explain the policy. The embassy officers were ignorant of the policy and I quizzed them when I got back. I talked to the ambassador about it, and I talked to the political staff; they knew next to nothing about the deployment. There had been no policies and the Norwegians were on the defensive. There was no communication. Now that has changed.

And my view is that you can change this, not by ordering anybody to do anything, but by setting a

good example and being consistent. And over a period of time they'll change. Norwegian popular opinion has changed very dramatically. Dutch popular opinion has been changing in recent years. A Dutch church leader told me — I was asking why the polls had suddenly begun to shift at least a little towards deployment for the first time — and he said, "Well, you know, the Dutch people aren't stupid and they've been watching the negotiations and they have suddenly discovered that the only thing the Russians were trying to negotiate for was non-deployment of American missiles." And you know, you can only be stupid for so long, and we didn't bludgeon anybody, but I think there was a consistent policy in those two countries, very important countries, bellwethers, made up of intelligent people, and both countries have begun to come around a little bit. But every little bit is significant.

Student: I think you have still not addressed credibility directly. If you're going to direct broadcast satellite into every home in the Soviet Union, I don't think your words would be that significant. They would not have the credibility that you seek, and I don't think you can have it as long as you are a propaganda tool of the administration.

Thompson: But that's not what you broadcast.

Student: I think it is. I think the fact that you tried to seek and have not been able to find any coherent world views that last from administration to administration is evidence of the controversy in this country over who should control foreign policy.

Thompson: I don't think there's any controversy that the administration should control foreign policy. Is there?

Student: I think the American public wants a hand in it.

Thompson: Oh they have it. They vote for a President but you can't have a plebiscite every time you have a foreign policy decision; I don't think that's the issue. I think the issue is a lot of people and a lot of students want a different foreign policy but there was an election and we elected an administration that has quite a different policy from that of a lot of students. But there is a majority rule in this country and some people were voted down and some people were voted in, and you take your lumps.

Student: But you're presupposing that there is one voice of America, and, in fact, there are multiple voices.

Thompson: I guess you missed the point that I didn't underline carefully enough. If you're talking about DBS, what you really want the Soviets to get is not the Voice of America, because they're already getting that. What they'd be able to get is American dissent, Italian opera, whatever. It would open a whole world of variety that they don't have access to now.

Oettinger: I cannot resist a personal anecdote on this because I discovered five years ago by accident that I was responsible for the defection of a Soviet. At least that's his story. If it were not for me he'd still be a good Bolshevik. He was assigned in 1958 to follow me around, which he did to the dacha of a poet named Ivanov. And my neighbor at dinner at the dacha was a man who translated Shakespeare into Russian and whom I described to my colleagues in the Slavic Department when I came back as a man named Boris Pasternak. They said, "Oh!" I said, "Who's Boris?" And they said, "Haven't you heard of *Dr. Zhivago*?" And I said, "Who's that?"

Anyway it was the summer when *Zhivago* was published in the West. So this fellow was there that evening with Pasternak and all these dangerous folks and said nothing about it until the Helsinki Accords were passed. And he said, "Aha, the fatherland has come around." And so he wrote a letter to *The New York Times*. Next morning he had lost his job at the Institute. He then became Scharansky's interpreter and would have disappeared had not Bob Toth of the *Los Angeles Times Mirror* reported the story and eventually the guy got out. He is now Professor of Linguistics at the University of Montreal. The point is that even this exposure to internal dissent made a difference that took 15 or 20 years to externalize itself, until the guy had an opportunity to do something. He made the wrong move, believing his government was serious in signing the Helsinki Accords. So it's not preposterous.

McLaughlin: I want to interject something else because I think that Nancy is talking in terms of DBS as a foreign news information ball game.

Student: I'm sorry, I am not making myself clear. If anyone, if any foreign nation, had a choice of believing what they heard on behalf of the United

build new missile systems; the only thing we can change in real time is an information policy." And that made it inevitable that USIA and communications tools would be much more important no matter who would be in charge at USIA during the Reagan administration. But the immediate cost was that by urging Reagan to talk tough to the Russians, we would cause an explosion of dissent in Europe and possibly in the United States. And we are still paying for that in Europe. As I keep saying to my European friends, "Fine." And who got the Russians to talk about real cuts in the nuclear arsenals for the first time? Carter couldn't even get his foot in the door. Vance was pushed out of Moscow in the spring of 1977. And here the Reagan administration because of this early policy, talking tough, won some respect in Moscow. It bought us time.

Student: But aren't those just words?

Thompson: Words are action. I already substantiated that in the sense that words led to arms control activities. The first President to have any success in arms control was Ronald Reagan.

Student: Arms control talks at the same time he's building up an arsenal...

Thompson: We're rebuilding to parity. You're certainly not going to get any arms control negotiations to work if you're not moving towards parity when there isn't parity to begin with. Otherwise what's the incentive for the other guy to negotiate?

Student: I think there are plenty of times as you've just said when our words cannot match our actions because the actions can be nine years later and we just have to ask people to trust us.

Thompson: Foreign policy is an interplay of these different things. I'm saying you can play catch-up ball on the cheap by using words. But you cannot do it very often and must do it with great care. And you can only do it in a pinch, for otherwise you can't do it a second time for quite a while. In other words, we fooled the Soviets. We literally fooled them. Now look, the Reagan defense program is a straight line version of the last Carter defense program. (For all intents and purposes, it has been whittled down to that.) Why do we have so much more influence in Moscow? Why did the Soviets really hear us? That after all is what I would want them to do. They didn't take Carter seriously, because of the way Carter talked. You know, "Gosh, I've learned more about the Soviets, blah, blah, blah." And, "Gee, they're not different from us." Vance saying, "I think that Jimmy Carter wants the same thing for his grandchildren as Leonid Brezhnev." What a world view that shows, what ignorance! I'm not denying that each of you has to choose between words and actions. You're going to choose actions to gauge a person's intentions. What I'm saying is, words in the atomic age, and in the communications age, are a very important medium for building a reputation. And what we needed on the quick was some time in which our reputation was being lean and mean enough to take action, even if we were militarily relatively weak. And that would buy us the time to rebuild our military strength to a point where we could afford to negotiate on a basis of less scary rhetoric.

Actually, our rhetoric wasn't that scary; it was pretty mild compared to the stuff the Soviets say all the time. So Ronald Reagan called the Soviet Union an evil empire at a Southern college. Well, as it's the only colonial empire in the world, I don't know what's wrong with that. The British decolonized and the French decolonized, why the hell couldn't the Russians decolonize? Read *Pravda*, or *Tass* or *Isvestzia* any day and you will get epithets about the United States that make "evil empire" look sweet and mild. You know, Reagan a madman, a lunatic, the worst idiot since Adolf Hitler, the greatest threat — stuff that we wouldn't dream of ever saying. It's just routine. Yet, people are climbing all over Ronald Reagan. I went to a dinner the other night where the returning Dartmouth delegation, led by General Davey Jones, was reporting that the Soviets were really saying one thing: "We really hate your administration because they don't consider us legitimate." They got the message, and it really eats at them, enormously increasing our leverage.

The Soviet Union is a country that isn't legitimate; it doesn't have elections; it stays in power simply by brute force; its people are in worse shape economically than they were 60 years ago when the revolution occurred. They can't feed themselves. It's a political disaster, it's an economic disaster, and it has no accomplishments except the building of great, big, huge phallic symbols called missiles. There is

States government or believing what they believed was a neutral source with no vested interest, would they not choose to believe the neutral source over the Voice of America?

Thompson: Not necessarily. We have a lot of scientific polling data on this, and it's carried out by non-American research organizations. It varies. In some countries the credibility of the Voice of America is extremely high — and higher than that of the BBC. When I was a student living abroad I always listened to the BBC and I thought it was much more credible but I think that was my cultural blinder. I think a lot of people were just predisposed. As a fairly typical student liberal, I believed that America lacked credibility, and, therefore, I shouldn't listen to it, which is a somewhat circular argument.

President Reagan sometimes says if you start listening to the United States, you might discover it is more credible. A lot of people have discovered that themselves. You don't notice boat people trying to get into Vietnam or the Soviet Union. Or very many other countries for that matter. So it really depends on with whom you're talking about credibility. I understand the problem; I get this all the time, because the kind of people that you and I are exposed to abroad are the kinds of people precisely amongst whom we don't have very high credibility. But when those people get into power, where do they send their children to school? Not to the Patrice Lumumba University in Moscow. Suddenly these people who have been lambasting us in their editorials are writing me. When their children turn 21 and they want to go to graduate school, they suddenly start writing me letters about how wonderful I am and how really they love America and by the way, Susie Q wants to go wherever. The Bhutto family is just one of the more conspicuous examples.

Part of what I'm saying (and this is a political and not an information message) is that we are going through a stage. I never let it bother me particularly. I don't think we can get credibility with a lot of the people amongst whom we lack it and frankly I don't think it matters a lot. I think we just have to keep working with a lot of the journalists to limit the non-credibility, but there's no way we can ever really solve the problem. You're not going to like my saying it, but there's very substantial infiltration of European journalism; it's a fact. I think any reasonable person would agree from just looking at the evidence. Why wouldn't it be a fact? Even if we don't know that it's a fact, this would be a very easy group to penetrate. Europe is right there, access is simple. Look at all the control, the leverage you get out of penetration. And you get a great deal of disinformation — such as concocted Army field manuals that show exercises by the U.S. military to take over countries. Some are not very competent forgeries, but usually the Soviets have done it with care. Stanislav Levchenko did a wonderful one that he delighted in telling us about. He wrote a last will and testament of Chou En-lai which he surfaced to the Japanese press. In essence, it said: "Oh my beloved Chinese people, I have labored for you all my life but now as I die, writing this, I have one last message: you must essentially capitulate to the Soviet Union. Once I've gone, get on with it, accommodate yourselves because their power is overwhelming and you have no choice." This was surfaced in the Japanese press to show the Japanese that obviously the Chinese were an unreliable partner and so forth; it was very successful until it was exposed. It took three or four months to wear it down, to make people believe it was just an outright forgery. We knew it at the time. Our information on this is pretty good because professionals know each other across barriers.

Everybody knew Levchenko had written that. When Levchenko came out, our chief disinformation guy said, "Congratulations, that was a first-class job on the last will and testament of Chou En-lai." And he said, "I thought you'd like it, and by the way, what about your ..." There's a little bit of honor amongst these thieves.

The question of credibility. It's very, very hard; I think that clearly we paid a real price. You may have read my piece in *The New York Times* last month. I argued that we made a conscious choice, in the defense advisory group in the transition of this administration, between what we thought was fashion and popularity among opinion makers versus real peace negotiations. In effect the tradeoff was: we thought the military position had deteriorated badly, certainly in Soviet perception — meaning the Soviet perception was that the United States had deteriorated substantially. We thought the truth was that our capabilities *had* deteriorated. We thought there was a certain degree of misperception but it had been reinforced by Carter's ineptitude and his craven attitude in regard to the neutron bomb and various other things. And we said, "Look, it takes 8 or 9 years to

Student: What about parity?

Thompson: Well, the Russians use the word parity, but it's not a meaningful concept to the Russians.

Student: I think that an awful lot of those people who said that they don't like U.S. superiority were choosing parity instead of U.S. or Soviet superiority.

Thompson: Everybody knows that one guy's going up and another guy's going down. Right now, I think the idea has been generated in the world that the United States is coming up and the Soviet Union is going down. I think that they no longer have credibility. When I was a student, tramping around in the Third World in the 60s, you actually had serious discussion at Third World universities, and still do in American universities, about Socialism — by which was meant the Marxist alternative. You never hear that discussion anymore. It's dead. No one takes Marxist economic planning seriously. Not after the miracles of the Southeast Asian market economies. And now no one is taking it seriously, except a few self-serving dictators who use Marxism and Leninism as an excuse to lock up their wives' lovers. It's not a serious source of discussion any longer in places around the Third World the way it was 20 years ago. A lot has changed. You've dealt with their politics; you've dealt with their economy; now you've got to deal with their military.

The fundamental question is your question of credibility — how and where you get at it — so that in the elite circles that you're talking about, that we both know so well, we could build credibility without militarily throwing in the towel. It can be done. Kennedy did it, with a very shrewd manipulation of symbols at a time when he was engaged in the most extensive military buildup in the history of this country, up until today. We're still living on the Kennedy military buildup: the Polaris program and Minuteman. All that comes from the Kennedy administration.

Student: Another point to the credibility issue is your ability to say the same things to all people. In the real world of politics that's not often the way it works. You say one thing to one nation quietly, and you say another thing to another nation loudly, when in fact what you wanted to say was the opposite.

Thompson: Well, you can't do that anymore, because everyone hears. You can't. The President's "evil empire" speech in Florida was instantly all over Europe.

Student: How does that affect your program, your planning, your activities?

Thompson: I think that's why you want a world view, a coherent world view. You really try to impress on the White House speech writers that you don't want them straying off the course. Set a course and stick to it.

Oettinger: I thought your question earlier was going in a somewhat different direction. It's one thing to have a coherent world view from any administration and its instruments, but it wasn't clear to me when you talked about DBS, for example, were you talking strictly about a sort of VOA extension? I thought I heard you also say that the system should be an extension of U.S. commercial broadcasting with all its amiable chaos. It seemed to me that there are a lot of advantages to that kind of approach, to that kind of incoherence with which we live all the time and which probably would be maddening to numerous governments.

Thompson: There's really a key point here, isn't there? If your target is the Soviet Union and its satellites, let the incoherent, splendid jumble of American dissent, support, whatever, let that flow. Obviously you want a pointed policy in other areas, because they're going to get the other stuff anyway. France is going to get all the commercial stuff they want; you want to make sure that your policy to the French government is very consistent. And that's the distinction.

McLaughlin: Well, that's the point I wanted to turn to before, because I thought Nancy was talking about a DBS type Voice of America. Now one of the most powerful propaganda weapons in the United States is some cops-and-robbers show where somebody's reading the Miranda card, and the existence of Miranda-type rights in most of the world is a revolutionary idea.

Oettinger: It's had the Canadians flummoxed for years because people ask to have their rights and there are no such rights in Canada. They all watch

absolutely nothing to commend the Soviet Union. Why shouldn't we want to get the word out, and talk about the virtues of democratic systems, letting the voices of liberty speak. This is a communications age! Let's cut them in.

Student: I think that words can only go so far in establishing credibility, because one action can knock down ten thousand words. I think a case in point is, you're saying that the U.S. is basically a defensive country, and yet the invasion of Grenada and the mining of the harbors of Nicaragua, it seems to me, do a lot to undercut that view. You have trouble convincing me that those aren't aggressive acts.

Thompson: You pay a price. I think what you're saying is, analytically, you pay a price any time you take what we would consider a rear-guard action. We would pay a higher price, had we chosen not to go into Grenada.

Student: I'm saying your actions can undercut the words you use.

Thompson: That's right. And I think by and large they do, but we haven't been getting that message out. Now, I think there will be more consistency in the future, in general, leaving aside episodes like Grenada, which are bound to happen. There'll be more, you know, probably because the Soviets have built up a greater world presence, which we're now beginning to react against, which we weren't in the Carter administration.

There's a very fundamental shift in the balance of power in Southern Africa in recent weeks, not done by us. But, there are all sorts of shifts in the world where actions speak louder than words, but I was simply saying, "Don't count out words, especially if the words relate to fundamental vulnerabilities of people." Find out what a person's vulnerability is, and then speak to that. Either reinforce it or undermine it. The greatest vulnerability of the Politburo is their realization of their own illegitimacy. Any time we wish to shake them up (and there aren't very many times you want to do that), we should remember that vulnerability.

Nevertheless, we're not going to do this idly. We did it in 1981, because we thought the price of not doing it was going to be higher. We thought that they would start testing, as they always test a new administration, and if they started testing before our military preparedness was up, we'd be in trouble. We believed that we didn't have the control.

In January of 1981, T. K. Jones argued that two men with wire cutters could disable the command and control military network of the United States in one hour. And he spent his first half billion dollars tightening up those wires against wire cutters. But, you know we didn't want a confrontation before we were at least minimally ready for it. And we didn't want to be caught off guard, and we didn't want to set a precedent of behaving cravenly right in the beginning. So, we threw them for a loop with words! It worked.

Student: You said you would talk a little bit about nuclear freezes and so forth, and I know you're probably more interested in foreign aspects, but you've got polls showing that a percentage of Americans favor the idea of a nuclear freeze. Also, back in 1982, there was a referendum going out in California on nuclear freezes. They found that if they interjected into the question the issue of not trusting the Soviets — if they could tie it directly into the nuclear freeze — you can't trust it and you can't verify nuclear freezes and so forth — then they dramatically changed all those opinion polls.

Thompson: Sure.

Student: Would you mind talking a little bit about that?

Thompson: Well, yes, everybody's for a nuclear freeze, you know; it depends on what kind of a freeze. I was supporting a nuclear freeze back when it would have been a very useful thing for the United States. Oddly, support for a nuclear freeze rose dramatically when it became vastly disadvantageous to the United States. I hardly find that amusing. But actually, if you look at the polls, 85 percent of the United States is in favor of nuclear superiority on the part of the United States, if you ask it in the right way. And actually, I'm surprised it's only 85 percent. I find it appalling that there are people who actually would prefer Russian superiority to American superiority. If you ask it that way, someone says that we don't want nuclear superiority. Well, there's only one alternative to that. It won't be Albanian.

Student: There seems to be a great hypocrisy in saying the Soviets are illegitimate but saying the Chinese are our allies. What's the difference?

Thompson: My friend, the world is made up of and rests on hypocrisies and the point is, you've got to choose yours, so you can survive and minimize the noise from the hypocrisy.

Student: So, everything you've been saying for the last hour about the Soviet Union, about it being an evil empire or that we should be destabilizing it, is just based on what is basically expedient at the time?

Thompson: No, I really believe all that about the Soviet Union, and what I believe about China is, I would take a lead from Lenin's card, who is the principal enemy? The Soviet Union is the principal enemy and the logic of Lenin's dictum is that you have to bend a lot of other things to that central ordering device. China is an ally, a tactical ally, helping us in a lot of ways and their economy is moving toward more flexibility, more individual initiative. Also, I would argue, they're much more legitimate than the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union never had a revolution; they had a coup d'état. The Chinese had a real revolution, and there is a great deal more support there. They had a miserable second revolution. But I don't have any problem comparing the two. But yes, having said all that there's still hypocrisy and it makes you feel uncomfortable, but you're uncomfortable throughout life with a lot of the square pegs that don't fit into round holes.

Let me make one point here. I think we made a fundamental error in not being fundamentally truthful from the very beginning, about Korean airliner flight 007 and the presence of the RC135. I drove in with Charles Wick, who was going to the NSC meeting. I was standing outside the West Wing of the White House. I wasn't in the meeting and he had a two-hour meeting in there. I was milling around, and as a result, I got to talk to all of the gumshoe guys. I knew by the time Charlie Wick came out of the meeting that there was this other plane. Charlie didn't know, because at the NSC meeting they didn't talk about it. You know, at the NSC meeting they exchanged rhetoric and this says something about where policy is made and what really happens. So I took Charlie aside, and I said, "Of course we should tell the truth. We'll talk about this plane for weeks around the world!" And I said, "You're talking about this 747 and I'm talking about something else." He said, "Oh." And I said, "Maybe I'm not supposed to tell you." That got him really mad. So anyway, the point is we lost a little — I think we did the thing letter perfect, except for that one. I think the way we handled the thing at the UN, which my office arranged — we had to push the Russian ambassador physically off the roster to get the cameras in, and we had the guy to do it — was beautiful. I think we should have just stated right up front in the beginning that there was this other plane and explained it, lost some supporters right there, but fewer than we were to lose three days later when it all leaked out.

Let's speak the truth, and I think it will all work out.

American television and believe they've got First Amendment rights and Miranda rights, and all that kind of stuff; it does not exist under Canadian law.

Student: That's not what I was talking about.

McLaughlin: Again, that may be the most useful flow from something like DBS, with the idea that commercial chaos and dissent and whatever else are extremely powerful weapons in a place like the Soviet Union. Just the fact that all this exists is important.

Student: Could you take that one step further? What are some of the concerns of other countries that DBS could lead to U.S. domination of their cultures?

Thompson: It's a real problem. Clearly you need to go to UNESCO on this — at least to a reformed UNESCO. A Minister of Information from a friendly African country came in to see me a couple of months ago. He said that they had been trying to get an African network to resist this "Western Imperialism," information imperialism. And he said, "I have to tell you in all honesty that I have to get up and join this (anti-Western) cacophony from time to time." But with respect to the local programming, he said, "People don't want it. We tried. We've done programs that were sort of mini all-African programs to see how they go. People don't tune into it. They listen to BBC or VOA. This is just much more sophisticated programming and it's also in sync with the other things they see on the cover of *Time*, fashions and cars." Of course at another level this is terrible, and, of course, if it goes too far, it breeds a reaction such as we had in Iran. I said, "Very few countries are as sensible as yours in keeping tradition present and blending modernization with tradition. It's a very hard thing to do, and I think you people have done it very well." This guy says, "Look, I'm in a dilemma, help me out. Help us help our media people to be better, so our people will take more of that and there'll be less reason for having to bitch about having all this cultural imperialism."

Oettinger: The last time I heard about USIA helping with the media was in El Salvador in the Johnson administration. We got all that educational television stuff, where the regime used to get more and more heavy-handed. Well we did some studies which AID tried to suppress. It did not conform to their notion that all that television stuff we were pouring in was aiding democracy in El Salvador; it was giving a heavier and heavier hand to a centralized dictatorship.

Thompson: Well, at least it's not as bad as the Liberian government, back in the late 1960s when AID sent a huge pile of books in and they were just allowed to rot in warehouses because they were meant for the tribal people up-country, who eventually rebelled and chopped off the leadership's heads. Information, as you said more eloquently than anybody else, is a two-edged sword and the only thing we can say is, you've got to learn how to wield the sword using both edges.

Student: Could you speak for a minute or two on China, and your position or your agency's position on China.

Thompson: It's a hard one. I was there last year, and we thought about it a lot. We argued that China was an ally, a tactical ally. We were trying to free up resources to do a magazine for China the way we do with the Soviet Union on an exchange basis. You know there are thousands of Chinese students in the United States now. It's like a great big sponge coming in and soaking up American technology. There's very little going in the other direction, and you're taking a calculated gamble, the same gamble taken with the Japanese and with the Chinese in an earlier era; they came in droves. I honestly don't have a decent reason for not letting them do it. And what's more I don't have a convincing explanation of how we could prevent it, given that the Chinese government wants to bring a lot of people in, and they're helping us in a lot of tactical ways, in Afghanistan and in Thailand; we have a similar world view at the highest strategic level, and in fact ours has been moving more into line with theirs. They were always telling us in the late 70s, "Just calm down, it's all right. It's bad — Russians are no good. They're going to go and invade here and invade there, but you know they can be blocked; they can be played with; they can be drawn in and then have their heads chopped off." And you know we've been moving more towards that view in the last year.