

White House Interview Program

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INTERVIEWER: Martha Kumar

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AH: Anything I tell you I'd be happy to see on the front page of the *New York Times*. They won't print it but I'd be happy—

MK: That's one of [Don] Rumsfeld's rules, right?

AH: It's not his; it's mine. He stole it from me. That's what I told the White House staff the first day I was there as Chief of Staff, during the Nixon presidency in 1972. I said to the staff: "I don't want anything in writing that you wouldn't be happy to see on the front page of *The New York Times*, because that's where you'll probably read it."

MK: How did you know that that was the way things work? That that seems to be an inevitable thing?

AH: There was an unusual hemorrhaging to the press during Watergate. Unfortunately, in addition to the disloyal, there were a lot of people also trying to impress the press with how much they were in-the-know. That's a tendency in every administration, but it really got out of hand during Watergate.

MK: Do you think people often will give information on the theory that it inoculates them to some extent in their relationships with reporters? Have people ever talked about that?

AH: Some do it that way. We've had a White House chief of staff, who will remain unnamed, who was the primary source during the Reagan administration, for almost everything. That was his style. Most of it was factually wrong but the press, having been given this information from a very high level, would write it as the gospel. And it wasn't right because it was always twisted to serve the purposes of the giver. That's what I call an individual utilizing his own position, or that of someone that he was supporting, to further his own agenda. On occasion, the press knows it's being used but assumes the role of accomplice, because it produces good print. However, once the rich resource is out of power, he or she becomes fair game.

MK: Would it be important, though, to try to explain to reporters—on a background basis—why policies came about, what the process was, and those kinds of things?

AH: Absolutely.

MK: Did you talk to reporters?

AH: Not often. Only when I was Deputy National Security Adviser and Henry Kissinger asked me to. When I was White House Chief of Staff, very seldom, unless the President asked me to. I did not like to talk to the press. I think there's too much of that going on. We have created a cottage industry in Washington in the staff's relationship with the White House press corps. These are not the professional journalists that usually are assigned to State or

Defense or the other Cabinet offices. These are political types who are going up the ladder of high notoriety and, hopefully, big bucks; not all of them, but a lot of them.

MK: Do you think the beat is a different kind of beat because it's a political beat—

AH: Yes, also it's totally news-oriented, totally headline-oriented, and highly political.

MK: —as opposed to Defense and State where you have—

AH: —usually, serious journalists.

MK: —substance that you're dealing with, whereas in a White House, so much of what you're doing is trying to move things politically that the kinds of people that come to a White House are people with a political specialty.

AH: That's absolutely right.

MK: When you came into the Chief of Staff position, what did you discuss with the President about what your job would be, what he expected and what did you expect from him?

AH: Well, I was appointed under very unusual circumstances. I really hadn't known Richard Nixon that well, except from the prism of national security—the Vietnam conflict, Russian relations, defense and arms control—all of the things that were associated with the work that Kissinger did as National Security Adviser. As Kissinger's deputy, I generally was cognizant of everything, and he traveled so much that the President got in the habit of dealing with me quite often, which Henry didn't like, but was nevertheless essential, and simply had to be.

Now, having said that, when I was called to take the Chief of Staff job and I had just managed to decouple myself from the White House—I wanted to get out of it almost from the day I was in it. In hindsight, as I look back, I think I learned a great deal and I'm glad to have had the experience. But I was a professional soldier and, at the time, I wanted to finish my career. Nevertheless, I was forced to retire, not because of law or due process but because of political exigencies. Roosevelt and Eisenhower both had professional military men as White House Chiefs of Staff and it was legitimized by executive order.

There were opposition leaders who couldn't do enough damage to Nixon. Every day, they woke up to ask, how could they damage him? There was more to it than just partisan hatred for Nixon; it was a classic struggle for power. If we had experienced a converging double impeachment of both Vice President [Spiro] Agnew and Nixon, the Democrats would have taken over the White House, without the vote, through the Speaker of the House, who was next in line, followed by the President pro tem of the Senate. There were some Democrats who were actually working for that outcome with the help of the *Washington Post* and the DNC [Democratic National Committee].

So this was what was really going on, and was the actual underpinning of Watergate that few recognized or write about, to this very day. It's similar to the fact that few will write that [Fidel] Castro probably killed John F. Kennedy, because President Kennedy was conducting a secret war against him through the CIA. Be that as it may, these are the truths that seldom surface in a contemporary sense. I've frequently said that, "He who has the power writes the history, and it takes maybe twenty or thirty years before scholars ultimately dig out the truth." They usually do, thank God, but that's the product of scholarship, not contemporary news reporting.

MK: It depends on what kinds of materials are left.

AH: Exactly. That's why what you're doing is important. But, you're dealing more in procedures, and less in substance. In the first place, Nixon hired me as Chief of Staff, with the guarantee that it would be temporary and I could get back to the Army. It was an awkward time, because the newly designated Chief of Staff of the Army had been under controversy. The designated chief, General Creighton Abrams, found his confirmation delayed because of the Cambodian operation during his time in Vietnam. Everybody in the Executive branch was free game. Even that wonderful professional, who was one of our great patriots, was singled out. It took a long time to get him confirmed, so, as Vice Chief of the Army, I was also Acting Chief of Staff of the Army; I was forced to do both jobs although I stayed in constant contact with General Abrams. He wasn't confirmed until a short time before President Nixon asked me to come back to the White House.

So I politely declined, following the first call by Bob Haldeman. Nevertheless, President Nixon insisted he wanted me for the job, but qualified the offer by saying it would be temporary and I wouldn't have to touch Watergate. My duties would be confined to keeping the government functioning. At the time, we had had ninety vacancies in key executive department positions, everything from Cabinet to agency heads. This had developed because, during the transition from his first to his second term, he asked his then Chief of Staff, H. R. Haldeman, to demand the resignation of every key appointee. Suddenly, Watergate exploded, interrupting the White House reorganization, and everything shuddered to a halt. Some would have been reappointed but they just didn't hear, so they left.

The government was run during that six-month period, from his inauguration until May, mostly by second-tier professionals, career bureaucrats if you will. They kept the government functioning. There were exceptions, of course, with some fine political appointees, such as Bill Simon, Bill Rogers, and others, who remained loyal to the President, and who had a strong sense of duty to the country.

So there was a tremendous rebuilding job that had to be done. But it was a rare person that you could go to in the private sector who would risk coming into the "Watergate White House." For example, attracting a new Secretary of the Treasury was literally impossible. I talked to a number of the nation's top financial leaders and economists. All turned the President down.

MK: How many people did you talk to?

AH: At least five, maybe seven. And I mean the cream of American finance, the top people, bank heads and experienced economic talent. That's how the late Bill Simon got the job. I ultimately had to ask him to move from where he was, serving as energy czar, to become Secretary of the Treasury. Some of those still serving just found they couldn't hang around any longer when Watergate exploded. When an official finds himself worrying more about himself or herself than their obligation to the American people, you're probably better off without them anyway. Be that as it may, we certainly had some of that.

MK: Did you have it because—maybe being tainted would be one thing—they felt that the energy was going to be in Nixon just trying to maintain himself, rather than push policy, and that policy was going to be on the back burner?

AH: Not really. As it turned out, the government ran pretty well, til the very end. Actually, presidential preoccupation forced by Watergate offered greater, not less, authority to the Cabinet and senior executives.

MK: What did they indicate?

AH: Most of them had some personal reasons. I don't want to suggest there was a mass exodus. Most of the vacancies were self-inflicted by the policy of demanding the resignation of senior officials. But I think that was a policy that was poorly handled. It should have been much more quietly done and not with the profile that caused appointees to have their pride damaged.

MK: Right. And much more selective.

AH: Yes. So the combination of those two things, plus the risks of Watergate, I would say were the primary problems. I don't know anyone that would accept the premise that we didn't get things done. The government ran. It wasn't until the final days of Watergate that the risk of what I call a frozen government were very high, because the legislature just simply refused to act.

For example, the Yom Kippur War of the fall of 1973 was probably the closest we ever came to a nuclear conflict. There was actually little chance of nuclear exchange during the Cuban Missile crisis, because the Russians only had a handful of missiles and they weren't any good. We had hundreds, and they knew that. But what was told to the American people was that we almost went to nuclear war. You recall that. That was untrue.

A far more dangerous situation existed during the Yom Kippur War, because by then the Soviets were approaching nuclear parity. The *Washington Post* carried stories suggesting the Yom Kippur crisis was a contrived crisis to prop up President Nixon. That's the kind of thing that makes you worry, because, during the Yom Kippur War, we actually alerted our nuclear forces, and the Russians had mobilized ground, air and missile forces to intervene, and they were actually in the process of doing so. They gave us an ultimatum and we were forced to respond by taking credible counter steps. But that crisis really got my attention from the standpoint of how dangerous Watergate had become. And I think it got President Nixon's attention as well.

MK: Do you think that they would not have moved if they hadn't sensed that the President was weak?

AH: No question. No question about it. They sensed a wounded president and that was one of the things that we had to be very conscious of in the conduct of foreign affairs. President Nixon knew what was going on. But as I said earlier, my charter was not to be involved in Watergate, but from the first day, I got involved. There was no way to separate Watergate from governance. You simply had to get involved, because the scandal permeated almost everything.

MK: No other game in town.

AH: Initially, the President didn't even have a lawyer. Here's a man facing impeachment without a defense lawyer. I tried to get him to hire [Edward] Bennett Williams, a top Democratic lawyer. I said what a smart Republican does is hire a smart Democratic lawyer, who is plugged in to the Democratic establishment. The President simply wouldn't do it.

- However, I then tried to get him to hire Joe Califano, also a Democrat. He refused to do that because, he said, "These fellows are Democrats; they'll do me in." I said, no, they're lawyers first; they're professionals; they have been professional throughout their careers. I talked to Joe Califano after Watergate. I said, "If we had asked you, would you have done it?" He said, "Of course I would have done it, and so would have my senior partner, Williams." This was partisan paranoia. I think paranoia (which Kissinger used to say was "excess complacency in our nation's capital") contributed to a lot of the problems during Watergate, and probably before.
- MK: In looking at the government domestically, what were the signs of the government coming into gridlock domestically? You could see it with the Russians. Were there any other foreign policy things and then what were the domestic one(s) [that] were there?
- AH: There were things that would be very worrisome. The economy was beginning to have trouble. You recall, because of the Yom Kippur War, we had the energy crisis. That caused sharp rises in energy prices, so inflation started to rise and economic growth was affected by inflation. So we were facing all of those things. President Gerald Ford, for whom I also worked briefly as Chief of Staff, stabilized the problem. I helped to work on his veto policies. His economic policies really reversed what was very serious erosion of presidential authority. President Nixon didn't have the votes to sustain most of his vetoes, especially on budget-busting legislation. The more he lost in a veto fight, the more discredited he became. President Ford never got credit, but he did a remarkable thing in holding firmly to his veto plan. President Ford vetoed more bills in the first six months of his presidency than Ronald Reagan vetoed in his first four years.
- MK: They were major pieces of legislation. Did you find within the departments that there was a building reluctance to listen to the White House?
- AH: No. There were some exceptions; some of the cabinet officers would be the exception. The Secretary of Defense w[a]s especially bad. This was one of the challenges that involved being certain that the Cabinet was strongly oriented toward keeping the country operating effectively, and being less worried about their own skins or egos. In that process we also had to recognize that the President, whatever his faults, should have had due process, and not be victimized by banana republic outcomes. So, preserving due process for the President became a huge challenge. Also, the Cabinet had to be smart enough and objective enough to understand that. I think, by and large, we did both, some through attrition and some by shifting the cabinet members. Kissinger, you know, became Secretary of State. He knew what was going on. Henry Kissinger was steady. Bill Simon was also. We had a mixed experience in other areas. That was the job my staff and I had to do.
- MK: How did you do it? What were the sorts of the things that you did? How often did you meet with them, talk with them?
- AH: I established a system. It wasn't new, but it had important refinements. One thing you learn about the White House staff and the Cabinet is that, for the principals in the White House, time is consumed with press demands, legislative demands for testimony, and with public appearances, which demand ever increasing amounts of time. Unfortunately, in an era of populism, they can't succeed unless they build positive public images of themselves. Most of today's populism influences the Cabinet as well as the President. Cabinet officers simply have to pay attention to their image. In practice, you pull the principals together and have a short, fast-moving meeting at the White House. In an age where we are on world time and with things happening every minute around the world and at home, sometimes lesser actions

simply don't get done in timely fashion because cabinet members can't get around to it. Sometimes they are solved from down below, in the Executive branch, but then the resulting policies lack philosophic integrity or don't coincide with the President's views. Also, since most of the non-political appointees vote as Democrats, a Republican president must deal with this problem more than a president who is a Democrat.

So what I did was, in addition to having a staff meeting every morning, I included key cabinet officers in that meeting: the Secretary of the Treasury, Defense, State, and CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] Director, as well as counselors to the President. We had a full table. Every day the staff went over the business of the country and the designated cabinet members joined us on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. A good part of those meetings was consumed with just handling the ongoing public relations crisis.

It doesn't take long to realize that the principals walked out of these meetings and into the maelstrom and by the end of the day hadn't done what the President wanted done. So I put a substructure together of the principals' key assistants, their deputies, or their hand-picked agents. My deputy in turn ran that meeting for me. He would sit in on the earlier principals' meeting, make notes on everything that was decided on, and then meet with the subgroup who, in turn, would and could spend all day getting the decisions implemented. That modified system began to work very well. I would pursue such a system today, Watergate or no Watergate crisis. It was both efficient and built better teamwork.

MK: What kinds of things would they be doing?

AH: Well, it involved many varied things. The full range of governance.

MK: Moving legislation?

AH: Certainly. Legislation itself; preparing legislation; and working the Hill to get support and building the required consensus for support for new policies; foreign affairs initiatives; and countless domestic items which involved the White House. And, finally, Watergate-related things—in the sense that the whole government was infected by Watergate. Thus, the whole Executive branch had to know what was going on, and at a minimum they had to know the demeanor they should adopt based on the facts about the crisis as we knew them. So, we had the lawyers there every morning as well. I think it worked rather well.

We had almost two years of Watergate-related governance. There were some profound mistakes made in the Watergate crisis, but not in running the government. I think the government ran rather well during that period, despite Watergate. This included one of the major foreign policy crises of my lifetime, which was the Soviet challenge during the Yom Kippur War in the Middle East. That was very close to nuclear war. In the face of a Soviet threat to intervene in Sinai, we actually alerted our nuclear forces and were required to give the Russians a counter ultimatum. In the end, they backed down

MK: And then other countries, did you notice any action on their part, sensing weakness?

AH: No, except perhaps the Soviets during Yom Kippur. The other countries, strangely enough, did not understand Watergate. They thought it was an absolute outrage for our Congress and press to be assaulting our President. Most of the world respected Nixon. Many thought he was the best U.S. foreign policy president in many years, and he probably was. He knew most of the leaders personally. This included even the Russians and the Chinese, and others, who were our alleged adversaries. Few abroad understood Watergate; it was very confusing

to them. And they frequently sent supporting messages to Nixon: “Don’t get driven out of office by this insanity,” which many viewed as irrational American political mischief. It was more than that, as you know, but this was the attitude abroad. And, in some respects, they were even more solicitous. They wanted to help the President. Certainly the major leaders of western Europe were very anxious to help.

MK: Like France in particular?

AH: France was very pro-Nixon, but so were Germany and Britain, the Italians, Benelux, as well as Spain and Turkey, and even China. They were all very avid pro-Nixon governments. They had been strong supporters of what he’d done abroad. They admired the China rapprochement and the genius that had brought that about. It can be very dangerous when domestic politics interferes in the conduct of foreign affairs. It is true that domestic politics should end at the water’s edge. In today’s Washington, it’s been lost sight of and Watergate unfortunately contributed to that. In foreign affairs, we really haven’t gotten completely back on track since Watergate. Of course, modern real-time communications, television, the internet, and the explosion of information sciences, are the main culprits in this regard.

MK: Within the White House, how did you all avoid burnout? It seems that you were in crisis mode for that whole time period.

AH: Many did burn out. By the time President Nixon resigned, most of the key staff were stressed to the limit, and had been for some time. Some were tougher. Some were more accustomed to pressure. It was a very difficult time in our history, and anybody that served through it deserves a medal of some kind, in my book. I know first hand what they and their families went through. It’s just like the soldier coming home from Vietnam. I know what he went through. He ended up a public pariah instead of a national hero, which he should have been, and would have been at any other time in our history. But these things happen and I am very thankful we had enough talent in the professional civil service, foreign service, and military that they were able—along with some superb political appointees—to do the people’s business, despite Watergate.

MK: Federal government service.

AH: There’s another lesson to be learned when you talk about organizing the White House. You can do what President Kennedy did, and that is to create what they used to call the Irish mafia. That was the term that was used. President Kennedy put his political appointees at every key junction box in the bureaucracy, so that when he wanted to do something he merely asked the bureaucracy, and was almost guaranteed to get the answer he wanted. You know what I mean? Now, that gave him a lot of discipline and a lot of ability to move quickly into controversial new policies, but it also took away his protection from mistakes, because it deprived him of historic memory. Historic memory comes mostly from your professionals and your civil servants who spend a lifetime studying the discipline in which they’re working.

Another lesson that surfaces is that presidents, newly elected presidents, can’t seem to grasp that it takes one kind of person to get you elected, and another kind of person to help you govern once you are elected. In this wonderful country of ours, you can also take care of those you owe political debts of gratitude. There are plenty of jobs that are suited for them. But if you make them Secretary of State, or Secretary of the Treasury, or Defense, watch out. You’re going to make profound mistakes; and you deprive yourself and the country of protection. Many political types have never read a history book. Winston Churchill wasn’t

- off the mark when he said to a group of students, "Read history, young man, because it's only through the knowledge of history that you are able to understand the secrets of statecraft."
- MK: What are the characteristics or qualities of the two types of people, the people who are successful in the campaign, and then the people who are successful at governing? What are some of the differences?
- AH: Every cabinet officer has a functional area for which he or she is responsible. The individual appointed to such a position should, either through experience in business or in academia or in scholarship, be a proven expert of some accomplishment. The best cabinets are those that have been manned by experts in their field either from the private sector or proven government people or proven academia people.
- MK: What about the deputy level? Can campaign people be successful there? Where do you think is an appropriate spot for campaign people? What are their talents and then what are the needs of those in governing?
- AH: You can't over-generalize on that. Their talents are as varied as the day is long. They have a sense of politics, and politics is the essence of government. So you can't be blind on that side either, but legislative affairs and public affairs, and liaisons with other states, these are all kinds of positions for those people. There are agencies that are essentially political in character. These are good jobs for people like that. Ambassadorships in some cases. There's nothing wrong with that. But if you take an individual who has never read a book on economics, has never had a job that was financially-oriented, why in heaven's name do you think he can be Secretary of the Treasury?
- MK: Do you think many presidents do that? Don't you think that one place where they put real attention is on their Cabinet? That they may bring in campaign people in inappropriate spots below that?
- AH: I won't answer your question. I'll just say, take a look at recent history. I will say this, that the first years of the Nixon presidency when I was a Deputy National Security Adviser, I think we had an extremely talented Cabinet. There were one or two soft spots but, in general, Nixon had a great nose for excellence and picking good people. That wasn't followed by others since. I don't know what to tell you. They stand out like sore thumbs if you really take a look at the appointments in recent presidencies. There are some very good people, and some not so good. But we have a nation of incredible talent, if you want to reach out and find it. But if you become paranoid and you view everything as a political litmus test then you're going to look for a politically compatible clone to run your agencies and appoint to cabinet positions. If you recognize that government is serious business and it's highly substantive, and you must have experience, then you're going to lean the other way, and you're going to achieve more, in my view. That's just one man's view. .
- MK: Do you see the chief of staff role as one where the chief is a complement of the president, has different kinds of strengths than a president, or are they generally a reflection of the president?
- AH: This, too, is a difficult question, and some of the generalizations I'll make have to be carefully conditioned. In the first place, the President decides what kind of chief of staff he wants. He generally will get what he wants, sooner or later; sometimes later after several trial runs. So that's important to remember. It's also important to remember that a chief of staff

has to understand that he's there to serve the president and therefore some of his own style is bound to be affected by that. The second point I would make, and it sounds contradictory to the first, is a chief of staff must view himself, first as a faceless intimate of the president. Faceless. He should seldom talk to the press. He should have little or no public profile. He should be viewed by the Cabinet and the counselors to the president as a transmission belt, as a facilitator of their communication with the president. Never an obstacle; never as an individual with his own agenda. President Reagan never understood this and it hurt him, despite his remarkable personal attributes.

The chief of staff should be viewed by the Cabinet as their ally in the White House. Why do I say that? First, the cabinet officer is confirmed, and he goes through a rather rigorous examination by, not only the people who selected him, but by the legislature. Counselors to the president have a different authoritative role. They should be specialists and highly skilled in the fields that they are working on with the Cabinet and other agencies.

MK: Say a President-elect was to come to you, and ask: why should he spend time on putting together a White House staff, what is it a White House staff is going to do for him both in terms of making time to go out and search but also to have a sense of what kind of people he should look for? What is an effective White House staff going to bring to a president and his presidency?

AH: There again, except for certain functional staff duties which require specialists like in public affairs, these are very political jobs. Presidents should seek very astute, political minds in those jobs. The other jobs, such as those in the financial sector and those in the management sector, or those in the foreign policy sector, should have people who are skilled in their disciplines, both through experience and accomplishment. I mean they should be accomplished achievers.

In the first place, it's very hard for a staff guy to carry his weight in a department or to have his influence felt, if he's not respected, much of which comes from accomplishment. So it's a very, very important aspect of the presidency, which must be done in that transition period between election and inauguration. I lived through it with President Nixon. Henry Kissinger was looking at me to prepare implementing procedures for his NSC staff, and I was also preparing how the President would be kept informed on international intelligence and other security-related events. How we would structure the National Security Council system? Appointees have to be on the job early enough in the transition period to prepare the President to take over, and at the same time be very carefully chosen based on their skills. That means that, when a man starts running for president—if it looks like he might be elected—he better start right then and there thinking about that Cabinet and staffing his government. Hopefully, they'll start that process while they are in the midst of the campaign. And they'll test some of these people by bringing them in, not only because of their political skills, but also some other things for which they have demonstrated competence. Again, populism is hurting candidates in this regard.

MK: It's very difficult to do it in today's environment.

AH: Very difficult. Although some have done it.

MK: Should a presidential candidate be thinking of the White House staff as well as the cabinet positions?

AH: Absolutely. Absolutely. With the same intensity. For the key positions, it is a must.

MK: The kind of person that you describe, a person who is going to regard oneself as staff, as a facilitator, a broker: where is he going to find that kind of person, most likely?

AH: Well, he can find them in a number of areas. First, you can bring professionals in. They have experience at that. For the National Security Council staff in the Nixon years, we brought a lot of people up from the departments: CIA, State, Defense, USIA [United States Information Agency]. They still do this. Some view it as a good way of sheltering the size of the White House staff. There was a general impression that Nixon had the largest National Security Council staff. I would question that. What President Nixon actually did was to use fewer employees who were carried on departmental rolls. Some other presidents employed that tactic to a much greater extent. White House staff actually were carried by the departments, so people never saw how big the White House NSC staff actually was.

MK: Did you find that detailed staff is a particular problem, because they can end up having more autonomy, because they're being paid from elsewhere, it's difficult to keep track of them? Say during the Reagan administration, the NSC had a lot of people that were off the books.

AH: That's right.

MK: It seemed like a unit that was just impossible to grab hold of.

AH: Well, I don't think we should permit this, except as an emergency exception. It isn't only for that reason. The reason is that the individual should feel the obligation to think exclusively in the president's interest, and White House statistics should be honest and accurate. So a White House worker should not be paid and promoted by the departments. I came from the Pentagon as a professional soldier to the NSC, and I ended up with a highly political job in the sense that, when Henry wasn't there, I was actually the National Security Advisor. It happened to General Colin Powell. I don't mean you shouldn't do that under certain circumstances, but I mean, in my case, it was both good and bad. It was good in that I knew where all the buttons were in the Pentagon. I, therefore, could get things done. I think I was trusted by the Pentagon when I conveyed something that the President wanted done in the military sphere; it was, "This came from Al Haig; this is what the President really wants." And that's the way it should be. As I say, there are pros and cons, and I have mixed emotions about it. If the individual is right for the job at that particular juncture in history, then I wouldn't have a prohibition against this practice, but I think as a rule the individual should be carried on the White House books.

We had problems. The then-Secretary of Defense often failed to do what the President wanted. Sometimes he did the exact opposite and he would take his orders from the Hill, from where he had come. President Nixon became frustrated with him. I would have fired him. But Nixon wasn't constituted that way and the secretary knew it. Only in the most extreme cases would President Nixon fire anybody. As his Chief of Staff, I'd have to do the firing. But that's not uncommon with presidents, in my experience. They simply don't like to do unpolitical things and some, such as Nixon and Reagan, did not like to do it as a personal preference.

MK: That's very typical.

AH: As I said, President Reagan was the same way. As governor of California, Reagan had to get his then-lawyer Bill Smith in to fire his housemaids. He simply didn't have the stomach to

do it. Maybe he thought it made him a good politician, or maybe it was simply his character. I would say the latter.

MK: Yes.

AH: But, be that as it may, that's why President Nixon wanted to be certain that every order he issued to the Secretary for the Joint Chiefs was known by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff at the same time. Otherwise, the secretary would be tempted to play his own political games.

MK: Whose idea was that?

AH: That was President Nixon's. That is why President Nixon created a small cell from the Joint Chiefs directly in the White House National Security staff. It was headed by a young admiral who was later killed in the Vietnam War. And his assistant was a Navy yeoman. Remember that so-called yeoman case? The press at the time tried to suggest that the military was spying on the President. Reality was just the other way around. It was the President trying to be sure that the military knew what he wanted, because he couldn't depend on his Secretary of Defense to accurately convey his views.

MK: Did you put people out in the various departments so that you would have people there that were eyes and ears, but also could explain your case?

AH: This is normally done by the victors during the transition following the election. What happens is, when you have a transition, you have a personnel structure, a whole organization, that goes about getting your appointees in key positions throughout the Executive branch. Now those appointees are involved in all the plum jobs and departments and agencies, as the chairmen of independent agencies, et cetera. So these are political appointees. It was done wholesale in the Kennedy years where we had the so-called Irish mafia. It was neither Irish nor mafia, but its members were placed in all the key junction boxes. I think that's carrying it too far, because as I said earlier, it strips you of the protection you get from the career professional who says, "Wait a minute, we tried that five years ago; that was a disaster; don't do that again!" Frequently, a newly-elected president doesn't know that. Also, too few of our modern presidents have read history.

MK: Did you find that OMB [Office of Management and Budget] was particularly useful in that way, too? That it had the memory?

AH: Yes. OMB is a very important source of advice and historic memory for presidents. Of course, the man that's in charge of it is a very important selection. Nixon picked George Shultz, and Cap Weinberger was his deputy. We used to call him "Cap the Knife" in those days, because he cut everything, especially defense. He cut everything out of defense. I used to have to fight him. Today's satellite cameras would have never been procured if it were up to Cap Weinberger; he redlined them. Of course, it became one of the most important technological assets we had throughout the later years of the Cold War.

MK: When you came in, what models did you think of for a chief of staff? What were the options you saw as to how the office would be organized? And how did you settle on a particular one?

AH: Kissinger and I leaned very heavily on the Dwight D. Eisenhower model. And I think Nixon leaned heavily on it, because he knew it. He had been Vice President during Eisenhower's

two terms. He liked it; he thought it was systematic. What you can't have is what President Ford installed initially, recommended by some of the assistants he brought up from Capital Hill with him. President Ford had in place for about six months what his staff called the "spokes-of-a-wheel" concept. He was astute and quickly learned it didn't work very well

MK: So you have the hierarchical model and the spokes-of-the-wheel. Is there any other model?

AH: The "spokes-of-the-wheel" is not workable. I know that. I think Don Rumsfeld will tell you that. I think Dick Cheney would tell you that. They lived with that problem. You've got to have sufficient formality in policy-making to avoid what Lyndon Johnson had, which was a product of the Kennedy system. The Kennedy system was ad hoc and characterized by an anti-organizational bias. Whether it was in foreign affairs or domestic affairs, he set up his own little task forces, the mafia, and they always fed him back what he wanted to hear. So, when he went wrong, he went very wrong. President Nixon wanted to get away from that.

The other thing that happened during that period was, if a cabinet officer came over to one of these breakfasts, or so-called weekly luncheons, the president would sit there and say, "I want to do a, b, c and d. Now boys, go back to work."

They'd all go back and tell their departments, and slant the decision in the direction towards what they thought their department wanted them to move to enhance their position in their own department or to come closer to their own personal viewpoint. So the next thing you know is when the bureaucracy sent instructions out to the field, if you're the ambassador in Timbuktu, you find that your CIA representative is getting one set of instructions, your Defense representative is getting another, and you're getting a third.

Remember, during the Johnson years, they started talking about rebuilding the country teams and enhancing the power of the ambassador? That was because the bureaucracy was so unstructured in Washington. The departments were adopting and disseminating the policy, as they each wanted it to be. Then their own department would say, "What a great cabinet officer we've got; he wins every battle." Well, you have to write down formally what the President really decides. That's why we resurrected decision memos or written recaps of what the President actually approved.

Eisenhower had a formalized staff system like that. You have to have committees that meet, interdepartmental committees, whether it's in economics, foreign policy, or on certain domestic policy issues. Also, when President Nixon finished his first four years, he concluded that the Cabinet was too big, and wasn't manageable and, therefore, he was going to create super-cabinet positions. Now, had he really asked himself what the problem actually was, it would have been that in some cases, i.e., Defense, he had the wrong cabinet guys in who had their own agendas. But he went all through that convulsion and that was part of the ultimate outcome. If you have enough formality, so there is no doubt about your decision, and you promulgate it in writing, you ingrain the policy formulation in a more formal structure, and help to keep each department from going its own way.

Unfortunately, what often happened during the Eisenhower period was that it was somewhat over-formalized. So what the various departments did was form a cabal of cabinet officers who would send up strawmen actions, but also a compromise option that had something in it for every member of the cabal. Thus, the solution that made sense had no philosophic integrity. It had no cutting edge. There was a lot of that in the Eisenhower period, so that's why President Nixon and Kissinger insisted on what I call philosophically

pure options to be prepared by the system for the President to decide on. That applies both domestically and in foreign affairs. So that's why the formality, and that's why these staff groups that have to meet regularly from the departments and the White House staff need to be sure to bring it all together. Now, who chairs these meetings is also a very critical issue.

Nixon, as you know, in the case of foreign affairs, had Kissinger chairing most of these interdepartmental groups. So it made Kissinger somewhat more powerful than the cabinet officers. I think Nixon regretted it later, because Kissinger got so powerful. Then, when President Ford arrived, his staff came in determined to cut Kissinger's power. So they took him out of the National Security Adviser position—which should have been done—but then they started undercutting Kissinger as Secretary of State. This was not a prudent thing, because Kissinger was one of the greatest assets the President had. All this means: you have to have secure heavyweights in White House staff positions. That's a hard thing to do. You've got to start early and you have to look for substantive skill, as well as political loyalty.

MK: With all of the duties and responsibilities that a chief of staff has, how do you determine what things you're going to focus on, and what things you can leave to others to do within your operation? Where did you focus?

AH: Remember, that's the task of an experienced manager. I would never put in a guy as White House chief of staff that wasn't an experienced manager. That man or woman has to have had executive experience, somewhere. I had had executive authority, commanding troops, and a lifetime of heavy administrative responsibility. You have to have that, because you develop a way of thinking in establishing priorities and it's a continuous thing. Now, in the modern day, if you're smart, you're going to be a computer guru too; you want to have a laptop to help you there. And it can help you. I have a son that's running a business largely through his computer. It's all on his laptop—his financials, his plans, who he's going to see every day, who he should see. He goes home every night and he looks at it and refocuses it for the next day. Computers are why the American industries and businesses are getting so much more productive.

MK: It just gives you more current information, but is it the thinking?

AH: But the properly-used computer never substitutes for human judgment. It only augments it.

MK: That's right, thinking and judgment.

AH: Absolutely.

MK: And, in fact, judgment is perhaps even more important, because the timeframe is so different now. Things happen so much faster.

AH: This is what's changed the nature of the White House, and the presidency, and it's why staffs have grown and why they have to grow. The facts are the explosion in information sciences has changed fundamentally the character of statecraft. You have to bear that in mind as you listen to someone who may have served in government in the Eisenhower or the Nixon years. What it's created is a new kind of political leader, too, the populist; the fellow who gets up every morning, puts his finger to the wind and says, "What's going to make me popular today?" In substantive terms, this means nothing. "What makes me popular?" "What builds my political base?" That's what's happening today in the White House. One should re-read Edmund Burke and his admonitions. In effect, what he said was: in a successful democracy, we don't pick our leaders because they cater to our whims as an electorate; we pick our

leaders because they are guided by the dictates of their conscience and their experience. If they fail, we replace them. If they succeed, it really doesn't matter, whether they are popular or not. In the long run, they are going to be popular, because they produce successful results. We should choose leaders in the White House who understand this.

MK: Do you think it's also the changed nature of campaigning, that it's so much more personal now than just party-based, as it once was?

AH: Absolutely. If you've got an unphotogenic candidate, he or she won't have a prayer.

MK: Can you think of instances where you could see, over time, the shortening of time for decisions and the increase in the number of factors that were involved in decisions?

AH: You've asked a very good question. That's the other shoe I started to describe. First, the creation of a populist leader; that's the wrong kind of a politician, although he or she may be successful in the short run. The second is the impact [that] information science has on whoever is in that White House. What this amounts to is this: suppose there's an eruption in Timbuktu tomorrow. Suddenly it's all over the television. That president the very next day has got to have an answer to the crisis, as the electorate demands it. So the normal, what I call steady professional, policy-making mechanism is bypassed by this compressed time frame. I saw it in the Johnson White House.

We had a situation in the Gulf of Tonkin where the NSA's [National Security Agency] highly sophisticated intelligence group over in Maryland picked up electronic signals from North Vietnamese vessels. What they thought were North Vietnamese torpedoes going toward our destroyer were actually the sounds of the engines of the destroyer. So NSA flashed this alleged attack notice over to the White House. President Johnson was informed that our destroyers were under attack. President Johnson picked up the phone (I was working for Robert McNamara at the time) and said, 'Bob, we can't tolerate this. This is the last straw. They're blowing up our hotels and now they're attacking our surface vessels. I want a strike on a North Vietnamese target immediately. How long will it take?' "Mr. President, about four hours," McNamara replied.

Four hours later, the order to our fleet hadn't even gotten out of the JCS [Joint Chiefs of Staff] in the Pentagon. Finally, it did get out, about six hours later. When it got to the Pacific fleet, they had to reload all of their aircraft, which were configured for air defense and to reload the aircraft for offensive ground attack. By then it was approximately eleven o'clock at night, Washington time. President Johnson kept calling the secretary. "I have already announced to the American people that I have an important announcement for them." He was scheduled to give the TV announcement at six that night. You know what he finally felt compelled to do? He actually announced the air attack before it happened, jeopardizing the lives of our pilots—who had not reached their targets. Of course, the American people were never told this.

MK: How many hours was it from stem to stern on that?

AH: It took until after midnight Washington time to get the job done.

MK: When had the crisis started?

AH: It started just before midday.

MK: Now, what about later? Give me an example from a later time period and contrast the compression of time.

AH: Now I think every recent president has had an experience like that. Take another twist on what you're saying, and that brings populism and technology together, and that would have been Somalia. Here we have a president who gets up in the morning and every network in America is showing these tragic starving little children. It was a heart-rending thing for the American people to watch every day. The scenes are shown over and over. The president has got to do something, right? Send in our troops.

The next thing we know, a U.S. helicopter is shot down and some of the servicemen get killed. Again, that's all you see on the TV. So everybody's demanding you "Get out!" So one day we rush in, and the next day we rush out, leaving the situation worse than what we found. As of this interview, it is still unsettled.

This is exactly what happened in Haiti. In Haiti, you had all these destitute and hungry refugees streaming across the Caribbean into southern Florida. Again, the people are demanding action, as the instantaneous news highlights the dilemma. "Send the Marines," recommended a former president. Our military occupied Haiti for over four years. It has cost our taxpayers over four billion dollars. The situation in Haiti today after the forces finally have been withdrawn is worse than it was when they went in. That's partially the product of the modern day's distortion of traditional ways of very carefully deciding when you should use force.

Force was always built on the ultimate estimate of whether or not it was in our national interest, and whether it furthers the interest of the American people.

Now there is the new dimension, which emphasizes human rights and the promulgation of our values. But recently, starting with President Jimmy Carter, we downgraded the national interest factor, and put human rights and democratic values at the centerpiece in deciding when we would use force. Now, if it actually worked, it might be justified. But experience confirms it hasn't worked and will not work. Every time we've done it—Haiti, Somalia, pretty soon in Bosnia and Kosovo—you're going to see that it doesn't work because the way you spread democracy and values and human rights is by example, not by force of arms. So we have become what I call ideological colonialists. Today, few politicians are saying a word about this. Mistake after mistake has been made and, believe me, we're going to pay for it. At the same time, we have allowed our armed forces to deteriorate, while we are overusing them all over the world.

MK: Do you think it's the combination, too, of the importance of television and the images that television sends, plus the end of the Cold War and what kind of role are we therefore going to have?

AH: Yes, misreading why we won the Cold War. Absolutely misreading it. We falsely claimed democratic values and our Republican military build-up won the Cold War. Suddenly, military spending and superior values caused the Soviets to collapse. Come on. I said they were collapsing in 1974 when I gave one of my first speeches to the NATO council. I said the Soviets are in an advanced state of decline. The Soviet system was rotten. They collapsed from the internal contradictions of the Marxist system. Now, that didn't mean building our defenses was not important, and that what Reagan did wasn't a catalyst. But it wasn't causal. You draw all the wrong conclusions from that. Democracy won, right? Didn't democracy beat the totalitarian communists? Not really. What beat them was their own corrupt, rotten,

poorly devised philosophic system, doomed from the day it was installed by Lenin. But when political leaders put this out to the American people and when the American press say that democratic values prevailed, what happens? We believe democracy is the only acceptable political system, therefore we must impose democracy around the world, and we are justified in using military power to do it. Well, what does that do? Any nation that is not a democracy feels threatened by the United States today fearing that we're going to go in there and impose our system on them. So they're building safeguards against that. Our new post-Cold War style is arrogant, insensitive to both those who tend to share our values and those who do not.

Now what you really could call a "victory" would be the victory of systems, the example of the success of free markets, free enterprise, and entrepreneurship. That's what helped to bring the Soviet Union to its knees. Their system deprived the people of what they needed and the western world succeeded through free enterprise. The struggle for values is still going on. And we have a lot of work to do in this country to come closer to true democracy. But when we have had the arrogant attitude that we know what's good for the world, then the rest of the world says, "Who needs this?" We are becoming an anathema throughout Europe today even among our best friends. We are no longer admired in Asia. It's all happened since the collapse of the Soviet Union. We have become insensitive and arrogant in our dealings throughout the world.

MK: In looking at the transitions, which you've seen many of in Washington and participated in, into a White House, what do you think are the four or five elements common to successful transitions?

AH: There are many things. The first is to avoid excessive partisanship. You, of course, have to be true to the ticket on which you ran. That's of course the core of our two-party system. Therefore, you have the moral as well as the philosophic goals encompassed in today's two-party system. You have to have people who know these principles to implement them. That's one thing. The second thing is to remember history and the dialectic of statecraft. There must be the historic sense to know, whether it was Georg Hegel or Immanuel Kant or even Karl Marx, and many others who had enough sense to know that opinions and attitudes on things sort of swing dialectically from one extreme to the other. If you're Immanuel Kant you say the swings will become shorter and shorter and ultimately you'll achieve the truth. Well, I'm an optimist so I believe that's ultimately the way the history of the world will evolve, but we're far from there today. So you've got to remember to have another voice available to you. Sometimes that means bipartisanship. Sometimes it means reaching out to get an iconoclast or whatever it is you need. But be sure you're hearing both sides of every argument. Good national leaders reach out to hear dissenting viewpoints and weigh them carefully.

MK: In a White House is that difficult to do—

AH: —of course. One way is to attract people to work in the Executive branch who are not sycophants and who will speak up when they disagree.

MK: —when you have such a fast pace?

AH: Absolutely.

MK: How do you build in looking backward and measuring your decisions and whether something needs to be dialed up in some way?

AH: Well, honest people, objective, professional people, in my view, are better at assessing whether or not things are going right or wrong and need adjustment, than are zealots. A zealot will insist he's right, notwithstanding that the whole place is collapsing. So, again, you've got to have experience. Why do we think that government is the most important task of humankind for Americans today? It's also our country; it's the world, because we're a world leader at this historic juncture.

You must have experience. Now prudent experience sometimes is the product of failure. You have to be aware of that, too. Leaders who are worth their salt have had a few mega-failures along the way and they probably are better persons for it. So there can't be too rigid a litmus test that some personnel specialist looks at a record and says, "This person is a leader, and this is not." You have to look at the whole person. That's a very difficult thing to do in the stress and strain of forming the government. There are real time pressures. But if you have the right people doing it, then you're going to probably do better than if you bring in some political hack or some ideological extremist, whether they be conservative or liberal. You've got to have a structural balance in your administration while giving preference to philosophical conviction.

MK: Did you have a group of people that were outside that you talked to from time to time?

AH: Yes.

MK: What was it composed of?

AH: Well, because of my set of problems during Watergate, I had legal people, constitutional lawyers, experienced political lawyers, criminal lawyers, all kinds. That included men like Maurice Liebman, from Chicago. He was a lovely, wonderful man although he was a Democrat at heart. I also brought in a professor from Duke University and a professor from Chicago; a judge from Chicago. They would come to Washington and I would seek their advice. One of their problems was that events were moving so fast, and there were so many wheels within wheels, and the public perception was so far from the reality, because of the newspapers' distortions. Earlier, President Nixon used a group of elder statesmen. He called them the wise men. They were people like Tom Dewey, the former head of the CIA, and former highly successful diplomats. He'd bring these people in on a foreign policy issue—that's why a Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board was established permanently to try to get that kind of varied and experienced advice. And you have to reach out for people like [Microsoft's] Bill Gates or [AOL's] Steve Case, very young people. Today they are a whole new dimension of our society in the information age. You need to listen to them as well.

MK: When you look at how you spend your time, how you divide up your time, what percentage of it was dealing with members of Congress, what percentage cabinet people?

AH: Well, your day is incredible as a White House chief of staff. I usually was in by seven and I never went home before midnight, frequently seven days a week. I did that for two years. I did the same for four years with Henry Kissinger in the National Security Council staff.

MK: Same schedule?

AH: Sometimes it was worse because Henry used to generate his ideas at night. He would call me at one, two o'clock in the morning, three o'clock in the morning. Frequently I had just gotten home. He seldom slept more than three or four hours a night. I didn't sleep more

than three or four hours a night. And I did that for seven years. That's the kind of job it is and that's why you have to change people. People do get burnout. You asked that question. I wouldn't have a White House chief of staff for more than four years, and I would look at them very carefully after two, depending on the workload and the circumstances.

MK: Because you build up a whole group of enemies. I guess part of the job is giving bad news to people.

AH: Yes. You do that. I don't find that as a big problem. The big challenge is making associates feel you are serving their purposes and their concerns and their substantive worries and they can get through. The worst outcome is if they believe you are a roadblock and have your own agenda.

MK: How did your day divide up, just giving an idea what percentages of your time, how they were spent?

AH: I used to think it was Watergate-peculiar, but today I think it's modern times-peculiar. The first order of every day is to get as comprehensive a picture of what is being said in the newspapers and on TV and radio as you can conceivably get, because you're going to spend a good part of your day coping with the news. No matter what else is urgent. I'd start reading that in the car and dictating actions to my office en route.

MK: Would you read *Post*, *Times*, *Wall Street Journal*?

AH: The *Wall Street Journal*. The *London Economist*, always. That's the magazine. It's still one of the best publications. And the second-best newspaper is the *London Financial Times*. It's strange they're both British. Both of them have some American management. The *Wall Street Journal* is more mixed than it used to be, but it's good. The *New York Times* is good at news, and weak at editorials. They are too frequently wrong in their editorial views. The *Washington Post*, of course. I don't agree with it all the time, but I think editorially it is a little more objective than the *New York Times*.

MK: So did everybody come in—was there a meeting before the senior staff meeting?

AH: For that? No. You've got to have a flow of official paper that brings that to you. We had a White House press summary—and they still have—which I read religiously. And I read the editorial pages, but they were mostly covered in that summary. That's a pretty good overview. And, of course, you've got the intelligence reports that you've got to read. That's the first order of business every day. As a result of that, I knew pretty well the agenda, because the substantive stuff I knew when I went home; so I would blend the two together and we'd put a quick agenda together for the early morning staff meeting. I brought the staff and Cabinet in early, eight o'clock as I recall. That's a burden for some staff, some cabinet officers. We'd sit there and go through that agenda. We enjoyed a free flow in our discussions.

MK: How many people would be in the room?

AH: Maybe twenty. We used to meet in the Roosevelt Room, which earlier was called the Fish Room. That whole table would be filled and there would be wall-sitters as well. Then, as I said earlier, I had my assistant there making almost verbatim notes so he could conduct his own meetings with the staff deputies to be sure there was prompt follow-through and implementation.

MK: When you were thinking that you would be spending your day on what kinds of publicity things had been generated on television, in the newspapers and what-not, did you find you could shape some of the stories by day's end? That you could figure out what's going to be on the evening news, and you could get into that story and perhaps shape it or present an alternate one?

AH: I think in normal times, yes, you can. And it's very important that you do. You try not to let them crystallize untruths. You do have to be sure your side of the story gets out, because otherwise you're a victim of the whims of the most outrageous. In today's media jungle, the more outrageous the spokesman the more media attention he gets. That's what has happened in our legislature.

When I started in Washington, the Congress was disciplined. There was a committee and a chairman and, if you had convinced the chairman that this was the right thing to do, you frequently had an approval. Today, it's almost one man/one vote. And usually it is the most outrageous one who walks out there on the steps, and gets the most press, by making some outrageous ill-founded statement, simply because it is newsworthy. Reinstalling legislative discipline is one of the major tasks of the modern state here in Washington. Legislative leaders are trying to do it. Most of these experienced legislators know this. I suspect populism has contributed to a weakening of the caliber of some members of our legislature. So there has to be legislative discipline. Just as there has to be discipline in the White House staff.

[End of Interview]