

Modernizing the Army After Vietnam

Interviewer

So let's—we decided just now in an off-camera conversation that we would begin right after your last tour of [the] Vietnam [War], but I asked you what reflections you have 30 years hence, and you mentioned, which you had already said earlier, the difference between Iraq and Vietnam being the fact that we had a draft army during Vietnam and we have a professional volunteer army in the era of Iraq.

Interviewer

How about with respect to the nature of the fight? I mean, the counterinsurgency doctrine, the so-called Petraeus Doctrine versus what we learned in Vietnam? Did we learn the lessons of Vietnam appropriately to be able to apply them to places like Iraq? Are they applicable in a place like Iraq?

Don Snider

Well, in my take, we didn't learn that much in Vietnam. There's a lot of revisionist history now that makes the case that at the end of the war, General Abrams, the CORDS project, some of that was going very well.

Interviewer

This is the Sorley thesis?

Don Snider

The Sorley thesis, basically. But my recollection of that period was that, at my level, as a major in the Army coming out of Vietnam and coming back here to teach in the Sosh Department, which was a hotbed of discussion then. Over in the History Department was Sy Bunting writing his book *The Lion heads* about the leadership of the 9th Infantry Division down in the Delta, the head count syndrome. In other words, there was an intense debate going among officers who had just been in combat and were just coming back here and teaching classes in kind of a graduate school milieu. My take of that whole period is that it was not settled in our mind that we knew how to prosecute the war well and that we had learned anything that was going to be preserved.

Don Snider

In fact, later, when the Army started dropping what it had learned about counterinsurgency, and there had been some things, my generation was not outspoken that that was the wrong thing to do.

Interviewer

Let me back up and make sure that the view is clear on this. So your notion of Sorley's thesis is seriously flawed, first off?

Don Snider

I'm not saying seriously flawed. We didn't learn—we were not as close to winning by my perception as Sorley makes it sound now that we were. We simply weren't.

Interviewer

The second point is that whatever we learned about counterinsurgency in Vietnam, the notion became one of abandoning counterinsurgency as a doctrinal approach at all, right, in favor of returning to our Cold War Soviet model?

Don Snider

Mission.

Interviewer

The mission, right, and that in so doing we abandoned the lessons of Vietnam to our peril?

Don Snider

Yes. And the other point I wanted to make is that my generation of officers did not think this was wrong. In other words, when you're that close to the issue, and you've just come out of a war, the country is still deeply torn over the war, the professionals [0:03:00] in the Army are deeply torn over the war, and you have two major tasks given to you in the next two or three years to do as the Army. One—create an all-volunteer force, the draft is over, we're not going to have that anymore. We're going to have a revolution in training. We now cannot bring in people in the Army and dictate to them how to be a soldier. We now have to motivate them. We have to lead them by positive leadership as opposed to the old, rather draconian, dictatorial transaction leadership—if you don't get A, then you get B.

Don Snider

So there was this whole human resource immense change going on in the Army, and then there was the return to the Cold War and the Central Front in Europe, and the Army was decimated. It had no NCO Corps. I mean, most people don't understand that the NCO Corps of the Army was gone by the end of the Vietnam War.

Interviewer

Devastated by the demands the Vietnam War put on it, right?

Don Snider

Well, by the repeated tours, and they had gotten out. I spoke to you earlier about the "Shake 'N Bake" lieutenants and how devastating they were to unit effectiveness—excuse me—"Shake 'N Bake" NCOs, squad leaders.

Don Snider

So we had to rebuild an army and my generation of officers, we came here to teach, then we went to Leavenworth, and then we went back to the Army. We were out as battalion executive officers, battalion S-3s, and we were full bore, intently occupied on rebuilding the human side of the Army, creating a new training system with national training centers, with standards for training, and modernizing the Army. Remember, at that point, we started getting the Pershing missile, the Bradley, the Abrams tank, there were five—the Apache helicopter—five major programs, as the Army kept calling it, the big five of modernization. That was a decade's worth of work in rebuilding the Army.

Interviewer

So we're talking here, '75 to '85?

Don Snider

â€™75 to â€™85. I went to Europe in â€™80. After I had a battalion command state-side and did War College [Industrial College of the Armed Forces], I went to Europe â€™80 to â€™84. When I got to Europe in â€™80 and â€™84 we were very visiblyâ€™”this was the Reagan build-up, big dollarsâ€™”we were rebuilding tank motor pools, tank training ranges throughout Europe. Hundreds of millions of dollars in the Reagan build-up because Europe had been starved for the whole Vietnam War. And then we started bringing in the Pershings, the Bradleys, the Abrams [tanks].

Interviewer

So the MX coming this time too or no?

Don Snider

The MX?

Interviewer

MX missile?

Don Snider

No.

Interviewer

Later?

Don Snider

No, MX was still a debate at that point. We were negotiating with the Soviets on re-entry vehicles and things like that, but MX was, at that point, a bargaining chip. It was, I donâ€™t think at that point the MX was a real missile.

Interviewer

Come back for a moment just to describe just how deprived and in need the Army was in the late 1970sâ€™”I mean, like immediately post-Vietnam? Youâ€™re describing that as the abandonment of the COIN doctrine essentially that had been established during the Vietnam War, but it also sort of sapped the spirit of the Army it seems, right?

Don Snider

Yeah, we had tremendous problems in the Army everywhere in addition to what was going on in Vietnam, because we had pulled the NCO Corps out, we had created a bunch of new divisions to send, we had altered training in the United States, drug abuse was up very significantlyâ€™”of course, that was an era of significantly more marijuana and minor drug abuse in America anywayâ€™”racial incidents were up very high in Europeâ€™”it was not uncommon for there to be, for duty officers to go in their unit areas armed with pistols at night.

So the state of the Army when we

Don Snider

The difficulty was, at that time in California, alcohol abuse was rampant in high school—and we didn't know it. Or the recruiting system didn't filter it. So I came in to take over a battalion at Fort Ord, and the drinking problems were so bad, the people that were coming in to the initial volunteer army were so poorly-screened, that the Army wisely gave discharge authority all the way down the chain of command to a battalion commander. I could determine which soldier left the Army by signing a piece of paper. That normally is an authority that's reserved for a central board even beyond your installation. In the first six months I was in battalion command, I discharged, out of a 780-man unit, 120 people.

Interviewer

For alcoholism?

Don Snider

For alcoholism.

Interviewer

Wow.

Don Snider

I mean, blind stone drunk by ten o'clock at night, coming back into the barracks, and tearing up the barracks.

Don Snider

So the Army's history with rebuilding the volunteer army after losing the draft—I shouldn't use the word "lose." The draft was an anachronistic structure, it was an inequitable structure. I'm not at all sorry that it's gone—other than, as I mentioned in the last recording, we lost a lot as a society from volunteerism and civic republican philosophy, etc.

But that said, from the Army's perspective, it took us a number of

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Don Snider

And the Army then—by then, the Army was solely focused. I mean, Vietnam by the early '80s was hardly even an afterthought. We were solely focused, because of the modernization program, the type of equipment—we were focused on Europe. The height of the Cold War, Fulda Gap, large training exercises, the big reforger exercises grinding every year. And I was privileged to watch what happened as the Soviets began to understand that maybe the mass that they had and were planning to use in second and third echelon attacks, maybe that mass was going to be insufficient for them to penetrate NATO's forward defense.

Interviewer

Alright. Let me back you up just for a moment before we move into that. Your teaching in the Poli-Sci Department here was—

Don Snider

Yes.

Interviewer

â€”â€™76, â€™77?

Don Snider

No, â€™71 to â€™74.

Interviewer

So you werenâ€™t around here for the cheating scandal of â€™76?

Don Snider

No, I missed the whole thing.

Interviewer

And then when you arrive in Europe you were in Germany?

Don Snider

You learn a lot of institutional history doing these things, donâ€™t you?

Interviewer

Yes, I do. I do. But itâ€™s helpful.

Don Snider

Oh, absolutely. No, I went from teaching here to Leavenworth.

Don Snider

Right.

Don Snider

To battalion command.

Interviewer

In California, at Fort Ord.

Don Snider

In California.

Interviewer

Yeah.

Don Snider

Back to Washington, to the War College [Industrial College of the Armed Forces] in D.C. I went to the National [Industrial College of the Armed Forces], and then to Europe.

Interviewer

Then to Europe, to Germany.

Don Snider

To Germany, yeah.

Interviewer

So does the doctrine change when you arrive in Germany? Is the Reagan administration at work now?

Don Snider

Army doctrineâ€”letâ€™s back up. Army doctrine is not monolithic. There are whole different pieces of Army doctrine. The Army doctrine of how you fight conventional wars in Europe never changed. Even throughout Vietnam, we still had a doctrine of how to fight a war in Europe. You did it with a theater army, you did it with two corps, you did it with two divisions in each corps, you had a forward defense, you broughtâ€”

Interviewer

So change was the modernization?

Don Snider

The change was the modernization. Two pieces of it. The human side, in building the volunteer army. And the equipment side, which was modernizing the facilities and the training and the units. And so those two things came together on the ground.

Interviewer

Maybe both of them were instrumental in getting the Soviets finally toâ€”

Don Snider

Absolutely bothâ€”although we know later, from histories of the Soviets, that the military part, the military-technical part, was more important to them. If you understood their doctrines of mass, and the echeloned way they were going to attack, what they understood was that we only had a capability of attriting and stopping the first two or three echelons. And by that time, if our reinforcements did not arrive from the States, if they hadnâ€™t been mobilized and arrived in timeâ€”12 divisions that were coming from the United Statesâ€”if that didnâ€™t happen, they would have penetrated and would occupy the heart of Europe.

Don Snider

When we started deploying, particularly the Pershing missile, and specifically, because the Pershing missile has such a small circular error probable, we demonstratedâ€”and we also had at that point, ground launch cruise missiles, we were introducing bomber launch cruise missiles, and all of those cruise missiles and the Pershings could use tactical nuclear weapons as well as conventional.

Interviewer

This was the whole Reagan build-up?

Don Snider

This was the whole Reagan build-up, and at the level of fighting under a nuclear umbrella, what it was beginning to show the Soviets was, "We have mass, they have better technology, their technology may trump our mass." And so, they attempted to do some modernizations on their own, and that's when the stresses on their economy basically began to rupture.

Interviewer

But both arguments then are true about why the Soviet Union collapses. It implodes, but it implodes because of the pressures on the economy brought by

Don Snider

That's what my take clearly is, and that comes from my later work at the NSC, particularly when Secretary Baker was working with Shevardnadze. I mean, you can read Baker's memoirs. It's quite clear that they understood that technologically the game was up. When we upped the ante, and they turned to their economy and said, "You've got to up the ante one more time," there was no wherewithal to do it. And so my take is that, yes, simultaneously multiple pressures.

Interviewer

Now you said you were Director of War Planning? Is that what you said?

Don Snider

In Europe.

Don Snider

Chief of War Plans.

Interviewer

Chief of War Planning. Now help me with this stupid question, but the doctrine exists, and we know where we're stationed, we know how we're going to respond. What does war planning do, the Chief of War Planning do, during the period that you were there?

Don Snider

The principal function of war planning for American forces in Europe was the reinforcement flow coming from the United States. What we had in Europe was certainly not enough to withstand an assault, and so the problem was, could you get the two plus ten divisions, two which had their equipment stored in Europe and they would fly over on planes, and the other ten that would come by sea. Could you make that mobilization and movement occur sufficiently rapidly that they could be in the fight before the first four divisions and the rest of the Germans, the Danes, the Dutch, etc., had lost the front?

Don Snider

So I was the Chief of War Plans for the American theater, but I not only did the American war plans, we did all of the American NATO war plans. So I spent as much time planning with NATO units as I did our own internal plan. Somehow we were going to do that. And frankly, it would have been a crapshoot if weâ€™d had to do it.

Interviewer

Yeah.

Don Snider

Yeah, and we all knew that. Thatâ€™s why we practicedâ€”

Interviewer

Not necessarily have won.

Don Snider

Thatâ€™s why we practiced the reforger exercises every year to show ourselves, and to show the Warsaw Pact as they were watching, â€œOh my goodness, these folks can really reinforce, they just put a new brigade at Bremerhaven, and now theyâ€™re going to leave it up here so this one doesnâ€™t have to come back over?â€

So we did several things during that period to convince our adversaries thatâ€”and to convince the Europeans, because remember, the Europeans wanted the fight to be fought forward.

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Interviewer

And you arrived there in â€™81, is that right?

Don Snider

â€™81.

Interviewer

â€™81. Were you worried that in a period of weakness, by virtue of not having modernized our defense there, that we were in danger of an assault from the Soviet Union?

Don Snider

Oh, we took the threat of an assault from the Soviet Union absolutely seriously. I mean, there were non-combatant evacuation plans that we rehearsed, where the civilians would be taken out of theater, convoyed back across to France to ports, they would go back as the troops were coming off. Oh, this was not lackadaisical. This was for real.

Interviewer

What I mean, was the fact that we have not modernized, did that put us at a weakness that could have encouraged a Soviet invasion because of their relative superiority?

Don Snider

It could have, but I don't think we thought about it in those terms. We had always known that we fight with the Soviets, it's mass versus quality versus quantity. The Soviets, whatever you study about the Soviets, you know that the equipment they used to fight wars with, whether it was the Second World War or any time thereafter, were always going to be mass-produced, very simple technically, and very robust but they're going to have plenty of them. And they fight a very stylized, echeloned, very tightly-controlled, little discretion down to the bottom level and so we knew what kind of forces we were facing, and we knew what kind of equipment they had.

Don Snider

And yes, we were banking on our technological capability to overcome that. But we had to have a modicum of mass. Technology couldn't do all of it. So were we concerned? Of course we were concerned. I don't think that anybody served in the Army in the late '70s or early '80s that was not seriously concerned about the Central Front of Europe.

Interviewer

Now how did you see, once we started the modernization, that this was having an impact on the Soviet Union?

Don Snider

I can't say that I saw it then. I saw a lot more of it later, after the Soviet Union imploded and we started being able to read what happened. No, I can't say that I saw it then. And I did a lot of traveling, including a good bit for planning conferences in Berlin behind the curtain, and I was privy to all the intelligence, white and black, all the allies. We were all concerned.

Don Snider

We knew that the Pershing was because of some public statements that Marshal Ogarkov and some of their other theorists had made about ground-launched and air-launched cruise missiles with tactical weapons and the Pershing missile we knew that they were considering those as game changers. Beyond that, I can't say that we had any real sense that we were over the top and that this was a sure thing.

Interviewer

It was only in retrospect, reading the memoirs of people like Baker and his top aides, Shevardnadze and stuff

Don Snider

Absolutely.

Washington Politics and Personalities

Interviewer

So after '84, you come back to Washington next, is it?

Don Snider

Back to Washington.

Interviewer

And you served in the National Security Council office?

Don Snider

Well, I came back, first two years back in the Pentagon working with General Vuono, General Mahaffey.

Interviewer

General Vuono, who was then the Chief of Staff?

Don Snider

Who was then the Chief of Staff. General Mahaffey was what's called the Operations Deputy, the G-3 of the Army. And I was still working as a war planner, but now working liaison between our army's top leaders and the Joint Staff, preparing them for tank sessions every day that's mainly because I had been in that milieu for the four years before and knew all the war plans. But it was a good job, and I enjoyed it.

Don Snider

And then I was called over to the White House. General Vuono called one day and said, "Go to the White House and have an interview with General Powell. He's coming back, I can't tell you what it's all about." And I had no idea. So that's when we went in to replace [Oliver] North and Poindexter and the National Security Council crew that had been dismissed because of the Iran-Contra issue.

Interviewer

Can you describe for the viewers just roughly the Iran-Contra affair and what damage it did to [the National] Security Council?

Don Snider

Yeah, the Iran-Contra affair was a case of a National Security Council staff getting involved in policy formation beyond where they should, is the heart of it for the people who want the history, they should go back and read the Scowcroft Commission Report, because there was a commission, Brent Scowcroft chaired it, it's a very clear report. And what it says in plain language is the National Security Council is to coordinate policymaking for the Office of the President, that's all. It has absolutely nothing to do with the implementation of policy. Policy in our Republican form of government is implemented by the cabinet offices, and so policy is made at the center, formation goes out, execution occurs outside. Well, Ollie North was flying around the world arranging for funds for the Contras in Latin America.

Interviewer

Ollie North was a

Don Snider

A Marine lieutenant colonel on active duty serving in the National Security Council staff.

Interviewer

You knew him well?

Don Snider

No, I knew himâ€”

Interviewer

But you werenâ€™t there before heâ€™

Don Snider

In subsequent years I met him, but I canâ€™t say that I know him well. But as happens in a Washington policy community, where personalities are as important as positionâ€”I mean, most people think that we have structures and institutions to make policy. Nahâ€”people make policy, and people have to mesh in terms of personalities.

Don Snider

North became very close to the Director of the CIA, [William] Casey. [William] Casey found a young, aggressive Marine Officer that he trusted. So when the Agency wanted to do some things, North was brought into them and was able to go beyond policy formation to implementationâ€”in this case, through the Agency. And it ill-served the President, and it ill-served the Republic.

Don Snider

Now youâ€™ve got to understand what was going on at this time. Reagan and the Congress were fighting like cats and dogs, probably as much as any timeâ€”well, I canâ€™t say that, because weâ€™ve got a great history of Pennsylvania Avenue fighting from one end to the other.

Don Snider

But to show you how bad it was, the Speaker of the House was running an independent foreign policy in Latin America, and announcing that he was doing that. He was supporting regimes in Latin America that the White House was not supporting and did not want to support, and the White House was supporting other regimes. And the crux of this was in Honduras, mostly.

Don Snider

But when you have that kind of power contest going on in Washington, then people work extra hard to make sure their side wins. Iâ€™m not trying to defend Ollie North. I think if you readâ€”or those that he was working forâ€”he didnâ€™t work independently. If you read theâ€”

Interviewer

Probably McFarlane and Poindexter?

Don Snider

Yeah, of course. He had cover. He had top cover, he had direction.

But all that said, we were brought in after that had occurred, and when the White House

did not have credibility in Washington

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Interviewer

A West Point alum, by the way.

Don Snider

Another West Point alum, former Ambassador to NATO, President of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a man of immense stature in Washington.

Don Snider

And they helped right the ship inside the White House, under the Chief of Staff's office, and they brought in Carlucci and Powell and said, "You're running the National Security Council." And Powell turned to the Chief of Staff of the Army and said, "I need three new guys." And I got a phone call that said, "Go over and be interviewed." I was a fellow at Brookings at that time working on Goldwater-Nichols legislation, writing a long series of essays on it, and it was a wonderful opportunity.

Interviewer

So you went to work with Colin Powell?

Don Snider

Yeah, he was the Deputy, Carlucci was the National Security Advisor. I was working in conventional arms control and in what were called Joint Chiefs of Staff Affairs. Any time the Joint Chiefs met with the President, I was the note taker. Any issues that the Joint Chiefs sent over, those were issues that I worked.

Don Snider

It was fascinating watching President Reagan interact with the Chiefs. A lot of the stories that we all heard about the jar of jellybeans and the collegiality, etc., it was all true. Reagan was very relational, but he also knew what he wanted, and he also listened very carefully and very quickly, and didn't show his hands while meetings were going on. Later, you would get a policy decision as to what the decision was, but seldom was it taken while you were in the meeting.

Interviewer

At this point, he was sometimes worried that he was slipping into dementia. Did you see anything?

Don Snider

Absolutely nothing. Nothing.

Interviewer

In fact, that was one of the arguments of why he didn't know about Iran-Contra but you wouldn't buy that?

Don Snider

It's all conspiratorial. Absolutely nothing. I mean, we were going through this. In the six months that I was in the NSC under Carlucci and Powell, as I recall, we had five arms control summits, a Canadian summit, and a Mexican summit. Now, you don't get a President ready for that many major issues going on if anybody is having any kind of mental problems. No, I just didn't see anything that came close to that.

Interviewer

Of course this is the time I think in some respects, these are the times of stories that were encouraged by the far Right worried about his growing relationship with Gorbachev

Don Snider

Yeah.

Interviewer

and wanting to undermine, worried that he had lost his Cold War kind of quality.

Don Snider

Well, let's face it, you're I learned so much about how our civil-military relations work and how presidential affairs work. The president is never and the president's agenda is never safe. I mean, you may think that you have political control because your party controls so many instruments of look, that's not how our political system works. The fringes are always fighting, and the fringes are always fighting against whoever is in power.

Don Snider

The other thing I learned is that all of the easy decisions in presidential governance, or in our governance process all the easy decisions are taken way before they get to the White House. I mean, cabinet officers make difficult decisions, but the only ones that really come to the White House are intractable problems. There are not problems that have two good outcomes, pick which good outcome you want. These are very, very difficult problems with high-risk downsides either way you go.

Interviewer

It's like the Supreme Court in that sense.

Don Snider

Absolutely.

Interviewer

Lower courts will make the easier

Don Snider

Of course.

Interviewer

5-4 decisions happen up here.

Don Snider

Yeah, the really tough decisions. So I've had great respect for everybody that I saw working at that level. Let me give you one other anecdote that I think is very educational. When I first went over there, one of the first things Powell asked me, all of us, the three or four of us that went into work in that, he said, "If you folks cannot separate personality from policy, tell me now. Can you deal in a pressure-filled environment where policy and personality have to be separated and you have to deal with policy and ignore personality? Can you do that? Because if you can't, I don't want you on this staff. People are going to be shooting at you, they're going to be calling you names, etc., etc. If you can't get beyond the ad hominem, and get to the substance, and stay with the substance, then I don't want you on this staff." I listened to that, and I thought, "Sure, I can do that."

Don Snider

Let me tell you one of the first times I chaired an NSC meeting I had a representative from State INR Intelligence, Treasury, JCS, Navy, and Army. It was conventional arms control. And the intelligence community and OSD. There were still very hard-liners from the original group of Reaganites. There were a few moderates from the second administration. There were deep intelligence professionals. And we got into a room, and the minute we started discussing the first subject, it was apparent to me that all these people had discussed this subject for six years, they had all made up their mind, and they were not going to change their agency position, period.

Don Snider

And within an hour, it was a cussing contest, and I thought to myself, "Now I understand what Powell is talking about." This is an issue that is so important to each one of these agencies, that at this level of decision-making, it is in gridlock. And I said, "Thank you very much, I've learned what I need to learn," and now I hand the issue to Colin Powell and he calls the deputies in. And at that level, if he could not get some movement he says, "Thank you much," and hands it to Frank Carlucci and the secretaries meet—and that is an NSC meeting by any other name, except the National Security Advisor is chairing it, as opposed to the President.

Don Snider

And that's how you make policy. Somebody finally has to give, and the President's agenda has to be served, but it's about people make policy. It was a fascinating place to work.

Interviewer

I bet. Give me a quick character study of Colin Powell.

Don Snider

Well, very smart. Let me—and, in addition, even more savvy than smart. I don't mean smart in terms of intellectual capacity. Of course, he had intellectual capacity—but he had immense, intuitive savvy about issues and policies and relative priorities, and where people would, or could, compromise.

Don Snider

One of the other lessons I got from him was, "What's the currency in Washington?" And I would think in terms of power. And he would say, "There's only one currency in Washington, it's consensus." You either have consensus, and therefore you have policy you can implement, or you have nothing but a declaratory policy that nobody can do anything with. That's what we had to deal with in arms control negotiations a lot. You had to separate what was a declaratory position that everybody knew wasn't going to change, from those little bitty areas that you could find that we can work on this, because we can create new consensus and move the process forward.

Don Snider

So he had the ability—and I, really, I call it intuition. I think it is much more intuition. It's a learned ability. Remember, he had been a White House Fellow, he had worked in OMB, he had worked as Weinberger's aide for two years. I mean, he had a lot of top-level experience. He knew Washington, he knew the players, and he knew how to play hardball.

Interviewer

How about Carlucci?

Don Snider

Same way, more diplomatic. He came out of the diplomatic corps, had been an ambassador earlier, and then had just gone into private business, and was called out of private business to come back into the government. And then later went over and was the Secretary of Defense for, I think, about three years—and a very good one.

Don Snider

But both men—and he had also been in OMB. That's how, why he and Powell came into NSC together. They had worked at OMB together earlier. So again, personalities count, teams count, like-mindedness counts, the ability to create comity where there is none—well, not everybody can do that. Powell can do it.

Negotiating Arms Control with the Soviets

Don Snider

Yeah, thank you.

Interviewer

Now during this time you were involved in arms control negotiations?

Don Snider

Yes.

Interviewer

So Colin worked closely with, I'm guessing, with Paul Nitze then, is that right?

Don Snider

He was nuclear almost totally and I was conventional. So I did not work with Nitze. I met him several times, but we had one person who worked chemical-biological. I worked

conventional, and then we had a series of folks working nuclear.

Interviewer

So what did it mean that you were handling conventional negotiations?

Don Snider

At the end of the Cold War, the Soviets were willing to negotiate and expand what had originally been just a negotiation on strategic arms. Then it went to tactical nuclear weapons, and then it went to the chemical. And, finally, at the very end of the Cold War, they were willing to sit down and negotiate on conventional arms—where we would negotiate such things as the positioning of helicopters and helicopter formations.

In other words, what we were trying to do was negotiate changes in military formations and placements—what we called confidence-building measures—which would create in the minds of

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Don Snider

We had to negotiate these things. We weren't going to pull our attack helicopter brigades back because they were the best tank-killing asset we had. We weren't going to pull those brigades back unless they took their Hind helicopters and moved them back also. And so you had to negotiate on the ground in Europe practically, each one of these and with NATO allies, because this was not just U.S.-Soviet. Remember, this was NATO/Warsaw Pact, and so that's the essence. Helicopters is probably a good example.

Interviewer

So would you, like they did in the nuclear talks, sit down with your counterpart from the Soviet Union and your NATO counterparts and work on trying to establish these agreements?

Don Snider

Yes. When you have arms control negotiations, it is a series of scheduled meetings, and you agree in advance at the top level what's the agenda, what is negotiable and what's not. Tank formations were not negotiable, helicopters were, so let's do helicopters first. Ammunition dumps were not negotiable. We tried to get them to move ammunition around because nobody sits with all their ammunition uploaded on their tanks. So these were all kinds of things that we had figured out and they had figured out. How do you convince the other side that you are lowering the threshold of going to war?

Don Snider

And what that really means is you're creating more time that you would have to recreate capability. That gives them confidence you're not going to go to war in a moment's notice. And so you have an annual schedule of negotiations, you agree what the topics are, we meet with our allies and say, "Let's talk about A, B and C," they do the same, and you have a meeting. Three months later, you go through the process again and have another meeting. And each time, you go back up to the secretariat level, they approve the progress, a cable goes out, coordinated across all the countries. This isâ€”

Interviewer

How do you assure compliance with that?

Don Snider

It was part of the negotiations. You do not negotiate a movement of a unit unless you negotiate an ability to do on-site inspections. I mean, this was Reagan's great mantra "Trust but verify."

Don Snider

So in all of these negotiations "strategic nuclear, intermediate nuclear (the INF agreement), tactical nuclear, chemical-biological, and conventions" we had five sets of negotiations going on all the time during the last few years of the Cold War.

Interviewer

Did you, like Baker and Shevardnadze, did you get a personal relationship? This is not the real time

Interviewer

The other clocks at West Point really work.

Don Snider

Okay.

Interviewer

[Laughter] Did you have a counterpart that you developed a relationship with?

Don Snider

No, I didn't, because they kept changing, and we were in coalition negotiations. More at the upper levels, they did. And later, when I was over and I left the NSC and went to Admiral Crowe's office as an Executive Assistant to Howard Graves. Howard was Baker's Military Negotiator, a three-star, and Howard had a counterpart. But much below two- or three-star level, there really weren't counterparts, there were staffs.

Interviewer

So you're in the National Security Office for four years. Through the first year of the

Don Snider

Two years.

Interviewer

Well, through the first year of the [George H.W.] Bush administration you said, so you're bridging?

Don Snider

I bridged, one year of Reagan.

Interviewer

â€™88-â€™89?

Don Snider

One year of [George H.W.] Bush.

Interviewer

I see, â€™88-â€™89?

Don Snider

â€™87-â€™89.

Interviewer

Oh, so okay, alright.

Don Snider

Yeah.

Interviewer

And then where do you go?

Don Snider

Back over to the Pentagon for one more year to be an Executive Assistant to Howard Graves, the three-star, who was the Senior Negotiator.

Interviewer

So Crowe is the Joint Chiefs Chair?

Don Snider

This is when Crowe was the Chairman. Actually, Colin Powell came in to be the Chairman the last few months but only had been there a few months from the time I left.

Interviewer

And how did your work change during that period then?

Don Snider

Not a lot. Basically, Howard Graves and I knew each other very well. We had taught together in the Sosh Department hereâ€”again, back to Sosh roots at West Point. He had followed what Iâ€™d been doing, I had followed what he had been doing. Our paths crossed occasionally, but when he was promoted to three-star, and Crowe selected him to be the Chairman Special Assistantâ€”which meant he traveled with the Secretary of State and was the Military Negotiator with the Secretary of Stateâ€”he called me and said, â€œI understand youâ€™re going to be leaving the NSC sometime soon, can we negotiate

something and you come over and be my Executive Assistant and help me through the first few months of negotiations?â€ Because Howard had not done strategic arms negotiations before.

Don Snider

So I was going to be replaced on the NSC anyway, Scowcroft was picking a new team, we all knew we had some number of months before we were gone. So that was part of the personnel negotiations, and I went over to Croweâ€™s office and kind of made a deal with General Graves that whenever he got through the first presidential summit that he was very happy with, he thought heâ€™d learned enough, I was going to retire and go to University of Maryland and finish a doctorate because I knew what I wanted to do with the rest of my life. Iâ€™d then done 28 years and only had two more years to serve.

The Goldwater-Nichols Act
Interviewer

Before we get to that, letâ€™s take an aside and go to the subject of Goldwater-Nichols. Tell me what Goldwater-Nichols is and then how you helped implement it and what its successes were and its failures?

Don Snider

Well, this is a big topic. Goldwater-Nichols was an act by the Congress in 1986 which fundamentally changed the way the services interact with each other and with the joint command structure around the world, and with the civilians in OSD. It was the last major reform act of everything inside the Department of Defense.

The sad thing about Goldwater-Nichols is, that act was unable to force any reorganization in the Congress. So it was an executive reorganization act, but one of immense success. Changed the power of the military departments and the services, reduced it, gave much more influence to the combatant commanders around the worldâ€CENTCOM, SOUTHCOM, etc. So it enhanced the standing of those commanders, reduced the power of the services, and changed significantly some organizational structuresâ€creating new commands that forced the services to cooperate. [0

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Don Snider

Remember what finally tipped the hat towards the legislation? The invasion of Grenada in the Reagan administration. We invaded the little island and the military forces, honestly, during the invasion, could not talk to each other, because each service had built their own communications and they couldnâ€™t talk. Army couldnâ€™t talk to Navy, Navy couldnâ€™t talk to Air Force, etc. We had soldiers landed on the island of Grenada that had ground communications that couldnâ€™t talk to the shipborne communications, so they would go to a local payphone and call commercially a number. I mean, thereâ€™s any number of after action reports that come out of [the invasion of] Grenada to show that this is just amazing.

Don Snider

That was the second big failure. The earlier big failure that had really percolated this was the failure of the rescue attempt of the hostages in Tehran. Desert One is the way that the books are written. Thatâ€™s theâ€

Interviewer

During the Carter administration?

Don Snider

Yeah, during the Carter administration. So you had major examples of military failure all due to failure to integrate, which meant that the services, the military departments, had too much power and they were all still going their own direction, a lot of redundancy, building their own things.

Don Snider

Big arguments during the—the best book on this whole subject is Jim Locher’s book, *Victory On The Potomac*, an exquisitely detailed book, since he was Sam Nunn’s Chief of Staff that wrote the legislation and shepherded it for about four years before it finally became law.

Don Snider

But it had an immense amount of change on how the Department of Defense works internally and how it works globally. My role while I was at DNSC, they were just implementing the Act, I went in—the Act was—and one of the first things we needed to do was executive order to implement a joint transportation command, so I drafted that. It’s a high-level White House document that basically tells, in the context of the legislation, each of the cabinet offices how to proceed in implementing it.

Don Snider

But what I could see, as someone who was a professional within the military but also a student of civil-military relations, this really has the potential to create some immense new capabilities within the military and maybe even a new military profession.

And later on, about 10 years later, when we were working up here on this book on profession, by then enough research had been done, we could gather it together and write a compelling chapter in our book saying, in fact, Goldwater-Nichols did create a new military profession—strategic military logistics, done with new expert knowledge, with new expert practice. But that’s where it stayed. It didn’t get any further. It never manifested itself in a full-blown

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Interviewer

Why is that?

Don Snider

Service parochialism was still strong enough not to go that far. So Goldwater-Nichols got us a long way. Let me give you another major example of Goldwater-Nichols. It established very binding criteria on the last stages of military education—professional military education. Who had to attend, who could not be promoted if they had not attended, and even dictated a number of subjects that had to be taught at the war colleges and the staff colleges—all subjects having to do with the integration of capabilities.

And to this day, those are still in place, they’re even more binding than they were then.

It is now even required that the war colleges exchange faculty. You may be a faculty member at the

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Don Snider

I don't think anybody would disagree that Goldwater-Nichols was a good thing. People may say parts of it were in excess, people may say parts of it didn't do what it was supposed to do. By and large, it gets a passing grade.

Military Reform and Intellectual Life
Interviewer

So you're at the University of Maryland. That's where you go after your retirement from the Pentagon. And what is your scholarly work there?

Don Snider

Well, I was in a program for a doctorate of public policy, and I majored in National Security Policy because I had just lived through the end of the Cold War, and it had been a part of much of that. So for my dissertation, I did a comparison of a political [0:46:00] analysis of the causal factors between the creation of the Cold War and those that were still extent at the end of the Cold War. And I was testing a couple of political theories about what are the most influential factors in the formation of national security policy.

Don Snider

It was not a deeply theoretical work. It was a much more "because I was in a policy school, not a deep discipline of either political science or social science, etc., and I wanted to study how policy was formed, what the outcomes were, and how that compared over different periods of time.

Don Snider

Not surprisingly, one of the things that I was assured of after doing that project "both at the beginning of the Cold War, the Marshall Plan, all the things that came out of the Second War, as we set our forces in the early '50s for what we were going to fight the Cold War with, is "personalities are how we make policy. It is not processes, it is not structures, it is not models. Real human beings sit down and discuss real problems and they arrive at "so it makes a real difference who is in the policy position.

Interviewer

And that's a good segue to work you've done here at West Point on professional officership. Can you describe that or talk about that for a bit?

Don Snider

Yeah. While I was here at the Academy, I had two major thrusts in research and in policy, in addition to what I was teaching. So let's set the teaching and mentoring of cadets and mentoring of junior faculty "that was a different world. But in the intellectual world, I worked on two things that started out as separate projects but very quickly came together.

Don Snider

The first project was the renewal of officership at West Point, is the way I will describe it. Now officership is a term that comes from the writings of Sam Huntington, one of the first books on American civil-military relations, where he describes officership as a profession. Now, we just finished a book on Huntington two years ago, my last project here, and a lot of Huntington, Huntington wrote in "1957" what I'm describing to you now, and a lot of it is since"

Interviewer

The Soldier and the State?

Don Snider

The Soldier and the State"and a lot of it has since been disabused and changed, but a lot of it's still valid also. But at that time, he wrote that American officers comprise a military profession, and he made the argument that it needed to be a profession and that it needed to be politically neutral.

The reason Huntington wrote the book"let me back up a little bit"Huntington, a brilliant man, wrote the book

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Don Snider

Huntington's argument was that, "Look, one of your cultural concerns is you don't trust the military and you have a distrust of a large standing army. My solution to that problem is let's make them a profession, and if they are a profession, they will willingly depoliticize themselves and serve whatever of you civilians after you're done fighting it out is responsible for running the U.S. government. This will be a politically neutral professional body."

Don Snider

Now, he wrote only about the Officer Corps, because at that time, only an Officer Corps was considered professional. That idea is incorrect today. The Non-Commissioned Officer Corps, as we have rebuilt it and educated it, is remarkably professional, and so are civilian corps. So officership originally referred to the portion of the Army that was a profession. Now, why was the Academy and why were we interested in renewing officership? "

Interviewer

What year are we talking about here when you're doing this?

Don Snider

I came back to the Academy in '95. General Christman was the Superintendent when this project really got going because he wanted to do a review of everything at the Academy and the cadet leader development system in particular"not what was being taught in the classrooms, not the Dean's work, but his work as the Superintendent over both what the Dean was doing academically and what the Commandant was doing in terms of military training and instruction. Is all of that building the right person for the future now that the Cold War is over?

Up until that time, the model that we had used here at the Academy, it was identity-based, as most military development systems are, but it was a model of only two identities. Cadets

were taught to think of themselves as a warfighterâ€”notice the wordsâ€”and a leader of character. Thatâ€™s it. Thatâ€™s all you do. Youâ€™re a warfighter, a leader of character. Remember MacArthurâ€™s speech â€”Fight and win the nationâ€™s wars, the domestic politics issues are not of your concern, etc.â€”a very Cold War model of development.

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Don Snider

And General Christman wisely asked a committee he put together which I was a part of, and he and I had also taught in Sosh years before and knew each other very well, â€œIs that the right model?â€

So about five or six of us worked for six or seven months on a project to determine what identity should we be using to develop cadets for the post-Cold War period. We recommended to him that that list of identities be expanded to four, and we recommended to him as followsâ€”â€œWarfighterâ€ is not the right word. That is an identity and a mindset that all you do is fight conventional wars and victory is what you achieve, etc., and remember by â€™95, we were starting to have some series of involvements in humanitarian operations and in peacekeeping operations, and so

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Interviewer

What were some of the others?

Don Snider

Yeah, this is an interesting debate. Guardian. The difficulty of guardian is that it has the defensive connotation, and youâ€™ve got to have a military thatâ€™s comfortable initiating offensive action using initiative, etc.

Interviewer

But you also could see it as a protectiveâ€”

Don Snider

It had a lot of things that we liked, but not all of them. So anyway, warfighter needed to change to a broader conception of warrior, and it really meant a warrior for the republic. Basically, you would do whatever the society wanted you to do in terms of missionsâ€”to get over the debate of do we do the big wars or the little warsâ€”and that was a pretty raging debate while we were studying this.

Warrior. We left leader of character exactly was it was, and we [0

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Don Snider

And then the last one, again, from the research that I was doing outside, I brought into the group and said, â€œLook, we need to renew the study of professions, and we need to renew the concept of professions.â€ The Army had not studied itself as a profession since 1970. At the end of the Vietnam War General Westmoreland had the Army War College do a study on Army professionalism in 1970. When I came to the Academy in 1995, 25 years

later, there had been no study of the Army as profession anywhere, and it took about five years before we published our second book, which was the end of that study. So there was a 30-year hiatus in which the Army had not thought of itself as a profession. It was a trained and ready army, we had all sorts of slogans, but we had lost an understanding of the sociology of professions and what makes the Army a profession. Expert knowledge”

Interviewer

Describe again the”or do exactly what you”re about to do.

Don Snider

Expert knowledge and expert practice, trust relationships with people, self-abnegation, a self-policing ethic”all the things that it takes to make an institution behave as, and to be perceived by the client, as behaving as a profession. Remember this phrase, “The Army is not a profession because it says it is. The Army is only a profession when its client judges it to be a profession and treats it as a profession.” The same way you treat every person you deal with who claims to be a profession. You”ll determine if you”re a professional. Did the cure work? If it didn”t work, the guy”s a charlatan, not a professional. This comes out of the sociology of professions.

So anyway, member of a profession was the fourth identity. And that led us right back where we had started”Huntington”s concept of, well, the last time the Army thought about being profession, Soldier and State, 1960s, the last time the Army thought about it officership was the profession.

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Don Snider

So that was one of the thrusts of the external project and writing two books, doing two big studies, updating the Army on the new theories of professions”primarily from Andrew Abbott, University of Chicago ”and the internal work here redesigning the cadet development system.

So I worked on an internal committee for about six years and went out and got private funding, as a scholar does, to do research projects with external scholars, mostly from the inter-university seminar, and worked on publishing two books on Army as profession. And the two works were connected, clearly connected, under the idea of, originally, officership as profession, and now

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Interviewer

What does it mean for the cadet development curriculum that this study was done? What changed? What nuance was there that wasn”t there before?

Don Snider

Most of the nuance that”s been implemented to the Academy, and a lot of it has, most of the nuance that has been implemented, the new developmental applications that have been implemented of this model, all center around the four identities. Helping cadets understand that you may not pick an identity to develop around and drop the other three, that you have to be all four, and that these four are going to vary in time over your career.

One example of how this is taught in the Simon Center, and maybe you've heard this example before, but none of this was going on before we redesigned the development system, but how to

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Don Snider

One of them is what we call the cemetery walk, and I'm not sure if you're familiar with it or not, but the staff there went down to the West Point cemetery, picked out graves of graduates, marked them, made sure we had obituaries of them, researched the obituaries, making sure that every death in battle was of questionable worth. Hamburger Hill in Korea, what did that accomplish? It was just a meat grinder, didn't move the line one bit, maybe a little bit. And so cadets in their Yearling Year when they were studying the concept of what does it mean to be a servant would go down to the cemetery, they would be assigned the grave, they would have to pick that obituary up, go back, think about it overnight and write an essay, "Did this soldier die in vain?" No right answers. Reflective learning, creating mental meaning, moral meaning, trying to help them understand, and then letting them debate among each other as to people who said yes and people who said no. And so that's one example of what this expanded identity model, one way it enabled the Academy to get further down the road.

Don Snider

Let me give you one other example. One of the difficulties in development of cadets at West Point is there's a long anonymity period. You get plenty of visibility in Plebe Year. Everybody knows you're a Plebe, and everybody is paying attention to you. When you're Firstie, you're the big men/big women on the campus. What happens in Cow and Yearling Year? Back by '95, back then, it was even much more anonymous than it is now.

Don Snider

But there was a very important decision that was made at the end of Yearling summer when they come back for their junior class for Cow Year. They had to make a decision that if you go to the first class on Monday morning of your Cow Year, you just accepted a five-year appointment in the active Army. If you resign from the Academy from your last two years, you're going to go out in the Army and serve as a sergeant for five years. Now, in the first two years, you can leave the Academy with no commitment. So if you're trying to change leadership and culture and environment, what do you do when you have a milestone which is absolutely unbenchmarked?

Don Snider

Well our committee found this, sorted this out. We went to the Commandant and said, "We need to create a meaningful milestone for these students when they go through this point so that the Academy is recognizing the importance of the decision they have made, and that they're recognizing the importance of a decision that's made." They didn't just wake up in the morning and decide, "I'll go to class this day." "Oh my God, I just committed five years of my life to this." We really would like you to think about this over the summer before you come back.

Don Snider

That's now what's known as "I'm having a senior moment" anyway, it's

a big ceremony. It occurs in August and the AOG gives the students a commissioning bar, their second lieutenant bar, which they put in their locker and stays there for the next two years, until they can pin it on on the day they get commissioned right after graduation. Accession ceremony, no, thatâ€™s not the right word. Gee, Iâ€™m sorry that I canâ€™t remember the word, but General Abizaid was the Commandant then, and he was a Brigadier. We sat down and talked to him and said, â€œYou need to create within the Corps of Cadets, just like Ring Night and the Ring Ball, and all of these great milestones that cadets go through in four years.â€ In the middle of this two-year period of anonymity, here is a very importantâ€”and what you are doing then, is they are saying, â€œI am willing to become a member of the profession.â€ And that was a way of symbolizing that identity deep down inside the Academyâ€™s developmental process.

Don Snider

So thatâ€™s only two examples that Iâ€™ve given you. There are many, many othersâ€”where once the concept of officership was developed, published by the Superintendent and passed out through the Deans and Commandant, some very innovative things happened. In our own department, in the Sosh Department, we teach a course on American politics, 40 lessons. When I came back to the Academy in 1995, in those 40 lessons there was zero instruction on civil-military relationsâ€”something absolutely central to being an officer. Witness the recent McChrystal issue, I mean, absolutely central.

When I came back in 1995, Soldier and the State had not been taught here for 10 years. We have a decadeâ€™s worth of generals out in the Army today who never read Soldier and the State, never read Huntington because the Academy took its eyes off profession, the Army took its eyes off profession. This was a void in our intellectual thought.

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Don Snider

So when the new cadet development system came out, the Dean turned to each Department Head and said, â€œCome back and brief me in a few months and tell me what youâ€™re doing in the corps courses to enhance the cadetâ€™s understanding of what it means to be an officer with these four identities.â€

Don Snider

Well, we took a quick look at the American Politics course and out of the 40 lessons within the first two semesters, six lessons were devoted to civil-military relations, including a case study, and it still is perfectly in the context of American politics. Itâ€™s what we should have been teaching instead of some other things in American Politics that officers are not that concerned aboutâ€”political participation, etc., theyâ€™re not all going to be political scientists. This is a core course. But theyâ€™re all going to be officers, and a core course should develop them on how to understand your being as an officer, not so much what youâ€™re going to do. This is aboutâ€”

Interviewer

Identity.

Don Snider

â€”personal conception. And so thereâ€™s an example of how this developmental model

was implemented in the lives of cadets right in the classroom.

Interviewer

Have you—do you think you’ve seen in the commissioned lieutenants going forward from that, change in the identity?

Don Snider

Yeah, amazingly, yes, particularly with—

Interviewer

How do you measure that identity?

Don Snider

Well, right now only anecdotally. There are some measures now that are being implemented in the assessment programs for the cadets. Particularly in member of profession, there are some new assessments for leader of character where human spirituality was entered in that model and the responsibility of the Academy to facilitate a moral search for the individual as the individual is learning what’s right.

Don Snider

In other words, the Army basically takes character development and says, “Hands off.” You develop your own character. We develop you with the competencies of a soldier. Slowly that’s beginning to change because we’re finding that doesn’t work in this war. Fortunately, by the development of this new model for cadet development, we were able to change that here at the Academy about a decade earlier, and the Academy accepted that it has a responsibility to facilitate a moral search.

Don Snider

We’ve been doing that, just not talking about it. Why do we teach philosophy in the core curriculum? It’s for exactly that reason. Well then, let’s help the cadets understand that’s why they’re studying philosophy. You’re not studying philosophy simply because it’s philosophy. You’re studying philosophy because this is what it takes to be a person that is able to reason with good, as a good logician, and make moral judgments based upon a range of moral considerations, some of which have philosophical standing, some of which don’t. So another example of where a standard academic course could now be presented to the cadets with much more meaning than was there before.

Strategic Leadership and the Problem of Policy Implementation

Interviewer

Turn now to “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” which you and I talked about during—we read the essay you wrote and thought it very—I guess it was a talk you gave, and I hope this won’t be disconcerting. I wasn’t sure at the end whether you were for abandoning the policy or that you’re into it, but nevertheless you made very interesting points about it. Could you go over your attitude about this and put it in some kind of context of the Army as you’ve seen it in the past 20, 30 years?

Don Snider

Yeah, let me—I wrote this essay because I’m a policy scientist. I want to know what policy is, how it gets made, and I study profession, so I want to know if policy is going to make the Army behave more like a profession. Remember, the Army has multiple characters in its institutionality. By design of Congress, the Army is a bureaucracy and it’s controlled by the Congress as a bureaucracy, right under their thumb. You get so many man days, so many dollars, etc., etc., etc. That hasn’t changed from the time of the colonial militias and the colonial legislatures.

Don Snider

There’s some parts of the Army that are very business-oriented, and we want them to be very efficient, so we adopt some business practices and management practices from business in a lot of our finance and our accounting and our bill-paying and administration. So part of the character of the Army, if you go out in some of the units of the Army, they’re very business-like.

Don Snider

The challenge is that you want all of this army to be a profession. You want the culture of profession to predominate over the culture of bureaucracy and over the culture of business. So to get that to happen, right understanding of the Army as profession would say, only colonels and generals can make that happen across the whole Army, because only colonels and generals have the authority to control the major management structures of the Army—the promotion system, the assignment system, the educational system, the force development, the material development—all that’s run by colonels and generals. So like any big organization, the people at the top have most control over the culture.

So I was, at the time I wrote the essay on “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,” at the Army War College, and there were just teaching people what it means to be a strategic leader—a colonel and a general. You’ve now got to change your focus from down here at the operational level and direct leadership, maybe through a

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Don Snider

And what I was trying to do in that essay was point out to them, here is a major policy decision coming down the road that the Army may or may not have a lot to say about but you’re going to have to implement it. How are you going to implement it? And what I really was trying to help them understand is what I had learned back at the NSC under Colin Powell. If I can’t separate my personal feelings about personality or about policy from the policy itself, how can I possibly be a good leader in implementing the policy?

So what I was trying to do in that essay was tell them, through a number of different ideas, this is going to be a very difficult policy for you to implement because (a) you all have strong feelings about this and, for some of you, you’re going to be absolutely convinced [1

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Don Snider

Second thing I wanted them to understand was that—I’m not sure if this was the second or the, I had three or four in the paper and I didn’t look at it before we came back in here—but let me go on. Second or third was that, for many of you, this is the first

time youâ€™re going to be implementing a policy where you are going to feel like you are in a human minority. And Iâ€™m touching on some sensitive areas here because Iâ€™m primarily speaking to senior leaders in the Army, which are primarily white and male.

Don Snider

I mean, the Army works very hard to be diverse. Weâ€™ve got more women, weâ€™ve got more ethnic diversity, weâ€™ve got immensely more religious diversity, etc., but fundamentally, when you get to the top levels of the Army, itâ€™s still pretty white and itâ€™s still pretty male. And what I was saying in this paper is, you may have enjoyed for your whole career majority status. Now youâ€™re going to find yourself implementing a policy in which you are in a minority. How are you going to deal with that? Now I was trying to do the same thing with theâ€”

Interviewer

Now theyâ€™re in the minority by virtue of their attitude towards the policy?

Don Snider

Yes, yes. In other words, generationally within the Army. When this policy goes to be implemented, captains and below donâ€™t have any problem with the policy whatsoever.

Interviewer

But those at the senior level having grown up with â€œDonâ€™t Ask, Donâ€™t Tell,â€ or something before that which wasâ€”

Don Snider

Or something before that.

Interviewer

â€”willâ€”donâ€™t want change?

Don Snider

They donâ€™t want change, no. And they would prefer not to have to have the change.

Don Snider

Yeah, but this goes to the heart of the profession.

Don Snider

Absolutely, thatâ€™s one of the third points I talked to them is, are you going to deal with this as a profession, where you have to adapt to the demands of the client to provide the services the client wants? This is another thing that strategic leaders in the Army have to deal with. They want to preserve the Army. Whatâ€™s that mean? What it normally means is Iâ€™m going to preserve the Army the way I understood the Army to be, that I was raised in and served in up to this point.

What we have to do when they come to the [Army] War College to become strategic leaders, youâ€™ve got to turn them around and say, â€œNow look, out here, five years in the future, 10 years in the future, thatâ€™s what youâ€™re leading toward. Somebody else is now taking care of whatâ€™s back here. Thatâ€™s what lieutenant colonels do. You

don't do that anymore, look out here. And that is professional behavior. That's what we want of the colonels and generals in the Army, a long-time horizon, decisions

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Don Snider

So what I was trying to do in that essay, without revealing my own position, because my position is not that important, I'm developing people to be strategic leaders. What I think is not important. How I can help them to think about their problem and their solution is what's really important. So I intentionally clouded, to the extent that I could, my position in the paper because I don't have a strong position on it. I really don't. I mean, if I learned anything from 13 years of teaching cadets here at West Point, anybody below Major in the Army, no, not anybody, but vast majority of people below Major in the Army, think this is a no-brainer.

So this is to implement this right, ethically, in an unbiased fashion, [1

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Interviewer

And just so that anybody viewing this understands, we're talking about the abandonment of the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy for something that involves complete openness. Is that right?

Don Snider

Well, we don't know, and I didn't tip my hand to that in the paper because I don't know what the policy is going to say. And thank you for asking, because that's a very good point. What we were talking about, what I was addressing, is that "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," as we understand it now, will no longer exist in the same form. I didn't specify what form it would be.

In discussions with the students, I implied to them that I thought that it would turn out very much like the fraternization policy. And if it does turn out like the fraternization policy, I think that is a

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Interviewer

Well and that becomes consistent with professionalism is what you're saying? That policy is consistent with a professional attitude?

Don Snider

Absolutely, it's perfectly consistent. The military is not, this is another immense point of civil-military relations that's very difficult. The people want the Army to be an effective Army, by and large. When the fringe elements of our political system attempt to use the military for social progress on their agenda, that's perfectly legitimate politically, but what we all have to keep our eyes on is when does it become deleterious to what the military is really about, being an effective military force?

Don Snider

And I pointed out in that paper that one of my laments was that I don't think the strategic leaders of the Army in the past have been sufficiently forthcoming on that issue at all. So now what do we wind up with? A political situation where political action moves ahead of policy analysis, and the President and Secretary have to say, "Wait a minute, we've got to take a year and study this because we don't know what the implications are going to be." I view that as an immense failure on the part of military leaders. They should have been doing that research all the time but

Interviewer

So they don't become a social science experiment?

Don Snider

Yeah, I mean, they ought to at least be able to stand up and say, "Let me tell you what the effect of this is going to be."

Interviewer

Did they in 1948 with the integration of the Armed Forces or did they

Don Snider

I don't think they did there either, although we did have combat experience of units that went in segregated and became integrated while they were in combat. There was some experience both in the Second War and in Korea [the Korean War]. Not "we didn't integrate everybody, but there were experiences of units that were integrated due to the necessities of what was going on in the battlefield, and I do know we had some data out of that, but that's not a field that I've spent a lot of time looking at.

Interviewer

Historically, the Army has been a leader in not only social but organizational experimentation and led to society just sort of being that's before Brown, right?

Don Snider

Yeah.

Interviewer

And we were discussing in an interview earlier today, the company man ethic comes out of the Army and goes into business, in the '50s, that's what business learns from the Army in terms of business and organizational structure. So the

Don Snider

Well, and the idea of physical health, the idea of preventive medicine. I mean, the military has been way ahead of preventive medicine in terms of the rest of the society for decades, because we can't afford to have endemic things on the battlefield.

Don Snider

So, yes, and I don't think anybody in the military "certainly I don't begrudge the military fulfilling that role when it can, but we can't lose sight of what the purpose of the exercise is. The purpose of the exercise for a republic to have an army is for it to be

effective in battle. So letâ€™s get that right, and make sure weâ€™ve got that right, and then we can talk about all the other things that we can do.

Don Snider

But that takes willingness on both sides of the civil-military divide to be open to substantive research and to allow it to be done. Now, there are a lot of times that the military simply was given very clear signalsâ€”â€œNo, we donâ€™t want you studying that subject.â€ So Iâ€™m not saying that this is all a failure on the side of the military. This is a national failure.

Interviewer

Well, thank you very much.

Don Snider

Okay.

Interviewer

That was a realâ€”

9/11 Witnessed From West Point

Interviewer

So weâ€™ve asked everyone, and now Iâ€™d like to ask this of you, where you were on 9/11, how you learned of the events of that day and what your reactions were?

Don Snider

Well, I was teaching here at West Point, and I was teaching that day, and I learned of 9/11 as I was in the faculty lounge getting a cup of coffee where we have a television, and CNN had just flashed the fact that we were under attack and showed the first video of the first plane going into the tower.

And I was obviously shocked, perplexed and I had a very, very sinking feeling in my stomach, an intuitive, gut-wrenching feel

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Don Snider

And so I walked into the class of Yearlings in American Politics and, of course, they had been in other classes and going from class to class, and one or two had heard rumors in the hallway, but nobody knew a thing, so it was a marvelous opportunity for me to say, â€œForget what we were going to study today, let me tell you what I know, and letâ€™s prepare ourselves mentally for what this might mean.â€

Don Snider

And I basically spent the class talking to the cadets about what it means when a nation goes to war, how they should think about this, the range of things that it could mean, what could be following on. I assured them about the redundancy we had in command and control, and about likely whereâ€”since I had worked at the NSC, and I knew how all these systems workedâ€”likely who was in secure places and who wasnâ€™t, and who was

airborne and who wasn't. I couldn't give them all the details, but I could help them understand that, "Look, we know how to respond to this, we will respond to this, and this is not a time for those of us who know so very little." I think I probably was "what I tried to do in my mind was calibrate their expectations, and really what I was trying to do was limit their expectations and try and get them from going way off the reservation.

Don Snider

But all the time I was talking to them, in my own gut, I just had this sinking feeling that, "Wow." I mean, I could connect the dots, at least from the Cole incident to this. I'd been in the White House when we dealt with the Lockerbie, when we dealt with Gaddafi, I mean, "when we were dealing in Lebanon, I had seen Middle Eastern terrorist-type activities, and I really in my heart of hearts felt it's now they've now come this far. The Cole was one thing, that was a sovereign capital ship in a safe port, now they're in the United States.

Interviewer

So this was a game changer for you?

Don Snider

Yeah, this was an absolute game changer, and I tried to help the people understand that "the young folks understand that, "Yes, there is tragedy, yes, there is immense pathos in what's going on," but you've already made a choice. You're a cadet at West Point, you're going to be an officer in the Army. The Army is going to be involved in protecting the Republic. None of us know how. The best thing you do is just go prepare yourself. Take very seriously everything you're doing. We don't know what you'll use when, where, or how. We have a sound developmental process "avail yourself of it to the fullest.

Don Snider

A very sobering reaction from them. Now they all had tons of questions, but you had to keep bounding the expectations to say, "No, no, no, we don't know that, we don't know any of this." What we do know is, you've got so many days to graduation and so much time to preparation, and we do know, I can assure you, the Army is going to be involved in this war for a long, long time.

Don Snider

I even relayed to them my own experience which we recorded earlier in Okinawa "that I had to get to the War in Vietnam because it was going to be over before I got there. I relayed that to them and said, "I can assure you there's going to be plenty of war here for everybody."

Interviewer

You're, in my line notes, you were tearing up a little bit at this, am I right? I mean "

Don Snider

Yeah.

Interviewer

“you’re describing what you did for the cadets. What about yourself? I mean, you’re a patriotic American.

Don Snider

Well, I felt immensely abused. I mean, this is an attack on our homeland. It doesn’t get more personal. I mean, I didn’t have any relatives in the buildings, but they’re innocents. I know the law of land warfare. I know how obscene it is to do this in war, that this has no ethical standing in anybody’s understanding, at least in Western civilization, of anybody’s understanding of war. You don’t just attack innocents.

Don Snider

Now have we been guilty of that in the past? Dresden bombings, of course—but haven’t we advanced? Haven’t we learned anything? So I felt immensely put upon, is I guess the right way to put it. And yet, my role was professor—to teach, to help calibrate, to get them to make meaning of what was going on.

Interviewer

In a sense you had a professional response?

Don Snider

Yeah, I had to, yeah.

Interviewer

Thank you.