

Patriot: Alexander M. Haig, Jr.

by Harvey Sicherman

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Alexander M. Haig, Jr., was unique among Cold Warriors. His resume spanned the spectrum of that fifty-year conflict, from the heat of battle in Korea and Vietnam to the lukewarm Nixon détente to the deep freeze of Reagan's first term. A decorated combat soldier, Haig also worked in harm's way on Robert McNamara's staff, as Henry Kissinger's deputy, and as Reagan's Secretary of State. He commanded NATO, history's most successful alliance, at a crucial time in the late seventies. Last, and surely not least, Haig's patriotism was tested in two constitutional crises – Nixon's resignation and Reagan's near assassination.

Only an outsized and dominating personality could have enjoyed such a complex career. Predictably, Haig left controversy in his wake. And in death, as in life, the General has gotten mixed reviews. But too many obituaries have mistaken fiction for fact, caricature for reality, and score-settling for history. Hopefully, this personal memoir will clarify a few matters. General Haig's patriotism deserves no less.



Beginnings

When I first met Alexander Haig in spring 1979, he was already a famous figure. Retiring from NATO's Supreme Command in 1979, he had returned to his native Philadelphia to mull over his future. The Foreign Policy Research Institute's founder, Robert Strausz-Hupé, and its Director, William R. Kintner, were both his friends; they offered him a Senior Fellow post at FPRI (July-December 1979). University of Pennsylvania's President Martin Myerson added a Lectureship.

FPRI was small, then as now. Still, a few accommodations were needed for the new Senior Fellow. Haig had escaped an attempted assassination by the Baader-Meinhof gang the year before so management thought it prudent to station a rent-a-cop at the door. Two men were assigned fulltime to assist the General. One, Sherwood (Woody) Goldberg, had served with Haig in Vietnam. A professional soldier by training and a Philadelphia resident, Woody had just completed a law degree at Temple University. The General requested his services to manage the transition from NATO Commander to private life. Woody's legendary skill at arranging Haig's schedule—while doing nearly everything else simultaneously—had not yet flowered but he was known to be punctual. I was not. So my job was “policy” advice, definition to be determined.

At our first meeting, General Haig swept into the room, filling it immediately with a big smile and a booming hail thee well. He was impeccably dressed, ramrod straight and exuded authority. If he minded the fact that he had gone overnight from a staff of fifty-two to just Woody and myself, he did not show it.

Unhappily, there was unpleasant business ahead. The university post carried a lecture requirement, but Penn's Political Science Department insisted on a faculty-senior student seminar instead and it was my duty to tell General Haig. Although he had a Masters in International Relations from Georgetown, I did not know whether he could—or would want to—handle an almost certainly hostile audience.

Haig scowled briefly when, in a nervous voice, I delivered the message. Then he smiled. “I suppose it's all right,” he said, “but I reserve the right to tell them to. . . .” The rest of this sentence offered a highly imaginative sexual suggestion. I replied that these professors were my former teachers and nothing would please me more. He laughed and then gave me the jocular wink that I learned later meant he saw something kindred in you.

General Haig proved a great success at Penn, his seminar standing room only. He charmed and disarmed the opposition without a single snarl (to my disappointment!). And, to my surprise, he managed to decipher the academic jargon tossed his way, and sometimes to reply in kind.

My main project with him was the drafting and editing of a short book called *The Three Per Cent Solution and the Future of NATO*. As Supreme

Commander, he had played an important role in securing allied commitment to increase defense budgets at a real three per cent per annum for five years, offsetting a substantial Soviet build-up. Contrary to the received wisdom, it was a case of the Europeans pressing the United States to do more rather than the reverse. Haig had also been part of the NATO decision to deploy new theater nuclear weapons prodding a negotiation with the Soviets to stabilize the nuclear balance in Europe. That summer, my colleague Adam Garfinkle and I had also helped in the preparation of his testimony to the Senate on the still-born SALT II Treaty. On all of these subjects, he was already more expert than the experts.

In 1979, Haig wanted to run for president. He certainly had the experience and the fame but he lacked a political base. Then he was stricken with circulatory trouble necessitating a bypass operation, at that time fairly risky. In early 1980 he took on a major corporate post, President of United Technologies, his first work in the private sector since his youthful stints as newspaper delivery boy and floor walker at Wanamaker's department store.

After the Reagan victory in November 1980, I performed one additional service for him, writing up in quick time a policy paper on the Middle East which he presented to a kind of auditioning committee. Haig seemed eager to help Reagan on international issues but was well placed at United Technologies and well aware of the hazards associated with another public post. As we know now, Richard Nixon strongly advocated Haig's selection as Secretary of State, a post also desired by, among others, Bill Casey who went to the CIA and Caspar Weinberger, who became Secretary of Defense. Reagan had no strong preference. As a result of this maneuvering, Haig was nominated very late in the transition.

Mr. Sicherman Goes to Washington

The General asked me to meet him on December 31, 1980. On that mild winter day, I had my first exposure to the Department of State from the inside. Haig and the transition team occupied nondescript ground floor offices calculated to be comfortable for no more than a week. To my surprise, I was greeted with exaggerated deference by all – except, of course, Haig's secretary, the late (and great) Muriel Hartley whose stare could freeze the bumptious in their tracks. The reason for the deference soon became clear: I was on the schedule to see him at 12:50 p.m. and the next appointment was nearly one hour later. Someone who would spend forty minutes with the Secretary of State designate was clearly a very important person! Apparently, my new found admirers did not know that the General ate lunch at his desk around 1 p.m. for about a half-hour. I would, therefore, be getting the ten minutes I deserved and soon emerged as a "Special Assistant." The exact duties of this post, the General observed, would become clear but he wanted me to do policy analysis and writing.

As it turned out, I did plenty of that as the Secretary's private one-man think tank on those occasions when Haig sought a view independent of the bureaucracy or his own predilections. Another assignment was to draft the "night note" from the Secretary to the President reviewing State's major actions of interest at day's end.

My role as an analyst might have been short-lived given State's skill in exposing and neutralizing political appointees unused to its culture. But Policy Planning, where the speechwriters were usually posted, was slow to staff up. The Secretary had to speak and I was a free hand. So unexpectedly, I soon found myself Haig's speechwriter.

At State, those charged with this task are usually called "wordsmiths," as in "blacksmiths" – mechanics of a sort, not policymakers and not even analysts. It proved a perfect cover for my other role, as no one thought me very consequential. But it also almost proved my undoing.

In spring 1981 after a decent start, my relationship with General Haig nearly foundered. Advised that he who controls the first draft controls the speech, I would write one then circulate it to the relevant bureau (or bureaus) and walk it through. The Foreign Service Officers had no stake in my language and were adamant that their often leaden prose not be altered. Then, I would be hailed into the Secretary's office a few days ahead of the occasion when he did indeed spend a whole hour with me.

By the time he became Secretary of State, General Haig was already an accomplished speaker, with or without notes. He put enormous effort into his delivery. So here we were, rehearsing the speech and, as he read, I had to explain this or that clumsy phrase to be absolutely essential because assistant secretary so-and-so demanded it. Several of these speeches on the college graduation circuit that spring nearly sank me. Finally, exasperated, after yet another of my justifications on behalf of someone else, Haig fixed me with the stare generals reserve for dimwitted lieutenants: "Are you working for me or working for them?" he demanded. It was an epiphany and just in time.

When the General disliked your work, he usually let you know directly. On the whole, his rebuke for inadequate work could be loud but it was much better than the next stage of displeasure. An invisible screen separated you from him; his manners turned formal; and he did not look to you for help.

Luckily for me, the bureaucracy botched a major speech on U.S.-Soviet relations in summer 1981 that I managed to rescue. My ways changed. First drafts came from the bureaus, forcing them to be constructive. I needed but ten minutes to hear what Haig wanted. And then close to the deadline, I wrote it in his speech patterns, imposing his ideas and language on the material.

The General and the Diplomats

Although an excellent formal orator and in private conversation direct, clear, and vivid, Haig soon deployed a convoluted patois at press conferences

that became known as “Haig speak.” The general told me once that he would rather not be understood at all than misunderstood. Haig-speak certainly achieved this objective and it was always good for comic relief. When a reporter devoted a column to it, for example, especially the fractured infinitive, the Secretary of State wrote him a letter, a model of English grammar, but ending in the word “to.”

Other facets of Haig’s methods deserve mention. He had a terrific sense of fun. The prankster in him, noted by his high school year book, never left. And he could be very amusing about himself. His first speech to the State Department at the Secretary’s Open Forum, for example, had been preceded by a news article alleging he was angrily intolerant of dissent among his subordinates. So Haig began his address by noting the allegation and then declared: “Nothing could be further from the truth! I insist (jaw jutting, finger pointing, loud voice) that people who work for me tell me what’s on their minds (long pause) even if it costs them their jobs!” The audience hesitated, noticed him smiling, then burst into laughter.

Haig could be fierce in argument but I never found him intolerant of dissent. If you disagreed, then you should be well prepared and press your point. Often he would counsel persuasion not assertion, “conservative principles expressed in liberal language” being his mantra.

Haig worked very hard and insisted on high quality. He explained to me once that decision memoranda always had three options: (1) what your predecessor would have done; (2) what only an idiot would do; and (3) what the undersigned wanted you to do. Haig did not hesitate to turn back shoddy work, letting nothing slip by him. (I saw him once cross off all three options and add a fourth, “none of the above.”) If you didn’t push for the best, he argued, then you would not get second best, you’d get the worst. Part of this, too, was his insistence on orderly procedures and well defined responsibilities. He had consummate respect for State’s professionals, who, in his experience, could sustain a course of action despite the political ebb and flow.

Last, and not least, General Haig was a truth teller, a trait always in short supply in government. His honesty probably unfitted him for a political career. It complicated his approach to diplomacy and relations with the media. Dissembling – the shadow of a lie – Haig could not do. (In this he resembled his close friend, the Israeli leader Yitzchak Rabin.) The private briefing was for the most part the same as the public one. Selective leaking, in his view, never turned out well.

Moreover, between Vietnam and Watergate, Haig was angered by the arrogance of editors who regarded themselves as the arbiters of the national interest. When it came to publishing secrets, his disdain showed. In later years when he condemned this or that administration’s policy, Haig would declare: “They’re getting their ideas from the editorials in *The New York Times!*”

Foreign Policy, the President and the Secretary

Haig became Secretary of State at a moment of great crisis. It was a violent time, counting five preexisting wars (Afghanistan, Iran-Iraq, Lebanon, El Salvador, Angola) to which two more would be added (Falklands, Israel-PLO-Syria) during his eighteen months. In addition, the PLO and other groups were terrorizing and killing European and American civilians.

Americans were angry and frustrated over a stagflating economy, Soviet advances around the world, and an ineffective president. Ronald Reagan had been elected to change this situation. An older man with roots in an earlier America, Reagan radiated optimism. He could soothe and inspire. And he did not mind the company of those smarter or more learned. Reagan's self-esteem needed only his wife Nancy's approval.

The new president had a few ideas that, together, offered the basis for what is sometimes called "grand strategy." Reagan proposed to win the Cold War through American moral and military rearmament, and the rejuvenation of its free enterprise system. He was confident that the communists would either have to change their spots or disappear. And it could all be done without a fatal clash of arms, nuclear or otherwise.

Haig agreed. He greatly admired what he called Reagan's natural leadership and instinct for American values. But getting from here to there – always the friction in strategy – was another matter. Reagan was content to leave this to the experts, of whom Haig was one. And this brings us to the president's troubling side.

Haig was acutely aware that a unified voice on foreign policy, sustained by a disciplined and orderly decision-making process, was crucial to success. This had been his experience in the Army and it was reinforced by his work for Henry Kissinger and Richard Nixon. He proposed, and Reagan agreed, that the secretary of state should be that voice – the "vicar." But Haig did not really know how Reagan conducted business.

More than most presidents, Reagan deferred to experts (or cabinet officers) especially on subjects of which he knew little. And more than most presidents, he wanted consensus. A small group of trusted advisors (Ed Meese, Michael Deaver, James Baker) could sort out most decisions for him. Comity and a laidback California atmosphere were cherished objectives in their own right. Most especially he did not want arguments that required him to favor one cabinet personality over another. And when faced by such divisions during his early presidency, in the absence of personal policy convictions, Reagan did not decide at all, leaving the administration paralyzed until events ran their course.

These habits could make for chaotic government with a plethora of mixed signals, the bane of all policy and especially foreign policy. They were extremely perilous for any secretary of state, who runs at best a small bureaucracy, controls a minor budget (especially compared to Defense), has 535 competitors on Capitol Hill plus a national security advisor near

the president, and nearly always brings bad news to the White House. The secretary can only succeed if he or she brings his or her own ideas, better than those of the competition and enjoys 110 percent support from the president.

Haig soon ran afoul of Reagan's decision-making system when he attempted to organize the interagency process and crisis management committee. The chairmanship of the latter was denied him in favor of the vice president George H.W. Bush who lacked the staff but whose advisors suspected Haig of competing political ambitions. As for the interagency process, the memo was never signed.

But it was worse than that. Sometimes, Haig had to call the president to question decision memoranda obviously checked in the wrong place; Reagan did not recall seeing the document. He would check with Meese, Deaver, or Baker, none of whom, like the president, knew much of foreign policy. Haig eventually called the whole system a "ghost ship." You could never be sure where the captain stood or even if the captain knew conditions on the deck.

Presidents, of course, get the systems they want and subordinates have to accommodate them. Haig's temperament, however, chafed at such arrangements. His knowledge, his urgent energy and his insistence on orderly procedures rubbed the new men raw. And, of course, the harder Haig tried, the more arrogant he seemed. I joked with him once that he was the canary in the coal mine, detecting dangerous fumes undetectable by the president (and the Californians). But it was no joke to be such a canary, whose chirping was usually ignored until the bird fell.

Haig was not to be the only official frustrated by Reagan's operation. A man of very different temper—George Shultz, his successor—had similar experiences, including paralyzing conflict with Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger, who conveniently claimed that if the president had not said it, it was not policy. When the two secretaries got dug in, the national security advisor often paid the price. Reagan had six in eight years.

These troubles were exacerbated by a real division over foreign policy. Haig did not believe the Soviets were ten feet tall. "They're up to their asses in alligators" he declared, "and will eventually collapse from their own internal contradictions." Moscow faced a failing economy and restive satellites, notably Poland. But these defects would only count in the longer term. In 1981, the Soviets were on the march to America's disadvantage. As Haig saw it, Washington had to force Moscow to choose its foreign policy priorities: what mattered more, Europe, or the Caribbean, adventures in Angola or the nuclear balance? Haig meant to "rollback" recent Soviet advances by applying geopolitical pressure especially in areas where the United States still held the preponderance of strength.

He soon found, however, that important cabinet members opposed this approach. Public rhetoric could mislead: Weinberger, for example, invoked Churchill on the podium but in private emphasized the Pentagon's unreadiness. This left Haig with trouble at every turn: boldness opposed by

caution, caution undercut by demands for boldness. (Two good early examples: Reagan refused to challenge Moscow over terrorism despite accurate intelligence of its role in helping international terrorists; the president also preferred covert action against the Sandinistas, telling Haig that the American people were not ready for the secretary's proposed blockade of Nicaragua, which may have meant the Pentagon was unwilling.) Reflecting on this situation already in late March 1981, Haig told me: "This is probably not the right place for me to be but while I'm here I'll do my best."

Threading the Chinese Needle

What then was his best? Obituaries clamored over the "I'm in control here" press conference after Reagan's near assassination. (James Baker, no friend, deemed Haig's actions proper); covert action in Central America (he hotly opposed it as a "cop out" and contradiction in terms); and unnecessary tensions with Moscow (as if Brezhnev were Gorbachev). Largely overlooked, however, were two achievements that sustain Haig's strategic reputation: (1) he preserved the relationship with China; and (2) he saved the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty after Sadat's murder.

In 1981, today's China was not even a glimmer on the horizon. Behind it was Mao's disastrous totalitarian experiment; ahead of it lay Deng's reforms. Americans regarded Japan, not China, as the economic threat of the day. But in another area, Beijing was pulling considerable weight. Sino-Soviet hostilities tied down a Soviet army of fifty divisions along the remote borders, costing Moscow dearly. The Chinese had also waged a short, sharp war to constrain Soviet ally Vietnam in 1979.

Haig had fought the Chinese in Korea. He had also been a key player in Nixon's original overture to China. He shared Nixon's and Kissinger's view that this opening was about more than the Cold War. If China could be brought into constructive international relationships then both the peace and prosperity of the Pacific might be assured. He had found the Beijing leaders to be strategically minded pragmatists but also, like most Chinese, highly sensitive to foreign slights, a legacy of European and Japanese imperialism.

Nixon's policy had its costs. America's former Chinese ally – the Republic of China on Taiwan then still a military dictatorship—remained a formidable force. Competing claims of U.S. loyalties were finessed by Washington's observation that both Beijing and Taipei agreed there was only one China so they ought to sort it out themselves. When President Jimmy Carter did recognize the PRC in 1979—derecognizing the ROC—he also severely limited diplomatic contacts. An affronted Congress passed the Taiwan Relations Act committing the United States to Taiwan's security, including arms sales, which in 1979-80 reached \$1 billion. Every administration since then has had to thread the needle through what may be called the "two no's and the one yes": "no" to the mainland on seizing the island; "no" to the island on declaring

independence; and “yes” to encouraging Beijing and Taipei to negotiate a *modus vivendi*. And Haig was the first secretary of state to face this issue.

Reagan himself did not oppose the Nixon opening but he recoiled from cooperating with a communist regime at the expense of the ROC. Some of Reagan’s campaign rhetoric, moreover, suggested that he might be inclined toward a two-China policy, an impression reinforced by some of his staunchest political supporters. Haig soon detected in the president an uneasy tug between heart and head, between his anti-communism and strategic necessity.

Matters began reasonably well. Reagan saw the Chinese ambassador. He approved a change in China’s status that allowed more technology transfer. Haig’s visit to Beijing in June gave him ninety minutes with Deng, a hardy survivor of Mao’s purges, then only four years in power. He found the Chinese fearful that the United States was not up to resisting Moscow. And there was an impending arms sale request from Taiwan for very advanced aircraft. The summer passed with Haig offering assurances against a multitude of pro-Taiwan stories and mounting expectations that the request would be met. An aroused Beijing decided to force the issue. At the Cancun Summit (September 21-23), the Chinese foreign minister offered a 9-point reunification plan for Taiwan; simultaneously, he conditioned a long-term strategic relationship with the United States on a schedule of diminishing arms sales to Taiwan. On October 29, meeting the Chinese ambassador, Haig firmly rejected this ultimatum.

The way out of the impasse was to draft a new communiqué that would commit the United States and China to each other while moving the Taiwan issue to a subsidiary level. Drafts were exchanged over many months, to no avail. Deng then sought to resolve matters by inviting Vice President Bush to Beijing in May when, amidst warm exchanges, the Chinese offered new proposals. But the words were still elusive. Late in the month, his situation slipping, Haig made one final effort. It took the form of a draft communiqué.

Haig never heard from the White House about this text. Apparently, his signature alone was enough to bring opposition from the president’s men. But neither the issue nor the draft went away. After urgent inquiries by the Chinese during the summer, George Shultz submitted the document to the White House under his own signature. Reagan modified it slightly and it was issued on August 17, 1982. It tied a reduction on U.S. arms sales to Taiwan to political progress between island and mainland. Reagan’s aides provided Taiwan multiple assurances that political support and the arms supply were not in jeopardy.

The “two no’s” and the “one yes” were now embedded in the U.S.-China diplomacy. Haig had the dubious consolation of knowing that, as he wrote, his “departure from the Reagan Administration was the single act that made possible the solution of this critical question.” He had protected a strategic relationship. The communiqué and its formula still stand.

Saving the Peace

Haig, like his predecessors and successors, was severely vexed by the Middle East, whose troubles were already familiar to him. He had been instrumental in two rescues (Jordan in 1970 and Israel in 1973) and knew many of the region's leaders. Already in the White House during Kissinger's shuttles, he was convinced that the step-by-step bilateral approach offered the most hope. Haig rejoiced in the Camp David Accords and recoiled from the Shah's fall.

By 1981, the Camp David glow had worn off. Egypt's President Anwar Sadat felt isolated and besieged, complaining that the United States had failed to deliver Saudi support for Camp David while Soviet arms and money were flowing to Libya, Sudan, and other enemies. He remained exposed through the autonomy negotiations with Israel on the Palestinian issue and harassed by the Iraqi-Syrian-PLO Rejectionist Front. The Saudis, too, feared Khomeini's Iran, then embroiled in a terrible war with Saddam's Iraq. Amidst these distresses, the final stage of Israeli withdrawal from Sinai – scheduled for spring 1982 – loomed and, as yet, there was no agreement on an essential component: a multinational force to monitor the post-withdrawal limited force zones.

In the face of these troubles, Haig sought to rally a pro-American grouping to oppose rising Soviet influence. He called this a “consensus of strategic concern,” a concept promptly ridiculed by all those who were sure that a settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict (imposed by the United States on Israel) was the key to everything. Using Robert “Bud” McFarlane as his special emissary, Haig set in motion military cooperation through the United States. (This paid off years later when the parties had to coordinate in the Kuwait crisis.) Haig – and Reagan – also sought to elevate the U.S.-Israeli relationship by giving it a strategic basis that went beyond the usual democracy-to-democracy solidarity.

The Israelis knew and trusted Haig. He was also ably served by Samuel Lewis, the U.S. Ambassador to Israel, the world's only known Begin expert. They had to work very hard, using the veteran diplomat Philip Habib as a special emissary, to prevent an Israel-Syria-PLO war in spring of 1981 over the convoluted Lebanese conflict, leading to an indirect cease-fire which Begin and Arafat promptly interpreted differently. Although both Haig and Lewis were aware of Israel's fears over Saddam Hussein's nearly completed nuclear reactor (then, as later, he often threatened to destroy the Jewish state) they were surprised by the timing (June 6, 1981) of Israel's successful air strike on Osirak.

I still recall the sight of Haig excitedly informing a subdued Caspar Weinberger by telephone of the Israeli feat. He stoutly defended the event as highly beneficial to U.S. interests but soon found himself isolated in the cabinet. Weinberger, Bush, and others were incensed. Later, while Haig travelled in Asia, the management of the U.N. resolution condemning Israel

badly damaged what had been an excellent relationship with U.S. Ambassador Jean Kirkpatrick. (She simply went incommunicado when she did not like, or did not want, instructions.) This earned Haig a presidential rebuke for leaks attributed to him that were critical of her.

Haig also had to manage the sale of U.S. AWACs aircraft to Saudi Arabia, begun under Carter, and intended to reinforce the political relationship while strengthening Riyadh's capacity to defend itself. He managed to mute Begin's opposition at first but the White House botched the congressional angle and Reagan's near assassination on March 30 put him largely out of touch for months. The sale eventually passed the Senate by four votes on October 28, 1981, the result of a combined State-White House full press.

In the midst of these battles, the Saudis launched their own Middle East peace plan on August 7, designed to displace the Camp David Accords with a return to the comprehensive approach thereby relieving Riyadh of pressure to take sides. The Fahd Plan, named after the Crown Prince (later King), the main power in Riyadh, quickly found favor, especially among the Europeans. They were already reluctant to join the Sinai multinational force, which had been rejected at the U.N. on May 18, 1981, giving them the excuse to argue that the Camp David Accords lacked international legitimacy. But Sadat feared that Fahd's plans would restore Soviet, Syrian, and PLO vetoes over Egypt, completely frustrating his ability to act independently, even though his army was the key to war or peace. The Camp David Accords had been borne of Sadat's and Begin's desire to avoid such a dead end.

Haig regarded the Saudi (and European) diplomacy as a gift to the Soviets and a repudiation of U.S. allies. He understood the Saudi motivation but minced no words in telling the Crown Prince that September in Mirabella, Spain, that the United States would not support the Fahd Plan as a substitute for Camp David. In late August, Haig was also encouraged by a Begin-Sadat meeting of the minds that the autonomy negotiations had to be completed soon so as not to complicate the Sinai withdrawal.

Then came catastrophe. Sadat was assassinated by Muslim fanatics on October 6, 1981, while reviewing a military parade celebrating the 1973 war, the very conflict he had used to switch from Moscow's ally to Washington's and from conflict with Israel to peace. I still recall Haig's demeanor that day, the only time he appeared downcast and drained. He left a vivid account in his memoir *Caveat* of the surreal trip to Egypt with the American ex-presidents; the somewhat chaotic funeral ceremonies; and the subdued atmosphere in Cairo. Sadat had been in trouble his last year, arresting his opposition and increasingly remote from Egypt's problems. Would his successor Hosni Mubarak continue the policy that had just cost Sadat his life?

The Saudis lost little time in renewing their push to gain American support for their plan now that the co-author of Camp David was dead. They could count on important sympathizers in Reagan's Cabinet. On November 1, President Reagan himself spoke favorably of the plan because it hinted at

eventual recognition of Israel, and the Saudis tried to treat this as an endorsement. The very next day at a press conference, Fahd openly promoted his way as an alternative to Camp David and the surest route to a PLO-run Palestinian State.

Haig quickly concluded that the Egyptian-Israeli peace was in danger. It could be saved if the Fahd Plan were derailed and European participation in the Sinai force secured. During that hectic first week in November, Haig persuaded Reagan to reaffirm Camp David strongly and by November 10, the Saudis had to admit the plan lacked American support. That led to the postponement of the Fez Summit intended to rally the Arabs behind it.

The next step was to secure European participation in the multinational force. The British and French were now in Haig's sights. He did not regard the U.N. Security Council as the sole custodian of international legitimacy, a point London and Paris had to concede. They countered instead by conditioning their participation on other formulae, such as the 1980 Venice Declaration which demanded the PLO's inclusion, all calculated to be unacceptable to Israel. Personalities played their part. It was easy to arouse Begin on the subject of London's perfidy and Lord Peter Carrington, the British Foreign Secretary, frequently drew his blood. One day U.K. participation would be linked to anything but the Camp David Accords. Another day it depended on Israel halting settlements in the West Bank. Begin's rage was understandable. Less understandable was his sudden annexation of the Golan Heights on December 14, 1981, leading to suspension of the U.S.-Israel strategic agreement. It occasioned a famous Begin tirade at the unfortunate Ambassador Lewis. The sequel was Haig's own set-to with General Ariel Sharon.

After weeks of wrestling with Carrington (provoking Haig to call him a "duplicitous bastard," later leaked to the press) and his French counterpart, Claude Cheysson, Haig persuaded Reagan to call Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and President Francois Mitterrand, both of whom had been pre-occupied with domestic issues. They overruled their foreign ministers. Finally on January 13, 1982, after still more ridiculous haggling, the U.K., France, Italy, and The Netherlands agreed to join in a formula acceptable to Israel.

That left the last step, the stalled autonomy negotiations. Haig was amused to find a reversal of positions by both sides. Israel had insisted the peace treaty stand alone, irrespective of what happened to autonomy for the Palestinians (the second of the Camp David Accords); now Israel hinted that an autonomy agreement might be necessary before they withdrew. The Egyptians had begun by linking the treaty and autonomy but were now insisting on withdrawal even if there were no autonomy.

When Haig visited Cairo and Jerusalem in early January 1982, however, both sides quietly informed him that an autonomy deal was too difficult. Still, they did not want this to complicate the withdrawal or the new Multinational Force and Observers' (MFO) deployment. Upon returning to Washington, Haig devised a solution: he would appoint a special negotiator,

Richard Fairbanks (Assistant Secretary for Congressional Relations) to renew the process without any real expectation of agreement anytime soon. This apparent resurrection of the autonomy diplomacy removed it as an encumbrance to the Sinai withdrawal. On April 25, 1982, Israel removed its forces and the MFO deployed to Sinai where it remains to this day. The peace treaty had been preserved. And General Haig had saved this particular strategic asset through the sort of coordinated action, led by the secretary of state and backed by the president, that he had always sought. It also proved the exception to the rule.

End Game

Haig's rescue of the peace treaty would be his last success in the Middle East. The Polish crisis (December 1981), strategic arms control issues (March 1982), and then the Falklands War (April-May 1982) soon preoccupied him. Nonetheless, Haig launched an ambitious Middle East plan in a May 26 speech, calling for redoubled autonomy negotiations following Israel's withdrawal from Sinai; an international effort to end the Iraq-Iran war which, in Haig's view, was simply entrenching both regimes – especially the Iranian – in ways harmful to U.S. interests over the long term; and yet another international effort, this time under U.S.-French auspices to resolve the multiple Lebanese conflicts. Philip Habib was dispatched once again to deal with the latter.

Unfortunately, Haig's time had already come short. He himself believed that the failure of his U.K.-Argentina shuttle (April 8-13; 15-19) to prevent war over the Falklands made it easier for Reagan to discharge him. As Haig put it, "there was blood on my collar." Some of that was put there by mixed signals as Ambassador Kirkpatrick and National Security Advisor Judge William Clark, both anxious to preserve Argentinean military training for the Contras, suggested that State and the White House might support Buenos Aires over London. Haig's diplomacy before and during the war was severely impaired by these actions and he suffered an undeserved black mark in Britain which still endures. In fact, he fully supported DOD and U.S. Navy efforts to help the U.K. and regarded preference for the junta over Thatcher as strategic stupidity.

In the spring of 1982, the president's men increasingly undercut him possibly because they already knew the president had had enough. Reagan's European trip in early June proved to be one long nightmare for Haig personally as he attempted to deal with a hostile White House over the Falklands war and especially the erupting Lebanon crisis. Throughout the winter and spring, Israeli complaints about the PLO's military buildup in southern Lebanon had been met by Haig's unvarying words, namely, that Israeli military action must be predicated on an "internationally recognized provocation" and "proportional response." This was a red light flashing against the most ambitious Israeli war plans—Sharon's sweep to Beirut,

defeating the Syrians *en passant* while bringing to power the Lebanese Christian-backed Bashir Gemayel. But Haig did not feel he, or anyone else, could deny Israel a right to reasonable self-defense. Indeed, when Israel did attack Lebanon on June 5, following the attempted assassination of Israel's ambassador in London, Begin hastened to assure the United States that Israeli forces would not advance beyond forty kilometers. The objective: to force the PLO beyond artillery range of northern Israel.

This was reasonable and it was the operation approved by the Israeli Cabinet. Had it stayed that way, Washington could not have objected much. In the event, however, Defense Minister Sharon so contrived the military tactics as to involve the Syrians. Spectacular defeats of Syria's air defense and air force followed. On June 10, the Israeli Army surrounded Beirut. Arafat was trapped. But so was Israel when Bashir Gemayel double-crossed Sharon and refused to use his own forces against the PLO.

Two dramas then played out, the one in Washington, bringing an end to Haig's public career and the other in Beirut, which eventually ended Arafat's presence there. Haig would have a hand for the second time (the Jordan crisis of 1970 being the first) in depriving the PLO leader of his mini-state sanctuaries.

To an outraged cabinet and a bewildered president, Haig argued that the best outcome would be an agreement that removed all foreign forces from Lebanon – the PLO, the Israelis, and the Syrians – not reprisal measures only against Begin. For this you needed a Lebanese government and Habib strove mightily to assemble one. Time was of the essence; Arafat's withdrawal first was the key; and the new Lebanese government the instrument. It had to be done without a massive Israeli bombardment.

Haig believed that Habib was close to success during the second week of June. But on the 13th, Saudi King Khalid died; Fahd became King. A high-level U.S. delegation including the vice president and secretary of defense arrived in Riyadh to console. Among their consolations apparently was a clear signal that U.S. policy would soon change. Apprised of this by the Saudis, Arafat promptly backed away from the deal. Soon the Israeli guns sounded again and Habib's Lebanese counterparts lost their nerve.

Upon returning from Europe, Haig commissioned me to assemble a series of short case studies on recent events, including the Falklands and Lebanon. The results were appalling. Time and again, the secretary of state had been undercut, and in some cases, the national interest injured by contradictory signals from high officials. On June 11, Haig had already offered Reagan his resignation because of these infractions, suggesting a good time might be in the fall, once the Lebanese situation had been patched. A fortnight elapsed. Then on June 24, at Reagan's request, Haig saw the president and handed him "a bill of particulars" embodying my research. Reagan pronounced the document "very disturbing" but also expressed his difficulty in giving Haig what he wanted.

Anyone who read the case studies could not have but concluded that Reagan's refusal to reprimand Clark, Weinberger, or Kirkpatrick meant the breaking point for Haig. Reagan later confided to his diary that the trouble with Haig was at heart a question of who would run foreign policy, although, as he put it, "Al never gave me a bum steer." Doubtless Reagan had hoped the transition from Haig to a new secretary would be smoother, done at a calmer moment, not in a crisis. But Haig had forced the matter.

The story of the next day, June 25th, is well-known but still bizarre. After a cabinet meeting, Reagan asked Haig to one side, then read a letter accepting Haig's non-existent letter of resignation. The president made up for this botch by agreeing not to publicize it until he had an actual letter. A few hours later, however, he did it anyway.

At lunch that Friday, Sam Lewis asked me whether the Lebanese crisis might jeopardize Haig's job. I thought it might but not yet. I was wrong. Upon returning to my office at about 2 p.m., Haig's secretary, Muriel Hartley, summoned me to an urgent meeting. Excited and anxious, Haig was being advised to present a simple resignation letter full of the usual clichés. He was inclined to list particulars and reasons. Two versions were drawn up. But then Haig's sense of public duty won out; he would not spill any secrets that might harm the national interest. He excised the particulars. The letter hinted at deeper reasons but did not specify them.

“Well Done, Well Done”

June 24th's oddity gave birth to something odder still. Reagan determined that Haig should manage the Lebanese crisis until Shultz was ready to take over. So for the next ten days, ensconced in the Greenbrier Hotel, in West Virginia, the now former secretary of state ran the policy unhampered by the White House or anyone else. He thought he came close to a solution again. A U.S.-French multinational force, substituting for the Lebanese government, would be put in Beirut once, and only once, all foreign forces had agreed to leave, beginning with the PLO. He had reason to believe such an agreement was within reach.

On this possibility, Haig's tenure ended. He was relieved on July 5. To his surprise, the very next day, the White House announced agreement "in principle" to offer U.S. troops as part of a multinational force for "temporary peacekeeping." This was not Haig's plan. It gave Moscow the excuse to resupply Syria's devastated forces on the grounds that American Marines in Beirut and the Israeli army in Lebanon were a threat to Assad. Syria would not leave Lebanon for twenty-five years. The Israelis would remain for eighteen. The U.S.-led multinational force, however, would leave ignominiously two years later, after 241 Marines were killed in a still unavenged suicide bombing sponsored by Iran and Syria.

Other aspects of Haig's time at State deserve consideration, not least his work with Pakistan's President Zia to facilitate both the war against the Soviets

in Afghanistan and easing of tensions with India. But for the long term, Haig's achievements in preserving the China connection and the Egyptian-Israeli treaty have stood both the test of time and strategic interest. Both outlasted the Cold War and are still fundamentals of American statecraft today. Had he not been Secretary of State in 1981-82, the outcome might have been disastrously different.

Life after State

After leaving public service, Haig established a successful international advisory firm, wrote two books, published numerous articles and became a popular public speaker. He devoted himself to West Point and became an active trustee at the Foreign Policy Research Institute.¹ Haig also joined the Washington Institute for Near East Policy's Board of Advisors. In 1988, he indulged in what he himself called "a bout of insanity," running unsuccessfully in the Republican presidential primaries. He lived long enough to see the Cold War concluded in America's favor but fought fiercely the idea that the United States had "won" it. In Haig's view, the Soviets lost it.

American triumphalism, to Haig's dismay, then gave birth to a pair of very dangerous errors: one, the belief that "globalization" or some variation of American capitalism would sweep the world and retire "power politics," the vice of the liberals; two, the idea that the sole superpower could somehow remake the world in America's image, the vice of the neo-conservatives he regarded as Woodrow Wilson's lineal descendants. Among other issues, he wanted early intervention in the Balkans, opposed putting NATO into out-of-area crises (preferring ad hoc alliances of the willing), and predicted Russia's comeback in 1999. (Putin he thought to be a typical late Soviet era KGB type.)

Haig supported U.S. action to evict Iraqi forces from Kuwait in 1991 but criticized the first President Bush's failure to achieve strategic closure by eliminating Saddam Hussein. He was even more exercised at the unwillingness of the second President Bush to put sufficient troops into the Iraq war in 2003. All his life, he used to say, he had to combat "sophistries" that would somehow do away with sufficient "boots on the ground." These shortcuts were the surest routes to disaster. Other sophistries included the "blame America first" school, which attributed most international problems to American failings. He also reviled policies harder on our friends than on our enemies. He refused to sign, and strongly opposed, the proposal by many former officials to abolish nuclear weapons. Haig believed that in practice this would lead to a weakened American deterrence rather than successful prevention of proliferation.

On October 27, 2008, he journeyed to West Point for the last time, dedicating there the magnificent Haig Room. At the rostrum it was Haig of old,

¹ Read Alexander M. Haig, Jr.'s FPRI addresses at www.fpri.org/byauthor.html.

vigorously reaffirming his patriot's creed: those who would defend America needed to tell their civilian superiors the truth. Anything less was a dereliction of duty. But as the year wore on he began to weaken. His last public outing was to honor Henry Kissinger at the National Defense University in Washington on December 2, 2008.

Haig's foreign policy principles may be easily summarized. You needed to distinguish between friends and foes and to encourage your friends while discouraging your foes. Problems come little and big; good diplomacy kept the little from becoming big and the big from becoming a crisis. Every policy needed both a moral and military escort. And every president had to find a balance between American ideals and American pragmatism.

In November 2009, we spent a glorious two hours together at lunch near his Virginia office, regaling each other with infamous bumbles, our own and others. Then, near New Year's General Haig rang to say that it was time to write something about America's strategic outlook. He would contact me upon his return from Florida. It was not to be.

We can remember him still, the force of his energy, his enthusiasm, the twinkle of his eye, his boisterous laugh, his boundless capacity for work, his insistence on truth and his truly astonishing capacity to see a larger strategy even as he worked the details. "Well done, well done," eulogized his closest associate Woody Goldberg. Henry Kissinger declared at his funeral that "Service was Al's mission. Courage was his defining characteristic. Patriotism was his motivating force." Indeed, in the final analysis, General Haig was a patriot's patriot. Blessed is the country that can evoke such devotion.²



²To read eulogies by Henry A. Kissinger and Sherwood "Woody" Goldberg, Esq. visit www.fpri.org/news/2010/20100221.haig.html.