

OIC Interview of General Colin Powell,
November 5, 1992

Brosnahan: The case is set to trial on January 5, 1992. The judge has so far held a very strong date. Doesn't want to move it. Last time I was in there I would have been pleased to get a continuance. . . .

There are five counts in the indictment. The first arises from the questions to Mr. Weinberger about whether he has notes _____. The second count of the indictment has to do with any knowledge he might have about the Saudis funding the Contras The third has to do with the proposed shipment in November 19-23, 1985 and . . . and the fourth count is the question about whether he knew anything about replenishment . . . and the fifth is a count which arose in 1990. . . . This count arises at a meeting An FBI agent and members of the _____ . . . and this time the Independent Counsel perhaps will see information on someone else's notes to the effect that Mr. Weinberger had a problem about that. So I appreciate very much your ability to give us a little time today and I know that this is a difficult case for you and someone you work with Mr. Weinberger and you like him and you respect him and I've read all your testimony and I want you to know at least I

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appreciate starting off that it must be difficult for you. I would like to review quickly as we can major elements in sequence starting in the summer of 1985 with the meeting in which Mr. McFarlane indicates that he's interested in doing some work with the Iranians as moderate elements of the Iranians and talking about . . . would you, would you attend a meeting like that? What was your understanding as to what Mr. McFarlane was?

Powell: The best I can remember is that the _____ strategy . . . essentially . . . leadership and moderate elements . . . the relationship . . . and at the same time it might be possible . . .

Brosnahan: Let me back up a little bit. You were Mr. Weinberger's Chief Military Advisor at that time.

Powell: Assistant.

Brosnahan: And you would see him regularly and talk with him . . . Is it correct as I glean from the testimony that there were some things that he might not share with you? For example, he might go to the White House and he might mention some of it but he might not mention all of it in the ordinary course It's really up to him to decide whether he wanted to raise something . . . that

needed to be raised . . . I'm always looking for new words . . . I don't know where . . . been around forever.

Powell: Well established.

Brosnahan: Is that right? Alright. If this can be used as an . . . I understand how it works. So you also were aware that he would make some entries and notes on 5 x 7 . . . and he would keep that on his desk.

Powell: More often than not . . . stand up desk.

Brosnahan: Would he do that during the day?

Powell: . . . I didn't watch whether he . . .

Brosnahan: Did he then put them in his desk?

Powell: My recollection is that he put them in his desk on the right side

Brosnahan: Now let me jump ahead for just a moment. You left that position in 1986, in March of '86 and it's true that in March of '86 certainly until the Iran-Contra story broke you really didn't have much contact with the Secretary

Powell: A couple of phone calls -- I didn't hear . . .

Brosnahan: So then when it came time specifically for production of documents by him you didn't participate

Powell: No.

Brosnahan: And I assume, you would assume that whenever documents were requested . . . would have been produced . . . where he put them . . . Specifically, we did . . . to some extent the . . . recall what he . . .

Powell: Yes, I'll explain. My recollection is that . . . I, sure I had a couple of conversations with him about the . . . quite sure that once I came back to the United States worked at the White House . . . working directly with him . . . and my position as Deputy National Security Advisor . . . and . . .

Brosnahan: This reading your testimony. I'm trying to condense this and if I have it wrong please correct me. Reading the testimony at no time did you and he have a discussion about whether he had produced his notes? That never came up?

Powell: No. I have no recollection. You're talking about these 5 x 7 notes?

Brosnahan: Right. I am.

Powell: I have recollection of the specific . . .

Brosnahan: Did you ever have any discussion about any other notes?

Powell: Not that I recall. I don't -- wouldn't have been my place. I wasn't the custodian of any notes . . .

Brosnahan: And, I think I'm correct in this . . . You assumed that his testimony as he gave it would be consistent with whatever records we have? You just assumed they found something . . . His testimony would be the same as whatever documents he had.

Powell: If he had any . . . not having the Grand Jury transcripts if that's what I said . . . Weinberger was a very honest man . . . to further process along I assume nothing to be . . . There are a lot of notes there but it's not my purpose to . . . they cover everything from the dog going to the veterinarian . . . to matters relating to this. Suggestion that there is 1700 pages of notes on Iran is . . .

Brosnahan: Oh no. I never said that.

Powell: No, you didn't.

Brosnahan: No.

Powell: But that's what you read in the paper.

Brosnahan: Oh. I understand. OK. So now if we may returning to the sequence of events as you experienced them and as you went through those days. . . On September 20 of 1985 there is a note on Mr. Weinberger

Powell: September 30th.

Brosnahan: I think it's the twentieth . . . of '85. . . there is a note by him that in the intelligence reports

he has noticed that Iranians believe they're getting arms
as part of a possible release. The note. . . and I have
it here also refers to you being in his office. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Powell: Yes.

Brosnahan:

put in the heart of this Dracula it would rise up like midnight. And so I know the note you're referring to . . . can see it . . . once again coming across information that some kind of a deal was going on -- something happened that he did not have full insight into apparently called Bill Casey to find out what he knew about this and he once again mused in his notes as to whether he was very fully informed by Bud. This was a well-known concern by Mr. Weinberger . . . and he testified that he didn't always . . . whether he was getting full insight regardless of what might or might not be going on.

Brosnahan: Here's a question I have for you. Please appreciate my situation . . . I'm not a military expert. I'm not a Washington expert.

Powell: Mr. Weinberger wanted to get to the bottom of this. He wanted to get this resolved . . .

Brosnahan: Good. Good, thank you. Here's my question. Evidently the Israelis sent 508 TOWs to Iran in August-September. The Iranians or the Israelis rather thought those would be replacements . . . and my question is, sir, where did they get that from? . . . McFarlane . . . But my questions is wouldn't they have to come out of the Defense Department? I hope that's the answer . . .

Powell: We've got TOWs. You can't buy them at Kmart . . .

Brosnahan: But on the other hand he was the kind of person that maybe would make that kind of commitment at such a high level and just assume that he could work out the details later. That may be what happened. In any event you didn't know about it?

Powell: I didn't know about it and I'm really not in a position to speculate on it told the Israelis that . . . if anybody told the Israelis . . . or whether they assumed it and what any of the persons may have caused them to believe that or why they themselves believed that . . .

Brosnahan: OK. The next major date that I'm aware of is on the 19th of November and there is talk about sending some HAWK missiles and I think your testimony has been that you are asked by someone and you're not clear which of three people it might have been. But you are asked to look into them. Is that right?

Powell: Yes.

Brosnahan: And you went to Mr. Gaffney? And could you tell me about that? What did you ask him . . .

Powell: I can't remember how it came into . . . mentions sources . . . secretary . . . request slips . . . Once

again this deal was a lot And so I went to our Defense Security Assistant Agency . . . Gaffney . . . and asked them to look into this point and lay out for me what the procedures were, what laws were appropriate in this situation was . . . point at which also the suggestion, question . . . raised whether the sale was broken up into parcels so that the . . . exceed threshold of a certain amount of dollars. We got the answer back and the answer as is well known to all present . . . Congressional notification and there's no way to bust it up or launder it.

Brosnahan: You were not surprised by that answer?

Powell: I wanted that answer . . .

Brosnahan: Where did he get that? Do you know?

Brosnahan: Did he consult with lawyers or

Powell: I have no idea.

Brosnahan: He is not a lawyer as I understand?

Powell: I don't know.

Brosnahan: But in any event.

Powell: The only answer I can give you is that . . . the agency existed for. You don't have to be a lawyer to know that there are certain laws that apply when you work in the government.

Brosnahan: He's authoritative in that sense. You believed at that point that it was illegal.

Powell: I believed at that point what he said in the memo. I'm not sure he used the word legal. I think what he said . . . the memo

Brosnahan: Yeah, I have not read this memo.

Powell: I think what he said was the Congressional notification is appropriate and the law does not apply to this kind of . . .

Barrett: I'm not sure those are the exact words used

Powell: But its clearly not what the law provides for and it is . . . it requires congressional notification. I'm pretty sure. . .

Brosnahan: Who is supposed to make the Congressional notification?

Powell: I don't know. That's a technical question. . . I don't know whether it's the Department of Defense or the Department of State . . .

Brosnahan: You then talked to Mr. Weinberger about what you had found out.

Powell: Yes.

Brosnahan: Could you tell me what he said at that time?

Powell: As I recall it, he needed the information because he was going to a meeting on the 7th and my recol-

lection is that I gave him the memo or I gave him the information for the memo as he was getting ready to go to the meeting. So my recollection is that he was armed with that knowledge by me either by me paraphrasing from the memo

Brosnahan: Do you remember anything with him coming back from that meeting?

Powell: If we're talking about that particular day, I have no direct recollection of him coming back and saying . . . the memo . . . I can't recall anything.

Brosnahan: OK. The next date is December 7 in which there is a meeting in which Mr. Weinberger said he called for the purpose of sort of finding out what was going on . . . I'm unclear as to . . .

Barrett: It's the President.

Brosnahan: This is the famous White House.

Barrett: Pearl Harbor day is on Saturday morning. It's the President, Mr. McMahon, Secretary Weinberger, Secretary Shultz, Poindexter, Regan -- I think that's everyone.

Powell: No, you missed the most . . . at least by reading the Washington Post you missed the most significant one. . . that one Vice President.

Barrett: That was in January '87. He's at the Army-Navy game . . . January 7 . . . they're both the 7th.

Brosnahan: I tried a case with Mr. McMahon by the way . . . it's a very small world.

Powell: . . . It took me at least a week to put together . . .

Brosnahan: OK . . . that meeting . . . you were not at that meeting?

Powell: No.

Brosnahan: You have any recollection of either preparing Mr. Weinberger for it in any way or talking about it with him before or after?

Powell: Not specifically. Not specifically. It was just a continuing thing throughout this period and whenever Secretary Weinberger sensed that this deal kept going after he made every effort to abort it and when it was clear . . . he would make his objections known . . .

Harris: You ever recall anything about the positions of any other people at that meeting?

Powell: At that particular meeting, no. I gathered over time that the views of some of the participants i.e. National Security Counsel staff was for it and he and Shultz were opposed.

Brosnahan: OK. So it's now December 7 and my understanding is at this point 508 TOWs have been sent from Israel to Iran earlier in the year. And 18 HAWK missiles which are old have been sent from Israel to Iran and rejected. Iranians are unhappy with this. And they are ultimately returned in February '86. And on December 10th Mr. Weinberger makes a note which says we still must replace 500 TOWs to Israel. He makes that statement on December 10. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] that you had a discussion with him about replenishing the Israeli stocks but as to the date and the time of that you are not clear and you have no way of really knowing when that occurred. Is that true?
Powell: Correct.

Brosnahan: OK. So that couldn't . . .

Powell: I think the way I characterized it . . . was that at some point I knew a replenishment problem had risen. I can't tell you when.

Brosnahan: OK. Then there's a January 7 meeting. Do you have any recollection of talking to Mr. Weinberger before that meeting or after that meeting -- that's at the White House?

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Powell: No . . . repeating what I said a few moments ago . . . that we had another meeting.

Brosnahan: Now in 1986 there was a replacement or replenishment to the Israelis which involved shipment of 4000 TOWs and as part of that I believe the figure became 4508 and in your testimony you're asked about that and I think you didn't know whether it was 508 or whether it was . . . Do you have a recollection of that? At one point it was going to be 4000 and then it became 4508.

Powell: It started out 4000 when we . . . January 17th when we finally got directions to do it. It started out 4000 and at some point after that it became 4500 or 4508. I don't remember how many actually got sent . . .

Brosnahan: Who had to authorize that shipment . . .

(phone rings) OK, can I call you back? Great, OK sure, send it down.

Powell: Within the Defense Department we didn't authorize the shipment of anything. We under the Economy Act transferred TOWs to the CIA.

Brosnahan: Did people within the Department of Defense have to authorize the transfer to the CIA?

Powell: The transfer was undertaken as a result of the direction that Mr. Weinberger gave me which I then gave to General Thurman

Brosnahan: Did you know what had caused Mr. Weinberger to give that . . .

Powell: He came back from a meeting at the White House where he said the President had decided to go forward with the initiative . . . and that the Attorney General had opined . . . legal . . . and I was to make an effort.

Brosnahan: Did you have any discussions about the Attorney General presenting . . .

Powell: No. . . .

Brosnahan: And before you leave just about the time or just prior to the time that the actually shipment is made?

Powell: I have to really check. But I can't remember if the first shipment went just before I left or just after I left. Once I got the thing rolling. In other words I connected the CIA . . . TOWs would go to the CIA and the CIA wanted them. I essentially removed myself and it was essentially being done between the Army logisticians and

Brosnahan: Alright. Let me switch gears if I may a moment and ask you whether you ever had any discussion with Mr. Weinberger on the Saudis funding the Contras? .

Powell: No.

Brosnahan: Did you ever have discussions after there was a lot of publicity about it . . . in '86 or '87?

Powell: Not to my recollection.

Brosnahan: You had no knowledge that the Saudis were funding the Contras?

Powell: No. I don't think I remember any of that no.

Brosnahan: I have a lot of governmental . . . Did the Defense Department have a whole lot to do with the Contras? Was that a State Department matter. I can't figure it out. . .

Powell: The Contras were essentially managed by the agency. CIA. I can't I don't have any recollection . . . how we got . . . and I suspect our principal involvement would have been just knowing about the program and participating in interagency meetings. . . . Your question was rather wide and broad.

Brosnahan: It was. I understand. Let me ask another question of procedure. Is it usually true that when the Defense Department departs with weapons to the CIA they know the ultimate purpose . . . where they're gonna go?

Powell: Not necessarily.

Brosnahan: OK.

Powell: In fact, the intelligence operation does not . . . Defense Department . . . it's done under the auspices

of the Economy Act . . . Weinberger . . . fully involved . . . comply with the directions . . . but he wanted to do it in a way that minimized DoD's involvement . . . the Economy Act . . . the easiest, cleanest way we normally support other government agencies . . . and my discussion with General Thurmond to make it start happening I specifically . . .

Brosnahan: OK. You never read Mr. Weinberger's notes?

Powell: Not until I was shown them in February . . . [REDACTED]

Brosnahan: You have no recollection of him ever telling you what the notes were and why he was doing . . . is it something you observed?

Powell: It was something I observed. They were a habit of his -- they were not secret notes . . . he did not hide them. They were there . . . and I saw no reason to read them. He didn't make them available to me and I didn't take any opportunity to read them.

Brosnahan: I just got my waiver of top secret . . . got my attention . . . my understanding is that if someone makes a note if there's a top secret document here and then a note is made that relates to that then the note is top secret.

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Powell: Not . . . well I'd have to see it. You could have an unclassified paragraph within a top secret memorandum and make a note of that and that would be . . . if you make a note of the unclassified part and then move it into the top secret memorandum then it doesn't have any classification. It only is classified because that which is surrounding it is classified.

Brosnahan: With regard to the Iran matter - the Iran initiative was that a top secret . . .

Powell: Whether it was secret or top secret I didn't have to . . . Certainly know parts of it were secret parts of it were top secret and parts were probably higher than that. But in general it was classified.

Brosnahan: Based on your understanding, if the note was made about that transaction that note would also carry the same level of protection . . .

Powell: The subject . . . classification . . . the content of the note . . .

Brosnahan: Do you . . . what might be an extreme attempt if someone made a note that Iran . . . or help or . . . what's his . . . highly privileged and if a note was made of that, that note would be . . .

Powell: I really don't want to answer in a hypothetical way . . .

Brosnahan: What I'm trying to find out is whether those notes were privileged or not?

Powell: Privileged as

Brosnahan: Well privileged is a lawyer's misnomer for top secret, secret. But protected? Classified.

Powell: There may or may not have been. I'd have to go through each note and classify each note by . . . classification . . . Just because there is a note on a subject does not make it classified . . .

Barrett: Can a Cabinet officer simply in writing something declassify that? Is that an official declassification act?

Powell: You really need to talk to the people who are responsible for information security classification to help a little bit. The originator classifies. The originator declassifies. If it is somebody else who is originating classified then you have to go back to the originator to declassify it. I really would refer you to the inspection security officer . . .

Brosnahan: We covered this in a general way earlier but I'd like to refine a little bit on the production of the notes. You weren't there and . . . or some superior's initial . . .

Harris: Would that mean . . . , an officer by definition
. . .

Powell: You have to have some confidence when you classify . . .

Brosnahan: To go back to a narrower question on the production of documents . . . 1987 you were not there even . . . You have never seen the exact documents that call for Mr. Weinberger's documents. Nobody has shown those to you?

Powell: Only in the indictment.

Brosnahan: So you have read the indictment and the reference . . . to what is called for including notes. You've never seen the original subpoenas?

Powell: The originals?

Brosnahan: The subpoenas?

Powell: No.

Brosnahan: The document which called for . . .

Powell: No . . . not to the best of my knowledge.

Barrett: Subpoenas or letter of requests from the Congresssional Committees or implementing memos from the General Counsel to the bureaucracy saying the following materials have been requested?

Powell: Not to my knowledge. But . . .

Brosnahan: I think that you were asked about whether you helped to prepare Mr. Weinberger in connection with any of his testimony. Help me here John. I think there is one murder board where General Powell is present. Remember the date?

Powell: For the Iran-Contra testimony?

Barrett: For his public testimony.

Brosnahan: In July. It gets near the end of July and its just a day or two, three, four . . . before that. Do you remember preparing him for that testimony?

Powell: I remember sitting around in the murder board with him and as he prepared for it.

Brosnahan: Remember anything about it? How long it was?

Powell: No I don't.

Brosnahan: Who was there?

Powell: I'm guessing and you probably know I suspect . . . people who possibly might have been there maybe Armitage, Will Taft or Larry Garrett . . . I don't know who else . . .

Brosnahan: These are my notes which come from Mr. Weinberger's notes. Larry Garrett, yourself, Will Taft and Gordy Fornell. That's what the notes show. Do you believe there was a briefing book for that?

Powell: I have no recollection.

Brosnahan: I think the only thing you're asking the grand jury is whether the regular practice when the secretary was coming to testify. . . matter of practice . . .

Powell: It was a matter of practice for Congressional hearing . . . Departmental budget presentation . . . tons of briefings . . . whether there was a briefing book with this I don't know since I was no longer in the Department and responsible.

Brosnahan: Murder board is I think I can visualize it. You ask questions a lot about this and a lot about that. It's an effort to anticipate what questions might be asked by whom. Now asking for general procedures. Do you usually try to anticipate Senator so and so is really interested in this matter. He's gonna ask you about that. As a general rule? . . .

Powell: Sam Nunn is interested in this, Fritz Hollings is interested in this Air Force base in South Carolina. So and so is mad at us about this.

Brosnahan: Go back to one thing. Do you have any idea whether this particular murder board was according to my notes was on July 27, 1987? One hour, two hours?

Brosnahan: When you participated in the murder board, did you have in mind what some of the Senators might be asking you about?

Powell: I don't think so. Some of the Senators were present when I was deposed and I don't remember

Brosnahan: Do you remember whether any of the other people Mr. Garrett, Mr. Taft, Mr. Fornell, had in mind what the Senators might ask about . . . any particular House members?

Powell: Yeah.

Brosnahan: Let's go back to the replenishment for a moment. Do you remember anything about the details of that discussion with Mr. Weinberger?

Powell: If you're referring to the discussion he makes note of about replenishment he makes a note.

Brosnahan: He does.

Powell: Yeah. Himself.

Brosnahan: That's December 10. He makes a note to himself.

Powell: Yeah. He'll have to replace 508 and I don't know . . . did he pass . . . I don't think so, so I don't remember a specific test about replenishment and I'm not sure I know what discussion you're referring to.

Brosnahan: OK. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Putting aside the question of the timing because you were trying to recall when it was and you weren't sure when it was. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Powell: [REDACTED] But I can't tell you whether it was December or whether it was when we had to go 4000 to 4508 . . .

Brosnahan: Now let me if I may extract the time implement - take that to one side. You did have a discussion then at some point focusing on that discussion. Can you remember anything about what you said or what he said?

Powell: No. I can't get it that precise. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] I'm sure I discussed it with him. That it narrowed down to a specific discussion . . . knew when it really was - the point in time - the place in time . . . now you're asking me exactly what happened in that discussion.

Brosnahan: Right.

Powell: The only thing I have a recollection of is at some point the issue of replenishment came up and I'm

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quite confident I had fairly good memory of having made him aware of it . . . and I made him aware of it . . . or whether he made me aware of it first I just don't know and I wish I could be more helpful.

Brosnahan: I understand. The one thing that you're sure of in this regard is that you and he discussed it.

Powell: I'm sure that we discussed the fact at that time that there was a replenishment issue or replenishment problem associated with this deal and it had to be dealt with.

Brosnahan: There's a lot of discussion in various ways when you're testifying that you wanted to be sure that the correct price was paid. I was really intrigued by that. But then it occurred to me that this is taxpayer's money and you want to be sure that whoever gets the

_____ even CIA that they pay for that. Is that what that's all about? We promised to get out of here by 4:00 and we're gonna do that. Here's where we are. I assume the trial will start on January 5 if it doesn't your office will be the first to know. We intend to call you as a witness and would like to work with you

When I took this case I was told it would last about a month. I hope that's correct. So my plan is that we start on January 5th and probably end the evidence on the

first of February, something like that. The jury will be out for a while. Your testimony will be sometime in the first couple weeks of January. . . . ideal time. I don't anticipate that you would be, as far as we're concerned, a long witness. I don't think that your, what we've done today is sort of covers the main items. I will refine my knowledge to a lot sharper point by then. But I have given you an outline of the sort of things that we want to ask you. So that if I said the direct might be an hour, something like that, I think that will be right. What the defense will do I don't know. . . . just want to give you some indication of that. If you could spare us perhaps one more hour before you testify I would appreciate it. If you think that's possible. Again I want to thank you for seeing us today. I appreciate it a lot.