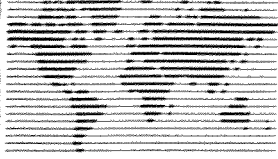


THOMAS J. WATSON JR. INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

BROWN UNIVERSITY



Center for Foreign Policy Development

17 April 1995

The Honorable Jimmy Carter
The Carter Center
1 Copenhill Street
Atlanta, GA 30307

Dear President Carter:

I write to bring you up to date on where things stand with our joint U.S.-Russian project on East-West relations during your presidency--what we call, for short-hand, the "Carter-Brezhnev project."

As you may recall, a small group of us met for the first time in October 1992, in Pocantico Hills, New York, to determine the feasibility of such a project. We determined there that we would move ahead. I last reported to you in May 1994, following our first major conference, at Musgrove Plantation, focussed on the SALT II process. Cy Vance, Zbig Brzezinski, Harold Brown and Stan Turner led the U.S. group. Anatoly Dobrynin and top-ranked Soviets from the General Staff, KGB and Defense Ministry led the Russians. The purpose of this letter is to summarize the results of our most recent conference, in Fort Lauderdale, Florida late last month, focussed on the global competition in the Third World, Europe and over China. Cy and Stan led the U.S. team; Dobrynin and Gen. Anatoly Gribkov, head of the Warsaw Pact and deputy head of the Soviet General Staff, led the Russians. I attach the agenda and list of participants in the conference, for your information.

The Fort Lauderdale conference broke new ground, chiefly because my colleagues were able to pry loose important materials from both U.S. and Russian archives and, for the first time, get the material translated and into the hands of all participants ahead of time. The "admission ticket," so to speak, to this conference was a thorough grounding in the paper trails in both Moscow and Washington on the topics on our agenda: Africa, the Middle East, China, the military balance, the Polish crisis, and two "critical periods": mid-1978 (a tough moment in the relationship, according to the newly released materials); and late 1979, before the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan when, despite the success at Vienna the previous June, the U.S.-Soviet relationship continued to deteriorate. Therefore, whereas in my report of the Musgrove conference, I relied almost entirely on anecdotes from the meeting itself, I will in this report include a few excerpts from the declassified material--U.S. and Russian--that was discussed in one or more of the conference sessions.

1. U.S.-USSR: Competitors or Implacable Enemies?

Participants on both sides of the table seemed to look back throughout the conference with a sense of profound perplexity. For even though the Cold War has been concluded only recently, it proved difficult for many to re-enter the frame of mind of those times, even for those who, like our senior participants, spent most of their adult lives in the Cold War environment. This was particularly evident at the outset of our discussions, which began with a consideration of the two episodes known as Shaba I and Shaba II. Before any significant discussion of those events occurred, several of the participants marvelled aloud at how superpower relations can have suffered such a severe setback over an essentially meaningless set of border skirmishes in a part of central Africa not one American or Russian in a thousand would have been able to find on a map.

Psychologists tell us that when explanations are obscure, the human mind falls naturally into metaphor. This is what seems to have happened at the outset of the Fort Lauderdale meeting. Karen Brutents, who was for thirty years an official of the International Department of the CPSU, and a man thoroughly familiar with all major Soviet initiatives in the Third World from Khrushchev to Gorbachev, drew his metaphor from his youth. "I used to be a boxer," he said. "And as I look back, you and we seem to have acted like boxers. No, not exactly like boxers, but like near-sighted boxers--like near-sighted boxers staring into a mirror. So every time I do this, it seems to me like you do this. And so on." Georgy Shakhnazarov, who also worked in the International Department of the CPSU, mainly on Eastern Europe, said it reminded him of what in soccer ("football" in Russia) is called "shadowing," or following each other's footsteps all over the field. Often, he said, players who are "shadowing" one another lose sight of the larger plans and objectives of the team.

Other metaphors were used as well, images of the global competition that contained in them sufficient condemnation to go around on both sides. Gen. Anatoly Gribkov said he remembered many times when some Third World leader would come to Moscow and proclaim "now I am a socialist." Then the Soviet leadership, he said, would make the foolish mistake of thinking they could with a little aid here or there make it possible for the leader's country to "move from donkeys to Mercedes'." Les Gelb, referring not to Southern Africa but to the confrontation over the Ogaden in 1977-78, put it in these irreverent terms: "We didn't want you playing in our sandbox, and you didn't want us playing in yours. Why? Because we didn't trust each other. Although we on the U.S. side had our differences, almost all of us believed that if we put our wallet on the table, you guys would steal it." This was followed

by several remarks from the Russian side that "it was the same for us."

But why? How did this mistrust develop to the extent that (for example) a border clash in central Africa could be blown up into an event of world-wide significance? Several people from each side reflected on U.S. and Russian attitudes at the beginning of 1977, as you and your administration were coming into office. Anatoly Dobrynin said that the Soviet leadership knew so little about you and your senior advisers that no one knew what to expect. Dobrynin and his colleagues seemed to agree that two events contributed greatly to the growth of mistrust on the Soviet side: their bitterness over the failure of Cy Vance's visit to Moscow in March 1977 (which was dealt with at length in the Musgrove conference); and their anger over suddenly being excluded from the Middle East peace process in early October 1977. Following the events over the Middle East in October 1977, according to Dobrynin, there developed two views: the "minority view," whose advocates asked "what kind of a game is the U.S. playing?"; and a "majority view," which was that the U.S. no longer considered detente with the Soviet Union its top priority.

Everyone on the U.S. side agreed, unsurprisingly, that there were diverse views in the Carter Administration, from the beginning, with regard to the Soviet Union. Les Gelb put it this way: "some on the U.S. side believed they knew about a 'secret handshake or mantra,' and some did not believe in the existence of these things." In other words, he said, some believed in a kind of rough but real Soviet "master plan" to best the U.S. on all fronts, while others doubted that such a plan existed. At several junctures Marshall Shulman made the point that there were people in your administration, as in the American body politic, who believed the Soviet Union was a competitor, but one with which it was possible and desirable to do business on a wide range of issues. But there were also those, he recalled, who believed that the USSR was an implacable enemy of the U.S. and, aside from limiting the nuclear arms competition, the Soviets should be regarded as having interests and intentions that were fundamentally incompatible with those of the U.S. Bill Odom, for example, said in Fort Lauderdale that while he was initially "bored by Africa," when he looked at the intelligence poring into the NSC in 1977-78 on the Horn, he had to admit that it looked as if the Soviets might indeed have a plan to destabilize the entire region surrounding the Persian Gulf, with all that might mean regarding U.S. access to oil.

Thus, there seemed to all the participants in Fort Lauderdale to have been some basic uncertainty at the outset of your administration regarding one another's fundamental intentions. To summarize:

♦ Basic Soviet Uncertainty. Will the U.S.: (a) be willing and able to acknowledge the USSR as the other superpower, and collaborate with it accordingly; or (b) will the U.S. seek to deny the USSR its rightful status by working to subvert its interests all around the globe?

♦ Basic U.S. Uncertainty. Will the USSR: (a) seek a collaborative partnership with the U.S. beginning with, but not limited to, nuclear arms control; or (b) seek to subvert U.S. interests all around the world, using "detente" as a cover for its malign intentions?

All participants in Fort Lauderdale agreed that, in early 1977, these were genuine uncertainties. Not everyone was uncertain, of course. But, taken as a whole, each leadership--U.S. and Soviet--the participants agreed, can be said to have had an "open mind" about these core issues. By the spring of the following year, both sides would begin to lean heavily toward answering "(b)" to the above hypothetical questions. Uncertainty would give rise to doubt, finally to a kind of certainty, by late 1979, that it is not possible to conduct business as usual with the other.

2. Spring 1978: The U.S.-Soviet Relationship on the Rocks.

It will come as no surprise to you that the documents made available for the Fort Lauderdale conference show that issues relating to Africa--southern Africa and the Horn--were becoming very contentious by the spring of 1978. We spent considerable time discussing the infamous performance of Gromyko who, in response to your opening remarks at a meeting in the White House on 27 May, claimed (I am quoting William Krimer's minutes):

There was no increasing Soviet presence in Africa. The Soviet Union did not have a single soldier with a rifle in Africa and did not intend to send any to that area ... Not a single Soviet individual had fired a shot in the course of the latest clashes in Africa, and not a single Soviet individual had taken part in any operation in that part of the world.

Bob Pastor pointedly asked the Russians in Fort Lauderdale if Gromyko had been lying. Bob was told by Dobrynin and Brutents that this was an "incorrect question." Bob responded by saying that this was the time to ask such questions, for two reasons: first, because we want to get at the historical truth; but second, that questions of truth and falsehood were important to you personally, and if the Soviet foreign minister would lie in such a situation, then the development of U.S-Soviet trust was, to say the least, retarded by exchanges such as that recorded on 27 May 1978.

Four days later, on 31 May, Cy Vance and Gromyko had again discussed Africa, this time with Gromyko taking offense, and the offensive. Cy had stated that U.S. intelligence indicated that the Cubans had been behind the second Shaba incursion, led by a certain Katangese General Mbumba. Gromyko then responded (from the notes obtained from the Russian Foreign Ministry):

But who on earth knows what kind of general this is? Who does he serve? Is he really the only one to tell the truth, like Jesus Christ of the Bible legend?

You have information from us--accept it. Your sources of information are bad if they present lies as truth. You yourself know from experience that you must not believe every report. Man was given his brain in order to analyze information, think and make realistic conclusions.

The U.S.-Soviet conversation about Africa had sunk to this level by the spring of 1978. I use the example of Africa to illustrate a pervasive impression many of us got from the documents on both sides: that the conversation regarding all aspects of the Global competition had deteriorated considerably and was almost completely at odds with the hopes of a year and a half before.

This was apparent not only in face-to-face meetings between U.S. and Soviet officials. A similar process seems to have been going on behind the scenes in Moscow and Washington. I thought you might find it instructive to see, in two documentary "snapshots,"--one American, one Russian--just how rocky the relationship appears, in retrospect, to have become a year or more before the June 1979 Vienna summit.

The intensity of the debate over Soviet intentions within your administration is especially poignant in the "near-verbatim minutes" of a Special Coordination Committee meeting on the Horn of Africa, 2 March 1978, 12:50-2:15 PM, in the White House Situation Room. It reads, in part, as follows:

C[yrus] V[ance]: We have told them that if the Somalis withdraw we expect them and the Cubans to get out and there should be an OAU advisory group that would protect the Ogaden populations against reprisals. There should obviously be a ceasefire and an agreement to respect the boundaries and consideration should be given to how the ethnic problem might be dealt with. They say that their interest will not be to stay if the Ogaden is settled.

D[avid] A[aron]: We ought to link this up and get a commitment from them. We should short-circuit the Ethiopians on this.

CV: If we can feel assured that the Somalis are going to get out of the Ogaden then we can do business with the Soviets.

H[arold] B[rown]: Can we do anything without long negotiations?

Z[bigniew] B[rzezinski]: The Soviets are demonstrating a predisposition to exploit a local conflict for larger purposes. They are frightening more countries in the region and they are creating a precedent for more involvement elsewhere. The Cubans are offering 800 men to ZAPU. If the Cubans and Soviets are going to get massively involved in Rhodesia, we are going to be in a worse bind there. If we allow the Soviets to send expeditionary forces to resolve territorial conflicts in ways that are beneficial to them, then we are going to have more and more problems.

V[ice] P[resident]: You are right but our remedies are all theoretical. We only strengthen their position. The conundrum in the Somali problem is that they are fighting an aggressor.

HB: I have an idea re China. The Chinese are less concerned about the aggressor. Why don't we get together with the Chinese in Warsaw and issue a joint statement of concern about the Horn and append it to a statement that we will consult on other areas where we have a joint interest? That would get the Soviets' attention.

CV: That would get their attention but we are at a point where we are on the brink of ending up with a real souring of relations between ourselves and the Soviet Union and it may take a helluva long while to change and may not be changed for years and I think that is a very important step to take--we should examine it carefully before we go down that road.

....

ZB: On this business of souring relations with the Soviets, the real question is why are they being soured? Do the Soviets want to sour these relations? If they can do what they want in the Horn without getting evidence of concern from us, we are going to have major problems with them in the south. We should communicate to the Soviets that they do not have a free hand and that what they do entails risks. Otherwise, what will they think?

DA: I think it is time to have a very thorough discussion with the Soviets on all this. We should include southern Africa in this discussion. We should give it this one crack before we take some steps.

ZB: Not before we take--as we take. Otherwise this is going to be a continuation of our pattern of behavior of the last few months: noise but no follow-through.

HB: The Chinese one is different.

....

CV: I think the key still remains SALT. If we make progress on SALT, then a lot of things will fall into place that do not fall into place otherwise.

HB: I do not think a SALT treaty would make any difference--if we had it now, they would be reacting the same way.

ZB: They must understand that there are consequences in their behavior. If we do not react, we are destroying our own posture--regionally and internationally and we are creating the conditions for domestic reaction.

CV: This is where you and I part. The consequences of doing something like this are very dangerous.

We have no comparable record on the Soviet side of a debate over fundamental aspects of superpower relations. But with the documents we obtained for the Fort Lauderdale conference, we are able to draw back the curtain slightly on the thinking behind the scenes in Moscow. Here, for example, is Brezhnev speaking to his Politburo on 8 June 1978, the day following your commencement address in Annapolis:

Comrades ... A serious deterioration and exacerbation of the situation has occurred. and the primary source of this deterioration is the growing aggression of the foreign policy of the Carter government, the continually more anti-Soviet character of the ~~statements~~ of the President himself and of his closest colleagues--in the first instance those of Brzezinski.

....

I think that passivity here is inadmissible. We must fight actively and persistently for peace and detente. We must do all that is possible in order to hinder the policy, which is fraught with the threat of a new world war. Here we need energetic steps, noticeable for the whole world.

....

Third. We should come forward with a special Declaration of the Soviet Government on African affairs. In this document we

should categorically refute and expose the imperialist intentions with regard to the policy of the Soviet Union and other socialist countries in Africa, among them the Horn of Africa, in Zaire, etc. Briefly and in calm tones we should say how it is in reality. At the same time with all sharpness we should condemn the policy of armed intervention, undermining activity and other forms of interference in African affairs by the governments of NATO headed by the USA. We should show how the contemporary colonizers, operating with the hypocritical slogan, "African solidarity," enlist accomplices for themselves in Africa from the numbers of reactionary, anti-popular regimes, for carrying out their own policy.

Beneath the familiar slogans of these passages, according to the Russians present in Fort Lauderdale who knew Brezhnev, was real anger and a feeling of having been trapped by (what was regarded by some around him) as too many previous concessions. By the spring of 1978, therefore, it was time to go on the offensive on the African question and, as the Russian documents make clear, on other salient U.S.-Soviet issues as well.

3. The Collapse of Detente: Lost Opportunity or Inevitable Outcome?

Was the collapse of detente preventable or not? Were there particular turning points at which, but for a decision here or there, the outcome might have been different? Or were factors operating which all but guaranteed the outcome that in fact occurred?

At what might be called the "tactical" level, there was no doubt among the Fort Lauderdale participants that mistakes were made along the way to the final demise of detente. Some that were discussed in Fort Lauderdale are:

♦ March 1977 Vance mission to Moscow. Needed: less U.S. tactical cleverness and more Soviet flexibility.

♦ October 1977 Middle East communique. Needed: More U.S. courage in resisting Israel and its U.S. domestic lobby and less Soviet angst and loathing about the setback.

♦ Southern Africa and the Horn. Needed: More Soviet resistance to the Cuban "tail" wagging the Soviet "dog" and more realistic U.S. assessment of Soviet intentions and capabilities.

♦ SS-20 and Pershing/Cruise Deployments. Needed: Less Soviet paranoia regarding the U.S. high-tech weapons program and a more realistic U.S. assessment of the real requirements of extended deterrence.

♦ The Polish crisis. Needed: less U.S. sanctioning of American citizens advocating the overthrow of the Polish regime and less Soviet military maneuvering seeming to indicate the imminence of an invasion.

♦ The brigade in Cuba. Needed: less Cuban and Soviet paranoia regarding U.S. intentions regarding Cuba and a more realistic Soviet assessment of what was in essence a screw-up rather than a plot.

♦ Afghanistan, pre-December 1979. Needed: more Soviet sensitivity to the likely U.S. and world reaction to military intervention and less paranoia regarding the existence of a Soviet "master plan" to de-stabilize the area and impede U.S. access to Arab oil.

Of course, not everyone agreed with all of these propositions, even after the fact, with benefit of hindsight and declassified documents from both sides. Some Russians, for example, left Fort Lauderdale utterly convinced that your administration had hatched a plot over the brigade in Cuba to humiliate the Cubans on the eve of the non-aligned summit in Havana. Some also believed that an organized plot existed within the Carter administration to undermine the Polish regime. Likewise, not everyone on the U.S. side seemed convinced by the emotional denials of Gen. Anatoly Gribkov and Georgy Shakhnazarov that an invasion of Poland was never contemplated, at any time, by the Soviet leadership. Nevertheless, many of the participants on both sides agreed with a good deal of what is summarized in the above bullets. In other words, yes, things might very well have been handled differently "if only"--as Les Gelb said at one point--if only the actors on each side had really known what their counterparts were thinking and saying among themselves at the time. Perhaps, some said, if each side had appreciated more fully the extent to which both believed they were acting from defensive motives, things might have turned out differently, in these individual cases.

But would the total outcome have been different, if one or more of the above adjustments had been made in real time? On this there was no agreement. On the one hand, Cy Vance and Anatoly Dobrynin argued again and again that each individual lost opportunity really did make a difference, and that had some of them been seized, rather than lost, the entire outcome might have been different. Dobrynin, for example, said that if a summit had occurred early in your administration--which of course you wanted but the Soviets refused, unless it was linked with the signing of a SALT II treaty--it would have forced both sides to confront basic issues and resolve them on the basis of facts, rather than rumor and myth, which (Dobrynin believes) characterized much of U.S.-Soviet relations toward the end of your administration. Moreover, Cy argued at Musgrove and in Fort Lauderdale that the most

important result of many of the missed opportunities was the loss of time, particularly the loss of time to get a SALT II treaty hammered out, signed and sold to the U.S. Senate. If that had happened in late 1977 or early 1978, he believes, much might have been different. Several others agreed with both Dobrynin and Cy.

But not everyone. Bill Odom and Georgy Shakhnazarov argued that detente was doomed, sooner or later, because of the inherent non-viability of the Soviet Union. Zbig Brzezinski made this point at Musgrove: because, as he saw it, the U.S. as a society was superior to that of the Soviet Union in every respect, the U.S. was obliged to play from strength in dealing with the Soviets, excepting only the need to limit the nuclear arms competition. In this view, there was a good reason the Soviet leaders seem always to have suffered from an inferiority complex (and the Americans seem to the Soviets always to have had a "superiority complex"). It is because the U.S. was superior to the Soviet Union, and everybody knew it, down deep. Needless to say, not everyone at the table agreed with this view, but it was interesting that it found support on both sides of the table.

4. Then and Now: Present Relevance of the Carter-Brezhnev Era.

A couple of years ago, when our project began (October 1992), almost no one made analogies between U.S.-Soviet relations in the period of your administration and contemporary U.S.-Russian relations. Yeltsin had stood bravely on his tank during the August 1991 coup attempt. Then President Clinton came to office promising to make Russia his first foreign policy priority. When he appointed Strobe Talbott to oversee policy toward the former Soviet Union, some felt that a "honeymoon" in U.S.-Russian relations had begun.

Now, a little over two years later, not only is the "honeymoon" over, but some believe ~~that~~ U.S.-Russian relations are on the rocks. Some even believe that Russia, under Boris Yeltsin is hardly more viable even in the short run than was Brezhnev's Soviet Union. Chechnya reminds some, in the U.S and in Russia, of Afghanistan. And paranoid, anti-Western rhetoric on the Russian side now comes from the Russian president and foreign minister, not only from far-right nationalists.

With this partial but suggestive resonance in mind between the Carter-Brezhnev and Clinton-Yeltsin periods, we invited both the U.S. and Russian governments to participate in our project. Each decided to encourage its ambassadors to one another's countries to be the "point men" for the acquisition of declassified documents. We, in turn, invited both Amb. Thomas Pickering and Amb. Yuli Vorontsov to come to the Fort Lauderdale conference and to

participate in a public discussion in Washington on the day following the conclusion of the conference, 27 March.

To Amb. Vorontsov, the great danger now is that the U.S. may begin to exclude Russia from its plans for Europe, just as (in his interpretation of the Fort Lauderdale results) the Carter administration eventually sought exclude the Soviet Union from the Third World and ultimately to deny it the status of the other superpower. According to Amb. Vorontsov:

Lack of trust in the relationship made all kinds of worst-case scenarios look plausible in the eyes of policy-makers of that time. The core reason for the breakdown of Soviet-American relations under the Carter Administration was the unwillingness of the United States to put up with the role of the Soviet Union as a major player in world affairs. This can be understood in the context of the two countries being ideological enemies. Any attempt to minimize the role of Russia, for example in Europe, can only restore the old undesirable pattern of behavior.

Amb. Vorontsov thus implied in his remarks in Washington that, since ideology no longer divides Russians and Americans, the U.S. has no excuse this time to "downgrade" the status of Russia.

Amb. Pickering, who made an informal presentation over dinner in Fort Lauderdale on connections between past and present, seemed to accept Amb. Vorontsov's central point. He said in his Washington remarks that:

if we are to avoid misperceptions in the future, we should be guided by consultations, by exploring not only the appropriate positions of each side, but the opportunities those positions present through dialogue, and we must work together to find solutions. These opportunities are new and must be seized. But the Carter-Brezhnev years suggest a cautionary note. There were "two" Carter administrations, one in which partnership with the Russians was sought and, to a degree, obtained; and there was a second, in which partnership proved to be impossible. We need to take care that positive momentum in the relationship this time is maintained.

Amb. Pickering left open the question of why there may have been, as he said, "two" Carter administrations. As he said in the discussion period, it really doesn't matter whether the "two-ness" of your administration was internally or externally caused. The important point, one which he said was driven home to him as he listened to the Fort Lauderdale discussions, was for both sides to work to maintain the positive momentum of the post-Cold War period.

5. Were There "Two" Carter Administrations?

Tom Pickering did not make up his idea of "two" Carter administrations out of thin air. It was much discussed, in one form or another, by many of the participants in Fort Lauderdale, both Russian and American. Oleg Troyanovsky, UN ambassador at the time, was the first to say that your administration spoke with "two voices." Bob Pastor agreed with this, saying that there were from the outset those who felt that Soviet cooperation was best obtained by firmness, and those who favored a more conciliatory approach, because they felt that was the way to induce Soviet cooperation. Bill Odom, echoing something Zbig Brzezinski said at Musgrove, said that he felt that there really were "two" Carter administrations: one that lasted until roughly the spring or summer of 1978, and one which began then and continued through to January 1981. Both Zbig and Bill attributed a lot of importance to the Horn of Africa in the change in course. Finally, Les Gelb and Bill Odom had an interesting exchange in which both concluded, to put it in Bill's phrasing: "the split was in the president's brain," by which we understood him to mean that all along your instinct was to cooperate if possible but, if that didn't seem to work, you were prepared to be firm with the Soviets, in order to raise the odds of a cooperative solution.

It seemed to me that these exchanges about "two" Carter administrations were both important and frustrating. Tom Pickering's remarks hint at why it is important to understand such shifts as may have occurred in U.S.-Soviet relations during your presidency. But it seemed to me, and to others, that it is impossible to carry the analysis any further without your active participation in the process. Had you been in Fort Lauderdale, I believe the participants would have wanted to put at least these questions to you:

1. Evolution. How did your perception toward the Soviet Union evolve and shift over time (if, in your view, it did shift)?

2. Events. What were the key events leading to such evolution or shifts as may have occurred?

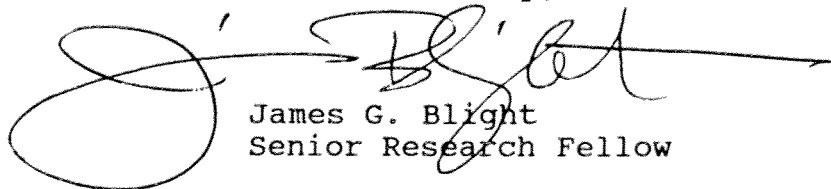
3. Lessons. What lessons do you believe should be drawn from your experience for current U.S.-Russian relations, for U.S. foreign policy, and for the conduct of international relations?

Only you can answer the first two. And because your interest, much like Ambassadors Pickering and Vorontsov, is known to be practical and forward-looking, we believe we would all benefit from your thoughts on how to make use of your unique experience in practice.

This is why I hope you will seriously consider the invitation from our colleagues at the Norwegian Nobel Institute to participate in the concluding conference of our project, in Oslo next September. Your presence would provide an important capstone to a project whose fascination and significance seems steadily to grow.

As always, I would be pleased to come down to Atlanta at your convenience, to brief you on the project, if that is of interest. Meantime, I send you all best wishes from your friends at the Watson Institute.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. G. Blight', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

James G. Blight
Senior Research Fellow