Sean Aday:

We have such a full crowd and not surprising given the wonderful guess speaker we have tonight and the interesting conversation that we are about to have. I'm Sean Aday I'm a professor of Media public affairs, international affairs here at George Washington University and I'm also director of the Institute for Public Diplomacy and Global Communication which is co-sponsoring this event with the Walter Roberts Endowment Board. This evening couldn't have happened without the generous support of IPDGCs parents which would be the school of Media Public Affairs, the Columbian College of Arts and Sciences and the Allied School of International Affairs.

First I'd like to say a few words about this lecture series and the man that it honors. Dr. Walter Roberts received his PhD from Cambridge – he became associated with the George Washington University in 1995 after a 40 year career in the United States Government. He joined the Voice of America when it was founded in 1942, served in the State Department and the US Information Agency in Washington and overseas and retired as associate director of USIA then the agencies top career position. At GW he initiated a course called the Diplomacy in the Information Age and this was in 1985. That introduced students to the great changes that have occurred and the conduct of foreign policy as a result of the communication revolution and that was before the more recent communication revolution that we'll be talking about tonight. It was during a tour as counselor at the American Embassy in Belgrade, then Yugoslavia that he met a young military attaché Brent Scowcroft along with a Foreign Service officer and future secretary of state Larry Eagleburger and the three would become close friends. In fact last week I was having coffee at Walter’s apartment and he was talking about how he had found some old appointment books from that era one of which has scrawled in it dinner with Capt. And Mrs. Scowcroft.

Since his retirement from government Walter has written widely and spoken eloquently and I would say in a very forward thinking way about the practice and theory of public diplomacy. His book “Tito, Mihailovic and the Allies: 1941 to 1945” was described by foreign affairs as the best book on the subject. And just this month because he’s still very active in writing he published a fascinating piece in diplomacy that placed President Obama’s controversial May speech referring to the “1967 lines of mutually agreed swaps in the Israel Palestinian conflict in historical context” something that Walter was uniquely in a position to do given that he covered the United Nations deliberations on this topic in 1947 as a reporter for Voice of America. Walter’s commitment to the practice and study of public diplomacy speaks for itself in so many ways not the least of which being this institute itself. Walter along with Barry Zorhian established what was known first as the Public Diplomacy Foundation and then later then when it found a home at GW as the Public Diplomacy Institute. It is his endowment that birthed the institute, which now honors his legacy, support and service with this lecture.
series and when I first broached the idea at the endowment board meeting a while back more than a year ago now of having an annual lecture in Walters honor and his name the very first person he mentioned as someone who would give that talk is his old friend General Scowcroft.

General Scowcroft served as the national security advisor to both Presidents Gerald Ford and George H. Bush following a long career of service in the Air Force and in government. Among many other affiliations he’s the founder and president of the forum for international policy as well as the president of the Scowcroft Group an international business consulting firm. In recent years General Scowcroft has served as co-chair for both the Blue Ribbon Commission on America’s nuclear future and National Academy’s of Science committee on science security and prosperity. In 1991 General Scowcroft was presented with the Medal of Freedom the nation’s highest civilian honor by President George H. Bush for whom he served an exemplary as national security advisory. In fact General Scowcroft has been hailed by many as being the best national security advisor of the many immensely talented men and women who have held that position.

He will be engaging in conversation tonight with his old nemesis from the media Frank Sesno actually we have another faculty member from SMPA Mike Shanahan in the crowd who also covered General Scowcroft’s tenure. Frank is the director of the School of Media and Public Affairs, is an Emmy award winning journalist among winning many other awards with more than 25 years of experience including winning 18 years at CNN where he served, where he still serves as special correspondent. He served as a White House correspondent, an anchor and Washington bureau chief during which time as I said he covered General Scowcroft frequently. But we aren’t here to listen to biographies and an hour isn’t nearly enough time to pick General Scowcroft’s brain and all he has to tell us about where we are and where we’ve been so I want to get us started by framing the discussion in the terms of the class that Walter taught here at GW for some many years.

As Walter taught his GW students as early 1985 diplomacy in the information age is not just about leaders talking to other leaders or elites talking to other elites. It’s about government officials talking to people what we call public diplomacy. Presidents and secretaries of state when they are traveling overseas used to only see their counterparts. Today while of course they still do that they make a special effort to reach out to the people of the host country by addressing Town Halls, and I would add these days engaging in Facebook chats, Twitter conversations and other means of communication. They do this because it’s a fact that even in autocratic countries as a consequence of the information revolution the people of a country have an ever increasing influence on their governments and ever increasing modes of communication by which they as
we’ve seen in the Arab spring can communicate with each other and with the outside world.

And we need look no further than what we see with some of the I would say really heroic efforts of the US Ambassador in Syria and they way he is engaging the people there on the streets who are trying to effect political and social change but we’ve also seen it elsewhere in the region and around the world. And these present new and interesting challenges both in terms of traditional diplomacy and public diplomacy and one of the things that has really been a hallmark of the last ten years since September 11th both in the Bush administration and the Obama administration is at least an effort to increase the roll of public diplomacy to get public diplomacy in the first three feet not just the last three feet to use Murrow’s phrase, and so one of the things I think we are really interested in discussing with General Scowcroft tonight is the way in which from a historical perspective from a person who has all this experience how these changes in the way that communicate with other publics changes or alters the way that diplomats and foreign policy makers do their job and the way we effect our foreign policy. With that I turn it over to you Frank and General Scowcroft.

Frank Sesno
Thank you very much Sean and I just invite you to join me in welcoming General Scowcroft at George Washington University.

General Brent Scowcroft
Thank you.

Frank Sesno
As Sean correctly noted I’ve had the great opportunity to see General Scowcroft in action in his decision making and advisory capacities and I’ve had an opportunity to interview him many times and we had a chat yesterday in preparation for this conversation and so what we’ll do here this evening is we are going to talk a lot about public diplomacy as Sean Aday laid out this idea of how leaders talk to the world, talk to other citizens, and how media are changing but also have an opportunity to call on General Scowcroft to share his unique perspective and the incredible arch of history that he has in many ways helped to shape. So this conversation will bob and weave a bit and I know that the General Scowcroft -

General Scowcroft
You mean I will.

Frank Sesno
You never bob and weave. Unless you are trying to be diplomatic. And then a little bit later we’ll open the questioning up to all of you on the floor and I look forward to that as well. General Scowcroft I want to start though with sort of
your take on the challenges that we face in the world today if you were in the
White House if you were the National Security Advisor today what would be at
the top of your list keeping you awake at night? There certainly seems no
shortage of that yet you’ve known plenty of crises in the past so how do you stack
them, what would be at the top of your list?

General Scowcroft
Let me first say just a word about Walter Roberts. It’s 51 years ago that I met
Walter Roberts and we were both stationed in Yugoslavia, in which Tito trying to
construct a new brand of communism different from the Soviet model. It was a
very complicated political situation and Walter and I worked through it together
we lived just a few doors apart in one of the well there weren’t very many
exclusive areas in Belgrade but that was one of them this is indeed a great honor
for me to kick off this lecture series. Thank you Walter. Your question is a great
one. I think one of the things that makes the current scene different from any
others is related to the Arab spring and that is I’ve seen I emerged into public
service in the heart of the Cold War I saw that, I saw the dissolution of the Soviet
Union and Iraq, Kuwait saw it. But they are all a traditional world. What’s
happened now is that technology has caught up with us and is dramatically
changing the character of the world. Call it globalization. Globalization is an
overworked word. But it is changing the fundamental character of the
international system.

Frank Sesno
How is it changing?

General Scowcroft
It’s eroding national borders and there are fewer and fewer things that the
nations state can do which has traditionally done to provide for the security and
welfare of its citizens unilaterally. More and more issues have to be, you have to
reach out to other countries in order to cooperate and get things done. Whether
it’s in health, whether it’s in climate change, but the one I want to point to is
information technology. And one of the best examples of that is the fact that a
poor fruit peddler who was beat up in Tunisia and emulated himself really started
the Arab Spring almost instantaneously now why. It’s because now the world the
citizens of the world have been politicized. For most of the world history you
expected to live exactly like your father lived, you expect your son to live like you
lived there was an order things you were a certain part of a society and that was
your place and you couldn’t do anything about it. Then along comes radio,
television, cell phones and so on. All of the sudden people are insight of what’s
going on in the world and they said the world’s not like this at all. We can make a
difference in a way. So they are politically activate and then along with that
comes the more highly technical which I’m not up to but Tweeters and the
Facebook and so on which solved one of the most difficult problems in protesting
governments. Which is a demonstration or something? There you are very vulnerable you have to go out and raise people and organize and so on. Very difficult. Not anymore. You push a button and say turn out at Tahrir Square at 10:00 o’clock tomorrow morning and a million people get that. That’s a whole new world and I think the spontaneity throughout the region is testimony to this is a different kind of world that we are just beginning to experience.

Frank Sesno
So when Walter went to work for the Voice of America there was a short wave broadcast that tried to reach around the world to inform people. Do you see it in this new technology where people can go directly to one another to go out to Tahrir Square or wherever they are going to be as an evolution of that technology that merely accelerates it or do you see it as fundamental revolution in the way people connect and communicate and organize and the challenges to governments to deal with that along the way?

General Scowcroft
I think it’s both. I think its evolutionary in the sense that we are better able to get our message out but there are at the same time a lot of very different messages and the whole blogosphere the Tweeters and so on go out to foreign countries who have no way to evaluate the information they are getting and its unvetted by newspapers or the formal journalists which make it at least reasonable it can be anything now. So it’s very much more confusing.

Frank Sesno
So is your answer to that what is the biggest challenge that we face today your answer is the Arab Spring or is your answer the new technology that’s transforming these relationships.

General Scowcroft
I think it’s the new technology because the Arab spring is just a phenomenon of one area but look how the Chinese reacted. They got, they panicked in a way and tried to cover it all up. The Iranians are saying the same way.

Frank Sesno
Will it work over time?

General Scowcroft
Not over time it won’t work. No.

Frank Sesno
What does that mean where a country of 1.3 billion people that is trying to build the Great Fire Wall?
**General Scowcroft**

What it means is an increasingly complicated struggle between suppressing information, controlling it, and just keeping some of the very worst aspects of it out. And you can see the Chinese in a way playing catch up all along. They are doing reasonably well now and they are also on their own offense through cyber programs which is a very different part.

**Frank Sesno**

Will they be able to retain control?

**General Scowcroft**

I think probably so. I think probably so and I think partly so because in my experience with the Chinese the one thing that the Chinese leadership is deathly afraid of is instability. Their overall goal is to keep China stable and they have different ways of doing it but Deng Xiaoping decided the way to keep China stable is to increase the standard of living a little bit each year so that people would be content with the direction the society was going and so he threw it out as an economic system and said I don’t care whether is black or white as long they catch us mice and that was the theory. And they build a huge economic machine which was very successful but now they are running into problems of inflation and if there is a threat to the leadership now inflation is a serious problem.

**Frank Sesno**

Inflation is a problem and the people are a problem so they have the crashes of their high speed trains, they have state run media that control the message but people send messages to one another they learn from the cell texting and other ways what really happened or what information they don’t have that provokes a backlash same thing with Sars when that epidemic went through same thing with the earthquake that poses a very profound challenge of people to communicate where people can communicate directly with one another. You know one of, this is just so much for me because you have no idea, but one of the great

**General Scowcroft**

It’s more fun now than it used to be.

**Frank Sesno**

But one of the stories that I got to cover and one of the stories that I broke when I was at the White House and I don’t if you remember this but it was after Tiananmen Square and relations went very cold very fast between the Bush administration and Beijing and I got a tip that you had made a secret mission to Beijing it was the first highest level outreach to the government there I had I think it was John Sununu who was the chief of staff at the time and I got his undivided attention when I said I’m about to report that Brent Scowcroft has gone off to Beijing but that was secret diplomacy in its own way right that was
very private diplomacy. What where you doing at the same time, take us inside to what a government is doing in the middle of a crisis like that with its public diplomacy. What are you trying to convey? What are you trying to make happen with what you are doing publically even as you are operating in traditional diplomatic fashions privately?

General Scowcroft
Publically what we had to show was what the Chinese did in Tiananmen Square as unacceptable and so –

Frank Sesno
And show that to whom to a domestic audience? A Chinese audience to a domestic audience.

General Scowcroft
Domestic audience. And to a Chinese audience as well but the principal one was the domestic audience to begin with. And so the president we had fairly close military to military relationships with the Chinese by then especially in intelligence to look at Soviet missile launches and so on. And he put sanctions on those and sanctions against the military accusing them of doing it. That was because they were the perpetrators but also because he didn’t want to break the overall relationship so after having put that one and we were the first ones to do it, we were ahead of the Europeans on that, he tried because he felt that this relationship however badly they had behaved, however badly the Chinese had behaved the relationship was too important to throw over the side. He tried a phone call and the answer was we Chinese the leaders don’t talk over the telephone where we don’t make policy that way. Period. So he sent me over to the Chinese Embassy in Washington

Frank Sesno
So basically they said we’re not taking the call.

General Scowcroft
Not taking the call, they did not take the call. And so I went over and talked to the ambassador and I said you know the president would like to reach out he’s prepared to send somebody over and within about three hours the answer came absolutely. Send them. It was secret because after just having sat sanctions on it wouldn’t look exactly congruous to send

Frank Sesno
You collaborating those public and private messages –

General Scowcroft
Public and private absolutely.
Frank Sesno
And when you say you were trying to get a message to the Chinese - were you trying to reach the Chinese was it through Voice of America and our public and our broadcasting our international broadcasting? Was it through statements made from the White House podium or a combination?

General Scowcroft
In yeah there were initial statements from the podium but primarily it was Voice of America and other things that said this is what happened at Tiananmen square it’s a terrible thing to have happened.

Frank Sesno
Was that message received? I mean what impact do you feel this sort of public diplomacy had?

General Scowcroft
I don’t think we have any way of knowing. I really don’t and when I went to China and met with Deng Xiao Ping who had just given up his authorities then he said I’m meeting you as an old friend I’m not in power anymore which was a joke I’m not in power anymore but I want to welcome you but I’m welcoming you as a person not as an emissary of the United States. And he said what you have been doing and saying is none of your business.

Frank Sesno
He said this to you?

General Scowcroft
[He said] what happened in Tiananmen square is none of your business.

Frank Sesno
And you said?

General Scowcroft
And I said you are correct what did is none of our business but the consequences of what you did for our relationship with you and with the world is very much our business and that’s why I’m here.

Frank Sesno
And he said?

General Scowcroft
And then we started talking from then.
Frank Sesno  
Was that turning point meeting?

General Scowcroft  
No it wasn’t a turning point meeting it was a stop the bleeding meeting. And the turning point was six months later when I went back to China after President Bush had met with President Gorbachev at Malta and I went back to tell the Chinese what had happened there. And at that time we started a roadmap as to how we could move back towards normalization of the relationship.

Frank Sesno  
So come back to current days this is fascinating examples but in that more traditional world you talked about where communicating was done through very traditional nations states and we weren’t worrying and we weren’t observing, weren’t worrying about and seeing some of the things we are seeing now so come to back to Tahrir Square for a moment, what when you think about the consequences of the Arab spring and where this is going where do you see it going?

General Scowcroft  
I think one of the differences in where it’s going is in the more traditional communications of Walter’s time you were actually communicating with a small part of the population the sort of upper crust the elite that’s right. Now you are down way below the elite to everybody who has a grievance and I think one of the big questions about the Arab spring is this a yearning for democracy or it is a yearning for dignity to be treated like a human being rather than a chattel of the government.

Frank Sesno  
What do you think?

General Scowcroft  
My sense is that it is more the later than it is democracy. We understand you say democracy and we immediately put it into representative government. What does the average Egyptian think when you say democracy? It’s not at all clear and I think that when you move beyond this we know what we are against to what are we for. Time will tell how easy it is make that step. History doesn’t teach but you can learn from it. But if you look at history and some of the great revolutions most of them turned pretty sour before they ended up right. The French revolution, the Russian revolution, the Iranian revolution look at they start out with this euphoric kind of sense then the bad guys come in and take over and only gradually is that, we have to wait and see now.

Frank Sesno
Do you expect that to happen in the Arab Spring?

**General Scowcroft**
I hope not.

**Frank Sesno**
Is there any reason to think it won’t happen though?

**General Scowcroft**
No I don’t think I think there is more reason to think that it will happen because I think there are fewer people in the demonstrators who have some sense of what they want rather than some sense of what they want relief from.

**Frank Sesno**
Imagine if you were a national security advisor today I mean President Obama goes Cairo and makes his famous Cairo speech and maybe in the careful for what you wish for department we now have the Arab spring where does that leave the Obama administration and this president with respect to its policy towards the Middle East?

**General Scowcroft**
In a very complicated position.

**Frank Sesno**
You are so diplomatic.

**General Scowcroft**
No the presidents Cairo speech was a traditional speech and it was a brilliant speech and the Middle East in general just fell in love with that speech. Now however it’s not quite so clear what the presidents, what the United States really thinks about the Arab spring. Half a dozen countries were in turmoil, who did we choose to apply force against Libya is Libya the most important country in the region and now I’m an Egyptian or I’m a Syrian why did the United States do that so that’s a very complicating factor. And now comes an esoteric factor out of left field which is the Palestinians who they think they ought to profit by the Arab spring too. And we are now probably the only country supporting Israel in the United Nations with their appeal for statehood. So we’ve gotten ourselves its intrinsically complicated. And it’s hard to know how to act.

**Frank Sesno**
So what is or what should be our public diplomacy surrounding this very complicated messy and maybe contradictory US policy confronting this very complicated contradictory region. Right isn’t that, what’s the story
General Scowcroft
Walter is the guy who did that for me.

Frank Sesno
So it’s all your fault?

General Scowcroft
It is very complicated and it’s very hard to send the right message.

Frank Sesno
What is the message?

General Scowcroft
The message is basically that people ought to have the right to select or modify their government.

Frank Sesno
And what is our message to the Palestinians?

General Scowcroft
Well that’s the question. Should it be different for the Palestinians?

Frank Sesno
Should it?

General Scowcroft
It is. The president’s speech in the UN was a very different speech about Palestine.

Frank Sesno
So where we have a –

General Scowcroft
It just complicates diplomacy immensely. Syria is a very different case. We probably have as many interests in Syria as any country of the region. It’s Syria and Israel. Syria and Hamas, Syria and you name it - Syria and Lebanon, very important country to us but if we encourage revolt in Syria who replaces Assad?

Frank Sesno
We’ve heard of revolt in Libya before we had an answer to that question.

General Scowcroft
Yeah and we still don’t know the answer. But it’s even more complicated than Syria because almost certainly it’s not going to be a broad based group because
Syria is extremely mixed up, it is run at present by an Alawite sect of the Shia branch of Islam maybe a 10% the majority or Sunni and overlaying it all is the Ba’athist party and a sort of secular socialist. The army is probably crucial to what happens in Syria now and the army is certainly led by Alawite generals but most of the troops are very likely Sunni.

Frank Sesno
Let’s look at another very challenging place and that’s Pakistan right when we talk about sending a message that is one of the most complicated places of all. Who’s war is it? Many Pakistanis believe we’re fighting on their territory, we’re trying to say no this is your war, this is your business, this is about your county when you think about public diplomacy, when you think about messages sent from leaders to citizens, is this a war we are winning? Are these hearts and minds that we are winning?

General Scowcroft
Pakistan is a really particularly complicated. Well let me tell you -

Frank Sesno
Life was so simple when it was East and West and

General Scowcroft
Yeah but look at Pakistan when Pakistan I’m giving you the picture from the Pakistan side now. Pakistan became independent we were their security blanket. We provided much of their military equipment, we trained their troops, there was a close military relationship with Pakistan. Then after I think the second Indo-Pak war we put sanctions military, military equipment to both sides. Didn’t matter to the Indians because they got all their equipment from the Soviet Union it mattered to the Pakistanis. And so they thought well we got to fend to ourselves only way we can do it is nuclear weapons so as they started a nuclear program then we developed the Pressler amendment and we undermined their every step they took we undermined with the Pressler amendment their sense of security ok then comes the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and we go back to the Paks and we say look we’ve got to get rid of these guys. So we joined them on all of the people that are terrorists now I remember some of them Oval Office to get the Soviets out of Afghanistan. When the Soviets got out of Afghanistan from the Pakistan standpoint we left them. Ok now we are back again and we’re saying these irregulars, these people on the border, these tribes they are not your friends. They are your enemies. Well, Pakistan the ISI (the intelligence group in Pakistan military) had been using these groups against the Indians they, you know, send them into cashmere and so on they are sort of irregular troops now we are saying they are your enemy go after them which is a true statement but at the same time we are saying two years we’ll be gone again. So they will have alienated all of the people they relied on and we’re not there to help them. So
Pakistan is a really complicated question. And another I think what we did Osama Bin Laden was a brilliant tactical exercise, but we had to know that for the Pakistanis it made the government look either complicit or inept or both. And we seemed very surprised when the government reacted sharply. We shouldn’t have.

Frank Sesno
What should we have-?

General Scowcroft
I don’t know there is no easy way out. But we had not thought about it beforehand. And we’re still living in the results of that.

Frank Sesno
When we talk about public diplomacy, what do you think are the in the contemporary world, today’s world are the most effective tools of public of American public diplomacy?

General Scowcroft
Well I wish we still had USIA.

Frank Sesno
Because?

General Scowcroft
Because it was an enterprise devoted to a single task under state department you know state department now has –

Frank Sesno
We have some young people who probably have no idea what USIA was.

General Scowcroft
The US Information Agency

Frank Sesno
And it’s purpose was?

General Scowcroft
It’s purpose to get the American message out to the world

Frank Sesno
And it was absorbed by the state department

General Scowcroft
And it was absorbed by the state department as was AID which used to be ICA and so on those were both for decades independent agencies. Now they’ve been absorbed by the state department and neither one of them I think operates anywhere near the effectiveness that they

Frank Sesno
So should a new independent agency do you think be set up to resume those functions? Is that practical or even necessary given the -

General Scowcroft
No because it’s a different problem now.

Frank Sesno
So what are then do you think the current mix, the most effective tools of American public diplomacy? Or expressions of American public diplomacy?

General Scowcroft
I think it’s probably our media and the fact that our media is available more broadly than it’s ever been and people see the freedom with which it operates and that’s a I think a very good message the problem is it’s not you know not focused and purposeful like it would be we had an agency doing it.

Frank Sesno
I want to show you all and talk to the general about this, this is on my wall in my office and it’s a favorite of mine and this is aboard Air Force One in 1989 President Bush I’m 12 and General Scowcroft, Marlin Fitzwater the president’s press secretary at the time and the president is talking to this pool of reporters I was on Air Force One that day so I happened to be fortunate enough to be in the pool and here is the backdrop to the story because it’s fascinating and it’s exactly along the lines of what we are talking about. This was during the standoff with Noriega earlier in the day Marlin Fitzwater came to me I was with CNN and he said if we offered you an interview with the president would you take it and of course I said no why would I want that. And he said no serious. And I said of course why? And he said well would you confine it to the topic of Panama? And I said well I can’t do that I’m not, we can’t have an arrangement where you dictate to us what our editorial reach would be so no but of course we are at hydrogen moment with Panama and of course I’m going to ask him about that. Logistics didn’t work out, we ended up getting called up to the front of the plane where you were I mean that is a great intense picture of you listening to every word the president is saying there maybe you helped craft them, but what the president was saying was our argument is not with the Panama defense forces our argument is with Manuel Noriega. And we were told way later was what the president was trying to do was to send a signal that if PDF through Noriega out if there were a coup that would be a nice thing. Would you take us inside that
because that was a direct attempt by the president to use the media to reach a crisis crowd and influence events? What was your calculus? What were you trying to do? Would that still work today? Do presidents still do that today?

**General Scowcroft**

Sure. Sure they do it. What we were trying to do is to get rid of Noriega without a real conflict to show the Panamanian people with whom we had you know historic relationships that our beef was with this bad guy who had just stolen an election. At least according to former President Carter who observed the election. And so what we were trying to do is to encourage a coup against Noriega rally. There had been –

**Frank Sesno**

And you were trying to send that message through the media? Publically? You wanted all of Panama to hear this?

**General Scowcroft**

Sure.

**Frank Sesno**

Were you not able to pick up the phone or have your contacts or people at the embassy on the ground make private entreaties?

**General Scowcroft**

No we wanted a broad uprising if we could. So we happy to have everybody aboard. There had been an attempted coup against Noriega and it surprised us and we didn’t know who was behind it and so we didn’t act and part of the problem was that there is an executive order against assassinations. And some of our people in Panama would not support the coup because they could be accessories you know if your perpetrate a coup somebody is likely to get killed. That’s an assassination. So it was a pretty unhappy period and we were trying to put things together.

**Frank Sesno**

What was fascinating for me was to know that you were so deliberately using the media it was quite humbling actually as the guy who was sort of caught in the middle of it because what’s my job is my job to be your mouthpiece, is my job to merely report what you are saying? Do I worry about the impact of that information after it lands when I know that there is a purpose like that attached to it?

**General Scowcroft**

Let me tell you, it’d be a surprise to you a former member of the press, how preoccupying this is to the President at times, how do you get message to the
American people that’s not adulterated by going through you. And so you know the President gives a press conference what he says nobody knows expect what you say that he says so some of our presidents have actually stopped giving press conferences and gone out and given public speeches so at least you have to report what everybody knows was said. It’s a very complicated again. That’s a bad. But looking a press strategy is an important part of any kind of program decision making that you have.

Frank Sesno
General Scowcroft I want to go questions from the floor in just a minute before we do that and while you get your questions in place and Derek’s got the mic in the back you’ll raise your hand and Derek will come to you or do you want people to come to you? Why I don’t select people and then you’ll go to them. I want to ask you a broader question because I think you are the perfect person to ask this. You have worked with many presidents, you’ve watched many others, you have been in the military, and you’ve been a leader in the military and seen many others. We live at a time now where the media whether it’s foreign or domestic are always on 24/7, you don’t get a word out of your mouth when somebody isn’t ripping it to shreds and offering an opinion about it. And somehow through all this you have to navigate as a leader, you have to still try to keep your focus. I’m so interested in what you think constitutes a good leader. What leadership in any environment but especially in this sort of hypercharged environment we live in. You’ve worked with President Ford, with President Bush directly, you were very close to Henry Kissinger, to the Reagan White House, you tried to have some influence in the W. Bush White House.

General Scowcroft
I’ve studied leadership a lot during my long career and the real qualities of leadership in terms of how do you teach leadership still elude me because I’ve seen people who do essentially the same thing one is a leader and one isn’t. For myself personally I have followed the dictum to try to hire people to be with me who are smarter than I am and that was pretty easy but no because and many people have just the opposite that they are afraid of being overshadowed by their associates but you don’t learn anything, nor are you at your best unless you can extend your knowledge that way. But what makes a presidential leader. A president doesn’t have to be brilliant. He has to be reasonably intelligent but not brilliant but first of all, he has to know how to pick good people to be around him. And that’s a matter of judgment but as I said they ought try it for people smarter than him and secondly he needs to know when to listen to them and when not to. Now that’s an art.

Frank Sesno
Who were the best leaders, the most outstanding leaders you’ve worked with or observed in your long career?
General Scowcroft
Well I think that the best prepared president in foreign policy that we’ve had was George Herbert Walker Bush because he was in congress, he was head of the republican party, he was ambassador to the UN so he learned how all the world looked at us, looked at international relations and so on, he was the second representative to China at time when it was the end of the earth it was a completely different society, he came back he was director of central intelligence then he was vice president. So he had seen government from virtually every aspect and so he was at home with it in his instincts prepared him for it.

Frank Sesno
How do you rate President Obama on a leader scale?

General Scowcroft
I’m uncertain at this time. I think he’s a great communicator. I think the speeches that he gave at the outset of his administration were really well crafted and touched exactly the right points. I’m worried about the follow through. And whether the president is an executive. He’s a great thinker but is he able to take an issue, formulate it into a program and sell it.

Frank Sesno
His predecessor called himself the decider, George W. Bush, how do you rate his leadership?

General Scowcroft
He had a deliberate style of leadership. As the decider and he had a Texas veneer to it.

Frank Sesno
Meaning?

General Scowcroft
In your face. If you are not with us you are against us. It worked quite well for awhile but I think the ramifications around the world have been negative.

Frank Sesno
Was he a great leader?

General Scowcroft
Above average. You know great leaders I don’t know. You know Richard Nixon for example who was one of our most controversial presidents was a real leader he had innovative ideas and he was prepared to implement going off the gold
standard for example was not a minor thing. Normalizing relations with China big issue but inside he was beset by demons.

Frank Sesno
Fatal flaw.

General Scowcroft
And so was he a great leader or not you know that’s a hard thing to say.

Frank Sesno
Let’s open it up your questions I think it’s, I could listen to you all night I’m sure many of us could but why don’t we start in the back there. Right by the microphone.

Guest:
General because this is the Walter Roberts inaugural speech and we both share Walter as a good friend I don’t have the good fortune of knowing him as long as you have but perhaps you might want to share one of our favorite stories about Walter and his service to our country?

General Scowcroft
I don’t have any favorite stories about Walter he always was perfect. We lived just a few doors apart from each other it was my first overseas assignment and he sort of was a Godfather to me and told me things I didn’t know. I didn’t know how an embassy worked. I didn’t know any of those kinds of things. And so it was that sort of thing even as I recall help me when we went over there we had a daughter who was about a little over one years old and we had a wall around our house but it had doors open and people would come in and out and leave the doors open. And our little girl every time she could would rush out and down the street. Well there was a soccer stadium just a few doors away and that just panicked me. And Walter I think told me right across the street was a Yugoslav leader and he had 24 hour guards so he said get to know the guards so I did and it got so I’d see the door open and know that she had escaped and we’d go out and the guy across the street would say this or that and. That’s what I remember it was a dear friend and we have retained contact but not close ever since that time. But he is a wonderful human being.

Frank Sesno
Remember that the wall and the door and the guard across the street? Only time you invoke the guards your daughters -

General Scowcroft
That’s right. It worked.
Frank Sesno
Next question let’s come right up here.

Guest
Brent you were asked whether we should reestablish USIA and expressed some reservations about it as to whether it would be practical because the world has changed so much I think I speak probably for the majority of my colleagues in the audience that I don’t agree with that. I think we should reestablish USIA and the reason I think we need to do it is not that the mix of instruments hasn’t changed dramatically but the central, independent budget in a single voice within the administration who can project the importance of public diplomacy at the beginning. Not picking up as they used to the droppings after the parade but actually participating in the decision making and working the public diplomacy angle into it can’t be achieved in any other way in my judgment and I was part of USIA as well as the state department as you know and I think that the decision and I lay this on Madeline Albright to give up USIA was a serious structural error and I think we should recast and bring about a new USIA it would obviously be somewhat different but it would be independent with an independent budget and they would do their own lobbying to get their budget not depending on the state department which has so many complications.

Frank Sesno
Let me turn that into a question and repose it what about some kind of reconstituted USIA that has an independent budget, has a degree of independence is different from the preceding but represents more of a reach than we are getting from the reorganized disbanded USIA?

General Scowcroft
Well I was trying to be realistic. I agree. I agree with both of you. But the chances of getting that done with our current environment in Washington I think are less than zero. I just don’t see it happening. First of all state would fight bitterly about giving it up. The congress would say we ought to do away with entirely.

Frank Sesno
I’m going to say do away with state entirely.

General Scowcroft
I agree it’s the way, I agree it’s the way to go. Both with USIA and USIAD. They ought to be independent. Yes. I agree with that.

Guest
Hello General I’m a senior here actually the Elliot School. I’m a senior at the Elliot school and my question is from a national security perspective you talked
about how the world is changing with the decentralization of information and with you know a lot more people being involved in politics around the world and my question is do you think that the Obama’s administration foreign policy and you know such as the Obama doctrine. Do you think that it’s putting us on the right side of history so to speak in terms of how the world is changing. Do you think we are adjusting in the right ways and do you think that national security will improve in the future?

General Scowcroft
I think in general he is putting us on the right side and certainly he started that way. What I’m worried about is what we talked about on the Arab spring because I think we are now in a position of sending very mixed messages. For the Middle East the Arab spring the sense of euphoria that is involved in much of the Middle East the President’s speech at the UN the other day was very had to be very disheartening. And I worry about that. I think that the decision on Libya was a decision designed specifically to demonstrate that we were on the side of liberalism and yet it was a case where it was manageable, the outcome was manageable and the forces applied manageable but I think we’ve taken the step now which could for that whole region in the Middle East put us on the wrong side of this new revolution.

Guest
Thank you for coming today General we really appreciate it. In terms of a new age governed by information technology what affects do you think hacktivist groups such as anomalous or wiki leaks will have on US foreign policy in the future. What do you think hacktivists groups such as wiki leaks or anomalous will have on US foreign policy in the near future?

General Scowcroft
Wiki leaks however titillating it is going to have a disastrous affect on partly on US foreign policy but especially on the reporting of US foreign policy because people are going to hedge their reporting a lot of the wiki leak stuff is not so much highly classified information it’s the field trying to tell Washington what the personalities are and they how they react and so on intimate kinds of details. You’ve got to have it because the president doesn’t know everybody he meets with in the world if has some idea of the person he likes this, he doesn’t like that this is the way he likes to do things. It’s valuable now you are not going to do that anymore. Why because you don’t know what’s going to happen to the cable. And so I think it has been deeply damaging and it has hurt our foreign policy as well for the same kind of reasons because there are a lot of pretty frank comments about the policies of other countries and other leaders and so on and those countries are taking umbrage at the consequences so I think it without redeeming virtue. Is there an over classification problem yes. There is no question about
that people sometimes classify to cover their own you know what. And so on but this is not the way, this is not the way to solve it.

Frank Sesno
Time for one last question from the floor let’s go in the back row.

Guest
The UN has passed resolutions condemning propaganda which leads to a breach of the peace or provokes aggression we recently had an example of propaganda which if it didn’t provoke aggression it justified it, tried to justify it ex post facto. A day or two ago it was reported that a masquerade was found outside the prison in Tripoli the implications being that these were prisoners killed under the Gadhafi regime the basis of this story is a little hole outside the prison about a foot deep in which some bones were found. Turns out the bones weren’t even human, no excavation has been performed and yet many of these media outlets gave an exact body count 1270. I’m sure the explanation or the justification the media would give for this story is that they were just quoting the national transitional council that maybe an excuse that’s acceptable to professional journalists but I think most of us laymen consider that scurrilous. Do you believe General Scowcroft that spreading propaganda which leads to a breach of the peace or provokes aggression constitutes a war crime?

General Scowcroft
Oh my goodness. No I don’t think it’s a war crime. I would certainly try to get them fired but I think we shouldn’t toss around things like war crimes lightly. I think we have many more serious kinds of issues along those lines that we need to think about it. Like for example our activity with drones where we are prosecutor, judge, jury, executioner, and you know we’ve got a lot of things that we need to look at. It’s torture a war crime? It’s banned by the universal code for wartime. So there are lots of these things that need to be looked at. I think missed information by the press even when it comes from a deliberate source is wrong but one of the things worry about is that when it comes from the press as a whole most of the time there is an editor who at least makes a cursory check. When you look at a blog heaven only knows where it comes from and he can say the blogger can say anything he wants to the world. So I think we need to look at the whole communication scene again and see if there is some way we can improve on the acceleration that we talked about at the outset our remarks.

Frank Sesno
Your comment you just made about drones - are you suggesting that America’s use of drones could constitute a war crime? Are you suggesting that Americas use of drones...
I’m not suggesting it to war crime but it is a different way of operating. Just like you know we’ve declared war on terrorism so a terrorist is a warrior. Is he? All I’m saying is these are very different, no I’m not saying that’s a war crime, but these kinds of things in this modern world we have now I think deserve a relook at some of the things we’ve taken for granted.

Frank Sesno
It leads me to the, I’m going to let you end on this note and maybe it will be a hopeful note. Before we go in for our reception and refreshments and I ask this question to honor Walter and your work and your incredible life and yours you have seen so much World War, Cold War, wall come down, planes fly into our skyscrapers, drones, internet, social media, think of the changes that you have seen in your lives it is breathtaking, breathtaking let me ask you to project into the future. What will be find breathtaking do you think 50 years from now? What is this century’s big idea or big story?

General Scowcroft
I think one of the things we are going to find breathtaking is that we will find that Africa for example has entered the world community in a real sense. And here is a continent where there is not a thoughtful border anywhere. The borders were drawn by colonial powers based on a dozen reasons. Africa is now undergoing this information revolution and I think it’s going to be one our most vexing problems. In the coming times. We’re going through the Middle East now. The Middle East compared to Africa is relatively advanced in terms of communications. I think it’s going to be a very different world.

Frank Sesno
And make a sequel to its complicated. You can be it. General thank you very, very much.

Sean Aday
Thank you very much General Scowcroft and Frank this is a wonderful inaugural Walter Robert’s lecture this couldn’t have gone better maybe we should just make this a weekly seminar this would be great.

Frank Sesno
And what are you doing next semester.

Sean Aday
I want to thank you all for coming and I want to direct shameless plug to our institute website and Twitter feed and Facebook page for news about upcoming events and we’ve got a lot going on this year as always but also very shortly we will have video clips of tonight’s talk, a transcript of the speech of the conversation I should say among other things and also to the SMPA website.
because SMPA and the Elliot School do a number of things on almost a daily basis between the three of us and so there is always something going on here at GW and we certainly appreciate you coming.

**Frank Sesno**
Can I just jump in for one other minute I would like and I feel remiss that I didn’t do it before, thank you to you General. Just acknowledged your incredible lifetime of national service and yours too Walter. There are very few people who dedicate the energy and the brain power and the commitment that you have two done and to our students in the room if you want to grow up to be like here are two great examples so thanks to you both very, very much.