

Eulogy for Brent Scowcroft
By Henry A. Kissinger (read by James L. Jones)
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That Brent Scowcroft has left us is difficult to absorb. For over half a century, he had been part of my life as a colleague, a friend, and a kind of national conscience.

Brent and I met on President Nixon's White House staff—he as Military Aide, I as Security Advisor. Brent's duties included managing Air Force One and, when Nixon flew, accompanying him. That is how Brent and I came to know each other: during long flights in conversations on international affairs, especially about Russia, his academic specialty, and occasionally about the complexities of the Washington bureaucracy as well as its idiosyncrasies.

When, in 1972, General Alexander Haig, then my deputy, was appointed NATO Commander, President Nixon generously permitted me to recommend Haig's replacement. I selected Brent, who had not sought the position. A kind fate guided me. Brent brought important dimensions: impressive intelligence, exceptional administrative skills, and a self-effacing tenacity in pursuit of the national interest. Combined with an impish sense of humor, this took the tension off the elaboration of guidelines for the President's approval, one of the key aspects of the Security Advisor's duties.

It was a period when America was tearing itself apart in a quest for moral absolutes. There was agreement on the objective—peace—but a deep division on the strategy for pursuing it. Brent's steadiness had a calming influence then as did his faith in his country's ultimate purposes. The divisions of that conflict, reappearing periodically, blight our own time.

Brent and I worked as a team. This was illustrated in September 1973, when I telephoned him from Moscow about negotiations with Leonid Brezhnev on ending the Middle East war. Brent greeted me with: "Henry, do you realize that we have problems of our own?" I replied impatiently: "What problems can you possibly have in Washington on a Saturday night?" Brent informed me that a determining episode in the Watergate crisis, later labelled the Saturday Night Massacre, had just taken place.

In 1975, after Nixon was replaced by Gerald Ford, Brent was promoted to Security Advisor. Brent's new status—which preoccupied the media—did not alter our relationship based on friendship and trust, reinforced by both our friendships with President Ford.

In 1989, President George H.W. Bush named Brent as his Security Advisor, making Brent the only individual in American history to be appointed to the position by two different Presidents. Bush's was an extraordinary foreign policy Presidency. The triumvirate of Bush, Jim Baker, and Brent overcame Iraq's occupation of Kuwait, managed the collapse of the Soviet Union, assisted the unification of Germany, and preserved America's relationship with China in the building of which Brent had played an important role twenty years earlier. In 1991, as the Bush administration was ending, I sent Brent a note: "No one has served this country more devotedly or more honorably."

Brent's service to the country did not end then. He continued to give principled non-partisan advice to senior officials of both parties and countless study groups.

A biographer wrote that honor and patriotism were Brent's lodestars and that these qualities enabled him to separate fact from fiction and right from wrong. This made him into a kind of conscience for all.

In 2018, on the occasion of my 95th birthday, Nancy invited Brent to a dinner with some 100 special friends. Brent came though, by then, travel had become difficult for him. Nancy seated him on her right. At the end of the dinner, Brent came up to me and, despite the limitations of speech that had frustrated his last years, said something along the lines of a letter he had written me earlier, that our friendship was "one of the most cherished parts of my life." I replied that his conduct had uplifted me.

Everyone whose life Brent touched will always remember this self-effacing man who fulfilled his life's purpose of service and, in the process, achieved the triumph of character over circumstance.