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SUBJECT Stansfield Turner: "Terrorism and Democracy"

HARRY SMITH: From the Iran hostage crisis to Americans kidnapped in the Middle East, U.S. Presidents have had varying degrees of success dealing with terrorism. As President Carter's CIA Director, Stansfield Turner had a key role in formulating U.S. policy on terrorism. His new book, "Terrorism and Democracy," discusses the tough choices that have to be made. And Stansfield Turner joins us from Washington.

Good morning, Admiral.

ADMIRAL STANSFIELD TURNER: Good morning, Harry.

SMITH: One of the things we hear so often when the subject of terrorism comes up, and especially with regard to the White House, people in the White House say, "We don't deal with terrorists."

Should we or should we not deal with terrorists?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Well, Harry, my survey in the book is that of eight Presidents I looked at carefully who had hostage problems, seven of them ended up making deals. That doesn't mean deals are necessarily good. You've got to judge each one on its own merits. But because we're a democracy and because we're a humane people, when there's nothing else that looks like it will work, we'll try a deal.

SMITH: Because we are a democracy, how does that affect how we deal with terrorists?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Well, because in many cases the only other way to handle a hostage problem is to just wait it out.

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But because we do have democratic pressures, because you and I care about those people who are held hostage, we put pressure on our Presidents to do something. Sometimes they make a deal that isn't desirable. Sometimes they make deals that barely are acceptable. And we have to be able, as a public, to judge between a reasonable and an unreasonable deal when there's nothing else will do.

SMITH: You were President Carter's CIA Director during the Iran hostage crisis. Was that situation handled properly?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Well, of course, the biggest problem we had was that we tried a rescue operation, because there was nothing else seemed to work at that point. We couldn't even make a deal. We had tried that. And the rescue mission failed.

What I try to do in the book is to analyze why it failed. It wasn't just because the helicopters broke down. In point of fact, at the end of that mission all of the helicopters were operational, some at some risk. There were a lot of other reasons that have to be explored in detail.

SMITH: Do you think you and President Carter's other advisers served him properly during that time or served him well?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Well, I think we had trouble coordinating and playing as a team, in part because there was such a need for secrecy, lest the rescue mission be compromised even minutes before it actually got to the embassy in Teheran. I think we had a lot of the same bureaucratic problems that almost every Administration has in pulling together, even in an emergency.

SMITH: There's a lot of talk right now that the release of the hostages was delayed by Republicans in an effort to change the results of the 1980 election. Do you believe that happened?

ADMIRAL TURNER: It's such a terrible accusation to make that I don't think we ought to accept it until we've got more firm evidence than we do today. The evidence is circumstantial, but it is accumulating. And it is deep enough today that I think we ought to get a resolution of this. I think the White House could produce a lot of records of where people were at that time. And if they don't, I do think the Congress ought to subpoena those records and let the public put this thing to bed.

SMITH: So you believe there should be some kind of formal investigation.

ADMIRAL TURNER: Yes. It's a cloud hanging over that whole period, and unfortunately it still hangs over the President who was part of it. And I don't think we want that to continue.

SMITH: There's still Americans being held hostage right now in Lebanon. Should President Bush try to strike a deal and get them released finally?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Oh, I think a deal is being made behind the scenes right now. All the ingredients are there. And the President, because he's taken such a strong stand against deals, will have to obfuscate the fact that it is a deal, will call it something else. But you and I, the public, because we are humane, will be forgiving. We'll let him get away with that all right. And I hope those six Americans in Beirut, one of whom's been there over six years, will come out before too long. I think the chances are good.

SMITH: "Terrorism and Democracy" is the new book.

Stansfield Turner, thank you so much for joining us this morning.