

SPECIAL INTERVIEW I

DATE: March 26, 1993

INTERVIEWEE: ROBERT McNAMARA

INTERVIEWER: Robert Dallek

PLACE: Mr. McNamara's office, Washington, D.C.

Tape 1 of 1, Side 1

D: You know I'm writing this two-volume biography, and--

M: I'm glad somebody other than [Robert] Caro is writing it. Caro hasn't reached the point where he's written on the period of Johnson's life that I know. But what he has written on, much of it doesn't ring true to me, at least not as a balanced appraisal. I haven't read your book thoroughly, but from my point of view it's a much more reasonable, more representative view of the Johnson I knew.

D: He is such an interesting--

M: A very complex character, no question about it.

D: He was important to this country. I feel I'm a special advocate because, after all, I have a certain rivalry with Caro, so it's hard for me to be objective. But I've found his work to be so biased and overblown. It seems to me that you don't have to gild the lily if you want to put Lyndon Johnson in a bad light; there is plenty there that can speak for itself, and plenty of positive there that speaks for itself. But he is so inclined to beat on him unmercifully.

M: He blew up Governor Coke Stevenson as a saint, which is absurd.

D: There was a review of his book in the St. Louis *Post-Dispatch* which said, "It takes the Catholic Church three hundred years to beatify a saint, but Caro did it to Coke Stevenson in one chapter."

(Laughter)

What you could tell me first off is, do you remember when you first met Lyndon Johnson and Mrs. Johnson?

M: I don't recall when I first met him; of course it would have been early in the Kennedy Administration. I really don't think it was before we were sworn in. In other words, I

McNamara -- Special Interview I -- 2

don't think it was before January 20 but it would have been shortly after. I know that I visited him before he became president, several times at his home. I worked with him some in his capacity as vice president, because the President assigned to him two or three activities that in some fashion or other involved me.

D: The Space Council.

M: That's right, that was one, and another was the supersonic transport. And I don't recall the degree to which I was involved in that with him as vice president, as opposed to involvement with him on the supersonic [transport] when he was president. But I was involved in that as well and he was very, very interested in that. The point I'm making is that I didn't have many contacts with him before he became president. But I had met him and I had worked with him and I knew him.

D: What were your general impressions of him, as a man, as a politician?

M: My impressions of him really in a sense are epitomized by his interest in and actions on the Civil Rights law, because I saw there a facet of his life that I just had tremendous admiration for. It was a function of several things. Number one, I think he had a very, very deep-seated belief in the necessity for that law, and a very deep-seated desire to see it pass. It wasn't solely the fact that it was in a sense the legacy of Kennedy, that he felt obligated to do something about it for fear of criticism. That may have been a factor. In my opinion it wasn't by any means a major factor. I think he felt that it was time for this society--regardless of whatever he may have thought in the 1950s--it was time for this society to address this fundamental issue. And he was determined that he was going to address it successfully. That was one element in my relationship with him.

The second element had to do with the way he did it. I've never seen anybody work any harder nor with more determination, to achieve what he would with respect to that. I can give you some illustrations of it. And then thirdly, he was superb in his political sense of how to get it done. I'll just give you a few illustrations of both those points.

He used to involve me in things, civil rights and other matters, that didn't have a thing to do with defense, because we got along well together. But one time he asked me to come over to the White House; he was having a meeting in the Cabinet Room with business leaders and labor leaders. He said, "You'll know some of them; Henry Ford is going to be there, Walt Reuther is going to be there," and so on. So I sat through the meeting. And he was pounding on the table trying to develop support from them that could be translated into them contacting members of Congress, indicating their desire, whether they be business or labor, Republican or Democrat, to get support for this bill, this legislation. And he was absolutely frustrated, he wasn't making any progress at all. And after about an hour, he pounded on the table and he said, "You all know Zephyr

McNamara -- Special Interview I -- 3

[Wright]." I don't think there was a person in the room that knew Zephyr, except me. Zephyr was his cook.

He said, "You all know Zephyr. Lady Bird and Zephyr and I were driving from the Ranch back to Washington last August. We passed through some Oklahoma town and Lady Bird said, 'Lyndon, would you mind stopping at the next gas station? I would like to relieve myself.'" So they stopped at a gas station and went in to relieve themselves, and got back in the car and drove on. And about half a mile down the road Zephyr said, "Would you mind stopping by the side of the road?" He said, "What the hell for?" And she said, "I would like to relieve myself." "Goddamn it, we went to the gas station to relieve ourselves. To hell with it." And she said, "Mr. President, they wouldn't let me in." He pounded the table and said, "Damn it, gentlemen, is that the kind of a country you want? It's not the kind of a country I want." It was very, very effective.

Another illustration of the same point: One night Margie and I were having dinner with Lady Bird and the President in the White House, just the four of us, upstairs in the family dining room. I've never seen anybody work the way he did, day and night; every minute he was thinking about it, whatever it was he was concerned about in the nation at that point. And the result was that he had a telephone hooked right under the place setting on his table. And he's sitting at the head of the table, a small oval table that might seat eight; there were four of us there. So he reaches under the place setting and picks up the telephone and says "Get me Dirksen." Now if he had said "Jesus Christ" he would have gotten Jesus Christ, because the one thing that worked in this town was the White House telephone service. So soon he has Dirksen on the line.

I could only hear one half of it but it went something like this: "Goddamn it, Ev, you lost that vote today." What had happened was, it wasn't the final vote on the Civil Rights Bill; it was on a critical element of it, and enough Democrats had deserted the President so that the President was defeated on that significant test. And you could hear Dirksen sputtering and saying, "What the hell do you mean, I lost? Your damned Democrats deserted you." And Johnson said, "Look, Ev, I knew I was going to lose some Democrats; I was counting on you to deliver the Republicans to offset them." So they sparred around on that for a while and finally Johnson said, "Look, Ev, there is something you want. I want the Civil Rights Bill. What is it that *you* want?" You know, let's make a deal. But it's just illustrative; I've never seen anybody work as hard on anything as he worked on that Civil Rights Bill. And this is illustrative of many things, not just the Civil Rights Bill, but the Great Society, the Job Corps, you name it.

D: What I argue is that his commitment to black--you know, people have not given him credit for being the great civil rights president.

M: I agree; that's really what I'm trying say, that's exactly what I'm trying to say.

McNamara -- Special Interview I -- 4

D: Not just as a politician but as a man with vision.

M: And as a man with some feelings and with some values, and some basic understanding of poverty. I never quite knew how much to believe of some of the stories he told. I don't really know the degree in which he experienced poverty. But I tell you, whether he experienced it personally as he alleged, or whether he simply observed it in others as I'm sure he had, he had a real feeling for the poor and the disadvantaged and the determination to do something about it.

D: He understood that segregation in the South not only segregated the races; it segregated the South from the rest of the nation, and his objective, I think, was to integrate the South--and this was early in his career when he was a congressman and senator--into the mainstream of the country's economic life.

M: I think you are absolutely right. I think the way he dealt with many of the racial discrimination issues and civil rights issues was consistent with that. There are some who would perhaps argue to the contrary, but I think they are wrong and they misunderstood him. I'll give you an illustration of that.

We had information that Martin Luther King was going to march on Selma, Alabama. I've forgotten which year it was--

D: 1965.

M: Nineteen sixty-five, right. It seemed clear to me that there was going to be a heck of a lot of violence. As you know, the National Guard is under the state unless the president exercises the authority to federalize it. So I said to the President, "Mr. President, this is going to lead to violence. We've got to federalize the guard."

"Hell no, I'm not going to federalize the guard."

"Hell, Mr. President, it's going to be terrible."

"I know that. I'm going to destroy that. . . ."

"Who?"

"Wallace."

I said, "Mr. President, we've got to protect--"

"Goddamn it, Bob, that's what's wrong with you; you don't understand politics. We've got to get rid of this guy Wallace. I'm going to let him destroy

McNamara -- Special Interview I -- 5

himself."

"But," I said, "Mr. President, if in the process of destroying him you destroy other people, that's absurd." So finally he federalized the guard.

My recollection is--I may be wrong on the exact day of the week, but it was awfully close to the weekend. I think it was a Friday night. I got home about nine o'clock; I hadn't had dinner and I was tired. One of my children had come home from college, and I said, "Margie, darling, how nice to see you. Did you have a pleasant trip home?" She said, "Daddy, it was terrible." I said, "Why was it terrible?" She said, "I spent thirty-three hours on a bus." I said, "How in the hell could you spend thirty-three hours in a bus?" "Well," she said, "I went by way of Selma, Alabama."

D: Where was she at school?

M: She was at school in St. Louis, at Washington University.

(Laughter)

So I picked up the telephone and I called the President and I said, "Mr. President, I know you thought I was wrong in urging you to federalize the guard, but I know you love Margie and I just thought you'd be pleased to know that federalizing the guard saved her." I thought he was going to tear the telephone out.

But he was an extremely astute individual. And his point about destroying Wallace was just what you were saying; he was determined to change the South.

D: This was the technique he used when he was in the Senate and he destroyed Joe McCarthy. He was, in part, at the center of it. He was the one who got the idea to put the McCarthy-Army hearings on television. I have it in my book, how he worked through Leonard Goldenson and ABC.

M: He was a scheming individual. Well, I don't know if you would call it scheming or not; I'd call it thoughtful. He really thought through how to accomplish what was at hand. Maybe at times the end justified the means, but in any event, he was thinking twenty-four hours a day how to accomplish his objectives and his objectives--contrary to popular view, at least at the time--were often very much to the nation's advantage.

D: Coming to the 1964 election, I know there was some talk of putting you on the ticket as vice president.

M: You undoubtedly know Johnson as well or better than I do. You could never take at face value what he said. I don't mean to say that he was duplicitous, but he was a very shrewd

McNamara -- Special Interview I -- 6

guy. The fact is that he said to me, "Bob, I haven't yet selected my running mate and I would like you to--"

D: Do you remember when this was?

M: No, I don't, but it was before all that maneuvering with Kennedy and the cabinet and all that stuff. I really believed I was totally incompetent to run, with no experience in an elected-office campaign. I was not a politician in the sense that one should be a politician to be an effective vice-presidential candidate. So I said, "Absolutely not, Mr. President." I don't wish to imply to you that I had considerable reason to believe that if I'd said yes that he would have said, "Great, it's a deal." If I had said yes, he might have said, "I'm delighted to know that; I want to think about it." I don't wish to exaggerate. But the fact is he did say that.

D: What about the relationship to Robert Kennedy? What about that relationship?

M: I had a very close relationship with Bobby. I had that for years. I just had breakfast yesterday with Les Aspin, and next to the secretary's office is a big room which is sort of the secretary's conference room. There's a table in there, and Les and I were sitting at breakfast, and he was asking me how I would run the department. I said one of the things was to try to ensure, before I took a recommendation to the president, that it had been properly talked out and staffed out, if you will, by others who were concerned, the Bureau of the Budget [inaudible].

I said, "As a matter of fact, I was sitting at this exact table when Bobby Kennedy called and told me that the President had been shot in Texas. Because we were going over the budget that we were going to present to the President [inaudible], and I had Dave Bell, McGeorge Bundy, and others present." I mention it because after the first call Bobby called me a second time and said the President was killed and he wanted me to ride out to Andrews Air Force Base for the body, which I did. He wanted me to go on board the plane, which I wouldn't.

I got home about eight o'clock. [Inaudible] It's only to say that Bobby and I had a very close relationship that went back to before the time that Johnson became president. And then afterwards--Bobby was somewhat like the President in some respects. Each of them developed strong personal views that affected the thoughts of others in contact with them. And Bobby was clearly having difficulties in his relationships with the President. But I was close to each of them and I didn't feel that it compromised me or that I was in any way compromising my relations with them.

D: In that 1964 election did Johnson talk to you at all about Bobby Kennedy's potential as vice president?

McNamara -- Special Interview I -- 7

M: If he did I've forgotten. We talked about so many things. And some of the things we talked about I was always discounting in my mind, as I might have discounted that offer of the vice presidency. I really knew what he thought about Bobby, so whatever he said didn't change my opinion, and therefore the answer is I can't tell you. I don't remember.

D: Since we are talking about elections, let's jump forward to 1968. Were you involved in Bobby Kennedy's 1968 campaign at all, and the connections that Johnson had to it [?].

M: Essentially no; with one exception which was very important, and I will come to it in a minute. I was then president of the World Bank; I had become president on April 1, 1968, and was hence precluded from taking part in national politics. However, my recollection is I'd only been in the bank a matter of weeks. So it was either late April or early May, and as I say I went to the bank April 1, 1968. But in any event, I'd say it was in the first six weeks. Bobby asked if I would do a taping, I think it was a videotaping, of my recollection of his participation in the deliberations during the Cuban Missile Crisis, which I did. Now when I did it I wasn't so naive as to think it might not be used in a campaign. He didn't say that it was done for that purpose. He just said that this was an important event in his life, and he and I worked very closely together during that. He asked me if I'd do a videotape, which I did. Then within a matter of four weeks after that it was shown, and all hell broke loose. It was shown on TV, and all hell broke loose, because it was alleged that I was participating in ways that were unbecoming of my official role in the bank, and there were some demands that I resign from the bank and so on.

D: Did Johnson know about this?

M: No, absolutely not.

D: Because by now, I guess he was out of the race anyway.

M: Yes, that's right. But in any event it was a very--no, he was not out of the race.

D: So it was before March 31.

M: No, that's right. Johnson was out of the race; you are absolutely right. But in any event I got in a hell of a mess because of it, but the interesting point there is within a couple of weeks after it was shown Bobby was killed. And although I felt very badly about possibly compromising my position to run the bank, I would have felt much worse if he had asked me to do it and I'd refused to do it and he had then been killed. Other than that I wasn't involved in the campaign.

I'll mention an incident and this I would like erased from the tape unless you confirm what I'm about to say with McGeorge Bundy.

McNamara -- Special Interview I -- 8

D: I'll see Mac Bundy next week; I'll ask him.

M: Ask him but don't tell him I mentioned it. I may be totally wrong, but I have a clear recollection of something that is interesting and it involves him. I may be totally wrong; I would like for you to simply say you had heard something about this, and don't in any way indicate it came from me.

D: Fine.

M: My recollection is that before the Democratic convention in Chicago I had heard that Humphrey--I think it was to be on Saturday, and my recollection may be totally off the wall--was to meet Johnson in the White House, at say four o'clock Saturday afternoon, and undoubtedly was going to discuss his position on Vietnam, which up until that time had been fully supportive of Johnson's position. Humphrey was being severely criticized for his clinging to this stand. My recollection is that Bundy and I agreed that we would convey to Humphrey the view that if he told Johnson that he was going to change his position and walk away from supporting Johnson on that, that after he told Johnson that in this conversation Saturday afternoon, Mac and I would publicly state we agreed with Humphrey. If that happened I might well have had to resign from the bank; it would have been a terrible situation. On the other hand, it was such an important matter for the nation that my recollection is that's what we agreed to do. I may be totally wrong.

The second point: What I heard happened was that Johnson, being shrewd and an evaluator of people as he was, knew that Humphrey was likely to say something like that. Therefore when Humphrey came in for the four o'clock appointment Johnson said he was terribly busy, please wait. He kept him waiting so damn long that by the time Humphrey came in he'd lost his will to say it and he didn't say it. Now this may be totally off the wall but this is very distinctly my impression.

D: Of course, the technique was one that FDR used.

M: I know that. I have no doubt about it, and by the way, you undoubtedly have much more evidence than I do on this, but Johnson learned a hell of a lot from FDR and he was applying it every day.

D: In the 1968 campaign Johnson learned about things with which Johnson could have sunk Nixon, apparently. But he didn't use these things.

M: Johnson could have what?

D: Sunk Nixon. May I tell you what these are right now? After a while we'll have these on record. There are allegations--we know, of course, that Richard Nixon was dealing with the South Vietnamese, discouraging them from--this is pretty well known--through

McNamara -- Special Interview I -- 9

Madame Chennault. But it was also believed that Nixon was dealing with the North Vietnamese and that Johnson was furious about that, and he thought Nixon was guilty of treason. George Christian has said to me, "Damn right he's guilty of treason." Boys were dying and he was mucking up the peace negotiations. And yet Johnson apparently didn't want to go public with it. I have the impression that--Walt Rostow won't tell me, even though we are good friends; he's been very discreet about this. He says, "When a certain party dies, I'll let you see the materials that are locked up." I said, "You mean Richard Nixon?" He smiled and said, "No comment."

The other thing is--I have it from a man who was a Greek journalist; he assures me that the Greek CIA was putting money into the Nixon campaign in 1968, and he told Larry O'Brien about this. O'Brien was then head of the DNC. He told O'Brien to go and tell the President that he should ask Richard Helms of the CIA about this, so that he can confirm it. O'Brien told the Greek journalist, [inaudible] he told me that Johnson refused to take this up with Richard Helms. What I've wondered all these years is, was Johnson eager to see Nixon elected?

M: See, I wasn't close to him during that period. I'd left the administration March 1 and I was not in close contact.

D: Let me, because I know you have limited time, ask you about Johnson and foreign policy generally. The documents that I've read--and this is where I mainly do my work; I find interviews are interesting and greatly enjoyable for me to meet some of the actors. I mainly rely on the documents and records which, of course, are hardly perfect--although one of the things you may or may not know is that Johnson had an extensive taping system.

M: I didn't know that.

D: During 1968 there are some eight hundred transcripts of tapes that he made. But he had a taping system that was hand activated and there are apparently some three thousand conversations that were taped, both on the telephone and the Oval Office and Cabinet Room discussions. Harry Middleton is eager to get these opened, obviously. Because you know Johnson didn't commit himself to paper all that much, and my feeling is that the historian trying to come to terms with Lyndon Johnson wants to hear him talking to Everett Dirksen on the telephone. And while one feels in a certain sense that, my goodness, here's this damn fool, on the other hand the historian having it available, it's an enormous boon.

Anyway, reading the documents, the impression I have is Johnson was so surefooted in domestic affairs, as you were describing him; he knew where he wanted to go, there was a clear sense of vision--

McNamara -- Special Interview I -- 10

- M: He knew people so well that he used his ability to probe people and influence people to get them to where he wanted to go domestically.
- D: And to get that tax cut, to get the civil rights bill, get the Voting Rights Act, medicare. But I find in foreign affairs at the outset--and I'm not talking necessarily about Vietnam, though obviously it's one piece of the story--in] Panama in the beginning, I find that there is a lack of confidence.
- M: I don't think that he knew much about geopolitics or international relations; I think that's correct.
- D: Your early dealings with him on foreign affairs, your sense--
- M: I don't have clear recollections of that, but I think the point you make is an entirely justified point. But I would overlay the point on the conditions that existed when he came in; it was a hell of a mess by the time he came in.

I'm not going to talk about Vietnam, and before you leave I want to tell you what I think I may do in respect to Vietnam. But in any event I'm not going to talk about Vietnam. You can have access to my oral history that I did in the Defense Department [?]. I don't think I said much in it about Vietnam. I've tried not to talk privately or publicly about Vietnam. Now whether I'm right or wrong, that's not the issue. I just haven't done it, with the exception of the Westmoreland trial, which I felt was a goddamn disgrace and which I volunteered to be deposed on [?] [inaudible] I have not talked about it. What I want to say to you is that I think that he inherited a mess.

There was a very important meeting in October of 1963, before Johnson became president, at which I came back from Vietnam and reported to President Kennedy on certain things, and then there was a heck of a debate within the National Security Council as to what should be done. The situation was that we then had, as I recall, sixteen thousand military personnel in Vietnam that were classified as advisers. Their objective was to help train the Vietnamese and to develop their capabilities to defend themselves against the pressure from the North. When I came back, I had several people with me from, as I recall, the CIA--and in a sense we could break down to three groups. There was one group that thought the Vietnamese were still too green; there was another group that thought that the advisers had been successful in training the South Vietnamese to take care of themselves and therefore we could begin to withdraw. There was another group that thought the advisers had not been successful in training the South Vietnamese to take care of themselves, but they had been there long enough so that if they hadn't been successful up until that time they weren't going to be successful in the future, and therefore they should be withdrawn.

Then there was a third [fourth] group who believed that the advisers hadn't

McNamara -- Special Interview I -- 11

succeeded in training the South Vietnamese to take care of themselves, but could succeed if they were left there long enough. I said three, but there were four groups. And this was debated in front of Kennedy and Kennedy finally decided that yes, we should begin to withdraw and we would withdraw a thousand by the end of that year. Then in order to make sure that decision stuck, because there was so much controversy, we proposed and he accepted that it should be announced. So it was announced. We did withdraw a thousand; that occurred sometime in mid- to late October, 1963. However, between then and the time he [Kennedy] died, Diem was killed, and that changed the dynamics in South Vietnam.

Now I'm not going to suggest to you what I think Kennedy would have done had he lived; all I want to say is that he didn't live after we decided to withdraw the thousand and Diem was killed, and Johnson inherited that. It was mess; it was a hell of a mess. And whatever he did or we did or whatever he didn't do or we didn't do. . . .

D: Some people make so much of this shift in that national security action memorandum.

M: I just want to stress that that was what he inherited, and God knows [inaudible] after that, no question about that.

D: Well, [inaudible] found this book by Leslie Gelb, *The Irony of Vietnam* [inaudible]. Do you remember that book? 1979. [Inaudible] Lucien [?], there are guilty parties and they could point the finger; that's foolish. My view of the thing is, I can't understand how we would not have gone [inaudible] on the escalation is highly understandable. The tremendous recrimination that we've had over that--I think one could make a case for the idea that maybe Kennedy would have been more flexible about how he proceeded and left himself a side door to escape from; I think that might have been, because I think Kennedy had a degree of confidence in foreign affairs that Johnson didn't. He was a different man, had a different background with a different perspective. My sense of this thing is--well, perhaps I shouldn't say this, but my tentative way of thinking is that you will come off pretty well in my book because I think you had the wisdom to see the need to get out when the getting was good.

M: I'm not going to comment even to you on this, but do I want to digress a moment and tell you what I'm thinking about doing. I don't think it will affect your book at all, but you should know about it. I'm not going to comment on Vietnam, but I have in recent months for a variety of reasons been pushed very hard to write my memoirs [?] because of Vietnam and I'm--after twenty-five years of absolute silence, public and private, on the subject--thinking about doing it, and I don't feel confident of this yet, but I'm thinking about doing it in collaboration with one of your former students, Brian VanDeMark.

D: You couldn't choose a better fellow.

McNamara -- Special Interview I -- 12

M: I'm glad to hear that. I tell you, he is--whatever competence he has as a autobiographer and I don't know exactly what that is, but I can tell you one thing, he is a very honest individual with the highest possible integrity, and I have absolutely no desire to write other than an honest statement of what happened.

D: Are you thinking about writing strictly about Vietnam?

M: No, no. The reason I'm not thinking about writing strictly about Vietnam is that I don't think that they would understand in the least my behavior in respect to Vietnam without understanding where I came from. And therefore I don't want to write an autobiography; therefore I've got a biographer. I have to talk about being at Harvard [?], about education at Berkeley, which was a very definitive period of my life, a very informative period in my life. And there is absolutely no question in my mind that it affected my subsequent behavior in life, so I have to do those things. I haven't yet decided to do this, but if I do it--I'm sure it will come out after your next volume is out--if I do it I will express the views, some of which I [inaudible] what happened, and why we did what we did.

But there is no question that we failed; you have to start with that. That's not the issue, the issue is why did we do what we did, what might we have done differently and in the sense to say we failed, what might have happened if we had done something differently.

D: I would say to you as a historian, please never forget to keep it in the historical context. There is so much water under that bridge so that if you are writing about this in 1994 or 1993 with all that baggage and debate, and discussion and recrimination--I get this from students all the time about the use of the atomic bomb. I say, "You have to see the context of bombing in World War II, and you have to look at the fire bombing of Dresden and the fire bombing of Tokyo."

M: I was one of the men who did that. And you have to look at what people were thinking might happen if you didn't [inaudible].

D: The invasion that might have cost a half a million lives.

M: No question about it. You're absolutely right, and that's what I would try to do, is put it in historical context.

D: That's where Brian can be of some help.

M: However, I don't have any diaries; I don't have time to do the research myself, and so on. But he can. But what I would do as I do it is this: a) I would put it in historical context, and b) I would want to draw some judgements or lessons from it that in a sense are applicable today. One of them is--I'll just mention this in passing, that relates to today--

McNamara -- Special Interview I -- 13

after spending my life solving problems and believing that problems have solutions, I have come to the conclusion that some problems may not have solutions, or no immediate solutions. Now this relates to Bosnia, for example, and it has something to do with Vietnam. In any event, I just wanted you to be aware. If I do it, it won't be published until 1996 at the earliest.

D: We might be close, because I think it's going to take another three years at least to do the additional research and writing on my second volume.

M: You'll have to dig into Vietnam then.

D: I'm doing it. I could talk to you about the details of it, because I've been working my way through that record. And in a sense the fact that you don't talk about it, I understand, and I'm going to get it from the record and make my judgements.

M: I'm not talking about it to hide something; that's not at all my point--

D: I appreciate that.

M: I'm not talking about it for several different reasons but one reason, to be absolutely frank with you, is that I fear if I talked about it, it might be interpreted as self-serving, and whatever else I've done I've never been self-serving on Vietnam, and I'm not going to do so now. I don't want to expose myself to that charge, so that's one reason.

D: In some ways a memoir is inevitably self-serving, because it's difficult to write unrighteously. But I'm delighted to hear that you are not going to write simply about Vietnam. One of my great frustrations in doing this book is, I don't want to dwell on Vietnam; everybody and his brother has written on Vietnam. I'm going to make my judgements on it; it's inevitable, it's very important. But there was Latin America; there was the Middle East war of 1967, Soviet-American relations, the rapprochement [?] with China.

M: In any event, there are all these domestic points that you make. And in history, whatever he did or didn't with respect to Vietnam will begin to pale vis-a-vis what he did in some of these domestic issues, particularly civil rights, but not only that. We are beginning to come back today to some of the views that he had, that we have very serious economic and social problems in this society, some of which we don't know how to deal with, but all of which are pressing and deserve our attention. Now he had that view thirty years ago, we are gradually coming back to it.

D: And as this group at the White House deals with this issue on health care, I think they would be well advised to look back at what happened in 1965.

McNamara -- Special Interview I -- 14

M: And the same thing is true with job creation and the handling of the disadvantaged.

D: And questions about community action.

M: There is a very simple little thing; I don't know if you would be interested in it for your book. But in 1968 he wanted to create an urban institute, which was created, and which McGeorge Bundy and Cy Vance and I and Irwin Miller were all associated with creating. That is still in existence today and it is a source of information in the Clinton Administration, on how to deal with some of these problems. But it was simply a reflection of his concern and interest in these issues.

D: Of course, the LBJ School at the University of Texas [inaudible]. Let me ask you a couple of other things; I don't want to keep you, I'm sure you've got to go: The Dominican invasion of 1965.

M: Yes. I don't have much detailed recollection but go ahead and ask your question.

D: How do you feel about it in retrospect, or your memories of it as something which was-- you know, there's been so much talk about the fact that he so grossly exaggerated the communist presence there.

M: My memory just isn't clear enough to render a--

D: What about the 1967 war in the Middle East?

M: Oh, I've got lots of memories of that, very clear memories. The facts were, I think, very clear then and are clear in my mind today. Number one, the Egyptians were planning an attack on Israel. Number two, we knew it; the Israelis knew it, the British knew it. Number three, we were convinced that the Israelis could repel the attack. Number four, Wilson came over here for a meeting with Johnson, totally unrelated to that initially, but by the time he got here that was the only subject on the agenda. The only difference between the British and us was as to how long it would take the Israelis to beat the Egyptians. I have forgotten whether we thought it could be done in seven days and they in ten, or vice versa. Wilson left.

Johnson was trying to prevent this from happening and in any event he didn't want the Israelis to preempt, which we were beginning to feel they might. [Abba] Eban was in the city at the time and Johnson asked Rusk and me to join him on the second floor of the White House, in the family quarters, with Eban. And Johnson really worked him over to try to persuade him to persuade his government not to preempt. Well, of course, they went ahead and preempted.

A very interesting sidelight of it is that--I don't recall the exact date, but it was

McNamara -- Special Interview I -- 15

after the Israelis knocked the hell out of the Egyptians. I went to my office as I always did at 7:00 a.m. in the morning, and about seven-fifteen the telephone rang. It was the duty officer in the War Room. We had a War Room that was staffed by a general officer or an admiral twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. He said, "Mr. Secretary, Kosygin is on the hot line and wants to talk to the President. What should I tell him?" Now this sounds absolutely absurd, but the hot line was put in after the Cuban Missile Crisis, sometime I would guess in the first half of 1963; and here we are in June of 1967 and the officer says, "Kosygin is on the hot line." I said, "Why are you calling me?" He said, "Well, the hot line terminates in the Pentagon." It was a teletype line. I didn't even know that. So I said, "General, we are spending"--at that time I think it was about forty billion dollars a year. "Can't you take a few thousand of those dollars and get these goddamn lines patched across the river to the White House? You call the Situation Room and I'll call the President and we'll decide what to do."

It was seven-thirty in the morning and I knew the President was probably asleep, and he had an air force sergeant that sat outside his room to take calls. So I called him and the sergeant answered, and I said, "I want to talk to the President." He said, "He's asleep." I said, "I know he's asleep, sergeant. Wake him." He said, "He doesn't like to be awakened." And I said, "Goddamn it, wake him and tell him I want to talk to him." So Johnson gets on the telephone and he's groggy and he says, "Goddamn, Bob, why are you calling me at this time of the morning?" And I said, "Mr. President, Kosygin is on the hot line and he wants to talk to you." He said, "*What did you say?* What do you think I should do? What should I say?" And I said, "Well, why don't you say that you'll be down in the War Room in fifteen minutes or so, and in the meantime I'll call Dean and we'll meet you over there." And he said, "Fine." So we did that.

I think recollection might be slightly wrong on this, but this wasn't the first message; it was the second message. The message said, "If you want war you're going to get war." The reason this happened was a) the Israelis had knocked hell out of the Egyptians; b) the Egyptians and Jordanians believed [?] a false charge that we were bombing Cairo from a carrier, and when Hussein came in the Israelis knocked hell out of *him*.

Tape 1 of 1, Side 2

We had had a carrier group in the Med and fairly close to Israel, and we'd sent it on a training exercise toward Gibraltar. And then we thought the situation was so tense in Israel that perhaps the Syrians, fearing Israel would attack them, or the Russians supporting the Syrians might wish to redress the balance of power and might attack Israel. So we turned the carrier group around and sent it back toward Israel, not with any intention whatsoever of supporting an Israeli attack on Syria, or any Israel offensive moves whatsoever, but rather purely to be able to defend Israel in the event of further attacks on Israel. The Soviets learned of that and they interpreted our action as offensive

McNamara -- Special Interview I -- 16

in character, and that's why that message came. But I mention this because there were hundred different things happening in those days, domestic and foreign, and this was the kind of a life the President led.

D: The *Liberty*, you have--

M: I've heard so much about the *Liberty* my mind is clouded on it. I have no independent--

D: Richard Helms talked to me about that.

M: Helms would know far more than I. I don't mean I didn't know at the time, but I have heard such absurd stories about the *Liberty* that--I was told a few months ago that we knew that the Israeli planes were going to attack the *Liberty*, and the American planes were going to take off a carrier to prevent the Israeli planes from attacking, and Johnson called them back. I believe that is baloney. But I mention it only in the sense that I am so confused as to what actually happened I don't want to even pretend to have [inaudible] source of information.

D: I think that was part of one of those journalistic exposés on television about it.

M: That's exactly what it was. Today I'm so confused that I don't have an independent view as to what happened.

D: There is a very substantial record in the Johnson Library about that and I'll be reviewing it. I just thought of it because Helms told me something about that which I found interesting. What he asserted to me was that the Israelis knew perfectly well what they were doing, and they attacked the *Liberty* because they felt that it was an electronic spy ship that was passing information back to Washington; that they were afraid the Egyptians and Syrians were going to pick it up, and the Israelis were about to attack the Golan Heights.

M: I have no knowledge one way or the other, but I find that pretty hard to believe, and I am no admirer or supporter of the account[?]. But I just find it such poor judgement, if that was the case.

D: I'm glad to have your perspective on that.

M: I underline what I said before: My mind is so confused by all these damn stories I've heard, I cannot tell you what my knowledge was at the time.

D: That's the danger of doing these oral history interviews; that one just takes it as gospel that--

M: This is one reason why I almost always refuse to participate in oral history now, because

McNamara -- Special Interview I -- 17

most of it is so--what I call unscholarly.

D: You have to be very careful. Believe me, [on] anything we talk about, my first priority is to look at the document. I can barely remember what happened to me two weeks ago, let alone you to go back twenty-five or thirty years and put this all together.

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Special Interview

NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION

LYNDON BAINES JOHNSON LIBRARY

Legal Agreement Pertaining to the Oral History Interviews of

ROBERT S. McNAMARA

In accordance with the provisions of Chapter 21 of Title 44, United States Code, and subject to the terms and conditions hereinafter set forth, I, Robert S. McNamara of Washington, D.C., do hereby give, donate and convey to the United States of America all my rights, title and interest in the tape recordings and transcripts of the personal interviews conducted in Washington, D.C. on March 26, 1993, and prepared for deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

- (1) The transcript shall be available for use by researchers as soon as it has been deposited in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.
- (2) The tape recording shall be available to those researchers who have access to the transcripts and tapes.
- (3) I hereby assign to the United States Government all copyright I may have in the interview transcripts and tapes.
- (4) Copies of the transcript and the tape recording may be provided by the library to researchers upon request.
- (5) Copies of the transcript and tape recording may be deposited in or loaned to institutions other than the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

Signed by Robert S. McNamara on October 28, 1993.

Accepted by Trudy Huskamp Peterson, Acting Archivist of the United States, on June 16, 1994.

Original Deed of Gift on file at the Lyndon B. Johnson Library, 2313 Red River, Austin, TX 78705.

ACCESSION NUMBER 96-10

NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION

LYNDON BAINES JOHNSON LIBRARY

Legal Agreement Pertaining to the Oral History Interviews of

ROBERT S. McNAMARA, BY ROBERT DALLEK

In accordance with the provisions of Chapter 21 of Title 44, United States Code, and subject to the terms and conditions hereinafter set forth, I, Robert Dallek of Washington, D.C., do hereby give, donate and convey to the United States of America all my rights, title and interest in the transcript and tape recording of the personal interview I conducted with Robert S. McNamara on March 26, 1993, and prepared for deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

- (1) The transcript shall be available for use by researchers as soon as it has been deposited in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.
- (2) The tape recording shall be available to those researchers who have access to the transcripts and tapes.
- (3) I hereby assign to the United States Government all copyright I may have in the interview transcripts and tapes.
- (4) Copies of the transcript and the tape recording may be provided by the library to researchers upon request.
- (5) Copies of the transcript and tape recording may be deposited in or loaned to institutions other than the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

Signed by Robert Dallek on March 18, 1996.

Accepted by John W. Carlin, Archivist of the United States, on March 27, 1996.

Original Deed of Gift on File at the Lyndon B. Johnson Library, 2313 Red River, Austin, TX 78705.

ACCESSION NUMBER 96-10