INTERVIEW I

DATE: July 8, 1971

INTERVIEWEE: GEORGE BALL

INTERVIEWER: PAIGE E. MULHOLLAN

PLACE: Mr. Ball's office in New York City

Tape 1 of 1

M: Let's begin by identifying you, sir. You're George Ball, and during the Johnson Administration you served as under secretary [of state] from the time Mr. Johnson took office until the summer of 1966.

B: Until the end of September of 1966.

M: Then you came back as ambassador to the United Nations for a very short period.

B: A period of four months beginning--I thought it was the beginning of June of 1968, but that wouldn't make it four months, would it? No, it wasn't four months.

M: It was April, May, and June, wasn't it?

B: Actually I was appointed in April, but because of the fact that Arthur Goldberg, who was my predecessor, wanted to see something through--I've forgotten what it was--I didn't actually take office, as I recall, till June.

M: How well did you know Mr. Johnson back in the days prior to his vice presidency, when you were working for Governor Stevenson in his campaigns of the fifties? Did you have any personal contact with Lyndon Johnson then at all?

B: Very little. I knew him casually, not only because of my relationship with Stevenson, but because as a lawyer in Washington I had had some very casual relations with him. But I didn't know him well, no.

M: Did that include the 1960 convention when Mr. Johnson was an outspoken candidate on his own, as well as Mr. Stevenson?

B: Actually in 1960 I was at the convention. I didn't take any part in it. I was simply there on the sidelines, holding Adlai's hand. It wasn't a very happy affair, because none of us expected him to be nominated, but one had to see it through.

M: What about Mr. Johnson as vice president? You were in the State Department throughout

that period, first as under secretary for economic affairs and later as under secretary.

B: I had a certain amount of dealings with him, and they were all very satisfac tory, very pleasant. One got the very clear impression of a man who was quite unhappy with his lot. Here was a man who was an activist, who was used to being at the center of power in the Senate, who suddenly found himself with substantially no power whatsoever, working with a president who, for reasons I've never been able to understand, treated him as apparently every president treats his vice president: fails to include him in serious councils, rather ignores his advice, and gives him the most menial tasks.

M: Does that mean that Mr. Johnson wasn't really very close to any of the foreign policy decisions that you worked with while you were working for Mr. Kennedy?

B: He was not at all close to them. He was actually involved in very few of the decisio ns that were taken during that period, or in very little of the discussion. Now, an exception to that was in October of 1962 when he came into the meetings of the so -called Ex-Com during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Those meetings were held in my conference room at the State Department. We had a kind of continuous session that went on for that week while we were trying to decide what action to take.

He came into the meetings. He said relatively little. He didn't take a dominant part at all in the discussions. The rest of us did to a much greater extent. He was inclined to take quite a hard line, as I recall, but displaying at the same time a kind of deference to the rest of the group, almost making it clear that he recognized that he didn't have the background and experience, that he had not been through this problem in as intimate a sense as most of the rest of us had been.

M: The stereotype of the man always concerned with domestic things and not very knowledgeable about foreign affairs is fairly true then, officially.

B: That's fairly true. Then, of course, he went on certain missions. He went on the mission to Berlin at the time of the Wall. But it was again in a kind of public relations role rather than a substantive role.

M: From the department's point of view, how did he perform as a public relations ambassador, either in the Berlin case or in his Vietnam trip? Acceptably or unknowledgeably?

B: He was very hard to work with, I think partly because of the insecurity of his own position. It was much more difficult to work with him as vice president than it was as president, much more demanding, less reasonable in these demands,in my observation. After he had become president and was secure in his mastering of the situation, I always found him relatively easy to work with, but he certainly was not during his vice

presidential period.

There was one time when he complained very bitterly to me about some speech that someone in the department had written for him. I rewrote his speech myself, wrote him a letter of explanation, and he acknowledged it with a good deal of grace, in effect, not exactly apologizing, but recognizing that the fault had not been all on our side. But I can't say that even during that period I got to know him extremely well, although he always treated me with a great deal of warmth, and from time to time would give me what I suppose was the maximum praise for Lyndon Johnson. [He'd say], "You're a can -do man."

(Laughter)

M: Specifically on the Vietnam issue, you signed I guess the so-called critical telegram August 24, 1964 [1963] that is alleged to have led to Diem's downfall. This was when I believe Kennedy and McNamara and Rusk were out of town. Did Johnson get involved in that because they were gone?

B: No, he didn't get involved with it at all. I'll tell you the situation. It was during the period when Dean Rusk was at the General Assembly in New York. He went up every year for a couple of weeks at the beginning of the General Assembly because the foreign ministers and the heads of government from all over the world were there, and it was a great opportunity to consult.

McNamara was off on a holiday, as I recall. I believe I saw the President in the morning, and then he went up to Hyannis Port. I think it was one of the four times in the six years that I got to play golf. I think twice I did it with Rusk and twice with Alex Johnson. Alex and I had gone out to play golf for a couple of hours at the end of the day. I had been on the phone with Rusk all day. Obviously I always left word as to where I was.

Just as I was finishing up the ninth hole, or eighteenth, I th ink it was probably only the ninth hole, we normally didn't have time for more than that --it was a public golf course contrary to what was in the paper at the time, it was not Chevy Chase, I don't belong to any golf club--Averell Harriman and [Roger] Hilsman appeared in a great sweat. They had a telegram that they wanted me to approve because I was acting secretary, [a telegram] that could be sent to Saigon.

So we went back to my house. I looked at the telegram; I recognized that this was a telegram of considerable importance. I personally was not unsympathetic with what it said because I had felt that we had really run our course with the Diem regime. Unless he got rid of the Nhus and straightened up, [I felt] that it was impossible to go forward. If we were prepared to get out, that was one thing, but I had found no sympathy with my

general views that we ought to get out of Vietnam. So if they were saying to the generals as this telegram did, saying to Saigon, to the embassy, "Make one further effort with Diem, but you can tell the generals that we're certainly not encouraging a coup and we're not going to assist a coup, but we will support any respectable, non-communist government that is established, that existed." It was perfectly clear that this could be taken as encouragement and would indeed be taken as encouragement by the generals.

So I talked to Rusk in New York and gave him a rather [general briefing]. I don't think I read him the text, although I probably read him the critical paragraphs --we didn't have a secure line--and told him that I was going to call the President and see what the President thought of it. Rusk said, "Well, go ahead."

So I called Kennedy at Hyannis Port, and I went over the whole thing. He asked me what I really thought. I had told him that Averell and Hilsman very much wanted to do this. I had made some changes in the telegram; I had watered it down myself actually over their earlier version. I read him the critical paragraphs. I told him that this would certainly be taken as encouragement by the generals to a coup. But I said I thought that, in my judgment, the situation with Diem was becoming an enormous humiliation to the United States, that we were supporting a regime which was behaving in the most unconscionable and cruel, uncivilized way toward a significant minority of the population. Madame Nhu was making the most outrageous statements, and Nhu was a very devious and unreliable fellow. I thought to send this telegram to Lodge, who had just arrived there, was probably all right. So he approved it.

He said, "Where's Bob?" I said, "He's away." He said, "Get hold of Ros Gilpatric and see that it's cleared with him." So I left it with the Pentagon people to prepare and get out. I notice the accounts now say that Ros says he cleared it because he understood the President had cleared it. Well, that wasn't exactly what the President did, and that wasn't the instructions I gave. The instructions were that the President said that if it's agreeable to Gilpatric, to go ahead.

M: I guess [John] McCone was gone, too.

B: McCone was gone, too, yes. Anyway, we went ahead.

M: Johnson was not involved in any of this?

B: He wasn't involved in any of it. There's been a squib in the newspapers that his boo k is going to say that this was just cleared by underlings, which isn't the case. It was cleared by the President of the United States.

M: Apparently he's supposed to have held this against Hilsman, too. Is this what led to Hilsman's departure shortly after the President took office?

B: No. I fired Roger Hilsman, with the full approval of Mr. Rusk. He had become very difficult. He was so full of his own omniscience with regard to Vietnam, and he was lecturing the generals on strategy. He became rather a nuisance. So we got rid of him.

M: I'm glad to get that story on the tape because I suspected that that was indeed the case. I'm glad to have you put it on there.

B: I can tell you another story, if we're going to put any time limit on this. And that is that Dean Rusk once said to me later, "You fired Roger Hilsman, but would you do a great favor for me? I said, "What's that?" He said, "Would you let me say that I fired him?"

(Laughter)

M: The good things, the Secretary wants to take credit for himself.

It's strange in light of some of the revelations of the so-called Pentagon Papers that apparently one of the things that Hilsman was very strong on was the covert operations strategy, and that was being undertaken at just the time that he left. Of course, he later said that he left because the President wasn't doing what he wanted to do.

B: Roger spent a great deal of time in his own self-justification, taking a lot too seriously.

Let me just add one thing on this, just to complete the record. I don't think that this telegram was what precipitated the coup. Nothing happened after this telegram. The generals decided they couldn't do anything about it. This telegram, as I recall, was in August. The coup took place the first of November, and that's quite a long time afterward. In the meantime a lot of things had been done. President Kennedy himself on television had made some very tough remarks about what Diem has to do to straighten up, and this could very well have been taken as that kind of encouragement. In fact, we had already started putting the squeeze on by withholding aid, so that I think we had established the causal relation, one way or another. I think this was only one of a number of things, and to put the total focus on this, I think, was a great mistake.

M: It may have been done by Hilsman putting it in his book so prominently, as a matter of fact.

After the assassination, I believe you were one of those who accomp anied the new President Johnson back from Andrews [Air Force Base] on the helicopter that night. Can you describe that?

B: The situation that night, as you recall, the members of the cabinet were on the plane that had taken off from Hickam Field en route to Japan for the annual joint cabinet meeting

with the Japanese and United States governments. I was acting secretary of state. Bob McNamara was in the Pentagon. Mac Bundy was in the White House. In fact, the whole rest of top level government was out of town.

So I telephoned Dean Rusk and told him that the President had been shot --on the plane--and he said that they had just had word from one of the press services and what was the situation. I told him all I knew. He said they were going to come into Hickam Field and he would call me as soon as he got to Hickam. He called me from Hickam Field, and I told him the President was dead. He said, "Where shall we come to? Shall we come to Washington, or shall we come to Dallas?" I said, "Come to Washington." Of course, they weren't going to get in until much later that night.

In the meantime, I found myself suddenly with a great number of duties imposed which I didn't ever think of as attached to the Office of the Secretary of State. There are all kinds of statutory proclamations and actions that a secretary of state has to take on the death of a president. It derives from the fact that the Office of the Secretary of State as originally conceived was really the Secretary of State; it wasn't the foreign minister. There was going to be an associate foreign ministry. Then they put the two things together, but there were still some residual obligations that were left over from the original conception. So I was very busy drafting proclamations and doing all kinds of things that afternoon.

Then Bob McNamara, Mac [Bundy], and I went out to meet the new President. We met him; we got in the helicopter with President and Mrs. Johnson, and the five of us rode back to the White House together. We talked a bit. The President, of course, was enormously moved by the dreadful experiences he had been through. He talked principally of how gallant Mrs. Kennedy had been, how she had insisted on standing with him even though the blood was still on her stockings and dress and so on.

He assured each one of us that he was going to count on us, that we had to stand by him, and that the government was going to go forward. [He said] that the one thing that heartened him was the fact that he was surrounded with fine people like us, the things that I suppose one would normally say.

We got to the White House. We went in through the Cabinet Room. The President was going to meet with the leadership. So I went back to the department, because I still had a thousand things I had to finish that night. Then I went out later to meet the cabinet when it came in.

M: That was not a policy-discussion evening. That was just a recovering-from-the-shock-type of conversation.

When did he finally get into starting to try to master the issues outstanding in the area of foreign affairs? Right away?

B: As I recall, when we got off the helicopter we stopped very briefly in the Cabinet Room, and he said, "Now, what do I have to do right away? What are the things that have to be done in the next forty-eight hours? Apart from the funeral arrangements, what substantive problems are there?" I think I may have mentioned two or three things that were on top of the agenda.

M: Lodge was in town, I think, wasn't he? Or just about to come into town, or something of that nature?

B: Yes, he was. He had come back for some kind of briefing.

M: What about the funeral itself and Mr. Johnson as a personal diplomat with all the world leaders who came in? I know in the case of De Gaulle it was rumored that this was the beginning of a sort of breakdown of relationship between the two.

B: I obviously had a great deal of conversation with the President about how we organized this reception: whom he should see and whom he shouldn't see; the fact that De Gaulle was coming over; what attention should he pay to him and what attention should he pay to everybody else. We agreed that for the De Gaulle visit that he would go into the Secretary of State's office, as I recall, since the reception was on the eighth floor of the State Department. I'd asked the General to come in. To the best of my recollection, when he met with the General I think I stayed in the room with them, but I'm not certain on that. I can't really recall. There were so damned many things going on. If I didn't, Dean did, and I don't know which one of us did, very frankly. We always operated on a kind of interchangeable basis. He may have felt he had to stay with the other heads of state.

But it wasn't a substantive conversation of any significance.

M: So far as you know, it didn't lead to any long-term [consequences]?

B: I don't think so. The General felt honored, I'm sure, to be given even this brief meeting under the circumstances. I can't imagine anything serious came out of it. But let me say that President Johnson was extremely awkward at that time and ill at ease. This was just out of his experience, I mean not a part of his experience.

M: Did he take your advice on who to see, for example, and what to say, how to say it?

B: Yes, by and large. He resisted at some points if we crowded people on him he couldn't quite understand why we had to see then. No, I don't say that --he was not a [inaudible] the arrangements.

M: During that first two or three months, as you watched the new President sort of start

settling down into the job he'd suddenly come to, did he frequently display a shortness with the Kennedy men, a blow-up at Kennedy men, an abuse of subordinates?

B: I think he was doing his best to lean over backwards to make them feel a part of the show. Certainly during that early period he gave every indication that he wanted them to stay, that he certainly didn't want anyone leaving. He wanted them to feel that they had a place with him.

Now, when I say that was the attitude of the President, I'm not suggesting that some of the people that he brought in didn't have fairly abrasive relations with the Kennedy people because this was certainly true.

M: Of course they were replacing them, and they were ....

B: They were replacing them, and even if they weren't replacing them, they were working alongside of them. And they were perfectly open in making clear that they had better access to the President than the Kennedy people did. But I think the President did his very best.

M: How would you in your now considered hindsight estimate the situation in regard to Vietnam when the presidency changed? Was it such, for example, that Mr. Johnson could have disengaged? Was that a time when a basic change could have been made?

B: There was always a time when a basic change could have been made. I never subscribed myself to the belief that we were ever at a point where we couldn't turn around. What concerned me then as it did much more intensely even later was that the more forces we committed, the more men we committed to Vietnam, the more grandiloquent our verbal encouragement of the South Vietnamese was, the more costly was any disengagement.

I think it would have been terribly difficult for him to have disengaged immediately, because it would look as though he were repudiating the policy of Kennedy. I think that this is something which would have been almost impossible for him to do. At that time there was no particular opposition to the war amongst the public. I think he would have been subject to all kinds of attack--that the moment he gets in, he turns his back on the policy of President Kennedy and gives something to the communists. I just don't think he could have done it then, as far as the domestic political situation was concerned.

But actually what he was most concerned with was not Vietnam at that point. While Vietnam had begun to fill up more and more of the kind of screen through which we view things, at that time it was just one of a lot of things that were ongoing.

I've got something--I don't particularly talk about it, but one of the very few things

I took away from the department was telecons of my conversations for six years. I could tell you a lot more, actually, if I sat down and reviewed them.

But I got the impression that the President's instinct was to do what came naturally to him. It's easy to forget now, but at that time it was almost a constitutional crisis as far as President Kennedy's program was concerned. There was a kind of constipation on Capitol Hill that was really very serious, and the President turned immediately to the problem of how could he get the Kennedy program through. I think he felt sort of a personal responsibility to Kennedy to get his program through. I think he deeply felt this, and he did it superbly. He did it much better than Kennedy could ever have done it. Whether Kennedy could have done it at all, I'm not sure, because by that time he was very worried about it. He was not getting along well with Congress at all.

So this was what consumed an enormous lot of his [Johnson's] time. He was much more intent on this than he was on the problems of Vietnam which were cranking along. It was in the hands of exactly the same people who had been advising Kennedy, and I think he was more or less inclined to let those of us who had this responsibility continue with it.

M: I've had people tell me that Vietnam didn't really engage him probably until after the 1964 election. Of course, now we're being told that all these decisions had occurred before then.

B: That's absolute nonsense. They weren't decisions. What was happening was that after he got the legislative program through, or even before, he became immediately involved in the election campaign, the convention and the campaign. The Tonkin Gulf occurred in the middle of that, in August.

I remember at the end of September I had become so deeply concerned about the situation in Vietnam that I sat down during the nights--because I couldn't do this in the office and I couldn't use any staff--and dictated a memorandum which turned out to be about seventy-five pages long.

M: Is this the one that got leaked to Joe Alsop ultimately?

B: Yes. He never saw the memorandum. All that was ever leaked to Alsop was the existence of the memorandum, the fact of its existence. This was a memorandum that challenged every assumption of our Vietnam policy. And then the second section was a kind of plan for disengaging. I don't have this with me. I've got it, but I don't have it here.

M: Will it be in the presidential library somewhere?

B: Yes.

M: It did get to the White House, then?

B: Yes, it got to the White House. What happened on that was that the memorandum was written the last week of September. It took me about two weeks, because, as I say, I'd get up at three or four in the morning--I had a dictating machine in my house--and I would go into the library there and dictate through the night.

M: That's sometimes the best time.

B: Yes. I had a very strong conviction that I should never treat with the President on an ex parte basis. So I sent a copy of this to McNamara, and one to Rusk, and one to Mac Bundy. I think there were only five copies made, altogether. McNamara, in particular, was absolutely horrified. He treated it like a poisonous snake. The idea that people would put these kinds of things down on paper!

We met then for two Saturday afternoons to discuss this thing. As I say, the general attitude of the conferees was to treat it as something that really shouldn't have been done. Although I think that Rusk and Bundy were more tolerant of my effort to put it on paper than Bob was. He really just regarded it as next to treason, that this had been put down on paper.

M: Was anybody else saying such things at that? Anybody in a senior position?

B: No. None of them. Not at all.

In some way the fact that I had written the memorandum challenging the assumptions of our Vietnam policy did get to Alsop. I have a theory that Mike Forrestal knew something about it. Whether this is true or not, I don't know. It would be unjust to leave that accusation in that form, because Mike said he had not done so.

Anyway, Alsop had a column in which he said that I had written a memorandum challenging our policy in Vietnam and that while I knew something about Europe, my knowledge of Asia one could put in a thimble. So I wrote Alsop and said, "Dear Joe, You are quite wrong in your statement that my knowledge of Asia could be put in a thimble. It could be put in a soup plate. By this, I mean it's much broader than you suggest and also more shallow." (Laughter)

M: Which he probably accepted at face value.

B: The President was very upset that this thing appeared.

M: In the column, you mean? Not with the memorandum?

B: Not with the memorandum, which he had not then seen. I didn't press to show it to the President, because he was occupied with the campaign at that time. But about the first of January, after the election, Bill Moyers was over for lunch with me one day, and I gave this to Bill. He read it, and he says that this was the beginning of his conversion on the Vietnamese issue. So then I said, "Well, if you feel that this is something serious, I had intended it for the President, and I want to give it to the President." Which he did.

And the President read it not once, but twice, so he told me, and he was very impressed, or shaken, by it. So he insisted that we sit down and start arguments. Well, that was the beginning of a process I then employed, because then I wrote the President every few weeks setting forth, in effect, what I thought were quite serious reasoned memoranda which were difficult to do because, as I say, I had to do them all myself. But each one was addressed at some particular proposal for escalation, challenging the proposal and arguing that we were losing the war, that it was an unwinnable war, that the whole objective was an unattainable objective, that we could commit any number of--500,000 I think was the figure I used at one point in a memorandum --and that we still would not win. All the reasons I've set forth. And each time I ended up, "Therefore we should cut our losses," that this would be the consequence in short-term problems, but in long-term we would gain by it, which I set forth in relation to each country: countries in the Far East, countries in Europe, the neutralist countries, and so on.

The President always read these things. And the reason I know he read them is because he always insisted on having a meeting then, and he would call on me to present my views, which I would do. The reason I know he read them was that he would sit there without looking at them and he'd say, "Now, George, you say on page nine" so-and-so. "I don't see how you can possibly defend that." So then I'd defend it. "And on page fourteen you say" so-and-so.

M: You're not bluffing when you can do that.

B: No, he wasn't bluffing. I always sat next to him at the table. So I know he wasn't reading from anybody's notes. He read them, and it was perfectly clear that he read them. And invariably without exception I think he always thanked me, as he put it, for disagreeing with him.

M: Did they ever occasion, in being presented that frequently, what you considered really a basic reconsideration of some of the premises by the other principals?

B: Not basically consideration of some of the premises. But what did happen was that the President on two or three occasions said at the end of the day, "Look, I agree with George. I think he's right. We're not going to do this thing. I don't agree with you, Bob, you've got to make your case. I don't agree with you, Mac. We're not going to do it."

But we ended up by doing it a couple of weeks later, because events moved on and pressures built up and so on. [Inaudible sentence] I think I slowed the process, let me put it that way.

M: And didn't destroy your effectiveness with the President, as far as you know?

B: Not so far as I know. My relations with the President, by anything he ever indicated to me, always remained very good. I always had the feeling that I could say anything to the President.

M: He didn't block you out because he knew you were going to be unsympathetic?

B: No. Let me say if I had found myself excluded from meetings as the Vice President did, for example, then I would probably have quit. But, on the contrary, I was always involved. And very often when we'd have something up, he'd turn to me and say, "All right, George, let's hear what you have to say against this, because I know you will."

M: Does that mean, though, that you became kind of the house critic? I mean, just going through the motions?

B: He used to use the term, "You're my devil's advocate," but it was never a stylized affair, as far as I was concerned. I think that he did this rather deliberately, and I was prepared to accept it on these terms, because after the Alsop leak I think he wanted and I think they spread the word around the White House that, "George Ball is just sort of doing this on an institutionalized basis, just always filing the brief for the other side." Which was not the case. What I was doing was deeply felt out of my own guts here. I wouldn't have sat up until three or four o'clock in the morning doing it.

M: You don't stylize something at three o'clock in the morning!

B: The interesting thing about all of this from my point of view was not only the President's response, but the fact that we had very, very hot arguments that never affected my relations with Dean Rusk or Bob McNamara. Bob McNamara may have felt angry at me from time to time--and the others [may have]--but it was never a personal matter, let me put it that way. And it was never taken that way.

M: And you said the first memorandum dated from September of 1964.

B: It was dated October 5, as I recall, but it was written [beginning in late September].

M: That came after the Tonkin attack, and you also were a primary principal in that, I understand.

B: Yes. But at that time I think my views were fairly well known, but they hadn't been put down on paper. I mean, I would urge them in the councils. This was the first time I deliberately sat down and reduced to paper my very strong feelings about it.

M: Can you describe the Tonkin affair from the vantage point that you occupied in i t?

B: When the first Tonkin Gulf thing occurred, Rusk was away. I was again acting secretary of state. That always seemed to happen during a crisis. There is one interesting thing which actually I discovered the other day reading one of these telegrams, telecons, and that is I talked to McNamara and I talked to Bundy in the course of the afternoon following the [Tonkin attack].

M: When you say Bundy without a first name, you mean Mac?

B: Mac, yes. Bill Bundy was really a --

M: He wasn't even an assistant secretary--oh, yes, he was by then in September, 1964.

B: Bill is offended with me because I apparently said in the Star the other day that Bill was more the technician than the man of substance. Well, this was certainly true. He was not [inaudible]. He was not in the top councils. He was an assistant secretary of state. From time to time, we would have him there but this was simply to outline a plan, something of this sort. But he was not one of the top three or four people that were always talking to the President about these things.

I talked to them in the course of that afternoon--I believe it was the afternoon after the Tonkin Gulf, because one gets mixed up there because of the international date line. But talking to Bob McNamara, talking to Mac Bundy, our principal concern was one thing: that there would be a kind of orgasm of outrage in the Congress and that some of the right-wing hawk Republicans might take such action that would be in effect a declaration of war or would put the administration in a position where we had to do things which we thought would be very unwise, that might involve bringing the Chinese in or offending somebody else. So we talked about it. And I think it was McNamara who suggested it to me that wouldn't it might not be a good idea to leak it out that there had been a 34-A attack, and that while they were not related, the other side might have thought they were related, and therefore if it attacked the Houston ... It wasn't the Houston first. It was the other one, whatever it was.

M: It was the Maddox first.

B: The Maddox, yes. It was because they were confused by these things--in order to blunt the effect.

Now, that was the first attack. The second attack was a different matter. We didn't know for a time whether it was a real attack or not. The only real confirmatory evidence which came in later was the intercept of the radio from the mainland. But I think that the President always had considerable doubt during at least part of that period and even afterwards in a sort of kidding way, he would say to McNamara, "Well, those fish [inaudible] were swimming," or something.

But anyway during the time that we were seriously considering action we thought it was genuine. Then we thought it might not be. And then when the instructions were finally given--they were given subject to there being confirmed that there had been an actual attack--the President decided that this was the time to go up to Congress, that we were going to probably have to do some more things, and that was the time to go up to Congress and bring Congress fully in, and that this was a very good occasion to do it. And the fact that we were giving some direction to a congressional action might save the Congress from doing something more extreme.

M: Who actually wrote the resolution as it was sent up?

B: I can't remember. I think I had a slight hand in tinkering with the language, but I don't know who wrote it. I think it was based on an original Bill Bundy draft. I think it was redrafted in the White House. I think I made some lawyer suggestions at the end.

M: Was it based strongly on a contingent draft that had been drawn up back in the spring?

B: Yes, the draft that Bill Bundy had written earlier which was too long and wordy, as I recall.

M: But they do bear a lot of similarity, the two.

B: To my recollection. I haven't looked at it for [a long time].

M: Did you talk with some of the congressional leadership about it?

B: Yes, I went up. I was always the President's ambassador to Bill Fulbright. I went up, as I recall, and I spent quite a lot of time with the Foreign Relations Committee, trying to get this thing through.

M: Fulbright, of course, later claimed that he had been fooled. Do you know of any reason why he might think he had been fooled as to the intent of the resolution or its content?

B: I think that what happened with him--and I like Fulbright, I don't mean to be unfair to him--he simply hadn't given the matter all that much thought at the time; perhaps didn't

read all the implications into it that one might have if he'd studied it more carefully. The language was perfectly clear; it was extremely far-reaching language. But, even so, it didn't go so far beyond that Near Eastern Resolution at the time of the Lebanese invasion, or the--

M: Nationalist Chinese one, I guess.

B: Nationalist China say that Matsu [?] ....

M: You were already having doubts, obviously, about the general direction of our policy at that time.

B: Oh, I'd always had doubts.

M: But you favored the Tonkin Gulf Resolution.

B: Yes, I don't recall having opposed it. I just felt that--

M: Did anyone?

B: I don't think so. "Let's go get this authority." It didn't seem to me that implied in this was much more than that. "Let's get some authority from Congress," rather than act entirely--again, this was perhaps a lawyer's instinct--on the basis of the implied powers of the President, war powers of the President. I just thought we ought to tidy up. That was really what it was.

M: That was obviously a presidential decision, to go for the resolution?

B: Yes.

M: So he was engaged in Vietnam to that extent. Had he been in on any of the so-called decisions that had been so much subject to discussion in connection with the Pentagon Papers? The 34-A decisions, contingency plans?

B: No, I don't think he had ever heard of it. I can't be sure of this. My recollection is that he had never heard of the 34-A. I'm not even sure I had myself.

Now, on all of those 34-A decisions, let me say that, as I recall, the authorization which was approved by the Ten-Eleven Committee or some damned thing.

M: I think that's the name of it.

B: Too, the command in the Southeast Asia theater was fairly broad, so if they wanted to run

a particular 34-A operation, they ran it. I don't think the individual operation had to be approved, just the program of operations. With respect to that particular committee, our representative on the committee was Alex Johnson, and Alex had the practice of before going to one of these committees, he would bring in the proposals and the files which they were going to consider and show them to me, and he would get my instructions as to the position that the department would take. This didn't always happen because sometimes I was away, but I had confidence in Alex, and he acted on his own. But when I was there, this was always done.

M: And this is as high as it got.

B: This is as high as it got. And in the Pentagon, it was Ros Gilpatric who was doing it.

M: The same level.

B: Yes.

M: Was it your understanding that there existed in early September of 1964, as the Pentagon Papers seem to be saying, a consensus that we were going to start bombing?

B: There wasn't any consensus. There were a lot of people thinking, you know, "This situation is not good. Let's think of all the contingencies." And everybody who was working on South Vietnam was writing papers about this or that type of program. There wasn't any consensus at all.

M: And certainly not a presidential decision?

B: Certainly not a presidential decision. No, he definitely didn't make it. He didn't want to make this decision. He was always a very reluctant fellow, but he always got kind of dragged along, kicking and screaming. The impetus toward escalation never came from Lyndon Johnson, I can assure you of that.

M: There did occur that fall several instances that might have provoked the same kind of retaliation that we took in Tonkin Gulf and we didn't take retaliatory action.

B: That's right.

M: Did they involve presidential refusal?

B: Usually. The President would say, "Yes, we're not going to do this." And then what happened really, the reason why the bombing started in February, it didn't have anything to do with any very clear decision that something had to be done to the North, but that something had to be done for the South. There had been a whole sordid series of coups, a

feeling that the whole political fabric of South Vietnam was beginning to disintegrate, and that we had to do something very fair and affirmative if we were going to keep this damned thing from falling apart. That's what happened. It was a great bucker -upper for South Vietnam. That was the whole reason for it. I say the whole reason. That was really the reason for it.

Now the problem that I was encountering at that time, particularly with Bob McNamara--and, again, I don't want to be unfair to him. He was the one who had the responsibility for the war in a rather special sense, in the military sense. He was under enormous pressures from his own soldiers and sailors and airmen to escalate, and he resisted. He made his own decisions, and he kept the thing under very considerable control and under great restraint. But the reaction I always had from him was --he would put up a proposal, and I would say, "Well, I don't think it's demonstrated that this is going to achieve the purpose at all, and I don't think that the argument has been made in any convincing form that this can succeed or that it's going to do any good. The cost could be very considerable, and it's one more step on this road," and so on. He had a set answer, which was, "All right, George, what do you propose to do?" I had a set answer, too. I proposed that we cut our losses and get the hell out. But that was no [acceptable] answer.

M: It would have been a banker's solution, maybe not a Ford executive's solution.

B: Well, they did with the Edsel, but ....

M: That's right. They did. (Laughter)

B: It was an unacceptable answer in the current mood at the time.

M: Had anybody joined you by February of 1965 in that point of view in regard to the bombing when the bombing decision was being made?

B: No. That was the general attitude I had toward every act of escalation.

M: But you were still alone as late as February of 1965?

B: I was alone in the top councils. If Bill Bundy tells me he had lots of reservations, and I suspect he did--Bill is an honest man--he never argued them in any direct or vigorous way, even to me. He would always say, "You're overstating. You've overestimated this thing. It isn't as bad as you say," and so on. I think there were people in the department who were beginning to feel this way.

M: Lower down, you mean?

B: Yes. My own personal assistant, George Springsteen, I think agreed with me. Abe Shays, who was in the consular department. But they were in a position where they couldn't make their voices felt.

M: When the bombing did start, was it clearly understood by everybody that this was going to be a permanently instituted policy?

B: No. It started on a so-called tit-for-tat basis. Max Taylor was pressing this idea of gradually escalating the thing. I had a kind of sense of fatality that I wasn't going to keep it from happening. It would indeed happen. Once you get one of those things going, it's just like getting a little alcohol; you're going to get a taste for more. It's a compelling thing.

M: Was it seriously considered that the bombing program itself might call for a greatly expanded ground force, if for nothing else, to protect the air activity?

B: I wrote one paper which is not in the presidential file. I guess to make this complete if you want any documentation on paper, I'll get you a copy of it.

M: I'd like to, if it's not in the presidential files particularly.

B: I'll tell you why it isn't in the presidential files. It was a paper that I wrote to President Johnson describing the escalatory steps which would follow one another until we got into deep trouble--a war with China and a war with the Soviet Union and so on --because I wanted to take him through this. I wrote it, and then I tried to negotiate it with McNamara and Bundy. We spent a whole afternoon going over this, and they disagreed with me on one significant point. They weren't going to be a part of that. Llewelyn Thompson went with me pretty much the whole way. So then I wrote it for the President as a paper which reflected the views of Thompson and myself and of Bundy and McNamara, with the significant differences which we noted. I sent this to the President and he called me and said come over. I went over with Mac Bundy. I think this was on a Saturday. We sat down and I went through it step-by-step and explained the logic for each step. Then he did something that he had never done before. At the end of I suppose an hour and a half or two hours with him, he handed the paper back. So I have the original.

M: That's why it's not in the files.

B: That's why it's not in the files. I suspect it would be in the files of the Pentagon, although it hasn't appeared, to the best of my knowledge. But I'll get you a copy of it.

M: One of the things you suggested was that ground troops would be a necessary follow-up.

B: Yes.

M: Do you think that was fully understood by the people who were so avid that we be gin a bombing program?

B: Nobody was prepared to concede that any particular step would require any further step. This was kind of a standard assumption which I kept repeating again and again was a false assumption. The argument that I kept making through these memoranda... I remember quoting Emerson about "things are in the saddle" and "you're losing control. You go forward with this further step, and you will substantially have lost control. Finally, you're going to find the war is running you, and we're not running the war."

M: The Pentagon Papers imply that the decision to go up fairly hard and fast on troops on the ground was made as early as April 1, 1965. Was it your impression that it was a hard decision that early?

B: No, it wasn't made that early. As a matter of fact, the very big review that we had wasn't, in my recollection, until June. Then we spent a week fighting this thing out, and there had been no decision taken.

M: That was the occasion for another one of y our major memoranda?

B: Yes, I think I wrote two at that time.

M: Seeking to disengage. Are you still fighting a pretty lonely battle among the higher echelon at that point?

B: There wasn't anybody else.

M: Did you get again as serious consideration a s [always]?

B: I always had my day in court. That's the reason I always felt I ought to stay around. I was listened to. People didn't agree with me, but I was listened to. If I hadn't been there, nobody would have been raising any restraint.

M: What about after the bombing began and the department attempted to justify its position with what became a rather well-known white paper that the critics always thought was a weak effort to ....

B: A terribly weak effort. That effort was written really I thin k under Bill Bundy's supervision. They gave it to me at the very last minute, saying, "It's just going into page proof," and so on. I read it and said, "I think this is absolutely appalling. It doesn't prove a damned thing." So then I made an effort to strengthen it, and I rewrote parts of it, and

so on. But even so I thought it was terrible. I always thought it was terrible.

M: Essentially, why? Just a poor job of drafting, or were there just not the facts to demonstrate the argument?

B: I was a trained lawyer. I thought this was a most unpersuasive brief. It never seemed to me--and particularly this technique of taking a special case history and tracing it through and drawing lots of conclusions from it, I didn't think you could do that.

M: What was the general view of the top inner circle advisers regarding what our chances were of doing what we wanted to do in Vietnam by this time? Was there optimism in the State Department?

B: It depended on what parts of the State Department you're talking about. I remember saying to Bill Bundy once on a certain measure of escalation that, "I don't think this thing has a chance. I think it's absurd to be putting this up and seriously going for it." I said, "What do you think the chances are?" "Oh," he said, "10 or 15 per cent." I said, "That's absolute nonsense for a great government to go ahead on as potentially costly a program of this kind in terms of lives, in terms of ancillary breakings that might occur on that kind of a risk. It's just a lousy business judgment. You can't do it."

I think it differed from one man to another. I think that McNamara up through that period was absolutely convinced that one could make a quantitative demonstration, given the disparity in resources between the United States and the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong; that if we didn't impose our will on the country, it was simply because we weren't using those resources properly and weren't being sufficiently skillful and imaginative. Therefore, it was a tremendous challenge.

M: But doable?

B: It was doable, because the figures demonstrated it. With Rusk, it was quite a different thing. He was enormously influenced by his experience during the Korean War. He had been a key element in the Korean situation and Korea, so far as he was concerned, had been a great success. So I would say, "Look, you've got no government. It's impossible to win in a situation where you've got this totally fragile political base. These people are clowns." Whereupon, he'd say, "Don't give me that stuff. You don't understand that at the time of Korea that we had to go out and dig Singman Rhee out of the bush where he was hiding; there was no government in Korea either, and we were able to come through. We're going to get the same breaks down the road. One of these days something is going to happen, and this thing is going to work, just as it did in Korea." I think he believes that almost to this day. He said on television the other night that he had misappraised the will of the staying power.

I had quite a differing ... I resented the idea that there was any particular wisdom on one side or the other. Everyone was responding to his own set of experiences. Bob McNamara was analyzing this thing as a man who was trained in quantification, who believed in systems analysis, who believed in application of games theory to strategy, who was enormously persuaded by the disparity in military power. This was his approach.

I think that Mac Bundy saw this as a fascinating set of operational problems. I think he assumed that we were so clever, somehow we could find the key hook.

For myself, I had a whole different set of experiences. As a practicing lawyer, I had had among my clients various agencies of the French government when they went through the Indo-Chinese experience. I had heard everything before. I used to tell this to the President when McNamara was present, and it would just drive him up the wall. I'd say, "Look, Mr. President, everything that the Secretary of Defense has been telling you this morning, I used to listen to with my French friends. They talked about the body count. They talked the relative kill ratios. They talked about the fact that there was always a new plan, and with a little increment of effort, the Navarre Plan, the DeLattre de Tassigny Plan, and so on, that was going to win the day. And they believed it just as much as we're believing it sitting around the table this morning. I can tell you, however, that in the end, there was a great disillusion. And there will be one."

M: But it didn't get through.

B: It didn't get through. And as you will note, if you ever see those memoranda, a lot of them were filled with references to the French experience. That was no particular wisdom on my part. I just had a feeling that this was a terrible place to commit power, that there was no political base on which it could rest, and that the physical terrain was awful, what President De Gaulle described to me as "rotten country."

M: I'm not, as I move along here, leaving out a lot of important things, particularly the peace initiatives. I want to go through them chronologically together, if you don't mind. I'd like to get the rest of these escalation decisions in chronological order.

B: What is your time situation?

M: I'm at your disposal.

B: Are you going to be here tomorrow?

M: I can be.

B: We could do some work tomorrow morning for a while. Tonight I ought to leave here by six.

M: We've got probably twenty minutes or so on this tape to go. Then tomorrow morning we can probably do a vast portion of it.

B; Let me check on the situation. (Interruption)

M: The Honolulu Conference of early 1966 coincides with Fulbright's nationally televised hearings. What role did you play in that?

B: I never went to any of those conferences. I just viewed the whole idea of a conference as being absolutely appalling because I was convinced that the President got out there with whoever happened to be the head of the government in Vietnam, and we were going to get in deeper and deeper and deeper. So every time anybody suggested a conference I shuddered.

M: What do you think his purposes were in all of the whole procession of conferences?

B: I'd get the feeling that he really wanted to see these people, but the response of one politician to another, you know, is automatic and usually rather overstated. What we were doing was visibly, before the world's eyes, tying ourself onto one sordid little politician after another, and this just disturbed me.

M: Of course, right after that one, South Vietnam went through one of its really worst periods of chaos, I guess, the struggle and movement of early 1966. That apparently occasioned another full-scale review of policy and another one of your memoranda, I suppose, opposing it. Was that basically different than any of the others that preceded it, that review? Had it gotten a lot more serious then?

B: If you want to wait just a second, I think I've got t hat book of memoranda there.

(Interruption)

M: What I was really trying to do was really see if there's a real difference in the way that the reviews took place over time. Did enough people begin to take your doubts more seriously by early 1966 that there was a difference in the way the review came out?

B: No, because actually what happened was in a curious way the persuasiveness of my view diminished with time simply because we were deeper and deeper and deeper in. Therefore, people could always say, "Well, it's too late. And even if we wanted to get out, it's too late to get out." Bob McNamara took that position at the end. "Well, it's too late." This was the problem. That's the theme that runs through these memoranda, as you can see.

M: I guess the last really drastic military decision that was taken while you were still under secretary was the decision to bomb the Haiphong POL in the early summer of 1966. How were you involved in that?

B: I tried my very best to stop that. I think there's a memorandum in there about it. I tried to get them to follow it.

M: And again simply were unable to get anywhere.

B: That's right.

M: McNamara was as strong that late in favor as he had been previously?

B: Toward the end of the time I was in the department, I got a sense from Bob of real anxiety that "We've got to settle this thing. Let's get the diplomatic machinery going and get it settled." His idea of diplomacy, as I have gathered, was just to send a lot of people out to talk to a lot of people. Well, I didn't think we had any absence of channels, any lack of channels. The problem was we weren't prepared to say anything that could be a basis for settlement. So that while I felt this anxiety, I knew it was genuine.

And John MacNaughton at that time had developed very serious doubts. John would get me aside and say, "Gee, I agree with you, but Bob won't quite buy this." But John comes out very badly in the Pentagon Papers, I think quite unfairly because he was a rather early dove.

M: Our oral history tapes will make that quite clear. He'll get his revenge at that time.

B: Good. Well, I hope so.

M: Now by this time did you ever have specific authority from the President to be his seeker after peace, looking for initiatives?

B: Yes, as I recall, I was scheduled in a unique position where I think he told me, "My God, do what you can." I did launch one venture.

M: Was that the XYZ Gullion affair?

B: Yes.

M: There are some prior to that.

B: Wait a minute. There was the Gullion affair. There was another one, whether it was subsequent or prior I don't know, in which I used a fellow I had known, who was a retired

Foreign Service Officer living in Spain.

M: Sturm.

B: Yes, Paul Sturm.

M: That's subsequent to, I think, the Gullion. But there were, then, the inklings of things far earlier than that. I've been told, for example, that the Seaborn initiative, which has been played up in the Pentagon Papers, was in fact, at least in part, an effort to get discussions going. Was that your impression of this?

B: It was. Don't think these weren't genuine efforts to get discussions going. They were foredoomed efforts, because we weren't prepared to make any real concessions. Negotiation at that time still consisted pretty much of saying to Hanoi, "Look, let's work out a deal under which you will capitulate." And therefore I never had much optimism about any of these things, but I thought it was useful to keep things going. But the problem was that while people say they desperately wanted to negotiate, they never were prepared to make any real concessions.

M: Was there an agreement as to what we would say if Hanoi had agreed to talk?

B: Yes, but it was not an agreement that really conceded anything.

M: Can you sort out the Adlai Stevenson-U Thant alleged initiative in the fall of 1964?

B: This is a real headache, and I was in the middle of it very much. What happened was that Stevenson called up Rusk one day and said that he had been talking to Thant and Thant had had this signal. I've forgotten the exact form of it and I once knew it intimately because I got deeply engaged in it. And at that time we had some other things going; Rusk didn't want to encourage a new channel, particularly because he had no particular confidence in U Thant anyway who had a real Burmese view of the whole situation. So he didn't make any note about this thing, and he didn't mention it because he didn't regard it as very significant. All this was really was a kind of suggestion that there might be another kind of channel started. We had lots of channels going. I don't think he really thought anything about it. It was not deliberately brushing aside the possibility of making peace. He just thought this was Stevenson's anxiety to do something. He never mentioned it to me.

Then after Stevenson died there was that curious piece that Eric Sevareid wrote which, knowing Adlai for thirty-five years, was just Adlai blowing off. I don't think it was anything very serious. Stevenson was a great complainer, and he was always seeing things. But if you'd known him well, I think you could have understood it. If he happened to feel unhappy that particular evening... And he hated his job at the U.N. by and large; he

never wanted it. But that's another very long story.

M: Unfortunately the story came out as if this was said in all sincerity, and people who don't know Stevenson are likely to take it at its face value.

B: Then I found myself in the position of talking to Thant about this thing. As I recall, I had two long sessions with Thant, in which Thant insisted on telling me this story from the very beginning. And each time he told it differently. (Laughter)

M: So there's no straight version of it, not even in Thant's mind.

B: In Thant's mind, it expanded and it enlarged and he embellished it, and it was a much more attractive thing the second time than it was the first. So I decided it was hopeless.

M: You mentioned the other channels that we had going. These were in the fall of 1964? What kind of channels were we using then?

B: You know, the assumption that we had channels through the Hungarians that we played with a long time and which Rusk got rather excited about, this Hungarian foreign minister.

M: Peter?

B: Peter. And this fellow who defected ....

M: Janus Radvani?

B: Janus Radvani has written a piece on this, which explains the total deception that took place on Peter's part, because Radvani was, of course, at that time the chargé in Washington. I talked with Radvani about it at great length. He has just got a job. I had word from him just yesterday. He has gotten his Ph.D., and he has gotten an appointment to the University of Mississippi.

M: Holy smoke! He'll go over well in Oxford, Mississippi.

B: A very good guy. But there was that Peter initiative.

M: We weren't actually talking to North Vietnamese that early?

B: No. The Polish initiative didn't amount to anything. I think you've probably seen this stuff now.

M: Early in 1965 we undertook some talks with the British and Russians as co-chairmen of the Geneva Conference apparently. What did we have in mind at that point with them?

Anything serious?

B: Sure, it was to see what the possibilities were. The Russians were always lea ding us on. We'd get rumors through the underground that the Russians really wanted some approach from us and wanted to play some role; then when we'd test it out, nothing would ever happen. This was pretty much the normal thing.

M: In May of 1965 the President did go through a very short bombing pause. Was that in connection with any program design to get anything started?

B: It was hopeful that we could, yes.

M: How did you convince him to do that?

B: We had a session down at the Ranch i n which we were all down there. McNamara took the lead in that, and I joined him.

M: Early in the first pause, as well as the second?

B: What was that? May of 1965?

M: May of 1965. I'm not doubting you.

B: I don't know.

Let me just say one thing. Looking at my telecons at that time, it's perfectly clear that I was spending no more than one-tenth of my time on Vietnam.

M: Right, and I want to talk to you more about the other things, too.

B: It's hard to understand now, because it became such a b ig part of the show, but during this period we were having Congo crises, we were having crises --

M: Cyprus.

B: Cyprus. On all of these things I was spending far more of my time thinking and acting with regard to other things. I spend an awful lot of time on that Beef Import Bill and things of that sort that people are quite not aware of now. So it's very hard for me to keep a chronology straight about these particular things. I don't know. You asked me about ....

M: Obviously, it's not something that sticks in your mind as being a key point of any kind.

B: If you wanted to take this book home, if you would like to look at it tonight ....

M: Okay, that would be very helpful. I have no plans and I have time to do it.

B: I mean, you have to guard it with your life, because I have no business having this, you can well understand.

M: Oh, yes.

The episode with Ed Gullion came, as I understand it, in the late part of the summer of 1965. That was peculiarly your operation.

B: It was my initiative. It was my idea.

M: Did you sell this to the President?

B: Yes.

M: On what grounds?

B: On the grounds that I wanted to get a disavowable contact with him to see what would come of it.

M: Did it seem for a while to be more hopeful than some of these other earlier ones that you've talked about it?

B: I thought it might be, and particularly the Sturm one. Was that afterwards? I guess it was.

M: Yes.

B: The Sturm one. I don't know that at that time ... I just mentioned to the Pr esident, "I've got something going, and I'm not going to tell you what it is," or something like that. So he accepted that. You know, a disavowable contact.

M: And the Sturm one and the Gullion one were not connected?

B: I think the Gullion one didn't get very far; therefore, I fell back on the Sturm one. I think that was it. I don't think Gullion ever knew about Sturm. Maybe he did, but I don't think so.

M: Did anything happen to make it come to nothing? I'm thinking in terms of military activity that might have been unfortunate, as has been charged in some later events after you left

office.

B: I don't know. Has anything ever been published about these?

M: No.

B: I don't know whether they read it.

M: That's the one initiative, in fact, that I can think of that I've never seen in print anywhere.

B: No, it's never been in print.

M: That's about the only one that hasn't been so far. But so far as you kn ow, there's nothing about that that is outside the papers--

B: He saw Mai Van Bo three or four times, as I recall. But I think at the end it just petered out. Now whether there were some military events that may have effected the thing, or whether Mai Van Bo got instructions from Hanoi: "Don't go anywhere with this fellow," or what, I don't know.

M: Were we trying to sell any particular package, any particular set of activities to get something started?

B: I had a set of instructions, which I worked on very carefully, as to just what we were prepared to do. I couldn't reproduce them now if my life depended on it. They are in that file. They'll be in the White House.

M: The Sturm one wouldn't if you hadn't told the President who you were dealing with , presumably.

B: I don't think he ever knew. I mean he knew that I --he was willing to let me do a certain amount of this stuff on a disavowable basis.

M: If it turned out badly, you could always ....

B: "Well, this guy was acting on his own." And Stur m was the kind of fellow that could be trusted. I'd never use a newspaperman. I'd never use the normal volunteer in this business.

M: Ashmore and Biggs, you don't use.

B: Oh, God, they'd drive me right up a tree. But if you have a fellow who is a trained Foreign Service Officer, you could be pretty sure, particularly if I'd known him personally

for a long time.

M: At the end of that year, we went through the very long pau se, thirty-seven days. How was this sold to the President?

B: This may have been the one--was this the one ... ?

M: Yes, McNamara was in favor of this one, according to the Pentagon [Papers] documents. So quite possibly ....

B: I think he was in favor of both of them.

M: The first one is not mentioned very much in the Pentagon [Papers] documents. So quite possibly ....

B: He was in favor of both of them.

We all went down to the Ranch, and I guess it was probably early December. Both Bob and I made quite strong pitches for the pause. Rusk was not very much in favor of the pause. He just felt that we would get nowhere and we'd be in worse shape at the end of it. As I recall, there was no decision taken. We came back to Washington. And then I have a house in Florida and I went down for just a week, which was about the only vacation I had gotten in six years. I think I was away from the department for twenty -four days which included Sundays. And the President called me and said, "Look, you wanted a pause, and now, dammit, you're going to have a pause. You'd better get on an airplane and get back up here. I'm sending you a plane."

M: That's the first that you knew that the decision had been favorable? Is that the way he frequently did things?

B: Yes.

M: What about the aftermath and the sending of people all over the country? Was that something that he was advised to do by the State Department, or was that his own [idea]?

B: He wanted to make a great demonstration. He called me in. "Who s hould I send?" I was out in Virginia for some reason. He came out with that, on who we should send. So I was recommending people to send all over the place. The people I recommended were people I thought could do business, and the people he wanted to send were people who were too conspicious.

M: And sometimes the two didn't coincide, or they'd never coincide. Did any of those traveling salemen get to do any business?

B: I don't think so. I mean it was too flamboyant an affair. You can't begin to negotiate that way because the other side immediately reads this as a major effort to put them on the spot.

M: The initiative presumed to have been taken at that time by the Po les--what's his name, Neolovsky?--going to Hanoi was more show than substance?

B: I suspect so. I don't think there was anything serious there. I suspect it was no more serious than the whole Peter affair.

M: What about Norman Cousins' charge that he published a year or so ago, that at the last moment he had--

B: I'm going to do a piece in this little Newsweek column for next time on the frightfulness of self-appointed peacemakers. I think they really get in the way more than they ever help.

M: As far as you're concerned, no real chances was missed through this period?

B: No. The trouble with the self-confessed peacemaker is that, in the first place, he always goes desperately wanting to hear the other side say what he wants them to say. So he always hears them say that. He always comes back and reports that, when they haven't said anything different from what they've been saying for a long time. He reads everything into it. Then he insists on going to the press and announcing exactly what he's been doing. I think these fellows confuse the situation terribly.

M: The last one, I suppose, that occurred during your tenure as under secretary was a Canadian in the early summer of 1966, Chester Ronning.

B: That was a different story. That was not a volunteer.

M: That was another professional one.

B: That was a professional, yes.

M: And so that was of more consequence than the others.

B: Sure, that was something we initiated. These other things were--you know, like Bill Baggs and Harry Ashmore, these characters just wanted to get a Nobel Prize.

M: Did the Ronning thing move things forward at all?

B: No, I don't think it did, because again the problem was always the same. We really

weren't prepared to concede anything significant.

M: Still, by mid-1966? Did you have anything to do with any of those that have been published after you left office? The Marigold, or Harold Wilson, or Glassboro, or any of those?

B: I knew vaguely what was going on. For a period again of course in 1968 I was in the government. Not really, no. I didn't have any confidence in this. I didn't have any confidence ever after a very point in a negotiated solution.

M: Because of our viewpoint?

B: Because we weren't asking for a negotiated solution. We were asking the other side to capitulate, in effect, to give up everything they had been striving to do for twenty -five years. And this I was convinced they were not going to do. This reflected to a considerable extent my French period.

M: That takes us through the various initiatives until you left office and pretty much through Vietnam. I may think of some other things after looking at these tonight, but why don't we put in tomorrow talking about the 90 per cent of your time doing other things and any specific questions I might have?

B: Sure.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

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Legal Agreement pertaining to the Oral History interviews of George Ball

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, George Ball of New York, New York 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 on July 8 and July 9, 1971, at New York, New York and prepared for deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

(1) The transcripts shall be available for use by researchers as soon as they have been deposited in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

(2) The tape recordings shall be available to those researchers who have access to the transcript.

(3) I hereby assign to the United States Government all copyright I may have in the interview transcripts and tapes.

(4) Copies of the transcripts and tape recordings may be provided by the Library to researchers upon request.

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Signed by George Ball on August 20, 1986

Accepted by Frank G. Burke, Archivist of the United States on September 16, 1986

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ACCESSION NUMBER 88-2

October 10, 2006

MEMO FOR THE RECORD

It has come to our attention that there is an incorrect date in the interview of George Ball. It is believed that Ms. Mulhollan misspoke on page 4 when she stated that the "so-called critical telegram" was signed by Mr. Ball on August 24, 1964. The date was actually August 24, 1963.

Laura Eggert
Archives Technician