INTERVIEWEE: LUCIUS BATTLE (Tape 1)

INTERVIEWER: PAIGE E. MULHOLLAN

November 14, 1968

M: Let's identify you in time and position here. When Mr. Johnson became President, you were serving as Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs.

B: That's correct.

M: You had been appointed by President Kennedy?

B: I was appointed by President Kennedy in May of 1962 to that job.

M: Had you had before that time any opportunity to make acquaintance with Mr. Johnson before he became President?

B: Well, I was trying to remember today when I first met him, and I don't really recall when that was. I saw him several times while he was Vice President, but I think my first awareness of him, not as a Senator or figure, but as a person and as a personality, really was 1957. Dean Acheson is one of my closest friends; I worked for him as his assistant while he was Secretary of State. And I recall coming to Washington--I was then vice president of colonial Williamsburg.

M: How could anybody leave that job? I visited there not long ago. I believe if I ever got down there I'd retire happily.

B: Well, I had it a little too early in my own life. It was a lovely job. It was too lovely. I wasn't quite ready to have that kind of retirement. I may be nearer ready now, but I wasn't then.

M: I didn't mean to interrupt you, but that seems to me like the ultimate of accomplishments.

B: Well, it was a good job, a wonderful job. But I came up during 1957 to stay with the Achesons. I was making a couple of speeches here and we were going to spend several days with the Achesons. And I remember at breakfast--the first morning that we were there--Dean Acheson had a telephone call in the middle of breakfast and went out and then came back to the table. And he said to me, "That was Senator Lyndon Johnson." And he said, "I'm working very closely with him on the new civil rights bill," which Acheson--somewhat to my surprise because I hadn't been aware of any particular interest of his in this--he evidenced an interest also.

And he said when he came back that Senator Johnson was really quite a remarkable man and he had enjoyed enormously his relationship with him on that particular bill. That was the first time--while I had of course known the name and been aware of him--it was the first time I had really discussed him with someone who knew him well and at the kind of level that made it quite important.

Over the next two or three years I talked with Dean Acheson and many others about him. And I remember that prior to the Convention of 1960, Acheson told me that he really thought that Johnson was the best candidate for President, and that that was his candidate, and he was for him. I was somewhat surprised; I was not at that particular point one who supported Senator Johnson for the Presidency; I had no feeling about it one way or another. I found myself in support of Kennedy and yet from the talks that I had with Acheson and others, I developed a very real interest in Senator Johnson and later that developed into a very deep respect and admiration for him, particularly as I had the opportunity to know him in later years and to be with him.

M: Do you know if Mr. Acheson played any role as a campaigner for Johnson in

1960 prior to the convention?

B: I don't think so. As I recall, he did not. He never takes a very active role in politics except on the sidelines. He did make it very clear to many people, the press and others, that he felt this way. It was carried in the press at the time that Senator Johnson was his choice, and he stuck with this for quite a long time. I'll let him speak for himself on his attitudes toward Senator Kennedy; he and I taped for that particular project together.

M: Oh, did you?

B: Yes, we spent a whole day taping for the Kennedy Library. I try not to speak for other people; I only speak for myself. But I talked with him at some length about this, and I know and I have no hesitation in saying--because it was a matter of public record--that at that time he favored Senator Johnson for the President, and I think this attitude went on all during that period.

But the degree to which he was active I think was somewhat limited; he was not particularly engaged in political pursuits at that stage although he was on the Democratic Study Group, or the Policy Committee I guess it was called. And he was involved in that over those years in which the Republicans were in office and the Democrats were out.

My own involvement with later Vice President Johnson was somewhat peripheral. I really knew him only later when he became President, although I had one or two little contacts with him while he was Vice President. I recall fairly early in the Kennedy era--I came back, incidentally, to government to be Special Assistant to Dean Rusk and Executive Secretary of the Department of State. And during that period of about two years Dean

Rusk was very concerned that We make available in the Department of State to the Vice President and his office all that they WAnted in terms of material and telegrams and reports and what have you.

M: Was a man assigned to brief the Vice President periodically?

B: Yes, there were several people who worked with him during that early period. Bob Skiff was one who was with him for a short time. He was there for awhile; his job was not really to brief particularly, but to see that the Vice President and his office had everything that he wanted. I remember having a lunch with George Reedy and one or two other people in the very early days of the Kennedy era to see what we could do as a Department to keep the Vice President informed and to make available everything that he wanted. And we set up a procedure then to send over documents and summaries and briefing material and what have you to go to the Vice President's office. And Bob Skiff was for a time sort of a leg man between the Department of State and the Vice President's office.

I saw him during that period from time to time; I saw him in several periods when there were key issues on international affairs before us; he came to numerous meetings at the Department of State; I sat in on several of them. I was too lowly to have much direct contact with him, but I spoke with him on a number of occasions. I occasionally saw him socially during that period, once in awhile at Embassy parties. We had a group, I recalll, that was called the Potomac Marching Society, which is little known in Washington, but it was a group of people--we had dances about three or four times a year--and the group consisted of Soapy [G. Mennen] Williams, Mac [McGeorge] Bundy and Arthur Schlesinger and a group--the list is of no importance, but there were a lot of people who were closely connected with

the Administration, with the change, and he and Mrs. Johnson used to come to some of those parties. And I remember seeing him several times then; also Abe Fortas is a great friend of mine and I recall seeing him during that period before and after he became President as a guest of the Fortases. And I remember one birthday party, for example--it was Abe Fortas' birthday and they had a party; I've forgotten where it was; the National Democratic Women's Club, I think--and it was a group of maybe fifty people. And the Johnsons were there on that occasion; there were a few instances of that sort where I saw him socially.

M: This was still during the Kennedy period?

B: Well, it was both. I have a little trouble sorting out when one ended and when the other began. It was the latter part of the Kennedy era that I remember seeing him at the Fortases, and I recall being at one party with him and Mrs. Johnson after he became President and this was quite early in his Administration.

But my own involvement with him at that time was very, very peripheral. There was no reason whatever for him to have any contact with me.

M: There has always been the news claim at least, that Mr. Johnson was not very much at home among the New Frontiersmen of the Kennedy years, particularly socially. Do you think that has been exaggerated?

B: Well, it depends on what you consider the New Frontiersmen.

M: I suppose that can be defined in all sorts of ways.

B: There were a great many New Frontiersmen. I saw him during those periods and he seemed to be having a very good time, and I saw no particular problem. Certainly with the Fortases and the Cliffords and people that he had known for a long time, he was happy and certainly seemed to be at home. The New Frontier was not always kind to him; I was well aware of that. I

recall hearing little remarks made that I thought were unfortunate, very unfortunate. I don't want to quote the specific person who said them to me, but there were, I think, those who were perhaps unkind to President Johnson, then Vice President Johnson. He was not always easy either in all honesty. He was not a man who was easy to work with or for. I personally always had a very fine relationship with him as we'll come to as we go over my own relationships with him. And I never had any complaints whatever--none whatever. But there were those who did, and I think probably the New Frontier crowd in a way sort of inhibited him and brought out things in him that made him even a little more difficult than he basically was--that grew out of a kind of problem of relationship and went back in part to what happened in 1960 and all that.

M: Well it gets important in public policy, I suppose more important other than just as a matter of social contact, when he becomes President--whether or not those people are capable of giving the kind of loyalty to Mr. Johnson as President that they might have given. Do you think that most of them did?

B: Loyalty is a hard thing to define. I think that most of them who remained were certainly at a minimum loyal to the office, and I think their disloyalty, if you can call it that--that probably is an overstatement--was given to an excess of relationship to the past, and found its expression in sort of sniping and snarling remarks, probably to those that they felt wouldn't--I had no newspaper column and am notoriously discreet in dealing with them, and I may have heard comments that were unfortunate. There was not an entire happiness but part of it, I think, was defensible in the sense of their being such enormous emotion and bitterness following the assassination of President Kennedy.

This is a hard thing to assess, a hard thing to assess. The press of our country is always given to exaggerate this kind of thing; it made a better story.

M: They'll pick it up too, even though it's confidential?

B: They will make it up too. Whether it exists or not--they will create it. And I think this was part of it. I suspect that the disloyalty was much less real than it was imagined, but I think there was a kind of nostalgia and a sadness in a lot of those around the President, even among those who remained, that made it difficult for them quite to relate to the new President and the new situation in quite the degree that they had in the past. And that's understandable.

M: After he became President, did he come into contact with you directly in your position at that time as Assistant Secretary?

B: Not to any great extent. I had a great deal of contact with the staff and with others. It was a period in which he was so consumed with major problems; and educational and cultural affairs, in which he evidenced a great interest later, were obviously not the things on the very front burner. They were relatively unimportant in terms of what he was facing. Therefore, he took no particular part in these matters, although he had members of his staff do so.

And I recall one period in which he appointed Abe Fortas and Isaac Stern, the violinist, Pierre Salinger and me to study what should be done with respect to the Advisory Committee on the Arts; this led to the creation of the job that Roger Stevens held for him during the majority of his Administration. In fact it was I who suggested Roger; Abe and Pierre and Isaac--all of them were good friends of mine--wanted me to take the job of advisory chairman, or whatever he is called--special assistant for

the arts [Chairman, National Council on the Arts], in addition to the job of Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs. I felt this was very wrong. I felt that it indicated that they didn't know the extent to which I was working a schedule that just couldn't have much added to it with any real accomplishment; and I was very much opposed to this. I had to talk them out of it, and then they kept saying, "Well, if you don't do it, who does do it?" And they felt there was merit in combining the international and the domestic; and I felt that they should be separate, primarily because I believed that there was a great amount of work to be done in the international, for which I was responsible. And I suggested Roger, and this, I think, has worked out extremely well; this is certainly my impression and I haven't had a great deal to do with it over the last several years.

Then about, I suppose, May of 1964--this was only a few months. You see, I really was not in that job very long under the Johnson Administration--the assassination was November 22 and in May there began to be various talk of moving me to other things. There was, I thought, one rather unfortunate--and I can't say all of this without it sounding a bit egotistical, and I don't mean it to be so; but if I held the story, it must be, I think a little bit. I became very close to Bill Fulbright during the period I was Assistant Secretary of Educational and Cultural Affairs. As you know he had been a very close friend of President Johnson's, and he was the author of the exchange program for which I was responsible. I saw a great deal of him during all those years that I was in charge of that program and used to go up and see him every few weeks and have a chat with him about what was going on, keep him informed on things that were happening.

President Johnson, on the recommendation of a combination of George

Bill and Dean Rusk, asked me to become Ambassador to Egypt. I had turned down several other Ambassadorial appointments that didn't seem to me to be much more than ceremonial things, and I had not been interested in that kind of Ambassadorship. When this one came along, it was so obviously difficult and so obviously important and in a setting that seemed to me to be extremely interesting that I immediately wanted to take that one and ended up doing so.

The standard procedure is that a notification go to the Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee informing him that an appointment of that level is to be made and giving him--it goes also, I think, to the leadership, a similar letter--giving him twenty-four hours or so to indicate objection. Bill Fulbright and I had become very good friends during that period, and I told the Congressional Liaison office of the Department of State that I was a little concerned as to whether Fulbright would like my departure, because we had gotten along very well and he of course considered, and still considers, based on a letter I had from him last week--that the program is of special importance. It also carries his name.

M: He's my Senator, incidentally.

B: You're Arkansas too?

M: I'm from Fayetteville. My permanent job is teaching at the University of Arkansas. And I have had the pleasure of introducing Fulbright several times and consider him a very good friend.

B: In spite of all that has happened, I have a good deal of admiration for him--not entirely, but a great deal.

But I told the Congressional office that I expected that Bill Fulbright would have a bit more than a casual interest in my departure from the job of Assistant Secretary of Educational and Cultural Affairs. As it happened,

the letter went up to him and the following day, within the twenty-four hours--I think it was twenty-four--in which he is permitted to indicate objection or view, I had one of my regular routine meetings with him. And I walked into the office, and he was absolutely livid. He said he did not want me to leave Educational and Cultural Affairs; that he felt I had not really stayed long enough to accomplish all that he and I had many times said should be accomplished in that field, and he was bitterly opposed to it. We talked for probably an hour, and he finally said, "All right, I will not stand in your way. If you really want to do this, I will let you do it without objection."

I went back to the Department of State, the telegram asking for the agreement for my assignment in Cairo went out, and several hours--two or three hours--went by. Then I had a frantic call from George Ball's office, saying, "Come upstairs immediately." And Senator Fulbright apparently on reflection over lunch had gone back to his original view that he held when I walked in the office that morning, that he did not want me to go. He said that I was not--he had called George Ball and he had called Dean Rusk--and said to both of them that he was very much opposed to my being moved out of Educational and Cultural Affairs, and he simply would not permit it.

There followed, nine weeks in which the question of what I was going to do next was caught up between the President of the United States and the Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, Bill Fulbright, with whom I talked almost daily at that point, kept saying that he would accept as a replacement for me anyone that I told him was up to the job. I kept saying to Senator Fulbright, "I have nothing to do with making an appointment as Assistant Secretary of State; this is a prerogative of the President of

the United States, and I have no claim whatever to make an appointment."

He said, "If you don't work out the name, if you don't tell me that he's up to doing the job, I will not permit you to go to Cairo; and I am very much opposed to your departure."

As these little ironies of fate happen, as it worked out, we happened to run into Bill and Betty Fulbright, it seemed to me, almost every night during those several weeks.

M: That always happens when you're involved in something like this.

B: It did then. And Betty Fulbright kept saying to me, "Bill isn't going to let you go anywhere; he wants you to stay here and run the Educational and Cultural program." And I kept saying to her, "It's not my prerogative to decide; it's that of the President of the United States; I'm a career foreign service officer,and I do what I am told. Therefore, I cannot do anything at all except what the President wishes me to do. I didn't ask to be Ambassador to Cairo, or for that matter, anything else; but if the President wishes me to do so, I must do it."

Well, this went on and on. I made up endless lists of people to replace me and would call Bill and say to Bill Fulbright, "I have no power whatever to make an appointment as Assistant Secretary of State; but how would you feel about these names if the President should select them?" being very careful to assure him that I couldn't say who was to be my replacement. In every instance he said, no, he wasn't interested in that fellow; he didn't like that name, or he never had cared for that fellow, or whatever.

More and more the press began to learn of this. I was very worried because I could see a column coming out saying "President and Chairman At Odds"; and an argument in which certainly I would have been the loser, and I felt everybody would lose.

M: This was early enough too, that the President and Senator Fulbright had not had their difficulties.

B: There had been no difficulties. This was before Viet Nam became a problem, before the Dominican Republic became an issue. And I simply did not want to get in the middle of that particular thing, and all I had in mind was straightening it out and trying to make it acceptable to both people.

I must say Senator Fulbright told several members of the press, and I had calls. Fortunately the ones he told happened to be personal friends of mine. Joe Kraft and Bill White, Sidney Hyman, and one or two others--and later I learned Walter Lippmann and others had known of it too--but those three particularly called me and said that they had heard I was going to be Ambassador to Egypt; and I said, "Please, please don't print that." They all knew what was going on, and I must say it's one of the few times in my life I ever managed to keep the press from writing something that I knew that would not be helpful to anybody.

So there were no columns, there were no stories, and it managed to hold for nine weeks. In the latter part of that period I had enlisted the help of a couple of friends of mine, George Ball and Ben Read, who is now Executive Secretary of the Department, in the job that I held earlier. And Ben Read came up with the name of Harry McPherson. And he said, "Harry McPherson is a friend of Fulbright's and he's a friend of the President's."

M: Was McPherson serving as a staff member for Mr. Johnson then?

B: No, he was not. He was in the Department of the Army; he was Assistant to the Secretary of the Army, or Assistant Under Secretary--he had a strange title, I remember, but I don't recall exactly what it was.

Well, I got in touch with Harry, and Harry obviously was extremely well qualified for the job, was someone who could get along with both the

President and Mr. Fulbright, and seemed to me to be absolutely ideal. I called the Senator, and the Senator said that would be great, he thought that would be fine. And for the first time I could see the light of day.

Harry, at that point, told me that he was deeply interested in the job, and he did very well in the short period that he had it; he did superbly well. He would have been great if events had not removed him from that particular assignment. He said he was a little worried that the President might pull him over to be a member of the White House staff,but that he would be interested in the job; and he talked with the President, the President said he was quite willing for him to take it, and it looked as though we were home free.

And in the ninth week, or tenth week, of this particular--what was for me an ordeal, because I was very much afraid it was going to pop out in the press and be a really embarrassing thing for the Secretary, for the President, for the Chairman. At the end of that very lengthy period, we finally got it settled and I went to Egypt.

I saw the President once or twice before I left although only briefly, no lengthy discussions. He was very warm and friendly to me. He had no particular awareness of me as a person at that point; I think he simply knew my name, and he knew I had many friends around the Administration, and around the White House staff, both old and new. But I had no relationship with him that I could in any way call personal at that point.

I went to Cairo. While I was in Cairo I had immediately several rather devastating experiences. I arrived in September and presented my credentials in mid-September of 1964; and then a series of little horrors occurred that caused considerable difficulty.

The American Library was burned down on Thanksgiving Day of 1964.

M: That was some greeting--

B: A great greeting. I had just arrived. An American plane, a private plane belonging to John Mecom of Texas, was shot down on December 18, if I remember correctly. President Nasser told me and then later said publicly, that he was aiding the Congo rebels at a time when we were lifting our people out of there, causing great, great consternation here in the United States and elsewhere around the world--that really was the factor that led to the burning of the library a little bit earlier. But the issue was still very, very hot, and he said he was providing arms to the Congo rebels. On the 23rd of December President Nasser made the rather famous speech in which he attacked me personally and asked the United States if it didn't like what he was doing, to drink the water of the sea. This was one of the more famous of many anti-American speeches he made.

The events that led up to that, I think, are of some interest, because I think they indicate something of the moment and something of the kinds of pressures internationally. I'm coming back to President Johnson--

M: That's all right. Actually we are interested in the life and times, and we're interested in your career there and elsewhere.

B: Well, if you recall, Khrushchev fell in the fall, I don't recall the date--the fall of that year. And there was a document that circulated around Western Europe saying that one of the reasons for his fall had been his relationships with Nasser and the fact that he had done several things that the Russians considered contrary, or at least not covered, by his mandate. He had provided aid beyond the level that was permitted; he had given honors to Egyptians, including Nasser, without approval of the Presidium; there were, I think, three out of several items listed as the reason for the fall of

Khrushchev. Khrushchev and Nasser had developed a very strong and very personal relationship. I think, from my talks with Nasser later, this had been a rather meaningful thing as far as he was concerned; and the general consensus both of Sovietologists and the Department of State and those of us who were engaged in the Middle East all indicated, I think, that this was a very important factor in Nasser's life. They were heavily dependent on the Russians for arms, for aid, in the Aswan Dam, for political support, et cetera, although he was trying very hard at that period to keep a nonaligned policy and not to be totally committed to either East or West, even though he bit by bit by bit even then and much more later was becoming committed to the East in a variety of ways.

Well, at the time, as I said on December 18, this American plane was shot down. The bodies of what we thought at first were two Americans stayed on the ground for two or three days; a representative of John Mecom came to Cairo, a lawyer and others; the widow of one of the pilots. It developed that one pilot was American and the other was Swedish, but we thought in the beginning they were both Americans. She arrived, and she was threatening to commit suicide. She was in a hotel room--we had to keep one Embassy wife with her around the clock; and the American Embassy could not get through to any official of the Egyptian government to even arrange to have the bodies moved or even to become in contact with them.

Unexpectedly, there had been a heavy rainstorm which happens very rarely in that area; and there was mud all around the area where the plane had been shot down--very hard to get to; and we had great difficulty even later in getting to the place. In the middle of this, I was summoned over to talk with Dr. Ramsey Stino, who was the Deputy Prime Minister for Supply; and he called me to come over to discuss increasing

the U.S. wheat aid under P.L. 480 before the end of the year. Because there was a new regulation that went into effect that required the payment for the transportation of wheat in dollars if any additional arrangements were made for the supply of wheat after the first of the year. And he wanted to work out an arrangement for us to increase the aid and before the end of the year in order to permit him to save the dollar cost of shipping; in other words he had to pay in dollars rather than in pounds. Well obviously this was an extremely bad moment. The library--the ashes were barely cold--and one American body--we thought two at the time--was on the ground, and he summoned me over for what was a very brief and very unpleasant meeting in which I said in effect, "I will not discuss this under the circumstances that exist today." This was December 18.

On December 23, President Nasser made the famous speech I referred to a moment ago with [Alexander N.] Shelepin who had come down from Moscow and was the first senior Russian to visit the UAR since the fall of Khrushchev. This was a great concern in the government about the relationships between Nasser and the Russians; they felt they had an opportunity, I can only say this based on my interpretations--it's not an absolutely established fact--but it was obvious that they had a fairly deep concern about reestablishing the relationship that they feared had been ruptured by the fall of Khrushchev, particularly when relations with the UAR were one factor in that demise. The fact that Shelepin was there, that I had had this conversation with Dr. Stino which was reported to the President--this I do know. He was told by Aly Sabry, who was then the Prime Minister of Egypt and one of the most leftward of all the group in the group--probably a Communist, but that is not completely clearly established, but certainly very pro-Russian--that I had called on Dr. Stino and had threatened to cut off all American aid.

I had not done that. I simply said I would not discuss this proposed increase that they wanted by the end of the year; I would not discuss it at all under those circumstances. He reported this, that I had been both arrogant and that I had threatened to cut off all aid because I did not like their behavior on the library and the plane incidents, I had made it very clear I did not like their behavior. I may have been arrogant, I do not know. Certainly I was firm. But I had no intention whatsoever of going over and discussing it--it would have been an impossible situation for this to become public knowledge and in the face of those two affronts to our country that I sat there calmly and discussed increasing aid with that government within two weeks.

The result was the speech and then immediately after a very, very strained relation between the United States and the UAR. I sent off the message that evening after President Nasser's speech to Washington, saying that I did not feel that anything that we had done warranted the kind of statements that had been made; I strongly urged that we do nothing at all for the next days--that it really was their turn to come to us; that they would come to us; and that under no circumstances should we make any overtures to the UAR at that time.

Incidentally, I had an appointment with Nasser at the moment that the plane was shot down, although I didn't know it and I don't think he knew it. But it occurred while I was in his office. I did not know it for several hours.

M: The shooting--?

B: The shooting of the John Mecom plane.

M: Was that just a mistake of circumstance--was there anything involved there?

B: I don't know that we'll ever know exactly what happened. This plane had been going between Amman in Jordan and Bengazi in Libya. It had made

several trips; they were moving detergents which in some way that I don't understand had to do with the drilling process; and they had been flying back and forth. They did have, I think, a new pilot on that particular run, as I remember it. There were several aspects of it that I could understand were confusing to the Egyptians, and this was clearly established. It was a comedy of error also. The plane filed to depart from Aman, and then something went wrong with the landing gear, and they came back down to have it repaired. The control station at Aman, probably not very efficient at best, assumed that they had cancelled the flight plan; and they sent out a message saying the flight plan had been cancelled. The landing gear was repaired, and they then took off and headed toward Bengazi, coming over Egyptian soil. The Egyptian tower had received word that the flight had been cancelled, and an unidentified plane, from their point of view, came into the air. It was one of the old flying boxcars of World War II, a plane that had been used by the Israelis for reconnaissance purposes; they thought it was that. Unfortunately again, the voice radio went out when they were just a few miles from the Cairo tower, and there was no communication, effectively--it came and went--between the airport and the plane. If I recall, the plane could hear but they couldn't send. The plane was ordered to land, and the Egyptians sent up interceptors, and the plane was ordered to land, the plane came down and within a few feet of the ground the interceptor pilots departed. And the plane apparently was about to land then for reasons that are unclear to anybody, the plane went back up into the air, and the Egyptian planes came and shot it down.

M: It apparently was not, at least, a premeditated anti-American act?

B: No, it could not have been premeditated. In fact, the attitude that I had

that the Egyptians had been totally wrong, was not born out at all by the FAA man when he came out and went over all facts and heard all tapes. The Egyptians finally, as is so often the case, were cooperative after it was too late to be cooperative, and helpful.

M: After the damage was done--

B: After the damage was done, they delivered their tape recordings and all that, and it seemed fairly clear that there had been certainly errors on both sides. I don't think anything justifies shooting down an unarmed civilian plane, but it was not all black or white either way, and yet an enormous damage was done and great problems created in terms of relations between the UAR and the United States at that particular time.

We went then through a period of enormous strain. We had a remainder of a three-year agreement on P.L. 480 wheat and all of that wheat was suspended and held up for quite a long time. We had to release it prior to June of the following year, June 30 of the following year, which we ended up doing. I tried very hard at that period to get the Egyptians to have some sense of the realities of American politics back here.

M: This aid was suspended now by orders from the State Department?

B: Yes, but what actually happened was, and this was I think unfortunate, but after the burning of the library after the plane was shot down--there had been a release by the Department of Agriculture of the next increment of the agreement. I would have opposed it; I was <u>not</u> consulted on it. I would not have felt that there was at that stage any wisdom whatsoever in releasing wheat, given that difficult situation; and that at a minimum there should be a pause in which the whole situation could be reassessed. But that there was a release in the face of the burning and the plane created a wild flurry of reaction back here.

This may even have come after the speech, I'm not sure; I think as a matter of fact it did. It did. It was after the speech.

M: You say wild flurries; are you talking about political opposition?

B: Yes, political opposition here in the Congress and thereby creating a very difficult problem for the President and a series of speeches--of tirades--at Nasser, understandably and justifiably. I might state here what my own views were on the question of relations between the United States and the UAR and we'll come back to this particular point where we are.

The problems between our two countries were numerous and complex. One of the key ones is that we had never been able to make up our mind exactly what we wanted our relations with Nasser to be; and we had gone through very violent swings of either approval or disapproval, when in my opinion what would have been a much more reasonable course, and it may not have worked, but a more understandable, justifiable and defensible course, would have been somewhere in the middle between total opposition and total support. In the Dulles era, right after Nasser came in--immediately after--we greeted him with every possible sign of affection and warmth. We could not be more helpful; we tried to do everything that we could do.

We then went through the period of the Aswan Dam and in the 1956 era we switched totally the other way and were totally in opposition to him. At the beginning of the Kennedy Administration, we went the other way. We signed a long-term three-year wheat agreement with Nasser, which was a mistake.

M: Why was that? Because it was too much support, you mean?

B: It was, I think, too long a term of support. The way to aid Nasser, if you're going to aid Nasser, is short-term, with a short leash, with a

constant--I recommended from the very beginning that our policy toward Nasser, if we were going to put in aid there, and I thought it was right that we should do so and I think it would have changed if we had been able to keep a more even keel in our relations with Nasser. It might have had a major effect on the history of the Arab-Israeli war that later occurred. But we had dealt with him in extreme--extreme of approval or disapproval. I felt that we should not deal with him in extremes, that somewhere in the middle was right, that we ought to follow what I described as a doctrine of continuous negotiation with him, in which all aid was on the short-term and he was reminded day-by-day of the importance of relationships with us and that we should never sign our name on something that committed us for several years into the future without any obligation on his part, particularly in view of Nasser's rather total lack of understanding of the nature of our society. He simply does not understand what a democracy is all about; he doesn't believe it. I used to take him books all the time--not every time, but frequently I would take him books--and he read actively and seemed to enjoy them, and we would discuss them. I took him books written about the Kennedy Administration; I took him Sorenson's book; I took him Schlesinger's book; I took him several things. A couple of times I said to him, "Mr. President, this one doesn't deal very kindly with you, but I think the book will interest you even though it is critical."

But he simply didn't understand what was involved in operating a society such as that of the United States. When I went out there, as I have said many times, we were overcommitted, not in terms of our international considerations, but in terms of our domestic considerations. The Kennedy era had signed a three-year agreement with Nasser in a period of relative tranquility and relative clam between the U. S. and the UAR for a lot of

reasons of which our relationships were one factor but only one. We had overextended ourselves in terms of our ability to back up a bad policy domestically here, if there were any incidents or any challenge to that policy.

Those challenges came right after I arrived through the burning of the library, the shooting down of the plane, the Congo--those were the big three issues. Those then became the arms of those critics of the policy, and we were therefore totally exposed with a long-term commitment against the affrontery of Nasser and against his actions, and we had no recourse at all, and there were no obligations on him, and we were put in a very difficult position. A much sounder policy, in my judgment, was a shorter-term arrangement in which we dealt with him, reminding him witout putting conditions on aid, but letting the time period of that aid be the condition itself. We would, I think, have reminded him of the importance of a continuing relationship with him, and we might at least have forced him, for his own reasons, to pay a bit more attention to what our own sensitivities require than he ever did under the circumstances that existed when I was there.

This is a policy that I deeply regret we never got into full force and effect; there was no dissent from that policy. Everybody agreed to it, but the problems domestically here were so great and the problems that President Johnson had in managing the Congress in other fields that limited his ability to act with respect to the Middle East never made that policy that I thought was right possible. And to add to this Nassser did not help us at all; he continued to make unfortunate speeches. I could quiet him down for a time, and he would behave himself very well for a few months; and then all of a sudden he would go into a tirade. We had a period of almost a year--I guess it was over a year--during which we had very little

difficulty. He gave us a new building for the library, he stopped aiding the Congo rebels, the tone of his speeches calmed down considerably, there was some progress but not much toward a settlement of the Yemen crisis. And there was at that stage very real quiet on the Arab-Israeli front.

M: How much was that affected by his political situation? When he's quiet like that, is it because he's safe at home?

B: Yes, but not entirely. I could never really--this is a question that has no total answer. I told him once that I had trouble understanding the reasons for his speeches. I said, "There are times when I understand why you say what you do because I see an internal problem or an area problem for you," but I said, "Most of the time I don't understand at all."

And he said an interesting thing to me. He said, "One reason is that I read your Congressional Record." And he said, "One of the Congressmen makes a speech attacking me," he said, "I have to answer back."

And I said, "Mr. President, you must understand that you're the President of a large and important country, and the idea that you must answer an obscure Congressman, perhaps little known even in our country"--

M: I was going to say, if he reads the Congressional Record, it's probably better than most Americans do.

B: But in that case worse; because we would have been better off if he hadn't read it. And I said, "If you ever had here a speech by President Johnson, or Secretary Rusk, or Vice President Humphrey, you answer it--you clobber them." I said, "I understand that, I won't argue with you, you won't have any problem with me if you do that." But I said, "You're not going to have that kind of speech."

I said, "But when you, a President, answer an unknown member of the

Congress, build up his speech, make it public news when it wasn't news before and was little noted and little known, you are not serving your interests and certainly not the interest of the United States and the UAR in a reasonable relationship between our two countries."

He professed to understand it, but he couldn't contain himself. And he would read a speech by someone who had attacked him, and he felt he had to attack. Therefore, it could easily be that these answers, these speeches that he made, really stemmed from some small insult as he saw it, some small sense of affrontery from the United States--he's enormously sensitive.

M: And something that the State Department couldn't control?

B: Something that no one could control. That is what I meant by not understanding a democracy. He couldn't believe, for example, and he said this to me several times, that President Johnson after the 1964 campaign when he had a huge, overwhelming majority of American public support and of the Congress, why there was any problem whatever--that President Johnson could do anything he wanted to do, anything. And he couldn't believe that there were limits on the President. He couldn't believe, for example, as I tried to explain to him, that the committee structure of the Congress was a great limiting factor, that a key committee chairmanship opposed to a bill having nothing to do with the UAR could well be a limiting factor in aid to the UAR because he was opposed to it. And this kind of consideration simply never got through President Nasser's mind.

I think we can look back with some regret on our relations with Nasser. Somehow I think it should have gone better--I'm speaking not now of my period because by the time I got there the die of the extreme was cast.

M: And has since continued?

B: Oh yes, even more so. Ever more so. But I think looking back many years ago when he first came into power in 1952 and the period after that, what he really wanted in the beginning period was not at all inconsistent with American interests and his basic goal for the people, at least as stated by him, and at least as apparent by him--he had not fallen into the prey of the Russians, he was still speaking fairly moderately in terms of his internal policy--somehow it should have gone a little better than it did. I think that if we had been able to acquaint him with the West, with the nature of the democratic society, with our country, that this might have been quite different. You realize that he has never visited the West, really. He visited France once for three days, and he came to the United Nations in New York the year that Khrushchev pounded the table with his shoe--which was that, 1961?

M: 1961--it wasn't a good year.

B: It wasn't a good year at all. He came for about two days, three days maybe, and saw New York and then went home. But he never had a contact with a Western society and with a democracy. He read a good deal; he has a certain basic intelligence, he's not a stupid man. He's a limited man in terms of world experience or certainly in terms of his own educational experience, but he's not a stupid man. And his motivation initially was not too bad. As time went on, it became more and more incompatible with American interests, and we at alternate times tried to woo him and condemn him, and he was all too well aware of this. And I think a steady course in the middle might have, and I can only say might have, changed the course of things. We can never look back and say what might have been,

but I would have liked seeing it tried on a longer term basis than the few months that I managed to get the policy through. It was never really fully through.

M: And the next real crisis with the UAR, I suppose, came after you had returned here as Secretary for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs. How did that appointment come about? Did Mr. Johnson take a direct role?

B: I don't know. I was put in a rather awkward position that summer. I came back here in the summer of 1966, on home leave. I had been out two years and I came back on home leave. I had received a message, an oral message, by a friend of mine George McGhee.

M: This was Ambassador-at-Large McGhee, I guess?

B: Yes. George and his family came and spent Easter with us in Egypt in the--I guess it was April of 1966--and he said that he had seen George Ball a few days before. And that George wanted to tell me that I was probably coming back to be Assistant Secretary in NEA. In fact it was more probably. He said would be coming back. I then began to get little letters, as one does in these circumstances, saying that it was highly probable. I had hoped that I would get orders to come back before I came back on home leave in July, as I remember, mid-July, for the simple reasons of problems of school, all these problems that one has to face with a family abroad. It would have been much simpler for me. I received no word other than these two or three intimations; I came back first to California where my wife's family lived, and the day I arrived there was a front-page story in the Washington Post with respect to the departure of George Ball, and Tom Mann had already gone, and Alex [U. Alexis] Johnson was going to be Ambassador to Japan; and that there were three top vacancies. And that day and for several days thereafter, the press was full of rumors that I would

take one of those jobs. Scottie [James] Reston, for example, had a piece that Bill Bundy and I would take two of the top three jobs, and then there began to be a flurry of rumors in all the columnists and the press that I was going to take one of those three, which would have been rather odd for a career person. It would have been, particularly, as young and junior in the service as I was.

But the press kept playing this up; I then came to Washington. By that time it was all over the city and all the press that I was going to be one or the other of these things. And I therefore had a feeling of utter confusion. I think the President had difficulty, and I was not here during most of that period, deciding who would be in each of these several slots.

I was told by George Ball and by Dean Rusk that the President had me in mind for one of the slots, meaning either the NEA job which was vacant or about to be vacant, the Congressional affairs job which was about to be vacant, the Deputy Under Secretary for Administration, or one of the two Under Secretaries. Dean said he thought the President would want me to come to one or the other of them; this was the last day that I saw him before I went back to Cairo. I said, "Well, there is only one that I will not take, and that is the administrative one. I do not want to be Deputy Under Secretary for Administration. I've been offered that job twice--"

M: This was the one Mr. [William] Crockett was leaving at that time?

B: Crockett was leaving at that time. I said, "That is the only one I will not take, so will you please tell the President, let me tell you I don't want that one." And Dean laughed and said, "Well, we won't ask you to take that," and he said, "But you may be asked to take one of the others."

And I said, "If the President wishes me to do it, I will do it." And I went on back to Cairo. Some weeks went by before anything happened

on any of them. And then finally the appointments of [Nicholas D.] Katzenbach and [Eugene] Rostow. By that time I was enormously relieved that I had not been asked to take either one of those jobs, and then later on Foy Kohler for a year--he agreed to take that only for a year.

And then I got a telegram on January 30 [1967] asking me to take NEA, which I agreed to do. I left there March 5. By that time the relations between our two countries were very, very strained. President Nasser had on February 22--George Washington's birthday which was the way I remember it--had made another very vitriolic attack on the United States. He chose the day that President Johnson had authorized the Department of State to go to the Hill to consider a short-term extension of P.L.480. He made that speech right in the middle of the consultations of that particular subject. I could see no internal need in Egypt for this kind of speech. It just seemed to me to be absolutely unnecessary. I told President Nasser that. I told him at my farewell call which was March 4--I said, "Mr. President, I want you to remember one thing: that you gave up before I did. You wrote off any further relationship before I wrote it off--before the United States wrote it off." I said, "We were consulting on the Hill that day, and you knew that. I sent you a message to that effect."

So while it's hard to understand what brought that on, it might have been some obscure speech somewhere that he read, it might have been just an uncontrollable, ungovernable problem that he has. When he's in front of an audience, Nasser becomes something that is quite different from what he is in private. It might have been a response to any one of those things; it might have been just Nasser.

I've been having some talks with a group of psychiatrists from the CIA, and we're trying to analyze the nature of Nasser and to try to--now

this really shouldn't be on any record--I probably ought to leave it out. But I've been going over all the details of the many meetings that I had with him, trying to uncover indications of the nature of his difficulties.

M: Sort of like historians who psychoanalyze characters of the past?

B: Yes, this is what we're doing. So I left here, oddly enough with an incredible sort of departure. Personally, my relations with the government, with the Egyptians, could not have been better by the time I left. After a very rough beginning--and the press was extremely kind to me on departure. At my farewell reception, I think I had twelve members of the Cabinet who came to my cocktail party--there were some very warm words in the press. Mohammed Heykal, who is President Nasser's closest friend and the editor of the leading paper in Cairo, wrote a very glowing column about me. One of the senior officials of the foreign office said, "To read what is being written and to hear the speeches that are made, one would think that the relations between the United States and the UAR had never been closer, and we know there is doom ahead," and there was.

M: You were replaced though. You were not the last ambassador?

B: I was replaced by Richard Nolte, although he never had a chance to present his credentials. And therefore I am at the moment the last official ambassador. He was ambassador-designate and an ambassador who was confirmed by the U.S. Senate to the post. He never presented credentials, and therefore legally was never the ambassador. He was present, but he was never legally the ambassador.

M: You got the same kind of baptism to being assistant secretary then that you had to being ambassador in the first place. You got back in March before June of 1967--

B: Well, the first problem I had was not the Arab-Israeli situation; it was the Greek coup.

You mentioned that I came back to a baptism of fire in the beginning of the NEA period. That's quite accurate. I took office--I was actually confirmed and then sworn in a couple of days late. I was sworn in, as I remember, about the eighth or tenth of April, and the Greek coup occurred the first week I was in office. Shortly thereafter a crisis occurred in Yemen in which two Americans were accused of having blown up an ammunition dump with the resultant loss of several Yemeni lives, and a very strong likelihood that those two fellows were going to be put to death for this crime, which they did not commit--I know who did it and it's now clearly established as to the origin of it. It's fairly highly classified as to what happened, but I knew at the time that they were innocent.

And then, of course, we went in shortly thereafter to the period of the Arab-Israeli crisis and its aftermath.

First on the Greek coup. We were faced, I think, with a very difficult choice. It appeared to us at the time that if we gave public voice to opposition to the coup crowd that we could very easily stir up a civil war in Greece. The crowd that took office--seized office--was certainly not to our liking; they were a bunch of second-rate thugs, by any measure. Some at this point appeared to be more thug-like than others, but they were all thugs.

M: That distinction among thugs is rather thin.

B: Very. Certainly no one in his right mind would have chosen this crowd to govern Greece. But Greece had been badly governed for some time before that, a very long time before that, and trouble was clearly coming. The charges were made immediately that we had brought about the coup, which was quite wrong; that we had known about the coup. This too was wrong, although there were many rumors of coups that week in Athens, and there

were many reports of a possible coup, and we had known of the existence of this plan--I've forgotten the name of the plan. It doesn't matter, but there was a plan that we had known existed. Oddly enough, we were criticized by some for having known about the coup, and we were criticized by others for not having known about the coup. So you can't win either way.

I remember testifying before one of the Senate committees on what happened in Greece, and one Senator said, "You didn't know about the coup?" I said, "No, we did not know about the coup." While some heaved a sigh of relief, he went into a tirade because he felt the CIA once again had failed. So no matter what you do, it's wrong. But it seemed to me that our policy at that stage had to be a minimal one; that if we were totally opposed publicly to the coup, we would stimulate all sorts of uprisings, none of which could succeed--as long as the military totally supported the new leadership which it appeared to do at that time. It seemed to us to be the very likely course of the future that there would be a civil war. While there was no evidence of any Communist involvement in the coup activity, we felt that a civil war could easily create a situation with which the Communists could play to our detriment. Because of the close NATO relationship that we had with Greece and because of the importance of Greece and the very special tie we had had, it seemed to us then that to follow a course that was neither one of approval of the coup nor one of such disapproval as would engender military uprisings in opposition to it, there could be no legitimate expression of opposition--there could only be military opposition. This seemed to us to be the worst of all worlds, and another civil war in Greece, we thought, would just be the ultimate in horrors at that particular moment. And we felt that we were better off to try to keep all the pressure we could on the government to move toward

a return to constitutional government, to a normal political life, parliamentary system, et cetera.

We suspended all major equipment going into Greece, planes, tanks, all those things--it was symbolic more than anything else. But we let small arms, resupply of equipment, and that sort of thing go on in. To some extent this was artificial; it was symbolism rather than being a practical expression, because if there was to be an uprising, the small arms were much more valuable than were the planes. But we felt that we had to evidence a disapproval, but we did not believe we wanted to so weaken the military machine that we had built up as part of NATO, by cutting off all spare parts and seeing a military structure into which we had invested vast millions, many millions of dollars, hundreds of millions of dollars, go down the drain because we happened at that particular time, on a short-term period, to have an attitude of disapproval of what went on in Greece.

Therefore we chose the middle course, made it very clear that we hoped that there would soon be a return to constitution and parliamentary processes, and that Greece would once again turn in the direction that it had somewhat more traditionally followed.

The notion that Greece is a stalwart democratic country is absolutely rot--

M: It refers to the fifth century--

B: You can go back and read some superb speeches, but Greece has not traditionally been a very democratic country, and it has been more often ruled by people not unlike what is ruling it now than it has been ruled by true democracy. That it is called repeatedly the "cradle of democracy in our crest" was to have a very narrow view of history and not to have looked very deeply into what really had transpired in the past.

We were not notably successful in our policy. I think we caused a good deal of concern within Greece; there was a good deal of opposition here, but coming for the most part from the very liberal members of the Congress and the Senate--Senator Joe Clark, Claiborne Pell, Congressman Don Frazier, a few people of that sort.

M: These people were seeking stronger action against the leaders?

B: Right. They wanted strong action against the coup leaders; they felt we should cut off all aid and should make it clear we disapproved, etc. Now one of them asked me whether I could guarantee that there would be a civil war if we did this. I said, "I can't guarantee anything. I can't even guarantee that the policy we have followed, are following, is going to work; but I think the odds are very heavily in favor of creating an internal situation that will be more difficult for us, and more difficult for democracy if we don't follow it. It is better to take this middle course of trying to rebuild a situation that we don't like and don't condone at all but in which our own leverage is somewhat limited."

This was perhaps too subtle for some of my friends on the Hill. But this was the range of the debate. There was not, however, any vast opposition or even for that matter any very great interest except in very limited terms.

The Yemen crisis that I referred to worked out fairly well. We managed to save our two men who were there; we got them out; we got all the Americans out; it was very close; it was a photo-finish, and one of the most nerve-racking experiences that I had, with the possible exception of the Cyprus crisis, which I will discuss in a moment.

M: Political considerations don't play as much role apparently in the Yemen crisis.

B: Well, the Yemen [crisis] is of no great importance to people here in the states.

M: People here just don't know it's there.

B: One fairly interesting sidelight on this. These two crises--Greece and Yemen--which ran somewhat concurrently--Andreas Papandreou, a Greek, ultra-liberal, former American, who had denounced his citizenship, who had taught in the American academic world, was imprisoned for a time in Greece. We urged his release and finally, I think, had a very real effect on the Greek government's attitude. I think they later regretted it, but they did let him out.

I must have had several hundred telegrams, telephone calls, and letters from American academia primarily, about the imprisonment--the outrageous imprisonment--of Andreas Papandreou whose life was not really seriously threatened, but he was under arrest. I did not receive <u>one</u> letter about the two Americans who were imprisoned in Yemen at the same time, from anybody.

M: These were American citizens.

B: These were American citizens who were totally innocent; who had done nothing whatever, and were caught up in a morass of international politics that they neither understood nor condoned nor had participated in. I thought it was a rather sad comment if all the members of academia who wrote me letters and said that it was a matter of high principle, we must do what we can to release Andreas Papandreou. I kept wanting one of them to say, "What about those two fellows in Yemen?"

M: They might even not have known about the two.

B: Well, it was in the press. It got almost as much publicity as Andreas Papandreou's arrest received; but it's a rather sad commentary on our society, and a strange one, because the appeals on Andreas were all couched

in the most high-minded of terms; and these two obscure fellows who could easily have been forgotten as far as the American public was concerned--those of us in the State Department who were deeply concerned took that case with equal if not even more seriousness than we took Andreas. We felt a greater responsibility for them as American citizens than we did for Andreas who was not a citizen and who had denounced his American citizenship, and had frequently been extremely critical of the United States government.

But it is a rather sad state of affairs that high principle applies in some cases but not in all cases.

But back to the mainstream of what we're talking about. The Yemen crisis was of no great importance in terms of the United States in a political sense; it was of some importance but not great importance. Therefore it received little attention and there was not nearly the congressional or public interest in it. It went on for a day or two, and then it faded from the front pages and found itself, if reported at all, in the back somewhere.

From the standpoint of saving the two boys in Yemen, this was good. Because the less attention it got, the less it became an issue, and it permitted the Yemen government to backtrack on it and the easier it was for them the less that was said here. Therefore, it was helpful in terms of getting the two fellows out. Again, by a queer quirk of fate, the extent to which Andreas was written about here, and it was the subject of wild screeches and screams and letters to the Greek government and to the United States government, so did it increase the difficulty of getting him sprung. We finally managed to spring him, but it had very little to do with the public outcry here, which really if anything hampered the effort rather than helped the effort.

This is a difficult thing to explain to the public; that governments are able to back down on matters that are less public and less controversial with a greater ease than they are on something that's on the front pages of every press.

We went, then, through the period of the Arab-Israeli war. For me that began really in mid-May and stretched over the period--well, it really never ended after that, as long as I was in the job as Assistant Secretary for the Near East and South Asian Affairs.

When I left Cairo I told my wife the last day we were there--she stayed on with the children for some weeks after I did to permit them to finish school, since we knew there would be no ambassador going for some little time, some weeks. I told her that I could only see trouble ahead; that I was confident there was going to be a flailing out by the Egyptians in one direction or another. We had reported repeatedly to Washington that it would come in one of three ways; that if Nasser needed a diversion and something to cover his internal difficulty, that he could heat up the Yemen crisis with a view possibly toward undermining the Saudi Arabian situation in the hope of getting some of the oil money that existed there or in Kuwait. He could go the other way and try to undermine by subversive action the regime in Libya, also a very rich regime where he had a great many Egyptians who were functioning there as teachers ostensibly and in other ways; or, lastly he could heat up the Arab-Israeli situation.

At the time I left, the Yemen was hotter and it became hotter with the arrest of these two men and all the issues that came. It looked for a time as though that was the most likely course. It also had the attraction of having at the end of a rainbow a hope of money, not necessarily by a conquest, but by a contribution which actually happened after the Arab-Israeli

war, and is still going on--the contributions made by the Saudis and the Kuwaitis to Nasser for a different set of reasons. But the Arab-Israeli one seemed to be more of a political diversion without any sort of economic gain that come directly therefrom.

M: He wouldn't consider it a disadvantage that it would draw the major powers in whereas the Yemeni one would not?

B: I don't think he ever intended it to draw--never thought it would get to the point of drawing the major powers in, at least into a conflict. I think he thought that if he was going to draw them in, he was going to draw them in ostensibly through the United Nations in a way that would pull apart the Arabs and the Israelis because he probably believed, and he was undoubtedly right in this, that the Russians and the Americans did not want to go to a full-scale war. I think this was clearly one of the lessons of the June 5th Six-day War. I think he began the venture in mid-May with a view toward a political diversion, with the hope of a political victory without loss to him, that would stop short of war. I think that's what he wanted. One can speculate as to many things, much of it is not clear, and I think really the details of all this had better be left to something more precise than memory; because there is a history of all this period being prepared and based on documents and telegrams which will be much more exact than my own memory can possibly be.

But it was, I thought, fairly clear that what he sought, what he hoped for, was a cheap political victory without any major loss to him, that would restore his prestige in the area which would bring tribute and contributions from certainly the Arab world and perhaps both East and West, and put him back in the position where his influence and power would not be treated lightly. He had had a series of economic and political reverses;

the Yemen had gone very badly; he couldn't find a way to extricate himself from it. He told me a couple of times that Yemen was his Viet Nam, and it was indeed in many ways. I think he would have liked a way out of that conflict if he could have found a way that permitted a political face-saving, but alas he couldn't, or didn't, to be more accurate. And he needed something to restore the confidence of the Arab world in him as a winner, which he certainly gave no evidence of being at that particular time. But he, I think, did not intend that there be a full-scale war, certainly not the kind that transpired. But he thought he saw an opportunity for a cheap political victory in which he could heat up the situation without any real loss to himself.

The rest is history; anyone can ask questions about the way he blamed the United States and the United Kingdom for engaging in attacks on him when he knew it was not true. There is a standard requirement in the Arab world to blame somebody else for whatever goes wrong; it's never your fault. This has to do again with a loss of face; it has to do with the sort of Messianic complex that Nasser has; he doesn't like to be proved wrong and can never admit to these wrongs; and in fact no Arab can ever admit, without loss of face, that he has done anything that is wrong. This was part of the problem.

But he got in this and he couldn't turn back, and I think he became more and more drunk with the world attention he was getting, and more and more convinced that he could contain it, could control it, could prevent the war from occurring. If he had prevented the war, if the war had not occurred, if he had prevented it, we had prevented it, if he had been given a free victory, I think the result from our point of view would have been even worse than what we have now. His own power in that part of the world would have been increased markedly; the tendency toward

polarization within the area between East and West, between Arab and Israeli, would have been as great as today. And we would have found ourselves in a situation that would have been quite intolerable for everybody.

M: So his concept from his point of view really wasn't bad?

B: Wasn't bad at all.

M: He just lost control of it.

B: He just lost control of it. If he had managed to contain it, if he had not let himself--I think one thing--there are lots of facets of this. There was a phony intelligence, or wrong intelligence, fed by the Russians to the UAR, and to Syria and others; there are many things that are very difficult to understand. There are many facets of it; and I don't know that we will ever have a complete, total fix on it. I think one of the things that's hardest to understand, and I suspect was a key to his becoming over-involved and overextended, was his call for the withdrawal of the UNEF troops, the UN troops there. I do not believe he really expected that the troops would be pulled out as quickly or as easily, and he thought that this, when he asked for their withdrawal, instead of having it acquiesced in immediately, that he might have thought that this would be the point in which the world would call a halt.

M: The UN got a lot of criticism here for acceding so rapidly. Why would they do that?

B: Well, I think they deserved that criticism. I think it was quite wrong; I think the Secretary General should not have acquiesced in this. Of course, it wasn't helped any by the Indians agreeing to withdrawal of theirs--

M: The troops who were actually on the spot?

B: The troops that were on the spot. And once they said they were willing to

pull back, and the Yugoslavs did the same thing, then it became very difficult for U Thant and he acquiesced immediately in the whole withdrawal. The Indians have always been mixed up about Nasser; this goes back primarily to the very intimate relationship between Nehru, Tito and Nasser; that was a very real force in the world of a few years ago, but is of no great importance today.

M: It didn't last beyond Nehru's career?

B: It has lasted to a degree, but it's a little less directed. Mrs. Ghandi, I think, still looks with great warmth and affection on that relationship as she sees it, in terms of her father Nehru. Nasser was a friend of Nehru's, therefore he's a friend of hers.

Tito, I think, still has a very real concept of it, but Tito is older, perhaps a little wiser or less wise, depending on how you view his past. It's a different world. And Nasser's own impact in the situation has certainly lessened, and it is very difficult to find a nonaligned world in the terms in which we knew it a few years ago. Therefore the triumvirate does not have the force and effect and impact that it had in years past, and it can't possibly have. It's a different world. But a certain vestige of this still goes on.

M: That might have explained some of the Indians' quickness to get out.

B: I think it did.

M: This is a crisis that was compact in time and is a pretty good case study, I expect, in what they call, by now a cliche, crisis management. What role does the President play in a situation like this, where you have a lot of things happening of tremendous importance in a short period of time? How does he relate to the situation?

B: Well, in this particular case the President followed it for a lot of reasons

with extreme closeness. He read everything that came in, he was briefed a couple of times a day; I saw a good deal of him during that period. He had the National Security Council or a select group of members of that group, and I was frequently included in those meetings. This is all, I am sure, a matter of record at the White House. I couldn't tell you by days or when at this point. This particular case not only had a very important international implication, but a very important domestic one. He followed it very closely; he was very much on top of what was going on; he wanted to hear about it. I think we met every day for a time at six-thirty, if I remember correctly--every day, every night we met at six-thirty--and we brought him up to date. Dick Helms and various others came to this gathering; the Secretary of Defense, Buz [General Earle] Wheeler, and Dean Rusk, and I, or Nick Katzenbach or Gene Rostow and I, various combinations of us. But we four--I went most of the time, I'd say almost every day--and the others varied, depending on what was going on. We had a meeting with the President for the first days. We went every afternoon at six-thirty, every evening at six-thirty; and Mac Bundy was brought back. I had worked very closely with Mac in the early part of the Kennedy era, when I was Executive Secretary of the Department and he was over at the White House. I have known Mac very well for a long period of time; from my point of view, I remember he said to me, "I hope you don't mind my presence here." I said, "Mac, I don't mind it, I welcome it." He was a great help; it was good to have him in the White House, following full-time what was going on, in this particular war and without the many duties that Walt [Rostow] had; Mac and I worked very closely together during that period, and he was a tower of strength.

M: There was no difficulty of liaison between the State Department operation and the White House?

B: There might have been except for the sort of basic good will that existed between us. I think it could have been difficult. There have been times when it has been. But there was no problem at all. Mac and I talked every day, two or three times a day, and I think there's always a tendency in moments of hot crisis that you find too many people trying to cook the stew. There was a bit of that in this one. In contrast to the Cyprus crisis which we'll talk about another time, where the interest in it was somewhat less and it was pretty much left to me, with the approval of the Secretary and Under Secretary and the President on the basic lines that we would follow. And that was potentially as hot a crisis as the Arab-Israeli war.

M: Or worse.

B: Or worse. It could have been much worse. But there was, I thought, a much greater attention on the part of the top levels, partly reflecting the degree of interest in the Congress and the public and the directness of the Societ threat in the Arab-Israeli situation, where it was a step removed in the Greek-Turkish one. But don't have any illusions that if Greece and Turkey had gone to war over Cyprus, it would have been the end of NATO and a very serious involvement by the Russians, and a very, very bloody mess in Europe.

M: What about the pressures, the political pressures, when the Arab-Israeli controversy gets important? Are these important in actually determining what decisions, or what reactions, are made here?

B: Well, the pressures worked many ways. It was a very odd moment in history. I'm not the greatest living expert on many things, but I am the greatest living expert on one subject. On June 5, I was sent to the Congress by the President and the Secretary of State twice that day; once to brief the

House Foreign Affairs Committee and once to brief the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee invited all the Senate. Fifty-one members showed up, over half the Senate. It was a moment in which no one knew how the war was going. It was the first day, and very, very delicate. Nobody knew.

I got a message from the White House while I was testifying. It went on for several hours. It was one of the roughest hearings--I hadn't even been to bed--well, I had been to bed but just barely the preceding night. I was dead tired after two hearings, being up most of the night, and horribly harassed, with things being stuck in front of me all during the period of the hearings, to sign, or initial, or read, when I was trying to answer the questions. But there was a moment in which, it was a kind of a moment of truth in the sense that the Senate had to--the senators, individual senators--there were contradictory pressures on them that they in effect responded to by their questions. There were the doves on Viet Nam who didn't want any involvement of U.S. troops anywhere in the world. But those doves on Viet Nam were essentially the liberals, domestically, who were deeply committed to Israel and to Jewish groups in this country, who could see a conflict there. There were others who didn't give a damn about Israel in any emotional sense, who were simply worried about our commitments, and those cut across hawk-dove lines. There was a clear line of questioning by some such as [Jacob] Javits, who obviously deeply was committed publicly; others there was a mixture of horror and concern and uncertainty and so on.

The President asked me when I got back to the White House--I came back, walked into the middle of the NSC meeting which was going on. It was quite late; the hearing had gone on for several hours. My recollection is I went to the House Foreign Affairs at two o'clock and to the Senate Foreign

Relations at four o'clock, and I finished about seven or seven-thirty, something like that. I went directly to the White House, and the first question the President asked was what I thought the Senate believed at that moment. And I said, "It's impossible to tell, Mr. President." I said, "If I had to guess, I think you'd find them split about even between some kind of U.S. intervention and some have an attitude that is roughly 'don't get involved.'" I said, "I think very few would be with favor of the interjection of American military--of manpower--into this situation. Arms are another question. But in this is the very technical question then as to the nature of our commitment--the nature of our obligation. What is it? Why are we in this situation where we don't know what we mean?"

Well, the truth of it is you are tied to the past and as is frequently the case, documents aren't defined, statements aren't defined with precision until there's a test of it. This is particularly true when the prime commitment here of an international and public character went back to 1950--

M: To the Tri-Partite Declaration?

B: The Tri-Partite Declaration--the U.S., U.K., and France, in which the status of it was very much in doubt. It was then in a very different context; it had to do not with the guarantee of the Israeli borders, but the guarantee of the territorial integrity of all countries in the area. It was a very difficult thing to define.

M: It has been used since, I think, to criticize our allowance of Israeli gains.

B: It has indeed. Many people, many countries in the area, believe that we have completely violated that commitment by not forcing, in their view, the Israelis to withdraw. It would have been a bit harder than they realized to achieve, but they have a point. And so these questions of

interpretations, there is no way in which one can be certain. And of course I had no idea what the President's attitude would be in the event we suddenly found Israel was losing. How far would we go in?

M: Did he ever make that clear?

B: He never had to make that decision. He might have made it clear to himself, but this is the prerogative of the President. It's not my prerogative, and there's no requirement for me to know. I could only assess the situation as I saw it, and until the President of the United States makes up his mind, he doesn't have to tell me what he's thinking. In fact, it would have been unwise for him to do so.

But again from a purely selfish viewpoint, not knowing puts you in a rather awkward position when you're testifying to fifty-one senators. So it was a rugged day. It was a rugged day, and one I will long, long remember. I came across a note the other day from one senior senator who is a very good friend of mine and written to me in the middle of that thing, he said, "Luke, you're doing great," and he had signed it and it had been handed to me in the middle of that hearing, which had gone on for hours.

M: That kept you going?

B: Yes.

M: This is probably a pretty good place to break this.

B: Why don't we stop now and let me know when you want to come back.

(End of tape 1)

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By Lucius D. Battle

to the

Lyndon Baines Johnson Library

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Date Sept 3, 1970

Accepted Harry J Middleton - for
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Date March 10, 1975