INTERVIEWEE: WILLIAM BUNDY (Tape 1)

INTERVIEWER: PAIGE E. MULHOLLAN May 26, 1969

M: Let's begin by identifying you. You are William P. Bundy, and your last official position in the Lyndon Johnson Administration was as Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs; prior to that you were Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs at the very beginning of the Johnson Administration.

B: Yes, I might comment that my appointment as Assistant Secretary of Defense for ISA in the Pentagon was, I think, President Johnson's first approved appointment, alongside that of Paul Nitze as Secretary of the Navy. We both hold what must be unique commissions in the recent history of the United States, possibly in all its history, because both of us had been nominated by President Kennedy before the assassination and gone through and been submitted to the Senate from the relevant committee, and our appointments were actually confirmed by the Senate, these two appointments, at 1:00 on the afternoon of the assassination. Thereafter, when President Johnson took office he decided he would accept these appointments and he appointed us both early in the following week. So-- I suppose this is a trivial footnote to history--Mr. Nitze and I hold commissions from President Johnson in which the word "nominated" does not appear. "By and with the advice and consent of the Senate do appoint," is the form used. I merely mention it because his first act, as far as I was concerned, was simply to approve President Kennedy's promotion of me from Deputy Assistant Secretary to Assistant Secretary. Then--actually the decision was in February, but the appointment in March--President Johnson moved me over to Far Eastern Affairs in the Department of State, which incidentally

became--so that historians don't get confused, we changed the name of the bureau to East Asian and Pacific Affairs about October of 1966. And I served in that capacity from March 16, 1964, right to the end of the Johnson Administration and then stayed on three and a half months in the Nixon Administration and am now out of office.

M: You had been Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for ISA for some time prior to the assassination?

B: Yes, I was appointed by President Kennedy at the very outset of his Administration. Actually that's not a Presidential appointment, but I'm sure with his approval Secretary /Robert S./ McNamara had appointed me. Before that I had been in CIA, and in the year 1960 I was out of government on leave with the Eisenhower Commission on National Goals as staff director.

M: How much contact, if any, did you have with Lyndon Johnson either before he was President or while he was Vice President?

B: My contacts with him arose almost entirely through the very close friendship between my wife and myself and two of his very close friends, Bill White and Jim Rowe. Both the Whites and the Rowes are old friends of ours and in the early 50's, and I can't place the date, we had become particularly close to the Whites, with our children very close friends. And we used to see the then-Majority Leader and Mrs. Johnson once or twice a year possibly, socially, at dinner at the Whites. And we thus came to know them reasonably well. He knew who I was, we had fairly far-ranging conversations on those occasions. I was fascinated by him, interested in him of course as a person and as a man who also held great power, /but/ primarily as a person. I wouldn't have reckoned that our paths would eventually converge to the extent they did.

M: You weren't connected with him in any way in a policy sense?

B: No, I was not connected with him in a policy sense. He did consult, of course, with Mr. White and Mr. Rowe, and also in the latter part of the '50's and early '60's he used to see something at least of my father-in-law, Dean Acheson. So there were all these secondary kinds of connections; but I myself never consulted with him directly or saw him other than socially in the period before he became Vice President.

During the time that he was Vice President, I saw him at official meetings in the White House, but I never participated directly that I can now recall in any briefings of him. I used to stay in touch with his staff; I remember Col. Burris used to ask me for something every now and then in my Pentagon position, and I of course would supply it and supply such notes as were needed. But I had no direct personal contact; I used to see him socially, again through the Whites and the Rowes, also on one occasion I can remember at a dinner with Harry McPherson, who was another old friend of his and of ours. And I used to see him at larger parties every now and then, but it was not an extensive association. But I think it's fair to say that he regarded me as a straight person at any rate.

M: And knew who you were?

B: And knew who I was, so that I'm sure that was the background of our relationship when it became official, in a sense, after he became President. I used to greet him very cordially when I'd see him as Vice President in these meetings, where, as is I think truly recorded, I never heard him express his views. He obviously chose, and I think very wisely, to do that in private with President Kennedy; so he was always the silent listener.

M: He never discussed with you, by any chance, his trip to Viet Nam?

B: No, no, he didn't discuss that. I did pick up all kinds of secondary reports on it, but nothing that would be worth recording.

M: How much involvement did you have in your position at the Pentagon with Viet Nam affairs in the years 1961 to the end of 1963?

B: I had quite a lot because we were the principal office concerned with military assistance, among other things, and that alone would have given you a great deal. And I was very close to the work that was done in the spring of 1961 on Laos and then also the work that was done particularly under Mr. /Roswell/ Gilpatric, with advice from General /Edward G./ Lansdale, in the spring of 1961; I participated in that. And then in the fall of 1961 when the mission headed by General /Maxwell D./ Taylor and Walt Rostow went to Viet Nam, I was very active on Secretary McNamara's behalf in the policy review that followed the return of that mission. And that policy review included a number of meetings over in the State Department about what should be done, and the thing was argued very fully at that stage, including the possibility that even our sending men on an advisory basis and logistics and the rest, that what was in fact done might involve a really deep commitment over time. The point I'm making is that the Kennedy Administration, it seemed to me from my participation at that time, did in fact look at the issue in terms of whether taking this step tended quite strongly to commit us to take further steps if required to maintain the independence of South Viet Nam. I simply record my strong impression from those meetings that this was the case.

Then in December of 1961, I went to Honolulu and met Secretary McNamara coming from NATO and General /Lyman L./ Lemnitzer at a meeting that I think was very significant in the formation of policy or at least how to carry it out, a meeting with Admiral /Harry/ Felt and all his staff,

in which the policy of sending advisers and giving all the help we could short of combat forces was fleshed out. And I became in a sense the honcho of that policy for Secretary McNamara; that is, all the things that were supplied under it, the additional military aid, the equipment for the strategic hamlet program, were all funneled through my office so that I had that close connection with it. Now this went on through--and I visited South Viet Nam in February or March, 1962--

M: Before you go on from there--and that's exactly the kind of thing I like for you to do, to carry it along like that--did the Vice President play any role in these various meetings--

B: I don't recall his doing so. I have no direct recollection, I haven't been back over my papers for this period as I have for the period since I moved to the State Department.

Well, since he doesn't figure very greatly in the story, I'll make it rather brief and simply say--

M: No, that's fine. We'll be happy to have the whole background, I think that's very important for comparison, but I just wanted to make sure that he either had or had not been--

B: No, he was not. Now this went along through 1962 and 1963 and in the summer of 1963 the Buddhist crisis in South Viet Nam of course became progressively more acute. Being in the Pentagon I didn't figure directly in that. My involvement in Viet Nam, however, became much more acute in September of 1963, when the government was more divided, more at sixes and sevens, than I can ever recall it--

M: Our government?

B: Our government, on the issue--than I can <u>ever</u> recall it--on what we should do about the problem of Diem, his repressions, the pagoda raids, and all

the rest. And I think this is a significant period in terms of President Johnson because it was my understanding at the time, and I have no first-hand basis for asserting this--I did not participate with him--that he had grave reservations about the policy that was finally adopted in late September and early October of 1963, which was in effect to dissociate the United States from Diem in an effort to get him to reform. We accepted the possibility that this degree of coolness on our part would encourage other elements, and specifically the military, to take some action to overthrow him, which is of course what happened. I, myself, participated in that policy very closely; I went with Secretary McNamara on the McNamara-Taylor mission to Viet Nam in late September 1963, and I was, what you might say, the executive secretary of that mission, and drafted the report. I worked it over with everybody, with the Secretary, and it was a report that recommended this policy which President Kennedy adopted.

M: This would seem to discount the account by your immediate predecessor as Assistant Secretary of State of the famous August 24 telegram?

B: Well, all of that had taken place when I was away. I'm glad you mentioned it because it's a piece of the story. I knew that only by the files. In fact I always supposed that one of my prime qualifications for Secretary McNamara and President Kennedy in effect asking me to pitch in on the problem to the degree I did, and to send a Defense Department mission headed by Secretary McNamara, was that Secretary McNamara hadn't been directly involved in that telegram, and I had been, as it happened, on leave--and a duty trip, too--all through the period from middle August to mid-September. And when I came back Secretary McNamara latched right on to me and said, "You're not emotionally engaged in this thing as

everybody else in town seems to be." And he, I say frankly, particularly disliked the attitude and the operating methods of my predecessor Roger Hilsman. And I myself had been put off by some of the things in Mr. Hilsman's behavior, but that's entirely by the way.

M: But the important thing is that what he describes as the August 24 wire did not set the policy--

B: Well, it had a tendency to steer it; as a matter of fact his account of those events is reasonably accurate, factually. A more accurate public account will be found in Robert Shaplen's book, The Lost Revolution; and the Johnson Library will, I think, be found to contain a very careful memorandum that I wrote, oh, two years later at least, for Bill Moyers, giving the whole chronology of the thing from the file. I had kept the file with some care because I had to study it to learn what had happened, in effect; and although I didn't participate in those events, I studied them with great care, and I don't think there's any doubt that the conclusion you state is correct, that what we did in August--the famous August 24 telegram--and the actions that Ambassador /Henry Cabot/ Lodge took under those instructions--which was, in effect, to go to the military and say if you want to start something new, we won't be against you--those had the effect of setting in motion all the thinking and so on that in turn finally led to the military coup of late October, there's just no doubt of that in my mind. There was an effect on policy by what was done in August even though for the time being, and the files are very clear on this, it was judged fruitless to pursue it as of the late August time period. In other words, the military simply just didn't have the chips to play.

M: At that time.

B: Then of course Diem was overthrown and to all of our deep regret murdered as well, and we then had a very strong sense we had to pitch in and help the new crowd get hold just as fast as possible, and this led to a Honolulu meeting about November 20 that was the last thing that happened in the Kennedy Administration.

Now as far as President Johnson's views on this; as I've said it was later recorded, I can't recall that I was contemporaneously aware of it, that he had grave reservations about the dissociation, if you want to call it that, in effect, as it turned out the dumping, of Diem. But that's second-hand.

M: I think that's based largely on some of the comments he had made about Diem on his trip.

B: Yes. But there's one episode that I think I can bear good second-hand witness to which had a bearing perhaps on the decision to replace Mr. Hilsman as Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, as it then was. I do remember this first-hand from the period. Jim Rowe told me about having been at a dinner at the Whites at which the guests included the then-Vice President and Mr. Hilsman; and, from Mr. Rowe's description Hilsman grabbed the floor and talked in a fashion implying criticism of Secretary /Dean/ Rusk, talking with what appeared to be far too great freedom or indiscretion concerning his own views about Diem and other matters in South Viet Nam and policy in general and, Mr. Rowe then reported to me--and he's one of your interviewees, maybe he can tell the story more vividly--his own strong impression that what the Vice President would have concluded was that this was a very impetuous and not very discreet man; and I think that impression by the Vice President of Hilsman as a

person undoubtedly played a part in the eventual decision of February that Mr. Hilsman should go. This brings you up to the beginning of the Johnson Administration.

M: One thing, you made a speech some time in 1967 which was fairly widely cited, in which you said something about "serious mistakes" that we had made in the past. Are some of these that you had in mind mistakes that date from this 1961-63 period, that were already behind you when Mr. Johnson came to office?

B: Well, this is hindsight judgment of conduct over a long period of time, but if I had to single out two areas where I would in effect look for mistakes, or where I believe mistakes were made--I'd always want to be a little reserved about this, because I've lived enough in the firing line to know that kibitzing judgment is not always correct. But two areas that I believe--tentatively fairly clearly, but still not finally--that we made mistakes, we as a nation, were in our military aid policy toward Diem in the late '50's, where we were building a conventional armed force, and where incidentally we allowed the position of the senior military officer on the spot, General /Samuel/ Williams, to become much too strong by comparison to the Ambassador. That military aid emphasis, the building of conventional forces rather than the kind of forces which were needed to combat something that had a local flavor to it, even though its cutting edge was going to come from the north--it was going to take the form of a low scale guerrilla war, if you really put your mind on it. And we did not prepare the South Vietnamese for that threat, that's one. The second area that I believe we made a mistake on in hindsight--I'm less confident of this, but it seems to me the result indicated we should have pushed much harder--was in connection with the decisions that

followed the Taylor-Rostow mission in the fall of 1961. Those decisions included instructions to Ambassador /Frederick/ Nolting to press Diem very hard for certain reforms, because it was clear that Diem had tightened and narrowed and generally lost support, and we had a whole series of reforms; and the question was whether we used the leverage of what we were about to do by withholding it, or played it out and tried to get Diem to do these things. Well, we made an effort, but my impression is we didn't make enough of an effort. That was one case, and I may say a very rare one, where I think we did have leverage and could have used it more forcefully. I don't mean to buy the argument that Robert Shaplen has made in several of his writings that we could have pressured the South Vietnamese at other times, particularly after we were more heavily engaged. But this was a break-point in our relationship; we thought the situation was fairly critical, but as I look back on it, it certainly wasn't anywhere near as critical as it was to become because of the domestic failures of the Diem regime. And I think it was probably a mistake not to press a great deal harder, but that's not a Johnson story.

M: Can you trace a reason for that failure or is it something that seems to have happened without much consideration?

B: I think it was a lack of follow-through. I think we lacked follow-through in the Viet Nam problem, really all through the Kennedy Administration. I think that's a fair historical judgment. President Kennedy felt that we had to do what was necessary to hold South Viet Nam, if I interpret his views correctly; and I'm not imputing anything about what he would have done if he'd lived and faced the decisions in 1964 or 1965.

M: It is important to get the status of the commitment at the time Lyndon Johnson took over the Presidency?

B: Yes. I think it's an important point. It leads into something that was certainly President Johnson's first feeling, and I'll come to that in just a minute, when he did take office. The whole management of the enterprise, the coordination in the field, the team work, the coordination and team work in Washington, were frankly never very good in the Kennedy Administration. I think they had weaknesses during the Johnson Administration, but not for lack of unremitting Presidential attention to the problem. I think Kennedy focused on it, felt strongly what we had to do, but didn't quite see what the handle was, and simply didn't have a really pulled together method of management of it. It's a terrible problem, and I don't think we found the handle really during the Johnson Administration. But specifically in the fall of 1963, during the whole Diem crisis, it became very apparent that Ambassador Lodge disagreed with General /Paul D./ Harkins, that the CIA man was in rough alignment with Harkins, but that the whole thing was not a team operation. And that leads me to the first thing that I was acutely aware of when President Johnson came to office. The assassination and his taking office coincided with the return of Ambassador Lodge following this Honolulu meeting I just mentioned, and I well remember that the President's appointment with Ambassador Lodge was on the Sunday, or there about. I remember working on Saturday on a paper which I assumed went to the President, because he had requested it from Secretary McNamara I think on the way in on the helicopter from Andrews--which I was present at, but where my brother /McGeorge Bundy/ and McNamara went in with the President. Undoubtedly one of the very first items cited for the President's business was, "Ambassador Lodge is here and we'll need your guidance." And the memorandum I wrote at Secretary McNamara's behest stressed teamwork.

"Get everybody pulling together. We have got to make this policy work." And that's a very important point, I think, that the first and strong imprint of the new President was, "Let's get hold of this thing. This is tough; this is serious; we really haven't been pulling together on it, and we need to pull together; and you, Lodge, need to pull it together in the field, and you have my full backing; and we're going to be backing you here, and we want to know what you think," and so on. I think it coincided with a sense--of everybody--a sense of urgency, a sense that the new government in Viet Nam wasn't going to be very good, however popular it might temporarily be; that we had moved into a new stage that coincided with the transition in many respects. But there's no question that President Johnson said, "This is our Number One problem," and I think he did use the phrase, "This is the only war we have"--or somebody used it--

M: It was later used against him.

B: Later used against him, and it was certainly the truth. At any rate he said, "Now look, let's focus on this, let's look hard at it, let's see what we can do better." He read a very strong message--I've heard it described as a sort of riot act but I wasn't there--to Ambassador Lodge on this subject.

M: What he's really saying, or what you're saying he's doing is saying, "Let's pull together" on a currently established policy, not making a new policy decision.

B: That is correct. There was no thought at this stage of new policy or stronger action. Now--and I would recall--well, the whole thrust that I got through McNamara was "What can we think of doing that we're not doing? What are we not emphasizing we should be emphasizing? Where are

there people who aren't as strong as they should be? Let's get with it." And in effect this continued, well it continued in terms of any policy change right through until the decisions of February 1965. But it is important to record how hard the President looked during 1964, at the possibility that stronger action might be required, because he did; and there's no getting away from the fact that he did, and I'm sure he's deeply conscious of this and all of us were. The point is that he did look hard at it, and no serious recommendation was ever made by his advisers that he should in fact move to stronger action. But the history of what was looked at is very important; and I repeat there is simply no truth whatsoever in what Hilsman has written that there was a change in policy in early 1964.

M: No basic decision in early 1964?

B: No basic decision. Nothing more than an exploration of possibilities. Now just to digress for a moment to finish that one off, I don't have direct, first-hand knowledge of the circumstances of the decision to relieve Hilsman. I was not personally consulted nor did I definitely know this until Secretary McNamara said, "The decision has been taken, and one of the names in the hopper is yours." And he and I had a heart-to-heart talk. I said I thought it was my duty to take it if that's what was wanted, which turned out to be the decision. But to me there was never the slightest doubt--and this is based on a rather serious effort with George Ball and Averell Harriman in the light of what Hilsman subsequently wrote--there's not the slightest doubt that Hilsman was fired. He was fired directly and personally by George Ball, it is my understanding. The decision had been taken that he would not continue,

and this is also what I've been told first-hand by Secretary Rusk. Perhaps they are better ones than I to describe the reasons, but I think it was a lack of confidence, a feeling that he was indiscreet. The one thing I've never heard said, and by implication everything I've heard is to the contrary, is that his departure had anything to do with his views on policy and the conduct of the war. His views on the conduct of the war were well known. "Let us stress pacification, let us stress the most unconventional types of warfare," and all of us felt that these needed to be stressed. Hilsman maybe a notch more than the rest of us, but only a notch. But that slight difference of degree on how the war should be handled never amounted to a difference of view on policy. All of us at this stage were very skeptical that bombing the north was wise in the state we believed things to be in; there really wasn't any difference of view of any significance up to the time Hilsman was fired.

M: What about on the other side just at this point? Was anybody advising an undoing of the commitment, was anybody advising withdrawal at this time?

B: I don't recall anybody doing so. There was no paper that I'm aware of in this period that urged withdrawal. I read somewhere the other day that this was a golden opportunity to look things over again--

M: That's why I asked.

B: ---and my recollection is that nothing of that sort was done. The whole thought was, the whole view of the situation at that time was, the removal of Diem has given them opportunities; but, equally, they're going to take a time to pull themselves together. Which indeed we had foreseen in the papers of October, 1963, that the successor government would almost have to be military and that it would have a job to do. It had become clear to us, I think even before President Johnson came in, that the new

government was not very well organized, not very effective, and it became clear to us--very, very clearly in November-December-January--that Hanoi and the Vietcong had moved very forcefully to take advantage of the wholesale change in officials and the demoralization of the administrative structure of the government to make very considerable gains. That they had set in motion a very strong adverse trend which, it looked in hindsight, might have begun as early as the summer of 1963, but in any case was moving ahead by February-March and continued to haunt us right through 1964.

Now, what the papers show, which I think are mostly available in the Johnson Library, and I refer particularly to the Pentagon compilation that is being sent to the Library, which I happened to have examined in the State Department in the last three weeks. They show that when in late January you had the /Nguyen/ Khanh coup--Khanh became the head and by a coup--we faced the decision whether to support him and decided very quickly that that was the thing to do. He had some promise and some hope, maybe he would turn out to be a Chung Hee Park, a parallel that certainly occurred to many of us because by then Park had been elected in his own right and looked pretty good, as he subsequently--at least to this point--has certainly been in Korea. At any rate there were major strategy meetings in late February of 1964 and early March just before Secretary McNamara was dispatched out there to look over the situation, see what needed doing; and in the process, and this I think was a particular personal decision of President Johnson, to in effect make it very clear that we were with Khanh, that we were very strongly supporting Khanh. Secretary McNamara went to great lengths in the trip putting his arm

around Khanh and making speeches at the airport and just in the most demonstrative way evidencing that the United States was with this man. And that was what I understood to be rather clearly on Presidential orders. I don't recall being in the room when the President said, "This is what you should do," although it's one of those cases where my recollection of what Secretary McNamara understood himself to be ordered to do is so clear that I'm not clear whether I was present or I just have it vividly second-hand. Now I mention that because I'm not sure that was a wise decision, quite frankly, in hindsight, and I'm talking 20-20 four years later, five years later hindsight. I think it tended to legitimize changes of government by coup. I think we might have played it a lot cooler and been better off in the long run. We thought Khanh was more promising than he turned out to be. We thought the situation was serious, and that we had to get somebody who really took charge, and the best thing to do was really get in close with him. Well, it was an understandable decision and one that I hasten to add I fully supported at the time and did not question. But I think it is one of the ones where, in hindsight, we might have done better to do it on a lower key. Well, in the course of that review there was an airing given to the question of whether we might engage in some limited bombing of the supply lines from the north. What we did about the whole problem--which of course has bedeviled this particular war--of outside supply lines and access and of course the whole cutting edge from the north. And papers on that were included in the kit that went with Secretary McNamara to Saigon, and they were discussed quietly during the course of the visit in Saigon with Ambassador Lodge and General Harkins, and the reports of that trip

which are in the Pentagon papers if they're not otherwise in the Library, make it perfectly clear that there was quiet discussion of this subject, but nobody felt this was the time to go ahead.

M: Strictly contingency.

B: Yes. Now on our return, and I may say I went on this trip still in my Defense Department role but as Assistant Secretary of State designate. John McNaughton went as Assistant Secretary of Defense designate, my successor, and he wrote the report in this instance and his annexes show pretty clearly the state of the play.

We came back in mid-March, I assumed my State Department position on March 16, and the very first item of business I had was, as my own files make very clear, to get working with Secretary McNamara on a major Viet Nam speech, which became Secretary McNamara's speech of March 26, 1964, to the National Industrial Association, or something of that sort. It was a major speech. And I think it was an important landmark, in effect, of President Johnson really spelling out through Secretary McNamara, because I have every reason to believe that speech in its concept and in its detail was approved by the President. I don't have that first-hand, but I can't suppose for a second that Secretary McNamara would make a major speech of this sort without checking it very fully with the President, and checking the idea that he should do it rather than, let us say, Secretary Rusk. I think a factor there was that he simply had a major speech on his docket, and that the subject was hot. Well that speech is a very important historical review of our involvement. I could improve on it now, but as of the time it was the best effort we could pull together. Among the draftsmen of it, I might add incidentally, was Mr.

James Thomson, subsequently a member of the Harvard faculty, and a rather too self-serving critic of President Johnson. But anyway, that speech was an important policy act by the Johnson Administration, the thrust of which in terms of policy was to reaffirm what we were doing, but with a paragraph saying that if this doesn't work we will have to see whether something more is needed. I don't want to try to paraphrase something that itself is written in the historical record.

M: Is this the kind of thing that leads to the confusion? Charles Roberts of Newsweek claims in one of his books that President Johnson told him subsequently that planning for the bombing, for example, had been decided upon in May of 1964. This has been used as a charge by the critics that this was something that had been decided on long before it was actually done. Is it just the confusion about these quiet talks and these hints in speeches--

B: Well, the record is just terribly clear on this, and I speak as one who has gone over it again within the last three weeks, and I expect that I ought to write a memorandum for the Library showing some of the things that might not be in all the White House files, and perhaps the best thing to do is just tell the story. The short answer to your question is that President Johnson had directed a look at this possibility in late February /1964/--a look at it. And he looked again at it in April, May and through mid-June. And he looked in a sense at it in mid-August and September. On none of these occasions did his senior advisers recommend that he move in this direction specifically through any attacks by United States forces against North Viet Nam, anything stronger than a very limited and from the outset concededly pinprick-type of South Vietnamese

operation, what became known as 34-A--very limited agent operations of a kind that really couldn't be expected to have more than the most marginal significance. We were really just trying it on for size, it never turned into much, we never thought it would. In other words, the story is that he did look at this, preliminarily in February and March, quite hard from mid-May to mid-June, as a possible future contingency in August and early September. But he most definitely neither had a recommendation from his senior advisers nor took any decision that this was what he was going to do in the future. In other words, from my ringside and I think detached point of view, it was perfectly clear in November of 1964 when the President was elected in his own right, that he was going to face a very tough problem; but, that he had not made up his mind that this is what we would do. And I think it's terribly important for somebody in my position, I'm a Democrat and I have political feelings, but above all at this stage, I was a witness to what took place. The President did not conduct the 1964 campaign in a hypocritical fashion in this area. He had not made up his mind. He had acted in Tonkin Gulf, of course, and he had the Congress' explicit backing of that action and a much wider mandate from the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, but he did not conduct himself in the campaign against the backdrop of anything of which I am aware by way of any private decision of what he would do in the future.

M: And you need to deal with what I think one of the better accounts of the whole affair, the one by Philip Geyelin of the Wall Street Journal /Lyndon B. Johnson and the World, 1966/.

B: I don't happen to know it.

M: He makes a statement, I believe, that Mr. Johnson didn't really turn his attention seriously to Viet Nam until early 1965. What you're saying would

tend to contradict that.

B: Oh, I'd contradict that a hundred percent, just a hundred percent. There isn't any stronger percentage you can use. Because there were moments of real anguish in the look at the thing, and perhaps the best way to do is tell it in very rough chronology and then let the papers flesh it out, because there are parts that are more vivid in my memory than other people's. But the rest is in the papers. Well, as I say, in late March McNamara made this speech; in April we had the SEATO meeting resulting in a very strong communique, and that's an interesting story in itself but doesn't concern the President directly; we had the abortive upset in Laos; and then in May of 1964 the North Vietnamese began to put on real military pressure in Laos and to make significant gains. My files show and my recollection confirms that beginning about the 16th of May there was a very intensive Executive Committee review of the combined situations in Laos and Viet Nam. Now I mention the Executive Committee because it was called this at this stage; this is an interesting survival, if you will, of the nomenclature of the Kennedy Administration. I don't believe that it was really called that again--possibly in late 1964--but at any rate this one was definitely called an Executive Committee. This group was the Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense, I presume the Director of Central Intelligence (then John McCone), and the Chairman of the Chiefs (which at that period would have been Max Taylor), and my brother Mac. And it met and actually a great many of the papers were put together by Mac or by me. It was sort of back and forth between us to a very heavy extent. Well, the result was a program of reconnaissance in Laos strongly recommended and in the event carried out, armed reconnaissance, firing back to lift the morale of the Lao. The result was, I think, some

step-up in these very limited 34-A covert operations in North Viet Nam itself. The result was that we entered into a rather definite effort to put the Laos situation onto a diplomatic track, to get some kind of action taken by the co-chairman, by the 1962 Conference members. And then there was a very promising initiative from the Poles in late May that would have brought together the ICC and the co-chairman, and two or three others. It was a smaller and more promising grouping than the wider Laos membership, which would have of course included Communist China and the French, both of whom gave us cause for not wishing them around. Well, this is the rough agenda of the May to June period, and it included a very serious look at the possibility that as the series unfolded it could lead to the initiation of some degree, and a limited degree, of air bombing against the north. The parts I recall most vividly are that by about the 24th or 25th of May this had reached a point where it seemed important to cut the British in. The British were still very close to us on this problem, very closely engaged always in the Laos problem, but regarded as the ally we most needed to have approval from, and the full understanding of, if we acted in these directions. Nehru died, and Shastri took over /in India/ just at this time as we were about to consider what to do next. The result was a quick scheduling of the Secretary of State going to New Delhi for the funeral, then on to Saigon for a brief visit, then meeting with the Secretary of Defense and Ambassador Lodge and General Westmoreland, who had by then succeeded General Harkins; and well, everybody--and Admiral Felt would it have been or /U.S. Grant/ Sharp, whichever it was--in Honolulu. Now this series of meetings took place in the last week of May, and culminated in the Honolulu meeting, which as I recall was June 2. I certainly wouldn't date it, but it was the date of the California

primary among other things, because I'll never forget Ambassador Lodge's face when he got the news that Goldwater had beaten Rockefeller in that primary; and that happened in the corridor at Honolulu. Well, I, myself, was sent off as part of this same scenario, dead alone in a military transport, to London to see /R. A./ Butler, the British Foreign Secretary, privately; and to convey to him that we were looking very seriously at this sequence of actions involving Laos and the possibility of stronger action against North Viet Nam. The record of my talks is something that I've got to check because it's of some minor significance in indicating exactly what we were then thinking. What we put to the British was perhaps a stronger, longer, record in that I was carefully instructed, personally instructed, exactly how to play that, and so that's of some importance in the record.

Then we went to Saigon, where Secretary Rusk met with Khanh and where that conversation indicated, and I think our reporting of it reflects, that Khanh as much as said, "I need something stronger, I need your hitting the North," and Secretary Rusk said, "Look, if that's going to be done, it's going to have to be a very considered decision." Secretary Rusk, in effect, cooled him off on it and thereby preserved, I'm sure wisely, our freedom of action and didn't get us involved in it. Then we went on to Honolulu. Now, I don't think there are very careful notes of the Honolulu meeting, I think it was largely word of mouth both at the time and in reporting. And I took some notes of it which are in long hand and which I haven't looked at. But my overall recollection, subject to check, and very much subject to the recollections of others, is that there was a really intensive discussion of should we get in this stronger action against the North? And in the upshot, Lodge said he didn't think the time

was right to do it, he was in favor of a certain amount of tit-for-tat action, if it came to that; spectaculars of any sort on the other side should be met, and this foreshadowed that very limited type of thing. But Westmoreland particularly said, "I think we've got to strengthen the South Vietnamese armed forces, and I think six months from now we can hope that this will be in better shape." Well, the long and short of it, as I recall that meeting, was that there emerged a very strong consensus that the situation was not so serious that to start bombing the North was essential irrespective of the political and military situation in the South. And that if it had to be done, it was very much better to do it against the backdrop of a South Vietnamese government that was taking hold of things on the political side and South Vietnamese armed forces that had responded to the additional measures that had been worked out in preceding months and was doing a progressively better job.

M: Both of which dictated future but not now?

B: It pointed ahead, and this was very much an important point in the thinking because all through this period we were aware that it would not be a bed of roses if we got into stronger action; that people would attack us for it. But if we could do it against a backdrop of this kind of increase of strength in South Viet Nam, so that we could properly and accurately depict the situation as one where the United States was acting against the external factor which was preying on a nation that had caught hold of itself. This was very much one of the fruits of the Honolulu line of thought.

The result was that we brought back from Honolulu a very clear picture, in effect cooling off the whole line of thought that led to the possibility of action against North Viet Nam at that period. Now what

took place was in a sense a continuation of the Executive Committee process that had begun in mid-May. We reported, and the sessions were resumed: "What do we now do," in effect. And at that point there was resumed consideration of a proposal that had been made in May, and this is very important because of certain distortions that are possible and some of which have been implied, resumed consideration of the possibility of a Congressional resolution. In mid-May that had been aired as one of the sequence of actions which would in effect affirm Congressional support if it were decided in effect to go further, against the North specifically.

In early June, we looked again at that in the face of a decision that I don't believe was ever recorded as such because in effect there hadn't been an issue as such. But it was conveyed to the President, "Your men in the field do not believe you need to go to bombing the North; they think it would be much better if it ever becomes necessary (in the way I described) to do so against a stronger backdrop. Put it to one side. Your advisers do not recommend this."

M: Did anybody dissent from that, was there any strong objection?

B: I recall no dissent whatever from it. Now I'm not aware whether there were other papers out of this channel, but in this group of people, to the best of my recollection, it was unanimously concluded that this was not required. And the President must have been told this. Now I seem to recall, but my brother Mac is much the best witness, there were very private meetings with the President, of which I've heard only fragments; and that in one of these he said, "If I have to do this, or anything else, I am going to do it. It is more important to be President of the United States than to be elected. If you have to be unpopular that's the price of doing the job." I thought it was the right attitude, and I believe it to have governed him all the way through.

At any rate, we looked again at the question of a resolution. Not to support a defined course of action that we'd agreed upon and thought definitely we should do, but because we were obviously going into a period when Hanoi might assume the United States government was incapable of taking action, and when there might be controversial and difficult periods in our election debate otherwise. Should we have a Congressional resolution to in effect define and support a line of policy which might not have been decided upon, but which anybody could see might become necessary if the situation took a bad turn? And this was the debate that took place until roughly June 15. My notes indicate a series of meetings, about two or three, involving Secretary Rusk and Secretary McNamara, and an ultimate decision that there simply wasn't a way to do this, that it couldn't be fitted with the Congressional timetable--Congress had been tied in bowknots of course by the Civil Rights fight and the whole plate had to be disposed of before the conventions--that it just wasn't feasible from a Congressional timing standpoint; that it was a difficult case to present, an ambiguous one, you would have had to expose your view that the situation could turn very sour. I don't know exactly what the arguments were, I'm afraid I'm dabbling in hindsight a little bit, but I do recall references to the Congressional timetable. At any rate, it was put to one side. But there was extensive staff work at that time on what a resolution would look like. Doug Cater did some papers on what kind of arguments you needed to use to persuade the American people that this was the right thing to do; but it was thought of as a basic affirmation of policy and was not intended after the Honolulu meeting as the support for anything that had been decided.

M: There was a draft resolution?

B: There was a draft resolution. I find this now, there was an extensive supporting scenario, in effect how you'd handle it. Well, on or about June 15 this was submitted to the President, with in effect a negative recommendation. At least that would be the thrust of my notes. It must have been conveyed to the President how this process had come out, I do not know how. And at that point it is shelved, as far as my files show it is completely put to one side. Now I think it's very important to describe that exactly as it happened because of course, then in early August you had the Tonkin Gulf attacks and you had a real Congressional resolution very quickly submitted, worked on, and approved. But I want to say with all the emphasis I command, what took place in early August may have owed a very little bit to the thinking preceding it, but I believe it would have taken place in any event; and in any case--and this is the key point that critics could easily fasten on--in no sense whatsoever was there any provocation intended to cause something like the Tonkin Gulf incident. There was not an "Oh, boy, can't we wait and find some occasion to do this." Absolutely not! I just--I'm morally certain of that. The files bear me out, my own personal status was that from daily contact with the Secretary of State I'm absolutely sure that he would never had had a part in any such thing to begin with--he thought that we had made that decision, we had put it to one side, we would have to rock along as best we could. And I, myself, I might add, was on vacation when Tonkin Gulf took place, so that we weren't exactly in an alert status.

M: Was there any question about the facts at the time of Tonkin?

B: No. No question whatsoever in any of our minds. The first attack, of course, was crystal clear, with bullet holes and dents and things like that. The second one was a matter of--it was difficult to be absolutely

copper-riveted sure. Everybody knew that Navy officers could see things on radar that turned out not to be what they reported them to be at the time. But there was much harder evidence, and this is a matter that Secretary McNamara, in the Fulbright hearings of early 1968, covered with the Committee off the record. I merely refer to it; that's where you'll find the best--it's all off the record because of the nature of the sources involved. And that evidence was totally persuasive to all of us, that the second attack had taken place and had been deliberate and premeditated and all the rest. My distinct recollection is that until Secretary McNamara was able to report to the President that he was positive the second attack had taken place, the President was not prepared to give the go on the decision to engage in the immediate retaliatory bombing of the naval bases from which we believed the attacks had come. Well, in other words that was the one thing I would say before the bar of history, or heaven or wherever else, was that this was absolutely the way it appeared to be. It was on the up and up, there was no question about it. And the decision to go after a resolution was very quickly reached in this process. Now as I say, maybe that owed something to the fact that we'd had the idea kicking around in May and June, but I think it would have occurred to everybody as inevitable and natural in any event. Here the United States had been subjected to a major challenge. Here we were with the possibility of further challenges of this type and going into a campaign, Congress was I think definitely called on to say something. It was, to me, very much on all fours with the kind of situation that had led to the offshore islands resolution; I think there may have been one at the time of the Lebanon; there had been one at one point on Cuba; but at any rate, a whole series of resolutions, and I think these were rather

rapidly dredged up. But the drafting of this resolution, and this I can say from personal knowledge, the drafting of this resolution--I think they did have the text that had been fiddled with in May and June--but it's a very different piece of paper from the ones that had been fiddled with in May and June. When you look at this kind of thing seriously, George Ball and Abe Chayes, who did the principal drafting, decided that it just wasn't very much good. It is the most natural thing in the world to conclude that; when you face a situation and say, "Oh, that won't meet it." And it didn't meet this situation because after all the May-June thing had been in an entirely different context. So a whole new resolution was drafted, and then, and this I think history is quite clear about, was the subject of careful consultation with Senator Fulbright. And its implications were rather carefully gone over, and this is stated in the record of the Senate debates and certainly part of my recollection was that George Ball, who was the center of the operation, was back and forth with Senator Fulbright constantly, checking it out and carrying it back and forth.

M: Fulbright obviously didn't object. Did anybody?

B: I don't recall that anybody did. Certainly not within the Executive Branch. There was no doubt in anybody's mind.

Well, that's what I have to contribute on that; and I think it's important because I personally am the source of the story that there had been a resolution that had been considered as a possibility. I said this in testimony in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee--it happened to be on Thailand, but the question was asked and I had to respond truthfully to it, in the fall of 1966. And I said there had been a resolution but I thought it had been discussed only at low levels and at any rate it had

not--it had been put to one side. Now, my testimony was in error to this extent, that the files show very clearly that it was considered at least to the level of the two Secretaries and that being the case one must presume that the President was aware of it, but I'm not stating that as a matter of first-hand knowledge.

Well, so you come to late August, and in late August Khanh came a cropper in South Viet Nam, made a mess of things. He introduced a constitution that had all kinds of resemblances to Diem's constitution, and precipitated what in the end led to his own overthrow. At any rate, he lost control of the situation. And it was against that backdrop--Max Taylor was by then our Ambassador, and I might say parenthetically, I don't know anything or can I add anything about the circumstances under which President Johnson made his successive ambassadorial appointments in South Viet Nam. I think those were among the most important choices of people affecting policy, and therefore of policy, that there were; but I'm not familiar with the backdrop of any one of them; Taylor in 1964, Lodge in 1965, or Bunker in 1967.

M: That's an interesting fact in itself, though. This opens up a fairly large topic, I guess, and one that continues over a long period, but does that mean that the Far Eastern Bureau was not really close to policy initiation? I think perhaps John Leacacos [Fires in the In-Basket, 1968] or some other observer of the State Department operation have so maintained.

B: Well, that differed. It's hard to generalize. But the cases I was just discussing, the question of selections of Ambassadors, which of all matters is Presidential at any time, and I seem to recall that Mac, my brother Mac, may have asked me what I thought of X or Y a little bit, and

I would tell him, but at no point was I drawn into that selection process. But I put that to one side, because this was sensitive from the standpoint of leak. President Johnson was extremely sensitive to that, I've known very few Presidents who weren't. But it was so peculiarly a Presidential thing and particularly in the case of Lodge. The political implications of the men he selected for the Ambassadorial post made it, to my mind, entirely natural that this should be very much the President and the most limited possible circle, and that wouldn't include me. I would accept that as the most natural description of the way government operates there could be. Now as far as the participation of myself and the Bureau in policy deliberations, this varied. As I described the May-June events, I think it's clear that we were very much in the middle of it through Secretary Rusk and to some degree through my working with Mac on papers; but I hasten to add, and I know that Secretary Rusk always understood this, that any dealings I had with Mac, as with Walt subsequently, were always very fully reported to the Secretary. I mean, that's the way people who have any sense of loyalty behave. But I worked very closely on the May-June period. We worked very closely on the August-September period. In the November-December-January review, where the Executive Committee set up a working group under my chairmanship, with John McNaughton and other members, we were the fomenter of papers galore. Now undoubtedly the President was getting other strands of advice. He was getting it in effect direct from Ambassador Taylor in Saigon; he was undoubtedly exercising the right and proper Presidential prerogative of getting it direct from his Cabinet members without the use of papers, or by separate and private papers; he was getting it from Mac on the same basis; he was undoubtedly calling on senior members of the Congress and senior outsiders

for their advice; this is all what a President, in my judgment, should do. But there was a clear strand of, you might say, staff work from the Bureau that was contributing, that was feeding in.

M: You were not being forced out.

B: Oh, no, absolutely. Neither were we it. And I don't demur to that for a minute. It's a very different--we're talking really about his style of operation, and I think this is an important point. He believed, really, as President Kennedy believed before him, in not generally speaking, having "the" paper, or even a split paper come to him. In this sense he did not operate as Eisenhower did a good share of the time, as President Nixon has started to do--whether he will keep it up is another question. He would keep the thing fluid so that the papers that came to him were drafts. Nobody had gone into concrete in them. He kept fluidity in the process. I, myself, think that has a lot to commend it, because if you go into concrete, you tend to harden people. You lose something in the way of being systematic. But describing any one of these processes, I find in my files a great many papers that in effect remained in draft. But that doesn't mean they weren't read, and that they didn't have immense thinking importance in sort of forming a center of gravity of government thinking. Well, to round out the response to your question about the Bureau's role, it differed considerably. At these moments of great policy concern, and I would include the June-July 1965 period, we were very much in it as fomenters of papers and so on, we were very much in it in the pause decision of 1965, late 1965. We were very much in the abortive re-look at policy in the spring of 1966, which barely reached the President, where we were all terribly discouraged by the "Struggle Movement" and the loss of control in Danang and Hue and was this worth

going on with; and there was a brief review, and we were very much in the middle of that. At other times, when the issue was bombing policy or in one or two cases of diplomatic initiatives, I think particularly of the Kosygin letter of February 8, 1967, the Bureau wasn't in any sense frozen out, I wasn't frozen out, but that particular letter was done personally at the White House by the Secretary of State in a midnight drafting session without my participation. I'm simply describing in response to your question, "How it did work."

Then at other times, in the spring of 1967 where the issue was bombing, force levels, the whole posture, we were commenting in papers--in effect, I'm really saying you have to go into each one.

M: Each crisis, well we can do that.

B: There was great sensitivity; it is fair to say this, there was great sensitivity on the President's part to enlarging the circle of any major decision or anything that could come out as a change of policy, or a major change in emphasis. I had to do a great deal of drafting myself, but I think I probably would have preferred to do it in any case, because I knew the kind of thing I thought was effective, fair, persuasive, rounded, for the President and senior Cabinet officers anyway. But it certainly is true, there is this much truth in the thing, that President Johnson felt very strongly about keeping the circle to the absolute minimum limits--

M: As far as knowledge--

B: As far as knowledge of a thing was concerned. For example, a rather vivid example, in March 1968, during the whole of the review of those successive speech drafts and all the issues that were reflected in them, this was available in the Department of State to the Secretary, the Under Secretary

Nick Katzenbach, Ben Read the Executive Secretary--whose importance in the Department was enormous throughout the period--and in the Bureau solely to myself and to Philip Habib.

M: Habib was your Deputy by that time?

B: Yes. And this was literally the circle. Habib would see the texts. Habib was working on a whole set of material, what we could get the South Vietnamese to do, which was an important contributing element in effect. But it was very closely held.

M: That's five. You can't cut the team much further than that.

B: I don't believe it was going further than that. My notes indicate at any rate that this was the direction, that it should not go further than that, and I don't believe it did. I had to quietly go to Ben Read and say, "Can't I keep Habib in the play?" The result was--of course my two immediate secretaries knew--but literally my personal assistant did not know. None of the Viet Nam working staff knew, although of course we were asking them questions and getting their reading all the time as a part of educating ourselves to contribute. Well, we've gone off on another subject but it's fair to say that the Bureau /participated/ in limited numbers--this kind of thing on a really sensitive issue didn't pan out, the bombing programs were very closely held, very closely held, those were available to my Viet Nam deputy and my military assistant and that was about it. Every now and then I'd deliberately bring in the Chinese boys because I wanted to get a judgment from them, but I did so on a keep-your-mouth-shut basis.

M: And on a one-shot basis.

B: And on a one-shot basis. So in other words, a great deal of it did devolve on me personally, there's no getting away from that. And there were others

of my deputies whom I never consulted over long, long stretches of time, and it became a situation where there could never be a time where both I and my Viet Nam deputy were away, because this was just sort of understood.

Well, I've got you to the fall of 1964, if I may go back to the chronology.

M: Yes, I didn't mean--

B: No, this is an important element and I might think of ways to change it, but the papers will tell you more than any description will, how the Bureau worked in relation to the President. I must say, I'll take the occasion to say, it's obvious that I never felt that I was cut out of anything. The Secretary of State cut me in quietly even when I wasn't party directly to the discussions. There were long periods when I wouldn't go to a particular meeting, but I'd know the subject matter, I'd have an opportunity to give him a memorandum. Ben Read would keep me posted, and I could call on others in the Bureau if I really thought I had to; but I could disguise the issue in such a way that it did work. So, I've no complaint at all, I always understood the method that was being used. I've never been sure that we might not have been able to get a more systematic way of the conduct of the war. A sort of Executive Committee thing I think would have had many advantages. The President's reasons for not wishing that were never fully clear to me, I raise it as a question. I think it was almost too personal, the whole method of handling the war--I'm merely throwing that out as a field for scholars to look at.

Well, going back to the chronology. In early September, with Max Taylor back, there was a policy review that decided that we would be

prepared to retaliate for specific attacks on American people or installations, similar to Tonkin Gulf, but including those Americans in South Viet Nam. And that we would consider--and this is important--we would consider the possibility of getting into what was then called Phase-Two, an enlarged program, including some bombing of the North. And I find to my surprise in the papers that there's mention in September, 1964, of limited U.S. ground forces to secure the installations that would be involved in bombing the North, specifically the Danang airfield.

M: It's a logical extension of it.

B: It's mentioned as a possibility in a future stage; but in saying that I emphasize that this was regarded as a future stage, that in no sense had the President decided that we would do this; he'd merely taken note, in effect, that there was the possibility that one would wish to go further or that the situation would compel him to go further, and one possible way of going further was this set of actions. And there it goes to bed for the campaign, reinforcing and I think fully supporting the picture that I would have had at the time and do in hindsight, that the President had not made decisions to go farther, that he knew the situation wasn't good, he knew that it could be on his plate right after the election, but he was hoping that it would somehow right itself, and so on.

M: You made a speech to this effect in the month of September, didn't you, in Japan?

B: Well, yes. That speech is an interesting sidelight. It led to some headlines that I'd contradicted the President. What happened was this. I had to give a major speech in Japan before the Newspapers Editors Convention, it's called Jiji, and it's a major speech, given over the

years by a great many senior Americans, and I happened to be tagged as the new Assistant Secretary. And most of the speech was about Japan, and that part had to be rewritten rather frantically in the last days before I gave the speech because we had to respond to an article by George Kennan that appeared to question the whole basis of our policy in Japan and which many in Japan read as a sort of tip-off that we were, in fact, going to change. So we had to reaffirm a lot of fundamentals and that was the overwhelming focus of the work on the speech. There was a passage about Viet Nam which is in the record, so my paraphrasing can be corrected, but in essence it said, "If the pressure keeps up, we might have to consider stronger action." Well that particular paragraph had been written by my staff as almost boiler plate in late August, and it was true to the mood and the papers and even the utterances of late August. But by the time it was delivered, which was about September 24 or thereabouts, it happened to coincide with the President's speech in New Hampshire. And the two didn't seem to be saying the same thing to some of the eager interpreters of the press, and so there was a fuss. And I didn't know what was happening, sitting in Tokyo. I wasn't sure I'd have a job when I got back. But I did the best I could and said, no, I was simply referring to a future possibility, and there wasn't anything to say about that.

Well, then I went to Korea and then came back and in effect, and I forget the form of the encounter, I sort of looked at the Secretary of State and I said, "Do you want my resignation," or words to that effect, or "I've got myself in terrible hot water and caused difficulty for you." And he sort of grinned and said, "It's all right, just relax."

M: But it had not been cleared specifically because you--

B: No, it had not been cleared specifically. I don't recall that I'd shown it to Secretary Rusk personally, because frankly I would have regarded this passage as axiomatic, an axiomatic interpretation of what the Tonkin Gulf Resolution had said, and to say less than this was to walk away from Tonkin Gulf.

Now, who was writing the President's speeches, or how they came to take the tone they did I have no knowledge. Because, I say frankly when Secretary Rusk reassured me in this way he of course never then or at any time in our relationship ever said anything remotely critical of the President, not remotely critical that I can ever recall; but I think he was as much as saying, "You were saying the straight view of our policy and the others are something else again." That's nothing he said, but I couldn't--by saying--now obviously I didn't go out and say the same thing next week. I shut up for the campaign as anybody in the State Department should.

M: Somebody, I think, reported at the same time, that a "high authority" had said something about contingency plans. Did you give a backgrounder that went further into this?

B: I did give a backgrounder in Tokyo, and the New York Times' /Robert/ Trumbull reported it verbatim, and I don't think he was false in any particular. I deeply resented his putting a backgrounder on a verbatim basis; but yes, I think I must have said something about this was something we had looked at and had contingency plans on. Which was the truth, of course.

M: Surely.

B: I may not have been wise to say it, I'm not a bit sure. I had regrets about the backgrounder, particularly as it came out. I had none about the

speech really, because it was a straight line performance, and it had gone through umpteen hands, all of whom had assumed this was a straight restatement of policy as of the time it was written and a policy that would necessarily continue.

M: Did that include the part of it that seemed, at least, to reject the idea or concept of neutralization? Had that been a matter of great consideration?

B: I've forgotten that particular passage, but that, too, would have been true to inner thinking at the time. I've forgotten. I must have said it in several other speeches as well, and I forget their timing. But the question of neutralization, particularly the semantic overtones of the word, of course goes back to De Gaulle's various utterances and goes back, in my memory, to a rather careful interrogation of Couve de Murville by Secretary Rusk at Manila in April of 1964, in which it seemed perfectly clear that Couve de Murville had in mind the tightest kind of neutrality, in which a nation wouldn't have any right even to call for outside assistance. Now if you read neutralization in that sense, and it was so read pretty much--even without the French saying it loud and clear--then it obviously was a very dangerous thing to do anything but oppose. And that's what I meant. That's what I meant in references I made, I don't happen to have the one I make in Tokyo right before me.

M: Had the possibilities of what might come out of negotiating situations been as seriously looked at as the possibilities of military action in the future?

B: Oh, I'm glad you asked that, because you remind me I left out a whole, very important part of the story, and one that undoubtedly involved the President's direct authority and knowledge.

Part of the collection of suggestions that had come up--and I think this one dated from about March or the latest in April in 1964--was from Lodge to the effect that the Canadians had a very good man who was coming to take over their representation on the ICC, and would thus travel back and forth between Hanoi and Saigon. His name was Seaborn, J. Blair Seaborn. And he was well known to Lodge from having served at the United Nations, and he was very well and favorably known to many others in our service and remains a man of real standing as a Soviet, and other kinds of Communist, expert, and a very straightforward and reliable diplomat. He was going up to Hanoi in June of 1964 to start his back and forths, and in the two months, roughly April through early June, this suggestion matured and finally it was acted on, that we should have Seaborn make a real exploration of North Vietnamese thinking on peace. And he was given a rather carefully stated description of the American position--that we were not threatening North Viet Nam, that we were not talking about anything other than letting South Viet Nam run its own affairs--to see what he encountered. Well, I haven't looked at that file lately, but the chronology is clear. In June he went up, and he brought back--he got rather a strong and full response on the other side, very hard line indeed. "The Americans have got to get out, they are the aggressors,"--just tough as nails. And no sign of give at all and his description of their mood was one of confidence and all the rest. In August, after Tonkin Gulf, he had another trip scheduled up there, and we sent him with a message saying "Look, we didn't like this kind of thing any better than they did. If they started to cool it, we could get somewhere." And that met a very sharp and indignant response, which we read--and I'm not quite clear how specifically it was founded--but we read it, we

interpreted it, as meaning that they thought they might be at a disadvantage as a result of what we'd done, and they weren't even about to show any sign of interest in those circumstances. Well, then you had the fall in which things on the ground were just so clearly moving their way that it had us very frightened indeed underneath. And then in December, just to round out the Seaborn story, Seaborn went up with a mission to see what was on their minds, and he didn't get to see anybody except at a very low level. It was plain that they had in effect turned him off, at least for that visit.

M: Not even willing to talk to him.

B: Now that's the effective end of the Seaborn channel, but it is an important thing because it is the first serious Viet Nam peace initiative, but I would add that it has to be taken even on that basis alongside the continuing series of initiatives on Laos and on Cambodia, both at the United Nations in 1964 and in April of 1965 when we accepted a Cambodian conference. In other words, the whole attempt to engage the Geneva machinery was in a sense--by the way, continuously back to, well 1961 at least, when Kennedy met Khrushchev in Vienna.

M: Does that include any initiative of U Thant--

B: Well, now, I come back to that. That's certainly involved here. My own knowledge of it is hindsight knowledge because my recollection is entirely clear that I did not know of it in any way until some time in late December or it may have been early January.

M: 1965?

B: 1965. The Secretary of State being absent, as I recall, Adlai Stevenson got me on the phone and said, "U Thant says that Hanoi would be ready to have the locale of a meeting be in Rangoon." This is by recollection,

and very much to be corrected against the files. And at that point I was filled in very roughly on what had taken place, and subsequently I worked with Harlan Cleveland and George Ball to try to reconstruct it more fully, and the results are in the Department of State files, but they're not very satisfactory. Because apparently Governor Stevenson simply didn't keep really proper memoranda of his conversations with U Thant.

M: Your reconstruction was after Stevenson's death?

B: Well, I don't know--no, we did it as early as February or March, as I recall, because even then U Thant was starting to talk, and it was reaching us through various reporters. And he was making elliptical references to it, and so on and so on, and we were getting questions on him. And then before the Governor's death or the /Eric/ Sevareid story of November /Look, Nov. 30, 1965/, we had occasion to try to reconstruct what had happened. I think the Secretary of State got out his telephone conversations, and his is always going to be the authoritative account on this one, and I'm only second-hand on it, and therefore perhaps just might as well leave it at that, except to say that when it came to assessing its significance or the way in which we handled it, I myself always agreed totally with the judgment that whatever message U Thant had, and there is evidence on which the Secretary of State should recite that U Thant in effect stimulated the message, that he never had direct contact, never had an original message from Ho, and particularly that no Russian was ever involved. The Secretary of State has firsthand evidence on that point, and I merely flag it as one that is worth pursuing with him. But that my own view at the time was that if Hanoi had said anything it had been in a response to a suggestion that we were prepared to surrender. That the only type of meeting they envisioned was one where

we surrendered or alternatively one they could make public to the grave morale damage of Saigon.

M: No opportunity missed, as far as your assessment is concerned.

B: My assessment is that whatever you think about the way it was played, and I have no judgment of that, there was not an opportunity for serious discussions of peace. My goodness, we've seen how dug-in Hanoi has been even when the tide is moving against it. To suppose that they were ready for anything less than total control of the South with the cards as they lay in the fall of 1964 and in early 1965 to me beggars the imagination.

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GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE

Gift of Personal Statement

By William P. Bundy

to the
Lyndon Baines Johnson Library

In accordance with Sec. 507 of the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949, as amended (44 U.S.C. 397) and regulations issued thereunder (41 CFR 101-10), I, William P. Bundy, hereinafter referred to as the donor, hereby give, donate, and convey to the United States of America for eventual deposit in the proposed Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, and for administration therein by the authorities thereof, a tape and transcript of a personal statement approved by me and prepared for the purpose of deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library. The gift of this material is made subject to the following terms and conditions:

1. Title to the material transferred hereunder will pass to the United States as of the date of the delivery of this material into the physical custody of the Archivist of the United States. The donor retains to himself for a period of ten (10) years all literary property rights in the material donated to the United States of America by the terms of the instrument. After the expiration of this ten (10) year period, the aforesaid literary property rights will pass to the United States of America.

2. It is the donor's wish to make the material donated to the United States of America by the terms of the instrument available for research in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library. At the same time, it is his wish to guard against the possibility of its contents being used to embarrass, damage, injure, or harass anyone. Therefore, in pursuance of this objective, and in accordance with the provisions of Sec. 507 (f) (3) of the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949, as amended (44 U.S.C. 397) this material shall not, for a period of ten (10) years, be available for examination by anyone except persons who have received my express written authorization to examine it. This restriction shall not apply to employees and officers of the General Services Administration (including the National Archives and Records Service and the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library) engaged in performing normal archival work processes

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5. I hereby designate McGeorge Bundy to have, after my death, the same authority with respect to authorizing access to the aforesaid material as I have reserved to myself in paragraph 2 and paragraph 3 above.

Signed William P. Bundy

Date Feb. 23, 1970

Accepted Harry J. Middleton - fN
Archivist of the United States

Date March 11, 1975